



# The Effectiveness of Trade Union Strategies in Sub-Saharan Africa: The case of teacher union in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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## Abstract

*This article analyses the effectiveness of union strategies in Primary, Secondary and Technical Education (EPST) in the DRC and focuses on the interactions of stakeholders in public schools. The financial and limited power of the Congolese State obliges the latter to engage in a permanent dialogue with the educational stakeholders, especially the trade unions. What about the effectiveness of the strategies developed at the EPST? This evaluation analyses the issues and games in which these actors intervene, particularly the dynamics of the negotiations. Strategies are influenced by the political, economic, and social contexts of a country, which exert a significant influence on the types of claims, the nature of strategies, and professional relations. The case related to the EPST brings an added value in sub-Saharan Africa literature, but also marks the central place of its trade union struggle in the construction of public policies, in particular by offering a broader understanding. By exploring the interactions of the EPST stakeholders, the article aims at analysing, explaining and understanding the different operational strategies and the results achieved at the EPST in a context of perpetual and recurring conflicts.*

## Keywords

*Trade Unions; Republic of Congo; Teachers; Trade Union Strategies; Counter Strategies*

## Theoretical framework

The trajectory of labour conflict in the twentieth century has been anchored not only in recorded cycles, but also in cycles of global politics that generate an interaction between the dynamics of global labour conflict and global politics (Silver, 2003, p. 149). Classic analyses of social movements on collective conflicts, labour rights, unions and democracy, even globalisation, fuel the debate with the industrial revolution, democratisation of States, corporate restructuring, and rise of the informal economy (Rizzo, 2013; Touraine, 2000; Streek, 2011). In an attempt to resolve socio-economic crises, some authors have focused on the relevance of trade union strategies as a counterweight to neoliberal policies, and others have focused on the outcome of various employer-labour crises, as well as desyndicalisation and the difficulty for unions to adapt and play a crucial role in a globalised environment (Gagné, 1996; Lévesque & Murray, 2020; Pulignano, 2015; Silver, 2003; and Verrat, 2010; Weber, 1952).

Other analyses specifically explore the empirical experiences of trade unions in West, North, and South Africa in asserting their place in the deconstruction of authoritarian regimes and the democratic construction of their country in a neoliberal context. The analyses also focus on the impact of globalisation in Africa and the response of trade unions, such as the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) of South Africa to obtain trade union rights in multinational factories, the contribution of demands for the rights of trade unions to urban transport in Dar-es-Salaam (Rizzo, 2013), the motivations and limits of collective mobilisations facing the paradigm of the neoliberal system in Gabon (Tonda & Débain, 2010) without forgetting the recent organisation of domestic workers in Mozambique (Castel-Branco, 2014). And as many authors point out, understanding social conflict requires an approach in terms of political economy or between the economy and the union.

Actor theory and strategy choice theory provide an explanatory model of strategy effectiveness (Boxall, 2008; Crozier & Friedberg, 1977). As such, the collective action places at the centre of its concerns the power relations and the stakeholders' strategies to grasp the hidden facts and the latent logics. The neoliberal context reinforces the applicability of the strategic theory of Crozier & Friedberg (1977) in order to describe the social constructs of the EPST stakeholders, their practice, and conduct. This conceptual essay draws its anchor from two diagnoses of the Congolese education system in 1996 and 2014 whose data collection, analysis and results have significant scientific validity. In 1996, the Congolese government organized the General States of Education (EGE) and a critical reflection with its partners before the end of 2015 (RESEN, 2014) with the objective of making an overall assessment and providing essential alternatives to improvement of the education system. Specifically, the results of each of the studies present strengths and weaknesses on which educational reforms and partnership relations are built. These studies have shed light on the key concepts whose definitions we support.

The concept of strategy refers to a set of behaviours from which organizations define their place in the environment (Mintzberg, 1978). It is also a set of critical choices about the interests and resources used in the behaviour of an organisation that stakeholders mobilise to achieve their goals: strategy means actions that are consequent for survival, if they survive their level of performance (Boxall, 2008). This concept is dependent on the stakeholder's relative freedom, significant social meaning, and the choice of actions with unpredictable ends (Crozier & Friedberg, 1977). In practical terms, through the strategy of denouncing the arrest of the Secretary General of the Congo Teachers' Union (SYECO), Mr. Jean-Pierre Kimbuya, and that of the Catholic School Teachers' Union, Mr. Jean Bosco Puna, in 2007 and 2017, the Government ended up freeing them. The threat of non-resumption of the courses envisaged by the teachers' unions leads the State, either to convene negotiations, or to pay salaries in advance. The deployment of a strategy by actor A leads actor B to develop a counter-strategy to preserve his interests.

Moreover, strategy and counter-strategy are seen as a link where the strength of calculation prevails in the quest for the space to be controlled and the will to set up logics of channelling in the trajectories of movements and individuals to build a social order (De Certeau, 1990). This creates a dynamic of strategic games where the actors weave a concrete action system. At the EPST, the concrete action system includes the network of five stakeholders listed in Table 1 (see below), the evaluations, the joint committees, the teacher control missions carried out jointly by the Government and the trade union bench in all the educational provinces and all the strategies adopted. Among the strategies of one another there is communication, advance payment with wage increase, strike and denunciation, marches and sit-in, repression, arrests, and negotiations accompanied by the signature of agreements.

It turned out that, during the pedagogical evaluations, the stakeholders adopt attitudes that reveal complicity in favouring their interests detrimental to the general interest. They erect in the system the anti-values of corruption and tribalism, or during official examinations, these stakeholders conceive the network in which we find the corrupt and the corrupters, in the face of which the authorities are powerless (Ekwa, 2004). These strategies are built according to the capacities and aptitudes that the stakeholders possess and, through the relationships in which they fit. In doing so, the concrete action system is the set of informal relationships that bind the organisation stakeholders to deal with problems and day-to-day issues (Amiel et al., 1998).

