



Quality of Education and Teacher Training: What challenges for the Democratic Republic of Congo? Qualità dell'educazione e formazione degli insegnanti: Quali sfide per la Repubblica Democratica del Congo?

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the intricate relationship between educational quality, teacher training, and the challenges faced in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It emphasizes that improving the quality of education is contingent upon effective teacher training programs that address inclusivity, equity, and diversity. By analysing the current educational landscape in the DRC, the study identifies systemic shortcomings in teacher qualifications and highlights the urgent need for a paradigm shift in educational policies.

Questo articolo esplora l'intricata relazione tra la qualità dell'istruzione, la formazione degli insegnanti e le sfide affrontate nella Repubblica Democratica del Congo (RDC). Sottolinea che il miglioramento della qualità dell'istruzione dipende da programmi efficaci di formazione degli insegnanti che affrontino i temi dell'inclusione, dell'equità e della diversità. Analizzando l'attuale panorama educativo della Repubblica Democratica del Congo, lo studio identifica le carenze sistemiche nelle qualifiche degli insegnanti e sottolinea l'urgente necessità di un cambiamento di paradigma nelle politiche educative.

KEYWORDS

Educational policies, Quality of education, Teacher training, Democratic Republic of Congo
Pratiche educative, Qualità dell'educazione, Formazione degli insegnanti, Repubblica Democratica del Congo

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1. Introduction

This paper aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the educational landscape in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), with the goal of informing and enriching the planning of the *Maison de Paix project*¹ located in Kikwit. By thoroughly examining the unique challenges and opportunities present within the DRC's educational system, we seek to identify pedagogical frameworks that can significantly enhance the effectiveness of our initiatives.

This article employs a dual approach, incorporating both empirical data and theoretical perspectives, which encompasses descriptive analysis and theoretical review. Primarily, it endeavors to delineate the educational environment, emphasizing critical factors that influence quality. This segment is underpinned by a descriptive analysis based on secondary sources and pertinent case studies. Moreover, it correlates established pedagogical theories with the distinctive context of the DRC, thereby situating the paper within the domain of theoretical review and utilizing specific examples to elucidate broader educational concepts.

This analysis aims not only to contextualize our efforts but also to offer valuable insights that address the needs of local communities. In doing so, it advocates for sustainable educational development in Kikwit through pedagogical considerations that promote a transformative change in perspective.

2. The notion of quality in Education and the role of the teachers

Inquiring in 2023 about the challenges related to the quality of education and their implications for teacher training situates us within an ongoing process of change that began in 2015, with the adoption of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UNDP, 2024b).

The principle of sustainability defines education and represents a crucial dimension, as it compels states, institutions, scholars, and citizens to focus on future generations and take responsibility for the world's future. As Jonas points out in a work that delves into the philosophical foundations of responsibility, this obligation extends beyond mere survival to include the unity of the species and the dignity of human existence: "the future of humanity constitutes the foremost duty of collective human conduct in the era of technical civilization, which has become, negatively, omnipotent" (Jonas, 1993, p. 175). The notion of sustainable development, while it may appear simplistic, emphasizes the need for a human-centred approach: only a humanistic perspective, rather than a purely utilitarian one serving economic growth alone, can foster the well-being of all. In this light, Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) underscores the imperative to "ensure inclusive and equi-

table quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UNDP, 2024, SDG 4).

Indeed, the sub-points aim to

"[ensure] that by 2030, every girl and boy enjoys freedom, equity, and quality to complete primary and secondary education leading to adequate and relevant learning outcomes [and to] ensure that by 2030, every girl and boy benefits from quality early childhood development and has access to pre-primary education to be ready for primary school" (UNDP, 2024, SDG 4).

It is evident that the concepts of quality and equity are fundamental and are closely interconnected.

The improvement of educational quality has always been a primary concern in international educational reforms: as early as 2000, this goal was formalized in the *Dakar Framework for Action*, which committed all governments to ensuring that everyone would achieve a quality basic education by 2015. In particular, the document emphasized the necessity of

"improve all aspects of the quality of education in a manner aimed at excellence so as to achieve recognized and quantifiable learning outcomes for all—particularly in terms of reading, writing, and arithmetic, and essential life skills" (World Education Forum, 2000, Section 7, Sub-section vi).

