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## **FAMILY RESILIENCE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CHILDREN SOCIAL SKILLS ACQUISITION IN FAKO DIVISION SOUTH WEST REGION OF CAMEROON**

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### **Abstract**

Family resilience plays a critical role in shaping children's social development by fostering nurturing and stable environments in which children feel secure, valued, and understood. Such environments are essential for the development of emotional competence and social skills. This study examined the influence of family resilience on social skills acquisition among children aged 9–12 years in selected primary schools in Fako Division, South West Region of Cameroon. A sequential exploratory mixed-methods design was adopted, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data were collected from a sample of 409 respondents, comprising parents, teachers, and pupils, selected through stratified random sampling, simple random sampling, and purposive sampling techniques. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, while quantitative data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The Spearman's rho correlation test was employed to test the study hypotheses. The findings revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between family resilience and children's social skills acquisition ( $r = 0.712$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that as families demonstrate greater adaptive capacity, effective communication, and improved stress management, children exhibit higher levels of social competence, including emotional regulation, interpersonal communication, and conflict resolution skills. The study concludes that strengthening family resilience is fundamental to enhancing children's social development. It therefore recommends that families, educators, and stakeholders involved in child development initiatives intentionally create supportive environments that encourage open emotional expression, positive relationships, and adaptive coping strategies.

### **Keywords:**

*Family resilience, social skills acquisition, children, emotional regulation, Cameroon.*

### **Résumé**

La résilience familiale joue un rôle essentiel dans le développement social des enfants en favorisant des environnements stables et bienveillants dans lesquels les enfants se sentent en sécurité, valorisés et compris. De tels environnements sont indispensables au développement de la compétence émotionnelle et des habiletés sociales. Cette étude a examiné l'influence de la résilience familiale sur l'acquisition des compétences sociales chez les enfants âgés de 9 à

12 ans dans certaines écoles primaires sélectionnées de la Division du Fako, Région du Sud-Ouest du Cameroun. Un devis de recherche mixte exploratoire séquentiel a été adopté, intégrant des approches qualitatives et quantitatives. Les données ont été recueillies auprès d'un échantillon de 409 répondants, comprenant des parents, des enseignants et des élèves, sélectionnés à l'aide de techniques d'échantillonnage aléatoire stratifié, d'échantillonnage aléatoire simple et d'échantillonnage raisonné. Les données qualitatives ont été analysées par analyse thématique, tandis que les données quantitatives ont été analysées à l'aide de statistiques descriptives et inférentielles. Le test de corrélation de Spearman ( $\rho$ ) a été utilisé pour tester les hypothèses de l'étude. Les résultats ont révélé une relation positive forte et statistiquement significative entre la résilience familiale et l'acquisition des compétences sociales des enfants ( $r = 0,712$  ;  $p < 0,05$ ). Cela suggère que, à mesure que les familles démontrent une plus grande capacité d'adaptation, une communication efficace et une meilleure gestion du stress, les enfants présentent des niveaux plus élevés de compétence sociale, notamment en matière de régulation émotionnelle, de communication interpersonnelle et de résolution des conflits. L'étude conclut que le renforcement de la résilience familiale est fondamental pour améliorer le développement social des enfants. Elle recommande par conséquent que les familles, les éducateurs et les acteurs impliqués dans les initiatives de développement de l'enfant créent intentionnellement des environnements favorables qui encouragent l'expression émotionnelle ouverte, les relations positives et les stratégies d'adaptation efficaces.

**Mots-clés:** Résilience familiale, acquisition des compétences sociales, enfants, régulation émotionnelle, Cameroun.

## Introduction

The acquisition of social skills is an essential developmental process by which children from infancy learn to act and respond appropriately in social interactions and to maintain healthy relationships with others (Ogden, 2015). As children grow and gradually expand their social environment, the home and school become an important arena where children both learn and exercise social skills. Social skills are learned and affected by the characteristics of the context in which they develop and are important in their own right but also been found to relate to other important domains of development, such as mental health (Humphrey & Wigelsworth, 2012), coping (Bijstra & Jackson, 1998, and academic achievement (M. Welsh et al., 2001).

Social skills are the skills such as planning, decision-making, communication and problem-solving, peer relationships, self-management, social cognitive skills, emotion-oriented skills, assertiveness skills, discipline skills, and taking responsibility. From the moment a child is born, the child's interaction with his/her social environment starts to increase with the mother or any other person taking care of him/her. Social skills are the abilities that are necessary to get along with others and to create and maintain satisfying relationships (Kennedy, 2011).

Children who are empowered with social skills acquire knowledge and develop attitudes and skills which support healthy behaviours. The acquisition of social skills is particularly meaningful for children and teenagers, when their self-assessment and personality-building process is of particular significance, and they are very conscious of how their activities are assessed by other people and their peers. Social skills are developed and manifest in social interaction and each member of a community needs social skills for the processes of social interaction. These skills are acquired and

developed through interaction and communication among family members, teachers, between pupils and adults in the wider community.

The Family Paediatrics Reports (2003) indicated that, families are the most central and enduring influence in children lives regardless of their education, level of resilience, composition, income or values. Resilience refers to the capacity to adapt and recover from adversity. Resilience is described by McCubbin and McCubbin (2002) as a process of adjustment and adaptation. They explained how some families are resilient since they are able to use proficient family functioning to adjust to the impact of various life stressors. Resilience plays a crucial role in promoting mental health and well-being in families and resilient children are better equipped to navigate life's challenges, maintain positive emotions, and recover from setbacks. Bonanno (2004) Stipulate that resilient children demonstrate higher levels of self-efficacy, optimism, and problem-solving skills, which contribute to their ability to adapt and thrive in adverse situations.

