



Development pathways for the DRC to 2050

Education

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Education

The Congolese education system is a hybrid. It is made up of public secular schools and religiously affiliated schools. The Catholic Church is by far the most important actor in the DR Congo's education system and this was so from the very early stages of the colonial period. The Church organises most of the education and the state provides (at least in theory) the funding.

The duration of compulsory basic education is six years for children between six and eleven years old. Although there is a three-year pre-primary education, it is only available in a few urban areas.

Secondary education has two components (*cycle long* and *cycle court*). The *cycle long* consists of the first stage of two years of general studies called *tronc commun* or *cycle d'orientation*. The second stage of four years of specialisation ends with a certificate called the *Diplôme d'Etat* for those who pass the terminal examination called the *Examen d'Etat* which grants access to tertiary education. The *cycle court* concerns vocational education and consists of a four-year course starting immediately after primary education, or a three-year course after the first stage of the *cycle long*.^[1]

The regular age for lower secondary education is 12 to 13 years and 14 to 17 years for upper secondary education. Repetition is permitted only once in each stage.^[2]

The DR Congo has recorded a notable improvement in indicators related to education over the past 15 years. The adult literacy rate (population aged 15 years and older) experienced an improvement from 61.2% in 2007 to 79.5% in 2019. Higher literacy rates improve employment prospects for the poor, and hence, an opportunity to get themselves out of extreme poverty. IFs forecasts the literacy rate in the DR Congo at 98% by 2050, well above the average for low-income Africa (91%).

Chart 7: Selected educational indicators

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Generally, the DR Congo is on par with its peers in terms of primary and secondary school participation rates (Chart 8).

Chart 8: Education outcomes, 2019



Geography	Primary		Lower secondary		Upper secondary		Tertiary	
	Gross enrolment rate	Completion rate	Gross enrolment rate	Completion rate	Gross enrolment rate	Completion rate	Gross enrolment rate	Graduation rate
DRC	111.2%	52.7%	63.0%	35.0%	39.4%	23.5%	7.0%	5.3%
Low-income Africa	106.1%	57.7%	48.8%	33.4%	24.6%	17.3%	7.8%	5.1%
Low-income globally	104.6%	62.7%	54.2%	37.6%	30.7%	21.9%	9.7%	6.0%
Sub-Saharan Africa	103.3%	73.4%	60.3%	46.0%	38.4%	28.0%	10.1%	5.8%

Source: IFs version 7.54; historical data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics

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Share

The education completion rate is very low regardless of the level. Because of low completion and transition rates right from the primary level, fewer students are eligible for subsequent education levels and the resultant outcomes get poorer. It is estimated that half of the students who enrol at universities drop out before their third year. Some of the root causes of low educational outcomes in the country are widespread malnutrition, the difficulty for the students to switch from their mother tongue to learning in French, and especially, financial constraints. In a survey conducted in 2018, about 64% of households mentioned that financial constraints were the main obstacle to their children's education.[3]

Although free primary education in public schools is enshrined in the 2006 Constitution and included in the education law adopted in 2014, it was not applied until September 2019 after a decision by the newly-elected President Tshisekedi. This gives an additional 2.5 million children access to primary education.[4] Previously parents had to pay two-thirds of school costs which most households were unable to afford and often had to choose between feeding their children or keeping them in school.[5]

The free primary education programme is widely supported, but the decision to implement it raises concerns about the government's capacity to shoulder the associated cost (teachers' salaries, etc.) estimated at more than US\$1 billion annually, and the material capacity of the educational system to absorb such a massive influx of learners.

Female education in the DR Congo has experienced some improvements, but more needs to be done to close the gap between female and male education, especially at secondary and tertiary levels. The improvement is more significant in

primary education. For instance, the parity ratio in primary education increased from 0.81 in 2007 to 0.90 in 2015 and was estimated at 0.99 in 2019. The parity ratio in secondary education was 0.70 in 2019, up from 0.5 in 2007. The parity ratio at tertiary level improved from 0.35 in 2007 to roughly 0.60 in 2019.[6]

This improvement in gender equality in education augurs well for productivity and growth in the DR Congo. Educating girls improves not only the average level of human capital in a country but also generates female-specific effects such as decreasing fertility and child mortality rates, as well as benefits on children's health and education that contribute to economic growth.[7]

Although the DR Congo has made significant progress in getting more children into school, the quality of education they receive is poor and not well suited to the needs of the job market. This remains a major challenge facing the education system. Learners in the DR Congo score 318 out of 625 on the Harmonised Test Scores while the average African learner scores 374; 625 represents advanced attainment while 300 represents minimum attainment. The country ranked 40th out of 44 African countries on educational quality.[8]

The main factors explaining this low quality of education are the shortage of teaching staff with the required skills, obsolete equipment and overcrowded classrooms.[9] The education sector is underfunded; the government spending on education was about 2.5% of GDP in 2019 while the sub-Saharan African average was 4.3% of GDP.

There are promising efforts towards the improvement in the quality and quantity of education and hence human capital in the DR Congo. On 16 June 2020, the World Bank approved US\$1 billion in loans and grants to support the education and health sectors in the DR Congo. Specifically, US\$800 million will be used to roll out the free primary education programme in the poorest provinces such as the Centre, East and Kinshasa. The funds will also be used to strengthen governance in the education system as well as to improve the quality of education.

According to the World Bank, the programme will provide more than one million poor children, currently excluded from the education system, with access to education, while US\$200 million will be used to respond to health emergencies in 14 provinces, particularly for mothers and children.[10]

Endnotes

1. World Bank, Education in the Democratic Republic of Congo: [Priorities and Options for Regeneration](#), World Bank Country Study, Washington, DC: World Bank, 2005
2. World Bank, Education in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Priorities and Options for Regeneration, World Bank Country Study, Washington, DC: [World Bank](#), 2005
3. World Bank, ['When I grow up, I'll be a teacher.' The new ambitions of Congolese schoolchildren now that school is free](#), World Bank, 16 June 2020
4. World Bank, ['When I grow up, I'll be a teacher.' The new ambitions of Congolese schoolchildren now that school is free](#), World Bank, 16 June 2020
5. World Bank, ['When I grow up, I'll be a teacher.' The new ambitions of Congolese schoolchildren now that school is free](#), World Bank, 16 June 2020
6. [UNESCO Institute for Statistics](#), 2020
7. World Bank, World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development, Washington, DC: World Bank, 2012.
8. African Economic Outlook, Developing Africa's workforce for the future, African Development Bank, 2020.
9. World Bank, Democratic Republic of Congo, Systematic Country Diagnostic, Report No. 112733-ZR, 2018.
10. Agence France-Presse, [The World Bank earmarks US\\$1bn for DR Congo health, education](#), MNA International, 17 June 2020

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Dr Kouassi Yeboua previously worked as a Senior Researcher at AFI, where he led significant ISS studies on the long-term development prospects of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Horn of Africa, Nigeria, Malawi, and Mozambique. His research focuses on development economics, macroeconomics, gender, and economic modeling. He holds a PhD in Economics.

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