Although the intended recipients are "everyone"² maintaining a sense of equity among all members of society—regardless of individual differences and personal characteristics— as André underlined, is "an essential dimension for developing inclusive relationships" (André, 2018, p. 33). This assertion is made by the author after years of study on the conditions that give rise to inclusive practices in schools and the identification of their barriers and facilitators, with the aim of promoting social participation and the success of all students, thereby assisting them in being recognized as such.

On the other hand, about the concept of educational quality, we must acknowledge its complexity, as we are confronted with a proliferation of frameworks. There are both national and supranational definitions, and this complexity begins with the definitions themselves and extends to their implications (Tawil et al., 2012). In particular, the one shared by UNESCO in 2015 stipulates that

"having the right to quality education means having access to relevant learning that is tailored to needs. But, in a world marked by diversity, learning needs vary from one community to another. Therefore, to be considered relevant, learning must reflect what each culture, each human group defines as necessary conditions for living with dignity. We must accept the existence of a multitude

1 For further details about the project, please refer to *UNESCO Chair on Education for Human Development and Solidarity among Peoples* (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 2024) and the institutional website of SFERA Foundation (2024).

2 Among its objectives were also the education of girls and the assurance that no genuinely committed country would be hindered by a lack of resources, with the support of donor countries and institutions.

of ways to define the quality of life and, consequently, an extreme diversity of ways to define what the content of learning should be" (UNESCO & UNESCO Chair..., 2015, p. 35).

Discussing quality in education without considering specific, practical interventions risks devolving into a mere terminological disquisition that lacks real impact in educational contexts. It is, therefore, crucial that the debate on quality is not confined to abstract definitions, but instead focuses on concrete strategies that can be effectively implemented in practice. In this regard, it is essential to recognize the pivotal role of teachers' professional development, which must be viewed as a continuous and fundamental process throughout an educator's career. Only through opportunities for ongoing training and further education can teachers acquire the necessary skills to meet contemporary educational challenges and ensure a high standard of education, both within the school system and in their daily teaching practice.

This is because the quality of the education system is a multidimensional concept, where the expertise of the teaching staff plays a decisive, though not exclusive, role given the system's complexity. The Point c of *Goal 4* states that "by 2030, significantly increase the number of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation to support teacher training in developing countries, particularly in least developed countries and small island developing states" (UNDP, 2024, SDG 4). This point is also emphasized in the *Incheon Declaration* (UNESCO et al., 2015), which, in its desire to "transform lives through education", specifically urged member states to

"ensure that teachers and educators are empowered, are adequately recruited, have satisfactory training and professional qualifications, and are motivated and supported within efficiently and effectively managed systems, and with sufficient resources [as] quality education fosters creativity and knowledge and ensures the acquisition of fundamental skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as skills in analysis and problem-solving, and other high-level cognitive, interpersonal, and social abilities" (UNESCO et al., 2015, Section 9).

A necessary commitment is required, recognising that the teaching profession has evolved significantly since the 20th century, becoming increasingly complex due to the ambiguous nature of the tasks assigned to teachers (Altet & Guibert, 2014).

We face a shift in imagery, where "the teacher transitions from a managerial profile to a professional profile" (Altet et al., 2006, p. 17). Where professionalism is characterized by a multiplicity of skills, know-how, and knowledge, but also by practical, affective, cognitive, and cognitive dimensions; where joint practice development (i.e., the development of shared practices) is fundamental. Schön (1992) articulates a model of the reflective teacher, positing that cognition is fundamentally anchored in both reflection-in-action and intrinsic reflection on action. This comprehensive model further encompasses essential technological competencies, a sense of agency, and the multifaceted

challenges inherent in collaborative practice, thereby highlighting the dynamic interplay between individual reflection and collective engagement in the teaching process.