The stakeholders' interdependence and the conflict universe dysfunction of teachers' union struggle in DRC have favoured the alliance establishment among stakeholders since the advent of democracy. In fact, as soon as the stakeholders are strategic and there are several other interveners, the strategies of one another collide. Similarly, action space offers the scheme and a diversity of stakeholders intervening in an environment where they interact by means of different strategic models proportional to the interests at stake (Muluma, 2017). Throughout its history, the EPST presents stakeholders corresponding to the eras and the ongoing evolution of teacher trade unionism within which relations occur.

Professional relations are social relations of production among employers, workers and the State or a new distinct type of power relation in production to create and apply employment rules, which depend on

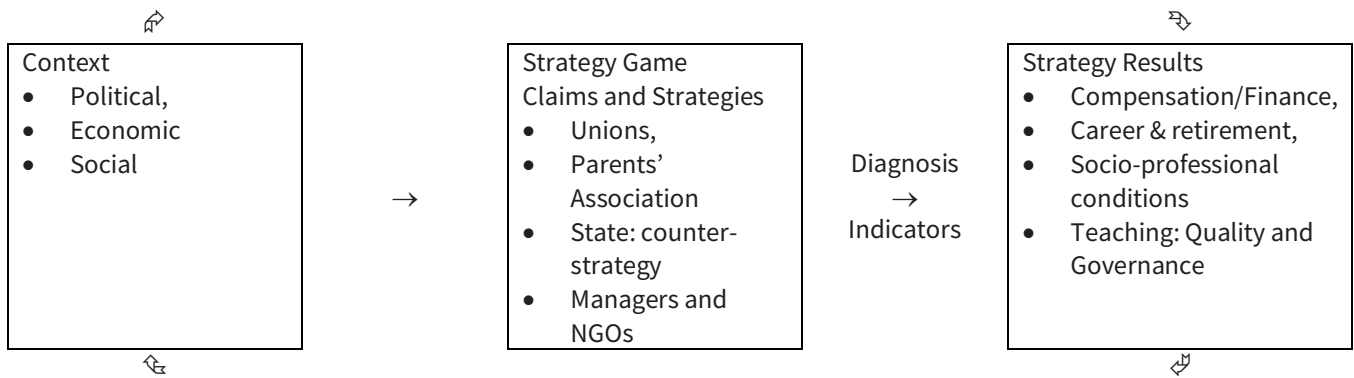
technological and commercial changes (Dahl, 1957; Dunlop, 1958). It is also the set of policies and rules which, in an organisation, structure the relationship among employees, employers and the State (Lallement, 1995). They are the expression of everything that tends to determine, by legal or contractual means, the modes of existence and relations of the parties involved (Lallement, 2018). These relations represent a strategic issue in the social struggle, since they set the limits to the rights of the respective stakeholders of an organisation (Muluma, 2006).

For Jack Duncan (1990), effectiveness is the capacity of a person, a group, or a system to achieve their ends, their objectives. Effective power is the ability of “agents” to cause significant effects, in particular by defending their own interests and/or harming the interests of others, positively or negatively (Lévesque & Murray, 2010; and Lukes, 2005). Effectiveness at the EPST is the ability to resolve or provide solutions to collective conflicts, to give adequate results to the problems of education and those relating to teachers’ living and working condition improvement. Effectiveness is the achievement of the expected results. For example, by boycotting the start of the school year, the teachers’ union initiates strategic action that should lead to solutions to the problems posed. The effective strategy is apprehended according to the stakes, the situation defining the gain and profit. This concept refers, finally, to the satisfaction of the demands of employees, to the concretisation of their socio-professional demands.

It is admitted that the results depend on the social context and the relational cleavage of the stakeholders who make it possible or not to resolve the teachers’ claims. Consequently, the political context, transversal to the economic and social context, binds the State to a competitive, holistic, and relational environment. The situation of weakness in which the State finds itself obliges this one to engage in a process of permanent dialogue with its social partners, and especially the teachers' unions.

We opt for the argument that the strategies of trade unionism depend on the political, economic, and social contexts of a country, which influence the types of demands, the nature of strategies, and complex professional relations. An alignment is established between context, claim, strategies, professional relations, effectiveness and potential results. Thus, in this context and through negotiations, the stakeholders set up strategies and counter-strategies in order to achieve the needs satisfaction (the theoretical diagram below).

Figure 1 Collective negotiation: Government joint committee - EPST trade union bench



Source: Author

This diagram represents the concrete action system of the EPST, which is likely to explain the interactions carried out during the three decades of social dialogue. In this system, the educational stakeholders interact when they intervene during the evaluations of the finalists and through the mediatisation of the crossed, often divergent actions, at the start of the school year. Positions taken by one side are rejected by the other side. This is what causes the social tensions recorded at the EPST. In these power relations, the pupils’ parents find themselves in a

perplexed situation, which pushes them to align themselves, either on teachers' side, or on State's side, by supporting the actions of the latter through the payment of teachers' additional salaries. On the other hand, the majority of parents without means encourage trade union actions. Such is the cycle of issues in which the actors who participate build their sets of professional relationships.

## Methodology

The data used in this study were collected from an anthropo-sociological survey (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2016) conducted among educational stakeholders of the EPST in Kinshasa, the capital of DRC, and in Kwango Province, precisely at Kenge and Feshi. It allowed us to identify the population and draw our sample. The representatives of the Ministry of EPST and trade unionists have been privileged due to the fact that some exercise a key role in the management of public schools, and unions are pressure cycle triggers.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the financing of education in DRC (1994-2019) by parents constitutes another epicenter of the respondents' choice and one of the issues in the resolution of problems relating to education.

In DRC, national education is managed by four ministries; three reasons motivated us to choose the Ministry of EPST. First, it is about the importance of education as a breeding ground for human capital investment and the most powerful weapon for changing a society. Second, this ministry is a public sector where the State employs more than half of the employees of the Public Service, that is, 678,537 paid teachers out of 1,399,068 State employees<sup>2</sup>, which makes it a centre of attraction where projects are numerous due to urgent needs (ODD4). In addition, its partners participate in the development of policies that should lead to the satisfaction of educational needs and citizens. Third, it is because the teachers' working conditions and the decline in teaching quality constitute a real education problem in Sub-Saharan Africa. To this end, our respondents revealed evidence of the dynamics of the cycles of demands and interactions between the unions and the Government which led to the negotiations and the results which, unfortunately, remain unnoticed and less theorised.

