

Issues in Basic Education in Developing Countries: An Exploration of Policy Options for Improved Delivery

Joseph P. G. Chimombo

Centre for Educational Research and Training, University of Malawi

Abstract

For more than 40 years, different stakeholders have partnered to support the development of basic education throughout the developing countries. Education is widely regarded as the route to economic prosperity, the key to scientific and technological advancement, the means to combat unemployment, the foundation of social equity, and the spread of political socialization and cultural vitality. While progress has been made in increasing the number of children enrolled in schools, there are still many more who are not enrolled and who do not complete. There are many reasons for this. The evidence showed that the strategies needed to tackle schooling problems will vary and needs to be country specific. While many lessons can be got from the experiences to date, there is need for an increased number of studies that should shape policies aimed at making education inclusive, responding to the diverse needs and circumstances of learners and giving appropriate weight to the abilities, skills, and knowledge they bring to the teaching learning process.

Introduction

For more than 40 years, different stakeholders have partnered to support the development of basic education throughout the developing countries. Since independence, the progression achieved in education in developing countries has been remarkable. This massive expansion has been made possible by the infusion of large sums of money by the new governments who saw the expansion of education opportunity as a political necessity. However, while progress has been made notable everywhere including Africa, there are far too many children who do not have a chance to go to school, and far too few who complete the bare minimum of schooling needed to become permanently literate and numerate. This paper discusses the issues surrounding these problems. First, a rationale for education is given before presenting these issues. Then, some of the alternative approaches to the delivery of basic education are outlined and critically discussed while making the case for quality basic education. Finally, using the author's experience at the Center for Educational Research and Training (CERT), suggestions for possible areas for research are highlighted.

Whose Education For All and Education for All for What?

Human development is partly a matter of people and communities improving their own lives and taking greater control of their destinies. Education is broadly used as an instrument for social change. The critical point of such belief can be traced far back to the 1960s when Theodore Schultz systematically articulated the human capital theory of development. In his voluminously printed works, Schultz argued that population quality and knowledge constitute the principal determinants of the future welfare of mankind (Schultz 1961). Adding to this argument, Harbison and Hanushek (1992) contended that a country which is unable to develop the skills and knowledge of its people and to utilize them effectively in the national economy will be unable to develop anything else. And according to Psacharopoulos (1985, p.5), education is widely regarded as the route to economic prosperity, the key to scientific and technological advancement, the means to combat unemployment, the foundation of social equity, and the spread of political socialization and cultural vitality. One can also make up an intricate argument in that educating all the children provides stratificational costs to oneself and one's children since only in this way will one protect one's own rights. Equalizing the welfare of the individual in society is therefore an important modern desideratum.

It was at the back of these rationales that African, Asian and Latin American governments expressed their intentions for Universal Primary Education (UPE) in the early 1960s. This movement was rekindled by the recent Jomtien and Dakar Education For All (EFA) conferences. The advocates of UPE contended that mass education will result in an increased supply of educated human power, accelerated economic growth, more social justice, reduced regional disparities, and improved social welfare. At any rate, all children will have an equal start in life regardless of sex, socio-economic background, or geographical location (Coombs 1985, p.70). No wonder that as governments strived to reduce poverty and improve the lives of their people, they looked to education as the vehicle for achieving these objectives (GM 1995).

Article 26 of the 1948 UN universal declaration of human rights said that everyone has a right to education and that this education shall be free and compulsory. It went on to say that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. If education is viewed as a human right, then EFA implies education for everybody since everybody must have that right. The challenge towards this drive is how to indeed make education available to all and in good quality. As regard to the purpose of that education, this is all about the role of education in peoples' future's lives. Education has a great significance for the economic social and cultural development. The aim of educational policy should therefore be to give every person a chance of developing his/her inherent potential. It is that kind of education which will bring about inter alia, accelerated economic growth, more wealth and income, decline in population growth, national unity and political stability. In contemporary societies, educational attainment is directly valued and is the main factor leading to advantage along

all other key dimensions of individual stratification. Simply to be a member of the modern political economy requires that individuals receive large doses of mass schooling. Consequently, the state attempts to create large number of white-collar jobs, legitimizing urban forms of work and knowledge, and sanctions school credentials through a variety of licensing and employment rules. It is therefore desirable to give everyone education.