The certainty is that the professionalism of teachers is, like quality, a very complex concept contaminated by multiple connotations and definitions (Freidson, 1986; Soder, 1990). Acknowledging that teachers are strategic professionals capable of effecting meaningful improvements within educational systems—and recognising their significant role in shaping the future of 21st-century society—it is imperative to invest in and implement strategies for ongoing, comprehensive professional development in areas that resonate with individual educators. Such investments are essential for enhancing "this set of knowledge, skills, values, and behaviors exercised towards students" (Hoyle & John, 1995, p. 14).

These training processes must combine professional practice with active learning processes. They should recognize that teacher expertise exists only within context and depends on the ability to adapt to variability inherent in the context and the individuals involved. Additionally, it is necessary to rethink the characteristics of ongoing professional development, integrating multidisciplinary and cooperative approaches (Eurydice, 2015).

Training, however, should never be mandated; rather, it should be an informed choice, emphasising the conscious exercise of freedom of choice (Sen, 1999) that ideally defines teachers' engagement in such initiatives. While the modes of delivery may differ—one of which will be examined in the subsequent section—it is evident that through their educational practices, teachers play a pivotal role in conveying innovative ideas, transforming and refining existing methodologies, and ultimately shaping the contexts in which they operate daily. This dynamic interplay not only enriches their own professional development but also enhances the overall educational environment for their students.

3. The Africas

Teacher training is a fundamental aspect of ensuring educational quality. Nevertheless, many countries worldwide fail to meet international standards for educational quality. This challenge is especially pronounced in sub-Saharan Africa, where the critical shortage of qualified teachers significantly undermines efforts to provide effective education. Consequently, addressing the deficiencies in teacher training and recruitment is essential not only for improving educational outcomes but also for fostering sustainable development in the region.

Firstly, data from 2019 indicates that only 64% of primary school teachers and 50% of secondary school teachers in these regions had completed their training by the conclusion of the 2017–2018 academic year. This reflects a notable decline from 71% and 79%, respectively, in 2005 (UNESCO, 2019). This decrease in the proportion of qualified teachers is primarily driven by the surging demand for education, spurred by a rapidly expanding school-age population. Con-

sequently, this burgeoning demand imposes considerable pressure on educational systems, complicating efforts to adequately address the diverse needs of students.

One of the most recent reports in this regard is the one published in 2021 by the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, titled *Closing the Gap – Ensuring There Are Enough Qualified and Supported Teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa*. The analysis examines the causes of the teacher shortage, showing how trends affect certain regions more (Central African Republic, Chad, Mali, and Niger for the primary cycle, and Burundi, Central African Republic, Mozambique, Niger, Chad, and Tanzania for the secondary cycle), and describes the extent of the shortage. At the same time, however, it shows how the political and economic situation of the country strongly influences this dynamic, highlighting that salary costs and the costs of initial training and continuous professional development for teachers are not appropriate or adequate. Even if educational agencies are currently ‘under-performing,’ they require support, dialogue, and strategic planning to explore potential solutions and recommendations. In this context, educational agencies encompass not only governments but also the various stakeholders collaborating within these domains.

Many factors contribute to the shortage of teachers and their low qualifications. Firstly, policy changes and economic investments in the education sector have led to increased demand due to a greater number of schools, but the response in teacher training has not kept pace. As a result, the financial demands on the workforce at large have also increased (Pitsoe & Machaisa, 2012), while salaries have often remained the same. Additionally, there has been no adequate strategy for preparing and qualifying teachers, resulting in professionals who lack essential pedagogical and service skills (Moon & Villet, 2017).

There is no singular solution to the myriad challenges confronting sub-Saharan Africa, and these complexities cannot be effectively addressed solely through a systemic analysis, which refers to examining issues within the broader context of interconnected systems and structures. Instead, meaningful change requires a multifaceted approach that considers the unique circumstances and needs of individuals and communities. In this regard, it is important to offer continuous professional development opportunities and establish mentorship programs. Additionally, creating exchange networks and shared working environments is crucial for recognizing and valuing each person’s contributions.

Simultaneously, it is crucial to prioritise investments in the well-being, health, and safety of professionals by implementing targeted preventive measures and enhancing workplace conditions. This includes establishing clear protocols for health and safety, providing access to mental health resources, and ensuring that the work environment is conducive to productivity and employee satisfaction.