Taking these three elements into account makes this sector a judicious choice to address issues related to the effectiveness of strategies in sub-Saharan Africa (Boxall, 2008; Crozier & Friedberg, 1977; Rizzo, 2013; Silver, 2003). Besides, three other types of the EPST stakeholders (Presidents of pupils' parents' associations, Coordinators of Catholic and Protestant Schools and Representatives of NGOs) were chosen and interviewed to reinforce a broader understanding of this study, given that these are authentic partners (Article 21 of the National Education Outline-law of February 11, 2014). All these social stakeholders have the mission of contributing to education quality improvement and teachers' socio-professional conditions. It should be noted that these social stakeholders have historical influence in the political, economic, and social changes that have occurred in Africa during the democratisation process (Alternatives Sud, 2014; Bianchini, 2001; Chabi-Imorou, 2010; Fonteneau, 2004; Gouchon, 2015; Ndaywel, 2009;; Sagnes, 1994 and Yagoyena, 2014).

This article adopts a qualitative approach in order to analyse the interactions among educational stakeholders and observe the union dynamism (Sristava et al., 2009) on the one hand, and on the other, the stakeholders' issues, the impact of their power over the life cycle of strategies decided and their working relationships that arise from collective conflicts in any department (Friedberg, 1997).

Using an interview guide, we administered to respondents' questions relating to the problems of teachers' living and working conditions, those of the EPST stakeholders and their strategies and counter-strategies, the questions related to the frameworks of dialogue or professional relations, to the context of democratisation and those related to the results of their struggle. These interviews took place primarily with stakeholders at the national (macro) and provincial or local level, that is, 51 and 47 out of a total of 128.

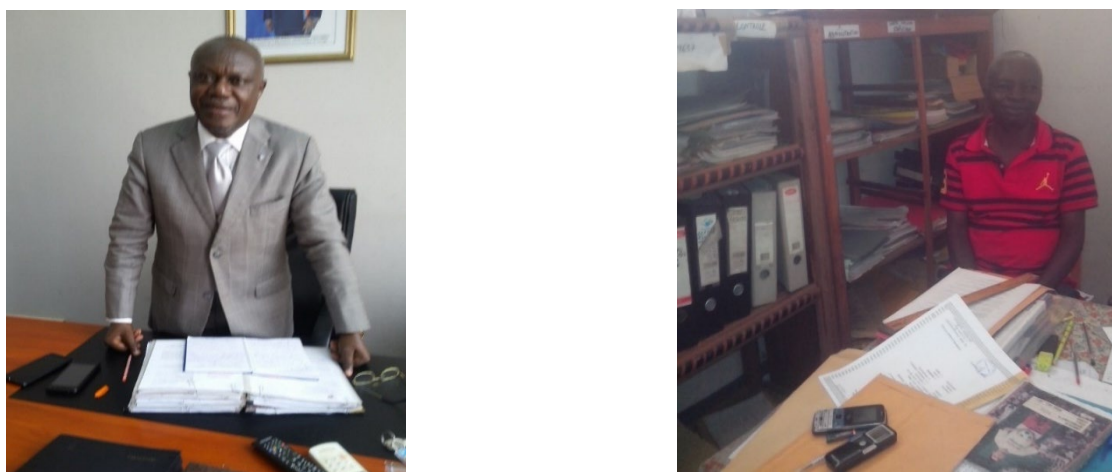
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<sup>1</sup>The people interviewed were senior officials of the EPST (Minister, Directors, managers of public schools), teachers' unionists, presidents of pupils' parents and NGOs.

<sup>2</sup>Statistical data received from the payroll department of the Ministry of the Budget, April 2022

At the national level, we interviewed the representatives of each category (ministers and directors of the EPST and some high-ranking civil servants), trade union leaders, Catholic and Protestant coordinators, presidents of parents' associations and NGOs who gave us the overall configuration of the study concerning, in particular, socio-professional problems, the history of union struggle, the strategies of educational stakeholders and their centripetal and centrifugal issues, the complexity of teacher management, their agreements and the results obtained (Kaufman, 2016). In addition to the official documents and the trade union specifications received, the 51 semi-directed interviews with senior executives in Kinshasa, often carried out in their offices, or even in their residences, revealed certain common practices at the EPST and other evidence related to statements mentioned to constitute our database.

Figure 1: Benjamin Mukulungu (left), interviewed 24/8/2018, and interview with secondary school inspector Feshi Mr. Camille (right)



Source: Author

Table 1: Study sample which corresponds to the population targeted at the EPST

N°	Types of stakeholders	Number of interviews	Frequency 2016-2021
01	Unions: leaders and teachers	72	August-Sept-February
02	Parents' associations	8	October-May
03	Ministry of EPST	35	April- August
04	Managers of schools under agreement	6	March-June
05	NGO intervening at the EPSP	7	November-June
Total		128	

Source: Author

At the provincial level of Kwango, we organized 47 interviews, including 22 at the provincial level and 25 at the local level. The 22 respondents were provincial authorities and trade unionists at Kenge (provincial headquarters of Kwango), interviewed from April 19 to 22, 2017, which allowed us to categorise the problems common to public schools in each territory and their uniqueness. Then, the 25 other interviews presented the differentiations experienced between urban teachers and those in the countryside, including the image of trade unionism and its

influence on the socio-professional environment. The responses from these interviews constitute consistent data allowing comparison across many respondents (Ritchie and Spense, 1994).

Participant-direct observation (Arborio & Fournier, 2015; Gotman, 1985; Kaufman, 2016) carried out during the *kaïros* of the EPST school cycle (August-September, January and April-May), in which we took part also allowed us to collect additional information to enrich this analysis.

Figure 2: Teachers in General Assembly



Source: Author

Figure 3: Teachers' March, October 25, 2021



Source: Author

In figure 2, the teachers gathered in general assembly evaluate a month of the strike at the headquarters of the synergy located on n°1, 1<sup>st</sup> street on October &2, 2021 in Kalamu Township in Kinshasa. Figure 3 shows the march of teachers on the Boulevard de la Victoire towards the seat of Parliament (Palais du Peuple) in Kinshasa, on October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021, to demand the holding of negotiations.

