



SPOTLIGHT ON BASIC EDUCATION COMPLETION
AND FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING

Democratic Republic of the Congo



In partnership with



Ushirika wa Maendeleo ya Elimu Barani Afrika
الرابطة لأجل تطوير التربية في إفريقيا
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Foreword

More than three decades ago, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), in Article 19 of *Framework Act No. 86-005 of 22 September 1986 on National Education*, set the primary education system the objective of "preparing children for life and providing them with an introduction to general, physical, civic, moral, intellectual and social education". However, the Act has proven inadequate in terms of the constitutional and social development of the DRC, its education system, cultural realities and the fundamental prerequisites for national development.

In adopting *Framework Act No. 14/004 of 11 February 2014 on National Education* 28 years later, the DRC resolved to address the challenges facing its education system and to overcome its shortcomings through basic education. Article 10 defines basic education as "the body of knowledge acquired by children from the primary to the general secondary level". The country was henceforth committed to "meeting the learning needs of children, young people and adults, including learning how to write, read, calculate, and express themselves orally and in writing, how to solve problems and how to acquire soft skills, know-how, the ability to get things done by others, and to achieve their potential and civic awareness" (Article 11).

Against this background, the DRC Spotlight Report shows how policies on basic education and its completion have evolved between 2019 and 2022. This report is based on the analysis of seven factors determining the level of student learning in education systems, as defined by the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM Report) team: (i) vision and focus on performance; (ii) teaching and learning; (iii) teachers; (iv) management and leadership of schools and budgets; (v) supervision and monitoring; (vi) community and parental engagement; and (vii) learning assessments. It also reviews the progress and challenges of basic education in the DRC and highlights positive practices and opportunities to improve fundamental learning so that basic education is completed. The Government of the DRC has made a concerted effort in this regard through ambitious reforms included in the *Education and Training Sector Strategy 2016-2025*, such as free primary education, professional teacher training, the creation of pre-primary classes and the implementation of a quality assurance mechanism. Thanks to these efforts, it has been possible to identify the seven factors indicated above, as well as the critical success factors – resources, teachers and vision – and those that explain the gaps in academic reading performance in high-performing classrooms and schools (financial resources, teacher support and the staff-student ratio), including good teaching practices. This report therefore encourages serious reflection from the various partners involved in the DRC's education system and proposes more realistic recommendations for strengthening the system, in order to achieve, as expected, the fourth Sustainable Development Goal.

Hon. Tony Mwaba Kazadi
Minister of Primary, Secondary and Technical Education



Table of Contents

Foreword.....	2
1. Executive summary.....	5
2. Introduction.....	6
2.1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY.....	6
2.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	6
2.3. MAIN ACTIVITIES.....	6
3. Situation analysis.....	7
3.1 GOVERNANCE OF PRIMARY, SECONDARY, AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION..	7
3.2. ENROLMENT AND COMPLETION.....	11
3.3. LEARNING.....	13
3.4. ANALYSIS OF CONGOLESE LEARNING ASSESSMENT DATA FROM PASEC16	
3.5. FINANCING OF EDUCATION.....	20
3.6. POLITICAL ECONOMY.....	24
3.7. SUMMARY.....	25
4. Analytical framework and fieldwork findings.....	26
4.1. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS.....	26
4.2. RESULTS OF DISCUSSIONS WITH NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS.....	27
4.3. FIELD APPROACH AND AREAS VISITED.....	29
4.4. FIELDWORK RESULTS AND RELATIONSHIP WITH CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS.....	31
4.5. RESULTS OF LESSON OBSERVATIONS.....	33
4.6. WHAT FACTORS UNDERLIE DIFFERENCES IN SCHOOL PERFORMANCE? 33	
5. Two positive case studies.....	35
5.1. PARENTAL PARTICIPATION.....	35
4.1. PROFESSIONALIZATION OF TEACHER TRAINING.....	35
6. Recommendations.....	36
Abbreviations.....	37
References.....	39



1. Executive summary

The *Spotlight Study: Democratic Republic of the Congo* (DRC Spotlight Study) provides education partners with a fact-based diagnosis of the national education system, with a focus on basic education and foundational learning. It seeks to highlight the progress made within the system in relation to the impact of factors such as education vision, teaching and learning, teachers, leadership and management, assessment, parent and community intervention, and evaluation of basic education and foundational learning.

Access: Since 2016, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has committed to ambitious reforms, especially with the introduction of free basic education (*gratuité*). Progress has been made in terms of primary school attendance, which is currently almost universal with a primary gross enrolment ratio exceeding 100%. However, late entry and high repetition result in a primary net enrolment rate of 69%.

Quality: The overall quality of education remains very low and no noticeable attempt has been made to improve it on a large scale and in a lasting manner. Multiple challenges persist, including insufficient funding, lack of equipment, dilapidated buildings, overcrowding due to increased enrolment, poor opportunities for teacher professional development, and low, often delayed or even unpaid teacher salaries.

Basic language learning: Language has become a major subject in the primary school curriculum, a national reading roadmap has been developed, and performance standards for reading in French and in the four national languages have been established. However, poor student skills at both the beginning and end of primary school have been observed. An assessment by the Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs de la CONFEMEN (PASEC, the CONFEMEN Education System Analysis Programme) in 2019 found that 73% of students fell below the minimum threshold at the end of primary school.

Vision vs reality on the ground: Results on the ground showed that school performance, the state of teaching and ownership of the education vision are still thorny problems, and that courageous reforms need to be made in areas including teaching and learning, leadership, supervision and parental engagement, despite positive examples observed in a few schools.

Based on the fieldwork carried out for this report, the following four recommendations are made:

- Provide the education system and schools with necessary resources.
- Prepare and supervise teachers through more effective in-service teacher training and regular school-level inspections.
- Clarify and disseminate the vision of education more widely.
- Produce and disseminate appropriate textbooks and other educational materials aligned with the curriculum and adapted to reflect local languages.



2. Introduction

2.1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The Spotlight series has two goals:

- Synthesize, analyse and clearly present comparative knowledge on challenges and solutions to achieving universal basic education (UBE) completion and foundational learning as a basis for support to regional peer learning mechanisms and national, regional and global accountability mechanisms.
- Support national and regional coalitions in the use of this comparative knowledge to move national education systems, plans, policies and budgets – but also international support mechanisms – in the direction of achieving UBE completion and foundational learning.

2.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study aimed to stimulate an informed and strategic country-led policy dialogue with stakeholders and development partners which would, in turn, lead to tangible actions to address identified issues. It also assessed progress towards reaching targets. This Spotlight report will be a key input into an annual continental Spotlight report that will serve as a basis for continental peer dialogue on issues related to UBE completion and foundational learning. Four research questions guided the study:

- What is the current state of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's education system in terms of the seven factors (see Figure 11) identified for the report's analytical framework?
- What progress has the country made in achieving UBE completion and foundational learning skills?
- What challenges does the country face in achieving UBE completion? What solutions is the country pursuing to overcome them?
- What are potential ways forward to foster foundational learning outcomes given the structural characteristics of the country's education system and the country's current commitments to other goals?

2.3. MAIN ACTIVITIES

The Spotlight study in the Democratic Republic of the Congo comprised a set of activities, each generating evidence and findings related to the study's four research questions.

- Literature review and stakeholder mapping (August to September 2021).
- Initial stakeholder workshop (October 2021).
- Fieldwork (15 November to 1 December 2021).
- Validation workshop (January 2022).



3. Situation analysis

3.1 GOVERNANCE OF PRIMARY, SECONDARY, AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

This section briefly describes the Congolese education system (for detailed reviews, see Groleau 2017; Khan et al. 2020), including the structure, key actors (Figure 1) and key strategic documents.

The most common path in the formal Congolese education system consists of three years of pre-primary, six years of primary, two years of junior secondary and four years of senior secondary education (Table 1). The six years of primary schooling are compulsory.

TABLE 1
Structure of primary and secondary education

Age	Class	Learning cycle	National examination and/or external evaluation
3	1 st	Pre-primary	
4	2 nd		
5	3 rd		
6	1 st	Primary	
7	2 nd		Standardized tests: CIEAS and PASEC
8	3 rd		
9	4 th		Standardized test: CIEAS
10	5 th		
11	6 th		National end-of-primary test and PASEC
12	1 st	Lower secondary	
13	2 nd		
14	3 rd	Upper secondary	
15	4 th		
16	5 th		
17	6 th		State examination

Note: CIEAS = Independent School Performance Assessment Unit.
Source: Compiled by authors.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has three types of school – public, private and government-aided faith-based (écoles conventionnées). Ecoles conventionnées follow the national curriculum and teachers are paid through the government payroll, but the schools are owned and managed by religious groups (Catholic, Protestant, Islamic and Kimbanguist).



FIGURE 1
Key actors

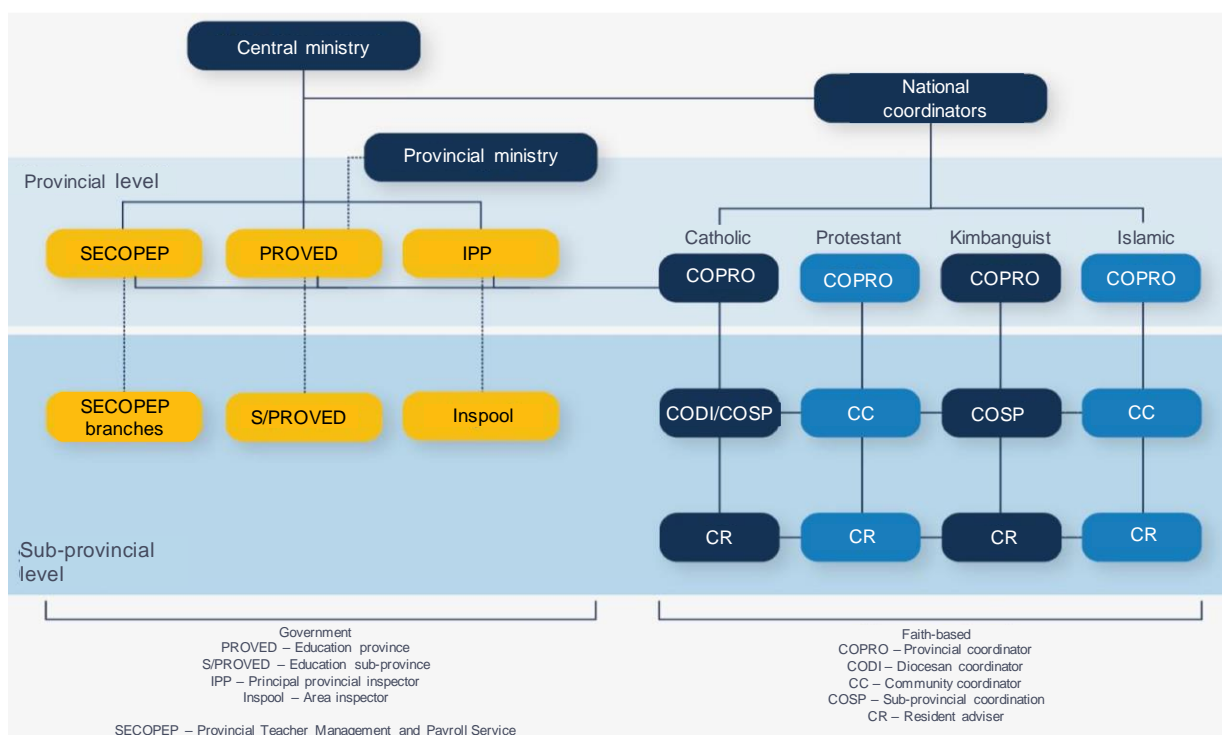


Table 2 outlines the key actors at the **central** level.

