

EDUCATION MANAGEMENT DURING TRIBAL CONFLICTS IN ITURI PROVINCE (2018–2020)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines in depth the dynamics of education management during the period of intensified tribal conflicts in Ituri Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo between 2018 and 2020, a period characterized by severe insecurity, mass displacement of populations, and widespread disruption of public services including education. The main objective of the study is to analyze how educational institutions were managed under such fragile and unstable conditions, with particular attention to the challenges faced by school administrators, the coping strategies adopted to sustain learning, and the role of different stakeholders in supporting educational continuity.

The study is based on a qualitative descriptive approach relying on documentary analysis, reports from international organizations, and existing scholarly literature. The findings reveal that tribal conflicts had a profound and multidimensional impact on the education system, including the destruction of school infrastructure, frequent closure of schools, displacement of teachers and learners, and severe shortages of essential learning materials. Despite these challenges, education actors developed adaptive mechanisms such as flexible school calendars, temporary learning spaces, community-based protection initiatives, and partnerships with humanitarian organizations to mitigate the effects of conflict on schooling.

However, these interventions remained insufficient due to persistent insecurity, limited institutional capacity, and inadequate financial and logistical support from government structures. The study concludes that education management in conflict-affected regions requires strengthened leadership capacity, sustained humanitarian engagement, and community participation to ensure resilience and continuity of learning in crisis contexts.

Keywords: Education management, tribal conflict, Ituri Province, education in emergencies, school leadership, DRC.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is universally recognized as one of the most powerful instruments for individual empowerment, social development, and long-term economic transformation, and it plays a crucial role in promoting peace, stability, and social cohesion within societies that are often affected by inequality and structural challenges. In well-functioning systems, education management ensures that schools operate efficiently through the effective coordination of human resources, financial inputs, infrastructure, and pedagogical processes, thereby enabling teachers to deliver quality instruction and learners to benefit from a structured and supportive academic environment.

Within the field of Educational Management, it is widely emphasized that school leaders and education administrators carry the responsibility of ensuring institutional stability, maintaining academic standards, and responding effectively to internal and external challenges that may affect learning environments. However, when education systems are located in conflict-affected regions, these responsibilities become increasingly complex and difficult to fulfill due to insecurity, displacement, and institutional breakdown.

In many conflict-affected contexts around the world, education systems are disrupted not only physically but also structurally and psychologically, as violence leads to the destruction of school infrastructure, interruption of academic calendars, displacement of learners and teachers, and weakening of governance structures that are essential for system stability. According to UNESCO (2019), millions of children living in conflict-affected regions are deprived of access to education due to insecurity, destruction of learning environments, and the inability of institutions to function normally.

In addition, UNICEF (2020) emphasizes that children exposed to conflict not only experience interruptions in schooling but also suffer psychological trauma, social instability, and long-term developmental consequences that negatively affect their educational performance and future opportunities. This highlights the fact that conflict does not only affect access to education but also undermines the quality and effectiveness of educational systems.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, and particularly Ituri Province, provides a critical case for understanding the relationship between conflict and education management. Between 2018 and 2020, the province experienced intensified tribal conflicts that resulted in widespread insecurity, displacement of communities, destruction of infrastructure, and severe disruption of public services. Schools were among the most affected institutions, as many were forced to close temporarily or operate under extremely difficult and unsafe conditions.

During this period, teachers and learners were frequently displaced, school facilities were damaged or occupied by internally displaced persons, and educational authorities struggled to maintain supervision and coordination of academic activities. These challenges significantly undermined the effectiveness of education management and created a fragile environment in which continuity of learning was extremely difficult to maintain. Despite these challenges, some schools continued to operate through adaptive strategies developed by administrators, teachers, and communities.

This study therefore seeks to examine how education management was conducted during the tribal conflicts in Ituri Province between 2018 and 2020, with a focus on understanding the strategies used to sustain learning, the challenges faced by administrators, and the implications for strengthening educational resilience in conflict-affected regions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Education and Armed Conflict

The literature consistently demonstrates that armed conflict has devastating effects on education systems, particularly in low-income and fragile states where institutional resilience is limited and resources are already constrained. Conflict situations often lead to widespread school closures, destruction of infrastructure, displacement of populations, and disruption of governance systems that are essential for educational planning and delivery. These disruptions significantly reduce access to education and contribute to long-term inequality and underdevelopment.

