Professional logic and school disengagement: sociological study of the teaching profession in Congo.

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Abstract

The secondary education sector, both at the lower and upper levels, in the Democratic Republic of Congo is deeply affected by the structural effects of the country's ongoing economic crisis. This socioeconomic reality simultaneously affects students' schooling conditions and teachers' working conditions. Upper secondary students, in particular, face multiple obstacles that compromise the continuity of their academic careers, while teachers practice their profession in a precarious context that limits their ability to fully fulfill their educational mission.

This qualitative research focuses on analyzing the material and symbolic conditions in which secondary school teachers operate, as well as the adaptive strategies they develop to cope with the system's multiple constraints. It also examines their potential for educational action, particularly as actors supporting academic perseverance. By adopting a perspective of combating school dropout, this study highlights not only the dimensions of teachers' professional and social vulnerability, but also the relational and pedagogical resources they mobilize to support young people in their academic trajectory. The results thus highlight the dual role—fragile but potentially resilient—of Congolese teachers, both subjects of a failing system and possible mediators of students' academic resilience.

Keywords: *Vocational disposition, habitus of submission,* professional identity *, process of academic disqualification, professional ethos.*

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I.   INTRODUCTION

The issue of school dropout in secondary education, both at the first and second cycle, is a subject of analysis that has not yet been fully explored in the Republic of Congo. Existing work on this phenomenon highlights a plurality of determinants, registered at different levels of analysis – individual, family and institutional – and underlines their intertwining (Chagnon et al., 2017; Chenu & Blondin, 2013; Demechau , 2013; Esterle-Hedibel , 2006). These factors should not be understood as isolated elements, but as interdependent dimensions of a complex social system, in which the school experience of young people is constructed at the intersection of multiple social logics. In this sense, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) offers a relevant theoretical framework for thinking about school dropout as the product of interactions between the student's proximal spheres of socialization (mesosystem), more distant but nonetheless influential environments (exosystem), and broader societal dynamics, relevant to the economic, political and cultural context (macrosystem).

From this perspective, it appears methodologically difficult to isolate the effect of each of these levels. Therefore, this article aims to question more specifically the role of teachers in the school retention processes, taking into account the particular configuration of the Brazzaville macrosystem , particularly in terms of educational policies, the structural characteristics of the school framework (mesosystem), as well as the social and material conditions in which teachers exercise their profession (exosystem). The objective is thus to highlight the tensions between institutional expectations, professional constraints and the capacities of educational actors to act, in a context marked by systemic inequalities and low social recognition of the teaching profession.

Combating educational inequality is a central issue for an inclusive and democratic school. From this perspective, teachers appear as key players in implementing educational resilience processes, particularly among

students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As Bouteyre (2008), Anaut (2006), and Kouyimoussou (2021) have shown, their actions can help prevent academic failure, mitigate the effects of frustrations related to educational pathways, and promote student integration within the school system.

However, this ability to act is heavily constrained by the socio-economic context in which the teaching profession is practiced, particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Mwatote (2022) highlights the precarious conditions in which Congolese teachers operate, particularly those in the public sector. Poorly paid, despite recurring demands for almost a decade, they struggle to meet their basic needs, which directly affects their professional commitment and their potential role as resilience tutors.

Adding to this economic precariousness are degraded working conditions: overcrowded classrooms, a critical shortage of teaching materials, and a lack of documentary resources and adequate infrastructure for practical activities. These structural factors compromise the possibility of quality teaching and weaken the school's ability to play its role as a lever for equal opportunity.

From this point on, a central tension emerges: how can we expect teachers to support struggling students and participate in the fight against school dropouts, when they themselves are undergoing a form of professional deinstitutionalization, marked by instability and socio-economic vulnerability?

This study thus aims to question this tension by pursuing a dual objective: on the one hand, to analyze the material, professional and social conditions in which the teaching profession is practiced today in the Congolese public sector; on the other hand, to highlight the subjective resources, adjustment strategies and forms of commitment that teachers mobilize, despite adversity, to try to maintain a meaningful educational relationship and support the academic perseverance of students.

II.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1-1 : Precariousness and working conditions of teachers: a Congolese reality in sociological perspective

The teaching profession is characterized by a structural precariousness which reflects the instability and vulnerability inherent in this social function (López Alós , 2021). This precariousness reflects not only material and organizational difficulties, but also symbolic tensions linked to the position of teachers within the educational field. Hélou (2008) highlights the constraints encountered by teachers in their role of supporting students in difficulty, highlighting the weight of tensions between the professional and private spheres, thus illustrating the porosity between these two dimensions. This double burden contributes to making the teaching exercise an "interminable" job, marked by uncertainty about the effects of pedagogical actions, particularly in the face of challenges of student motivation and engagement in the process of school socialization. Furthermore, André and Poncelet (2013) emphasize the historical and institutional nature of this precariousness, which they analyze as the result of a permanent tension between institutional injunctions and the concrete management of classroom dynamics. In doing so, the professional precariousness of teachers reflects more broadly the contradictions of the education system, which simultaneously demands adaptation to bureaucratic requirements and addressing the social and cultural inequalities of students.