### **Understanding the Background of Family Resilience and Children Social Skills Acquisition**

The development of children's social skills has long been recognised as a central outcome of early and middle childhood socialisation processes. Social skills—such as empathy, cooperation, communication, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution—are not merely individual attributes but are socially constructed competencies that emerge through sustained interaction within primary social units, particularly the family (Vygotsky, 1978). In contemporary developmental psychology, increasing attention has been paid to the conditions under which children successfully acquire these competencies, especially in contexts characterised by adversity. Within this discourse, the concept of family resilience has emerged as a critical explanatory framework for understanding how families function as protective and developmental systems that shape children's social outcomes.

Historically, early research on child development tended to adopt a deficit-oriented perspective, focusing primarily on risk factors such as poverty, family instability, and parental dysfunction as predictors of maladaptive behaviour (Luthar et al., 2000). While such perspectives provided important insights, they often overlooked the adaptive capacities of families and children who, despite exposure to significant stressors, demonstrate positive developmental outcomes. This shift in scholarly attention—from risk to resilience—was significantly advanced by resilience theorists who argued that development must be understood not only in terms of vulnerability but also in terms of protective processes and adaptive functioning (Masten, 2001). Within this paradigm, family resilience is conceptualised as a dynamic process through which families withstand, adapt to, and recover from adversity while maintaining functional relationships and supporting the development of their members (Walsh, 2003, 2016).

The background of family resilience is rooted in systems theory and ecological perspectives of human development. Rather than viewing resilience as an individual trait, scholars such as Walsh (2003) emphasise that resilience resides within relational processes, particularly those embedded in family interactions. Families serve as the primary context in which children learn social norms, emotional responses, and behavioural expectations. Through everyday interactions—such as communication, caregiving, discipline, and shared problem-solving—children develop the foundational skills required for navigating social relationships. When these interactions are characterised by warmth, consistency, adaptability, and mutual support, they create conditions that facilitate the development of positive social behaviours (Walsh, 2016).

Understanding the background of children's social skills acquisition therefore requires recognising the family as a critical socialising agent. According to social learning perspectives, children acquire social behaviours by observing and imitating the actions of significant others, particularly parents and caregivers (Bandura, 1977). Within resilient families, adaptive behaviours such as empathy, cooperation, patience, and constructive communication are modelled consistently, providing children with behavioural templates that guide their interactions in broader social contexts. Conversely, in families where stress is poorly managed and relationships are characterised by conflict or inconsistency, children may internalise maladaptive social behaviours, including aggression, withdrawal, or poor emotional regulation (Bandura, 1977; Luthar et al., 2000).

Beyond behavioural modelling, the acquisition of social skills is deeply embedded in cultural and social contexts. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory underscores that learning is fundamentally a social process mediated through interaction and language (Vygotsky, 1978). Within the family, children engage in guided participation, where caregivers scaffold their understanding of social norms and expectations. This process is particularly significant in African contexts, where child-rearing is often communal and involves extended family networks, elders, and community members (Nsamenang, 2006). In such settings, children's social skills are shaped not only by nuclear family interactions but also by broader communal practices that emphasise respect, interdependence, and social responsibility.

The relevance of family resilience becomes even more pronounced in contexts characterised by socio-economic and political instability, such as the South West Region of Cameroon. In Fako Division, many families have experienced disruptions linked to prolonged sociopolitical tensions, economic hardship, and displacement. These conditions can potentially undermine stable family functioning and limit children's opportunities for consistent socialisation. However, resilience-oriented research suggests that even under such constraints, families can develop adaptive strategies that sustain children's development (Masten, 2001). For instance, families may rely on extended kinship support, religious faith, shared cultural values, and community solidarity as mechanisms for coping with adversity and maintaining relational stability.

From an ecological standpoint, Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that child development is influenced by multiple interacting systems, with the family serving as the most immediate and influential environment. Within this framework, family resilience operates as a mediating and buffering mechanism, shaping how children experience and respond to external stressors. A resilient family can mitigate the negative effects of environmental instability by providing emotional security, reinforcing positive social norms, and maintaining routines that support children's behavioural regulation. Thus, children raised in resilient family environments are more likely to develop strong social competencies, even in the face of broader contextual challenges (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Walsh, 2016).

Critically, however, the concept of family resilience must be approached with caution. While it highlights strengths and adaptive capacities, there is a risk of romanticising resilience and overlooking structural inequalities that constrain family functioning. Families may demonstrate resilience not because adversity is manageable, but because survival necessitates adaptation under difficult conditions. In such cases, resilience should not be interpreted as the absence of hardship but as the capacity to function despite it (Luthar et al., 2000). This critical perspective is particularly important in the Cameroonian context, where systemic challenges such as limited access to social services, educational disruptions, and economic constraints continue to shape family life.

Furthermore, the background of children's social skills acquisition must also consider the role of changing family structures and modern influences. Urbanisation, migration, and shifts in parenting practices are altering traditional modes of socialisation in many African societies. While these changes may introduce new opportunities for learning, they may also weaken traditional support systems that historically contributed to children's social development. Consequently, understanding family resilience in contemporary contexts requires an appreciation of both continuity and change in family practices.

Family resilience to Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000) is a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity. A family can be considered resilient when it has encountered adversity and coped successfully with the challenge to enhance their well-being. It is an ongoing adaptive process in which protective factors interact with chronic or acute risk factors, resulting in positive outcome (Condly, 2006) and children can be resilient despite dysfunctional families. To Mackay (2003), families can be resilient despite dysfunction and that family resilience influences positive outcomes for children thus intervention that identifies and enhances family resilience can potentially help both children and their families. Through consistent interaction and supportive parenting practices, children in resilient families are more likely to develop confidence, self-efficacy, and the ability to form and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships.