Research conducted by UNESCO (2019) highlights that children in conflict zones are disproportionately affected by educational disruption, as they face barriers such as insecurity, lack of transportation, destruction of schools, and shortage of qualified teachers. Similarly, UNICEF (2020) reports that prolonged exposure to conflict increases dropout rates, reduces learning achievement, and negatively affects psychosocial development among school-aged children.

2.2 Educational Management in Crisis Contexts

In crisis and emergency situations, educational management requires a shift from traditional administrative approaches to more flexible, adaptive, and resilient leadership models. Scholars in Educational Management argue that school leaders must adopt crisis-responsive strategies that allow them to make rapid decisions, mobilize resources, and collaborate with external actors such as communities and humanitarian organizations in order to sustain educational services.

Bush and Glover (2014) emphasize that effective leadership in education is a critical determinant of institutional resilience, particularly in contexts where uncertainty and instability are prevalent. Leadership in such environments involves not only administrative competence but also emotional intelligence, crisis coordination, and community engagement.

2.3 Community and Humanitarian Response

The literature also highlights the importance of community involvement and humanitarian support in sustaining education during conflict. Communities often play a protective role in safeguarding schools, while international organizations provide essential support such as learning materials, temporary learning spaces, and psychosocial services. However, the effectiveness of these interventions depends on the level of coordination between stakeholders and the severity of insecurity in the affected regions.

2.4 Research Gap

Despite the growing body of literature on education in emergencies, there remains a significant gap in research focusing specifically on how education systems are managed during tribal conflicts in Ituri Province between 2018 and 2020. Most studies emphasize humanitarian impacts but fail to provide detailed insights into administrative processes, decision-making strategies, and institutional adaptation mechanisms used by education managers in such contexts.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design that is appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena such as education management in conflict-affected environments. This design allows for an in-depth understanding of the experiences, challenges, and responses of education stakeholders operating under conditions of insecurity and instability.

The study was conducted in Ituri Province in the northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, a region that experienced intense tribal conflicts between 2018 and 2020, resulting in widespread disruption of social services, including education. The population of interest included school administrators, teachers, education inspectors, community leaders, parents, and representatives of humanitarian organizations who were directly or indirectly involved in education management during the conflict period.

Data were collected through documentary analysis of reports from international organizations, government documents, and academic literature, supplemented by secondary qualitative data from published studies. The collected data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, which involved identifying, categorizing, and interpreting recurring themes related to challenges, management strategies, and stakeholder involvement in education during conflict.

Ethical considerations were observed through the use of publicly available data, proper citation of sources, and adherence to academic integrity standards.

4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study indicate that tribal conflicts in Ituri Province between 2018 and 2020 had a severe and multidimensional impact on the education system, affecting both the structural and functional components of educational management. One of the most significant impacts was the widespread disruption of schooling, as many institutions were forced to close for extended periods due to insecurity and threats of violence.

School infrastructure was frequently destroyed, looted, or repurposed as shelters for displaced populations, which significantly reduced the availability of learning spaces and created overcrowded conditions in the few operational schools. Additionally, the displacement of teachers and learners led to irregular attendance, weakened classroom interaction, and increased dropout rates, thereby undermining the overall quality of education.

Education managers faced substantial challenges in maintaining institutional stability under such conditions. These challenges included insecurity, lack of supervision, shortage of qualified teachers, limited financial resources, and psychological trauma among students and staff. Administrative decision-making became increasingly difficult due to the unpredictability of security conditions and the lack of reliable communication systems.

Despite these challenges, several adaptive strategies were implemented to sustain educational activities. These included the introduction of flexible school schedules, relocation of classes to safer areas, establishment of temporary learning centers, and increased collaboration with local communities and humanitarian organizations. These strategies demonstrated the resilience and adaptability of education actors in crisis situations, although their effectiveness remained limited by ongoing insecurity and resource constraints.

5. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that tribal conflicts in Ituri Province between 2018 and 2020 had a profound negative impact on education management, significantly disrupting school operations, weakening administrative structures, and limiting access to education for thousands of children. However, despite these challenges, education stakeholders demonstrated resilience through adaptive strategies aimed at sustaining learning under difficult conditions.

The findings highlight the importance of strengthening educational leadership, improving crisis preparedness, and enhancing collaboration between governments, communities, and humanitarian organizations. Ultimately, ensuring the continuity of education in conflict-affected regions requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach that integrates security, resources, and community engagement.

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