Some of the Main Issues in Basic Education in Developing Countries

Although developing countries experienced massive growth in enrollment soon after independence, such exponential growth has been accompanied by manifold challenges and dilemmas. This section discusses some of the issues surrounding the challenges and dilemmas to the initiatives at getting everybody in school and provide them with quality basic education.

Opportunity Cost of Schooling

In deciding to send their children to school, parents face a trade-off between household consumption now and children's expected future income. There are direct and indirect costs of children's forgone labour at home or in paid work, their forgone time that could be spent in non-school education, such as learning how to work in the family business or on a family farm. Thus, opportunity costs refer to the cash earnings or other contributions which a household or individual sacrifices in order, for example, to keep a child in school. Prakash and Chaubey (1992) argued that the role of opportunity costs in the generation of demand for schooling has been underplayed. They noted that although stagnation, failure, dropout and such other factors of wastage have often been attributed as reasons for the low internal efficiency of education systems, the embedded assumptions fail to represent the complexity of the phenomena as there are external factors which may also impinge upon the education system.

They are suggested on the basis of an inadequate appreciation of the complexities of the problem and the centre stage occupied by economic factors. The punitive and persuasive measures miss the behavioural propensities of the poor. (p. 17)

Many studies have found that the necessity for children to perform economically important tasks that support household survival limits participation, especially in rural and urban squatter groups (Anderson 1988; Lockheed and Verspoor 1992). Lloyd and Blanc (1996) noted that 'even when schools are accessible and affordable, families have to see a net advantage to themselves and to their children from forgoing children's full-time participation in domestic and economic activities. They argued that in countries where the state has limited powers to enforce compulsory schooling laws, families serve as their children's gatekeepers through their control over children's access to the educational resources made available by the state.

Bryant (1990) noted that many children in Malawi began working at very early ages

and were not enrolled in school at all. He noted that they spent their time on childminding of their siblings and working on the estate farms, in family fields and with herds or on the lake. Elsewhere, Dall (1989) observed that in Zambia, parents, unable to spare children from rural household chores, withdrew or kept them away from school during important seasonal events like harvest and fishing (p. 17). In Nigeria, Jakande (1987) observed that the establishment of neighbourhood schools appeared to have been an effective answer to the problem of rural parents who wanted to be compensated for the loss of their children's labour on the farm as the child is available after school hours. However, if schools were to be within walking distance in sparsely populated areas, this would result in the construction of schools for small numbers of children. It seems that this is the inevitable at this level of education if every child of every citizen is to be educated.

Williams (1983) and Colclough and Lewin (1993) observed that the practical and financial difficulties of moving towards 90 or 95 per cent net enrolment are likely to be considerably greater than those associated with the earlier stages of expansion of the primary system. This is because those children not in school are likely to be different in important respects from their peers. The opportunity cost of school attendance may therefore be significant. They are likely to live in marginal or relatively inaccessible areas with poor infrastructure. Lockheed and Verspoor (1992) argued that one of the most significant ways to increase demand is to improve the quality of education and therefore increase the opportunity cost of not attending school. One other major factor directly linked to the problem of opportunity cost is poverty. Children of the poor are least apt to attend or complete school than children from better off families. Poor children are also apt to be malnourished, which lowers their achievement levels even further. Poverty is also directly influenced by the cost of educating children. Even when schooling is ostensibly 'free' studies have shown that parents incur other direct costs such as activity fees, uniforms, paper and pens (including texts and excise books), transport, lunches, expenses for boarding and others which often result in the exclusion of poor children from school (Nkinyangi 1982; Chimombo 1999).

Equity and Gender Issues

Another problem in the provision of basic education has been to reach deprived groups. It has become clear that a simple linear expansion of conventional primary schooling faces serious limitations that are due, in the first instance, to the fragility of the demand among the deprived groups in society (Ahmed & Carron 1989). In deprived areas, creating schools does not guarantee that children will attend them. Ahmed and Carron argued that measures to increase the physical accessibility to primary schools and to improve their quality will have to be supplemented by other types of action aimed at stimulating the demand for education while at the same time adapting educational services to the specific needs of deprived local communities. And Burney and Irfan (1991) also pointed out that male and female differentials in literacy and school enrolment cannot be attributed to the availability of the schools since enrolment differentials are also influenced by the parental characteristics and socio-economic status of the household.

