

BUILDING A RESILIENT FUTURE: INTEGRATING EDUCATIONAL SOLUTIONS FOR SOCIETAL RENEWAL

By

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Good morning,
Your excellences,
The Vice-Chancellor,
The Vice-Chancellors,
Other Principal Officers present,
The Dean,
The LOC Chairman and his team,
Honourable guests,
Esteemed colleagues, and educators
Other distinguished guests and students,
Ladies and gentlemen.

I feel honoured to be invited, to give an address to this distinguished gathering of scholars, and experts from other areas of knowledge, at the 12th International Conference and Workshop of the Faculty of Education, Delta State University, Abraka.

It is with great pleasure and enthusiasm that I welcome you to this unique occasion. Indeed, it is a privilege and a great responsibility to speak before you today on the crucial subject of building a resilient future. As we all know, our world is experiencing rapid changes and unprecedented challenges—from environmental crises and economic volatility to social unrest and technological disruption. While formidable, these challenges also present an opportunity to reshape our societies and forge a stronger, more just and sustainable future. At the heart of this transformation lies education—a tool that has the power to not only enlighten minds but also rebuild and renew entire societies.

Introduction

Education systems play a crucial role in building resilience, as they equip individuals and communities with the tools necessary for sustainable growth and social renewal. Building resilience in education systems involves reimagining education as a holistic process that

extends beyond the traditional classroom to encompass lifelong learning, civic engagement, and the development of skills needed to address global challenges.

Resilience is a dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma. Education systems must address several key challenges, such as inequitable access to education, mental health challenges, and inadequate social-emotional learning (SEL) programmes in the curriculum. Inequitable access to quality education, particularly in low-income and marginalized communities, can compromise students' ability to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and emotional regulation skills. Traditional teacher training often neglects areas like SEL, trauma-informed teaching, and mental health awareness, leading to missed opportunities for students to develop coping strategies. Rigid and test-oriented education systems often prioritize standardized testing and academic achievement, limiting opportunities for creativity, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence. Cultural and societal expectations, the digital divide, and parental and community involvement are also challenges in building resilience.

To effectively contribute to societal renewal, education systems must incorporate STEAM education, sustainable education, lifelong learning, digital literacy, civic education, and global citizenship. Policy frameworks play a crucial role in fostering educational solutions for resilience and societal renewal. Collaboration across sectors, including governments, educators, businesses, and civil society, public-private partnerships, community involvement, global cooperation, access to technology, inclusive education, and gender equality in education are essential for a resilient future.

Education is the most powerful weapon that we can use to change the world. That weapon must be upgraded over time and used wisely to prepare individuals to take up the challenges and opportunities of their time and contribute to a resilient and flourishing world. Education policy, the education function in schools, and the post-secondary sectors must play a key role in addressing societal challenges that limit well-being and prevent societies from being responsive and thriving. Economic fragility, racism, conflicts, environmental challenges, natural catastrophes, and economic, social, and political inequalities have become increasingly apparent both among and within nations. These polarization factors can be a source of growing chaos, dissatisfaction, threats, and violence intergenerationally. For individuals and societies to grow and be resilient, the cultivation of empathy, ethics, and understanding is fundamental (Eduviere, Oluwole & Oluwole, 2020; Moronke, Busari & Oluwole, 2023).

In an increasingly complex and interconnected world, societies face myriad challenges, including economic instability, environmental crises, and social inequalities. The concept of resilience has thus gained prominence as a framework for addressing these systemic challenges and fostering long-term societal renewal. Resilience, in this context, refers to the ability of societies to adapt, recover, and thrive in the face of adversity, ensuring sustainable development and well-being for current and future generations (Folke, 2016). One of the most critical components of building a resilient future is education, which serves as the foundation for fostering innovation, adaptability, and problem-solving skills. By integrating educational solutions into societal structures, nations can equip individuals and communities with the tools necessary for creating resilient systems that support sustainable growth and social renewal (Oluwole & Ayodeji-Oyalowo, 2021).

Educational institutions, at all levels, play a key role in shaping the resilience of individuals and societies. They are not merely sites for knowledge transfer, but spaces where critical thinking, creativity, and ethical decision-making are nurtured. The integration of educational solutions for societal renewal involves reimagining education as a holistic process that extends beyond the traditional classroom to encompass lifelong learning, civic engagement, and the development of skills needed to address global challenges (OECD, 2018). This requires

innovative pedagogical approaches, policies that prioritize inclusivity and educational programmes that align with the evolving needs of society.

