



1. Project Data

Project ID P157922	Project Name Education Quality Improvement Project	
Country Congo, Democratic Republic of	Practice Area(Lead) Education	
L/C/TF Number(s) TF-A3052	Closing Date (Original) 28-Feb-2021	Total Project Cost (USD) 99,418,355.74
Bank Approval Date 18-Apr-2017	Closing Date (Actual) 30-Dec-2022	
	IBRD/IDA (USD)	Grants (USD)
Original Commitment	100,000,000.00	100,000,000.00
Revised Commitment	100,000,000.00	99,418,355.74
Actual	99,418,355.74	99,418,355.74

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2. Project Objectives and Components

a. Objectives

The original Project Development Objective (PDO), as stated in the Grant Agreement (Schedule 1, Project Description) and in the Project Appraisal Document, was to improve the quality of learning in primary education and to strengthen sector management.

An August 2020 restructuring revised the PDO: “The Project Development Objectives are to improve the quality of learning conditions in primary education and to strengthen sector management.” This change meant



that the project now aimed to achieve improved learning conditions as opposed to learning outcomes. This ICRR therefore concurs with the ICR that a split rating was necessary, based on the 2020 restructuring.

US\$38.13 million, or 38.5 percent of total Bank financing of US\$99.42 million, was disbursed at the time of the 2020 restructuring.

b. Were the project objectives/key associated outcome targets revised during implementation?

Yes

Did the Board approve the revised objectives/key associated outcome targets?

No

c. Will a split evaluation be undertaken?

Yes

d. Components

The project aimed to benefit children, teachers, and other stakeholders in nine provinces of the DRC. These provinces were selected based on poverty and equity indicators.

The project included three components:

1. Quality of Learning Conditions in Primary Education (appraisal: US\$65.5 million; revised: US\$61.6 million; actual: US\$60.4 million). This component aimed to improve the quality of teaching and learning in primary education through a conducive education environment enabled by the strengthening of Early Childhood Education (ECE), improved teacher training and support, and the provision of instructional materials. It had three subcomponents:

- Strengthening the ECE system for Quality Service Provision through the establishment of national quality standards and interventions to improve ECE teacher competencies.
- Enhancing Teacher Effectiveness under the three dimensions of (i) teacher training, (ii) teacher support, and (iii) teacher management.
- Supporting the Supply Chain of Learning and Teaching Materials through (i) providing and distributing learning and teaching materials to improve literacy and numeracy during the early grades of primary education, and (ii) strengthening the sustainability of the textbook supply chain.

2. Strengthen Sector Management (appraisal: US\$21.8 million; revised: US\$24.7 million; actual: US\$25.2 million). This component aimed to improve knowledge of sector performance and to build systems of accountability to be leveraged in support of improved learning outcomes at the school level, with a special emphasis on girls' learning. The component had three sub-components:

- Institutionalizing Standardized Student Learning Assessment would support the creation of an independent unit responsible for learning assessment.
- Institutionalizing Accountability in the Administrative and Pedagogical Support Chain through the Performance-Based Financing (PBF) Approach/Program. The DRC was a pilot country for the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), which required meeting "stretch indicators" as a



prerequisite for some disbursements. There were three indicators under this project, each of which was valued at US\$10 million, that were tied to the implementation of specific activities (these indicators and the corresponding assessments are further discussed under Efficacy, Section 4). This subcomponent would support technical assistance for the implementation of the PBF so as to incentivize specific results on the part of (i) the offices that provide administrative and pedagogical support to the schools, and (ii) the schools in the implementation of their School Development Plans (SDPs).

- **Support to Girls' Education.** Under the PBF program, girls' education would be promoted through ensuring that textbooks were free of gender stereotyping before their printing and distribution. Incentives would be provided to increase female enrollment, increase in the number of girls participating in student testing, and increase female retention at the end of grade one.

3. Management, Monitoring, and Evaluation of the Program (appraisal: US\$12.7 million; revised: US\$13.7 million; actual: US\$13.8 million). This component would support effective project implementation and coordination, as well as monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of project results and outcomes. Baseline and end-line surveys were to be implemented to assess impact of the PBF and of project activities.

e. **Comments on Project Cost, Financing, Borrower Contribution, and Dates**

The project was fully financed through a GPE grant. At appraisal, total project costs were US\$100 million. Actual disbursements were US\$99.42 million.