Several studies highlight how burnout, caused by long-term work-related stress, can also be influenced by the environment, leading to states of depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and reduced personal fulfillment (De Stasio et al., 2017).

However,

“the teacher shortage is a multidimensional problem with deeply rooted causes. Training and recruiting new teachers will not be enough to solve the problem: structural issues within the educational systems of the region must also be addressed. These issues include low-quality and excessively poor teacher training and continuous professional development, lack of professional autonomy, non-competitive salaries, and poor working conditions” (Teachers Task Force for Education 2030, 2021, p. 12).

The fact that teaching is not of high quality is also due to other factors, such as classroom conditions. Several studies show how school buildings and classrooms influence teaching and learning processes (Moos, 1979; Steele, 1973; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). Moos asserts that “architecture and physical design can influence psychological states and social behaviour” (Moos, 1979, p. 6); he then identifies key functions with Steele (1973): “Security and Shelter, Pleasure, Symbolic Identification, Task Instrumentality, and Social Contact.” In response to these events, it is important to note that in sub-Saharan Africa, it was estimated in 2018 that only 34% of primary schools have access to electricity and 44% to clean water.

Another factor is training.

“According to PASEC data, in at least one-quarter of schools, second-grade teachers had not received any professional development opportunities in the two years preceding the survey. The content of teacher training is often not organized to prepare trainees to teach the early years. Recent assessments suggest that most teachers in Africa lack sufficient skills to effectively teach basic literacy and numeracy skills” (Global Education Monitoring Report Team et al., 2022, p. 5).

In summary, it is challenging to guarantee and achieve *Goal 4* of the *2030 Agenda* if key elements are missing to ensure the qualified work of teachers, who are tasked with supporting an “education [that] should aim for the full development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (UN, 1948). While these elements illuminate the landscape of sub-Saharan Africa, it may be inappropriate to speak of Africa in general, as we are confronted with multiple *Africas*. Among them, we have chosen to focus on the context of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

4. The Congolese context and its challenges

The country, with a population estimated at approximately 102,262,808 million (World Bank data, 2023), possesses a historical narrative characterized by conflicts of varying intensity and complexity, encompassing periods of dictatorship and armed struggles between rebel factions and the government. This tumultuous history is intricately linked to the region’s extensive experience of Belgian colonization, which

persisted until the 1960s and has profoundly shaped its social dynamics. A particularly tragic consequence of this colonial legacy is the genocidal violence that erupted during various conflicts, notably the widespread atrocities that led to the deaths of millions, reflecting the deep scars inflicted by foreign domination.

If Belgian dominance, which arrived in 1909, was characterized by firm political control and constraint, independence came in 1960 under the peace promise of Patrice Lumumba. A great nationalist leader and representative of the non-aligned movement, inspired by Pan-Africanism, he emphasized during his inauguration the end of the people's suffering, which had experienced "humiliating slavery imposed by force". A thought that accompanied him until his last words when, from the Thysville prison, shortly before his assassination in January 1961, he wrote:

"To my children whom I leave and whom I may never see again, I want it to be said that the future of Congo is bright and that the sacred task of rebuilding our independence and sovereignty is expected of them, as of every Congolese, for without dignity there is no freedom, without justice there is no dignity, and without independence there are no free men" (Blackpast, 2009).

Despite efforts to establish a functional government, political instability soon engulfed the country, leading to a brutal civil war. The Democratic Republic of Congo's political history is intricate, shaped by decades of conflict and external influence. The assassination of Patrice Lumumba in 1961 was not only a profound emotional shock for the nation, but also a pivotal moment in its history, marking the loss of a key figure in the fight for independence. This national tragedy set the stage for one of the most notorious and enduring dictatorships in Africa, under Mobutu Sese Seko, whose regime spanned 32 years and left deep scars on the country's political and social fabric. Mobutu's rule was characterised by widespread corruption, authoritarianism, and economic decline, which further entrenched instability and division within the nation. Following Mobutu, Joseph Kabila's presidency also struggled to bring peace, as his tenure was marked by continued conflict and economic challenges. Despite numerous interventions by the United Nations, aimed at stabilising the country and fostering peace, Congo's trajectory towards stability has remained precarious. Particularly in the eastern regions of North and South Kivu, and Ituri, ongoing conflict and violence persist, often described by international observers as 'highly unstable' and resistant to peace efforts.