In Congo-Brazzaville, the professional insecurity of teachers reflects deeply rooted social mechanisms linked to postcolonial history and the structural constraints of the state. Since independence, a shortage of qualified human resources has combined with weak institutional capacity, marking the beginning of a trajectory in which structural inequalities in the education sector have been reinforced. The 1990 reform, intended as a lever to revalue teacher training, was not enough to reverse this trend, reflecting the limitations of public policies in the face of systemic problems.

In the 1990s, the education crisis illustrated a progressive deinstitutionalization of the State, abandoning its responsibility for educational provision, which exacerbated the social marginalization of teachers. Teachers thus find themselves in an ambivalent position: despite their central social role, they suffer from degraded working conditions, particularly through underpayment and a lack of suitable infrastructure. This situation reinforces their social and professional vulnerability, while accentuating tensions with students' families, demonstrating the conflicting issues between social actors in the educational field.

The government's attempt in 2008 to upgrade the status of civil servants, including teachers, through an appropriate salary policy appears to be an insufficient institutional response to a deeper crisis of legitimacy and resources. This dynamic highlights the difficulty of ensuring lasting social recognition for the teaching profession, at the intersection of the political, economic, and symbolic issues that structure contemporary Congolese society.

In 2023, the State established the CAMU for Secondary and Primary School Teachers (MEPPSA), a structure aimed at providing health care to teachers. However, this initiative failed to achieve its objectives, revealing the limitations of the institutional mechanisms intended to support this professional body. Furthermore, teachers face clear social stigma, particularly in access to housing, where landlords are reluctant to rent them living spaces, reflecting social marginalization beyond the professional sphere.

In terms of salaries, a large proportion of teachers employed by the MEPPSA experience structural insecurity: only 75% of them receive a regular salary from the state, while a minority remains excluded from official recognition and remuneration systems, despite having been practicing their profession for more than five years. This institutional exclusion reinforces their socioeconomic vulnerability. For those who receive remuneration, the salary level remains insufficient to guarantee a decent living, forcing teachers to resort to debt.

Thus, these conditions reflect a dual form of exclusion: on the one hand, economic and institutional marginalization that weakens teachers in their social role, and on the other, social devaluation that limits their integration into civil society. These issues highlight the contradictions between official discourses valuing education and the realities experienced by key players in this sector.

1-2: The dynamics of emancipation in the face of vulnerability

The teaching profession, in Congo as in many international contexts, is marked by unstable and precarious working conditions, reflecting a structural disengagement of the State in the education sector. This weakening of the profession is part of a broader context of social and economic devaluation of the teaching function. However, far from being simple passive performers, teachers are developing forms of active resilience (Lantheaume , 2008). Through the construction of close pedagogical relationships with students, investment in innovative systems or collective mobilization, they are reinventing their professional role and redefining the boundaries of their profession. These practices reflect adaptation strategies in the face of systemic constraints, but they struggle to compensate for the lasting effects of structural precariousness, which limits individual and collective room for maneuver. Thus, teaching action oscillates between professional commitment and tensions linked to recognition and the conditions of practice of the profession.

In Congo-Brazzaville, the vernacular expression "fonctionner" is frequently used to describe adaptation strategies deployed in the face of precarious socioeconomic conditions. This expression, rooted in the register of resourcefulness, reflects a practical rationality shaped by the uncertainty and instability of resources. In the educational field, this logic is manifested in particular through the accumulation of professional activities, which constitutes a structural response to insufficient remuneration. Bodumbu (2021) shows that many teachers, constrained by low and irregular salaries, diversify their sources of income by exercising several functions simultaneously or by engaging in parallel commercial activities. This pluriactivity, far from being marginal, tends to become an implicit norm in teaching circles.

Bedford (2020) highlights the intensification of teaching work, often characterized by days exceeding ten hours, without guaranteeing an improvement in living conditions. This professional overload is accompanied by a feeling of social disqualification, encouraging some actors to resort to deviant practices to compensate for material and symbolic deficits. Kodila (2013) mentions in this regard the sale of grades or the granting of better evaluations in exchange for compensation, practices that are part of a widely tolerated system of informal corruption. These behaviors, although morally condemned in official discourse, can be analyzed as forms of informal regulation in a context where institutional norms are weakened and room for maneuver reduced.

It is also important to emphasize that, beyond individual initiatives, forms of collective solidarity, rooted in Congolese culture, constitute social resources mobilized to address the structural constraints weighing on teachers. As Tungisa (2013) analyzes, these practices of solidarity are mainly structured around two mechanisms. The first takes the form of a tontine, an informal rotating savings mechanism through which each member of the group contributes periodically (often a quarter of their salary) to a common fund that is redistributed in turn, thus allowing each member to access a significant sum from time to time. The second is based on interpersonal support networks, activated through ties of kinship, friendship, or community affiliation, which allow teachers to request occasional help when needed.