Resilient families can adapt and thrive under stress, influenced by various factors, while maintaining their integrity and well-being. This involves rising above losses, staying flexible, and moving forward, recognizing that all families possess strengths and resources (Nicholas, 2013). Two primary sources influence the adaptation of family resilience: guidance from family belief systems and emotional support from resources outside of the family. Extended family, neighbors, or various types of service providers may bolster families' coping capacity by performing family maintenance tasks or supplying economic assistance, emotional support, or resources for basic family needs. These extra-familial resources can help families learn how to modify or enhance skills that strengthen family coping and problem-solving skills. Likewise, cultural beliefs, values, or worldviews can lead to improved family functioning by helping families develop a sense of coherence, defined as being better able to comprehend the nature of risks, identify and implement available protective factors, and find positive meaning in the process (McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, Elver, & McCubbin, 1998). This helps the family believe in its ability to become resilient.

Family resilience provides a strong connection within families and the practices of it provides a bond which aids with a child's academic development. According to Shonkoff and Phillips (1992) children show significantly better cognitive and language skills, as well as positive social and emotional development, when they are cared for by adults who are attentive to their needs and who interact with them in encouraging and affectionate ways. The absence of such connections early on can harm a child's ability to develop normally. When children have secure attachments early in life, they tend to have better development, social interactions, and academic achievement (Teo, Carlson, Mathieu & Stroufe. 1996).

Family environments that are caring and stable, hold high expectations for children's behavior, and encourage participation by children in the life of the family and environments that more successfully foster resilience in children. According to Wang et al. (1994), most resilient children have a strong relationship with at least one adult (not always a parent), and this relationship helps to diminish risk associated with family discord. The ability of parents to deliver high-quality parenting, despite the

presence of risk factors, plays an important role in children's resilience. A family that emphasizes the value of assigned chores, caring for siblings, and the contribution of part-time work in supporting the family helps to foster resilience.

## Literature Review

From a theoretical perspective, Masten (2001) risk and resilience framework stipulates that, the family and environmental influences are classified into risk factors, which increase the likelihood of negative outcomes, and protective factors that promote positive outcomes even in the presence of risks. The theory stipulates that resilience is built from everyday systems of support, such as caregiver relationships, emotional regulation, and community stability. To Masten, resilience is something that can be nurtured rather than something you are born with. Within this framework, child routines have been identified as powerful protective factors, particularly in high-risk family and environments that could otherwise impede child development. The establishment and maintenance of routines, especially around home activities, act as key coping mechanisms. They provide a sense of predictability and stability in family life, which is critical in fostering resilience and adaptive responses in children facing family and environmental stressors.

The concept of family resilience extends the understanding of family functioning to situations of adversity. Walsh (2010) defines resilience as strength in the context of adversity, the ability to withstand and rebound from stressful life challenges, strengthened and more resourceful. Resilience is founded on the observation that under traumatic or otherwise adverse circumstances, some people cope and develop relatively well while others fail to do so (Greeff, Vansteenwegen, & Ide, 2006). The term "resilience" describes the characteristics of those who cope relatively well - their personal attributes, the quality of their family life, their social supports etc. It is important to emphasize that resilience is not just about personal qualities, but about the way in which these qualities interact with external factors within the family and wider environment. The term "resilience" is derived from the natural sciences and describes the capacity of a material or product to recover its original shape after being stretched or stressed: when applied to people it describes the capacity of the person to "bounce back" after difficult or stressful experiences.

Family resilience plays a significant role in shaping family functioning and enhancing children's social skills. It provides a framework for understanding how families can confront and adapt to challenging situations, positively impacting their functioning. Hawley (2000) stipulates that, family resilience can guide families through difficulties, nurturing their strengths and maintaining positive outlook. It also aids families in addressing challenges and adapting to stressful circumstances, ultimately enhancing overall family functioning. Strong resilience in children and adolescents is associated with better self-autonomy, critical thinking skills, social competence, a sense of purpose, and problem-solving abilities (Zolkoski and Bullock, 2012) as well as better development in various life domains (Wu et al., 2017).

A child who is resilient has an advantage when it comes to meeting the challenges and responsibilities of adolescence through adulthood, even if he or she has experienced circumstances such as poverty, health problems, or strained family relationships. In the context of mental health, resilience can be viewed as the ability to handle stress positively. Resilience can also be viewed as the product of the stressors a child is currently bearing; the child's genetic temperament; his or her competence both for independence and for seeking help when appropriate; and the social support provided by family members and others.

Sharon (2019) investigated resilience and social skills in high school students. It was found that resilience correlates positively with the dimensions of social skills check list, specifically high correlations were obtained with the dimensions: skills against stress, communication skills, planning skills, alternative skills to violence and feelings-related skills. When comparing the results by gender, significant differences in planning skills were also found, with women scoring higher.

Esther Alard (2016) investigated the relationship between family resilience and academic performance of learners in the phase of middle childhood. Family resilience has a positive bearing on the academic performance of learners in the developmental phase of middle childhood. The role of family is often ignored and so there is a gap in the literature on the link between positive academic performance and family resilience. The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between perceived family resilience and the academic performance of children in the phase of middle childhood. The results show that there is a significant positive relationship between the dimensions of academic performance and family resilience.

Andreja Brajša-Žganec, Marija Džida and Maja Kućar (2024). Studied Family Resilience and Children's Subjective Well-Being: A Two-Wave Study According to the Theory of Change, the resilience of the family unit plays a crucial role in shaping the developmental trajectory of children. Families exhibiting higher levels of family resilience are typically characterized by transparent and effective communication, optimistic outlooks on adversity, adept problem-solving skills, strong spiritual beliefs, and effective management of social and financial resources. Children aged 9–13 years (48% boys, age = 11.04, SD = 1.16) assessed their life satisfaction, positive and negative affect in two study waves, while mothers and fathers assessed family resilience in the first wave. A dyadic data common fate model was employed to create latent variables representing family resilience. Three latent variables were: family problem-solving, family spirituality, and utilization of social and economic resources. Findings from the structural equation model indicated a positive association between higher levels of family problem-solving and increased children's life satisfaction, alongside a negative relationship between higher family spirituality and negative affect.