The project was approved on April 18, 2017, and became effective on August 9, 2017. It was originally scheduled to close on February 28, 2021. The mid-term review was carried out on September 30, 2019. The project closed on December 30, 2022, after an extension of 22 months.

The project was restructured once, on August 20, 2020, at which stage US\$38.31 million had been disbursed. The restructuring included a change in PDO, where the objective of achieving improved learning outcomes was lowered in ambition to achieving improved learning conditions. There were also significant changes to the results framework. Of the original 13 outcome indicators, 10 were dropped, two were revised, and three new indicators were added. Intermediate and stretch indicators (under the PBF) were also changed. Component descriptions and costs were also modified to align with the change in PDO, as well as to drop several activities that were deemed not to be achievable by the end of the project implementation period. Most notably, teacher training was limited to in-service training, dropping the pre-service component and teacher support activities. Also, all infrastructure activities were dropped. An extension of 22 months was included as well as changes to safeguard policies and implementation schedules.

3. Relevance of Objectives

Rationale

The objectives of the project, as well as the revised objectives, were highly relevant to the DRC's country context. The country had made progress in enrollment at the primary education level from 93 percent in



2005 to 107 percent in 2014, driven mainly by increases in female participation. On the other hand, learning achievement was persistently low, with only 47 percent of students being literate at the end of primary school at the time of project appraisal. Poor achievement was primarily linked to three factors. First, children entered primary school without or with inadequate preschool education. Second, teacher effectiveness was very low, as teachers lacked adequate skills. The teacher training system, both at the preservice and in-service levels, was very weak, and teachers' compensation, work conditions, and professional career path were very poor. Third, while there had been an effort to improve textbook production and distribution, teaching and learning materials were not readily available in the classroom. In large measure, this was caused by the lack of a distribution system that took into account the challenges of the country's climate and topography. Further to this, at the time of appraisal, the government was transitioning to the use of four national languages for the introduction to literacy and early instruction, as opposed to universal education in French. While this change was well aligned with the global evidence on improved learning when literacy is done in the child's mother tongue, the transition was proving to be complex given that work was needed to develop a unified orthography and vocabulary for each of the four languages.

The objectives were well aligned with government strategy. The government's Second Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy Paper (2011-2015) focused on improving the quality of human capital to accelerate growth and promote employment. The education sector was also identified as a priority in the government's National Development Plan (2017-2021). In addition, the government adopted in 2016 an Education and Training Sector Strategy for the period 2016-2025. This Strategy established a sector-wide approach, having as its main objective improving the quality of education, covering all education levels, from ECE to tertiary. In 2020, the government implemented a fee-free schooling policy, which resulted in a large increase in the number of children enrolling in public schools. While the fee-free policy did not affect the relevance of the project's objectives, which were linked to improving quality of education, it raised the stakes given that the system had to cater to a larger number of students, particularly those who were in the poorer segments of the population.

The objectives were also highly relevant to the World Bank's FY13-16 Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) at appraisal and to the FY22-26 Country Partnership Framework (CPF) at closing. The CAS for the DRC included a strategic objective that aimed to improve social services delivery and increase human development indicators, and a specific objective on improving access to basic education in targeted areas. The CPF included a focus area on strengthening systems for improved service delivery and human capital development, under which an objective was included on strengthening systems to increase access to and quality of services in education, health, and social protection.

This project built on prior World Bank experience in the education sector through the GPE-financed Education Sector Project (US\$150 million, FY13-17, P086294), which aimed to support essential primary education services in a context of fragility and violence. This project focused on providing inputs to the primary education level, achieving important results in terms of enrollments, particularly for girls. The project also supported the preparation of the Education and Training Sector Strategy mentioned above.

This project was financed through the GPE, an association of lower income countries and development partners, including the World Bank. The project was aligned to the GPE 2012-2015 Strategic Plan and the extended goals of the GPE 2020 Strategic Plan, which addressed improvement in the quality, efficacy, and efficiency of education in fragile and conflict affected states. The project's design built on the previous GPE



Projet de Soutien a l'Education de Base, (PROSEB), which supported production and distribution of school materials, in-service teacher training, and school management.

Rating

High

4. Achievement of Objectives (Efficacy)

OBJECTIVE 1

Objective

Improve the quality of learning in primary education

Rationale

The theory of change under this objective held that improving the quality of ECE, ensuring adequate teacher training (including preservice and in-service), and making available teaching and learning materials in the classroom would be conducive to improving learning in primary schools.

