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LITERATURE REVIEW IN PERSPECTIVES OF PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOLS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: CASE OF THE ITURI PROVINCE FROM 2021 TO 2024

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1. Introduction

The key factors that define a proper education system, where the fragility, conflict, and inept states have their weaknesses mitigated, are the management and the educational planning. In these cases, education is not only one of the developmental aspirations but also a peacemaking, stabilizing, and societal-order-boosting structure. The image of the issues of the existence of schooling under circumstances of crises in the long term is the mirror of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the eastern part of the country, in particular, Ituri. Different eruptions of violence, population displacement, and human displacement that began at the turn of the 2000s have undermined the paucity of resources needed to provide education services on a routine basis (World Bank, 2020). These realities make it difficult to plan (set priorities, allocate and follow resources, and ensure cultural conformity to national policy structures) and make managing a school daily difficult because of head-teachers, district officers, and local communities.

Conventionally, planning education in different territories, which embrace the globe, has necessitated the necessity of systematizing means of projecting enrollment, teacher expansion, and supply of funding facilities, as well as guaranteeing quality results (Caillods & Hallak, 2006). These traditional strategies, however, are more liable to make assumptions pegged on stability and predictability, which is hardly the case in the war-stricken regions. In the weak context, Davies (2011) and Bush and Glover (2014) state that educational leaders are supposed to use adaptive and context-based styles, not formal, in the use of formal planning tools. This is especially true of Ituri, whereby the authorities of the school are compelled to cope with shortages of supplies, unstable funding, and even the dangers posed by safety, teacher turnover, and changing enrollment as a result of displacement.

Sub-Saharan research cites empirical studies as one of the methods of contributing to the understanding of how schools prevail over these challenges. Based on the example of Akyeampong (2018), community and teacher resilience in maintaining education in Northern Uganda during the conflict is recorded. In Sierra Leone (Novelli and Smith, 2011) and South Sudan (Obura, 2013), on occasions where the formal state process fails, the burden of planning and managing the processes is usually removed by the local society, non-governmental organizations, and religious institutions. The national policy in DRC is concerned with the decentralization of education under the Ministry of Primary, Secondary, and Technical Education (EPST), but the policy implementation is not uniformly actualized at the provincial level or school level; hence, policy and practice are explored (Titeca & De Herdt, 2011).

This is considering the fact that this literature review entails a profound examination of both theoretical views and empirical investigations on the field of planning and management of schools in conflict-prone regions and, in particular, the DRC and other similar scenarios. The given review is divided into three parts: (1) the theoretical background that rules the learning planning and management in weak states, (2) the scholarly studies, which offer the learning of Sub-Saharan Africa and the DRC in particular, and (3) the conceptual framework, which will guide the current study. In the debate concerning the various factors of decentralization, leadership, resource allocation, and community participation, and the realization of the high-debt frailty of the conflict-stricken regions, one can identify some serious reasons.

This chapter is the reflection of the world research, African experience, and research specifically conducted in the territory of DRC to define knowledge gaps that were of primary interest and the reason why the research had to be carried out in Ituri Province. It particularly singles out the inadequacy of localized, school-level data on how head-teachers, teachers, parents, and provincial authorities plan and go about education jointly in the face of the compounding pressures of insecurity, displacement, and resource shortages. At the individual level, these lapses are both an urgent educational issue and an academic policy and practice provision in the future, once weak education systems are strengthened and subsequently viable.

2. Empirical Literature Review

2.1 Education in Conflict-Affected Contexts

The education research conducted in the world concerning fragile and conflict states has persisted in showing how the instability over time has been a central force in derailing the school planning, leadership, and day-to-day running. Despite these overlapping crises, war results in demolished infrastructure, displaced good teachers, governmental budgets being expended on war activities, and psychosocial trauma on learners and teachers. Its report, which UNESCO (2022) reported, showed that over 222 million children in the conflict-affected areas had urgent educational needs and that Sub-Saharan Africa contributed the highest number to the overall. Education is usually aborted in such children, who contribute to the impacts of poverty and instability due to the influence of the displacement condition, insecure conditions, and a shortage of educational staff.