In addition, the scientific interest consisted in obtaining the narrative on the life of certain leaders in order to bring historical causes and effects to the social surface as materials indicating the explanatory scope of “new” social constructs (Bertaux, 2016; Kita, 1982), revealing the source of the collective identity of employees and enabling understanding of how their cultural strategies interfere with the changes of the 21st century. All these data collected have been authenticated by qualified persons and official sources, a summary of which is given in the table 1 above.

The information collected was used to implement the theoretical construct, specifying the issues and games that caused such and such an event, and produced a given social order. The processing and exploitation of the documents obtained and read gave the real image of the EPST. Epistemologically located at the epicentre, all these elements bring new information and insights to our analysis.

## Analysis of the Results

This analysis focuses on the effectiveness of union strategies at the EPST. It describes, first, the contexts of the emergence of trade unionism in the DRC. It proceeds, second, to the presentation of strategies and counter-strategies of educational stakeholders leading to the evaluation of the results obtained.

### Contexts of the emergence of trade unionism in the DRC

This article takes into account the contexts below in which the trade union struggle is developing in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

### *The political context*

The end of the Cold War and the advent of democracy in Africa provided an opportunity for citizen expression that the political and social forces seized for their demands. Congo-Zaire with its violent destiny (Van Reybrouk, 2012) has a political history characterised by political and institutional crises. This specifically concerns institutional crises such as, on the one hand, the conflicts between Joseph Kasa-Vubu and Patrice Emery Lumumba, respectively President of the Republic and Head of the Government and, on the other hand, situations of the secession provoked by Tshombe in Katanga and by Kalonji in Kasai as well as rebellions by Mulele May in Kwilu and, with Gbeni, in the East; to which are added the two Shaba wars (1977 and 1978) and the current war in the east of the country.

At the end of the one-party regimes recorded in Africa, in the 1990s, a new institutional crisis of illegitimacy persisted until the post-National Sovereign Conference (CNS) period of 1992-1997. It resulted in the neutralisation of internal socio-political forces causing the upsurge, in November 1996, of an armed rebellion under the auspices of Laurent Désiré Kabila which led to the conquest of power on May 17, 1997. This revolution would be followed by rebellions called wars of aggression led by Nkunda Batware (CNDP) in 1998 and by the movement of March 23, 2013 (M23). It is also worth noting the “Kamwenasapu” phenomenon in Kasai in 2017 and the presence of armed groups that still cause insecurity and the systematic looting of wealth in the east of the country.

The DRC democratisation process that started in 1990, still in progress, constitutes an inescapable mark of a study centered on the trade union strategies at the EPST. We consider this context necessary for the strategic deployment of stakeholders, indicating the elements that characterise the process of building professional relationships of the stakeholders involved in the education sector. We note that the strategies are influenced by a series of factors expressed through both the behaviour of these stakeholders and the very broad political and economic context (Boxall, 2008). Any action system constitutes a prolonged effort, implemented by a given subject, undertaken to carry out a project that is close to his heart, in macro-social contexts.

As part of the Congo democratisation process, it is important to understand how the teacher unionism strategies specifically depend on the political, economic, and social context to influence the nature of claims, the strategic games and ambivalent relations within the EPST. Indeed, these contexts of the effectiveness of the said process are catalysts for trade union action.

Of course, the construction of democratic values and the emergence of associative pluralism are forged in an organic and integrative environment. This environment is rooted in a concrete action system fueled by teachers' unions, government, and parents' associations and the rest of stakeholders. These transversal relations are woven in the multiparty system and citizen participation; they certainly have an impact on social conflicts in the political, economic, and social field.

The political context has influenced the education system structuring, which has undergone metamorphoses in terms of its organisation and functioning. In this reformed system, the EPST organises three teaching cycles (nursery, primary and secondary), in 60 educational provinces, 64,879 public schools, at least 22 million pupils and 691,537 teachers, including 676,537 paid and 15,000 unpaid (Mbuela3 EPST report, 2023, March). In this new configuration, 70% of schools are managed by religious denominations (EPST Development Strategy, 2010, May), thus redefining the power of stakeholders and determining the effectiveness of their strategies. In any event, the political context turns out to be a lever generating a multiplicity of strategies, which generates a snowball effect in both the democratisation process and sustainable development.

### *The economic context*

In a predatory governance, the economic context confirms the conclusion of Hyden (1984) according to which the particular evolution of the political economy during these last twenty years and the economic decline can be explained by the institutional characteristics, the imprints of neo-patrimonialism and the particular functioning of an economy of affection established on the basis of networks and traditional links, thus paralysing the proper functioning of government and markets.

It should be noted that the collapse of the Congolese State has been accompanied by that context of its economy. Already in 1973, the Zairianisation policy of the portfolio sufficiently demonstrated this predatory mismanagement through poor governance with companies described as “lame ducks.” Paul Bouvier (Doc. Législatif, 2003) describes Mobutu's system as a predatory state and a network of elites. It is a state that monopolises public funds and squanders them in ostentatious expenditures detrimental to national investment. This creates a context of economic underperformance.

Despite these ambitions, some political progress had a positive impact on the achievement of the objectives of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative in 2010 and the recovery of macroeconomic policies, which contributed to reducing the debt of the DRC and inflation, then to relaunching the growth of its economy (REGED and ODEP report, 2018). To this end, inflation, which had reached 511% in 2000 was reduced to 1% in 2014. At the EPST, we note this increase in inflation of 6% and 15% per year was despite the financial crisis of 2008 and the drop in prices in the mining sector (DSCR, 2016). DRC's real GDP contracted by 1.7% in 2020 after increasing by 3.3% in 2021, 4.5% in 2019, and 5.8% in 2018. In March 2022, the GDP per capita amounted to 622 dollars, which earned it 10th place in the ranking of the poorest countries on the planet. According to IMF, the DRC's economic growth is encouraging, but the global economic situation is marked by the impact of COVID-19 and the war between Russia and Ukraine, the disruption of trade, the rise of raw material prices, and inflationary pressure (Banque Centrale du Congo, weekly information note n° 3.5/22 from March 25 to April 1, 2022).