The current president, Félix Tshisekedi, has made notable political efforts to bring about reform and reconciliation. However, these regions remain volatile, plagued by ethnic conflict, armed groups, and competition over natural resources. International interventions, while frequent, have had limited success in fostering long-term stability. The legacy of colonialism, the enduring effects of decades of dictatorship, and the complex web of local and international interests in the country's vast natural resources continue to impede progress. Congo remains at a crossroads,

with its future hinging on the ability to address these deep-rooted issues and build a foundation for sustainable peace and development. Considering the issues addressed in this contribution, it is noteworthy that the Democratic Republic of Congo recorded over 1,000 attacks on schools between 2015 and 2019 (GCPEA, 2020).

Focusing specifically on the Congolese educational system, it is noteworthy that in 2016, there were 9,560,522 illiterate individuals aged 15 and over, comprising 7,163,256 females and 2,397,266 males (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2024). In addition, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is committed to integrating refugee children and youth into public schools, in alignment with the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees: by the end of 2021, the country was home to 228,000 school-age refugee children, yet only 34,000 were enrolled in school, with the majority attending primary education (UNESCO et al., 2022, p. 39). With a population whose average age is 17 years, in 2021, children aged 0 to 14 years numbered 45,557,364 and represent 47,55% of the population (World Bank, 2023). Also in 2024, in terms of training outcomes,

"DRC as many other African countries is facing a learning crisis. Learning poverty, the share of children not able to read and understand an age-appropriate text by age 10, is estimated by the World Bank, UNESCO, and other organizations at 97%. This is in part because out-of-school children are unlikely to achieve reading proficiency. But it mostly results from the fact that 122% of children enrolled in primary school could be learning poor. It is imperative to improve the quality of the education provided in schools" (UNESCO IICBA, 2024).

The educational system, therefore, operates within a context of high demographic growth (3.2 according to World Bank, 2023) where the population remains predominantly rural. In 2019, 45.05% of the total population of the Democratic Republic of Congo lived in urban areas and cities, including its capital, Kinshasa, which has 15 million inhabitants and is the second-largest French-speaking city in the world. This urban-rural divide not only affects access to educational resources and infrastructure but also complicates the delivery of quality education, as rural areas often face greater challenges in terms of school availability, qualified teachers, and necessary educational materials. Therefore, understanding these demographic dynamics is crucial for addressing the systemic issues within the Congolese educational framework. Furthermore, despite its efforts in education and health, the DRC has a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.481, placing it 180th out of 193 (UNDP, 2024a).

Framework Law No. 14/004, enacted on February 11, 2014, establishes the foundation for national education policy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC; *Loi-Cadre n° 14/004*, 2014). As stipulated in Article 12, the law declares that "to achieve basic education for all, throughout life, the State: guarantees compulsory and free primary schooling for all in public national education institutions, dedicating appropriate human, material, and financial resources"

(Loi-Cadre n° 14/004, 2014). This commitment underscores the importance of accessible education and allocates essential resources to facilitate it.

The educational framework encompasses a total of 12 years of mandated schooling, beginning with a primary education phase that lasts for six years and culminates in the award of a *certificat d'études primaires*, which is a prerequisite for progressing to secondary education. The secondary education cycle, which spans two years, is characterized as non-compulsory yet remains free of charge (Loi-Cadre n° 14/004, 2014, Article 79). This legislation also introduces the concept of basic education, which integrates both the primary education cycle and the general secondary education cycle, amounting to a total of eight years of foundational education. Thus, the right to education is guaranteed for a comprehensive 12-year period (GEM Report, 2022). Following primary education, students may opt to pursue vocational training based on their academic outcomes and personal interests. Vocational programs, which can last up to five years, equip students with practical skills in various trades and crafts, ultimately leading to the receipt of a *brevet* certificate.