These informal solidarity logics reveal the modes of adaptation deployed in the face of economic insecurity and institutional deficits that characterize the conditions of the teaching profession. In this context of socio-professional vulnerability, the aim is to question the forms of support that teachers are able to provide to students experiencing academic difficulties, as well as the social logics underlying these support practices. The challenge is to understand how, despite the constraints, teachers can play a role in building resilient educational trajectories.

1-3 : Teacher support as an instrument for reducing trajectory inequalities

From a sociological perspective of education, supporting students in their learning requires taking into account their needs and abilities in a differentiated way, as Rossier (2018) points out. This support cannot be limited to a uniform transmission of knowledge, but must integrate a logic of individualized support, particularly in contexts marked by strong social vulnerabilities. This is particularly the case in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where school dropout constitutes a worrying structural problem.

In this context, teachers find themselves at the crossroads of pedagogical injunctions and social realities. They are increasingly called upon to take on functions that go beyond the strict framework of teaching, in particular by offering emotional, and even material, support to the most vulnerable students. However, as Mwatote (2022) points out, many Congolese teachers themselves live in persistent economic insecurity, which severely limits their ability to intervene financially. Therefore, it is mainly in the register of emotional and symbolic support that their action can be exercised.

This emotional support, often informal and little recognized institutionally, nevertheless plays an essential role in students' academic journey. According to Okito (2020), the encouragement, advice, and recognition provided by teachers contribute to strengthening students' self-esteem, their academic motivation, and their commitment to studies. Teachers then become actors of social regulation in the education system, taking on, in an artisanal but significant way, the functions that more robust institutional systems—such as the presence of school psychologists—could normally assume.

Faced with the lack of these resources, some Congolese teachers take on multiple roles: advisors, mediators, and even career guidance. Their involvement is particularly evident when they identify signs of academic disengagement, such as recurring absenteeism or a sudden drop in academic performance. In such situations, discussions are initiated with students to explore the root causes of their difficulties (socioeconomic, cognitive, family) and to consider workaround strategies: reorganizing time, using income-generating activities, and guiding them toward more economically accessible qualifying or professional courses.

Thus, the Congolese teacher, beyond his pedagogical function, sees himself invested with a role of "school social worker", acting both as an interface between the pupils and an insufficiently resourced educational system, and as an actor in the fight against educational inequalities in a context of strong social insecurity.

From a sociological perspective, teachers appear as determining agents in the processes of secondary socialization and the construction of students' academic trajectory (Pourtois & Cyrulnik, 2007). By providing emotional support and creating a climate of trust, they can promote the emergence of forms of resilience in the face of the destabilizing effects of socioeconomic inequalities. Their educational practices, far from being limited to the transmission of knowledge, participate in the production or compensation of social inequalities. Thus, faced with the risk of school disaffiliation, particularly among students from disadvantaged backgrounds, orientation towards vocational or qualifying training courses can constitute a form of socially regulated alternative to exclusion or marginalization, thus avoiding the use of illegitimate strategies for social survival (Ouédraogo, 2022; Kabongo , 2016).

III.   DISCUSSION

As part of this survey, which aimed to understand the living and working conditions of Congolese secondary school teachers, as well as the practical ways in which they engage in supporting students' academic perseverance, we used a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted with 26 teachers, mostly working in the public sector, at both primary and secondary levels.

The surveyed population is composed mainly of men (20 out of 26), reflecting a certain gender distribution of teaching positions in the Congolese context. In terms of marital status, the diversity of statuses (married, single, divorced, widowed) suggests heterogeneous family configurations, likely to influence career paths and relationships with work. It should be noted that the majority of respondents have significant family responsibilities, with more than three children in their care for 15 of them, which highlights the tensions between professional demands and domestic obligations in a constrained socioeconomic context.

In terms of professional experience, seniority trajectories appear marked: twelve teachers have more than ten years of seniority, eight have between fifteen and twenty years of experience, and six have a career of more than twenty years. This distribution reveals forms of professional stabilization that can condition teaching practices and representations of the profession.

The interviews were conducted in Congolese territory, within a time frame adjusted to the teachers' availability, highlighting the organizational constraints that weigh on their daily professional lives. The subjects' participation was voluntary, and each interview, lasting less than an hour, allowed for the collection of discursive material focused on lived experiences, strategies implemented to deal with students' academic difficulties, and representations of the teaching role in an educational environment marked by structural inequalities.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed with the participants' informed consent. To rigorously report on them, we used the interpretative phenomenological analysis method (Antoine & Smith, 2017), structured in six stages. This methodological choice emerged as the most relevant for capturing teachers' subjective experiences in their relationship to the profession, based on their placement in a specific socio-institutional context: that of the Congolese education system.

The analysis was conducted manually, without software support, focusing exclusively on the verbal language produced by the respondents. It began with a phase of immersion in the data (listening to and rereading the interviews), followed by the identification of recurring patterns allowing salient themes to emerge. Each theme was then the subject of an interpretative elaboration, centered on the meanings attributed by the actors to their professional experience, while placing them in the social, cultural and institutional logics that run through them.

