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CROSS-NATIONAL SYNTHESIS ON EDUCATION QUALITY
REPORT NO. 1

by
Karima Barrow (AED)
Elizabeth Leu, Academy for Educational Development (AED)

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INTRODUCTION TO THE CROSS-NATIONAL SYNTHESIS

The Cross-national Synthesis of Education Quality is a comparative qualitative study designed to generate information on factors that influence quality at the school, classroom, and community levels across national contexts. The synthesis draws information on quality of education from a series of pilot studies carried out under the USAID-funded Education Quality Improvement Program 1 (EQUIP1) Leader Award. Each of the pilot studies tracks quality factors in the context of specific program inputs. The EQUIP1 pilot studies included in the present report are the Pilot Study on Teacher Professional Development in Namibia, the Pilot Study on Education in Islamic Schools in Nigeria, and the Pilot Study on a Transitional Education Program for Out-of-School Girls in India. The synthesis explores: 1) whether stakeholders' definitions and constructions of education quality are similar or different across a variety of local and national contexts; 2) what factors lead to change in perspectives on education quality; and 3) what programs have an effect on changing perspectives on education quality. This paper, the first report of the synthesis, responds to the first question and compares perspectives on quality of education held by teachers and other local stakeholders drawn from the three EQUIP1 pilot studies.

The purpose of the synthesis is to generate information that will assist in understanding the complex process dimensions of quality, with a particular focus on stakeholders' perceptions on factors that promote quality. The synthesis is based on the findings of qualitative studies of ongoing program interventions to improve education quality. In comparing the findings of qualitative studies, the synthesis is unusual. The majority of cross-national studies compare national policy initiatives, the quantitative results of program inputs, or student achievement; few cross-national studies compare local process factors or the results of "thick descriptions" obtained from open-ended interviews with stakeholders (Alexander 2000). This synthesis, therefore, attempts to provide new types of information and new "ways of looking" at quality - information and methods that should be especially important as policy makers and program designers work to overcome the traditionally weak relationship between policy and practice and focus on local-level process factors as the engines that drive the effective interpretation and implementation of policies that promote education quality (Anderson 2002; Farrell 2002).¹

Methodology

This synthesis uses a comparative case study approach, each of the pilot studies constituting a case study made up of the "bounded system" under study (Merriam 1998; Yin 2003). A constant comparative method is used to group and compare similar segments of data across countries to determine similarities, differences, and change (Bogdan and Biklen 2003; Creswell 2005). Questions from all interview protocols and items in observation schedules of the three studies that explored stakeholders' perceptions of quality directly and indirectly were identified. These data were then extracted from the three studies, displayed in a comparative manner, and analyzed using constant comparative cycles of identifying and grouping similarities and differences.

¹ One of the goals of the synthesis is the development of an analytical framework to assist program planners in the use of local-level process factors in the design of programs to improve education quality in a variety of contexts. This framework will be developed as the synthesis evolves and will be included in a later report on the synthesis.

SUMMARY OF THE PILOT STUDIES²

Pilot Study on Teacher Professional Development in Namibia

The USAID/EQUIP1 Pilot Study on Teacher Professional Development in Namibia, carried out by the Academy for Educational Development, addresses the overall issue of how teacher quality and teacher learning, as central elements of education quality, are best supported. The study is guided by questions of how teachers and other stakeholders at the school level perceive quality of education, how perceptions of quality relate to and shape teachers' classroom practice, and what factors of teacher professional development are most influential in supporting teacher quality. The results of the study indicate that, although the policies of Namibia are strongly based on a foundation of constructivism, active learning, and learner-centered education, these policies are often understood in a very narrow sense and the conceptual learning aspects of learner-centered education are only minimally practiced. The study findings support school-based teacher professional development programs, associated with whole-school improvement programs, as very promising ways of increasing understanding and effective implementation of active-learning policies.

