

Effective Professional Gestures and Knowledge Transmission Among Primary School Teachers: A Collaborative Approach in the Republic of Congo

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Abstract: *This study aims to understand how effective professional gestures, constructed within peer communities, promote the transmission of knowledge between teachers. Using a qualitative approach based on filmed observations, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis, this research identifies the gestures most frequently mobilized, their perceived effectiveness, as well as the factors favoring or limiting their dissemination. The results show that these gestures, when integrated into collaborative dynamics, contribute significantly to the ongoing professionalization of Congolese primary school teachers.*

Keywords: Effective professional gestures, Knowledge transmission, Primary school teachers, Collaborative approach, Republic of Congo

1. General introduction

Although the Republic of Congo has achieved a relatively high primary school enrolment rate over the past two decades, this quantitative progress remains out of step with the qualitative performance of the education system. Indeed, the unsatisfactory results obtained by Congolese pupils in national and international assessments, such as those of PASEC or UNESCO (2021), highlight a persistent deficit in pedagogical efficiency. This paradox reflects a structural tension between the massification of school access advocated by policies to universalize basic education, and the inadequacy, or even absence, of robust mechanisms to professionalize the teaching profession.

This situation stems from several interdependent factors. On the one hand, the imbalance between initial and in-service training weakens the consolidation and evolution of teachers' professional skills. Initial training, which often follows a top-down logic, remains focused on theoretical knowledge with little contextualization, disconnected from the socio-cultural and material realities of the classroom, particularly in rural areas. On the other hand, in-service training is rare, sporadic and poorly articulated with the needs of the field, both pedagogically and organizationally (Mbemba, 2019). In the absence of regular support, teachers are often left to their own devices, with no space for reflective feedback on their practices.

Moreover, teaching resources are sorely lacking. Obsolete or missing textbooks, inadequate teaching aids and poor access to digital technologies are all obstacles to the adoption of active, differentiated teaching practices. This deficit is compounded by the massive use of unqualified staff, often recruited on a voluntary basis or without initial training or systematic supervision. Although these teachers are often motivated by a desire to help children, they have neither

the professional skills nor the institutional support needed to respond effectively to the demands of the job.

In this constrained context, collaborative practices between peers appear to be spontaneous and adaptive alternatives. Although informal - in the form of occasional mutual assistance, co-observation or the exchange of teaching aids - these practices form a tacit basis for professional transmission. Nevertheless, they remain marginalized, unrecognized and not integrated into training or assessment systems, which limits their impact and durability.

It is at the intersection of these dynamics between structural shortcomings and local initiatives that the present research takes place. It proposes to pay particular attention to **effective professional gestures**, understood as intentional, contextualized and adjusted pedagogical actions emerging from shared experience in communities of practice (Bucheton & Soulé, 2009; Tardif, 2013). These gestures - whether they relate to classroom regulation, the staging of knowledge, pedagogical language or tutoring between colleagues - contribute to the construction of professional knowledge rooted in everyday action. Identifying, analyzing and transmitting this knowledge offers an opportunity to rethink professionalization not just as a matter of formal training, but also as a collective dynamic based on exchange, mutual observation and peer support.

The aim of this study is thus to explore the ways in which these professional gestures emerge, are transmitted and reinforced in Congolese primary school teaching practices, outside institutional training arrangements. The aim is to understand their contribution to improving pedagogical practices, in an educational environment that is both fragile and rich in informal human resources. With a view to continuous professional development, this research aims to provide useful food for thought for the rethinking of national education policies, particularly in terms of teacher training and support.

In this work, despite the first section which is itself devoted to the general introduction, section 2 will dwell on the methodology, section 3 will rebound on the results, as for section 4, it will present the results and finally section 5 will close this article.

2. Methodology

This section focuses on the methodology of this research paper.

2.1 Methodological approach

The present study adopts an **interpretative qualitative** approach, focusing on a detailed understanding of the professional dynamics of primary school teachers in their working environment. This methodological choice is justified by the nature of the phenomenon under study - professional gestures in collaborative practices - which requires the analysis of contextualized realities, subjective representations and situated interactions.