The central aim of this research is to examine the ways in which Congolese teachers construct forms of meaning around their practices, and to identify the strategies they develop to meet institutional expectations in a context often marked by strong structural constraints. The results we present reflect these processes through a series of major themes emerging from the analysis.

It should be emphasized that, in accordance with the interpretative approach adopted, the results are not intended to produce statistical generalizations. Rather, they offer a situated, dense, and contextualized reading of teaching experiences, allowing for a better understanding of the tensions, adjustments, and resources mobilized in the accomplishment of educational work within the Congolese system.

IV.   DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The survey results are structured around four cross-sectional axes of analysis: living conditions, schooling conditions, adaptation logics deployed by students, as well as the forms of institutional and informal support they receive. The sociological interpretation of these dimensions is based on a connection between students' discourses, collected through interviews, and the social dynamics that structure their educational trajectory. These verbatim accounts allow us to grasp, in their depth, the subjective experiences of adolescents confronted with educational inequalities.

1-3: The lives behind the school careers

The analysis of the testimonies collected highlights the economic and social precariousness that characterizes the living conditions of the individuals surveyed, profoundly conditioning their educational path. The latter experience structural difficulties in accessing stable and decent housing, securing their financial resources, and meeting recurring expenses such as paying rent. These material constraints are accompanied by problems related to hygiene, privacy, and basic conditions of comfort, which directly affect their ability to mobilize for academic requirements. Thus, social inequalities translate into concrete obstacles in the exercise of schooling and in access to educational resources, highlighting the determining role of living conditions in the reproduction of educational inequalities.

" *Ah, it's complicated! First of all, I have trouble finding decent housing with my salary; I haven't been able to save any money* ." Excerpt from an interview with a junior high school teacher.

" *I live in Mikalou . I rent a two-room house with two of my children and two of my grandsons; the rest are at home. Hygiene and privacy conditions are not respected. We have difficulty accessing water."* Excerpt from an interview with a secondary school teacher

" *Apart from my two children, I have one nephew in my care. I rent a two-room house. I don't really like this place because of the flooding and my landlord's bad behavior. As soon as I'm late with the rent, he starts insulting me and saying nonsense about me. But as soon as we pay, I have to repay the debts I've incurred throughout the month, and as a result, I find myself empty-handed, forced to borrow again to make it to the end of the month."* Excerpt from an interview with a junior high school teacher.

The teachers interviewed are faced with living and working conditions marked by material and symbolic constraints that affect their physical and mental health. According to Bourdieusian theory, these difficulties limit their accumulation and mobilization of the cultural and social capital necessary for effective teaching practice. Furthermore, institutional constraints reinforce their subordinate position in the educational field, restricting their scope for autonomy and innovation. These factors contribute to perpetuating the mechanisms of social reproduction, to the extent that teachers, as agents of the system, see their ability to compensate for students' social inequalities diminished, thus consolidating educational disparities.

1-4: The social role of the teacher in the reproduction or transformation of educational inequalities

Teachers operate in an institutional context marked by structural constraints that hinder their ability to fully fulfill their educational mission. They must contend with material obstacles, such as access difficulties linked to transport infrastructure and unfavorable environmental conditions, which reflect territorial inequalities that directly impact their professional practice. Furthermore, overcrowded classes reflect tensions related to human resource management in the school system, accentuating the precariousness of teaching conditions. The deficit in teaching resources, particularly in documentary resources, illustrates the institutional and budgetary disparities between establishments, forcing teachers to mobilize their own resources or to deploy informal strategies to compensate for these deficiencies. Finally, long working hours and low economic recognition highlight the power relations and social tensions within the teaching profession, which is suffering a form of devaluation despite its central role in the reproduction of knowledge and the socialization of new generations.

" *Normally, the school should provide transportation for its staff, which is not the case. We are forced to rent in unsanitary neighborhoods so that we can live near the workplace and come on foot. Even that doesn't protect us from bad weather. The school doesn't buy books and leaves that to the teachers* ." Excerpt from an interview with a high school teacher.

" *There are difficulties in better supervising children because of the overcrowded classrooms; imagine, it's difficult to progress in the subject and we can't give homework every day...* " Excerpt from an interview with a high school teacher.

" *I don't like my workload, which is too demanding (28 hours per week), nor my pay, because it doesn't even allow me to meet basic needs. It's shameful to constantly ask your family for money, when they know you're working somewhere...* " Excerpt from an interview with a college teacher.

Respondents emphasize that the precarious material and institutional conditions in which they practice their profession negatively impact their professional capacities, thus revealing how structural constraints affect the quality of teaching and perpetuate educational inequalities .

" *In classrooms, students are poorly seated and study in poor conditions. At home, it's the same thing; we pay for services from Energie Electrique du Congo, but they don't provide you with electricity, and you don't have electricity to prepare your lessons in the evenings. How can we be more efficient and more competent at work? How can we be expected to provide quality teaching?* " Excerpt from an interview with a middle school teacher.