Pilot Study on Education in Islamic Schools in Nigeria

The objective of the USAID/EQUIP1 Pilot Study on Education in Islamic Schools in Nigeria, carried out by the Education Development Center, is to explore the characteristics and needs of traditional Qur'anic schools in three diverse states in Nigeria (Kano, Lagos, and Nasarawa) in order to determine if there are possibilities to enlist Qur'anic schools in the goal of achieving universal basic education. As Qur'anic schools in Nigeria serve millions of children, either as a sole source of education or as a supplement to government education, they are significant educational institutions and possible sites to expand basic education to previously unserved or underserved populations. Results of the study indicate that many parents view religious and secular education as interdependent and equally important. They see the role of the Islamic school primarily as a precursor to public school success and academic or professional achievement.

Pilot Study on a Transitional Education Program for Out-of-School Girls in India

The USAID/EQUIP1 Pilot Study on a Transitional Education Program for Out-of-School Girls in India, carried out by World Education, focuses on one school, the Kuchinerla School. The residential school provides a one-year basic education program for 100 girls aged 7-14 who previously worked in the cotton seed industry and other forms of child labor. The program provides these girls with a healthy living environment and an accelerated education program with the aim of transitioning them into the formal educational system. The results of the study suggest that the acquisition of academic learning and life skills are strongly linked with teachers' ability to meet children's specific learning needs. In-service teacher professional development is identified as a key component to achieve quality education. Respecting students' cultural and socio-economic reality and involving parents and communities in school activities are essential to keep children engaged in the learning process.

² The EQUIP1 pilot studies in the synthesis were carried out in three very different settings: rural government primary schools in Namibia; traditional Qur'anic schools in Nigeria; and a transitional school for out-of-school girls in India.

CROSS-NATIONAL SYNTHESIS ON EDUCATION QUALITY

Perceptions of Quality

Based on data from the three EQUIP1 pilot studies outlined above, the present report compares similarities and differences in perceptions of education quality held by teachers and other stakeholders across three national and local contexts in Namibia, Nigeria, and India. The analysis includes the question of whether there are consistent education quality factors suggested by the findings of the three studies. This question is especially significant, given the great differences in the three study settings.

Five Factors Related to Quality

Five common factors emerged from each of the studies as important to education quality: 1) the purposes of education or what quality means; 2) the role of teachers in education quality; 3) the role of principals in education quality; 4) the availability and use of resources and teaching aids as important ingredients of education quality; and 5) the role of community or parental involvement in quality. Qualitative data on these five quality factors from the three studies are summarized in the next section.

1) Purposes of education

Stakeholders in all settings emphasize that good quality education should lead to future employment - with emphasis on academic learning in Namibia and Nigeria and emphasis on life skills as well as academic learning in India.

Namibia

Teachers, parents, principals, and students all focus on outcomes of education at various levels. Parents and students emphasize primarily the individual level: gaining specific skills and competencies in preparation for future jobs. Parents relate quality education to reading and writing skills and passing with good grades. They also discuss the importance of good behavior. Students highlight education in terms of the future: achieving passing grades and getting jobs. Teachers and principals widen their perspective, including both individual gains and the development of student characteristics that benefit the larger community. Good social behavior is a related factor to the vision of quality education. Many teachers comment that learners should have good manners, be responsible, respect others, and become good citizens.

Nigeria

In the Islamic schools that participated in the Nigeria study, all stakeholders define quality education in terms of gaining academic/intellectual skills - reading, writing, mathematics - and passing exams in preparation for future jobs. Most teachers comment that it is important for students to receive preparation for further schooling at the secondary level. Some teachers also mention that schooling prepares students for marriage. Another crucial purpose for education in Islamic schools is the religious knowledge that students gain. Teachers stress that parents prefer Islamic schools because of the moral lessons and ethics that students learn. However, when teachers are asked whether religious or secular subjects are more, or equally, important, over half state that the two are equally important; teachers state that having a solid foundation in both prepares students for a more balanced life in the future.