When educational policies are generally devised to affect the total education system, evidence in Anderson (1988) indicated that certain groups in virtually all societies are disadvantaged in terms of both access to education and opportunity to complete the various levels of education. In some cases, disadvantage is due to insufficient resources and in others, differential impact is as a result of educational policies that are embedded in the social/economic/political relationship and interactions in the society. Lloyd and Blanc (1996) pointed out that efforts to achieve universal access to education have not yet overcome the advantage of those children who live in relatively well-off households. Burney and Irfan (1991) in their regression analysis of the determinants of child school enrolments highlighted the influence of the household status both economic and social on the propensity to invest in child schooling. 'The most disturbing, though not unexpected, finding of the study appears to be the predominance of the influence originating from parental education. It is this inter-generational transfer for human capital which needs more attention as it implies that illiteracy and hence poverty of the parents get transmitted to the offspring' (p.12).

Discrimination is sometimes explicit, as when schools are designed along region, ethnic or racial lines and sometimes implicit, as when the language of instruction favours one group over the other. Lockheed and Verspoor (1992) argued that in the crucial early grades, when children are trying to acquire basic literacy as well as adjust to the demands of the school setting, not speaking the language of instruction can make a difference between succeeding and failing in school, and between remaining in school and dropping out. The case for using local languages was succinctly put by a World Bank report which observed that:

There is very little research on the cost of bilingual or multilingual alternatives. But we do know something about the effectiveness of the alternative....the evidence is slowly building that it is effective to begin a child in certain situation in his/her first language and later start him or her on the necessary second language. In term of effectiveness, there may be no choice; if you do not have the first language, you will not have the second. (World Bank 1982, p.45)

However, in diversified contexts, this line of thinking begs the question whose language is to be used for teaching?

Colclough and Lewin (1993) showed that the ratio of female to male primary enrolments was significantly lower in countries with low GER than in other countries. The World Bank (1995) also noted that the gender gap in school enrolment is of course not just a matter of access. In addition to lack of school places for girls, in many countries, parents' demand for education of their daughters is low reflecting both cultural norms and girls' work in and around the home. 'Literate parents are more likely than illiterate ones to enroll their daughters in school, and the regions with the highest proportions of illiterate adults are therefore those with the widest gender gaps' (p.44). Overcoming the gender gap will therefore require not only providing more school places for girls but also overcoming many parents' ignorance of

the gains that will result from enrolling their female children.

In an attempt to conceptualise the problems associated with female education, Wamachiu and Njau (1995), noted that the survival or non-survival of girls in the education systems is influenced by a complex interplay between macro-level policy and micro-level practices, beliefs and attitudes. 'Together they determine whether households feel it profitable to educate their daughters; whether sending girls to school is a wise or poor investment for the future' (p.2). Anderson (1988) observed that since education is often thought to be most useful in the formal sector and because girls/women often have less access to this sector than boys/men, parents decide that schooling is not relevant for the economic roles of their female children. In addition to low expectations about future employment, Lockheed, Jamison et al. (1980) also argued that in many cultures, parents decide that education is not worthwhile for their daughters who will move into their husbands' families when they marry and that gains in productivity or income due to education will accrue to the families of their sons-in-law rather than to them.

The low value attached to female education is said to be linked with some rooted features of gender relations. Davison and Kanyuka (1990) noted that in Malawi, gender division of labour combined with patrilineal property rights, the norms of patrilocal residence and village exogamy tend to reduce the perceived benefits of female education. It seems that culture defines the economic worth of educating girls vis-à-vis boys. As Summers (1992) summed it up, under-investment in girls is an economic problem that results from a vicious cycle caused by distorted incentives. The speculation that girls will grow to do other than serve their husbands, reduces the parents' incentives to invest in their daughters as human capital. 'Uneducated women have few alternatives and so the expectation becomes self-fulfilling, trapping women in a continuous cycle of neglect' (p.1). Colclough (1994) however urged that there is little systematic evidence to show that private returns to education of girls are, in general, lower than those for boys.