In a context marked by precarious and undervalued working conditions, a significant majority of teachers surveyed perceive the practice of the profession as a transitional stage rather than a lasting commitment. This professional instability is part of a broader social dynamic where the choice of the teaching profession often results from a subordinate position in the labor market. Indeed, many of them access this function not by vocation, but by default, having been unable to integrate other more valued or better paid professional sectors. This phenomenon thus reveals the mechanisms of social reproduction and the structural constraints that influence the professional path, highlighting that teaching is frequently a career by default rather than a fully assumed choice.

" *We know that in Congo, it's not easy to find work, the opportunity presented itself in teaching and I didn't hesitate. If the opportunity presented itself to change careers, I wouldn't hesitate, but until now the opportunity to change careers has never presented itself* ." Excerpt from an interview with a college teacher.

" *I ended up as a teacher through a combination of circumstances. If the opportunity arose to change careers, I wouldn't hesitate for a second because the working conditions aren't good, and we're paid a pittance* ." Excerpt from an interview with a teacher at the Collège.

The lack of financial recognition for teachers is part of a structural dynamic of devaluation of educational work within society. This economic devaluation leads to a progressive disengagement of educational actors, who, constrained by precarious material conditions, reduce their professional investments, both in course preparation and in student support or pedagogical innovation. This phenomenon reflects a tension between institutional requirements and available resources, exacerbated by the need for many teachers to hold several jobs to ensure

their livelihood. This double time and energy burden limits their ability to fully meet academic expectations, thus contributing to a reproduction of educational inequalities. Moreover, the massive departure of qualified teachers to sectors offering better conditions illustrates the skills drain that further weakens the public school system. This situation reveals a contradiction at the heart of educational policies: while schools are presented as vectors of equality and social cohesion, they suffer from institutional management that guarantees neither the recognition nor the necessary resources for their staff, accentuating disparities and compromising the very legitimacy of the educational institution.

1-4: Educational adaptations and inequalities

Accommodation strategies refer to the mechanisms by which teachers attempt to manage, or even circumvent, the structural and institutional constraints they face in the exercise of their profession. Rather than simply individual adaptations, these strategies reflect forms of resistance and adjustment to a professional context marked by tensions between institutional demands, social expectations, and the material realities of the field.

Analysis of the interviews reveals that these teachers employ a variety of practices—whether reinterpreting pedagogical prescriptions, modulating their interactions with students, or redefining their professional role—in order to maintain a fragile balance between professional commitment and external constraints. These accommodation strategies can be understood as situated responses, shaped by the teachers' specific social conditions, but also by the power dynamics and organizational logics specific to the education system. They thus reflect the tensions inherent in the educational mission in a context of social inequalities and institutional transformations.

The situation of teachers holding multiple jobs is part of an institutional framework where the resources allocated to education remain insufficient, revealing structural flaws in the management and financing of the school sector. The educational institution, supposed to be a place of knowledge transmission and civic socialization, is thus crisscrossed by contradictions linked to the precariousness of its staff. The holding of multiple jobs, whether in different public institutions or between public and private sectors, reflects an institution incapable of ensuring stable and decent working conditions for its teachers. Furthermore, some teachers simultaneously hold administrative positions in ministerial offices, which also demonstrates the circulation between the political and educational spheres, and highlights a certain porosity of roles and statuses in these spaces.

Economically, this plurality of activities reflects the material insecurity that affects a large proportion of educational staff. The need to diversify sources of income forces teachers to adopt adaptation strategies that are often invisible in official discourse. This plurality also reveals the existence of a fragmented labor market, where full-time , well-paid jobs are rare, and where salaried employment is often supplemented by informal employment. Teaching is no longer enough to guarantee an acceptable standard of living, forcing teachers to negotiate their social position through entrepreneurial or informal practices.

Finally, the informal dimension, particularly commercial activities carried out within or outside of schools, illustrates the ambivalent relationships between institutional norms and local social practices. These activities, sometimes referred to as "diversions" or "petty fraud," can be analyzed as forms of resistance or adaptation to heavy economic constraints. They reflect a pragmatic way of circumventing the limits imposed by a rigid institution, while meeting immediate economic needs. These practices also contribute to the reproduction of educational inequalities by introducing parallel economic logics into the educational space that can divert attention from pedagogical missions.

" *The salary is insufficient, how can I be satisfied with it? Luckily for me, I have a small bread business at the Moungali market, that's what keeps me going* ." Excerpt from an interview with a college teacher.

" *When you choose to become a teacher, you condemn yourself to poverty. Without the extra work I do as a tutor outside of my working hours, I would struggle to meet my daily food needs* ." Excerpt from an interview with a high school teacher.

The teaching profession, in the socio-economic context of Congo-Brazzaville, is characterized by a structuring duality. On the one hand, it offers a certain temporal flexibility, with adjusted schedules and extended vacation periods, which can constitute a temporal space conducive to engagement in other forms of activity, whether institutionalized or informal. On the other hand, this profession is marked by persistent wage insecurity: the often insufficient remuneration does not allow many teachers to fully meet their basic needs and those of their families. This economic insufficiency leads them to develop economic survival strategies, investing in informal activities

such as commerce, private tutoring, crafts, or agriculture. Thus, teaching work is part of a broader system of economic and social relations where the profession is not limited to an educational function but also becomes a pivot in the dynamics of social reproduction and income diversification.