India

In the Kuchinerla School, quality learning is related to the girls' academic performance and their ability to use what they learn in their everyday lives after they finish the program, whether or not they are mainstreamed into the formal education system. All students are expected to learn the age-appropriate content of the government curriculum. Parents and the principal express an especially strong interest in life skills regarding nutrition, gardening, and agricultural knowledge so that the students can earn a living and take better care of themselves and their families in the near future. The principal believes that academic and life skills, by themselves, do not necessarily improve girls' lives, as many of them return to their homes a few years after they join the government schools.

	Namibia	Nigeria	India
Purposes of education: summary and comparison of responses	Stakeholders, including students, focus on academic performance, acquiring skills for future employment, service to the community, and good behavior.	Stakeholders focus on academic performance and future employment, but also Islamic knowledge.	Stakeholders emphasize academic knowledge and life skills (nutrition, gardening, agriculture) that will help students earn a living and care for their families in the near future.

2) Role of teachers

Stakeholders in all settings emphasize the central role of teacher quality in creating education quality with only minor differences.

Namibia

Teachers define quality teachers as those who use learner-centered education well, are well prepared, use learning materials, and communicate with parents about student progress. Principals define quality teaching in similar terms: good teacher preparation, lesson planning, the use of teaching aids and materials in the classroom, and the use of continuous assessment. According to principals, teachers' reflection on their practice leads to improvement. Almost half of the principals describe quality teaching as learner-centered. They also think that teachers should vary their methods and strategies to reach students at different levels. Parents describe quality teaching as giving regular homework and using varied teaching strategies like group work. Students highlight positive characteristics of teachers such as kindness and they prefer teachers who emphasize students' active involvement and participation in group activities.

Nigeria

In the Nigeria study, teaching quality is exhibited most clearly by having lessons prepared, using student-centered methods, and by having strong subject matter knowledge. Teaching aids are mentioned by almost all teachers as central to education quality. Principals emphasize that teachers should encourage student participation and questioning. Principals also highlight the positive characteristics of good teachers- teachers who are patient, tolerant, friendly, understanding, and observant. In addition to creating a stimulating learning environment, principals focus on teachers using a variety of teaching methods to reach students at different levels.

India

Teachers in the India study emphasize the importance of using different methods and resources - charts, pictures, models - to help children learn. Most teachers also highlight the importance of working closely with students who cannot follow a lesson. Through persistence, teachers believe that the learning difficulties of students from underprivileged backgrounds can be overcome. Principals comment that teachers should create a learning environment where children are motivated to participate actively and are encouraged to think beyond their own context. Principals also relate quality teaching to teachers' understanding of the local context. The teachers, who come from the community and live in the school, serve as role models to the students. Teachers also discuss the importance of education with parents; principals emphasize that teachers must, therefore, believe in the mission of the school.

	Namibia	Nigeria	India
Role of teachers: summary and comparison of responses	All stakeholders define quality in terms of teacher performance, teacher qualifications, teachers' use of lesson plans, teaching aids, and learner-centered methods.	All stakeholders define quality in terms of teacher performance, adequate qualifications, teachers' use of student-centered methods.	All stakeholders stress that teachers should use different resources and change their methods depending on students' abilities; teachers' understanding the local context is important.

3) Role of principals

Stakeholders in all settings emphasize the important role of principals in education quality, with a focus on the instructional leadership role of principals.

Namibia

Principals and teachers relate quality education to the principals' role of providing support and guidance to teachers. This also includes monitoring teachers to make sure that they are prepared with lesson plans and follow the curriculum. Principals ensure that teachers are qualified and encourage them to take advantage of further opportunities for professional development. Principals emphasize the importance of leadership, motivating teachers to uphold standards. They encourage teamwork among teachers. Principals make frequent class visits and provide teachers with feedback. As mentioned previously, principals view quality education in terms of quality teaching. Ensuring that teachers are adequately prepared and using learner-centered teaching methods is of utmost importance.