Such obstacles do not simply stop at the growth of access to school in physical terms. According to scientists, learners in war zones are also likely to learn in an insecure environment when schools might become the target of the military or might be turned into a military base (GCPEA, 2020). The sense of insecurity that comes with that reduces the levels of enrollment and attendance, especially among girls, who are at risk of being victims of gender-based violence in the event of a military confrontation (UNICEF, 2019). The second acute crisis is the teacher crisis, as the majority of teachers do not want to be the ones to deal with violence or get to their posts, as anything can occur because of the insecurity and displacement (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Further, the psychological trauma is likely to impact the children, as they were exposed to schools, and the outcomes of the factor under discussion affect concentration and school discipline negatively, and also the further academic outcomes (Betancourt et al., 2013).

Such challenges can be brightly illustrated by the case studies of the African countries. Years of armed conflicts have destroyed the education system in the Central African Republic: more than half of national schools have been ruined, damaged, or occupied by military groups (UNESCO, 2022). Civil war in South Sudan not only ruined the lives of millions of citizens but also affected the Education Sector Strategic Plan and the distribution of the teaching staff and the unavailability of learning materials (Obura, 2013). This is also the case in Somalia since political instability and displacements of citizens have rocked the national planning systems that have compelled communities and non-governmental organizations to address the gaping needs at the school management level (Novelli & Smith, 2011). The examples were reinforced in this instance by the fact that the conflict weakens the national policy structures and that schools leave, causing the school systems to only rely on the humanitarian relief.

The practices of patterns are not just practiced in Africa but all over the world. In line with school shutdowns, assaults on educational institutions, and teacher flight, planning formal education has been undermined in Afghanistan and Syria, thus leaving them to consider informal programs or community-based programs (World Bank, 2018). These studies suggest that the situation may not be the same, but the circumstances that are being experienced by the weak states are alike: under-investment, weak administration, and short-term investments.

In spite of these limitations, resilience and innovation are also cited in the literature. The parent-teacher associations and community mobilization were also being used to support learning in insurgencies of the Lord's Resistance Army and later on in schools in Northern Uganda (Akyeampong, 2018). Community planning Community planning was selected and accompanied by a process of reconstruction of post-civil war Sierra Leone schools, which had to result in intensified ownership and responsibility of neighboring communities (Novelli and Higgins, 2017). The local approaches rooted in community involvement and active leadership, as the cases show, may help in offsetting the systemic upheavals, at least in the midst of the conflict.

2.2 The State of Education in the DRC

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is the country with the poorest education mechanism in Sub-Saharan Africa, and describes the decades of low investments, the ineffectiveness of the administration, and a range of political and security conflicts. The nation, with all its natural resources, has not been able to establish self-sustainable means of financing and governing education, the biggest portion of which is taken to families and external donors (World Bank, 2020). According to the Ministry of Primary, Secondary, and Technical Education (MEPST, 2023), the

structural issues that are still in place include the following: poor completion rates that are further accompanied by poor infrastructure and undertrained teachers, among others. Lastly, at the national level, only a limited percentage of 54 out of all school-going children pass through the primary school level, not to mention a good percentage of teachers are illiterate or poorly educated, and the standard of teaching and student performance is low.

The discrepancies between access and retention also hurt the education. According to Wodon et al. (2021), the rates of dropout are particularly elevated in the context of the military conflict, among girls, and among dispersed people. These economic tendencies consist of the following: families will opt more to live on child labor, and they will not be able to afford the costs of the informal schools had the government adopted the free education policy in 2019. The reform further brought about expansion in the number of enrollments in the country, yet the number of additional pupils was not rising in concomitant proportions to the rise in the number of instructors and their expansion, facility construction, and investment in schools (De Herdt and Titeca, 2019).

The eastern provinces, especially, are the worst, with violence that is rampant and recurrent, making the educational system shaky and the people unstable. The common attacks, armed conflicts, and insecurity force schools to close and make it unsafe to attend classes for teachers and learners. It displaces families multiple times, and children have no consistent access to education, which already cripples weak school systems. Teachers are fleeing in the majority, school materials are being burned, and armed combatants or displaced families fill in school buildings. This constant insecurity initiates a vicious circle in which a failed education turns into vulnerability itself, and a whole generation is at stake, which brings up the need for certain steps to rescue education in conflict-related zones.