TABLE 2
Roles and responsibilities of key actors at the central level

Actor	Role and responsibilities
Ministère de l'enseignement primaire, secondaire et technique (MEPST, Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Technical Education)	As the state's representative, the MEPST defines, conducts and executes general government policy on pre-primary, primary, secondary and technical education.* It ensures compliance with the general standards applicable to all national education establishments and sets the conditions for obtaining the titles (certificates and diplomas) sanctioning the end of study cycles.
General Secretariat	Organizationally, all MEPST administrative and educational services are located at the central level under the direction of a secretary general who executes government policy and ensures the sustainability of administrative action.
General Inspectorate	Established in 1991, the General Inspectorate is responsible for visiting schools and monitoring their proper functioning as well as observing, appraising, advising and training teaching staff and monitoring their performance. It also organizes certification assessments at the end of the primary and secondary cycles. Its organization chart includes an inspector general, deputy inspector generals, principal inspectors, deputy principal inspectors and inspectors.



Actor	Role and responsibilities
Secrétariat permanent d'appui et de coordination du secteur de l'éducation (SPACE, Permanent Secretariat for Education Sector Support and Coordination)	SPACE is an interministerial body responsible for coordinating and evaluating sectoral education policies and strategies and monitoring their implementation. Its mission covers four ministries: the MEPST; the Ministry of Higher and University Education; the Ministry of Social Affairs, Humanitarian Actions and National Solidarity; and the Ministry of Vocational Training and Trades. SPACE is run by a group of international and national experts under the leadership of a permanent secretary.
Cellule indépendante d'évaluation des acquis scolaires (CIEAS, Independent School Performance Assessment Unit)	Attached to the cabinet of the Minister of Primary, Secondary and Technical Education, CIEAS is a technical body responsible for design, implementation, distribution and administration of local and national learning assessments and dissemination of results. It supports international evaluations carried out on behalf of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Under Article 4 of its 2016 decree of establishment, it pursues the objective of providing indicators to promote and contribute to improving the quality of student learning by monitoring regular performance and the implementation of remedial measures in terms of teaching programmes, teaching methods and teacher training.

* At the secondary level, in addition to the MEPST, which deals with technical education, the Ministry of Health manages medical technical education and the Ministry of Higher and University Education manages technical education provided by higher and technical institutes and universities.

At the **provincial** level, in line with constitutionally prescribed decentralization, 11 provincial education ministries were formed in around 2007. The number rose to 26 in 2015 after new provinces were delineated in what was known as *découpage*. Article 204, section 13 of the Constitution stipulates that primary and secondary education are exclusively provincial matters. However, this is not the case in reality. While the provinces are involved in some activities, including the appointment of school principals and the setting of some school fees, the central government provides the funding of teacher salaries and school operations. By law, decentralized territorial entities also play a role in some education matters but in practice they have carried out no noteworthy activities (World Bank, 2015a). It is formally the provinces' prerogative to keep and use 40% of any revenue, transferring the rest to Kinshasa. In fact, provincial ministries have not received much funding: 'the financial management of the [education] sector remains centralized and seems to be increasingly so' (World Bank, 2015a, p. 72). Most importantly, many educational administration units and divisional and subdivisional education offices have been set up under the education minister's discretionary power (Brandt and Moshonas, 2021). Table 3 gives an overview of the roles and responsibilities of actors at the decentralized level.

TABLE 3
Roles and responsibilities of key actors at the decentralized level

Actor	Role and responsibilities
Provincial ministry	The ministry implements educational policy throughout the administrative province.
Education province	The General Secretariat of Primary, Secondary and Technical Education is represented by education provinces at the provincial level. While the country has 26 administrative provinces, administration of primary, secondary and technical education is provided by 58 education provinces. It was deemed important to group schools into entities smaller than the administrative provinces to ensure effective governance of the primary, secondary and technical education subsector.
Provincial Inspectorate	At the education province level, education inspectors are headed by the Principal Provincial Inspectorate. This body includes a principal provincial inspector, deputy principal provincial inspectors, sub-provincial inspectors and itinerant inspectors.

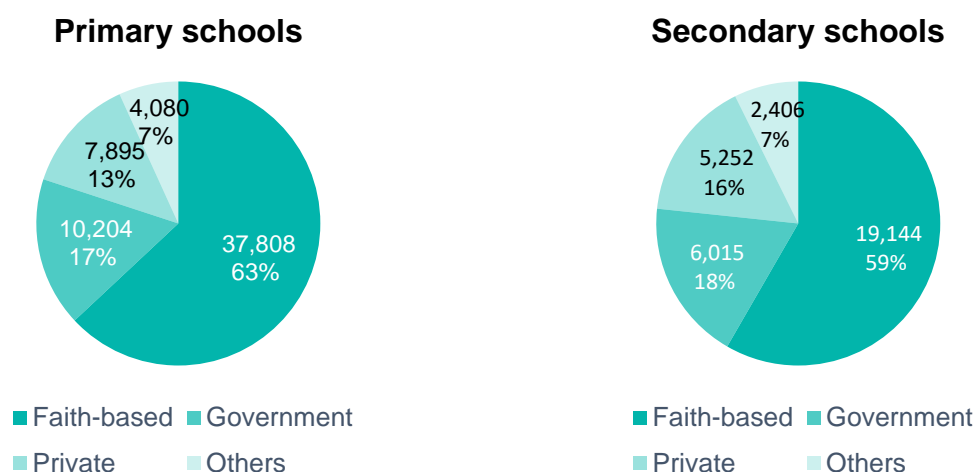


Actor	Role and responsibilities
Service de contrôle et paiement des enseignants (SECOPE, Teacher Control and Payroll Service)	This government department, present at the national, provincial and sub-provincial levels, is in charge of registering teachers and schools and facilitating their inclusion on payrolls.
Education sub-province administration	Primary, secondary and technical education is administered via 630 education sub-provinces overseen by the MEPST. The education sub-provinces are in closer contact with schools than are the provincial bodies and the General Secretariat.

In addition, there are numerous **non-state actors**.

Faith-based organizations: These are among the most active players in the Congolese education system. The country's first schools were founded by Catholic and Protestant missionaries in the 19th century. The religious denominations were removed from the schools' management in 1974 through the 'state schools' measure. In 1977 and 1979, however, an agreement between the government and the Catholic, Protestant, Kimbanguist and Islamic authorities returned the schools' management to religious denominations. These faith-based schools are called *écoles conventionnées*, while government schools are known as *écoles non conventionnées*. The country has around 100 faith-based networks, most of them Protestant. According to the 2019/20 school year statistical yearbook (MEPST/CTSE, 2021), religious denominations run some 63% of the country's primary schools and 59% of its secondary schools (Figure 2). Like the government, the denominations have management structures for their schools at the central, provincial and sub-provincial levels.

FIGURE 2
Share of schools per administrative network



Parents: Since the late 1980s, parents have been not only among the main funders of school in general, and of private schools in particular, but also active participants in school management. They are represented throughout the education system through school committees, municipal and provincial committees, and several national organizations, the oldest and most influential of which is the Association nationale des parents d'élèves et des étudiants du Congo (ANAPECO, National Association of Parents of Pupils and Students of the Congo). According to Article 127 of the national education framework law, the Parents' Committee is one of ten administrative bodies for pre-primary, primary, secondary and vocational education. In addition to participating through schools and administrative districts (e.g. municipality, province), parents of students from Catholic, Protestant and Kimbanguist schools participate in the respective religious education networks.



Private schools: Private schools contribute significantly to the education of Congolese children, particularly in urban areas. Their role was increased during the conflict period the country went through in the late 1990s and, especially, the 2000s. Although the privatization of education has slowed with the introduction of free primary education, the private sector operates around 13% of primary schools and 16% of secondary schools (MEPST/CTSE, 2021).

Teacher unions: Teacher unions play an important role in the governance of the country's education system. In addition to raising awareness and ensuring teachers' rights regarding status, career and pay, the unions significantly contribute to the debate on several important issues in the education system, in particular implementing the free education policy, improving the quality of learning and reforming teacher professional training.

Civil society: Through advocacy directed at the government, civil society contributes to the improvement of school conditions and the development of policies aiming to address issues within the Congolese education system. Representatives of civil society, along with development partners, are part of the Comité de concertation sectorielle (CCS, Sectoral Consultation Committee), which functions as the Local Education Group (LEG), made up of stakeholders who develop, implement, monitor and evaluate the education sector plan.

Technical and financial partners: The CCS includes the Technical and Financial Partners Group, which brings together active bilateral and multilateral donors as well as international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) (see Section 3.5 for more detail).

3.2. ENROLMENT AND COMPLETION

Education statistical yearbooks are produced irregularly. An education management information system was initiated in 2007 with support from UNESCO and the African Development Bank. Yearbooks are available from 2006/07 to 2019/20. They do not include data on learning outcomes.

Despite the dearth of data, some decisions on the Congolese education system are data-driven:

- Access, equity and quality were defined as strategic axes of the 2016–25 Stratégie sectorielle de l'éducation et de la formation (SSEF, Education and Training Sector Strategy) using diagnoses from the 2014 Rapport d'Etat sur le Système Educatif National (Country Status Report).
- The policy of free primary education was advocated by the president in 2019. The Projet d'équité et de renforcement du système éducatif (PERSE, Equity and Strengthening of Education Project) was initiated in 2020 in support of this policy.
- An initial reform of primary teacher education was begun after several evaluations revealed poor skills on the part of pupils, which were revealed by several evaluations.

The annual Joint Sector Review (JSR) is the main forum for sector plan monitoring. Its quality has fluctuated over the years (Meysonnat and Torrano, 2020). Concerning coordination, 'most of the sector dialogue and monitoring structures and mechanisms are functioning infrequently or not at all, and others are not yet operational' (Meysonnat and Torrano, 2020, p. xxi). In July 2022, a national workshop will consider the various coordination structures for SSEF implementation to decide which committees should be maintained and which should be abolished, since they are not yet operational.

The number of primary school students increased from 15.1 million in 2015/16 to 18.8 million in 2019/20, an annual growth rate of 6%, but UIS data reveal that around half the increase was due to the natural increase of the cohort as a result of population growth. A higher percentage of boys are enrolled than girls, with the gender parity index having stagnated around 0.9 in recent years. The high gross enrolment ratio must be understood in the context of the current government's flagship free primary education policy (gratuité), implemented since 2019, which abolished school fees for school years 1 to 8. Long-term effects are difficult to assess due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which entailed two periods of school closures (Falisse et al., 2022). Right after the policy's implementation in September 2019, classrooms were seriously overcrowded as the number of students increased but the number of teachers tended to decrease. Student-teacher ratios thus became untenable. The main reason was that teachers who were not on the payroll had lost their main source of income, i.e. parents' financial contributions.



A primary school net enrolment rate of 68.6% suggests late entry and massive repetition (Institut National de la Statistique, 2014).¹ Around 2.5 million children have entered schools since free primary education began (World Bank, 2020). Furthermore, despite the high gross enrolment ratios and free primary education, nearly 3.5 million children aged 6 to 11 are out of primary school (GPE, 2020).

Table 4 provides an overview of trends in gross enrolment, gender parity and completion rates in recent years. The primary completion rate was 71% in 2019/20, lower than in 2017/18 (75%) and not significantly different than in 2013 (69%) (MEPST/CTSE, 2014, 2019, 2021). Moreover, it varies by income, disability, geography, gender, conflict and ethnicity. Access to learning during the COVID-19 lockdowns was also unequal (USAID, 2020; Marchais et al., 2021; Marchais et al., 2020; Randall et al., 2017). For example, the primary completion rate varies from 100% in Equateur and Kinshasa to 40% in Tanganyika province (MEPST/CTSE, 2019). The 10-year SSEF target for 2025 is for primary completion to reach 99% nationwide (DRC, 2015).