Outputs

- National Minimum Quality Standards for ECE were adopted.
- At the ECE level, National Minimum Quality Standards were adopted and validated, and parent training modules on ECE activities were developed and delivered through radio, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- A Teacher Training Directorate was established, and the pre-service teacher training curriculum was revised. With respect to in-service training, a module on pedagogical leadership for school directors was developed.
- 80,387 first, second, and third grade teachers were trained in how to effectively teach reading in national languages nationwide, below the target of 150,000 teachers.
- The standardized class observation method was implemented.
- A total of 1,520,000 French textbooks were distributed for third and fourth grade students in schools nationwide, slightly exceeding the target of 1,500,000 textbooks.
- A total of 4,839,869 textbooks in math (first, second, third, and fourth grades) were distributed to schools nationwide, slightly missing the target of 5,000,000 textbooks.
- 2,967,457 textbooks in science (second, third, and fourth grades) were distributed to schools nationwide, slightly missing the target of 3,000,000 textbooks.
- More than 70 percent of textbooks were distributed to schools before the start of the targeted school year, meeting the target.



- 6,400 teachers, who had been previously unpaid, were included in the government payroll, thus contributing to filling needed positions as enrollment of children increased due to the implementation of the fee-free primary education policy.
- The number of direct beneficiaries (students in grades one through four that benefited from textbooks and teachers who benefited from training) was 14,222,497, exceeding the revised target of 11,000,000. While this indicator was expected to be disaggregated by gender, the data were not reported due to difficulties in collecting information in the field.

Some planned activities were not achieved by the time of restructuring, including:

- Implementation of Interactive Audio Instruction in the project provinces.
- Implementation of the standardized class observation method.
- Evaluation of the PBF scheme's impact on learning outcomes.

Outcomes

This objective had ten PDO indicators, only one of which was monitored. The remainder, all of which addressed achievement in learning attainment at different grade levels, were not monitored, as they depended on the implementation of at least two standardized student performance assessments.

- The primary completion rate in the project provinces increased from 69 percent (62 percent for girls) in January 2017 to 71 percent (63 percent for girls) in August 2020, from a baseline of 69 percent (of which 62 were female), not meeting the target of 82 percent (74 for girls). This indicator was dropped as part of the restructuring, as were all indicators on student learning outcomes.

Although the restructuring lowered the bar in terms of measuring student performance in the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), the ICR (p. 22) reported on the results for 2019 (baseline) and 2022 (progress). At the national level, there was some improvement with positive trends for grades two and four. At the provincial level, results were somewhat mixed, with two provinces showing negative results, while seven showed positive trends. As reported by the team, these trends are consistent with the diversity of the country, where poorer and more conflict affected provinces perform worse, overall.

In addition to the outcome indicators, the variable component of the program included three stretch indicators on quality, efficiency, and equity to be disbursed based on performance. These were: (1) Improvement of grade 2 and 4 students' test scores in reading, in French and in national languages, as measured by standardized learning assessments done by teachers and supervised by parents' committees; (2) Reduction of the dropout rate at the end of the first year of primary education, especially in provinces with low internal efficiency; and (3) Elimination of direct school fees across the country for primary schools and reduction of households' out-of-pocket expenses for education. While some progress had been reached for the targets under each of these indicators, none were fully achieved as of project restructuring, and there were no disbursements under the PBF. These indicators were modified as part of the 2020 restructuring.

Rating



Modest

OBJECTIVE 1 REVISION 1

Revised Objective

Improve the quality of learning conditions in primary education

Revised Rationale

The revised objective continued to focus on improving learning, such that the theory of change did not vary significantly. However, the expected outcomes were lowered to improving conditions for learning in the classroom. The increase in enrollment rates resulting from the implementation of fee-free education was expected to have a negative impact on learning in the short to medium term as the system adjusted to an increased number of students in the classroom. Together with this change in objectives, activities were simplified under the project components. For example, activities under pre-service teacher training were dropped. Outcome indicators were modified accordingly.

Revised Outcomes

- The percentage of second grade students with a reading textbook in targeted provinces increased from 30 percent (May 2019) to 80 percent (December 2022), exceeding the target of 70 percent.
- The percentage of fourth grade students with a mathematics textbook in targeted provinces increased from a baseline of 29 percent (May 2019) to 33 percent (December 2022), missing the target of 45 percent.
- The percentage of second grade teachers in targeted provinces who report having and frequently utilizing a teachers' guide for reading increased from a baseline of 65 percent (May 2019) to 93.3 percent (December 2022), exceeding the target of 80 percent.