The DRC offering a geological scandal feeds the stakes of the war, the quasi-systematic internationalisation of the problems of this country, and the economic and social conflicts at the heart of the stakeholders of globalisation since its Leopoldian origins until today (Kankwenda Mbaya, 2005; Silver, 2003).

#### *The social context*

Despite its economic potential, the Congolese population lives in glaring poverty. Indeed, “the incidence of poverty was 63.4% in 2012 and it exceeds 70% in the provinces of Kasai Oriental (78.6%), Equateur (77.3%), and Bandundu (74.6%), while it reaches 36.8% in Kinshasa. This poverty is due to the low salary paid by the government and the imbalance between 15% of the formal sector and 85% of the informal sector” (Sector Strategy for Education and Training in the DRC 2016-2025).

In the social context, the education sector and the Public Service are bastions of social tensions. For example, an inspector told us his life story: “We paid you a hundred thousand Congolese Francs in March 2017, when the rent was eighty thousand, if I had to spend the night in the gutter? Imagine when someone has no rent, where do you want them to stay and how well can they teach pupils in school? Therefore, the social problems of the teachers are, among others, the meager salary without family allowances, no housing and others, which not only place him in a position of eternal indebtedness but stick to him a social status of vulnerable and the less considered by society” (Respondent A, personal correspondence).

The absence of social justice offers a social context characterised by conflicts, cycles of strikes, the increase in the number of unpaid teachers (NP) and the devaluation of the teaching function.

From what precedes, it should be noted that there is a solid link between the contexts, the strategies, and the effectiveness of the trade union struggle at the EPST. This justifies the existence of internal and external causes, including structural adjustment policies, which have led to the deterioration of the education system and fueled a spiral of professional conflicts. Internally, four types of conflict consisted of a/an

- Financial problems: low pay, accumulation of unpaid teachers, insufficient operating costs, dysfunction of payroll services and management committees, banking effects, currency depreciation;
- Administrative problems: no status, no retirement of agents, lack of educational policy;
- Pedagogical problems: access to education and quality of education, State examination fraud, co-management, spoliation; and
- Political problems: end of single-party and single-unionism, social precariousness.



These salient facts have led teachers to organise themselves into unions and to regularly initiate, from 1990 to the present day, collective actions that have resulted in the signature of agreements. In other words, the daily experience of teachers has exacerbated cross-cutting conflicts, creating at times tension, contestation, and sometimes conjunction of positions in socio-political dialogue. This is the origin of current scientific debates. A partnership dynamic of a post-conflict negotiated State is being built (Titeca & Hert, 2011) among the State, pupils' parents, and teachers.

### **Strategies of trade union organisations**

As a social commitment and bearer of progress in the organisation, union action becomes a strategy in the process of defending the teachers' rights. From 1990 to the present day, the EPST unions resort to a cycle of strategies allowing them to achieve the assigned objectives. These strategies aim at the general interest of education because the resolution of socio-economic problems not only gives satisfaction to teachers, but also improves the quality of education, by meeting the expectations of the population. They become a tool for promoting the teaching function and for participating in the development of public policies.

#### *The mechanisms of trade union leadership or strategy of listening to employees*

Trade union leaders are counted among the educational stakeholders who influence decision-making relating to education and the improvement of teachers' living and working conditions. To achieve effective lobbying, says Mr. Ngoma, "We had a certain foundation of union education that characterised union leaders. This forced us to master the material and demonstrate competence. With a sense of responsibility, we took into account the internal and external context: favouritism to create partisan unions and decline in unionism due to the financial crisis. One of the key provisions is that we always take care to be mandated by the teachers, that is to say, we do not make a communication plan to go to schools, first of all listen to the teaching base to which we naturally had to report. It is through this social contract that we identify the socio-professional problems of teachers and, in turn, develop collective claims (Story by Ngoma, President of the crisis committee in 1990, interviewed, February 1).

#### *The formalisation strategy*

The union demand is the foundation of the professional conflict without which the teacher struggle would be null. Analysing the new conceptions of trade unionism, Pierre le Brun notes that the claim carries with it a human content. Union protest is not the mind that always denies. It is a questioning which, in the final analysis, bears on the place of man in society. With varying intensity and different contents, the various currents of the trade union movement all formulate demands, express needs that have not yet been satisfied (Bibes & Muriaux, 1990).

It is then set that the demand of teachers' unions is circumscribed in specifications likely to respond to the problems identified. It should also be noted that all the EPST unions have identical demands, which are transmitted to the State, either by the memorandum, or by the reminder of the memorandum of understanding.

This strategy is the prerogative of the union bench whose procedural tactic of filing with the government is often badly coordinated: some at the end of August, others in January or April.

#### *The strategy of filing by peaceful and administrative means*

After having produced a set of specifications reflecting teachers' aspirations, the union delegates courteously send it to the supervising Minister, with a strike notice.

Three quarters of the leaders interviewed recognise that many Ministers of Education were flexible, upon receipt of the said document, often setting them a period of three months to collectively study the problems posed. In the event of a government reshuffle, the trade unionists seek an audience with the new Minister of EPST to address him these words: "if you are going to receive us and listen to us, you will last a long time, but in the event of indifference, we will treat in the street to be decided by the madman" (Declaration by Mr. Kuyaku, trade unionist). Among the convincing cases, the Ministers of EPST and the union bench hold joint committees during

which the two parties manage to resolve the crisis. In case of refusal, trade unionists opt for the alternation of strategies that outlines a cycle of actions, in particular the communication strategy.

#### *The communication strategy*

This strategy allows union delegates to consult the base, gauge union health, gather teachers' opinions and provide them with information in order to mobilise them for action. Therefore, the union implements the following communication plan:

- member awareness through messages and leaflets through which union leaders transmit information that fits with the central contextual theme, allowing teachers to clearly identify the socio-professional experience and to take ownership of actions to be considered later;
- the use of the media is essential because it seeks to obtain the support of the majority of teachers and the rest of public opinion. The EPST union leaders convene general assemblies during which the participants evaluate their socio-professional situations and validate the list of demands and finally produce a final declaration. This pressure leads other EPST stakeholders to also adopt transversal strategies;
- the use of direct communications (telephone, internet) has a multiplier effect to directly reach members on the one hand, and on the other hand, the use of the “Arab method” which culturally consists in passing information by word of mouth; or even the use of the newsletter and other publications. We think, for this purpose, of the newspaper “*Le Moniteur*” and the written press. The display of messages has an impact on the success of trade union actions.