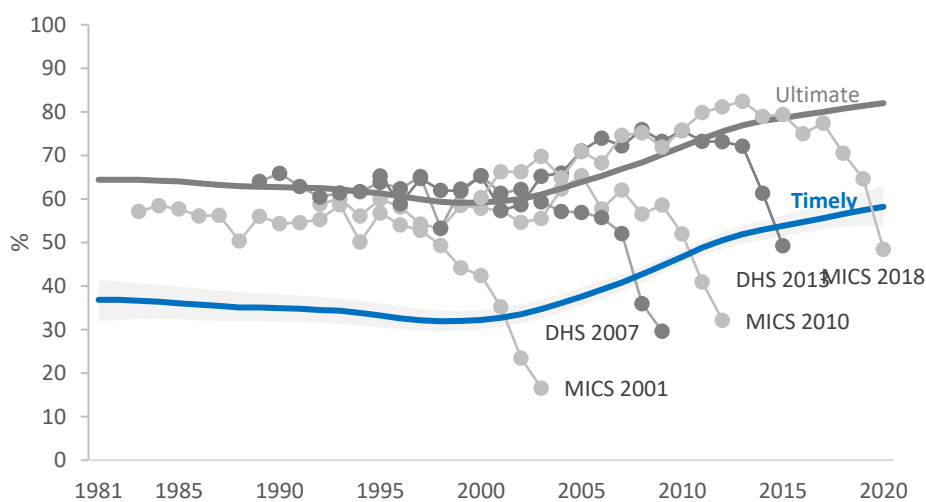
TABLE 4
Access and completion in primary education

Indicators	2014/15	2017/18	2019/20
Gross enrolment ratio	110%	113%	107%
Gender parity index	0.93	0.92	0.92
Completion rate	75.8%	75.3%	70.7%

Source: MEPST/CTSE, 2017, 2019, 2021.

GEM Report team estimates based on analysis of multiple survey sources indicate that the primary education completion rate increased from 32% in 2000 to 47% in 2010 and 58% in 2020. However, late enrolment and repetition mean that ultimately 71% of children manage to complete primary school (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3
Survey estimates of the primary completion rate in the Democratic Republic of the Congo



Note: DHS = Demographic and Health Survey; MICS = Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey.

Source: UNESCO country completion rate estimates, <https://education-estimates.org/completion/country>.

¹ Since 2014, the statistical yearbooks have not produced net enrolment rates, as the age of the school population is generally not precisely known.



3.3. LEARNING

Evaluations led by external education partners have not been disseminated widely. A review in 2014 found that ‘no products and services providing information about Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) results have been disseminated to schools’ (World Bank, 2014, p. 10). The World Bank’s *Projet d’amélioration de la qualité de l’éducation* (PAQUE, Education Quality Improvement Project) tackled this issue by including parental committees in monitoring EGRA at school level and disseminating results to local communities (World Bank, 2017a). PAQUE includes a project development objective indicator on the ‘Increase in early grade reading score in the national languages ... in the project provinces (Lingala/Tshiluba) for 2nd and 4th grade students’ (World Bank, 2017a, p. 13). These assessments are related to specific projects and do not cover large samples. The EGRA and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) surveys should nonetheless be discussed in more detail. Table 5 gives an overview of these assessments.

TABLE 5
EGRA and EGMA assessments since 2011

Year	Project	What?	Scale
2011 and 2014	Projet d’amélioration de la qualité de l’éducation (prior to PAQUE) (PAQUED, Education Quality Improvement Project) baseline and endline	EGRA (French) and EGMA*	Total of 191 treatment schools
2010 to 2013	Opportunities for Equitable Access to Quality Basic Education (OPEQ) randomized controlled trial	EGRA (French) and EGMA	116 schools (EGRA), 117 schools (EGMA)
2015 and 2019	Accès, lecture, rétention et redevabilité (ACCELERE!1, Access, Reading, Retention and Accountability) baseline and endline** (external)	EGRA in grade 3 assessed Lingala, Tshiluba and Kiswahili reading skills, as these were the national languages spoken in the provinces in which ACCELERE!1 would be implemented. French productive and receptive oral vocabulary were also tested in grade 3. Assessments in grade 5 targeted French only, as national languages are no longer used as a language of instruction from grade 5 onwards (USAID, 2018).	240 schools (baseline), <i>endline unknown</i>
2017 and 2018	ACCELERE!1: two large-scale formative evaluations (internal)	EGRA assessed pre-reading and reading in grade 3 in three national languages (Kiswahili, Lingala and Ciluba) and in grade 5 (French). This was coupled with Kiswahili quarterly assessments, which were ‘curriculum-based and grade-specific (in contrast to EGRAs, which are based on general reading skills across the early grades’ (USAID/UKAID, 2019, p. 4).	40 schools and 24 centres de rattrapage scolaire (accelerated learning centres)



Year	Project	What?	Scale
2019	ACCELERE!1: snapshot evaluation due to project modifications	EGRA in private primary schools and accelerated learning centres in French and national languages (USAID, 2019)	188 establishments – 124 schools and 64 accelerated learning centres
2017	UNICEF	EGRA (national languages) and EGMA in grades 1 and 2 (UNICEF, 2018).	480 schools
2019	CIEAS/PAQUE	PAQUE baseline (?)	1,350 treatment schools
2019 to 2021	Building Resilience: Education Opportunities in Fragile and Crisis-Affected Environments (BRICE)	EGRA (French) and EGMA	55 schools
2022	CIEAS/PAQUE	First ever national-level assessment (not EGRA/EGMA but still noteworthy)	1,350 treatment schools

Notes: 2017 UNICEF: results unavailable; UNICEF originally expected the report to be released in 2019 (UNICEF, 2019). 2019 CIEAS/PAQUE: 'CIEAS has published the results of the EGRA baseline survey carried out in Project provinces' (World Bank, 2021, p. 3).

* PAQUED's EGMA is not available publicly.

** The authors were unable to determine whether it has been carried out.

Sources: RTI International (2011); RTI International (2014); Torrente et al. (2011); Aber et al. (2017); USAID/UKAID (2019); USAID (2021a); UNICEF (2018); PAQUE and CIEAS (2020); Marchais et al. (2020).

After the minister of education authorized EGRA and EGMA in 2010, several such assessments were carried out (2010, 2011/12, 2015, 2017). However, they were bound to the PAQUED, OPEQ and ACCELERE!1 projects, mainly funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Until recently, no assessments had occurred at a national scale.

In 2020, in the Test national de fin d'études primaires (TENAFEP, National End of Primary Studies Test), 80% passed the French tests and 75% passed the mathematics tests. However, sample-based evaluations showed students' learning outcomes were low (PASEC, 2011; PASEC, 2020; PAQUE and CIEAS, 2020).

In 2011, a study similar to an EGRA showed that '68% of children could not read even one word of a simple passage; 91% of children who were able to read the first line of the passage could not answer a simple comprehension question about the content' (Torrente et al., 2011, p. 15).

In an EGRA carried out in 2015 in several provinces, grade 5 students were only able to correctly identify between 6.6 familiar words per minute (Equateur) and 21.2 (Kivu) and between 5.2 'invented' words per minute (Equateur) and 14.7 (Kivu). The results suggested that 'the majority of pupils in all provinces were non-readers. ... Fewer than 5% of pupils across the provinces demonstrated an ability to read with some level of comprehension' in the national languages, in other words they did not reach the level necessary to be able to read to understand' (RTI International, 2016b, pp. 1–2). Boys statistically outperformed girls significantly on several subtasks and girls had more zero scores on some subtasks. Table 6 provides more detail on reading skills.

Trends in results are contradictory. A 2018 EGRA found that 'learners' scores on the vocabulary subtasks declined in national languages and French' from assessments in 2015 and 2017 (USAID/UKAID, 2019, p. 3). However, it also provided signs of hope, though without referencing which subtasks this progress related to: 'The assessment found that students' and learners' reading levels are improving, with an overall upward performance trajectory noted from 2015 to 2018. Moreover, mean scores increased However, though the upward trajectory is promising, oral reading fluency remains low, reducing children's ability to comprehend.' (USAID/UKAID, 2019, p. 2).



TABLE 6**Share of attempted items scored correct for selected indicators of reading skills, 2015 EGRA**

Province	Identification of sounds	Reading of words	Oral reading fluency	Reading comprehension	Vocabulary
Equateur	56.4	24.5	31.8	8.7	60.0
Kasaï Occidental	57.1	32.8	39.5	16.0	60.1
Kasaï Oriental	66.5	37.9	45.8	14.8	69.1
Katanga	64.7	37.8	45.6	17.9	68.9
Kivu Accelerated Learning Programmes	74.7	64.3	71.8	38.1	70.1

Note: In 2015, the number of Congolese provinces was expanded from 11 to 26 in a process called *découpage*. This resulted in the division of some provinces and regrouping of some districts within provinces into new provinces. This report uses pre-*découpage* names of provinces.

Source: RTI International (2016a).

Finding the right language for assessments is crucial. In Katanga, ‘pupils might not be able to understand instructions or respond to stimuli in the official language’ (RTI International, 2016c, p. 8). Teachers flexibly switch between Lingala and French when teaching mathematics. While French is the official language, especially in higher grades of primary school, ‘it cannot be used in isolation, as students would not understand the content’ (Gandara and Randall, 2019, p. 73). Similarly, and in line with the outlined national policy, an evaluation of a project called *Go, Girl (Vas-Y Fille)* found a mix of national and local languages in the first grades of primary school (Randall et al., 2017). Consequentially, Gandara and Randall (2019, p. 74) make the case for ‘translanguaging’, an evaluation method that is based on assessments in both French and a national language, since ‘a large majority of girls used words from more than one language to provide their responses’. Their findings indicated that ‘a translingual EGMA improves the alignment between assessment and instruction’ (Gandara and Randall, 2019, p. 73).

The 2019 Programme d’Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs de la CONFEMEN (PASEC, the CONFEMEN Education System Analysis Programme) assessment found that 58.5% of grade 2 students were below the minimum proficiency level. Moreover, 92% of students could not easily read more than 20 letters in one minute, while 39% did not read any word of the test correctly. By grade 6, 73% of students did not reach the minimum proficiency level, which means they could not combine two explicit pieces of information in a text passage or make simple inferences from a narrative or informative text. In addition, less than 10% of students understood narrative or informative texts (PASEC, 2020).

The BRICE project baseline found that ‘9% of the children could not correctly identify any letter sound. This percentage increases four-fold to 45% with word reading; five-fold with oral passage reading; and for comprehension, 82% of the children gave incorrect answers to all questions’ (Marchais et al., 2020, p. 9). Strikingly, the study also found that ‘girls perform worse than boys on every subtask of EGRA’ (Marchais et al., 2020, p. 56).

With respect to standardized assessments, CIEAS was established in 2016 and has received support from UNICEF and other partners. With PAQUE support, CIEAS carried out pilot evaluations in the four national languages, French and mathematics in grades 2 and 4 (PAQUE and CIEAS, 2020).

The piloting process included the development of item banks, the establishment of organizational processes and technical resources, and the empirical validation of the assessments. This important process is laying the groundwork for the MEPST to have the capacities to carry out its own national evaluations in the future, as envisioned in the national assessment framework, and the World Bank is providing close technical support (World Bank, 2021, p. 2).

The baseline assessment carried out in 2020 by CIEAS also showed that student reading results were very poor in the three languages tested in grade 2 and in French in grade 4, with average scores of less than 20 points out of 100. Table 7 provides more detail on these test scores.



TABLE 7
Learning outcomes of the 2020 CIEAS assessment

	Test	Average (out of 100)
Grade 2	Reading (Lingala)	18
	Reading (Ciluba)	17
	Reading (Swahili)	15
Grade 4	Mathematics	35
	Reading (French)	21
	Mathematics	37

Source: PAQUE and CIEAS, 2020.

The 2020 CIEAS assessment showed that grade 2 and 4 students had enormous difficulties in mathematics. These results confirmed earlier assessments. In an EGMA conducted in selected provinces, Torrente et al. (2011, p. 12) found zero scores for 41% of children for subtraction, and noted: 'At least 20% of children could not respond to a single question on six of nine subtests.' With each grade, there are fewer zero scores. The subtests 'shape identification' and 'quantity discrimination' had the highest scores (62% and 61%), while multiplication had the lowest (10%). Striking differences existed between sub-provinces. Boys outperformed girls on all subtests in all grades, with the gap increasing with every grade on almost all subtests (Aber et al., 2016).