The other raging phenomenon in the education sector in the DRC is the manner in which teachers are employed. This is because the resources and accountability are not attached, as so-called ghost teachers, or those who never even teach at all, are on the payroll (De Herdt and Kasongo, 2020). And again, active classroom teachers risk suffering discontinuous or insufficient pay, many of them compelled, in fact, to depend on altruism or second work. Even in Ituri, where the teachers are not attending school due to the insecurity (they are responding to the war), the schools are left with volunteers or staff who are underqualified. This is one of the dynamic things that result in a high rate of absenteeism and low coverage in curriculum coverage and performance in the exams.

These systemic weaknesses have been reduced under the international and national interventions. The rehabilitation of the schools, training of the teachers, and offering of the psychosocial support of the post-conflict trends in the DRC have been well assisted by UNICEF, the Global Partnership to Education (GPE), and the NGO Save the Children programs. But according to researchers, like Mbeko and Berwouts (2021), such interventions are usually individual and project-based and donor-financed and can hardly be combined into a logical structure of national planning. Therefore, they can provide a short-run solution at best and only a slight long-term positive connotation to the school organization and management.

2.3 Decentralization and Local Planning

Decentralization has gained a lot of popularity as a means of good governance and service delivery in weak and post-conflict states. This is because decentralization to provincial and local governments enhances effectiveness, responsiveness, and accountability as the decision-making process occurs closer to populations being affected (Bray, 2001; Faguet, 2014). Decentralization of the sector of education has generally emerged as a means of improving planning at the school level, community involvement, and the capacity for making resource allocation in a more context-sensitive manner. However, the literature suggests that the effectiveness of decentralization heavily hinges on the performance of the local government, the consistency of the fiscal transfers, and the political climate.

Decentralization reforms have had a checkered history in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The 2006 Constitution formally codified the idea of decentralization, and after that, the later laws tried to devolve the key powers to the provinces. Decentralization reforms in 2015 were directly aimed at empowering provincial governments to take a greater role in operating the school system, the teacher recruitment and placement process, school housekeeping, and the provincial education plan (MEPST, 2023). These reforms were theoretically to result in the relief of the bottlenecks of central administration and the increase in local ownership of the planning processes.

The evidence on which it was founded, however, is still more humiliating. It is observed that decentralization has not gained much in terms of objectives in such conflict-afflicted provinces as Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu (Mutombo and Kabeya, 2023). Weak institutional capacities, poor training of provincial and district education officials, and patronage networks have undermined the ability of the local authorities to effectively perform the new functions. The fiscal decentralization has not been a superior point either: the funds are supposed to flow to the provinces from the central government, but delays, leaks, and deplorable transparency lead to the situation where funds do not always reach the schools (De Herdt & Titeca, 2019).

The World Bank (2021) provides quantitative data on these shortcomings, which indicates that in eastern DRC, among the school plans laid by the local authorities, 18% of the time the plans were executed as per the plans. Failure to implement the plans was attributed to the existence of weak oversight, highly fluid security conditions, and the low participation of communities. Mostly in the development committees of schools, they appeared to have plans that the donors had helped develop, but never translated to real activities due to a lack of funds or for other reasons, such as sudden school violence. This non-responsiveness between planning and implementation provides an example of how decentralization is limited in a highly volatile environment.

The experience of other African nations, whether negative or positive, throws light on the dangers as well as advantages of decentralization in education. To be more precise, in the Ugandan example, the UN Primary Education (UPE) campaign devolved the schools to the local councils and the parent-teacher associations. Though this increased the level of enrollment, research studies showed that the issue of elite capture, lack of capacity, and poor community accountability remained (Deininger, 2003). Similarly, Sierra Leone's postwar reforms emphasized community-managed school management committees more, but they were not equally successful since resources were constrained, and not all communities were equally engaged (Novelli & Higgins, 2017). These cases imply that decentralization can result in responsiveness only when fiscal transfers are adequate, and there are also systems of capacity building and good accountability.

In DRC, and the Ituri Province to be precise, the question of decentralization has introduced further complications. Though the local action towards the insecurity and displacement theoretically devolves power, the absence of strong institutional structures at the local level has made the planning activities merely representational rather than actual. The reality of schools tending to rely on NGOs and community input to fill the gaps left by the state is a reality that has spilled over to the formal planning systems and informal coping systems. Such a fact captures one of the main contradictions: any decentralization process that lacks the resources and control may strengthen the existing inequalities, worsening the state's legitimacy, rather than the planning and management, but vice versa.