Three complementary data collection techniques were used:

Filmed observations of collaborative work situations between teachers, enabling analysis of gestures, postures, interactions and forms of pooling professional knowledge. These observations were made in elementary school selected for their commitment to co-training or tutoring.

Semi-structured interviews with teachers at different levels of seniority (beginners and experienced teachers) in three departments of the Republic of Congo: Brazzaville, Plateaux and Bouenza. The aim of these interviews was to gather perceptions, accounts of experience and professional strategies mobilized in context, in connection with the construction of effective professional gestures.

A documentary analysis of institutional sources, in particular reports and mechanisms from national or partner programs such as **PRAEBASE** (Projet d'Appui à l'Amélioration de la Qualité de l'Éducation de Base) and **AREPA** (Appui à la Réforme de l'Enseignement Primaire et de l'Apprentissage). This analysis aims to situate teaching practices within their political, normative and formative framework.

Together, these materials enable us to triangulate the data in order to increase interpretative validity and cross individual, collective and institutional perspectives.

2.2 Population and sampling

The survey is based on a purposive sampling approach based on criteria of contextual relevance and geographical representativeness. The target population is made up of primary school teachers, working in both urban and rural areas, to reflect the diversity of professional situations in the Congolese education system.

Teachers were selected according to

Their geographical location, covering three departments with contrasting realities: Brazzaville (urban, dense and

institutionally structured), Plateaux (semi-rural) and Bouenza (predominantly rural).

Their level of qualification and professional experience, with particular attention paid to the balance between novice teachers (less than five years' experience) and experienced teachers (more than ten years), in order to document the intergenerational dynamics of shared professional knowledge.

This choice makes it possible to question the **conditions of emergence, circulation and recognition of effective professional gestures**, taking into account contextual determinants (territory, means, supervision) and teachers' individual career paths.

3. Results

We present the main results of our study below:

3.1 Typology of identified professional gestures

Analysis of the data collected through observation and interviews has enabled us to identify a typology of recurring professional gestures used by primary school teachers in the Congolese context. As significant units of action (Bucheton & Soulé, 2009), these gestures reflect didactic, pedagogical and relational skills, contextualized in the practice of the profession.

Four main categories of gestures stand out:

Classroom regulation gestures, which involve managing teaching time, organizing transitions between activities and maintaining discipline. They are essential to the stability of the learning environment and to the implementation of teaching sequences in contexts often marked by heterogeneity and large class sizes.

Staging knowledge: this involves organizing the presentation of content in a way that is accessible and engaging. They include the use of visual aids, concrete devices or problem situations designed to encourage students to take ownership of what they learn.

Language gestures, which encompass practices such as simplifying language, rephrasing instructions or using verbal encouragement. These gestures play a fundamental role in cognitive mediation and student support, particularly in multilingual or literacy contexts.

Peer-to-peer support gestures, which testify to the dynamics of horizontal professionalization between teachers. They take the form of cross- observations, informal exchanges, feedback or tutoring between colleagues, contributing to the circulation of professional knowledge within teaching communities.

3.2 Transmission of professional skills

The transmission of professional skills is only marginally based on formal or institutional training systems. Instead, they are mostly transmitted in **informal, situated ways**,

often invisible in educational systems, but essential to the continuity of professional knowledge.

Three main modalities have been identified:

Informal exchanges in local spaces, such as classrooms or between sessions, enable teachers to share their strategies, ask questions and reformulate real-life teaching situations, in a spirit of spontaneous mutual aid.

Cross-observations between experienced and novice teachers provide opportunities for implicit or explicit modeling of professional gestures. These interactions provide fertile ground for apprenticeship through companionship.

Local pedagogical meetings, although occasional, provide opportunities for mutual exchange, particularly in rural areas where the lack of trainers makes these encounters crucial to the dissemination of effective practices.

These modalities underline the importance of **co-training and collaborative professional development schemes**, which are still little recognized in official texts.

3.3 Factors favoring and hindering the circulation of professional gestures

The contextual analysis highlights several **factors facilitating or hindering** the transmission and appropriation of professional gestures within Congolese elementary school.

Facilitating factors:

Professional proximity and a relationship of trust between teachers are fundamental to the circulation of practices. They facilitate mutual observation and the taking of pedagogical risks.