Nigeria

The principals' primary role is also to encourage teachers and provide them with support. Principals themselves see religion in the curriculum as a key factor in ensuring a quality education in their schools, asserting that Islamic education is more relevant to children's lives than a public school education. Principals are seen as having a strong role in upholding this ideal. The role of principals is seen as ensuring the quality of teacher performance, accomplished through observation, support, and lesson-plan checking. Principals are also seen to ensure adequate teacher qualifications and teachers' ability to use new teaching methods. When principals were asked about their satisfaction with teacher quality they focused on experienced well-prepared teachers and good teaching methods. Similarly, in order to improve education quality, close to half of the principals cited improving the professional development of teachers.

India

In the Kuchinerla School, the principal's role is to ensure quality education in various ways. The principal's activities range from teacher administration to caring for sick children or managing a nursery. The principal also emphasizes a strong participatory relationship with the teachers, making decisions in consultation with teachers who understand the importance of quality education. The principal believes in reaching out to the local community from which the students come, to learn about their needs and to inform the community about the importance of educating girls. Convincing parents about the importance of education and keeping girls in school are challenging and among the most important roles for principals.

	Namibia	Nigeria	India
Role of principals: summary and comparison of responses	Principals encourage quality education by providing support and guidance to teachers, encouraging continuous professional development, encouraging good relationships with community.	Principals encourage quality in similar ways, support and guidance to teachers, encouraging professional development, good community relations, but, in addition, ensuring that religion is a key factor in education.	Principals emphasize the participatory nature of their relationship with teachers citing including teachers in decision-making; principals also have an important role in reaching out to the local community.

4) Resources and teaching aids

Stakeholders in all settings emphasize the availability of resources and use of teaching aids as being central to education quality.

Namibia

All stakeholders in Namibia define educational quality in terms of adequate resources and effective use of teaching aids. Close to half of the teachers highlight the need for teaching aids and materials to improve quality. Principals and parents echo the same focus on resources, citing the need for sufficient textbooks and teaching materials. Despite the importance placed on resources and teaching aids, observations from the study reveal that many teachers use them mechanically (material to be copied) rather than using them to advance conceptual and meaningful learning.

Nigeria

Teaching aids are mentioned by all teachers as central to achieving or enhancing educational quality. When asked how to improve quality, principals cite improving instruction materials and using modern teaching aids. Parents' viewpoints are similar to those of teachers and principals. The majority of parents believe that student learning is directly related to the amount of resources a teacher or school can provide such as books and computers.

India

Both teachers and principals associate quality learning with sufficient resources and the use of teaching aids. Teachers stress that more models and charts should be introduced to help students learn faster. Principals also emphasize the importance of using different resources to teach children such as blackboards, chalk, writing slates, notebooks, and textbooks. Teachers mention that the textbooks should be made easier and take into account the children's reality. Even though

such a high level of importance is attributed to resources and teaching aids, classroom observations reveal that teaching aids, when available, are not always used, or used well. Teachers do not always understand why and when to use teaching aids and rely mostly on a mechanical use of materials available.

	Namibia	Nigeria	India
Resources and teaching aids: summary and comparison of responses	Teachers, principals, parents emphasize resources when talking about quality, including textbooks, teaching materials, and a variety of teaching aids; use of teaching aids is often mechanical and weak.	The majority of teachers participating in the study cite instructional materials as a necessary element in providing a quality education.	Teachers and principals highlight using different resources to teach students basic skills and for different ability levels; teaching aids are often used mechanically. The school itself is considered a resource for the community.

5) Community involvement

Stakeholders in all settings consider community and parental involvement as a key element of quality.

Namibia

Both teachers and principals view a positive environment among all members of the community as essential to quality education. Teachers cite the need for a cooperative relationship among teachers, parents, other schools, and the community. Principals especially focus on promoting a good relationship between parents and the school.

Parents primarily relate quality teaching with the level of parental involvement that teachers encourage. Parents cite teachers inviting them to the classroom to teach, tell stories, or speak with them, as examples of quality teaching. The study results suggest that a whole-school approach of involving the community in school planning, reflection, and evaluation, in combination with school-based teacher professional development, is a promising way of supporting quality at the school level.

