



# International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation.

## Primary school free of charge in the Democratic Republic of the Congo the case of Teachers in Lubumbashi, Sub-division 1: Problems and perspectives

Kajila Kapalu Gaston <sup>1</sup>, Mamboleo Asina Pascaline <sup>2</sup>, Mukumbi Mitshi Dieudonné <sup>3</sup>, Mwenge Kalwa Ramoza <sup>4</sup>, Kumwimba Kabongo Polycarpe <sup>5</sup>, Mujinga Sapato Esther <sup>6</sup>, Mbuya Muluba Claude <sup>7</sup>, Bundule Mayunga Marcel <sup>8</sup>, Banze Kitamba Blaise <sup>9</sup>, Nkulu Ndalamba Odon <sup>10</sup>, Ilunga Ngaji Marcellin <sup>11\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Assistant at the College of Fine Arts in Lubumbashi /DRC

<sup>3, 4, 11</sup> Department of English at the Teachers' College of Education in Lubumbashi / DRC

<sup>5, 6, 7, 8</sup> Department of French at the Teachers' College of Education in Lubumbashi / DRC

<sup>9</sup> Department of Commercial Sciences at the Teachers' College of Education in Lubumbashi / DRC

<sup>10</sup> Department of Geography Environmental Management at the Teachers' College of Education in Lubumbashi / DRC

<sup>2</sup> Budget administrator at the University Maria Malkia in Lubumbashi / DRC

\* Corresponding Author: **Ilunga Ngaji Marcellin**

### Article Info

**ISSN (online):** 2582-7138

**Volume:** 03

**Issue:** 05

**September-October 2022**

**Received:** 08-07-2022

**Accepted:** 09-08-2022

**Page No:** 134-138

### Abstract

We have conducted an opinion poll in Lubumbashi on a sampling composed of 60 teachers of public primary schools about the primary school education free of charge in the context of a teacher who is not well paid in an over-populated classroom. After the investigation, teachers and all the other school workers, who used to benefit of the parents' contribution as a supplement on their salaries, unfavorably received the news. We have used the following techniques: simple random sampling, chi-two, unstructured interview and documentary.

**Keywords:** Education, free of charge, primary school, salary, NU

### 1. Introduction

During the 21<sup>st</sup> century, specialists in education are very busy thinking about education for all. Forums have been organized worldwide about an education system for the development of the modern world. UNESCO (Masandi: c2021)<sup>[9]</sup> stated that every human being should be given the opportunity to develop their potentialities and contribute to the edification of their societies.

To reach that millennium objective of the development, reforms in education about the situation-based approach have actually become the international preoccupation and put the learners at the center of their training. In developed as well as in developing countries, this new approach integrates curriculums at primary and secondary schools; in a very near future, high school and university level will also be totally concerned. Today, its applications are used in at least all the components of the education system: syllabuses, textbooks, evaluation and teacher's training.

Education is considered as one of the major tools in the fight against poverty; so politics highlight education as being a fundamental right for every human being: it is the key for the long lasting development and local stability. It efficiently participates to the increase of economy in countries.

Today It is urgent to think about serious researches in the teaching field of the Congolese schools regarding the appropriate policies which can adapt teachings to the socio-cultural realities of learners. New curriculums should be elaborated in order to meet the international recommendations in the scope of the objective of the millennium.

In this pedagogical reform quoted by (Masandi: c2021)<sup>[9]</sup> we should recognize that the teacher is an unavoidable actor. Without his active participation and implication, this reform will definitely die out.