What goes on in the classroom also affects female access to education. Teaching methods, curriculum content, classroom and other facilities are all found to affect female entry and retention (Anderson 1988, p.12). The sex of the teacher is even more important. Anderson said that it affects teacher-pupil interaction with female teachers acting as role models and thereby providing more encouragement to girls than male teachers. Malewezi (1990), in her study on why girls fail to continue with their education, observed that teachers treated girls differently from boys both in terms of academic expectations and gender-specific forms of discipline (p.2).

Gender differences are particularly acute when desegregated by urban-rural residence. In a study on the determinants of inequality in participation in school in Java, Pearse (1985) found that the urban-rural distinction, parental income, sex differences and demographic characteristics of the households were related to levels of participation. Further, Anderson (1988) observed that female attendance at school is more sensitive to distance, and the number of under five children in the household than male attendance. This was also supported by Ashby (1985) who found that the presence of other siblings influences who is and who is not

sent to school and for girls it was particularly important whether or not they had brothers. However, Lloyd and Blanc (1996) found no supporting evidence that family support systems operate systematically to the benefits of boys relative to girls. 'Instead, girls are more slightly favoured in female headed households, whereas boys are slightly better off in high income households' (p.267).

Cultural and Religious Attitudes

Culturally determined ways of defining women and men and their roles in a given society shape gender-specific opportunities and constraints. Thus, the existence of discriminatory attitudes towards the schooling of girls is informed by customs and culture. Mobility restrictions arise in many societies when girls reach puberty and this makes the effect to be more on girls' retention than on entry (Lloyd & Blanc 1996). In some tribes in Africa, as soon as a girl reaches puberty, she is taught the wisdom and knowledge of her society in order to maintain and develop it. These instructions are considered directly relevant to a girl, preparing her for life as a wife and mother in a village. 'Sometimes conflict arises between what is taught at home (in initiation ceremonies) and at school which may lead to parents opposing girls' continued attendance at school' (ODA 1996, p.8). Indeed, girls' behaviour is often directly related to the many tribal and traditional taboos which dictate what and what not to do at the various stages of their development which may conflict with the demands of schooling. And as Davison and Kanyuka (1990) observed, cultural factors in Malawi and gender-specific attitudes about the division of labour also shape the decisions about whether a child should or should not be in school. Another factor which also acts together with attitude is religion. Religious privileges of access have often been restricted to certain classes and to males. And this pattern of transmitting and gaining of religious knowledge and power has been influential in determining access and exclusion to formal public education. King (1987) found that religion, along with gender, social class and regional location were important determinants of schooling.

Efficiency and Quality

Repeaters cause overcrowding which raises school costs. Clearly, repetition is the key for improving overall efficiency and reaching suitable levels of equity. Davico (1992) found that poor teachers and inadequate support to poor children were to blame for increased rates of repetition and dropout in Brazil. And Patrinos and Psacharopoulos (1996) reported that repetition is especially severe amongst the most deprived, that is those, whose parents have the lowest levels of education and income.

Schwille et al. (1991) presented a detailed causal model to explain grade repetition. They hypothesised that student characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, family influence, place of residence, age, prior repetition, national policies regarding language, secondary school entrance, quality of instruction, and school characteristics such as management policies, coverage of syllabus, etc. act to influence repetition. They observed that these in turn affect student learning, student motivation, and self-esteem, the examination success rate, the

enrolment rate, the dropout rate and the mean time required to produce a graduate. Heyneman and Jamison (1980) found that in Uganda, improving the teachers' language ability, the availability of textbooks, school physical facilities, and the pupil's level of health and nutrition were powerful determinants of school achievement. In their study, Kunje and Stuart (1996) indicated that the low quality of education in Malawi schools contributed to the repetition and dropout problem.

Hanushek (1995) contended that high quality schools raise student achievement and speed students through the school cycle, thus saving costs. Hanushek suggested that students respond to higher school quality with lower dropouts; 'they tend to stay in good schools and dropout in poor ones' (p.236). In another work on Egypt, Hanushek and Lavy (1994) concluded that if they held achievement and opportunities constant, students going to high quality schools were much more likely to stay in school than those going to low quality schools. This, they noted, made sense since if a student is not going to get anything out of school, why waste the time.