#### *The strategy of strikes and denunciation*

It is a large-scale action resulting from the decisions made during the teachers' general assemblies. Strikes occur during the period favourable to demands, at the start of the school year, at the expiry of their notice periods and when their expectations are not met. Once the decision to strike is made, it accentuates the media tension and boosts the dynamics of stakeholders' power relations. It is in this context that we witness either the non-resumption of classes or the non-taking of exams, or the government thwarts them.

The denunciation intervenes in case of repression of the demonstrations and the arrests: “Twenty-six Heads of Institutions favourable to the strike and some teachers were suspended and transferred, the arbitrary arrest of certain union leaders, the spoliation of school sites, the detentions illegally operated by the banks on the salaries of EPST agents, the embezzlement of their salaries, are an integral part of denunciation” (Information from our field investigation).

Figure 4: Respect for the general strike observed at the Kimvula school complex



Source : Author

Figure 5: Denunciation of the Secretary General of SYECO



Source : Author

#### *The strategy of marches and sit-ins*

In addition, the EPST unions plan collective marches with the distribution of leaflets described as “hotcakes” in public transport, taking into account the extent of the strike. In this case, “at the end of the march relating to the spoliation of part of the land of the Gombe Institute, the Special Adviser to the Head of State in security matters contacted and invited us to the office of the Minister of Education. This bipartite meeting will be held respectively with the Minister, the Adviser, the Secretary General at the EPST, the Head of Sub-division, the Principal, the Secretary General of SYNECO Mwasa, Bosco J. and Kahindo L., opening the debate, the Minister will require us to prove his guilt for having vilified him under penalty of throwing them in prison. And, we took advantage of this situation to present the proof of sale of the land. The proof being established, the Adviser ordered the Minister, I quote “I received the order from the hierarchy that each trade unionist must spend the night at home” (Respondent A, personal communication, September 4, 2017).

Also in Kinshasa, the march of October 5, 2013 on the Boulevard du 30 juin is described in these terms: “On our way to the UNESCO office, we were barricaded at the Mandela roundabout and then managed to thwart the police, to finally achieve our objective by the declaration and filing of the memorandum to the representative of UNESCO. To this a spontaneous march of the Parish of Saint Alphonse de Matete is added on 13<sup>th</sup> Street residential Limete after being prevented from holding the previously announced general assembly. There was also that of Golgotha Square from the Public Service to the Prime Minister’s Office” (Respondent B, personal communication, May 17, 2017).

In provinces, these marches are exceptionally large, doubled as a day declared “school without teachers” for the purpose of demanding the immediate payment of often blocked salaries, the release of managers and inspectors kidnapped on the eve of dissertations in the East and Kasai and other harassment.

Faced with these issues, the unions target institutional spaces and take into account the economic context to exert direct pressure on the authorities. Many times, the unions had to invade the office of the Minister of EPST on April 30, a day devoted to the celebration of education, the Prime Minister, Parliament, the coordination of approved schools and certain sub-divisions of the 'EPST; even to the provincial inspectorate of the police to claim for the release of arrested union leaders.

Figure 6: Teachers' sit-in in the cabinet demanding free primary education and the departure of Minister Willy Bakonga



Source: Author

During sit-ins, teachers sing symbolic songs and place their banners containing targeted messages to alert public opinion to the existence of the problems on the one hand, and on the other, to compel the authority, either to receive a delegation, or to come out of his cabinet to address the demonstrators publicly, or again to give the order to repress them. These strategies are weapons that offer unions the ability to exploit their position in negotiations and to denounce the government demagoguery.

#### *Capacity building strategy*

Aware of the expertise held by the government, trade union leaders occasionally organise training seminars for their representatives following the traditional missions assigned to them. These trainings help members acquire knowledge enabling them to act in the field. At the EPST, some training has been organized for union members.

#### **The counter-strategies**

This is the instrument through which the Ministry of EPST or the government interacts with trade union strategies. To do so, the authority activates a battery of counter-strategies likely to thwart and deactivate the actions planned by the union bench. Among the counter-strategies, we detail the following.

#### *The strategy of silence and the media war*

At the EPST, the State observes a silence to any pressure because of the presumption that the teachers will not resist for a long time due to their precariousness. In proportion to the union pressure and the threats of dismissal of the children from the school, the government uses counter-messages announcing the end of the strike, by resorting to the media. At this stage, it broadcasts images of most downtown schools studying on one side, and on the other, official statements relating to the holding of bipartite meetings relating to the suspension of the strike, and that, “by getting some of the headliners of the teachers’ leaders to loudly declare out the end of the strike. Or again, if the message is circulated in schools that the strike is for Catholic and non-official schools, not Protestant; lack of quality of such a secretary general to declare the strike as long as he is already dismissed” (Respondent 3, September 2017).

And often, the presidents of parents' associations go on television to declare the inopportunity of the strike since the parents have already paid their money to the schools and teachers have no reason to continue to strike.

#### *The strategy of repression and decapitation*

The repression of collective demonstrations is a golden rule and a common response by any neoliberal and authoritarian regime (Ndawel, 2009; Rizzo, 2013; Seidman, 1994; Silver, 2003). In case of workers’ resistance, the government uses its imperium to target union leaders and arrest and suspend teachers considered as pillars of the strikes. As illustration, we recorded the arrest of the leaders of the strikes, kept at the intelligence service offices then transferred to the police cell, one of the leaders told us “When I was arrested and thrown into a jeep, one of them phoned his superiors saying, ‘I caught a big fish and I’m coming with it’ and after being kept for a long time and then interrogated, I was released while my deputy bearing the Kasai name will unfortunately be kept on the grounds that he was in collusion with the party of Etienne Tshisekedi” (Respondent 4).