Concept of Resilience

Resilience is a dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma. This term does not represent a personality trait or an attribute of the individual (Luthar et al., 2000; Eduviere, Oluwole & Oluwole, 2020). Rather, a two-dimensional construct implies exposure to adversity and the manifestation of positive adjustment outcomes.

The two pivotal constructs subsumed within the term “resilience” each have specific operational definitions in contemporary research.

Adversity, also referred to as risk, typically encompasses negative life circumstances that are known to be statistically associated with adjustment difficulties. Chronic exposure to community violence, for example, constitutes high risk given that children experiencing this life condition reflect significantly greater maladjustment than those who do not (Oluwole, Daodu & Komolafe, 2011; Toyin-Ojo, Oluwole & Degboro, 2023).

Positive adaptation, the second construct, is usually defined in terms of behaviorally manifested social competence, or success at meeting stage-salient developmental tasks (Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Oluwole & Afolabi, 2022). Among young children, competence may be operationally defined in terms of the development of a secure attachment with primary caregivers, and, among older children, appropriate indices include aspects of school-based functioning, such as good academic performance and positive relationships with classmates and teachers.

High social competence is not, however, the only or even necessarily the preferred index used to define successful adaptation in resilience research; sometimes, the mere absence of emotional or behavioral maladjustment is appropriate (Luthar et al., 2000; Rutter, 1999). The optimal outcome indicators are those that are conceptually most relevant to the risk encountered, so that when there are serious life adversities such as exposure to war, the absence of psychiatric distress can be a more logical outcome than excellence in functioning at school (Luthar & Cushing, 1999).

The Defense Logistics Agency which is a combat support agency in the United States Department of Defense defined Resilience as how one “deals effectively with pressure, ambiguous and emerging conditions, and multiple tasks; remains optimistic and persistent, even under adversity or uncertainty. Recovers quickly from setbacks. Anticipates changes and learns from mistakes.”

Resilience is the ability to function well in the face of adversity.

The DLA resilience model has four pillars: mental, physical, social and spiritual; balancing these four components helps strengthen your life.

Mental: The ability to effectively cope with mental stressors and challenges. Pay attention to your needs and feelings. Our thoughts control our energy.

Physical: The ability to adopt and sustain healthy behaviours. Regularly work out and continually monitor physical stamina. Recognize the connection between mind and body: strong bodies help build strong minds

Social: The ability to network. Build and value interpersonal relationships and social networks. Social connections with others widen perceptions and grow character.

Spiritual: The ability to adhere to beliefs, principles, or values needed to persevere and prevail in accomplishing missions.

Education as a Pillar of Resilience

Education is widely recognized as a key driver of human development and social progress. According to UNESCO (2015), education not only enhances individual capacities but also strengthens the collective ability of communities to respond to economic, social, and environmental disruptions. By fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration, education equips individuals with the skills necessary to adapt to changing circumstances, innovate solutions, and rebuild after crises. In particular, education systems that prioritize resilience focus on developing capacities for self-reliance, sustainability, and inclusivity.

Resilience, in the context of societies, refers to the capacity to anticipate, prepare for, recover from, and adapt to future challenges. Education serves as a foundation for this resilience by fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and adaptability among individuals and communities. It equips people to tackle issues such as climate change, economic inequalities, and social injustices. Moreover, education nurtures the ability to engage in constructive dialogue, encouraging collaboration and empathy—traits that are vital for social cohesion and progress.

A resilient society can weather crises without disintegration, and educational systems are key in nurturing this ability. By teaching skills such as adaptability, innovation, and ethical leadership, education helps societies to not only survive but also thrive in the face of disruptions. For example, the response to the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how quickly education systems could pivot towards online learning, while also exposing deep inequalities in access to education and technology.

Educational resilience involves more than access to schooling; it includes the development of knowledge and competencies that enable individuals to navigate uncertainty and complexity (Ungar, 2012; Oluwole, Talatu & Adisa, 2021). This is particularly relevant in the face of global challenges such as climate change, technological disruption, and political instability. In the context of climate change, for instance, education can empower communities to adopt sustainable practices and mitigate the effects of environmental degradation (Leicht et al., 2018). Similarly, in an era of rapid technological change, education can provide individuals with the digital literacy and adaptive skills required to thrive in a knowledge-based economy.

Key Challenges in Education for Building Resilience

Building resilience through education is a critical goal, particularly in today's complex and rapidly changing world. Resilience refers to the ability of individuals to bounce back from challenges, adapt to adversity, and continue learning and growing despite difficult circumstances. While education systems can play a significant role in fostering resilience, several key challenges can hinder these efforts. These challenges vary across regions, depending on factors such as socio-economic conditions, infrastructure, policies, and cultural contexts.