Analysis of our interviews reveals that support between individuals appears to be an essential solidarity mechanism, indispensable to the social and academic survival of the actors involved. This need for solidarity underlines the collective dimension of education, where individual resources are insufficient in the face of structural constraints, and where cooperation becomes a strategy to overcome inequalities and ensure inclusion.

" *...Too many hours of work and little pay. If it weren't for my friends and family helping me out from time to time, I don't think the kids and I would still be on this earth* ." Excerpt from an interview with a high school teacher.

" *When we have financial difficulties, school doesn't help us, and the daily changing prices of food at the market don't help. The tontine we organize with colleagues helps me send my own children to school and keep me going* ." Excerpt from an interview with a high school teacher.

In many rural areas, community mobilization, particularly through the creation of parent-teacher committees, illustrates a process of co-construction of the school as a social institution. These initiatives demonstrate a dynamic of local participation that contributes to strengthening the social capital of rural communities. By supporting teachers, these committees play a crucial role in stabilizing the teaching force and improving teaching conditions, which promotes better educational quality. This phenomenon can be interpreted as a collective response to the structural inequalities linked to the rural context, where institutional resources are often limited, thus highlighting the importance of social networks and community engagement in reproducing or transforming educational relationships.

Beyond institutional or collective adaptation strategies, some teachers mobilize an essential symbolic resource to overcome the material and organizational constraints of their work: their professional commitment, often conceptualized as a vocation or a passion. This emotional and identity investment in the teaching profession constitutes a cultural and moral capital that supports their perseverance in the face of difficult working conditions. Moreover, the hope of a future improvement in their professional situation functions as a psychological lever, helping to maintain their motivation. Thus, this subjective dimension of attachment to the educational mission reveals how internalized dispositions and temporal anticipations can influence professional trajectories in the educational field, beyond purely objective constraints .

" *I do my job with all my heart because I love teaching; it's the government that ruins this beautiful profession* ." Excerpt from an interview with a high school teacher.

" *I like teaching; it's a passion of mine. I won't change my career, no matter what difficulties I face* ." Excerpt from an interview with a college teacher.

In the constrained socio-economic context of Congo-Brazzaville, teachers develop forms of accommodation that are part of social logics deeply rooted in their environment. The use of community solidarity, often mediated by the principle of the "social family," reflects a form of social regulation based on mechanisms of mutual aid and reciprocity. This solidarity, which is similar to what Durkheim calls mechanical solidarity, is based on common membership in a social group sharing the same vulnerabilities. However, this form of support faces its own structural limitations, as the homogeneity of the difficulties experienced by the majority often makes this mutual aid ineffective in the face of teachers' material and professional challenges.

Faced with the inadequacy of these community resources, teachers mobilize other adaptation strategies, which fall under forms of individual or emotional coping. Attachment to the profession and emotional investment in the teaching profession thus constitute subjective resources allowing them to give meaning to their professional commitment, despite precarious working conditions. These forms of symbolic mobilization demonstrate an ability to maintain a positive professional identity in a context of social devaluation of the profession.

However, the adoption of parallel economic strategies, such as the accumulation of professional activities, illustrates the tensions between the need for subsistence and the demand for quality in the exercise of the teaching function. This accumulation, although it constitutes a pragmatic response to precariousness, generates deleterious effects both on the health of teachers and on their professional availability, thus revealing the structural contradictions facing the profession in the context of a weakened social state .

1-5: Support without stigmatizing? The paradoxes of helping adolescents

Despite the precariousness of their own professional situation, teachers strive to maintain an educational connection with struggling students in order to prevent school dropouts. When asked about the forms of support they can provide, the majority of teachers cite primarily emotional support, based on listening, encouragement, and individualized advice. This type of support, although based on a care logic, reflects both an adaptation to the structural shortcomings of the institution and a desire to compensate for the effects of social inequalities on educational trajectories.

"Yes, I encourage my students to be brave and stay in school. Because you never know what the future holds." Excerpt from an interview with a high school teacher.

"They are my children, when one of them is expelled from school for non-payment of school fees and misses my class, it hurts me deeply. But I can't do anything about it, I just ask them to continue coming to school on the days when we don't expel them." Excerpt from an interview with a middle school teacher.

In a context marked by educational inequalities and exclusion, some teachers engage in differentiated support practices, aimed at compensating for the harmful effects of institutional marginalization. Thus, informal or extracurricular support systems are put in place to allow students in difficulty - often those who have experienced trajectories of exclusion - to attempt partial reschooling and rebuild a more positive relationship with the educational institution. Other teachers, aware of the economic constraints weighing on working-class families, direct certain students towards employment opportunities in the informal sector, allowing them to support themselves while continuing their education, even if intermittently. These initiatives reflect a form of professional investment that exceeds institutional expectations and contributes, in an ambivalent manner, to the local management of structural inequalities.

"As I am often in order with my subject plans, I use weekends before noon and the mornings of public holidays to give catch-up lessons to students who have missed classes." Excerpt from an interview with a high school teacher.