Among grade 2 students who took part in the 2019 PASEC assessment, 23% did not know how to read figures, compare numbers or carry out addition and subtraction on numbers lower than 50. Among grade 6 students, 82% were below minimum proficiency level. In this assessment, subtraction was the subtask with the worst scores – but the test did not include multiplication, which makes comparison difficult (PASEC, 2020).

3.4. ANALYSIS OF CONGOLESE LEARNING ASSESSMENT DATA FROM PASEC²

Students in the Democratic Republic of the Congo performed at a range of PASEC proficiency levels between grade 2 and grade 6 (Figure 4).³ They also performed at higher levels than students in Chad, but at lower levels than students in Burundi and Congo. The Democratic Republic of the Congo's percentage of grade 2 students at PASEC level 4 for reading was 18%, compared with 55% in Burundi, 36% in Congo and 13% in Chad. Its percentage of grade 6 students performing below level 1 (i.e. not reaching the most basic level on the PASEC test) in mathematics was 37%, compared with 4% in Burundi, 26% in Congo and 51% in Chad.

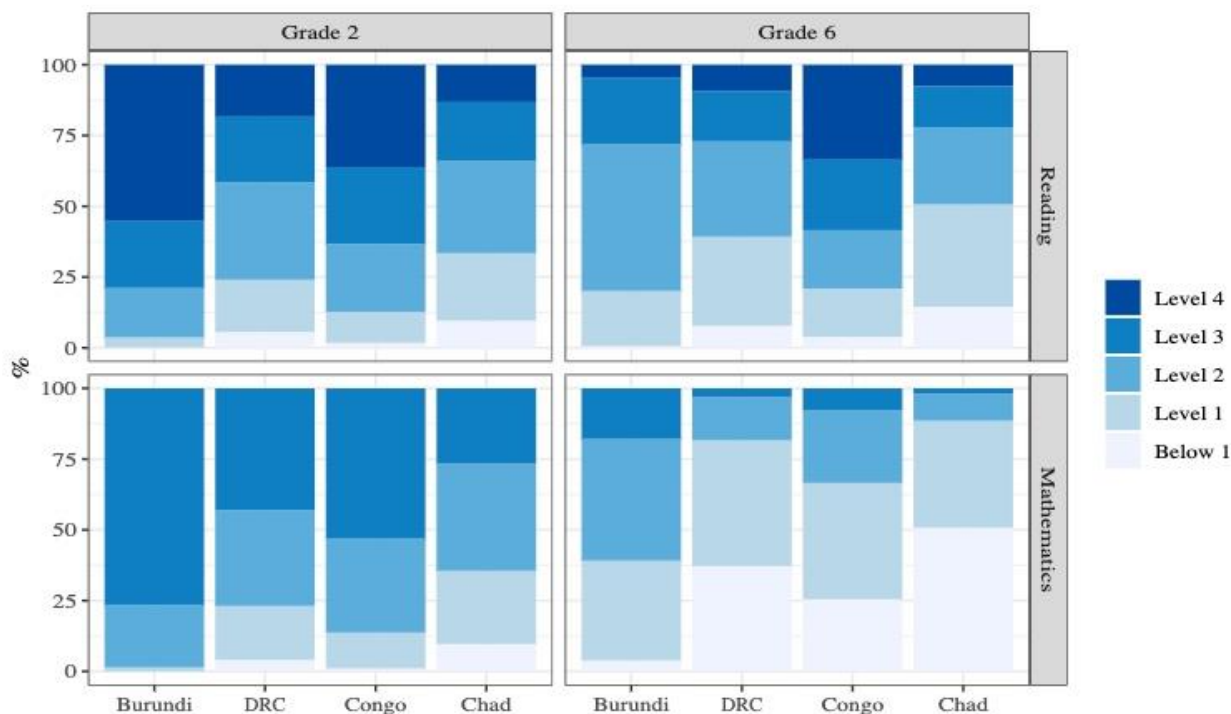
² For a more detailed analysis, see the Spotlight technical report on learning outcomes: DRC: Key Policy Questions on Learning and Equity.

³ Benchmarks in grades 2 and 6 are established separately and are therefore not comparable.



FIGURE 4

Percentage of grade 2 and 6 students reaching a range of proficiency levels in reading and mathematics, Democratic Republic of the Congo and selected countries, 2019



Source: UNESCO GEM Report team analysis based on PASEC 2019 data. 2020.

The majority of students did not reach global minimum proficiency levels (MPLs). Towards the end of primary education, the percentages of grade 6 students reaching minimum proficiency were 9% for reading and 3% for mathematics. In grade 2, the percentages with minimum proficiency were 42% for reading and 77% for mathematics. The shares were even smaller if children who did not reach grade 2 and 6 were included. It can be plausibly assumed that those children did not reach minimum proficiency, meaning that in grade 2 the shares with minimum proficiency would fall from 42% to 34% for reading and from 77% to 62% for mathematics (Figure 5).

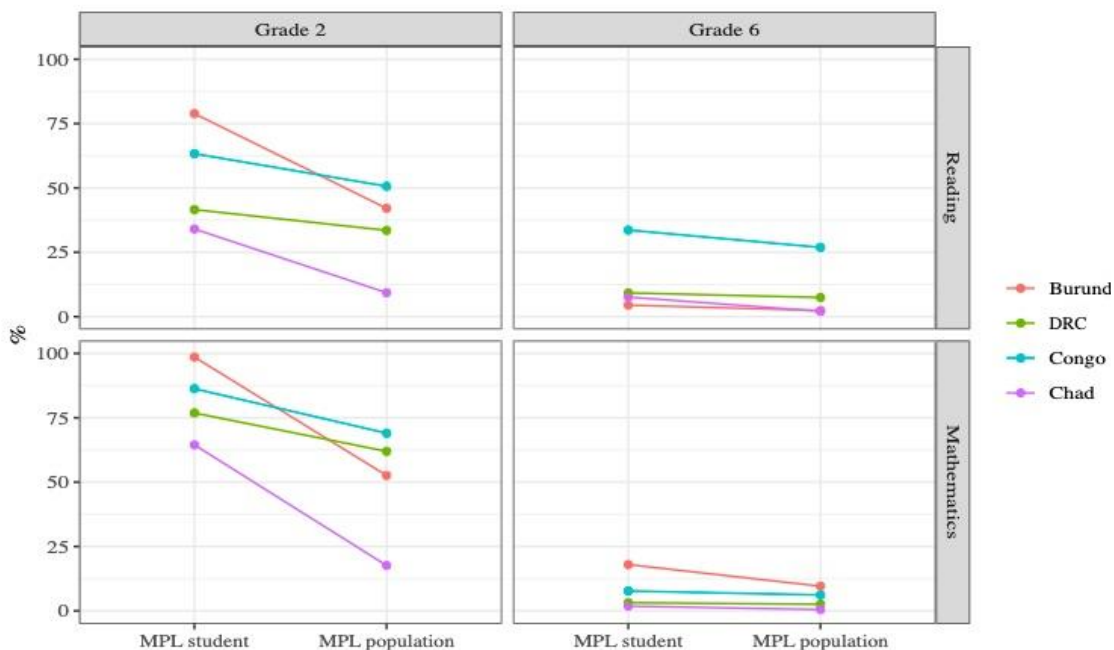
There was considerable variation in student outcomes by sex, school location and socioeconomic group (Figure 6). The percentage of grade 2 boys who reached minimum proficiency in mathematics was 81% while that of girls was 73%. The percentage of grade 2 students in rural areas who reached minimum proficiency was 37%, compared with 45% for those in urban areas. The percentage of grade 6 students from the lowest wealth quintile who reached minimum proficiency in reading was 5%, compared with 16% in the highest wealth quintile.⁴

⁴ Wealth quintiles are derived from the socioeconomic status indicator, which is based on student responses on the availability at home of services and goods, including electricity, television, computers, radios, telephones, refrigerators, air conditioners, cars, tractors, tap water and latrines with water. These data are not available for grade 2 students.



FIGURE 5

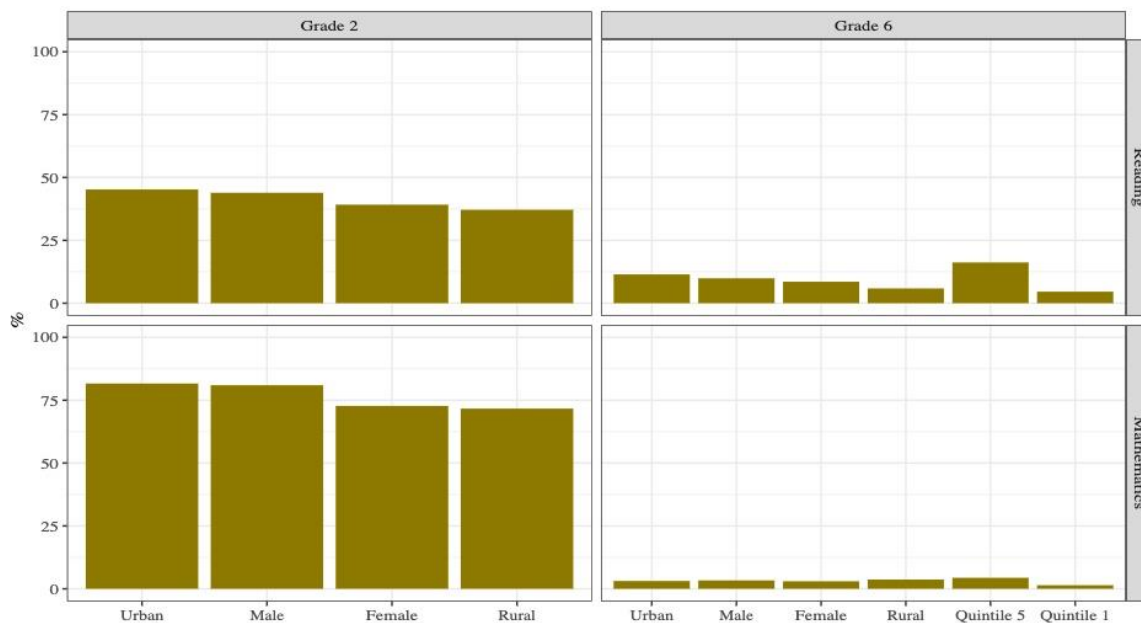
Percentage of grade 2 and 6 students and children of equivalent age who reached the PASEC minimum proficiency level in reading and mathematics, Democratic Republic of the Congo and selected countries, 2019



Note: Student and population minimum proficiency level (MPL) refers to students enrolled in school vs the overall population of school-age children.
Source: UNESCO GEM Report team analysis based on PASEC 2019 data.

FIGURE 6

Percentage of grade 2 and grade 6 students reaching minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics, by sex, location and socioeconomic status, Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2019



Source: UNESCO GEM Report team analysis based on PASEC 2019 data.



MPLs for subgroups are lower when students who do not reach grade 2 or 6 are accounted for (Figure 7). The gap between boys and girls in mathematics remained stable, because access rates to primary education were similar: 80% completed primary education. But the gap between students in rural and urban areas widened, because access to education in rural areas was lower: 90% in urban areas versus 71% in rural areas. The percentage of grade 2 children in rural areas with minimum proficiency in mathematics fell from 72% at the student level to 51% at the population level, and in urban areas from 82% to 74%. The gap widened, as well, for children in different socioeconomic groups.