2.4 Management Practices and Stakeholder Involvement

School management in weak and conflict-torn regions extends beyond classroom teaching and is concerned with supervising, managing, evaluating the teachers, and maintaining schools. The continuity of their learning highly depends on good management, especially when the institutions are faced with discord and displacement (Chapman, 2002; De Grauwe, 2005). The firm condition of these practices is dealt with by formal administrative bodies, such as the maintenance of good documents, regular inspection, and planning and evaluation based on the data. However, in the context of war, like in the Ituri Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo, such mechanisms are bound to fall apart or be highly fragmented.

The Ministry of Primary, Secondary, and Technical Education (MEPST, 2023) states that over 40 percent of the Ituri schools do not have basic administrative records, including attendance records and budgets, or inspection publications. This underdocumentation not only kills accountability, but it also paralyzes planning because the policymakers and the donors do not have tangible information that would possibly help them to make the use of the resources effective. Its financial control is also rather inefficient, which allows embezzling money, and the area of ghost-teacher scandals and off-balance-sheet payments is another practice, and the reason why the trust in the state structures is deficient (De Herdt and Titeca, 2019).

Inclusion of stakeholders is beginning to become one of the cornerstones of good school management, particularly in the unstable environment where a contest is imminent or a weak state exists. The confidence of the persons lost can

be renewed by the responsible involvement of the community in decision-making, which will bring the contribution of the sense of responsibility and make education priorities become responsive to local needs (Rose, 2003). Evocatively, in the northern part of Uganda, Akyeamong (2018) established that 15 percent of the pre-existing teacher absenteeism and school attendance can be reduced by using the active parent-teacher association (PTA), and it means that active forms of governance can be implemented in post-conflict recovery. Equally, the increasingly important element in Sierra Leone was the mobilization of resources and transparency in their distribution during the process of school education aid distribution by means of government and control by school management committees (SMCs) (Novelli and Higgins, 2017).

These participatory acts have not been able to establish themselves in Ituri, though. Incivility, distrust, and mistrust of the actors in the government play a significant role in reducing the capability of the communities to participate in the administration of the schools (Mutombo and Kabeya, 2023). Other factors will attract parents with displaced or threatened parents to be more concerned with survival at the current time, rather than attending PTAs or SMCs. Moreover, the populations of the regions controlled by military armies might negotiate that they will not be penalized because they engage in the programs familiar to the states and, thus, lessen the chances of cooperation. In other instances, where community involvement is involved, such initiatives are typically supported by external actors like NGOs, but not the local arrangements based on sustainability (UNICEF, 2024).

Another very urgent problem is teacher management. Absenteeism is also high in the majority of Ituri schools, and the most prevalent reasons are lack of security, salary delays, and poor working conditions (Wodon et al., 2021). As much as the community monitoring has been proposed as a device of complementary accountability, these arrangements are bound to be transparent and legitimate. The local stakeholders, who are not well prepared, might not be capable of reviewing the performance of the teachers, and in conflict-oriented regions, there are no such enforcement mechanisms. This might be conveyed to the so-called phantom accountability, which exists on paper but has no substance in real practice (De Grauwe, 2005).

Maintenance of infrastructure also includes inefficient management and a lack of participation by stakeholders. This is because the Djugu and Irumu territories are situated in rural regions, and they are regarded as the territories where the school buildings do not have roofs, toilets, or furniture at all (Mutombo and Kabeya, 2023). The reason why such issues can only be addressed periodically is due to the lack of effective local management, where donors can only provide short-term aid, or the society makes ad hoc donations. No correctional planning and unlimited finance that assures the recurrence of the infrastructure problem that extends with the sustenance of education.

Along with such developments, there are exemplars of good practice in some circumstances. The report suggests that the informal parent-teacher coalition has the resources to finance resources for school rehabilitation, as indicated by a few Ituri communities, where the network of trust further demonstrates that it may be regarded as an indication of its power and self-organizing capabilities. Participatory budgeting programs involving parents and teachers collaborating with local governments to determine what to treat in regard to the spending have also been tested through international agencies. These initiatives are small in extent, yet they are providing insights into how the communities can be targeted to a larger extent if the security and training concerns are addressed.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical strategies that were used in the study shed light on how the schools were operated and how they could be designed and managed in the situation of frailty. The theories not only provide explanatory energy but also a study instrument of the interrelated predicaments of education in Ituri Province. The theory especially comes in handy at a time of conflict and where resources are scarce, and the institutions are losing their bearings; the researchers map out the areas of leverage that they can leverage and turn around (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000).