## Theoretical Framework

The relationship between family resilience and children's social skills acquisition is best understood through an integrated theoretical perspective that situates the child within relational, cultural, and ecological contexts. This study is anchored on Walsh's Family Resilience Framework, and further enriched by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Bandura's Social Learning Theory, and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. These theoretical perspectives collectively explain how resilient family processes shape children's social competencies within complex and often challenging environments such as Fako Division in the South West Region of Cameroon.

The central theoretical anchor for this study is Walsh's Family Resilience Framework, which conceptualises resilience as a dynamic and relational process within the family system rather than an individual trait (Walsh, 2003, 2016). According to Walsh (2003), family resilience is expressed through three interrelated domains: family belief systems, organisational patterns, and communication/problem-solving processes. These domains are critical in shaping the developmental environment of children. For instance, when families maintain hope, construct shared meaning in adversity, demonstrate flexibility, and communicate effectively, they create emotionally supportive contexts that nurture children's social skills such as empathy, cooperation, and emotional regulation

(Walsh, 2016). In this regard, family resilience becomes a foundational mechanism through which children internalise adaptive social behaviours.

A critical strength of Walsh's framework lies in its strength-based orientation, which shifts attention away from deficit perspectives commonly associated with families experiencing hardship (Walsh, 2003). In the context of Cameroon, and particularly in Fako Division where families may face sociopolitical instability and economic uncertainty, this perspective is essential. It allows the researcher to recognise the adaptive capacities embedded in extended family systems, communal child-rearing practices, and culturally grounded coping strategies. However, it is equally important to approach this framework critically. While resilience highlights adaptive functioning, it should not obscure structural inequalities or normalise persistent adversity. Families may demonstrate resilience while still operating under significant stress and deprivation, which can, in turn, influence the quality and consistency of children's social development.

To complement this family-centred perspective, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides a broader contextual lens. Bronfenbrenner (1979) posits that child development occurs within nested environmental systems, including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The family, as part of the microsystem, plays a direct and immediate role in shaping children's behaviour and social learning. However, the influence of the family is mediated by interactions with other systems such as schools, peer groups, community structures, and broader sociocultural forces (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Within this framework, family resilience can be understood as a protective buffer that mediates the impact of external stressors on the child. For example, in contexts of insecurity or disrupted schooling, a resilient family may provide emotional stability, reinforce positive social norms, and sustain routines that support children's social adjustment. Thus, children's social skills acquisition is not solely a product of internal family processes but emerges from the dynamic interaction between the family and its wider ecological environment. Bronfenbrenner's theory therefore strengthens the argument that the effectiveness of family resilience is context-dependent and shaped by broader structural conditions.

The explanatory mechanism through which family resilience influences social skills acquisition is further illuminated by Bandura's Social Learning Theory. Bandura (1977) argues that children learn behaviours through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within their social environment. In the family context, parents and caregivers serve as primary models of social interaction. When children observe caregivers demonstrating patience, empathy, cooperation, and constructive conflict resolution, they are more likely to adopt these behaviours in their own interactions (Bandura, 1977).

In resilient families, adaptive coping strategies are often visible and practised in everyday interactions. For instance, a family that manages stress through dialogue rather than aggression provides a behavioural script that children can internalise. Conversely, in families where stress leads to conflict, withdrawal, or inconsistent communication, children may develop maladaptive social behaviours. Bandura's theory thus provides a clear behavioural pathway linking family resilience to children's social skills. However, it is important to recognise that children are not passive recipients of observed behaviours. They actively interpret and negotiate these behaviours within their social contexts, which calls for the integration of additional theoretical perspectives. This interpretative dimension is effectively addressed by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasises the role of social interaction and cultural context in cognitive and social development. Vygotsky (1978)

argues that higher psychological functions develop through social interaction before being internalised by the individual. Social skills, therefore, are not innate but are learned through guided participation in culturally meaningful activities.

Within the family, children acquire social competencies through interaction with more knowledgeable others, including parents, siblings, and extended family members. A resilient family environment enhances this process by providing consistent opportunities for dialogue, cooperation, and emotional engagement. For example, through everyday conversations, storytelling, shared responsibilities, and conflict negotiation, children learn culturally appropriate ways of interacting with others. In the African context, where communal living and interdependence are highly valued, these interactions are particularly significant (Nsamenang, 2006). Vygotsky's theory therefore underscores the culturally embedded nature of social skills acquisition and highlights the importance of interpreting children's behaviour within their sociocultural context.

The broader resilience literature further reinforces this framework. Masten (2001) conceptualises resilience as "ordinary magic," emphasising that adaptive development arises from everyday relational systems such as supportive families. Similarly, Luthar et al. (2000) define resilience as a dynamic process involving positive adaptation despite significant adversity. These perspectives support the argument that family resilience is not an exceptional phenomenon but a common developmental resource that can significantly influence children's social outcomes.

Synthesising these theoretical perspectives, the study conceptualises family resilience as the independent variable and children's social skills acquisition as the dependent variable. Family resilience is reflected in dimensions such as emotional bonding, communication, adaptability, and problem-solving capacity, while social skills acquisition is observed through behaviours such as cooperation, empathy, emotional regulation, and effective interpersonal communication. The integrated framework suggests that resilient family environments foster the conditions necessary for children to learn, practise, and internalise socially competent behaviours. The theoretical framework for this study is both integrative and contextually grounded. Walsh's framework explains the internal dynamics of resilient families, Bronfenbrenner situates these dynamics within broader ecological systems, Bandura provides the behavioural mechanism of learning, and Vygotsky highlights the sociocultural processes through which social skills are constructed. Together, these theories offer a comprehensive and critical understanding of how family resilience shapes children's social skills acquisition, particularly within the socio-cultural realities of Fako Division, Cameroon.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Across many educational and developmental contexts, children's ability to acquire and demonstrate appropriate social skills such as emotional regulation, cooperation, empathy, and conflict resolution—remains a central concern for educators, families, and policy-makers. These competencies are not only foundational to academic engagement but also to long-term psychosocial adjustment. However, in many primary school settings in Fako Division, South West Region of Cameroon, increasing reports of aggression, poor peer relationships, defiance, and limited emotional control among children aged 9–12 years suggest that social skills acquisition is uneven and, in some cases, significantly compromised. While school-based interventions have often focused on behavioural management and instructional strategies, less attention has been paid to the foundational role of the family environment—particularly the capacity of families to adapt, cope, and remain cohesive under stress.