When repetition is about failure to comprehend, Hanushek (1995) contended that such repetition may reflect demand-side factors of schooling where student choices lead to low attendance during each school year. 'Little is known about attendance patterns, but anecdotal evidence suggests that normal crop cycles and requirements for children to work in the fields at planting and harvest time may be important in some settings. Such attendance patterns could severely constrain the chances of completing a given grade, at least in the likely absence of well- integrated, self-paced instruction' (p.236). Those who oppose repetition contend that repetition does not improve the achievement of slow learners, and that, repetition, by calling attention to the repeaters' poor performance, damages their self-image (Motala 1995). Schwile et al. (1991) suggested that the study of repetition in developing countries has been overly influenced by the study of repetition in industrialised countries. They pointed out that in developing countries, where there is widespread practice of repetition, empirical examination of its pedagogical practicality are virtually non-existent. In a study on increasing primary school effectiveness, Eisemon and Schwile (1990) observed that of all the variables, the one with the greatest impact on test scores was whether a student had repeated a grade.

Relevance of Education

Policy makers have been preoccupied in seeking ways of making the content of primary education more meaningful and the methods of delivery more cost-effective within the context of nation building and economic development. The attention has been on the role of education in preparing children to participate actively and productively in national building. The literature is full of such attempts at making education more relevant (Thompson 1981; Watson 1988). The most famous being Julius Nyerere's education for self-reliance philosophy, which he advanced by emphasizing the establishment of a system of education whose cost and impact on agriculture and attitudes towards farming were to be appropriate to the country's needs. The literature is also full of many reasons as to why such attempts have not succeeded. Dodd's (1969) analysis of Nyerere's programme alluded to the non-examinability of the

subjects and the desire of parents to see their children progress into the educational ladder. In their analysis of innovations in developing countries, Havelock and Huberman (1977) concluded that inadequate planning and failure to take into account the systems into which the innovation is being introduced was the most important dimension of these. In a similar vein, Watson (1988, p.155) observed:

the main reasons for failure would appear to be ... the fact that ruralising or vocationalising the curriculum fails to take into account of the economic realities of the society, the existing power structures, the attraction of the urban areas,... as well as lack of employment opportunities.

Others have alluded to the fact that the lack of social demand for education is related to the fact that families and communities do not value or are ambivalent about formal education. Serpell (1993) pointed to the parental disillusionment with the present education systems and expressed support for more relevant curricula; more closely related to the daily lives of students and providing practical skills for students. Odaga and Heneveld (1995) contended that the problem is even more acute with girls where gender bias in subject choices together with cultural factors limit girls' chances of progress. Serpell (1993) extended his argument with reference to limited chances of progression in schools as he observed :

People are reacting to a situation where they see nothing good coming out of school. Local schools are in the business of producing failures. And so they ask themselves; what is the benefit of sending children to school? (p.12)

And in the same vein, Samoff (1998) observed that instead of considering the supply and demand side factor to schooling, studies of internal efficiency should proceed to consider the ways in which the education system pushes students out.

There is little attention to the magnitude and consequence of various eviction rules and that while the apparent proximate cause for attrition may have to do with test results or family circumstances or distance to school, underlying context is one of discouragement (p. 15).

This was what was happening in Zambia as Serpell (1993) observed, "presently, it appears that schooling can only vindicate its deeper education objectives by articulating a concrete relevance to the socio-cultural and politico-economic opportunities existing within the communities it aspires to serve" (p.108). Hoppers (1998, p.242) observed that in Africa, the inheritance of the Western system of schooling itself forms the key problem. This system is designed to socialize children into Western values and orientations, and rewarding only a few with positions of status in the modern society. "Rather than being organically linked with the African society, the system stands opposed to any profound inputs from it and

instead laying the basis for a mental and spiritual subjugation of the African child to Western interests and their manifestations in the modern sector of society”. However, others (Thomson 1981) have argued that this is exactly what the school is supposed to do.