(Masandi: c2021) <sup>[6]</sup> says that the target should be the development of the pupils' competences for their socio-professional integration as expressed through the Minister's Decree n° MINEPSP/CABMIN/0785/2005 of 31/08/2011. This is the outcome of recommendations from the forums held at Jomtien (UNESCO, 1990) <sup>[16]</sup> and that of Dakar (Forum Mondial sur l'éducation: c2000) <sup>[3]</sup>, which fixed the setting for the education of all by 2015, so paradigms in the learning-teaching system should automatically move from pedagogy by objective to the situation-based approach. As a consequence, D.R. Congo has voted the decree (Loi-cadre: c2014: 9: c23) about the national education whose basic principles are primary school education free of charge, children school compulsory and competence acquisition, which meets the UNESCO's recommendations to states to promote education in giving equal chance to everybody, especially in making it obligatory and free of charge at primary school (Kandolo: c2007) <sup>[4]</sup>.

Primary school free of charge and children school compulsory also meets one of the recommendations expressed in the Congolese Constitution of 2006 in its article 43 (Didithèque MJP: c2009) <sup>[2]</sup>.

On 10 September 2021, in his address to schools at the opening of the school-year 2021-2022, Tony Mwaba, Minister in charge of EPST, dedicated the year to continue the implementation and consolidation of the primary school free of charge.

In his latest letter of 25 July 2021, the Governour's decree (Kyabula: c2021) <sup>[6]</sup> has instructed all the primary schools in the province to continue to observe the no payment of primary pupils' education.

The school-year 2021-2022 started one month later because teachers went on strike as a consequence of the letter dated 13 September 2021 (Coordination Inter syndical EPST Grand Katanga: c2021) <sup>[1]</sup>, in which the teachers' labour Union addressed to the Provincial Minister of Education their claims before opening the school-year:

1. 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> increases of the salaries.
2. Pay UPT (teachers who are still unpaid though they are already registered by the government) and NU (New Units).
3. Remove different zones of salaries.
4. Create prefabricated classrooms in order to decrease the number of overpopulated classes.
5. Readjust the money for school and office functioning.
6. Effectiveness of health insurance guaranteed to all the teachers.
7. Honorable retirement according to international standards.
8. Reactivation of schools which were cancelled from the list in July 2021.

At Mbuela Lodge in Kongo Central, the government was in negotiation with the teachers' labour Union from different provinces in order to stop the strike (Multimedia Congo: c2021) <sup>[10]</sup>.

Today, inspectors are also about to stop work for the same reason.

In the latest official circular about fees for the school year 2022-2023, Minister Mwaba has once more reminded schools the instructions about primary school free of charge (Mwaba: c2022) <sup>[11]</sup>.

The preceding contradictory points of view in the Congolese society about the government's Primary school free of charge programme, reveal serious hidden problems which need much light. That is why an emergency is felt to investigate the issue through the topic entitled "Primary School free of charge in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The case of teachers in Lubumbashi, Sub-division 1: Problems and perspectives".

The government wants to reinsert children from all the social levels, that is, street children, those from poor families, those who fled the war as well as those from normal families in the school system and to offer them indiscriminately the opportunity to develop their potentialities. But a very salient question can still captivate our mind: "Are Lubumbashi schools favourable to the primary education free of charge from a teacher who is not well paid in an over-populated classroom?"

We can predict that teachers would unfavourably receive the issue concerning "the primary school education free of charge" without a good salary in an over-populated classroom; but the investigation can determine the real teachers' opinion.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This research needs Chi-two statistical test with one sample which can be supported by the unstructured interview and documentary technique.

### 2.1. Site of investigation

Lubumbashi is the site of investigation, we have chosen primary schools located in Lubumbashi town-center, that is, three big schools: Tuendele, Imara and Complexe Scolaire Kiwele: E.P. Kiwele 1 and E.P. Kiwele 2. The first is a Conventional Catholic girl school, the second is a Conventional Catholic boy school whereas the third gathers Non-conventional mixed schools.

### 2.2. Sampling

The sample is constituted by different people who work at school and who probably used to benefit from the parents' monthly payments before the government's programme about the primary school free of charge: directors, teachers and blue collars (people who clean classrooms). In the group of directors, we considered everybody working in the office, that is, the head, his assistants and secretaries. In each school, fifteen informants composed our sample, that is, E.P. Tuendele, E.P. Imara and Complexe Scolaire Kiwele: E.P. Kiwele 1 and E.P. Kiwele 2.