Referring to the well-known schools of thought of the systems theory, contingency theory, and participatory governance, the school's management of this case study is put in a context, and it is not perceived as a singular technical occurrence but as a dynamic process of structure-actor-environment interactions. The two theoretical lenses present the two different fields of view of the problem and, when united jointly, allow one to view the problem holistically and provide an answer to the same.

3.1 Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1968)

The General Systems Theory, so called, named by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968), considers an organization to be an open system and consists of parts that rely on one another and are constantly in contact with the surroundings. Schools could not relinquish learning natural communities, but a web made up of instructors, learners, administration, buildings, and community stakeholders around the school is all disposed to the impact of larger political, social, and economic systems (Hoy and Miskel, 2008).

One of the general principles of systems theory is interdependence: change of any aspect in the system must never come without some effects on the entire system. In situations like the scenarios where teachers are forced to quit the profession because of insecurity, the quality of teaching is influenced, and therefore, the learning environments and student attendance are minimized. This subjugation of the order is reflected, among other things, in the case of the schooling of more than 2,100 schools in Ituri Province, funded by the armed conflict in 2022-2024 (UNICEF, 2024). The lack of teachers, devastation of infrastructure, and displacement of students are mutually reinforcing and can lead to the chain of education breakdown.

The feedback is another notable observation of the systems theory. Feedback loops are part of healthy systems that keep a check on the performance to adjust it. The data employed in policy and resource infusion in functional education systems are school inspections, attendance history, and standardized tests. However, since it was discovered in MEPST (2023) that the availability of any form of administrative records is not possible in over 40 percent of the schools in Ituri, it is incompatible with the functioning of the feedback, and cannot implement any corrective measures. The policymakers can only fail, as they would not be in a position to monitor the problems, devise corrective measures, and more ways to trip up the system are created.

The historical systems theory is also relevant because of boundary permeability. Schools have an environmental interaction; the interactions lead to an exchange of resources, human beings, and information. The boundaries of this weakness tend to be very permeable: any external shock, like displacement, epidemic of disease, or any other intervention by a donor, can heavily distort the school dynamic (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000). This would imply in the case of Ituri that schools should at all times be responsive in an ever-altering environment where a stable environment becomes an exception rather than a norm.

Application to Ituri:

- The teaching staff will be sent home, and this will disrupt the teaching process, thereby decreasing attendance of the students and aggravating the results.
- The physical environment is affected by insecurity because it influences the infrastructure and infrastructural facilities to be insecure and unsafe, deterring investments from the parents.
- Accountability is weak due to a lack of an administrative system of feedback that cannot intervene and act in time.
- External actors (NGOs and international agencies): the critical resources are supplied by the external actors, but until the system can absorb them systemically, such external resources might create dependency, as opposed to a resilient system.

The theory is applicable in explaining the reason behind the result of the independent interventions that have minimal effects over time in school, just like the case of constructing classroom buildings while ignoring teacher shortages, training teachers, and providing safety assurances to the teachers. The process of sustainable changes in Ituri needs to be systematic and consider various factors at the same time, improve the feedback devices, and render the process flexible.

3.2 Participatory Planning Theory (Friedmann, 1987)

John Friedmann (1987) developed the participatory planning theory based on the assumption that the planning activities can and should not be personified by the technocrat or the state apparatus but by the collective as a whole—communities who are the stakeholders most likely to be impacted by the decision. The sustainability and legitimacy

of the policymakers also receive the benefits, as there would be participatory planning in which the citizens, as fellow-crafters of the development plans, unlike the top-down planning, would be the recipients of the authority and the policies. The key proponent behind this principle is that individuals will readily agree and defend policies when they feel like they are heard and their interests, along with lived experiences, are being factored in (Friedmann, 1992).