Here are some of the key challenges in education for building resilience:

1. Inequitable Access to Education

- **Challenge:** Access to quality education remains unequal, especially in low-income and marginalized communities. Factors such as poverty, geographic isolation, gender inequality, and disability often result in significant educational disparities. When

students are deprived of education, their ability to build resilience is compromised as they lack opportunities to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and emotional regulation skills.

- **Impact:** Without access to inclusive and equitable education, students in disadvantaged areas struggle to acquire the foundational knowledge and social-emotional skills necessary to navigate life's challenges, limiting their resilience.
- **Example:** In rural areas of developing countries, lack of schools, teachers, and learning materials leaves students without the support systems needed to foster resilience.

2. Mental Health Challenges

- **Challenge:** Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and trauma are increasingly prevalent among students, exacerbated by stressors like academic pressure, socio-economic hardships, family problems, and global crises (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic). These mental health challenges can undermine a student's ability to cope with adversity and build resilience.
- **Impact:** Students facing unaddressed mental health challenges may struggle to engage fully in their education, leading to absenteeism, poor academic performance, and dropping out of school. Without adequate mental health support in schools, building resilience becomes more difficult.
- **Example:** Studies have shown that students in conflict zones or areas affected by natural disasters often experience post-traumatic stress, making it harder for them to focus on their studies and build resilience.

3. Inadequate Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Programmes in our curriculum

- **Challenge:** Social-emotional learning (SEL) is essential for fostering resilience in students, as it helps them develop self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. However, many education systems lack comprehensive SEL programmes, leaving students without the tools to manage emotions, set goals, and cope with challenges.
- **Impact:** When SEL is not prioritized, students may struggle to navigate emotional challenges and interpersonal conflicts, limiting their ability to build resilience. The absence of SEL also affects their ability to form supportive relationships and develop empathy (Masten, 2014).
- **Example:** In many schools, the curriculum focuses heavily on academic achievement, with little emphasis on emotional and social development, which is crucial for building resilience.

4. Teacher Training and Professional Development

- **Challenge:** Teachers play a critical role in fostering resilience in students, but many educators lack the training and resources needed to support students' emotional and social well-being effectively. Traditional teacher training often focuses more on academic instruction rather than equipping teachers with skills to nurture resilience in students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).
- **Impact:** Without adequate professional development in areas such as SEL, trauma-informed teaching, and mental health awareness, teachers may struggle to identify and address the needs of students facing adversity. This can result in missed opportunities to support students in building resilience.

- **Example:** In some education systems, teachers receive little or no training on how to support students dealing with trauma, making it difficult for them to help students develop coping strategies.

5. Rigid and Test-Oriented Education Systems

- **Challenge:** Many education systems emphasize standardized testing and academic achievement, often at the expense of fostering creativity, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence—skills that are vital for building resilience. Test-oriented education can create a high-pressure environment that discourages risk-taking and stifles student engagement.
- **Impact:** When students are solely focused on achieving high-test scores, they may develop a fear of failure, which undermines their ability to cope with setbacks and challenges. A rigid focus on exams limits opportunities for students to engage in activities that promote resilience, such as group projects, experiential learning, and creative problem-solving.
- **Example:** In high-stakes testing environments, students may feel overwhelmed by the pressure to succeed academically, leading to burnout and reduced capacity to handle adversity.

6. Cultural and Societal Expectations

- **Challenge:** In some cultures, societal expectations regarding success, failure, and emotional expression may hinder efforts to build resilience. For example, in cultures where academic success is highly prized, students may face pressure to excel at the expense of their emotional well-being. In other cases, societal norms may discourage open discussions about mental health and emotional struggles, making it difficult for students to seek support.
- **Impact:** Cultural expectations can create environments where students feel isolated or unable to express their emotions, which limits their ability to build resilience. If societal norms discourage vulnerability, students may struggle to develop the coping strategies needed to navigate difficult situations.
- **Example:** In some parts of the world, there is a stigma associated with seeking help for mental health issues, which can prevent students from accessing the resources they need to build resilience.

7. Digital Divide and Technological Challenges

- **Challenge:** In an increasingly digital world, access to technology is essential for modern education and building resilience. However, the digital divide—disparities in access to the internet, computers, and other technologies—can exacerbate existing inequalities and hinder efforts to promote resilience.
- **Impact:** Students without access to digital tools are at a disadvantage in terms of both learning and developing the digital literacy skills needed to navigate the challenges of a technology-driven society. This gap can also limit access to online mental health resources and SEL programmes, which are critical for fostering resilience.
- **Example:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, students in rural or low-income areas who lacked access to reliable internet and devices faced significant disruptions to their education, making it harder for them to stay resilient during the crisis.