"I don't have the means to help them. However, I direct some students toward small objects in the city, so they'll be able to manage them well." Excerpt from an interview with a middle school teacher.

It should be noted that several teachers express a feeling of helplessness in the face of the distress experienced by some students. This dismay partly reflects the structural limitations of the school institution in responding to the multiple needs of a socially heterogeneous youth population. While some teachers doubt the effectiveness of support systems based solely on individual counseling, others note a form of symbolic disqualification of adult speech, perceived by students as lacking legitimacy, or even disconnected from their social realities. This situation calls into question the ability of the school to fulfill its integrative function in a context marked by persistent social inequalities and a distancing from academic standards by some young people.

"How can we help them? We give lessons and good advice for life, if a student decides to drop out, we can't do anything. Besides, they won't come and tell you they want to drop out, you'll just see the facts afterwards." Excerpt from an interview with a high school teacher.

"Well, the best I can do to support young people is to give them advice... But I have the impression that most students don't follow the advice we give them, youth delinquency is too high in Brazzaville and it's reflected in the schools." Excerpt from an interview with a middle school teacher.

Overall, it appears that teachers are heavily invested in their mission, mobilizing significant personal and professional resources to prevent dropouts. However, this involvement frequently comes up against unfavorable structural conditions (lack of resources, professional isolation, institutional pressure), which creates a lasting feeling of powerlessness among many teachers. This experience, often described as emotionally and cognitively challenging, contributes to a form of professional burnout, even compassion fatigue, revealing the tensions between individual commitment and the systemic limits of the educational institution.

V.   DISCUSSION

The study highlights the precarious conditions in which the teaching profession in the Republic of Congo operates, a precariousness that is part of a broader logic of reproducing social inequalities. Overwork, low pay, insufficient professional qualifications, and the deterioration of school infrastructure appear to be the effects of a structural configuration marked by a chronic deficit of state investment in the field of education. Far from embodying an elite endowed with the educational capital supposed to guarantee social mobility, Congolese teachers occupy a dominated position in the social space, caught in a vicious circle where their own precariousness limits their ability to effectively transmit cultural capital. This dominated position is all the more marked as it is accompanied by a weakening of pedagogical relationships, in a context where juvenile delinquency makes the imposition of legitimate authority more difficult. This results in a structural contradiction: the educational institution, which is supposed to compensate for inequalities, tends on the contrary to reproduce them, in a society where access to education remains conditioned by the social and economic position of individuals.

While teachers play a central role in the dynamics of school retention—by contributing to the construction of a supportive educational framework, spotting the first signs of disengagement, consolidating students' academic achievements, and maintaining a relationship with families—their ability to fully exercise this role comes up against the limits imposed by the system. In a context where educational policies tend to individualize responsibilities while reducing professional room for maneuver, how can teachers assume the role of "school resilience tutors," particularly for the most vulnerable groups, without sufficient institutional recognition or sustainable structural support?

It is this tension that our survey sought to explore: to what extent are Congolese teachers—whether they work in the public or private sector—still able to invest their professional role as a vehicle for socializing and supporting adolescents in a context marked by strong structural constraints? One of the major findings is that these school stakeholders devote a significant portion of their time and energy to compensating for the chronic inadequacy of their remuneration through parallel activities. This mobilization of resources outside the school field, which has become necessary to ensure their own subsistence, is to the detriment of pedagogical investment and individualized monitoring of students. This gap between the demands of the profession and the resources actually available gives rise to a feeling of professional burnout and disenchantment with their educational mission. However, despite this precariousness, some teachers develop circumventing practices and forms of differentiated engagement in order to keep adolescents on an academic trajectory. It remains to be seen how long such strategies can continue in an education system where the logic of individual survival tends to supplant the collective aims of school.

Sociological analysis shows that the quality of teaching cannot rest solely on teachers themselves. They work in a context where their human and emotional resources are limited. It is therefore important that educational policies take into account their working and living conditions, as well as the social and material constraints that influence their profession.

Academic success depends largely on the conditions in which teachers work: their salary, their ongoing training, and the support they receive. Moreover, schools, which are also social spaces where various inequalities intersect, often suffer from a lack of adequate infrastructure. This impacts the work of teachers and the opportunities of students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Public authorities have a key role to play: they must guarantee decent and stable salaries, offer regular training, and improve teachers' working conditions. These measures are essential to reduce educational inequalities and enable teachers to better support young people in their educational journey and future.

It should be emphasized that the responsibility for academic engagement is collective and relies on the interaction between several social actors. Families, as the primary socialization agencies, play a key role in accompanying and supporting their children's academic practices, thus helping to strengthen cooperation with teachers. This educational co-construction requires a coordinated mobilization of different spheres—family, school, and institutional—to address the complex challenges of adolescent success. Furthermore, improving educational conditions in the Congolese context cannot be reduced to the individual initiative of teachers alone, who are often overworked and faced with limited resources, which reveals the structural constraints weighing on the system. Sustainable transformation therefore requires integrated management, involving public policies, educational actors, and families, in order to overcome the institutional and social fragilities that hinder young people's academic progress.