Under the revision, two of three outcomes were met or exceeded, while one was not achieved. While textbooks distribution was key in order to make them available to students, there was no direct evidence on their use in the classroom, beyond the self-reported data on teachers' use of guides. Thus, while outcomes were mostly met, the evidence was not sufficient to confirm that textbooks contributed to the children's learning process.

Revised Rating

Substantial

OBJECTIVE 2

Objective

Strengthen sector management

Rationale

The theory of change underlying this objective was that sustained positive learning outcomes would be leveraged by improving knowledge of sector performance and building accountability systems, with a particular emphasis on closing the gender gap. Sector performance would be leveraged through the



institutionalization of student performance assessment. The accountability system would rely on school level-initiatives and the use of incentives for improved performance. The gender gap would be addressed by supporting girls' education through communication strategies and outreach interventions.

This objective did not change in the restructuring of 2020, but one PDO indicator was modified to include one additional large-scale standardized test.

Outputs

- The teacher training directorate was established within the Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Technical Education (MEPST), with a clearly defined institutional mandate, in coordination with the Ministry of Civil Service.
- The MEPST elaborated a pre-service teacher training policy and a budget action plan.
- A policy framework providing incentives to better performing teachers and teacher educators was developed and approved.
- Inter-school pedagogical training networks in project provinces met regularly.
- The percentage of school directors in the project provinces that were trained in leadership (including classroom observation and school development plans) was 15.9 percent, well below the target of 80 percent.
- Five communication/sensitization campaigns were carried out, surpassing the target of four campaigns.
- An independent Learning Assessment Unit (*Cellulle Indépendante d'Evaluation des Acquis Scolaires*, CIEAS) was created and was functional.
- The share of targeted schools (under the PBF component) receiving funds for dropout reduction in grade one, as a part of their management plans, was 48.3 percent below the target of 80 percent. It should be noted that during the pre-pandemic school years, the share was 54.1 percent (2018-2019) and 74.4 percent (2019-2020). The lower share at the end of the project was attributed to the recovery process from school closures resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of the fee-free primary school program in a context of limited resources.
- The number of programs and related textbooks that were revised for elimination of stereotypes was 21, surpassing the target of 8.
- Semi-annual communication campaigns to prevent violence against females and early child marriage were conducted. While the target was qualitative (yes/no), the ICR indicated that 716 trainers (of whom 174 were women) were trained, and 2,156 people (of whom 597 were women) benefited from the program.
- Annual campaigns for girls' education were conducted.
- The impact evaluation of the PBF scheme on learning outcomes was carried out. This impact evaluation included an Early Grade Mathematics assessment for grades 2 and 4 as well as assessment of service delivery indicators based on surveys.
- Sector annual reviews were conducted by the Permanent Secretariat of Support and Coordination of the Education sector in 2019 and 2021. The annual review for 2020 could not be carried out due to the pandemic.
- The share of school management plans co-signed by parent committees in targeted schools was 100 percent, well above the 60 percent target. The total number of targeted schools was 1,350.



- The share of schools receiving textbooks where parent or student representatives confirmed receipt was 98 percent, exceeding the target of 65 percent.

Outcomes

- Two large-scale standardized student learning assessments were undertaken in 2020 and 2022, meeting the target.
- Public primary school fees paid in targeted provinces were reduced by 89 percent from 2017 to December 2022, exceeding the target of a 20 percent reduction.

While the two outcome indicators met or exceeded their targets, they did not measure the overall achievement of the Objective as they only referred to the implementation of two student learning assessments, and the reduction of primary school fees. On the other hand, two of the output indicators that were below target were relevant to the objective of strengthening sector management: training of school directors and schools receiving funds for dropout reduction in grade 1.

Achievement of the performance-based financing stretch indicators

As part of the restructuring, stretch indicators were modified to focus on school system management:

- Stretch Indicator 1 was modified to read “reliable measurement of student learning in place, particularly in the early grades.” It had two objectives: (a) the first/baseline evaluation has been conducted, the results are available and have been disseminated, and (b) a student assessment framework for primary education is developed and validated by MEPST. This indicator had an allocation of US\$8 million.
- Stretch indicator 2 was modified to “developing and implementing strategies to reduce dropout” and had two objectives: (a) study on operationalization of government strategies to fight dropout disseminated, and (b) implementation of some strategies to fight dropout begin to roll out. This indicator had an allocation of US\$5 million.
- Stretch indicator 3 was modified to “elimination of direct school fees and reduction of households’ out-of-pocket expenses for primary education.” This indicator had three objectives: (1) government abolishes several major types of school fees, (2) inclusion of 6,400 previously unpaid primary school teachers in government payroll (9 provinces), and (3) the government regularly pays the monthly salaries of the 6,400 newly included primary school teachers (9 project provinces). This last stretch indicator had the highest allocation (US\$17 million) because of the government’s emphasis on fee-free education.