8. Parental and Community Involvement

- **Challenge:** The role of families and communities in supporting education is crucial for building resilience in students. However, parental and community involvement is often limited by factors such as poverty, lack of awareness, and cultural barriers. When parents and communities are not actively engaged in supporting students' education, it becomes more difficult for schools to build resilience.
- **Impact:** Students benefit from a supportive environment both at home and in their communities. Without this support, they may struggle to cope with academic and personal challenges, reducing their capacity for resilience.
- **Example:** In some regions, parents may not have the resources or knowledge to support their children's education effectively, particularly when dealing with emotional or mental health issues.

9. Policy and Funding Issues

- Educational policies and funding priorities often do not prioritize resilience education. Limited funding can restrict the implementation of comprehensive resilience programmes, professional development for teachers, and the provision of necessary resources and support systems (Boudrias & Guay, 2014).
- **Impact on Resilience Building:** Without adequate policy support and financial investment, resilience education remains a low priority. Schools may struggle to allocate resources effectively, leading to fragmented efforts that fail to produce meaningful outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Educational Innovations for Societal Renewal

To integrate education as a core pillar of societal renewal, it is crucial to reimagine traditional educational models. The global challenges of the 21st century require education systems to evolve in the following ways:

- **STEAM Education (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics):** Future societies will increasingly rely on science and technology to drive innovation. However, STEAM education emphasizes the importance of integrating the arts into traditional STEM fields, recognizing the need for creativity alongside technical expertise. This approach not only prepares students for careers in emerging industries but also helps them develop skills like critical thinking, collaboration, and design thinking, which are crucial for solving complex societal challenges.
- **Sustainable Education:** Environmental education should be embedded across curricula, teaching students about sustainability, renewable energy, and responsible consumption. Schools and universities can serve as incubators for new ideas about sustainable living, with students working on projects that address real-world environmental issues. By nurturing ecological literacy, education can empower future generations to lead the transition towards a more sustainable, equitable society.
- **Lifelong Learning and Digital Literacy:** With the rise of automation, artificial intelligence, and digital technologies, continuous education is essential for individuals to remain competitive in the job market. Lifelong learning programmes, particularly in digital skills, enable people to reskill and upskill throughout their careers. This adaptability is critical for personal and economic resilience, ensuring that societies remain agile in the face of shifting labor markets and technological advancements.

- **Civic Education and Global Citizenship:** Societal renewal requires not just technical skills but also a strong ethical foundation. Civic education fosters an understanding of democratic principles, human rights, and social justice. As the world becomes more interconnected, educating young people about global citizenship cultivates empathy and responsibility towards others, promoting peace and cooperation in a polarized world.

Integrating Educational Solutions for Societal Renewal

To effectively contribute to societal renewal, educational systems must integrate solutions that address both immediate and long-term societal needs. This involves promoting interdisciplinary learning, fostering collaboration between educational institutions and other societal sectors, and prioritizing inclusive policies that ensure equitable access to education. Educational curricula need to be reoriented to incorporate global citizenship, sustainability, and social justice (Sterling, 2011). By doing so, education can become a catalyst for societal renewal, equipping individuals with the skills and values necessary to contribute to the well-being of their communities and the broader society.

Moreover, lifelong learning plays a crucial role in building resilience, as it allows individuals to continuously update their skills and knowledge in response to changing societal demands. The integration of digital technologies into education offers significant potential for expanding access to learning opportunities and enabling flexible, personalized education that supports resilience at both the individual and community levels (World Bank, 2020).

The Role of Educational Policies and Programmes

Policy frameworks play an essential role in fostering educational solutions for resilience and societal renewal. Governments and international organizations must prioritize investment in education systems that promote inclusivity, innovation, and sustainability. Policies that support teacher training, curriculum reform, and the development of digital infrastructure are essential for building resilient educational systems (OECD, 2018). In addition, educational programmes should emphasize the importance of civic education and global citizenship, encouraging individuals to participate actively in societal renewal and work collaboratively to address global challenges.

In conclusion, building a resilient future requires the integration of educational solutions that equip individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to adapt to a rapidly changing world. Education serves as a critical tool for fostering resilience by promoting critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration, while also addressing issues of sustainability and social justice. By reimagining education as a lifelong process that extends beyond traditional schooling, societies can ensure that future generations are prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century and contribute to societal renewal.