Nigeria

Nigerian principals and teachers in the study overwhelmingly agree that parents' participation is important to achieving quality education, although most view the parental role as largely one of providing resources. The types of parent and community involvement teachers identify are paying fees, donations, fundraising, and providing equipment and materials. To a lesser extent, principals cite parents participating in decision-making, organized Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, school visits, helping with lessons, and checking performance. Parents also express their strong support for involvement in school activities. Although PTAs are not widespread in Qur'anic schools, the majority of parents in schools where there is a PTA believes that it has improved the school and that the PTA is an important institution at the school.

India

Both teachers and principals agree that parental involvement in the school is vital to children's persistence in school, as parents can create an enabling environment to sustain learning and to change the students' attitudes and behaviors in the household. They agree that different forms of mobilization to involve parents in children's education are important: community/parent

meetings, school open days, and parent visits to learn about various school activities. They also think that community meetings to discuss issues of health and nutrition in the village are important, after which parents share the information they gain with parents who are unable to attend. Principals find parents' participation important in parent-to-parent mobilization activities to recruit girls to school. These activities demonstrate the principal's view that the school is a resource center not only for the children, but also for the community at large.

	Namibia	Nigeria	India
Community involvement: Summary and comparison of responses	Teachers, principals, and students emphasize community involvement, including parents' involvement in whole-school processes of planning and evaluation.	Parental involvement is a key feature of Islamic education, primarily in the context of resource provision or support by teachers and the principal.	The principal envisions the school as a resource centre for the parents and community, not only for the children.

Similarities and Differences in the Five Quality Factors

A large number of similarities and small number of differences, primarily differences in degree of emphasis, emerge across the three studies. All three studies define the purpose of education in relation to academic learning, but they also highlight other definitions. In Namibia there is a strong focus on creating good citizens for the country, in India life skills are emphasized, and in Nigeria the benefits of Islamic knowledge are important.

The role of teachers and principals across the three countries demonstrates several commonalities. Quality teaching is defined as teachers who are adequately prepared, have strong subject knowledge, use lesson plans and teaching aids, use learner-centered methods in the classroom, and vary their strategies and methods to teach students at different levels. In India, this varies only slightly with a stronger focus on teachers' knowledge of the local context and an active relationship with the community that goes beyond what was expressed in the other two studies. In the three studies, the principals' role is largely one of supporting and monitoring teachers, with a secondary emphasis on the importance of developing relationships with the local community.

Across all three studies, an emphasis on resources and teaching aids and community involvement is apparent. All stakeholders relate quality education to the availability of resources and the use of teaching aids, although the studies highlight minimal or mechanical use of the resources when available. Community involvement is viewed in each study as a particularly important component of education quality. Community participation in decision-making is important in Namibia. In Nigeria, there is a strong emphasis on parents fulfilling a financial role in the schools. In India, the focus on community involvement includes helping to fulfill the needs of the community and community mobilization.

Additional Quality of Education Factors

In addition to synthesizing data on the five factors of quality identified as common to stakeholders' perceptions of quality in all of the studies, a step was taken to identify three additional priority quality factors that emerge from each of the studies. This was done without discussion among the partners and without an attempt to find factors that were common among the studies. The purpose of this was to gauge whether there would be consistency or difference in additional quality factors identified independently. The table below shows that, although context-

specific factors were identified, each list includes an item relating to active-learning teaching approaches:

Namibia	Nigeria	India
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Active-learning teaching approaches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Role of values and good behavior ▪ Existence of a school-based improvement program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Active learning and Islamic school pedagogy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Level of teacher qualification ▪ Role of religion in education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Active learning methods and strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Role of nutrition and health care ▪ Role of social mobilization

Namibia

1) Active-learning teaching approaches

All stakeholders in the Namibia study promote the tenets of the active-learning and learner-centered approaches in the classroom. Teachers and principals stress the importance of creating an environment in which learners actively participate, ask questions, and contribute to class discussions. Parents highlight the use of varied teaching strategies like group work and individual attention as good teaching. Students express the same attitudes in stating their preference for varied teaching strategies and teachers who allow questions and discussion in the classroom. While learner-centered education is mentioned most frequently in the interviews, when probed, stakeholders are often unable to add depth or explanation to the basic phrases they cited. Classroom practice shows that, on the whole, the form (group work) rather than the substance (conceptual learning) of active learning is practiced. This raises the question of whether active-learning policies are understood and whether they have made a significant impact on teaching and learning.