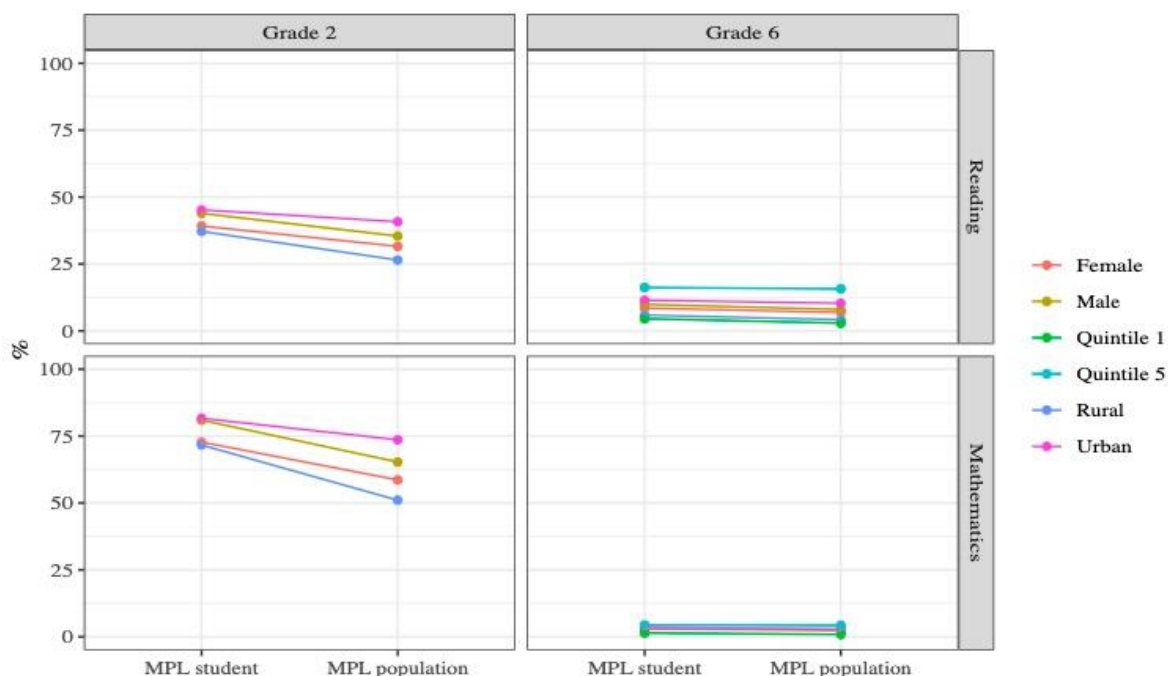
Further analysis of the data shows that children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds tended to perform worse in school than those from more affluent families. Family socioeconomic status, however, did not determine school success. Many children from disadvantaged backgrounds performed better than expected given their limited resources at home and children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds performed worse than expected.

The role of socioeconomic status is somewhat stronger at the school level. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to perform better because their schools serve a student population with more favourable socioeconomic status characteristics. In fact, within schools, there is no evidence that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds perform better than those of lower socioeconomic status.

The rural–urban gap in learning outcomes is almost fully explained by the socioeconomic characteristics of students in rural and urban areas. That is, rural schools perform worse than urban schools because they serve a student population from disadvantaged backgrounds. In countries including Benin, Chad, Congo and Togo, on the other hand, the rural–urban gap persists even after taking into account the socioeconomic composition of schools’ student intake.

While the rural–urban gap is fully explained by school socioeconomic status, only one third of the gap between private and public schools is explained by this status. That is, to a large extent the gap between private and public schools is unrelated to the characteristics of their students.

FIGURE 7
Percentage of grade 2 and grade 6 students and children of equivalent age reaching minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics, by sex, location and socioeconomic status, Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2019



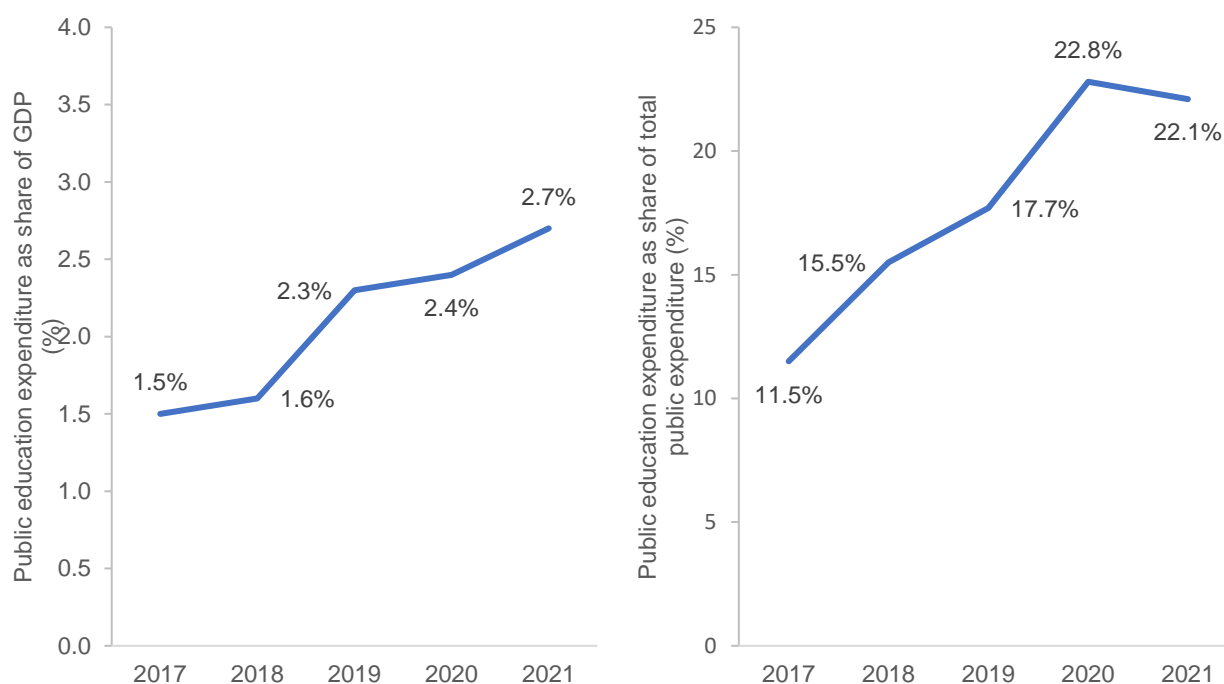
Note: Student and population minimum proficiency level (MPL) refers to students enrolled in school vs the overall population of school-age children.
 Source: UNESCO GEM Report team analysis based on PASEC 2019 data.



3.5. FINANCING OF EDUCATION

Since the 1990s, parents have funded the majority of education spending, allowing teachers to have salaries when the state was nearly bankrupt. Free primary education is now anchored in the Constitution. Its implementation started in 2010/11 and was reinitiated in 2019 by President Tshisekedi, with World Bank support, in fulfilment of a major electoral promise. The share of the budget allocated to education has increased considerably over the past five years, from 11.5% in 2017 to 22.1% in 2021. However, the share of gross domestic product (GDP) spent on education, at 2.7% in 2021, remains among the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8
Budget share allocated to education, Democratic Republic of the Congo



Source: DRC/Ministère du Budget, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021.

The distribution of education spending varies considerably across subsectors. The MEPST receives about 80% of public education resources (Figure 9).

For the MEPST, salaries allocated to teachers and administrators represented more than 94% of the budget for this subsector over 2017–20. Not until 2021 did the budgeted wage share fall to 68% (Figure 10), though it is not clear if the full amount was disbursed. The high share of salary and school operational costs in the overall budget makes SECOPE the key institution when it comes to managing public funds. In 2014, for example, SECOPE managed 92% of the MEPST budget. But several negative audits of SECOPE have pointed to a number of challenges within this department (DRC/Cour des Comptes, 2013; Andrienne, 2016; Brandt, 2018).

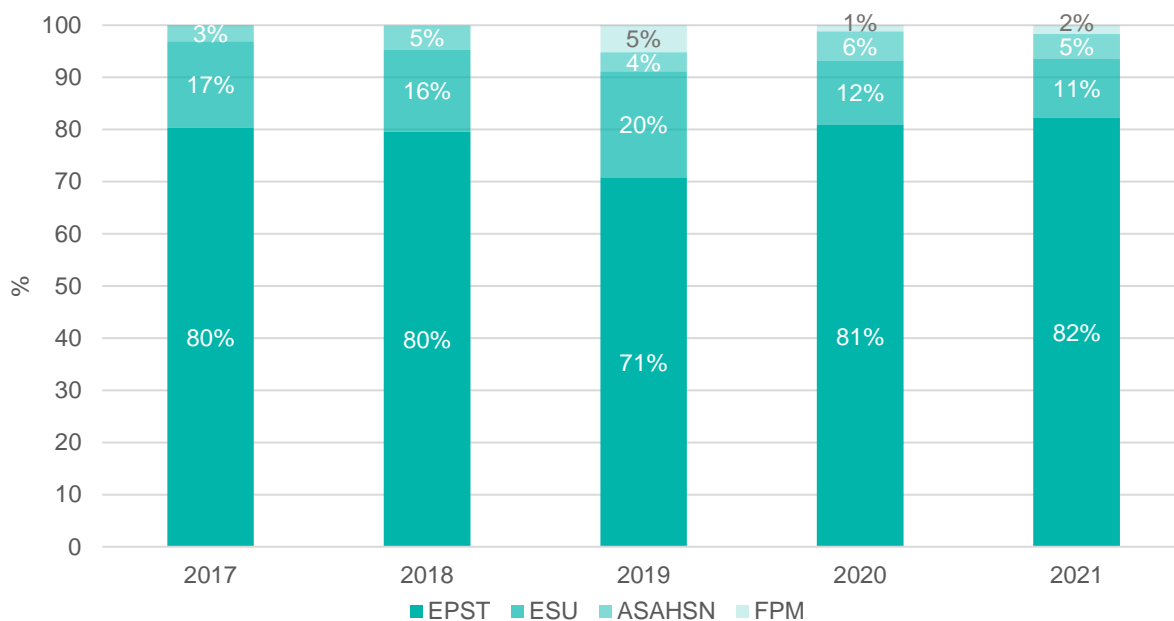
Contrary to what Figure 10 shows, capital expenditure decreased by 46% from 2018 to 2019 (CONEPT, 2021).⁵ 'While execution rates overall remain relatively high, the capital portion – essential for strengthening the education system – is most affected by reduced execution rates' (Meysonnat and Torrano, 2020, p. xxii).

⁵ Planned capital expenditure for the Congolese education system is generally not executed.



FIGURE 9

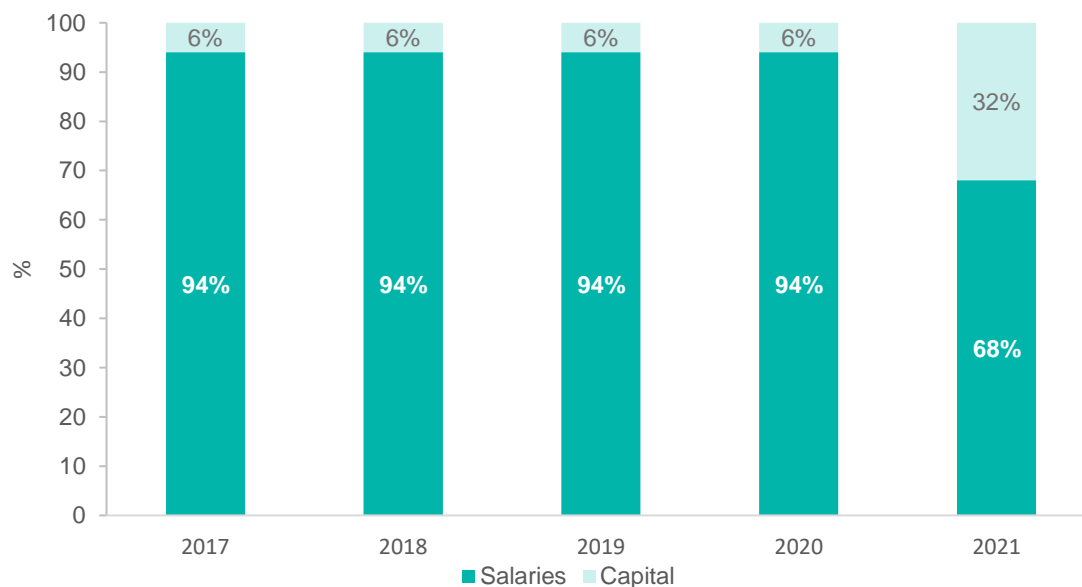
Education spending across subsectors, Democratic Republic of the Congo



Note: EPST = Primary, Secondary, Technical Education
ESU = Higher Education and Universities
ASAHNS = Social Affairs, Humanitarian Action and National Solidarity
FPM = Professional Training and Trades
Source: DRC/Ministère du Budget, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021

FIGURE 10

Allocation per category



Source: DRC/Ministère du Budget (2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021).