### 2.3. Statistical analysis

The asked questions offered to the respondents a choice of answers of which the number varied from four to six. The averages obtained were subjected to univariate variance analysis (ANOVA) with statistical software XLSTAT-Pro7.5. The independent variables were the studied variables and the choice of the scientific option to humanities constituted the dependent variable.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The results relating to the primary school free of charge of the survey carried out near 11 directors are included in table 1 below.

**Table 1:** Opignon of directors

Opinion of directors	Frequence	%
Very Favourable	3	27,3
Favourable	6	54,5
Neuter	0	0
Unfavourable	1	9,1
Very unfavourable	1	9,1
Total	11	100

Reading Table 1 shows that several directors appreciate primary school free of charge. Among them.

- 54.5% are favourable of primary school free of charge and
- 27.3% are very favourable. This could be explained by the fact that the Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Technical Education urges them to implement primary school free of charge regardless of working conditions. These results corroborate those of Torrance (1993) <sup>[14]</sup> who found that some school officials were against the sudden development of the Canadian curriculum but applied it under duress and for fear of being fired by the country's authorities.

**Table 2:** Teachers' opinion

Opinion of teachers	Frequence	%
Very Favourable	5	14,2
Favourable	3	8,6
Neuter	1	2,9
Unfavourable	17	48,6
Very unfavourable	9	25,7
Total	35	100

Table 2 presents the results in relation to teachers' opinions. It appears that many teachers are against primary school free of charge. Among them.

- 48.6% of teachers are unfavourable of primary school free of charge and
- 25.7% of teachers are very unfavourable. This could be explained by the sudden drop in their monthly bonus and by the increase in staff resulting in overcrowding and difficult working conditions. The results concerning the automatic application of free education corroborate those of Lacasse and all (1990) <sup>[7]</sup> who also found more than 89% of teachers who did not appreciate the abrupt generalization of the Canadian program and its

**Table 4:** Opinion of directors, teachers and blue collars

Opinion / Categories	Very favorable	favorable	neuter	Un-favorable	Very un-favorable	Total
Directors	3	6	0	1	1	11
Teachers	5	3	1	17	9	35
Blue collars	1	1	0	8	4	14
Total	9	10	1	26	14	60

According to the results of Table 3 of the survey of 60 informants. Their opinions are presented as follows: 9 informants are very favourable to primary school free of charge, which represents 15 %, 10 are favourable (16,7 %), 1 person has abstained himself (1,7%): c26 are unfavourable (43,3 %) and 14 are very unfavourable (23,3 %).

In schools, 66,7 % of informants refuse the government programme about primary school free of charge against 31,6 % of the informants who have constituted our sample. Teachers used to receive parents' money in supplement of

development which is done in a highly politicized context.

**Table 3:** Blue collars' opignon

Opinion of Blue collars	Frequency	%
Very Favourable	1	7,1
Favourable	1	7,1
Neuter	0	0
Unfavourable	8	57,2
Very unfavourable	4	28,6
Total	14	100

According to the results of Table 3 of the survey of 14 blue collars, several of them do not appreciate free education. Among them.

- 57.2% are un-favorable primary school free of charge and
- 28.6% are very un-favorable.