Furthermore, the same situation lived in Kinshasa was observed in Brazzaville with the kidnapping of Messrs. Ngami and Eyima during the teachers' strike launched in February 2013.

Figure 7: Trade union leaders Ngami and Eyima, victims of kidnapping in Brazzaville (OCDH, 2013).



Source: Author

*The strategy of politicising the trade union struggle and poaching*

The politicisation of the trade union struggle is the usual strategy in any collective crisis that rages at the EPST in particular and in Africa in general. It is evident in many facets, including political promotions, poaching, material benefits, and other threats. This reminds us of the appointment of trade unionists to the government and to decision-making positions at the EPST. This politicisation is also evidenced by corruption. As illustration, the payment of high bonuses, higher than salaries, are practices used to poach certain union leaders. One of the leaders will tell us of “being invited at midnight to the Plateau des Professeurs...finding a trunk of money which I refused...And the EPSP crisis committee was weakened and divided because some of the leaders among us, refused the presidential envelope while two of our comrades gave in to this strategic bait to compromise the effectiveness of our union actions in 1990” (Respondent 5, February 12, 2018).

In another facet, the government divides the union leaders to weaken them. We note, in this regard, the division that occurred within the crisis committee in 1990-1991 due to the hearse money received in Gbadolite from the hands of President Mobutu as well as the separation between SYECO and SYNECAT that occurred in 2009 and 2018.

*The strategy centred on collective conflicts or joint committees.*

Congolese case law puts the two parties around a table for a social dialogue related to the demands of employees. The matrix relating to this dialogue is done on the basis of conflicts, which dialogue is often based on the defense of acquired rights. Among the negotiations noted, there are the joint commissions of 12/2/2004, 2/9/2007, 15/12/2010, 31/3/2012, 2/9/2017 at Bibwa and those of Mbuela Lodge1, 2 and 3 of 2021/2022.

This phenomenon inspires other professional groups to copy the strategies of the professions established. These professions look at each other and cultivate analogy through the use of comparisons with more prestigious professions to justify their claims (Vezinat, 2016). Similarly, the EPST teachers' unions have taken an interest in the actions and demands of employees in other professions and have imitated them to adjust their own strategies by focusing on their observations. Thus, this article is the reflection of an approach of a mirror effect: the context sheds light on the theory and this in turn validates the context in which the strategies and counter-strategies are designed.

## Presentation of the research results

As in Brazil, South Africa and everywhere else, the emergence of teacher unionism has conquered agreements recognizing the union delegates' rights to be co-decision makers of sector policy reforms and key partners (Marée, 1985; Ngomper, 2009; Randall, 1986; Silver, 2003). Beyond the delicacy of the qualitative approach, the article calls on two variables (context and strategy) and a few indices of rationality (financial, administrative, pedagogical, social, and political). These indicators constitute benchmarks for the results presented below.

At the financial level, we note:

- The increase in the EPST budget, for which the State paid three times the initial staff, that is, from 119,618 in 2000 to 600,914 in March 2022 (from 7% in 2006 to 21% in 2020);
- The average teacher's salary increases from \$35 in 2007/8 to \$170 in 2022;
- Subsidy of operating costs to primary schools, FPEN and MESP;
- The pay of 246,882 NP teachers from 2007 to March 2022;
- The contribution of 70% of EPST funding by parents (27 years: 1993-2019); and
- 63% bankarisation of teachers' pay and the construction of 707 schools

At the administrative level:

- Obtaining the statutes of their profession by the Ord 91-231 and 232,
- 2,842 teachers have been retired (1,342 from 1997-1999 and 1,500 in 2021),
- The creation and regularisation of two key services (FPEN&MESP),
- School promotions, joint committees, forums on the EPST as legal frameworks for reflection, dialogue and negotiations of its stakeholders.

At the pedagogical level

- The recruitment of 2 waves of inspectors;
- 707 public schools built and rehabilitated;
- The restructuring of the educational provinces of the EPST from 30 to 60;
- Education policy reforms and SECOPE: Interim Education Plan, Education and Training Sector Strategy 2016-2025, Education Outline-Law of 11/2/2014;
- The publication of the Exetat by NTIC; free education in primary schools
- Partnership leadership as a mode of governance of the EPST.