In sum, spending remains 'low in view of the ambitious targets set out in the SSEF, and financing of the SSEF remains a concern' (Meysonnat and Torrano, 2020, p. xxii).

TABLE 8
Largest donor programmes with a focus on early grade learning

Name	Agency	Years	Budget and aims
PARSE	World Bank	2008–14	US\$135 million <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide textbooks and educational material for grades 1 to 4 in mathematics and reading. • Reinforce capacities to evaluate learning results.
Projet de Soutien à l'Éducation de Base (Basic Education Support Project)	World Bank (GPE)	2013–17	US\$100 million <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide educational material and supplies. • Reinforce training during employment.
ACCELERE! (USAID, 2021b)	USAID/UK Aid Direct	2015–22	US\$200 million <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elaborate and distribute 2,757,118 teaching and learning supports for teachers and students in almost 5,000 schools.
PAQUE (MEPST, n.d.)	World Bank (GPE)	2017–22	US\$200 million <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve teaching quality in primary education. • Strengthen the early childhood education system to improve the quality of services. • Improve teacher effectiveness. • Support the supply chain for learning and teaching materials. • Strengthen management capacity. • Institutionalize normalization of student evaluations.
PERSE ¹	World Bank	2020–24	US\$800 million (<i>envisaged, grant and loan</i>) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow free education access for all.

Sources: World Bank, 2007; World Bank, 2015b; World Bank, 2013; World Bank, 2017b; USAID, 2021a; World Bank, 2021 and World Bank, 2020.

BOX.1

Education and Training Strategy

The Education and Training Strategy (SSEF) for 2016–25 outlines the country's strategy on three axes: developing access to and ensuring equity in education; improving learning quality; and improving system governance and oversight. Under the first axis, the focus is on promoting free primary education, expanding universal primary education and adapting the education system to promote young people's social integration. Under the second axis, the SSEF aims to establish the conditions for a good-quality education system by setting up monitoring and quality assurance systems and providing an educational environment conducive to learning. The third axis aims to strengthen system governance by establishing transparent standards and mechanisms for resource management. The SSEF's five-year operational plan (2016–21) was updated in August 2019 to a three-year operational plan (2019–22).

Source: Meysonnat and Torrano, 2020.

UBE is a major goal of the current SSEF. In addition to the reforms carried out within its framework, the government abolished primary education fees in 2019 and subsidized schools to cover operating costs. This included paying teachers, who had worked for several years without salaries due to insufficient government budgets and a cumbersome teacher registration department (SECOPE; see above), as well as compensating retiring teachers for exceeding the normal length of their teaching career.



Regarding teacher payment, in January 2020 the government identified teachers called nouvelles unités ('new units') through an action called Opération Rapide d'Identification de Nouvelles Unités (Rapid Operation to Identify New Units). New unit teachers are those who have been employed and paid directly by government schools through parental fees and contributions. By the end of this operation, 394,692 'new unit' teachers had been identified, including 144,944 declared eligible for payroll. Among those found to be ineligible for payroll were fictitious teachers and those working in classrooms that had not been officially accredited by the government. Of the total deemed eligible for payroll, 58,735 primary school teachers were paid in October 2020 and 4,067 kindergarten teachers in July 2021. However, 81,509 secondary school teachers and management personnel are still awaiting payment. In the second half of 2021, 2,285 teachers became eligible for retirement (SPACE, 2021). Although this number is low given the total number of payroll-eligible teachers, it paves the way for recruitment of young teachers.

The SSEF recommends 10 reforms, of which 5 are related to improving completion and quality (DRC, 2015):

- **Pre-primary education:** This reform features the addition of a class to primary schools, especially in rural areas, accommodating 5-year-olds before the primary cycle. It aims to achieve an enrolment rate of 20% of 5-year-olds by 2025.
- **Basic education:** Covering six years of primary and the first two years of secondary education, this reform has two objectives:
 - Providing all children with a common base of knowledge, a solid and uninterrupted general education and an initiation into useful skills for life, either to continue their studies or to acquire basic knowledge.
 - Enabling every child to acquire a minimum package of essential knowledge and skills required for life, mainly the abilities to read, write, speak and do arithmetic.
- **Free basic education:** Since school fees constitute a major obstacle to the universalization of primary education, the SSEF retains free basic education among its reforms. The objective is to improve the level of education and facilitate access to the education system. The reform provides for the government to take charge of tuition fees for basic education in public establishments. This is a significant undertaking: Brandt (n.d.) reported that in 2015/16, average annual school fees for primary classes ranged from US\$20 (rural areas) to US\$59 (urban areas); for lower secondary the respective figures were US\$76 and US\$119.
- **Professionalization of teacher training:** Primary education is provided by teachers who have completed either four or six years of secondary school. However, studies (e.g. Maroyi and Mokonzi, 2019) show that the training in pedagogy at the secondary level is academically insufficient and not conducive to professionalization in line with the teaching profession skills reference framework. The reform of initial teacher training professionalization has two components. The first addresses the secondary Pedagogical Humanities programme, the Higher Teacher Training Institutes and Higher Teacher and Technical Institutes, and reform of the National Teaching University in line with the reference framework. The second involves establishing post-secondary Institutes for Teaching Profession Training.
- **Quality assurance:** A quality assurance system has been put in place through the establishment of CIEAS under MEPST auspices.

Despite the challenges outlined in previous sections, the Congolese education system demonstrates a certain coherence between education policy and programme implementation (Box 2).



BOX.2

Coherence between education policy and implementation

Programmes to increase access, accessibility, equity and retention

- Programme for the progressive universalization of primary education –
Performance indicators: gross completion rate; contribution of households in terms of school fees, reduction in fees, TENAFEP, insurance costs, printing and administrative costs, operating costs paid to schools and management offices).
- System reception capacity-building programme –
Performance indicators: construction of school infrastructure based on a community approach; rehabilitation of 3% of classrooms in primary and secondary schools each year.

Coherence between education policy and implementation

- Internal efficiency improvement programme –
Performance indicators: transition rate, repetition rate and dropout rate.
- Teacher upgrading programme –
Performance indicators: annual investment of the equivalent of 5% of the primary school teacher payroll in upgrading the teaching function; 100% automation of primary school teacher management, standardization of salary zones.
- Programme for the optimization and update of study programmes –
Performance indicators: investment of 1% of total current expenditure on primary, secondary and technical education to update and optimize study programmes.

3.6. POLITICAL ECONOMY

While a political economy analysis of the main stakeholders, relationships and incentives in the Congolese education system is beyond this report's ambit, teacher recruitment and salaries are particular areas of tension and opportunity. Since at least the 1990s, the Congolese education sector has lacked the budget to pay all teachers. Monthly teacher salaries have gradually increased since the early 2000s, and more teachers have been added to the payroll. Until recently, parents funded most of the education budget. Payments flowed upward to administrative offices, all the way to the MEPST in Kinshasa. At the same time, public money was spent inefficiently on an ever-growing administrative network of offices and staff.

Education expansion has been generally unstructured (Brandt, 2017) and clientelism has led to a significant increase in education units and staff (Brandt and Moshonas, 2021). Mass recruitment and high numbers of unregistered staff are also common issues in other sectors (Moshonas, 2019). It is estimated that a third of state personnel are registered 'new units' (Moshonas, 2019, p. 5). In the case of education, recruitment often begins locally, at school level, and is confirmed by the relevant administrative office, which may ask for illicit administrative fees. A key question is thus, 'Who can add staff to payroll?' While the budget ministry's (now Ministry of Finance) Payroll Directorate generally has discretionary power to adjust the payroll (DFID, 2016), the fact that SECOPE's database is computerized means that 'the scope for tampering and discretionary intervention at the Ministry of Budget seems much less than for other sectors where the procedure is quasi-entirely manual. Accordingly, any abuses in the case of the education sector would be more likely to occur prior to the transfer of the SECOPE database – at the local, provincial, and central levels of SECOPE' (DFID, 2016, p. 43). Hence mass registration processes in the civil service create ample opportunities to add names to the payroll, highlighting how supply-side and demand-side factor fuel patronage-based recruitment (Moshonas, 2019).



3.7. SUMMARY

With the development of the SSEF in 2016, the government has shown the will and determination to transform the Congolese education system, which has been plagued by challenges since the 1970s. Its will and determination are demonstrated by the increase in the budget allocated to education since SSEF implementation began, although the budget is still too low to meet the main challenges of transforming the education system.

In addition to making education a national priority, the president, in his inauguration speech on 24 January 2019, stressed that, in accordance with the Constitution, free basic education must be a reality. This was more than just rhetoric: free primary education became a reality in the 2019/20 school year. Despite the challenges it poses, it enabled around 2.5 million children to return to school in its first year.

However, despite the government's determination and political will to transform the education system, not all the reforms recommended in the SSEF enjoy equal attention from the political authorities. In primary, secondary and technical education, free education now seems more embedded than the other reforms planned in the SSEF.

Raising the completion rate in basic education requires effective implementation of free education at both the primary and lower secondary levels. But free education brings challenges, especially as regards the financial resources necessary to build schools, recruit and pay teachers, buy teaching materials and operate schools.

Given the low levels of learning (see Sections 3.3 and 3.4), a key challenge for the Democratic Republic of the Congo is to ensure that more students meet minimum proficiency levels at key points in primary education. Improving the quality of basic learning can only be ensured if teachers' skills and motivation are strengthened. For this, the government should urgently operationalize and accelerate implementation of the reform on professionalization of initial training and continuing training of teachers, as laid out in the SSEF. Finally, as several studies indicate, teacher motivation should be strengthened, in particular by improving salaries and working conditions.

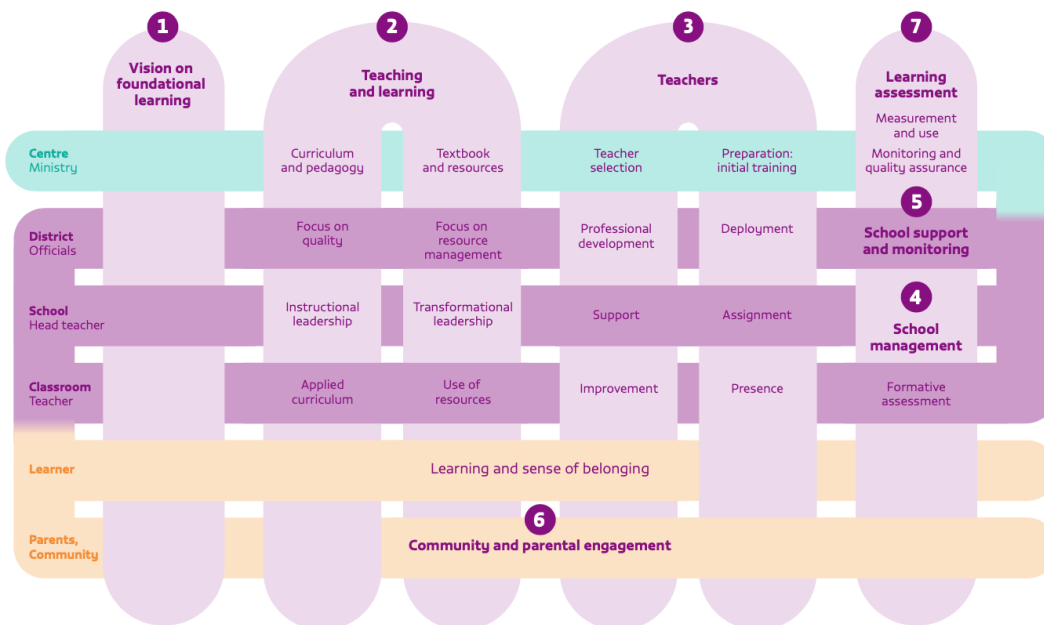


4. Analytical framework and fieldwork findings

4.1. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

This review follows the Spotlight Series conceptual framework, which outlines seven key factors affecting UBE and foundational learning (Figure 11).