The concept of family resilience has gained prominence in developmental and family studies as a critical determinant of children's wellbeing. It encompasses the family's ability to withstand and recover from adversity through adaptive functioning, effective communication, emotional support, and shared problem-solving. In contexts characterised by socio-economic pressures, shifting family structures, and prolonged socio-political instability—as is the case in parts of the South West Region—families are increasingly exposed to stressors that may undermine their resilience capacities. In Fako Division, for instance, the ongoing socio-political crisis has disrupted livelihoods, schooling, and community cohesion, placing considerable strain on family systems. Under such conditions, families may struggle to provide the consistent emotional support, guidance, and modelling necessary for children's social development.

Despite the intuitive and theoretical linkage between family resilience and children's social competence, empirical evidence within the Cameroonian context remains limited and fragmented. Much of the existing literature on children's social skills has focused on school factors, peer influences, or individual psychological traits, often neglecting the family as a dynamic and adaptive system. Where family-related variables are considered, they tend to focus narrowly on parenting styles or socio-economic status, rather than the broader, more integrative construct of resilience. This creates a significant knowledge gap, particularly in culturally nuanced settings such as Fako Division, where extended family networks, communal values, and indigenous coping mechanisms may uniquely shape resilience processes and, by extension, children's social outcomes.

Furthermore, there appears to be a disconnect between policy aspirations and lived realities. While educational policies in Cameroon emphasise holistic child development, including social and emotional learning, implementation frameworks rarely incorporate family-based resilience-building strategies. As a result, interventions targeting children's social skills often operate in isolation from the familial contexts that fundamentally influence these behaviours. This gap is particularly problematic given that children's early socialisation occurs primarily within the family, where they learn norms of interaction, emotional expression, and conflict management.

The problem, therefore, lies not only in the observable deficits in children's social skills but also in the insufficient understanding of how family resilience—or the lack thereof—contributes to these outcomes within the specific socio-cultural and crisis-affected context of Fako Division. Without such understanding, efforts to enhance children's social competence risk being superficial, fragmented, and unsustainable. Consequently, there is a compelling need to critically examine the influence of family resilience on children's social skills acquisition, in order to generate contextually grounded evidence that can inform more holistic, family-centred interventions and educational practices. This study is thus situated within the urgent need to bridge this empirical and practical gap by investigating how variations in family resilience shape the social development of children in primary schools in Fako Division. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to a more integrated understanding of child development that foregrounds the family as a central, yet often underexplored, site of social learning and adaptation.

## **Methodology**

This study adopted the mixed methods approach specifically the sequential exploratory research design. Using the mixed approach the researcher combined elements of quantitative and qualitative research approaches for the broad purpose of breadth and depth of understanding. The sequential-

exploratory research design consists of two distinct phases: qualitative followed by quantitative. With this design, data was collected over the period of time in two phases- the researcher first collected qualitative data from parents using an interview guide followed by the collection of quantitative data from pupils and teachers in the second phase of the study using a questionnaire. A total population of 409 participants including 335 pupils, 54 teachers and 20 parents in Limbe, Tiko and West Coast Sub-Divisions were sampled to take part in the study. The stratified random sampling technique, simple random sampling and the purposive sampling techniques were used. The instruments for data collection in this study included an interview guide for parents and questionnaire for pupils and teachers. The data was analyzed using the thematic analysis for the interview guide while the quantitative data were analysed using the descriptive and inferential statistical tools. The descriptive statistical tools used are frequency count, percentages, means, and multiple responses set (MRS).

## Findings and Discussion

The study focused on examining the influence of family resilience on children's social skills acquisition in Fako Division

**Table 1:**  
**Children's appreciation of family resilience in relation to family functioning**

Items	Stretched				Collapsed		$\bar{x}$
	Strongly Agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree (SD)	SA/A	D/SD	Mean
We accept stressful events as part of life	125 (37.3%)	113 (33.7%)	30 (9.0%)	67 (20.0%)	238 (71.0%)	97 (29.0%)	2.88
We accept that problems occur unexpectedly	119 (35.5%)	101 (30.1%)	58 (17.3%)	57 (17.0%)	220 (65.6%)	115 (34.4%)	2.84
We can walk through difficulties as a family	170 (50.7%)	98 (29.3%)	39 (11.6%)	28 (8.4%)	268 (80.0%)	67 (20.0%)	3.22
We trust things will work out even in difficult times	166 (49.6%)	112 (33.4%)	33 (9.9%)	24 (7.2%)	278 (83.0%)	57 (17.0%)	3.25
We can survive if another problem comes up	134 (40.0%)	122 (36.4%)	32 (9.6%)	47 (14.0%)	256 (76.4%)	79 (23.6%)	3.02
We are able to work through pain and come to an understanding	157 (46.9%)	115 (34.3%)	37 (11.0%)	26 (7.8%)	272 (81.2%)	63 (18.8%)	3.20
We have the strength to solve our problems	137 (40.9%)	125 (37.3%)	37 (11.0%)	36 (10.7%)	262 (78.2%)	73 (21.8%)	3.08
We feel we are strong in facing big problems	93 (27.8%)	98 (29.3%)	68 (20.3%)	76 (22.7%)	191 (57.1%)	144 (42.9%)	2.62
Our family is flexible and can deal with unexpected events	98 (29.3%)	125 (37.3%)	59 (17.6%)	53 (15.8%)	223 (66.6%)	112 (33.4%)	2.80
We can deal with family differences	122 (36.4%)	95 (28.4%)	55 (16.4%)	63 (18.8%)	217 (64.8%)	118 (35.2%)	2.82

<b>Multiple Response Set (MRS)</b>	<b>1321 (39.4%)</b>	<b>1104 (33.0%)</b>	<b>448 (13.4%)</b>	<b>477 (14.2%)</b>	<b>2425 (72.4%)</b>	<b>925 (27.6%)</b>	<b>2.97</b>
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Source: Field Survey, 2026

From the table above, family resilience was measured using ten (10) items. In aggregate (MRS), findings reveal that majority (72.4%) of the respondents agreed that their families are resilient while some (27.6%) disagreed. Among the children who said their families are resilient, (39.4%) of the children strongly agreed while (33.0%) of the children agreed. To be more specific, while majority of the respondents (71.0%) agreed they accept stressful events as part of life some of them (29.0%) disagreed.