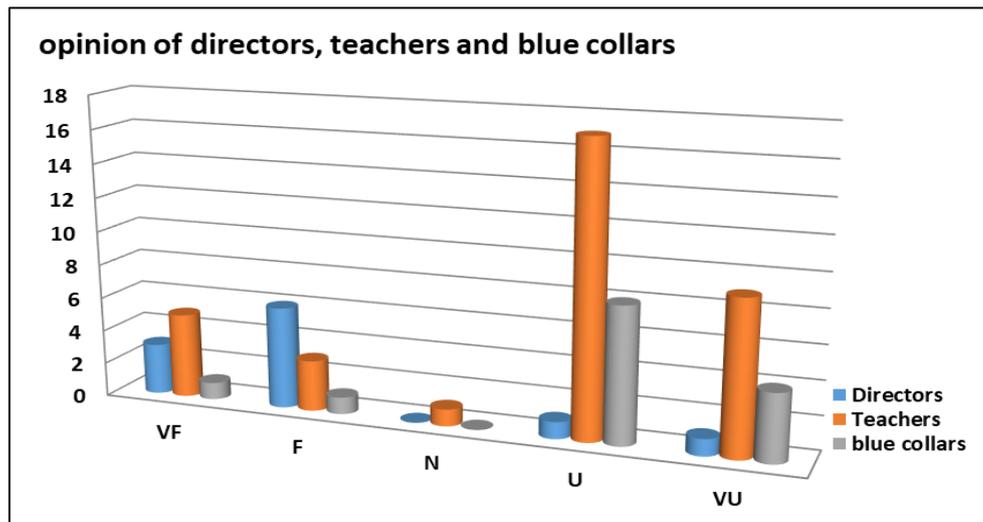
This could be explained by the fact that they work a lot within the framework of primary school free of charge because of the increase in numbers while the State pays less than the parents. This observation concerning dissatisfaction with primary school free of charge is identical to that of Lioré-Kovacs (1998) <sup>[8]</sup> who found that fashion designers did not appreciate the reform of the labor code which had a negative impact on their salaries. We first identified a relationship between the opinion of teachers and that of blue collars [ $F(3.3777)=8.0$ ;  $p<0.01$ ]; then a contradiction between the opinion of the directors and that of the teachers [ $F(4.2698)=8.2$ ;  $p=0.768$ ] and finally a contradiction between the opinion of the teachers and that of the blue collars [ $F(3.2888)=8.0$ ;  $p=0.965$ ]

The opinions obtained from our respondents show that the suddenly decreed free education has never been unanimous, both within the world of education and the political class. Kasanya *et al.* (2022) <sup>[5]</sup> also denounced the generalization of the Field of Training of Sciences programs in a highly politicized context in all schools, which was carried out without a careful assessment of the state of the essential prerequisites in terms of regulatory texts, capacity building of human resources and infrastructure in order to guarantee the expected efficiency of both teaching and administrative staff and learners, the main beneficiaries of the reform.

their salaries paid by the government and now they consider that life has become worse than before. In the broadcast on 24 December 2021, TV 5 Monde <sup>15</sup> corroborated this opinion that with the primary school free of charge, teachers, who used to receive 250 \$ to 450 \$ with the parents' money, receive now only 75 \$ and this is the main cause of strikes. It continues arguing that the Congolese government has no means to pay good salaries and the cost of school free of charge for all is estimated at 2,3 billions of US \$, which is the equivalent of 40% of the country's budget. Of course, Tony

Mwaba, the Minister of EPST (Primary, Secondary and Technical Education) also recognizes that the teachers'

salaries are low; but negotiations are still on the table for the increase.



VF: very favourable; F: favourable; N: neuter; U: very unfavourable and VU: very unfavourable

Fig 1: opinion of directors, teachers and blue collars

By categories, we have met 11 directors: 3 directors are very favorable (27,3%), 6 are favourable (54,5%), there is no abstention, 1 person is unfavourable (9,1%), 1 is very unfavourable (9,1 %). The teachers' sample is composed of 35 informants, 5 are very favourable (14,3%), 3 are favourable (8,6%), 1 abstension (2,9%), 17 are unfavourable (48,6%) and 9 are very unfavourable (25,7%). Out of 14 Blue collars, their opinions are: 1 is very favourable (7,1%), 1 is favourable (7,1%), no abstention (0%), 8 are unfavourable (57,1%) and 4 are very unfavourable (28,6%).