FIGURE 11
Spotlight analytical framework



Source: GEMR Spotlight series analytical framework and research guide.



TABLE 9
Synthesis of literature review with reference to the analytical framework

Factor in analytical framework	Current status in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
Vision and focus on performance	A vision exists in the SSEF. However, dissemination and ownership have been insufficient.
Teaching and learning	Primary school enrolment is almost universal. However, there are strong spatial disparities in terms of access. Education quality is poor. The curriculum is well developed but not accompanied by sufficient and pedagogically appropriate teaching materials.
Teachers	A new teacher policy has been developed but not promulgated. Initial and ongoing teacher education are insufficient. Recruitment and deployment are somewhat complicated due to the hybrid mode of governance between the government and faith-based organizations. Salaries have been raised but remain low. Many teachers remain unregistered and unpaid.
School management and leadership	There is no specific mentoring platform for school leaders in relation to reading. Teachers are not selected according to objective criteria and support for teachers from school management is insufficient. Head teachers are at times not selected using objective criteria. The hybrid mode of governance between the government and faith-based organizations compromises the running of schools.
Supervision and monitoring	The number of provincial and sub-provincial administrative offices has mushroomed, especially over the past five years, but they are poorly equipped and have insufficient resources.
Community and parent engagement	Parents are represented on school-level education governance bodies. However, there is no evidence of their impact on learning processes. Parents have contributed significantly to education financing in recent decades.
Learning assessment	Until recently, there were no national-level evaluations. Existing studies point to very poor learning outcomes. Results of such studies are insufficiently disseminated.

4.2. RESULTS OF DISCUSSIONS WITH NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

The research team organized a stakeholder workshop in Kinshasa on 15 October 2021 to introduce the analytical framework, present the literature review and assess priority issues. The stakeholder workshop had a satisfactory participation rate (16 participants out of 20 invitations, or 80%), including directorate and ministry representatives (education programmes, planning, budget and human resources), provincial education representatives (provincial education directors, deputy provincial education directors, IPPs and school heads), and representatives of civil society, teacher unions, private schools, SPACE, CIEAS and parent associations.

After the presentation of the analytical framework and the literature review, two priority issues were identified: the vision and teachers (Table 10).



TABLE 10
Synthesis of literature review with reference to the analytical framework

Factors	1 st priority	%	2 nd priority	%	Participants' justification
Vision and focus on performance	15	75	0	0	'When we do not know where we are going, we sail on sight and work at a loss.'
Teaching and learning	0	0	3	19	'There needs to be a programme that responds to the vision.'
Teachers	1	25	6	37.5	'This is the brain and engine of all hope of improvement in learning.'
School management and leadership	0	0	4	25	Resources have been the centre of attention by members to the point of competing with teachers.
Supervision and monitoring	0	0	1	6	A factor that cannot be ignored but not a top priority.
Community and parent engagement	0	0	0	0	A factor that cannot be ignored but not a top priority.
Learning assessment	0	0	2	12.5	A factor that cannot be ignored but not a top priority.
TOTAL	16	100	16	100	

Source: GEMR Spotlight series analytical framework and research guide.

Table 11 shows the assessment by stakeholders at the national level of the seven analytical categories.

TABLE 11
Results of discussions with national stakeholders

Factors	Key points of discussions
Vision and focus on performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Not well known enough and lacking definition and dissemination.
Teaching and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consistent efforts to improve teaching and learning are under way (training courses by the Service national de formation (SERNAFOR, National Training Service), but hampered by obstacles (e.g. selection of certain provinces for teacher training and lack of resources). ● Disparity in access persists. ● The free education policy is not accompanied by well-prepared arrangements for its success. ● Curriculum is not accompanied by sufficient and appropriate teaching materials. ● The Direction de production des matériels didactiques (DIPROMAD, Teaching Materials Production Department) is functioning. ● Many textbooks and other teaching materials are not of suitable quality despite efforts by partners and the government to produce and disseminate them.
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The potential impact of teachers on student performance is recognized. ● Teacher skills are generally poor. ● There are many problems with initial and ongoing training, recruitment, monitoring and professional support, deployment and motivation (insufficient salary).



Factors	Key points of discussions
School management and leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Leadership is recognized as having an impact on performance. ● There is no formal provision of support for teachers from principals. ● Selection of principals often disregards objective criteria. ● No regular retraining of principals is carried out. ● The budget is low and needs to be increased.
Supervision and monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Supervision and monitoring are scarce; inspectors lack the means to carry out their work properly.
Community and parent engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parents are concerned about school registration of children, payment of school fees and discussion of key issues by their assembly bodies, such as ANAPECO and the Association pour la Protection de l'Enfance au Congo (Association for the Protection of Childhood in the Congo). ● The community (NGOs, churches) come up with support strategies to improve education quality.
Learning assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Although evaluations (CIEAS, PASEC, EGRA) have taken place, their results were made known only at the provincial authorities' level and not communicated to schools, parents and communities. Widely disseminating assessment results is a challenge, but would allow actors to appreciate the efforts they are making in producing school results.

4.3. FIELD APPROACH AND AREAS VISITED

Fieldwork was carried out from 15 November to 1 December 2021. At the central level, representatives of the following directorates and key services were interviewed, with questions based on the seven-factor analytical framework:

- General Secretariat: manager of school administration, research studies and education partnerships.
- Direction des Réformes et Innovations Scolaires (School Reforms and Innovations Department).
- DIPROMAD.
- Direction de Formation (Training Department).
- SERNAFOR at the Inspection Générale de l'Enseignement (General Education Inspectorate) level.
- Direction de Planification Scolaire (School Planning Department).
- Direction des Ressources Humaines (Human Resources Department).
- Direction d'Etudes et de la Planification (Studies and Planning Department).
- Direction de l'Evaluation (Evaluation Department).
- Division de l'Enseignement Primaire, Secondaire et Technique (Primary, Secondary and Technical Monitoring Division).

At the regional level, four provinces were targeted: Tshopo, Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu. They were chosen because Tshopo and Ituri were known to the authors and all four provinces were covered by EGRA and EGMA, their languages were evaluated by EGRA and they were accessible by affordable means of transport. The four provinces recorded primary education completion rates in the 2017/18 school year that were higher than the national average (Table 12).



TABLE 12
Primary school completion rates by province

Factors	1 st priority
Kinshasa	103%
Kongo Central	65%
Kwango	76%
Kwilu	83%
Mai-Ndombe	93%
Equateur	104%
Tshuapa	62%
Mongala	98%
Sud-Ubangi	83%
Nord-Ubangi	90%
Tshopo	99%
Ituri	84%
Haut-Uele	67%
Bas-Uele	65%
Nord-Kivu	77%
Sud-Kivu	88%
Maniema	83%
Kasai-Central	52%
Kasai	66%
Kasai-Oriental	58%
Sankuru	53%
Lomami	94%
Haut-Katanga	60%
Lualaba	51%
Tanganika	40%
Haut-Lomami	66%
D. R. Congo	75.3%

Note: This list shows the 26 provinces as of 2015 after découpage.
 Source: MEPST/CTSE (2019).

At the regional level, two activities were organized. The first activity was key informant interviews using questions related to the analytical framework. They were conducted with the provincial education director, main provincial inspector, pool inspectors, provincial director of SECOPE, deputy provincial education director, provincial and sub-provincial coordinator, along with head teachers of schools and teachers of early grades, and comités des parents (parents and representatives of parent associations).

The second activity was class observations with a structured checklist. In each province, three classrooms (grades 1–3) of three primary schools were visited. The sampling was restricted by the fact that several public schools were on strike at the time. The selection of available schools was based on technical indicators provided

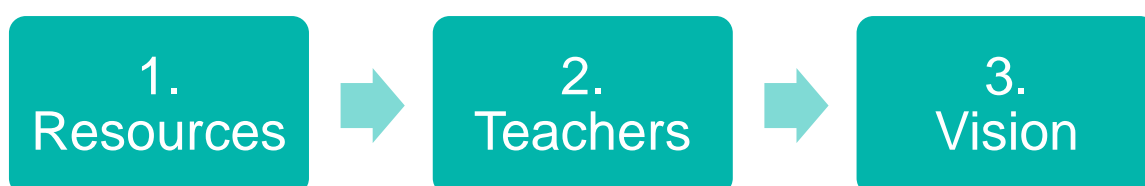


by the provincial education director regarding performance. Some schools visited were described as average and others as poorly performing, although no supporting data were provided.

4.4. FIELDWORK RESULTS AND RELATIONSHIP WITH CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

Actors at both central and regional levels identified issues concerning resources, teachers and vision as important challenges plaguing the Congolese education system (Figure 12).

FIGURE 12
Main challenges identified in key informant interviews



After the main issues were identified, stakeholders ranked the seven factors from the analytical framework in order of importance, in terms of their impact on UBE and foundational learning, as follows:

- Management and leadership (with a particular focus on management of available resources)
- Teachers
- Vision
- Teaching and learning
- Learning assessment
- Monitoring and supervision
- Community engagement

While the respondents did not regard **teaching and learning**, **learning assessment** and **monitoring and supervision** in the same way as the first three factors, they nonetheless confirmed that, in combination with the first three, they had an important impact on performance. Table 13 provides more details on stakeholders' opinions concerning the seven key factors affecting UBE and foundational learning.

TABLE 13
Respondents' view of critical success factors

Factor	Respondents' views
Vision and focus on performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The vision exists in key strategic documents (SSEF, Education Framework Law), but partners know it only poorly, if at all.
Teaching and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curricula are well structured. • Textbooks sometimes are not aligned with the curriculum. • Teacher training on curricula is lacking. • The number of daily lessons was reduced from nine to six. • Class hours increased from 30 to 45 minutes per lesson, but teachers are asking for more time (at least 60 minutes). • Viable infrastructure is lacking in some schools and classrooms originally built as housing. <p>'[M]any textbooks do not correspond to the national programme. This means that some subjects are not covered.' (Teacher)</p>



<p>Teachers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers are not equally trained in the new programme across and within provinces. • Several training modules (SERNAFOR) have been prepared for teachers, but without the means to produce and deploy them. • Teacher salaries are insufficient. • Some management offices (e.g. that of the provincial education director) do not share textbooks with schools. <p>‘All teacher training modules, old and new, are very well prepared and available, but the problem of resources to cover all provinces remains the challenging bottleneck. ... All teachers should take all training at almost the same time in order to start the reform at the same time.’ (SERNAFOR)</p> <p>‘Teachers support each other, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds; but motivation is not enough to give it everything. The state must take care of teachers.’ (Teacher)</p> <p>‘The lack of payment lowers [teachers’] professional conscientiousness and means that they are not motivated.’ (School stakeholder)</p>
<p>School management and leadership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources are insufficient. • New school infrastructure (schools, classrooms, etc.) is needed. • Old buildings need rehabilitation. • Education is financed entirely by the central government and not by the provinces.
<p>Supervision and monitoring</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior national and provincial education officials do not visit schools/classrooms. • School principals do not pay regular visits to classrooms. • Principals do not organize frequent model lessons. • Inspectors are ill-equipped, sometimes incompetent and pay irregular visits to schools. • Pedagogical advisers from faith-based schools (especially Catholic schools) regularly visit the schools. <p>‘The provincial office should increase the number of visits and they should follow up on the comments, recommendations and training.’ (Teacher)</p>
<p>Community and parent engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is authentic participation of parents in school management committees in accordance with ministerial decrees. • Parents recognize the work of NGOs in schools. NGO interventions generally take place under the supervision of provincial education authorities (e.g. provincial education director, deputy provincial education director). • Many parents do not visit their child’s school and do not know their child’s teacher, but contribute financially and materially through their presence at various meetings.
<p>Learning assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no independent assessments at the national level apart from the recent CIEAS assessment. • Existing studies indicate very poor learning outcomes. • The results of existing studies are insufficiently disseminated.