In addition, majority (65.6%) respondents accepted that they accept that problems occur unexpectedly while a few (34.4%) disagreed. Also, the majority (80.0%) respondents agreed that the belief that they can walk through difficulties as a family while very few (20.0%) disagreed. Likewise, most (83.0%) respondents agreed that they trust things will work out even in difficult times while minority (17.0%) disagreed. Again, majority (76.4%) respondents agreed that they can survive if another problem comes up whereas few (23.6%) disagreed. Similarly, majority (81.2%) respondents agreed that they are able to work through pain and come to an understanding whereas very few (18.8%) disagreed.

Findings also show that majority (78.2%) respondents agreed that they have the strength to solve their problems whereas few (21.8%) disagreed. Also, most (57.1%) respondents agreed that they feel they are strong in facing big problems whereas the minority (42.9%) disagreed. Furthermore, majority (66.6%) respondents agreed that their family is flexible and they can deal with unexpected events whereas few (33.4%) disagreed. Lastly, most (64.8%) respondents agreed that they can deal with family differences whereas the few (35.2%) disagreed. The findings on table 11 also revealed that the general mean opinion of the respondents is 2.97, which is greater than the critical mean of 2.50. This therefore means that family resilience influences children's social skills acquisition in Fako Division, South West Region of Cameroon. Figure 5 below presents the summary of findings on family resilience in relation to family functioning.

**Table 2:**  
**Distribution according to children's social skills acquisition**

Items	Stretched				Collapsed		$\bar{x}$ Mean
	Strongly Agree (A)	Agree (A)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree (SD)	SA/A	D/SD	
Children follow your directions.	97 (29.0%)	105 (31.3%)	116 (34.6%)	17 (5.1%)	202 (60.3%)	133 (39.7%)	2.84
Children complete tasks without bothering others.	67 (20.0%)	136 (40.6%)	113 (33.7%)	19 (5.7%)	203 (60.4%)	132 (39.6%)	2.75
Children participate appropriately in class.	117 (34.9%)	123 (36.7%)	82 (24.5%)	13 (3.9%)	240 (71.6%)	95 (28.4%)	3.03
Children pay attention to your instructions.	105 (31.3%)	85 (25.4%)	93 (27.8%)	52 (15.5%)	190 (56.7%)	145 (43.3%)	2.73
Children ignore classmates when they are distracting	59 (17.6%)	92 (27.5%)	124 (37.0%)	60 (17.9%)	151 (45.1%)	184 (64.9%)	2.45

The children follow classroom rules.	83 (24.8%)	103 (30.7%)	131 (39.1%)	18 (5.4%)	186 (55.5%)	149 (45.5%)	2.75
Children ask for support	77 (23.0%)	119 (35.5%)	112 (33.4%)	27 (8.1%)	196 (58.5%)	139 (41.5%)	2.73
Children resolve disagreements with you calmly	77 (23.0%)	117 (34.9%)	102 (30.4%)	39 (11.6%)	194 (57.9%)	141 (42.1%)	2.69
Makes a compromise during a conflict	55 (16.4%)	111 (33.1%)	116 (34.6%)	53 (15.8%)	166 (49.5%)	169 (50.5%)	2.50
Stays calm when disagreeing with others	129 (38.5%)	55 (16.4%)	83 (24.8%)	68 (20.3%)	184 (54.9%)	151 (45.1%)	2.37
Stays calm when teased	71 (21.2%)	92 (27.5%)	104 (31.0%)	68 (20.3%)	163 (48.7%)	172 (51.3%)	2.50
Responds appropriately when pushed or hit	73 (21.8%)	88 (26.3%)	112 (33.4%)	62 (16.5%)	161 (48.1%)	174 (51.9%)	2.51
Uses appropriate language when upset	89 (26.6%)	86 (25.7%)	107 (31.9%)	53 (15.8%)	175 (52.3%)	150 (47.7%)	2.63
Takes criticism without getting upset	64 (19.1%)	85 (25.4%)	115 (34.3%)	71 (21.2%)	149 (44.5%)	186 (55.5%)	2.42
Accept what they cannot control	54 (16.1%)	93 (27.8%)	131 (39.1%)	57 (17.0%)	147 (43.9%)	188 (56.1%)	2.43
Children are well-behaved when unsupervised	67 (20.0%)	102 (30.4%)	120 (35.8%)	45 (13.7%)	169 (50.4%)	166 (49.6%)	2.57
Takes responsibility for part of a group activity	92 (27.5%)	126 (37.6%)	82 (24.5%)	35 (10.4%)	218 (65.1%)	117 (34.9%)	2.82
Takes care when using other people's things	73 (21.8%)	116 (34.6%)	90 (26.9%)	56 (16.7%)	189 (56.4%)	145 (43.6%)	2.61
Children respect the property of others	66 (19.7%)	82 (24.5%)	112 (33.4%)	75 (22.4%)	148 (44.2%)	187 (55.8%)	2.41
Acts responsibility when with others	64 (19.1%)	134 (40.0%)	74 (22.1%)	63 (18.8%)	198 (59.1%)	137 (40.9%)	2.59
<b>Multiple Response Set (MRS)</b>	<b>1,579 (23.6%)</b>	<b>2,050 (30.6%)</b>	<b>2,119 (31.6%)</b>	<b>951 (14.2%)</b>	<b>3,629 (54.2%)</b>	<b>3,060 (45.8%)</b>	<b>2.61</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2026