2) Role of values/good behavior

Teachers, principals, and parents in the study all emphasize that social behavior and commitment to the community are important components of quality education. Parents stress that students should be disciplined, have good manners, behave well, and respect others. Essentially they expect children to learn proper values and adhere to the social standards of behavior. Teachers and parents share a similar view, that learning morals and good behavior prepares children to become good citizens in the future and, as good citizens, they will be able to contribute to their communities and to the country.

3) School-based improvement and professional development programs

Several differences emerge in the study when comparing teachers', principals', parents', and students' views on quality in schools participating in the School Improvement Program (SIP) and schools that do not participate in the program. For example, among the two sets of parents, all of the SIP parents state that the teachers are doing a good job while only half of the non-SIP parents think that teachers are doing a good job. An important reason for differences in perceptions of quality between SIP and non-SIP schools might be that the SIP includes the school and community in a planning and self-assessment process. Dialogue takes place among different stakeholders that encourages them to reflect on the meaning of education, set goals for the school, follow them through, and assess progress. This should make reflection on the meaning of

different aspects of quality, and a vision of what stakeholders would like their schools to be, a familiar process at the SIP schools.

Nigeria

1) Active learning and Islamic school pedagogy

Although active learning is emphasized by both parents and teachers in the study, classroom observations indicate that traditional Islamic school pedagogy is still present in these schools. Focusing on cognitive interactions by state reveals different levels of memorization as a teaching/learning method in each state with the highest level in Nasarawa and the lowest in Kano. The classroom observations also reveal that the positive reinforcement and level of praise given to students by teachers is low in all three states. One of the trademarks of traditional Qur'anic schools is the use of the cane or horse whip. The responses from the teachers confirmed that corporal punishment is still very frequently used in Qur'anic schools. There is an inconsistency, therefore, between the emphasis on active learning in the interviews and the lack of active-learning practices observed in the schools.

2) Level of teacher qualification

All teachers in the study could read and write, but less than a quarter are Hafiz (someone who has memorized the entire Qur'an); close to a third have studied Fiqhu (law) and Hadith (lessons from the life of the Prophet); less than a quarter have studied Tafssir (Qur'anic interpretation); and very few have other qualifications. Interestingly, both teachers and community members characterize teachers as qualified, but also in need of professional development to improve practice. Close to half of the parents and community members feel that the teachers in their schools were well qualified, although approximately half also indicated that the teachers are in need of professional development.

3) Role of religion in education

While academic learning is important in Nigeria's Qur'anic schools, religion in the curriculum is a key factor to ensure quality education in the schools. The majority of principals believe that Islamic schools are more relevant for pupils than public school education because of the emphasis on religion. They highlight the benefits of gaining knowledge about Islamic ethics and morals as preparation for life. Parents' views are mixed. The majority of parents agree that religious subjects are well taught. In contrast, about half of the parents believe that more time should be spent on practical subjects like mathematics and English than on religious subjects. While parents may support the inclusion of religious studies, they still seem to prioritize secular academic learning.

India

1) Active learning methods and strategies

Teachers cite the active-learning teaching methods that they believe aid children in learning: using charts, pictures and models; spending time with children individually to explain new concepts; using the key-word system of learning languages/words; using reading, stories, and songs; and recapping lessons. Most teachers emphasize the importance of reaching children at different levels by varying methods. Teachers' interviews and classroom checklist analysis, however, suggest that there is a prescriptive way in which teachers are expected to teach the current curriculum and very little teacher professional development to support them. Teachers

express the need for more professional development involving new teaching methodologies; they are open to finding solutions to the daily problems faced by the school, such as providing emotional support for girls who miss their parents.