At the tertiary level, the DRC offers a variety of both privately and publicly funded polytechnics and specialized colleges. However, it is important to note that the country is present four state universities: the Universities of Goma, Kinshasa, Kongo, and Lubumbashi. This educational structure aims to provide a comprehensive academic environment, although it continues to face significant challenges related to access and quality for all learners.

In 2016, the Democratic Republic of the Congo committed to a strategy for the education and training sector (SEEF 2016 – 2025), encompassing three key areas (access and equity, quality, governance) and setting as its goal major structural reforms (a total of 44 – with ten considered significant). However, the situation remains particularly complicated. Despite this, millions of children and young people leave school each year without qualifications.

This figure was also confirmed in 2021, where in agreement with the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, the primary school completion rate was at 79 % in 2021 for girls and 86 percent for boys (UNESCO IICBA, 2024). The situation is alarming in the central part of the country, in the province of Grand Kasai, where the secondary school completion rate is only 4.6%. A similar situation exists in the provinces of Tanganyika (Grand Katanga) and Mongala (Grand Équateur), while other provinces have completion rates below the national average of approximately 31.1% (INS, 2019, pp. 49 – 50).

Furthermore, data from tests administered by the *Programme d'analyse des systèmes éducatifs* (PASEC) of the Conference of Ministers of Education of Francophone Countries (CONFEMEN) show that at the end of the first cycle of primary education, results are “below the competency threshold in mathematics” and that “72.9% of Congolese students who took the test at the end of primary school are below the reading competency threshold: after six years of schooling, they are unable to read and understand a simple text written in French” (PASEC, 2020, pp. 179 – 189).

The extent of public-school abandonment by

wealthy families is surprising in Congo: 87% of the wealthiest, but only 6% of the poorest, attend public schools (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2021, p. 42). The reasons are related to the qualitative aspect; for example, when asked, parents

“in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, 45% of parents with children in public schools stated that they would prefer to send their children to public schools, but only if they offer adequate safety and quality, in terms of teacher quality, effort, and absenteeism” (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2021, p. 43).

The educational context in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) reveals a significant shortfall in quality compared to international standards. This deficiency is concerning, as education should occupy a central role within the social contract of the nation. To address these challenges, a collaborative effort among educational agencies and governmental institutions is essential to ensure that the teaching profession is both re-evaluated and re-defined. And this, knowing that

“teachers play a particular role in the advent of a new social contract for education, as the profession they practice is complex, delicate, and demanding, due to its crossroads situation, between the public and private domains. Similarly, their profession unfolds between past and future: teachers work together to mobilize the heritage of “common knowledge”, but within the framework of a dialogue with younger generations, who will inherit and co-construct the future” (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021, p. 97).

In the *Sectoral Strategy for Education and Training 2016-2025* (République Démocratique du Congo, 2016), which is aligned with SDG 4, priority is given to a reform entitled *Quality of Teachers and Teaching*, which aims to transform the system, requiring commitment from national authorities and the local education partner group (République Démocratique du Congo, 2016, pp. 74 – 75). Despite these improvement objectives, the reality presents a challenging and complex situation.

In 2020, the government identified 394,692 “new unit” teachers, of which 144,944 were eligible for payment. By October 2020, 58,735 primary and 4,067 nursery teachers were paid, while 81,509 secondary teachers and staff remained unpaid (UNESCO et al., 2022, p. 23).

Consequently, until the end of 2021, teaching staff faced underpayment and irregular payment schedules. Nevertheless, the reform of free primary education has had a significant impact on teacher salaries, both nationwide and in major urban centres. Tony Mwaba, the Congolese Minister of Primary, Secondary, and Technical Education (EPST), remarked: “We started with a salary of 155,000 Congolese francs within the country and 175,000 CDF in major cities; we have now reached 365,621 CDF, to which an advance of 20,000 CDF is added as the first phase of the teacher’s salary”. As a result, teacher salaries have in-

creased by over 148% due to the provision of free educational materials.