All three stretch indicators described above were fully disbursed. The ICR summarized the positive results from the impact evaluation of the PBF, as follows: (a) the performance level of PBF schools (including indicators on school management, enrollment, and learning outcomes) increased from 30 percent to 85 percent, (b) pedagogical supervision increased by 50 percent, and (c) 75 percent of the 1350 schools obtained a minimum performance level score of 70 percent. In addition, the MEPST secured a new funding line item to sustain PBF activities.



Rating
Substantial

OVERALL EFFICACY

Rationale

Prior to restructuring most outcomes and outputs related to Objective 1 on improved quality of learning were not achieved. On the other hand, outcomes were met under Objective 2 on strengthening sector management. It should be noted that these outcomes did not fully measure the achievement of this objective, while at the same time some key outputs that were key to this objective did not reach their expected targets. This is consistent with a Modest rating.

Overall Efficacy Rating
Modest

Primary Reason
Low achievement

OVERALL EFFICACY REVISION 1

Overall Efficacy Revision 1 Rationale

After restructuring, with the ambition of the first objective adjusted to improvement in learning conditions, two of three outcomes were achieved. In addition, outcomes were largely achieved under the second objective, with caveats as stated above. This is consistent with an overall efficacy rating of Substantial.

Overall Efficacy Revision 1 Rating

Substantial

5. Efficiency

The cost-benefit analysis at appraisal calculated the expected economic benefits from the increase in beneficiaries' future earnings, as a result of the attainment of more school years and improved quality of learning. The analysis used global evidence on the impact of more and better-quality education in order to quantify benefits. These would be derived from: (a) higher rates of enrolment, thus reducing the number of out-of-school children; (b) improved primary completion rates, thus reducing the number of children who would drop out of school; and (c) improvement in the quality of education, raising learning outcomes. In addition, there would be a benefit at the household level, as out-of-pocket expenditures would be reduced through the results-based component in support of the fee-free education policy.

Benefits and costs were quantified as follows. The benefit of including out of school children in the education system was estimated at US\$29.3 million. The benefit associated with primary completion rate was estimated at US\$387 million. The reason for the large difference between the first and second benefit is that the second one



estimates the benefit of the full completion of primary education, which ensures greater returns in the long run. The benefit of improving quality was estimated to be US\$955 million, mostly driven by the improvement in the quality of teachers and, much less so, by the implementation of student performance testing and the implementation of accountability mechanisms using these results. The distribution of textbooks was not included in the calculation, possibly making the estimate a lower-bound. The total costs of the project included the direct project costs (US\$100 million), the expected costs of the student performance assessments between 2018 and 2025 (US\$5.1 million), and the expected added teacher salaries, resulting from better qualified teachers demanding higher compensation (US\$9.1 million). Based on these estimates, the rate of return (IRR) was 16.1 percent, and the Net Present Value (NPV) was US\$295.7 million.

As part of the restructuring of 2020, the economic analysis of the project was revised, resulting in an IRR of 24 percent and a positive NPV of US\$150 million. These estimates included the provision of textbooks and teachers' guides as well as in-service teacher training, as opposed to the focus at appraisal on pre-service teacher training. The differences in IRR and NPV were attributed to the inclusion of costs linked to textbooks and learning materials, the increase in the number of primary school students benefitting from the project as a result of the fee-free policy, and the use of more conservative assumptions on impacts on student attainment.

The ICR also included an economic analysis, calculating an IRR of 16.9 percent and a NPV of US\$587.7 million. The ICR estimates were based on an analysis of the outcomes from Objective 1, where an estimated 4,020,000 students benefited from better teaching and learning conditions. The ICR noted that there were non-quantifiable outputs from the project, including the creation and operation of a learning assessment program, the production of materials in national languages, and the efforts to protect girls against gender-based violence. The sensitivity analysis, which estimated a higher discount rate (12 percent versus 10 percent) and half the impact, still produced an IRR of 13.3 percent and an NPV of US\$230 million. Given that the in-service teacher training was a one-off exercise, and that the number of teachers trained was below the target, the lower bound estimate might be more realistic.