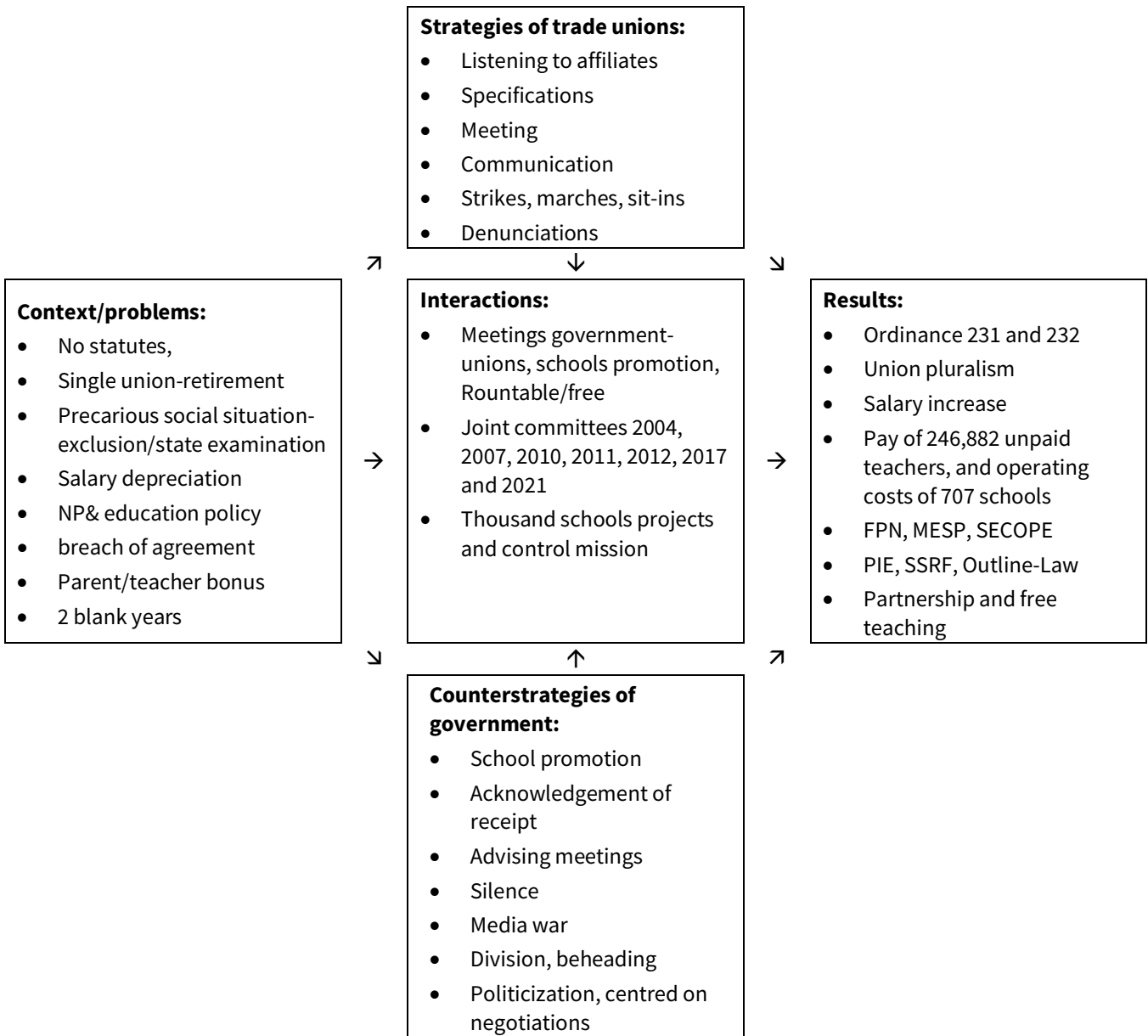
At the social level, 122,547 teaching staffs are covered by the MESP in three operational provincial entities (MINEPST/MESP, official website of the Ministry of EPST, read on 05/25/2022), granting of two funeral hearses and the free travel card/Sotraz 1989 -1992, collaboration between the Ministry of EPST and its social partners.

At the political level:

- Democratic opening and citizen participation;
- Effective trade union pluralism and acquired professional status;
- Construction of the democratic order of the country.

We admit that the effectiveness of trade unionism depends on the three contexts that influence the types of demands, the choice of strategies and professional relations. In this logic, the trade union struggle at the EPST has created a ripple effect in the Public Service (case of salary increase).

Figure 8: Summary of the results



Source: Author

These contexts, catalysts for demands, create a space of interaction in which the stakeholders build networks of interests and negotiations. This research starts from the stakeholders, their behaviours and their interactions to better understand their effects (Duran, 2013). This action cycle and context process builds and determines mutually to define the operational action system.

**The limits or weaknesses**

1. The bankruptcy of the State and the degradation of the educational system that finds its anchorage in distant and recent causes: the attack on factors determining a quality educational system, the policy of nationalisation,



the problem of governance, bad practices in assessments and the effects of the Structural Adjustment Program, which have reinforced the financing of education at 70% by the parents of pupils.

2. The divorce of the unions is the result of the dissolution of the alliances sealed by the union leaders. It turned out that some leaders remained faithful to the commitments despite various requests, others on the other hand were poached to the point of allowing themselves to be manipulated by the opposing camp. This statement confirms the positions taken by such and such a union: "On this schism are built the yellow and red unions which open the way to treachery and constitute a government strategy and maintain this division leaders" (Respondent 6, interviewed April 4, 2017). This leads to rivalry among union leaders to weaken union actions and develops two trends: "revolutionary" and "reformist" unions. Like the "division that sets in at the start of the school year and during exams where some threaten to strike and others contest it" (Mukulungu, 2018). By opting for the camp of ministerial authority, some change speeches by making statements contrary to the option exerted by their general assemblies and resort to the media to discredit them, if not by demonising them.
3. The proliferation of trade unions at the EPST as in Africa (BIT, 2010) is a poison in the DRC and constitutes a weapon that every Minister uses to destabilise the trade unions and favour the non-respect of the agreements. This proliferation instrumentalises certain leaders to accuse others of being the troublemakers by exposing them to threats. After being received by the Minister, a trade unionist was the target of others following the statements made. He expresses himself in these terms: "I was victim of betrayal on account of trade union comrades who wanted me to die. By seeking to statutorily respect the establishment of a new inter-union office, after the five years of the resigning team, I was treated and accused of instigator to the authority. The other trade unionists held a meeting at night to decide on my death. Two of them revealed this plot to me. I felt death coming and went to file a lawsuit to the court against these two traitorous comrades" (Kuyaku's statement). This environment emphasises the leaders' disconnection from their base and the inertia of the strategies of unionisation which are at the origin of the failure of the struggle and demobilisation.
4. The effects induced from teachers' support by parents and lack of union solidarity have made the struggle ineffective and reinforced de-unionisation.

## Conclusion

This article analyses union strategies at the EPST. To this end, we conducted a survey in Kinshasa at the national level with educational stakeholders. To respond to our question, we begun by discussing Crozier's and Boxall's theory, as well as appropriate methods for grasping the interactions between the government and trade unions, their strategies and counter-strategies.

With regard to the analysis of the results, we first described the contexts in which the stakeholders interact, build their compromise, negotiate and give solutions to all the beneficiaries. We noticed, against all expectations, that the claims that caused the power relations of the EPST stakeholders are influenced by the political, economic, and social contexts. This materialises through the power of stakeholders who influence all employee organisations and appears as the social construct of interactions, resistances, and compromises. The results of our study are apprehended in the light of union strategies at the EPST which correspond somewhat to a half-empty, half-full glass or moderately effective.

The article highlights the importance of education and recommends that EPST stakeholders rethink their perception of strategies likely to boost effective public policies leading to the implementation of an education system that takes into account all aspects relating to good governance in education. In this way, the compromises signed, in the general interest, must provide adequate solutions to the various crises recorded at the sectoral and global level. Based on a debate supported by scientific literature, the analysis of trade union strategies has shown how this new field of investigation would allow us to revisit current public and educational policies in Sub-Saharan Africa, in general and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular.

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