On the one hand, although these timely reforms recognise the crucial role of teachers' professionalism, many contexts still reveal schools to be lacking adequate teaching materials. The learning environment, defined as the interaction between the learner and the "place" in which they operate - including the use of tools, the collection and interpretation of information, and interactions with other individuals (Wilson, 1996) - is fundamental to ensuring the quality of teaching. In the context of the 1990s, constructivist scholars - including Wilson - highlighted that instructional design should reflect the relationship between traditional notions of knowledge and contemporary approaches to education.

In this regard, also Perkins (1991) emphasises the importance of information-processing technologies and the educational practices associated with constructivism, asserting that within a "learning environment", the learner has the opportunity to define their own learning objectives, select activities to undertake, access resources and informational tools, and receive support and guidance throughout their journey.

Educational science shows that various factors shape the learning environment, including classrooms, laboratories, building design, the surrounding context, the presence of green spaces, the colors of walls, the quality of lighting, technological equipment, furniture, and teaching materials. All these elements create the environment in which learners engage and interact with others. This perspective recognizes the student as part of a broader system, emphasizing the significance of their context. In this regard, Morin states that

"if learning is the affair of the subject, this subject is not isolated from its environment; its study has a dual entry: a biophysical entry and a psycho-socio-cultural entry, with the two entries referring to each other. From this perspective, one can think that the subject is a complex being and that their education should take this complexity into account" (Morin, 1999, p. 18).

Morin's insights hold significant relevance for this argument, as they illuminate the intricate interplay between individuals and their contextual environments. By conceptualizing the subject as an integral component of a broader system, he advocates for a holistic understanding of education that extends beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge. His assertion that individuals are "complex beings" highlights the imperative of considering not only the academic curriculum but also the socio-cultural dynamics that influence learning experiences. This perspective prompts educators to embrace context-sensitive pedagogical approaches, thereby fostering inclusive and effective educational practices that acknowledge and accommodate the diverse backgrounds and circumstances of students.

The State is aware of this, and, in the *Sectoral Strategy for Education and Training* (SSEF 2016 – 2025), it states that

"all human, material, infrastructure, and equipment resources needed to implement the activities defined by the strategy to achieve its schooling and learning objectives have a financial translation. The implementation of the strategy requires a doubling of the financial resources allocated to the sector, which should increase from 1.3 billion USD in 2016 to 2.8 billion USD in 2025" (SSEF, 2016 – 2025, p. 13).

Furthermore, as indicated by the PASEC report (2020), teaching staff in the Democratic Republic of the Congo often lack sufficient qualifications and do not have access to ongoing training. In the Sub-Saharan context, and particularly in the DRC, this represents a significant opportunity to address the gaps in initial training or even its absence (UNESCO, Lauwrier, & Akkari, 2015). The issue is also relevant internationally, where numerous studies have focused on the dimension of "teacher knowledge and skills" (Altet, 2008; Helms and Stokes, 2013). It is essential that during their career, teachers acquire or update their skills through continuing education activities: long-term training, peer training or mentoring, seminars, personal reading, workshops, and debates (Savoie-Zajc et al., 1999; Youdi, 2006). These teaching skills are technical and didactic (Altet, 1994) and enable performance in the career (Baribeau, 2009; Bidjang, 2005) to better initiate teaching-learning activities (Ekanga Lokoka, 2013; Masselter, 2004) and improve students' academic performance (Etumangele, 2006; Mulele, 2017; Vita, 2014; PASEC, 2020, p. 201).

In these terms, expressions such as lifelong learning, recurrent education, and adult education reflect the need to address the challenges and expectations related to education and training for adults and workers. In this context, schools themselves play a key role and should be actively invited to participate in teacher training projects, rather than delegating this responsibility to the state or other agencies. Schools must recognize this as their essential responsibility, fostering a continuum of professional development through the exchange of good practices and effective changes throughout educators' careers and professional biography.

Despite the recognition of educational challenges and the need for reform in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, significant gaps remain in addressing these issues effectively

"the initial training of teaching staff is considered insufficiently professional by many actors. Indeed, primary school teachers are trained in the secondary school humanities stream, and the teaching provided there gives little place to learning the teaching profession (curriculum content, practical internships in application schools, etc)" (SSEF, 2016 – 2025, p. 72).