Operational efficiency was difficult during the first phase but improved significantly after restructuring. The Bank had a country-based team that supported implementation, thus facilitating dialogue with the various government units that were part of the project. During the earlier phase of the implementation process, procurement was slow, impacting project implementation. The Bank provided training and, as a result, procurement processes improved. An initial confusion with respect to whether new Teacher Training Institutions (TTI) should be built or whether existing ones should be rehabilitated led to delays and ultimately to the cancellation of planned support for TTIs. The project's closing date was extended by 22 months, allowing for the project to almost disburse fully. The project underwent several other exogenous challenges such as governance and conflict conditions between 2018 and 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced school closures for almost one year in 2020-2021. Finally, the introduction of the fee-free policy in 2020 led to a substantive increase in enrollment of students, prompting the restructuring of the project as the original objective of improved learning outcomes could not realistically be met.

Efficiency Rating

Substantial

a. If available, enter the Economic Rate of Return (ERR) and/or Financial Rate of Return (FRR) at appraisal and the re-estimated value at evaluation:



	Rate Available?	Point value (%)	*Coverage/Scope (%)
Appraisal	✓	16.10	66.00 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
ICR Estimate	✓	16.90	62.00 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable

* Refers to percent of total project cost for which ERR/FRR was calculated.

6. Outcome

Relevance of objectives was rated High in view of the alignment with the CPF at project closing and with the DRC's Education and training Sector Strategy. Efficacy was rated Modest under the objectives and targets prior to restructuring and Substantial under the objectives and targets after restructuring, at which time the project development objectives were partially achieved, but with some shortcomings. Efficiency was Substantial. These ratings produce an Outcome rating of Moderately Unsatisfactory under the original objectives, and Satisfactory under the revised objectives. At the restructuring, 38.5 percent of funds had been disbursed.

Weighting the outcome ratings according to IEG/OPCS guidelines:

- MU (3) * 0.385 = 1.155
- S (5) * 0.615 = 3.075
- 1.155 + 3.075 = 4.230, which rounds to 4, producing an overall Outcome rating of Moderately Satisfactory, indicative of moderate shortcomings in the project's preparation, implementation, and achievement. In particular, the indicators used, and their respective partial achievement, did not ensure that the revised Objective 1, addressing learning conditions in primary education, could be measured adequately.

a. Outcome Rating

Moderately Satisfactory

7. Risk to Development Outcome

The risk to development outcome at the sector level appears to be low. The MEPST showed commitment to the objectives of the project and, even though implementation capacity was reportedly low, the Ministry was able to execute the project effectively after restructuring. In addition, the MEPST secured a funding line item to sustain PBF activities, given the positive results from the impact evaluation. The restructuring process dropped pre-service teacher training as it could not be implemented during the life of the project. This poses a risk in ensuring adequate learning environments, particularly in the context of a major increase in enrollment. This risk was addressed by the Bank through two projects, the Emergency Equity and System



Strengthening in Education project (US\$800 million, 2020-2024, P172341) and the Girls' Learning and Empowerment Project (US\$400 million, 2023-2028, P178684).

The main risk to development outcome is related to the weak governance and poverty conditions in the country. The DRC is highly dependent on the support of development partners for the implementation of education programs. In addition, as the ICR indicated, local conflicts affect the provision of education in several areas of the country.

8. Assessment of Bank Performance

a. Quality-at-Entry

The project design included notable innovations for education projects in the DRC. In particular, the project introduced performance-based financing linked to local accomplishment of specified targets such as school improvement plans. The project also supported the development of learning materials in the national languages, and activities to counter gender-based violence. At closing, these initiatives showed positive results. However, the overall project design was overly ambitious and complex, with “too many [activities] to effectively implement with limited capacity” (ICR, p. 30). The lack of clarity with respect to the TTIs led to the cancellation of these infrastructure activities. In addition, there were capacity constraints at the ECE level such that an Interactive Audio Instruction (IAI) program for teachers and parents had to be cancelled (ICR, p. 32). Furthermore, the project was expected to produce outcomes on improved student performance in a period of less than four years (April 2017-February 2021) in a difficult country context.