Participatory theory of planning has been implemented in the education sector as an idea of enhancing the school governance and accountability, especially in the weak context of the weak power of the state. As argued by the likes of Rose (2003) and Bray (2001), parental involvement, community, and school stakeholder committee consultations can be very different through the process of giving an assurance of resources being allocated to the way it is perceived to meet the needs of the local community. It also addresses minimal issues of the presence of divergence between national policy practices and locally specific practices, which is a major cause of inefficiencies and distrust.

The post-conflict settings are especially so where participatory planning is concerned. The state efforts cannot be successful in areas where conditions of insecurity and displacement still roam because of inaccessibility and invalidity (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000). The fact that such decisions result in high levels of transparency as well as the feeling of shared ownership is another critical component of restoring trust in institutions when parents, teachers, local leaders, and community organizations are involved in the decision-making. The involvement in the planning process can therefore be used as a twofold role since the achievement of better school management can be realized simultaneously, even as it can be seen that it plays two roles: peacebuilding and a socially cohesive role (Novelli and Smith, 2011).

Application to Ituri:

The feeling of marginalization of localities in the education policy-making has been the consequence of the absence of participatory processes in Ituri Province in most instances. Mutombo and Kabeya (2023) surmise that although the concept follows the reforms of devolution in the DRC to decentralize the localities of provinces and settlements, they have been highly uneven in the combat-prone regions because of inadequate competence and distrust amongst the concerned parties. The present paper will introduce the participation planning theory by stating that the school governance council, some of whom include parents, teachers, elders, and religious leaders, may be forums that are important in inclusion in the process of making inclusive decisions.

For example:

- Transparency and accountability: The councils will be able to trace their financial flow, which will curb chances of corruption and misappropriation of the education funds, which is the order of the day in Ituri.
- Culturally specific solutions include the interventions, which will be culturally based because the incorporation of the traditional and religious leaders will result in high probabilities of acceptance and maintenance.
- Conflict sensitivity: Local voices may be used to sensitize on security threats, e.g., the location of schools in insecure areas, which may be used to generate more context-sensitive planning.
- Community resiliency requires a communal engagement: because of communal engagement, a milieu of solidarity is created, and community mobilization leads to greater chances of resourced communities mobilizing to school rehabilitation at the time of delayed or nonexistent external assistance.

Nonetheless, the obstacles to participatory planning in Ituri are also applicable. Continuous bloodshed disperses the individuals and disrupts the consistency in executing a long-term community growth that is long-term. The fact that parents and local leaders are often inefficient in the practice of technical attention to school planning is also often premised upon the existing lack of literacy and poor training. Although donor-funded programs can partially substitute organic engagement with dependence, they can offer benefits despite their negative impact (UNICEF, 2024).

Despite the stated challenges, the participation planning theory may be applied as one of the most efficient means to reconsider the admission of weak states. The establishment of inclusive school councils and their empowerment is among the most notable features of getting into a more equal, transparent, and powerful management of the education process in Ituri, where the mistrust of what can be done by the state and a lack of institutional capacity remain topical.

When the engagement is internalized in the heart of a planning process, not only will the schools be turned into a learning center, but also a community healing and democratic zone.

3.3 Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964)

The human capital theory [theorized by Gary Becker (1964)] allocates education not only to the domain of a social good but also to a component of an economic investment that generates the productivity and earning ability of people. Based on this view, investment in schools and the education of the teachers and school curricula has been viewed as an investment in human capital that will pay off later on in the form of higher incomes, less poverty, and economic growth of the country. Those nations that do not invest in education are probably not to be underdeveloped, unequal, and social misfits (Schultz, 1961; Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2018).

Regarding the education system, the human capital theory concentrates much on two aspects of schools insofar as they inculcate skills in individuals that are valuable in the labor market, coupled with the realization of social stability on a larger scale by encouraging civic engagement and minimizing instances of conflict (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2008). However, this phenomenon is ruined by school systems, the population of teacher drift, and fractured education systems in a situation where the conflict takes place, therefore bringing about what Collier (2003) termed as confounding traps of conflict. Poor investment in human capital in these environments exacerbates the effects of poverty and instability that lead to increased difficulties in such a situation during post-conflict recovery.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is one of the nations that has immensely neglected investment in the education sector, and the effects of the same on the development of the nation have been pathetic. According to the World Bank (2021), most of the situations in the Congolese schools are because nearly 1/3 of the teacher population is poorly trained, as well as the school dropout rate of 1.23, compared to a regional average. This has reduced the ability of the country to source a skilled labor force to diversify the economy, as it is limited to the extractive industries. Moreover, as Wodon et al. note, the conflict-impacted areas like Ituri also have lower levels of education in the population, including the ones of girls and the displaced population, thereby increasing gender inequality and intergenerational poverty (2021).

4. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the given research includes many dimensions of educational planning and management according to the conflict situation. It is informed by the empirical literature found in Section 2.2 and by the theoretical knowledge in Section 2.3, which are the systems theory, the participatory planning theory, and the human capital theory. The framework offers four related disciplines that support each other, which comprise planning strategies, management practices, stakeholder engagement, and contextual challenges that together affect how education outcomes are achieved in volatile environments such as Ituri Province.

4.1. Planning Strategies

Planning strategies entail the processes that are associated with the assessment of education needs, allocation of resources, and personnel. The processes are most commonly dictated by formal measures of policy, standardized applications of data and projection in an environment that is always well-organized. Nevertheless, when the situation is weak, planning should be dynamic and sensitive to circumstances and responsive to the outburst during conflict, displacement, or shortage of resources (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000). Planning in Ituri entails evaluation of needs in order to establish the schools to be closed and distribute the teachers and the resources in schools that have been affected the most due to insecurity. A failure in planning, e.g., inconsequential assignments of teachers, or a lack of delivering materials on time, is also a prediction of systems theory and triggers systemic inefficiencies (Bertalanffy, 1968).

4.2. Management Practices

The administrative and operational activities of the schools, like supervision of the teaching, record receiving, financial accountability, and the upkeep of infrastructure, are called management practices. Sound management ensures that

plans bring tangible achievements even during difficult times. In Ituri, many schools lack so-called basic administrative records and do not have feedback and accountability (MEPST, 2023). Using a systems view, the management practices are considered as operational nodes where the planning strategies and the stakeholder inputs are concentrated to create a continuum in education.

4.3. Stakeholder Engagement

The stakeholder engagement is a participation of parents, teachers, community leaders, and NGOs in the decision-making process, resource mobilization, and control. Participatory Planning Theory (Friedmann, 1987) is the idea that insists on the importance of the inclusion of everyone in the planning, as it is clear in conflict regions where the right of the state is subverted. Ituri can use school governance councils, parent-teacher associations, and community unions to promote transparency that results in culturally sensitive intervention and sustainability of the learning endeavors. Effective interaction with the stakeholders will also assist in minimizing risks associated with absenteeism of teachers, mismanagement of resources, and disruption caused by insecurity.

4.4. Contextual Challenges

Contextual challenges are known as environmental and structural problems, which influence the planning and management of education. All these obstacles are common in weak contexts and include armed conflict, population displacement, infrastructure deprivation, and weak state capacity. The action-related limits and the source of uncertainty in context are both contextual factors that are highlighted under the contingency theory that demands the strategies of adoption to adapt to the scenario. In Ituri, school assaults, mass displacement of students and teachers, and destruction of facilities are some of the major challenges that relate dynamically to planning, management, and stakeholder involvement.

Domain-Domain Interactions.

The four areas are not independent of each other: strategic planning determines how the management operates, successful management operates on its stakeholders, and the three areas are also influenced by certain context-bound problems. Using the example of a well-executed resource allocation program, it can never succeed if the management systems are not robust and the stakeholders cannot take part due to insecurity. Conversely, the lack of development in official arrangement or management can be compensated for by an established interaction between the stakeholders, which demonstrates the adaptive skill of systems thinking. The cumulative effect of all these fields is on the education performance, including school enrollment, retention, learning performance, and the survival of the school system in conflict-prone environments.

5. Gaps in the Literature

Despite the large body of literature that has been done to examine education in conflict-affected situations all over the world and especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, several gaps still exist, specifically in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Ituri Province in particular. One, much of the available literature draws on the macro-level analysis or past data before 2020, and the recent developments are still underrepresented. Ituri, between 2021 and 2024, has become a particular center of armed violence and lack of wealth with multifaceted consequences on the life of the school, the supply and demand of teachers, and school attendance (UNICEF, 2024). The lack of empirical literature providing evidence of this latest period limits the amount of understanding about the current challenges and ways of adapting that are employed by local educational actors.