Recognition of local initiatives by certain pedagogical supervisors enhances collaborative practices and encourages their formalization.

Individual self-help initiatives testify to a professional commitment despite systemic constraints. They are at the root of many emerging forms of co-training.

Obstacles identified:

The absence of a clear institutional framework for peer-to-peer training limits the durability and legitimacy of these professional practices.

Overcrowded classrooms, often with more than 60 pupils, make it difficult to experiment with diversified teaching methods adapted to individual needs.

Unequal access to in-service training, particularly in rural areas, reinforces the sense of professional isolation felt by some teachers.

The precarious status of many teachers (untenured volunteers, volunteers) is a major obstacle to their involvement in professional development schemes.

4. Discussion

The results highlight the decisive importance of professional gestures in improving the quality of teaching at primary level. They confirm that these gestures, whether they relate to classroom management, the staging of knowledge, professional language or collaboration between peers, are central components of teaching competence. However, their effectiveness is highly dependent on the conditions under which they are recognized, transmitted and contextualized within local educational communities.

One of the major contributions of this research is to show that the transmission of these gestures is essentially based on the **dynamics of co-construction of professional knowledge**, which takes place on the basis of formal institutional arrangements. This finding is in line with work on teaching professionalism (Tardif, 2006; Bucheton & Soulé, 2009), according to which professional knowledge is forged at the crossroads of experience, peer interaction and specific contexts of practice. In the Congolese context, this co-construction remains insufficiently valued in continuing education policies, which are often dominated by a top-down, prescriptive logic.

In this sense, the collaborative practices observed - informal exchanges, spontaneous tutoring, cross-observation - appear not only as relevant modalities of professional learning, but also as effective alternatives to the structural limitations of the educational system, notably the lack of initial training, precarious status and overcrowding.

The originality of this study lies in its **empirical grounding in the Congolese education system**; little explored until now from the angle of professional gestures. It sheds light on a reality that is often invisible in normative frameworks: that of informal but active professionalization, carried out by the teachers themselves through networks of solidarity and situated learning.

These results argue in favor of **institutional recognition of peer coaching practices**. Their integration into national education policies would represent a strategic lever for reinforcing the professionalization of teachers, particularly in rural or disadvantaged areas, where training schemes are virtually non-existent.

Ultimately, this research invites us to rethink the modalities of professional development for teachers, starting from their actual practices, their local resources and their collective dynamics, from a contextualized **professionalization engineering** perspective.

5. General conclusion

This study has highlighted the central role of professional gestures in the professionalization process of primary school teachers in the Republic of Congo. Far from being mere technical automatisms, these gestures constitute situated

knowledge of action, constructed in and through experience, and bearers of genuine pedagogical effectiveness. Their transmission, although largely informal and rooted in peer relationships, represents a fundamental lever for improving the quality of teaching.

The results reveal that teachers appropriate these gestures through daily interactions, in a context often marked by structural constraints such as precarious status, insufficient continuing training, or professional isolation in rural areas. Yet these co-training practices, based on mutual aid, mutual observation and the enhancement of experiential knowledge, demonstrate the resilience and innovative capacity of the educational field.

We therefore need to recognize and institutionalize these forms of professional development. In particular, this implies designing educational policies that build on local dynamics of collaboration between teachers, by reinforcing contextualized, flexible in-service training schemes rooted in actual practices.

Recognizing **communities of teaching practice** as structuring tools for in-service training is a strategic avenue for educational decision-makers. By legitimizing these spaces for exchange, supporting them with formalized tutoring mechanisms and linking them to initial training, the Congolese education system could better respond to the challenges of quality and equity that run through it.

In the light of the results obtained, several avenues of research are open to extend this reflection:

Measuring the impact of professional gestures on student learning: a quantitative approach would make it possible to objectivize the effects of certain gestures on academic success, taking into account the teaching context.

Structuring a national system of mentoring between teachers: this would involve studying the conditions for the emergence, implementation and evaluation of formal support between experienced and novice teachers, as part of a professional mentoring approach.

Integrating professional gestures into initial training: this perspective would involve analyzing how training curricula can better articulate theory, practice and experiential knowledge, in order to prepare future teachers for a reflective and collaborative professionalism.

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