While the project was designed using global evidence that allowed for the design of a good quality results chain or theory of change, neither was included in the project design. In addition, the number of PDO and intermediate results indicators was extremely long, making monitoring and evaluation cumbersome. On the other hand, ECE was deemed to be very important, but there were no outcome or output indicators on ECE in the results framework.

The implementation arrangements were mainstreamed within government structures and built on the systems established under the PROSEB project, which was ongoing at the time of appraisal. At that point, fiduciary risk was deemed to be substantial, weaknesses were identified, and remedial actions were agreed upon. The performance-based financing component was designed to have an external verification agency that would need to confirm the compliance of activities before disbursements occurred.

Quality-at-Entry Rating
Moderately Unsatisfactory

b. Quality of supervision



According to the ICR, the World Bank carried out semi-annual supervision missions that included education specialists as well as fiduciary and safeguards staff and consultants. The supervision team consistently reported on project progress as well as compliance with fiduciary and safeguards policies. The team also provided technical assistance to the DRC government agencies involved in the project implementation to improve processes and address challenges.

The World Bank responded to the major challenges faced by the project, albeit relatively late. The project was facing major implementation issues from early 2019, but the mid-term review was only carried out in late September 2019 and the restructuring was approved in August 2020, almost a year later. While this was a major restructuring that would require time to prepare, the lag of time was somewhat long. Further to this, the restructuring did not include ECE indicators to measure the outcomes of the project in this area.

Quality of Supervision Rating

Moderately Satisfactory

Overall Bank Performance Rating

Moderately Satisfactory

9. M&E Design, Implementation, & Utilization

a. M&E Design

M&E was included under the third component on project management. The M&E activities included baseline and end-line surveys, an impact assessment of the PBF (which would be implemented in 1350 schools to be compared with a control group), and a joint evaluation with UNICEF of the ECE intervention. Further to this, student performance evaluation was to be determined through the implementation of the Early Grade Reading Assessment. The project design also included surveys that would measure beneficiaries' perceptions and would serve to report on citizen engagement. Regular monitoring of project implementation would be carried out through annual joint reviews between the government and the Local Education Group. The Project Coordination Team (PCT) was expected to include an M&E specialist who would be responsible for the design of an M&E system during the early stages of the project.

There was a total of 49 indicators, of which 10 were PDO-level indicators. This very large number of indicators made monitoring and evaluation a cumbersome task.

b. M&E Implementation

Prior to restructuring, M&E faced challenges, with difficulties in obtaining data and reporting actually occurring for very few indicators. After restructuring, when the number of indicators was reduced to 27, five of which were at the PDO level, data reporting was more effective, and indicators were reported on a regular basis. The PBF impact evaluation was carried out and third-party validation of activities was implemented, allowing for the PBF component to be disbursed. The baseline and end-line surveys were carried out, and data were collected for a statistical yearbook.



c. M&E Utilization

The ICR reports that the Independent Learning Assessment Unit, even though in its early stages, used the project's assessment and evaluation data to provide feedback on training programs in response to the initial learning results, inform decision makers, and support decision-making on expansion of PBF activities. In addition, the service delivery indicator surveys were used to prepare a GPE project and a proposed girls' project in the DRC. In addition, the MEPST has committed to producing statistical yearbooks on an annual basis.

M&E Quality Rating

Substantial

10. Other Issues

a. Safeguards

At appraisal, the project was rated Category B, Partial Environmental Assessment. The Environmental Assessment (EA) policy (OP/BP 4.01) was triggered to address minor potential environmental and social impacts linked with the construction of four teacher training institutions (TTI). The project also triggered OP/BP 4.11 Physical and Cultural Resources, because the construction of the TTIs would require excavations and thus the potential finding of archeological sites. The corresponding Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) was prepared and disclosed, as per Bank policy, prior to project approval. In addition, OP 4.10 on Indigenous Peoples was triggered because the nine provinces supported by the project were home to indigenous peoples. An Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework (IPPF) was prepared and disclosed.

The restructuring of the project led to partial changes with respect to the safeguard categories. The construction of TTIs was cancelled, and the EA category was changed from B to C. The Indigenous Peoples policy continued to be triggered, as the project area did not change.

A Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM), *Allo Ecole*, was implemented as part of the project within the MEPST. The GRM platform served all the Bank's education projects. In addition, a system supported by UNICEF and United Nations Population Fund received complaints related to sexual exploitation and sexual harassment. The GRM faced implementation challenges, as it did not comply with policies established under the project. These issues were addressed during the implementation process.