By and large, the findings from the field visit confirmed the findings of the literature review summarized in Section 3. The fieldwork also revealed that a good amount of innovation is taking place to improve performance without necessarily or primarily resorting to intervention by the government or other partners.



4.5. RESULTS OF LESSON OBSERVATIONS

Classroom observation covered 10 language lessons and 2 mathematics lessons. Four researchers – trained teachers and university staff – acted as observers. The researchers agreed that there was a striking disparity between public and private schools.

- Generally, lower student headcount (≤ 50) was recorded in private school classrooms, as opposed to more than 50 per public school class. However, classes in private schools that lacked substantial infrastructure were overwhelmed despite having fewer than 50 students.
- The largest class visited had 87 students, the smallest 23. The average was 68, with limited circulation space in two thirds of classrooms visited.
- Except in a private school, teaching resources were not stored in the classroom.
- In no classroom was the presence of supplementary materials (calculators, interactive whiteboards, computers/tablets for teachers and students) observed.
- All teachers had textbooks but no other printed materials.
- For language lessons, 75% of classes (i.e. 9 of 12) were observed reading letters, syllables and words, while 25% (i.e. 3 of 12) were observed reading texts or doing listening comprehension and reading.
- All teachers guided their pupils in discovery of the subject. Two thirds of teachers moved around the classroom, encouraging students to work using multiple methods.
- During lessons, no student used the manual during the observed lesson. In 10 of 12 classes, student textbooks were kept in a corner of the classroom, as they were insufficient for the number of students.
- A lesson was observed in which three quarters of children sat on undamaged benches and the remaining quarter were on broken benches. But the head teacher reported that this class was better than others thanks to its teacher, who adopts clear and appealing language and is very active in capturing students' attention.

4.6. WHAT FACTORS UNDERLIE DIFFERENCES IN SCHOOL PERFORMANCE?

Table 14 summarizes the main factors behind differences in school performance that were observed during field visits, focusing on financial resources, support for teachers and class size.

TABLE 14
Key factors in school performance

Factor	Respondents' views
Financial resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many schools do not receive government funding. • There is no objective and fair basis for schools to receive government-paid operational costs. For example, a school with 6 classes receives CDF 150,000 while one with 12 classes or more receives at least CDF 1–2 million. The basis for the calculation is not clearly defined.
Support for teachers in several categories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various de facto categories of teachers exist according to salary status: paid, unpaid, 'new unit' with low salary (on average, CDF 300,000 monthly, equal to about US\$150). • At well-off private schools and the public schools with the most parental involvement, the teacher salary varies from CDF 600,000 (US\$300) to CDF 1 million (US\$500) which is double or triple the government salary.
Large class sizes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Especially in public schools, classrooms are characterized by excessive numbers (70 students per class, on average) due to free education. • Successful schools respect guidelines on minimum and maximum class sizes.



Box 3 illustrates the case of a well-performing school, thereby underlining how school-level factors can make a significant difference.

BOX.3

Case study of a well-performing school



The **Shalom School Complex** in Bunia is a private school, affiliated with the Protestant educational governance network. It receives frequent visits from the provincial education director, sometimes unexpectedly. The head teacher does not announce the visits but can schedule them at any time of the day. It is among the best schools, if not the best, in the city.

In terms of human resources, teacher age ranges from 23 to 45 but most staff have around 20 years' experience in teaching. The personnel (teaching and administrative) undergo training at least once per term in mathematics and French. Some training sessions are held during academic holidays to address shortcomings observed during class visits organized by the principal or inspectors.

For reading instruction, the school abandoned the more theoretical, government-offered approach for the early years and, in collaboration with an American missionary, developed a more pragmatic reading manual. Grade 3 was the first to use the manual and with good impact, according to the head teacher. Workshop participants recognized this as a leading school. It has come first four times in the provincial dictation competition.



5. Two positive case studies

In view of the various reforms under way, and in line with the vision of a system focused on improving learning, the Democratic Republic of the Congo could share with its African peers two policies likely to affect SDG 4 targets: on parental participation and on professionalization of teacher training.

5.1. PARENTAL PARTICIPATION

Increased parental involvement has been observed in school operations since the 1990s. Initiatives manifesting parental commitment include:

- **Parent associations:** An association of parents of students is formed in each school. It generally meets quarterly to discuss with the management council various problems affecting the school, the teachers and the children enrolled there.
- **Ecole-parent ('School-parents')**: For each school, parents meet to discuss problems with their children's schooling. They meet outside the school, often in the evening at a parent's home or at a location in their community. They analyse possible problems, propose solutions and present them to the school management board.
- **'Couple-parents'**: For each class, two parents (one man and one woman) are chosen to act as proxy parents providing pastoral support to students in the class. They deal with the problems of all students in the class (e.g. financial problems, absenteeism, violence) and look for solutions. They are the first people to respond, before the school contacts biological parents.
- **Parent mobilization:** If the community notes a need for new classrooms, it mobilizes parents to support their construction in semi-durable materials. In addition, parents financially support the teachers who will be in charge of the new classrooms before the state takes over their remuneration.
- **Co-teaching:** Some first and second year classes have two teachers: one assumes the role classically assigned to a teacher in the classroom and an assistant ensures class discipline and helps students take notes, complete tasks and do homework. This practice also ensures continuity of teaching in case of a short absence by the regular teacher.
- **Buses:** Financial contribution by parents pay for provision of buses for school transport.

5.2. PROFESSIONALIZATION OF TEACHER TRAINING

Low skills on the part of primary school teachers are a determinant of poor student skills. As has already been noted, the reform of primary school teacher education, supported by AFD, UNESCO, PAQUE and the World Bank, has two components:

- **Streamlining teaching programmes in upper secondary education by strengthening teaching practice:** This component entails revising, in the short term, the old Pedagogical Humanities programme, emphasizing mastery of disciplines taught at the primary level and giving more emphasis to teaching practice than to theory.
- **Setting up post-secondary teacher training institutes:** In the medium term, teacher training, now done at the secondary level, will be provided by Institutes for Teaching Profession Training at the post-secondary level. The first pilot institute is expected to be built in 2022.

The AFD is particularly involved in the establishment of the first Teacher Training Institute at the post-secondary level at Mbaza Ngungu in Central Kongo province. With support from PAQUE, financed by the World Bank, UNESCO is more active in the definition of reference materials for the renewed pedagogical humanities.



6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on respondents' priorities for accelerating progress on reaching SDG targets 4.1 and 4.5.

Provide the education system and schools with the necessary resources.

The share of the budget allocated to education has increased considerably over the past five years, from 11.5% in 2017 to 22.1% in 2021, while the share for salaries (teachers and administration) dropped from 94% to 68%. However, fieldwork has shown that the budget is insufficient to significantly improve learning, and households still carry the greatest burden of financing education. Hence the government and its education partners must provide the education system in general, and schools in particular, with sufficient financial and material resources to achieve the expected results. This will need to include a focus on the remaining identified 'new unit' teachers who have not yet been transferred to payroll and ensuring they are paid.

Prepare and supervise teachers through more effective in-service teacher training and regular school-level inspections.

Among the 10 reforms recommended by the SSEF, 5 are related to improving the completion rate and the quality of basic learning, including professionalization of teacher training. While this report recognizes the key role teachers play in supporting learning, the fieldwork indicates that their skills are poor and their training, recruitment, monitoring and salary insufficient. In addition to establishing the pilot institute for teacher training as recommended by the SSEF, education partners need to prioritize ensuring that teacher trainers' skills are strengthened, that teachers are mentored by directors and monitored by inspectors, and that the government provides them with a decent salary to motivate them.

Clarify and disseminate the vision of education more widely.

The SSEF clearly specifies the vision, but the fieldwork indicates that it is less known by education stakeholders outside the MEPST and is not clear enough for everyone. Hence broad consultation with a range of education stakeholders needs to be promoted at the provincial and sub-provincial levels so as to reach agreement on key messages, along with sensitizing actors at all levels through flyers, at SERNFOR training sessions and during workshops.

Produce and disseminate textbooks and other educational materials that are aligned with the curriculum and adapted to reflect local languages.

Despite the support of the ACCELERE! and PAQUE projects in strengthening the supply chain for teaching and learning materials, the literature review and fieldwork showed that textbooks and other teaching materials are almost non-existent, of poor quality and sometimes not aligned with the curriculum and adapted to the multiple variants of Congolese languages. The government needs to develop a clear plan for producing textbooks and disseminating them in schools for all school subjects, including language-related subjects (reading). Moreover, the financial and technical partners, in collaboration with the government, should ensure that reading manuals are adapted to capture the variants of national languages.



Abbreviations

ACCELERE!	Accès, lecture, rétention et redevabilité (Access, Reading, Retention and Accountability)
AFD	Agence française de développement (French Development Agency)
ANAPECO	Association nationale des parents d'élèves et des étudiants du Congo (National Association of Parents of Pupils and Students of the Congo)
BRICE	Building Resilience: Education Opportunities in Fragile and Crisis-Affected Environments
CCS	Comité de concertation sectorielle (Sectoral Consultation Committee)
CDF	Congolese franc
CIEAS	Cellule indépendante d'évaluation des acquis scolaires (Independent School Performance Assessment Unit)
CONEPT	Coalition nationale de l'éducation pour tous (National Coalition for Education for All)
CONFEMEN	Conférence des ministres de l'éducation des états et gouvernements de la Francophonie (Conference of Ministers of Education of States and Governments of La Francophonie)
CTSE	Cellule technique pour les statistiques de l'éducation (Education Statistics Technical Unit)
DIPROMAD	Direction de production des matériels didactiques (Teaching Materials Production Department)
ECW	Education Cannot Wait
EGMA	Early Grade Mathematics Assessment
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
GDP	Gross domestic product
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
INGO	International non-governmental organization
IPP	Inspecteur provincial principal (principal provincial inspector)
JSR	Joint Sector Review
MEPST	Ministère de l'enseignement primaire, secondaire et technique (Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Technical Education)
OPEQ	Opportunities for Equitable Access to Quality Basic Education
PAQUE	Projet d'amélioration de la qualité de l'éducation (Education Quality Improvement Project)
PAQUED	Projet d'amélioration de la qualité de l'éducation (prior to PAQUE) (Education Quality Improvement Project)
PASEC	Programme d'analyse des systèmes éducatifs de la CONFEMEN (CONFEMEN Education System Analysis Programme)
PARSE	Projet d'appui au redressement du secteur éducatif (Education Sector Project)
PERSE	Projet d'équité et de renforcement du système éducatif (Equity and Strengthening of Education Project)
SECOPE	Service de contrôle et paiement des enseignants (Teacher Control and Payroll Service)
SERNAFOR	Service national de formation (National Training Service)
SPACE	Secrétariat permanent d'appui et de coordination du secteur de l'éducation (Permanent Secretariat for Education Sector Support and Coordination)



SSEF	Stratégie sectorielle de l'éducation et de la formation (Education and Training Sector Strategy)
TENAFEP	Test national de fin d'études primaires (National End of Primary Studies Test)
UBE	Universal basic education
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development



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