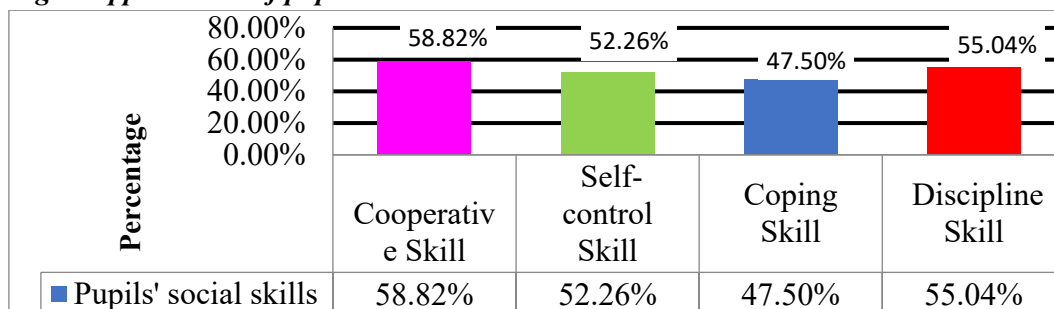
From table above children's social skills acquisition was evaluated using twenty (20) items. Generally, the findings on the Multiple Response Set (MRS) revealed that minority (54.2%) of the respondents agreed that children acquire social skills while few (45.8%) disagreed. For example, majority (60.3%) respondents agreed that children follow their instructions while very few (39.7%) disagreed. Also, majority (60.4%) respondents agreed that children complete tasks without bothering others while very few (39.6%) disagreed. Likewise, majority (71.6%) agreed that children participate appropriately in class while the minority of the respondents (28.4%) disagreed. In addition, majority (56.7%) respondents agreed that children pay attention to their instructions while a few (43.3%) disagreed. However, very few (45.1%) respondents agreed that children ignore classmates when they are distracting while most (64.9%) disagreed. Again, majority (55.5%) respondents agreed that the children ignore follow classroom rules while a few (45.5%) disagreed. Alternatively, majority (58.5%) respondents agreed that children ask for support while a few (41.5%) disagreed.

Consequently, majority (57.9%) respondents agreed that children resolve disagreements with them calmly while a few (42.1%) disagreed. Moreover, few (49.5%) respondents agreed that they make a

compromise during a conflict while majority (50.5%) disagreed. On the other hand, majority (54.9%) respondents agreed that they stay calm when disagreeing with others while a few (45.1%) disagreed. Similarly, very few (48.7%) respondents agreed that they stay calm when teased while most (51.3%) disagreed. In the same way, a few (48.1%) respondents agreed that they respond appropriately when pushed or hit while majority (51.9%) disagreed. To add, majority (52.3%) respondents agreed that they use appropriate language when upset while most (47.7%) disagreed. Following another pattern, minority (44.5%) respondents agreed that they take criticism without getting upset while majority (55.5%) disagreed. Furthermore, minority (43.9%) respondents agreed that they accept what they cannot control while majority (56.1%) disagreed.

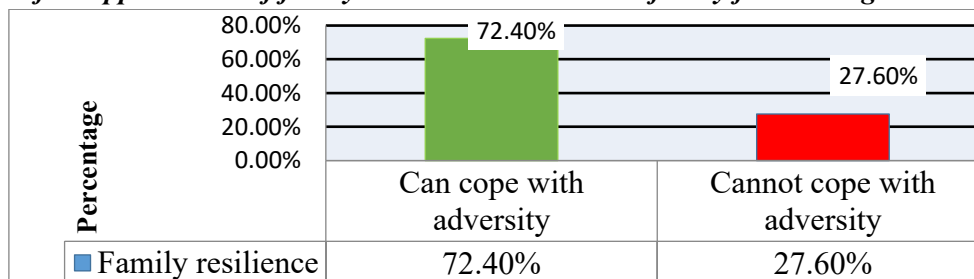
On the other hand, majority (50.4%) respondents agreed that children are well-behaved when unsupervised while a few (49.6%) disagreed. Also, majority (65.1%) respondents agreed that they take responsibility for part of a group activity while a few (34.9%) disagreed. Equally, majority (56.4%) respondents agreed that they take care when using other people's things while a few (43.6%) disagreed. Conversely, a few (44.2%) respondents agreed that children respect the property of others while majority (55.8%) disagreed. Lastly, majority (59.1%) respondents agreed that they act responsibly when with others while a few (40.9%) disagreed. A summary of pupils' social skills is represented on the figure below:

**Fig 1: Appreciation of pupils' social skills**



As shown on the figure above, the highest form of social skills acquired is cooperative skill (58.82%), followed by self-control skill (52.26%), then discipline skills (55.04%) and lastly coping skill while the least percentage of 45.50%.

**Fif 2: Appreciation of family resilience in relation to family functioning**



Findings on the figure above revealed that out of the 335 pupils who took part in the study, majority (72.40%) of them agreed that their families are resilient as most of them opined that their families do accept that problems occur unexpectedly and they are able to deal with them. They also agreed to the fact they believe that they can walk through difficulties as a family, deal with differences and come to a common understanding. However, very few (27.60%) respondents disagreed to all these.

To further examine the influence of family resilience on children's social skills acquisition some parents were interviewed and when asked whether the way parents handle stress at home help children to acquire social skills, participants unanimously agreed that a family's ability to manage stress directly shapes a child's social skill acquisition by determining the emotional, cognitive, and communicative environment they grow up in. They were of the opinion that a resilient home environment acts as a buffer against adversity, fostering the emotional strength, social competence, and confidence that enable children to thrive socially.