Safeguards were monitored during project implementation and were consistently rated as Moderately Satisfactory (MS), mainly due to the challenges faced with the GRM.

b. Fiduciary Compliance



At appraisal, overall fiduciary risk was rated as substantial. The main reason for this rating was the relatively weak implementation capacity in the public sector in the DRC.

A financial management (FM) assessment was carried out at appraisal. Since the project was to be implemented by the same unit that had been implementing a prior Bank project, staffing was found to be satisfactory, but the assessment recommended that two additional FM staff be added to the implementation team. During implementation, interim financial reports were submitted in a timely manner and were of acceptable quality. Audits were unqualified but came with recommendations for improvements, which coincided with Bank supervision mission recommendations. During the life of the project, FM performance was rated as moderately satisfactory.

A procurement assessment was carried out at appraisal, concluding that the risk was high. Even though the implementation unit had been strengthened under the Bank’s previous project, further strengthening was needed. During implementation, procurement was rated mostly as moderately satisfactory, with the exception of one period where it was rated moderately unsatisfactory. The main challenges faced by the project were related to long delays in processing contracts, which resulted in implementation delays. Procurement plans were updated and submitted to the Bank as required. Staff showed adequate capacity for implementation of procurement processes, having received training by the Bank.

c. Unintended impacts (Positive or Negative)

None reported.

d. Other

Not applicable.

11. Ratings

Ratings	ICR	IEG	Reason for Disagreements/Comment
Outcome	Satisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory	The ICR assigned a High efficacy rating after the restructuring, whereas under the ICRR, the efficacy was rated as Substantial. Despite meeting the proposed outcome targets, these did not entirely align with the objective, and there were also shortcomings in delivering some key outcomes relevant to the achievement of the objective



Bank Performance	Satisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory	Project design was overly ambitious. Restructuring was carried out on the third year of a projected implementation period of less than four years.
Quality of M&E	Substantial	Substantial	
Quality of ICR	---	Substantial	

12. Lessons

The ICR provided some important lessons learned, the most relevant of which are summarized below:

Performance based financing (PBF) can be an effective instrument to focus on results rather than inputs. This is particularly relevant for countries such as the DRC, as it shows that PBF strategies can be implemented in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Commitment from the MEPST and the government was key in the implementation of this policy. One particularly important outcome was that, as a result of the incentives posed under the PBF, more female teachers were hired.

Addressing sexual exploitation and harassment is a critical component of any effort to increase enrollment and permanence of girls in schools. The project focused on communications campaigns to raise awareness, removed stereotyping in textbooks, included this topic in teacher and administrator training, and implemented a GRM. Subsequently, two projects will be addressing this cross-cutting area in order to sustain these efforts.

Effective training for teachers goes beyond in-service teacher training. A teacher professional development system includes training at the pre-service and in-service levels as well as continuous support through classroom observation and feedback. This project only provided a short-term training program through cascade trainings. This limitation was recognized by the country and the Bank, and a wider scope of teacher development activities will be supported through the two new projects.

Ensuring that textbooks arrive and are used in the classroom is a critical factor in achieving better learning conditions. The project supported a last-mile textbook distribution system to avoid a previously observed situation where textbooks would arrive at the district level but would not reach the classroom. Logistics are particularly challenging in large countries with underdeveloped infrastructure, difficult climate conditions, and conflict situations.

Defining a realistic results framework is fundamental to the processes of evaluating outcomes and monitoring progress. The original project design had a very large set of indicators to be monitored, with a particularly large number of them at the PDO level. While the restructuring reduced the number of indicators, it was still large. A well-designed theory of change can contribute to the design of indicators, so as to selectively trace project activities and measure results and outcomes.



13. Assessment Recommended?

No

14. Comments on Quality of ICR

The ICR was well written and provided a clear overview of the project. It aptly explained the changes resulting from the restructuring of the project, which was complex and included a great deal of detail. The analysis was results-oriented, and conclusions were based on evidence. The ICR provided two theories of change, one for the period prior up to restructuring, and the other for the period after restructuring, thus compensating for the lack of them at appraisal and restructuring. However, these TOCs were not clear and did not connect well with the project's objectives. Further to this, the ICR did not provide a description of the work with other development partners, while the PAD indicated that coordination was very important in order to generate synergies and avoid overlaps. The PAD also indicated that the ECD pilot would be evaluated jointly with UNICEF, but there was no mention of this in the ICR.

a. Quality of ICR Rating Substantial