In Lubumbashi schools located in the town center, to know the opinion of 60 school workers at primary school about the "primary school free of charge government's programme", workers who are classed into three categories according to their results, the chi-two shows that there is a significant difference between "directors", "teachers" and "blue collars" because the highest tabular value directly inferior to the chi-two, which is 19,061 is 18,168 ( 18,168 < 19,061) at the level of significance  $p=0,02$  with 8 degrees of liberty.

In follow up questions, a number of teachers said they are ready to accept the government proposals to the conditions mentioned on their list of demands addressed to the Minister in charge of education in High-Katanga Province. In fact, at the National Assembly, the Deputy Floribert Loola addressed an oral question with debate to the Ministry in charge of the sector in order to incorporate teachers' demands in the budget: increase the teachers' salaries, money for school functioning, cancel different salary zones ... Tony Mwaba answered that kindergarten NU teachers' case has already been solved and for the year 2021, the primary school teachers' salaries have been increased of 40.000 FC, that is 20\$ and they are building a school for training primary school teachers at Mbanza Ngungu.

The Minister also projects to remove from salary lists all the fictive schools, which can permit the government to get back the amount of 4 billions of US dollars and retire 87.000 old teachers at the rate of 1.500 persons each month.

### Remedy

As a remedy to the government's programme about primary school free of charge, we suggest the following solutions:

1. The government should continue to clear up the education sector in order to remove fictive teachers and schools

### Classrooms are over-populated because

- Most of public schools have been built since the colonial period, today, they need to be refreshed and repaired.
  - In new housing plots, the government has built no school, only private ones have occupied the area,
  - To decrease the number of pupils in schools,
  - The government should collaborate with private school promoters either to buy their buildings or to pay the teachers' salaries, support the school functioning charges and pay promoters so that primary school can be totally free of charge in the whole country.
- It should build its own schools in the newest plots.
  - The government should produce its own teaching materials, that is, books, teaching aids... which can reflect the profile of the person it wants to educate.
  - Teachers should regularly attend in-time trainings in order to acquire new teaching techniques and scientific knowledge.
  - No money, no education is possible, that is why the most important thing is to urge the government to develop its economy before organizing the education system successfully.

### Conclusion

The topic of this research is "primary school free of charge in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: the case of teachers in Lubumbashi, sub-division 1, problems and perspectives". The sample has been composed of 60 informants grouped into three categories: directors, teachers and blue collars in

public primary schools located in Lubumbashi town center. The data collection technique was a simple random sampling, which was backed up by the chi-two as a technique to test the collected opinions, an unstructured interview and the documentary technique.

After the investigation teachers and all the other school workers, who used to benefit of the parents' contribution as a supplement on their salaries, unfavorably received the news. Primary school free of charge is President Tshisekedi's first priority in his policy. He wants to materialize the international recommendations about education for all children as requested at Jomtien in 1990 and Dakar in 2000. This ambitious programme is not free of obstacles and challenges, but teachers are still waiting for the improvement of their life and that of the school environment while the government is still promising solutions in a very near future. This programme is, in fact, not a new experience in the country. School free of charge concerned kindergarten, primary, secondary and university during the colonial era and went up to the years 1990s; but when President Mobutu underwent serious problems with the international financial institutions, parents were asked to contribute to the education of their children in order to alleviate the burden and improve the quality of school education after a series of teachers' strikes in the whole country. And this was the birth of school-fees.

Today again, the primary school free of charge is financed by the World Bank at the rate of 800 million of US \$ in the span of 4 years as declared by Scherezad and Melissa (2021)<sup>[13]</sup>. This research cannot be punctuated without asking this very pending question, which can open a way to other researchers to think of perspectives of the government's programme of primary school free of charge today and perhaps the whole education system tomorrow: if the same international financial institution blocked the education free of charge with Mobutu, which guarantee does this government have to come back on the same way?

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