2) Role of nutrition and health care

At the outset of the program, the Kuchinerla School established the goal of providing immediate attention to personal safety, health, hygiene, and nutrition issues because children come into the Kuchinerla School with several nutritional deficiencies and in poor general health. Teachers all agree that learning more about nutrition and health will improve children's overall health status and the health of their parents, as children pass on the information they gain in the school to their families. Teachers also believe that they can influence children's learning about nutrition by: including more information on nutrition in the textbooks already in use; using charts and diagrams; teaching children how to prepare nutritious foods; growing a vegetable garden in the school to address nutritional deficiencies in children's diets; using examples from children's own experiences in eating nutritious foods; and explaining how changes in eating habits can dramatically affect one's health.

3) Role of social mobilization

Because the Kuchinerla School focuses on out-of-school children, the component of social mobilization is important to all stakeholders. Teachers describe the primary aim of social mobilization as increasing school enrolment, mainly through door-to-door mobilization through which teachers engage parents individually. They also mention Kalajatas (street plays), processions/rallies, dramas and songs, and the inclusion of local authorities, local government teachers, and women's and youth groups as essential in promoting the skills of collective community organization and action to increase school enrolment.

Similarities and Differences in the Additional Quality Factors

Differences in the nature of the educational situations studied explain why some of the additional quality factors identified in the three studies are distinct. The Indian transitional school fulfills roles beyond academic learning such as nutrition and health and social mobilization, two of the additional quality factors identified. For the Islamic schools in Nigeria, two of the additional quality factors relate to the role of religion in the school and Islamic pedagogy. Stakeholders in the Namibian rural government schools voiced more mainstream concerns such as professional development programs to support improved teaching and good student behavior.

Despite these differences, there is an important additional quality factor named for each of the studies – active learning. Stakeholders in all three studies find active learning important, although problems are identified in its implementation. In Namibia, classroom observations suggest that teachers are more successful in implementing the forms (group work) than the substance (conceptual learning) of active learning. In Nigeria, classroom observations indicate that traditional forms of Islamic education based on memorization persist. In India, although teachers practice many aspects of active learning, the prevalence of memory-based learning in the government system has a strong effect on teachers' practice.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The first report of the Cross-national Synthesis is guided by the question of whether stakeholders' definitions and constructions of education quality are similar or different across a variety of local and national contexts. The synthesis demonstrates a remarkable similarity in stakeholders' perceptions of the five quality factors, despite the disparate locations and very different school contexts studied. In the additional three quality factors identified for each study, active learning (and difficulties in the practice of active learning) was included in each list, although the other factors named reflected the specific contexts of the studies.

The explanation for the similarities in responses may arise from similarities in the education policy environments in which, directly or indirectly, all of the schools exist. Although only the Namibia study focused on government schools, the Nigeria and India studies both concern schools that include at least some of the government curriculum. The India and Nigeria schools both prepare many of their students to transition into the government system. The general policy environments of the three countries are not greatly different, emphasizing: 1) the importance of maintaining or increasing quality in the context of rapid expansion and limited resources; 2) the key role of teachers in achieving education quality; 3) the instructional leadership role of principals; 4) active forms of teaching and learning; and 5) community participation as an important element of quality.

An especially interesting result of the synthesis is the support for active learning in all three school settings and evident challenges in the implementation of active learning. This is especially important because of the central role that active forms of learning play in present notions of quality and education policies. The issues reported are similar across the studies and suggest working backwards from the local level to the policy level to explore where the problems lie – for example, in the policies themselves, or in the understanding and implementation of policies.

The identification of quality factors that are both consistent and divergent among the three pilot studies, leads us back to the purposes of the study - to describe and compare perceptions and processes at the school level that are often missed in cross-national studies that focus either at the policy level or on program results. The kind of information included here and the ways in which it was collected in the individual pilot studies, through in-depth interviews with local stakeholders, suggest a “way of looking” at quality factors that would help policy makers and program planners design programs that are more responsive to local needs and attitudes and more inclusive of stakeholders at the school, classroom, and community levels. Both the understanding that comes from investigation of local processes and the processes themselves can create the likelihood of greater program effectiveness.

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