The influence of family resilience on children's social skills acquisition was further appreciated by computing the Spearman correlation test as indicated on table.

**Verification of Hypothesis:** Family resilience does not significantly influence children's social skills acquisition. A two tailed correlation matrix (Spearman) was done to inter-match the correlation indices of the predictor variable (family resilience) with the criterion variable (social skills acquisition) and findings on table 12.

**Table 3:**

***Influence of family resilience on children's social skills acquisition***

Test	Statistical parameters	Family resilience	Social skills acquisition
Spearman's rho	R-value	1.000	.712**
	P-value	.	.000
	N	335	335

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Statistically, findings on the table above showed that family resilience has a strong and positive influence on children's social skills acquisition ( $R = 0.712^{**}$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ,  $< 0.05$ ). The positive sign of the correlation value between family resilience and children's social skills acquisition means that as the family's ability to adapt, communicate, and manage stress increases; the child's proficiency in social skills such as emotional regulation and conflict resolution also improves. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis that states that family resilience significantly influences children's social skills acquisition was accepted.

findings of the study revealed that family resilience helps children built Positive modeling of emotional regulation. Resilient family teaches children to model resilient behaviors and emotional regulation skills. When parents handle stress well (e.g., staying calm), they model healthy emotional regulation for their children. Conversely, high stress and hostile parental behaviour can lead to children exhibiting lower social-emotional skills, such as difficulty managing their own emotions. parents who model healthy coping strategies (e.g., staying calm during stress) teach children social skills such as how to handle emotions and social interactions constructively. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the family is the primary environment influencing emotional development. A stable, resilient home environment provides consistent routines and emotional warmth, which strengthen children's capacity of emotional control. Walsh (2003) stipulates that family resilience emphasizes belief systems, organizational patterns, and communication processes that promote adaptability.

Additionally, the finding revealed that family resilience helps in developing self-efficacy in children. That is children come to believe in their ability to handle stress. Children develop confidence in their ability to face and overcome the problems faced and this leads to children believing that they are capable of performing an action. Families that are resilient maintain calm when faced with adversity. This leads to children's acquisition of social skills such as optimism and confidence which are all qualities needed for social interactions. When families face challenges with an optimistic, proactive attitude, children learn to feel more capable and self-assured in their social interactions.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

This study set out to examine the influence of family resilience on children's social skills acquisition within the socio-educational context of Fako Division, South West Region of Cameroon. The findings provide compelling evidence that family resilience constitutes a critical developmental resource that significantly shapes children's social competence. The statistically significant positive relationship identified between family resilience and children's social skills acquisition suggests that when families demonstrate adaptive capacity, emotional connectedness, effective communication, and constructive problem-solving, children are more likely to develop essential social skills such as empathy, cooperation, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings reinforce the proposition that children's social development is deeply embedded in relational and ecological systems. Consistent with **Walsh's Family Resilience Framework**, the study affirms that resilient family processes particularly shared belief systems, organisational flexibility, and effective communication—create environments that nurture adaptive developmental outcomes (Walsh, 2003, 2016). Furthermore, the results align with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasises the centrality of the family as the primary microsystem influencing children's development, while also mediating the impact of broader socio-environmental stressors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The findings also corroborate insights from Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which posits that children acquire social behaviours through observation and modelling within their immediate social environment (Bandura, 1977). In resilient families, children are exposed to positive behavioural models that promote prosocial interaction and emotional competence. Similarly, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory underscores the importance of guided social interaction in the development of higher psychological functions, including social skills (Vygotsky, 1978). The family, therefore, serves not only as a protective unit but also as a primary site of social learning and meaning-making.

Importantly, the study situates these theoretical insights within the lived realities of families in Fako Division. In a context characterised by socio-political instability, economic constraints, and disruptions in schooling, the role of the family becomes even more pronounced. Resilient families act as buffers that mitigate the negative effects of external stressors, thereby sustaining children's developmental trajectories. This finding is consistent with resilience scholarship, which conceptualises resilience as a dynamic process of positive adaptation in the face of adversity (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2001).

However, a critical interpretation of the findings also reveals that while family resilience is a powerful protective factor, it does not operate in isolation. Structural constraints such as poverty, limited access to psychosocial support services, and educational disruptions may undermine family

functioning and limit the extent to which resilience can be sustained. Thus, while the study affirms the importance of strengthening family resilience, it also underscores the need to address broader systemic and contextual challenges that shape family life and children's developmental outcomes.

The study demonstrates that family resilience is not merely a background variable but a central determinant of children's social skills acquisition. It highlights the need for a paradigm shift from deficit-based approaches to strength-based, contextually responsive frameworks that recognise the agency of families while acknowledging the structural conditions within which they operate. Strengthening family resilience, therefore, emerges as a strategic pathway for promoting children's social development and overall well-being in contexts of adversity.

Family resilience plays a vital role in promoting children's social skills acquisition by strengthening the family's ability to adapt, communicate, and manage stress increases which enhances the child's proficiency in social skills such as emotional regulation and conflict resolution also improves self-efficacy and confidence. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis that states that family resilience significantly influences children's social skills acquisition was accepted. Family resilience serves as a protective and promotive factor in children's social development, nurturing supportive relationships and modelling adaptive interaction patterns. Resilient families lay a strong foundation for the acquisition of effective social skills necessary for lifelong adjustment and well-being.

Family resilience is crucial for children's social skills acquisition. Families that promote resilience through supportive relationships and a safe emotional environment prepare children to navigate social challenges effectively. According to Masten (2009), resilient children are better equipped to handle social rejection and peer pressure, leading to improved social engagement and interactions. When parents demonstrate resilient behaviour to children, it teaches them how to cope with difficulties, fostering positive social behaviours. The study recommends resilience-building strategies within the family that teaches family members how to cope in challenging situations and also stress management techniques to embrace and adapt in times of difficulties in the family.

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