Case Studies and Best Practices

Finland's Education System

Finland is widely regarded as having one of the world's most effective education systems. Its emphasis on teacher autonomy, equitable access, and student well-being has resulted in consistently high performance in international assessments. Finland's focus on experiential learning and adaptability has equipped students with the skills needed to navigate societal changes.

Kenya's Digital Learning Initiative

Kenya's Digital Literacy Program, which distributes tablets to primary school students, aims to bridge the digital divide and provide access to quality education for all students, particularly in rural areas. The initiative underscores the potential of technology to enhance resilience by expanding access to learning resources.

Japan's Disaster Education

Japan has integrated disaster preparedness into its national curriculum, teaching students how to respond to earthquakes, tsunamis, and other natural disasters. This education builds resilience by ensuring that future generations are equipped to handle crises and support recovery efforts in their communities.

Colombia's Escuela Nueva

The Escuela Nueva (New School) model, first developed in rural Colombia, emphasizes student-centred learning and active participation in the community. The model has been successfully implemented in conflict-affected regions, providing a flexible and inclusive approach to education that fosters social cohesion and resilience.

Conclusion

Building a resilient future requires societies to embrace the transformative power of education. By equipping individuals with the skills, knowledge, and values needed to navigate the challenges of the 21st century, education lays the foundation for societal renewal. Whether through fostering innovation, bridging inequalities, or promoting sustainability and civic responsibility, education is central to shaping a future that is adaptable, inclusive, and thriving. In integrating educational solutions across all aspects of society, we can ensure that the generations to come are prepared to lead with resilience and vision.

Building resilience within educational settings is essential for preparing students to navigate the complexities of modern life. However, several key challenges impede the effective integration of resilience-building strategies in schools. Curriculum constraints, lack of teacher training, socio-economic barriers, mental health issues, inadequate school environments, cultural differences, limited research, and policy and funding issues collectively hinder the development of resilient students. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including policy reforms, enhanced teacher training, increased funding, and the adoption of evidence-based practices. By overcoming these obstacles, educational institutions can better support the development of resilience, fostering a generation of students equipped to thrive amidst adversity.

In conclusion, the future we envision—one that is resilient, just, and sustainable—can only be built through a collective commitment to education. Education is the cornerstone of societal renewal, the engine of innovation, and the key to ensuring that future generations are equipped to lead with vision, empathy, and resilience.

As we leave here today, let us all commit to working together to integrate educational solutions into our efforts to build a better future. Let us empower our students to be the problem solvers, innovators, and leaders that our world so desperately needs.

Recommendation: Collaborative Approaches for a Resilient Future

Millions of children and adults across the globe, particularly in marginalized communities, lack access to quality education. This educational gap exacerbates social, economic, and political inequalities, stifling societal progress. To truly harness education as a force for societal renewal, collaboration across sectors is essential. Governments, educators, businesses, and

civil society must work together to create integrated solutions that prioritize education and resilience.

- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Governments alone cannot address the challenges facing education systems today. By collaborating with the private sector, educational institutions can gain access to cutting-edge technology, resources, and innovative teaching methods. Tech companies, for example, can collaborate with schools to provide digital infrastructure and training programmes.
- **Community Involvement:** Local communities should play a central role in shaping educational programmes. Education that is tailored to the specific needs and values of a community is more likely to be effective and sustainable. Community-led initiatives can identify local challenges, and work with educational institutions to develop programmes that address them.
- **Global Cooperation:** The global nature of many of today's challenges, such as climate change and pandemics, requires international cooperation. Educational exchange programmes, cross-border research collaborations, and international organizations all play a role in sharing knowledge and best practices that can benefit societies worldwide.
- **Access to Technology:** The digital divide, highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, has shown the stark disparities in access to technology. Rural and low-income communities often lack the infrastructure for digital learning, making it harder for students to participate in online education. Governments, NGOs, and the private sector must collaborate to provide affordable and widespread internet access, ensuring that all students have the tools they need to succeed in a digital world.
- **Inclusive Education:** Integrating marginalized communities, including children with disabilities and those from ethnic or racial minorities, is essential for societal renewal. Educational institutions need to adopt inclusive teaching strategies and provide resources that cater to diverse needs. This not only benefits those communities but also fosters a culture of inclusivity and empathy in society as a whole.
- **Gender Equality in Education:** Around the world, girls still face barriers to education, from cultural norms to economic pressures. Closing the gender gap in education is not only a moral imperative but also a means of driving economic and social progress. Educated women are more likely to contribute to the workforce, make informed health decisions, and lead their families and communities towards positive change.

I sincerely appreciate the Faculty Management and the LOC for this timely topical conference. I wish you happy deliberations at this conference.

Thanks and God bless you richly.

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