Second, the national policy frameworks and local realities are generally far apart. The DRC has implemented numerous reforms and policies in its decentralization in response to education delivery, but the literature has demonstrated that these have not appeared in the war-torn provinces of the country due to poor administrative capacity, absence of fiscal transparency, and insecurity (Mutombo & Kabeya, 2023; World Bank, 2021). Limited research has investigated how local school heads, educators, and even communities bridge this execution disparity in an effort to provide continuity of instruction. This is what the general dynamics of knowing should be, which needs to be applied in the design of technically valid and contextual interventions that can be adopted.

Community-led management in high-risk zones is not a well-explored issue. The general opinion is that participatory planning and involvement of stakeholders are viable means of improving the educational efforts in terms of accountability, transparency, and sustainability (Friedmann, 1987; Akyeampong, 2018). However, the literature does not tell a lot about how the work of these mechanisms contributes to further violence, displacement, and the presence of a weak state. In Ituri, where the challenges of insecurity constrain formal systems of governance, the sense of community-based approaches to planning, management, and mobilization of resources is vital to identify the approaches that can be replicated and help local resilience.

6. Recap and Synthesis

The literature review in this chapter has illustrated the interdependence of factors concerning educational planning and management that are multicomponent in conflict-affected situations. Empirical factors in Sub-Saharan Africa and other weak states have shown that chronic instability disrupts school activities, reduces access to teachers, and worsens the performance of students (UNESCO, 2022; Dryden-Peterson, 2016). It is the years of neglect, poor governance, and insecurity in the Democratic Republic of Congo that have contributed to low enrollment rates and low completion rates, high teacher absenteeism, and high infrastructure shortage (MEPST, 2023; Mutombo and Kabeya, 2023). The example of Ituri Province is most illustrative of the compounding effect of strife, displacement, and poor governance, as it had over 700,000 students in over 2,100 schools (a situation comparable to 2022–2024) in 2022 and 2024 (UNICEF, 2024).

The theoretical frameworks discussed, which are systems theory, participatory planning theory, and human capital theory, provide an individual with complementary ideas about understanding these dynamics. Systems theory has been outlined with the focus on the interdependence of the components of the school and shaped by the impact that cascades out on the sensitive environments (Bertalanffy, 1968). Participation Planning Theory examines interventions that are legitimate and sustainable and are culturally sensitive and involve an inclusive decision-making process (Friedmann, 1987; Akyeampong, 2018). Human Capital Theory explains that education is treated as an investment in potential and socio-economic development in the long-term, and the cost of not receiving education is emphasized in the conflict zones (Becker, 1964; Wodon et al., 2021).

These insights are synthesized into a conceptual model of Section 2.4 that demonstrates that four inseparable domains, such as planning strategies, management practices, stakeholder engagement, and contextual challenges, contribute jointly to enhancing educational achievement in fragile settings. The planning strategies are defined based on the needs assessment, resource allocation, and staff deployment, yet they are efficient due to the well-developed management practice and involvement of the stakeholders. These spheres are actively engaged in participation with contextual forces, particularly insecurity, displacement, and poor infrastructure, which is likely to curtail their potential impact. This is a logical model of an analysis of the experiences of school managers, teachers, and community agents in Ituri.

Despite the abundance of literature in the education field in the conflict setting, there are still numerous gaps. There is little empirical evidence that would highlight the changes that have taken place since 2020, and sufficient attention is not given to the gap between the national policies at the national and local levels. There is not so much research on community-based governance in communities at risk. These gaps emphasize the urgency and relevancy of the study since the purpose was to gain firsthand perspectives of educational stakeholders in Ituri in 2021-2024.

Recapitulative, the literature has set that decentralized, participatory, and resilient educational planning should be adopted in conflict environments. The persistence of the Ituri issues, however, demonstrates that even theories are not always limited to a certain restraint in relation to their boundaries. It is this synthesis that provides the rationale of the current research, and there is a need to explore the mechanism of survival of schools in a volatile context through planning, management, and involving the stakeholders. The second chapter is chapter three, where the methodology employed in undertaking these research purposes is detailed with particular focus on the study design, the population, the sampling strategies, the data collection mechanisms, and the methods of analysis, which underpin this research study.

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