The quality of youth education is a central issue for the social and economic future of a society. As future actors and agents of transformation, young people represent essential human capital for the reproduction and evolution of social structures, as well as for the construction of active citizenship. Their education is not limited to a simple transfer of knowledge, but is part of a complex social process that influences social mobility, social

cohesion, and the collective capacity to address contemporary challenges, particularly those related to socioeconomic inequalities and environmental changes.

In this context, teachers occupy a strategic position, acting as cultural and social mediators within educational institutions. However, their action takes place within a broader institutional and political context, where recognition and material and symbolic support are essential to ensure their effectiveness. The responsibility for educating young people cannot therefore be attributed solely to teachers; it requires collective mobilization and equitable redistribution of educational resources to guarantee access to quality education, a key factor in social justice and sustainable development for the Congo.

VI. CONCLUSION

School dropout in Congo is a major issue that significantly affects human and socioeconomic development. This phenomenon must be analyzed from a sociological perspective, taking into account the complexity of the structural, cultural, and institutional factors that underlie it. Teachers occupy a central position in this issue, as social actors confronted with contradictions between vocation, professional commitment, and systemic constraints.

The teaching profession has historically been invested with a strong symbolic dimension. Indeed, the teacher is socially perceived as an essential vector for the transmission of knowledge and a pillar of the community, which gives their role a normative legitimacy. However, this ideal-typical image is in tension with the concrete realities on the ground: precarious working conditions, limited material resources, and insufficient continuing education policies. These elements reflect an institutional and social devaluation of the profession, which affects motivation and the quality of professional commitment.

The constraints faced by teachers are part of a broader context of institutional deficits, characterized by schools often in poor condition, overcrowded classes, as well as low and irregular salaries. This situation generates a form of precariousness that weakens the stability and effectiveness of the teaching staff. Furthermore, the absence of an institutional system of psycho-pedagogical support limits the intervention capacities of teachers when dealing with students in difficulty, thus contributing to the worsening of school dropout rates.

From a sociological perspective, school dropout must be understood as the product of a complex interaction between socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors. Family poverty, the persistence of sexist norms favoring the differentiated schooling of boys, early motherhood, and economic imperatives leading to child labor are major structural determinants. Added to this are logistical and security constraints that reinforce territorial inequalities in access to education.

Finally, the relationship between disengaged teachers and students reveals the limitations of an education system facing multidimensional challenges. The lack of resources and appropriate training often leaves teachers powerless to address the dropout phenomenon, which can lead to professional disengagement and even exhaustion. This observation underlines the importance of an integrated approach to educational policies, combining social recognition of teachers, strengthening material and institutional resources, and taking into account the social determinants of school dropout. In other words, the sociological analysis of school dropout in Congo highlights the need to address this issue beyond individual responsibilities alone, by integrating the social, cultural, and institutional dynamics that shape educational pathways. Revaluing the teaching profession and reducing structural inequalities thus appear to be essential levers for improving schooling and promoting inclusive development.

In light of the preceding analyses, it appears essential to integrate in-depth modules on student psychology, school dropout management, and inclusive pedagogy into teacher training. This knowledge mobilizes an understanding of socialization mechanisms and differentiated educational trajectories, often marked by social inequalities of class, gender, or ethnicity. Inclusive pedagogy thus aims to reduce the phenomena of exclusion and marginalization, while taking into account the diversity of students' habits and cultural capital (Bourdieu), in order to promote real equality of opportunity.

However, the transformation of schools cannot be separated from the structural conditions that shape the teaching profession. Improving salaries, modernizing infrastructure, and reducing staffing levels are all essential levers for revaluing this profession, which is often perceived as socially devalued, particularly in a context where teachers are subject to the effects of power relations and neoliberal public policies that tend to individualize responsibility for academic failure. This revaluation also requires continuing education, which must include awareness campaigns on the symbolic and material recognition of the profession, as well as incentive schemes such as incentive bonuses. These measures contribute to rebuilding teachers' social capital and strengthening their position within the educational field.

Furthermore, strengthening family-school collaboration is part of an interactionist perspective where education is understood as a shared social process. The mobilization of parents and local communities promotes

broader socialization, involving different educational agents and taking into account the socio-economic conditions of families. This articulation is part of a multisectoral approach that links education to other social spheres—health, transportation, child protection, the fight against poverty—thus highlighting the intersectional nature of the determinants of academic success.

Ultimately, the teaching profession in Congo finds itself at a crossroads: driven by a vocation that stems from a strong ethical and social commitment, it is nevertheless weakened by structural constraints inherited from social inequalities and insufficient educational policies. Yet, as agents of socialization and social reproduction, teachers occupy a central place in the fight against school dropout, which more broadly reflects the tensions between the reproduction of inequalities and the promise of emancipation through education. For schools to once again become a true place of equal opportunity and a future for all children, it is essential to support and revalue teachers—the true "architects" of the education system—so that they can fully play their role in building a more just society.

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