Training is therefore at the heart of teaching quality, as it recognizes the teacher as a reflective professional. Through their actions, teachers contribute to improving the skills and knowledge of future generations while serving as agents of transformation in educational and political environments.

Various proposals rooted in Western evidence-based pedagogy have gained significant traction in Africa, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). This trend can be traced back to the era of multipartyism and globalization, during which African educational systems were characterized by a lack of robust and contextually relevant models. Instead of fostering indigenous solutions tailored to local needs, the future of education was predominantly managed and coordinated by international experts, often appointed by funding institutions. These experts dictated educational policies and frameworks, which were then discussed and refined in supranational forums that prioritized global standards over local realities.

As a result, this reliance on external guidance has led to a process of harmonization, where educational strategies across different African nations began to align with the norms and expectations set forth by international bodies. While this harmonization aimed to create coherence in educational practices, it frequently overlooked the unique cultural, social, and economic contexts of individual countries. Consequently, the integration of Western pedagogical approaches, while potentially beneficial, raises critical questions about their applicability and sustainability within the diverse landscapes of African education.

The modus operandi of many partnerships and international cooperation projects warrants scrutiny, particularly concerning their relevance to contemporary needs in teacher training. This raises a critical question: Is the prevailing approach still appropriate today?

A significant concern is that a one-size-fits-all model frequently aligns more closely with the priorities of international organisations than with the specific needs of the target countries. Such an approach risks overlooking the local contexts and realities essential for fostering meaningful change. Effective teacher training necessitates not only a clear understanding of pedagogical best practices but also an appreciation of the socio-cultural dynamics that influence education in diverse settings.

Furthermore, reliance on Western-imposed strategies may undermine the potential for sustainable progress, as these initiatives often lack a solid foundation for continuity over time. When local stakeholders are not actively engaged in shaping educational interventions, there is a considerable risk that such efforts may not resonate with the communities they aim to serve. Absent a comprehensive understanding of local circumstances and challenges, initiatives to implement change may falter, ultimately failing to achieve their intended outcomes.

The insights derived from this analysis not only contribute to a deeper understanding of the educational system in the DRC but also offer practical guidance for the Maison de Paix project. By aligning pedagogical practices with the needs of local communities, the project can foster a more effective and inclusive educational environment.

In this context, it is imperative to engage in a dialogue that prioritises the voices of local educators, policymakers, and communities. By fostering genuine collaboration and co-creation of educational initiatives, partnerships can better align with the unique as-

pirations and challenges faced by the target countries. This approach not only enhances the relevance of training programmes but also promotes a sense of ownership among local stakeholders, thereby increasing the likelihood of sustainable educational improvements.

5. A change of perspective for training

In view of these considerations, it is important to shift from talking about teacher training to training *with* teachers. Indeed, meaningful learning and professional growth cannot occur if trainers do not foster a learning mindset in those they encounter. Engaging in dialogue as facilitators allows trainers to support a journey that belongs to the teachers themselves (Aglieri, 2020, pp. 21 – 22).

Otherwise, there is a risk of technocratization (where decision-making power becomes concentrated in the hands of technocrats, shaping the social organization) the

“debate on fundamental knowledge, skills, or competencies, rather than politicizing it. Consequently, teachers are made less responsible for choosing what knowledge to teach and the methods to help students learn it. By turning them into mere executors, this evolution paradoxically makes their task more difficult, as their practice no longer requires a true appropriation of meaning, and one might legitimately question whether it is still possible to talk about quality improvement” (Varcher, 2012, p. 27).

Therefore, it is essential, in the case of field actions, to identify the actual training needs of teachers using qualitative methodologies that enable participatory processes. The idea is that while a teacher can be seen as “a technical operator, capable of having the right algorithm to solve learning problems that are at least somewhat predictable”, here, on the other hand, it is envisioned to conceive “the teacher as a clinical guide of the student, who follows their own learning paths, which are original and unpredictable” (Damiano, 2004, p. 234).

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