Financial Issues

Discussions about public spending and educational priorities will always be undertaken within a broad sectoral approach and will vary from country to country. The central question of concern is the extent to which changes in public policy can affect the variables that interact with the supply side of schooling. Colclough and Lewin (1993) showed that the total number of school places available in 1986 would have to be doubled if developing countries were to accommodate all the eligible school children by the year 2000. They noted that reasons for low enrolment at primary level did not for some countries, in general, appear to be that inadequate priority has been attached to spending on education (although spending priorities within education might be to blame). On the other hand, there are some countries where both GER and public expenditures on education are usually low. In an analysis of the resource gaps, Colclough et al. (2003) showed that the demands for schooling for all are very considerable and that a very substantial increase in external aid to education would need to be increased if all the gaps were to be closed. Lessons from the Fast Track Initiatives (FTI) (World Bank 2004) also showed that external support for primary education in low-income countries, will need to increase from just over \$1 billion to about \$3.7 billion. However, the report observed that “while some FTI partners have been quick to respond to, others will need to make fundamental changes in the way they do business, in particular to increase financial levels, to make financing more flexible and predictable, and to finance an increased level of recurrent costs”. According to the 2005 global monitoring report, the international efforts to improve coordination for EFA remains focused on mechanisms and initiatives. The report also showed that some progress has been made but it is not yet commensurate with the challenge, especially in translating international dialogue into national action. Galvanizing political will and commitment in all nations, which lie at the heart of the Dakar Framework for Action, remains the most pressing need” (UNESCO 2004, p.220). The FTI demonstrates for the education sector the broad reality that even under the most optimistic growth scenarios and best fiscal management, the dependency of many low-income countries on external aid will remain stable or increase over the short and medium term.

On School Effectiveness and School Improvement Research

Two groups of educational researchers have attempted to examine how schools can be improved and/or made more effective. School effectiveness researchers have examined issues of quality and equity in schooling (Fuller 1987; Levin & Lockheed 1991), while school improvement researchers have aimed to understand the process and stages of change that schools go through to perform better (Fullan 1982). This section briefly summarizes the main research findings and arguments from the two schools of thought.

School Effectiveness

One of the most widely cited reviews on third world school effectiveness (SE) research is the work of Fuller (1987) on what school factors raise achievement. Reviewing work by Schiefelbein and Farrell (1985) in Chile, Heyneman (1976) in Uganda, Fuller and Heyneman (1989), Heyneman and Loxley (1983) and many others, Fuller showed marked differences between developing and industrialized nations in the importance of school related factors on student achievement. In another review, Fuller and Clarke (1994) concluded that after more than two decades of empirical research, it is now known that under some conditions, school effects on achievement are greater than family influence within impoverished settings. In their review, Fuller and Clarke identify two major frameworks for studying school effectiveness- the policy mechanists and classroom culturalists.

Spurred by the central agencies' search for universal determinants of effective schools, policy mechanists try to isolate those instructional inputs and uniform teaching practices that yield higher achievement. This line of enquiry from a production function perspective, has yielded impressive findings that distinguish those instructional tools which are likely to yield achievement effects within impoverished settings from those that usually do not (Fuller & Heyneman 1989; Lockheed & Verspoor et al. 1992). The classroom culturalists emphatically object to this cultureless conception of the particular effect that different schools, locations and diverse societies and ethnic communities, are attempting to realise. These observers focused on the normative socialisation that occurs within classrooms, the values children bring to the school, legitimate form of village authority and power, and acquired attitudes towards achievement and modern forms of status (Durkheim 1956; Apple 1990). However, evidence on the cross-cultural variability in meanings assigned to teaching tools and pedagogical behaviours by school actors, and how these "socially constructed inputs" influence achievement and child socialisation, remains scarce. No body of literature from the classroom culturalist framework rivals the production function literature in Third World settings.

Other summaries of the school effectiveness research in developing countries (Dalin et al. 1994; Warwick et al. 1992; Lockheed & Verspoor 1992) identified two important elements if schools were to become effective. The first includes the basic necessary inputs of instructional materials, a curriculum with scope and sequence, time for learning and teaching practices. The second component is what they called facilitating conditions including community involvement, school-based professionalism, flexibility, relevance to pupil curricula and the will to act. In another analysis of the research on school effectiveness, Heneveld and Craig (1996), proposed a conceptual framework of factors that determine school effectiveness and divided them into four categories: supporting inputs from outside the school, enabling conditions, school climate and T/L process inside the school. Heneveld and Craig observed that all these interact with each other and that they are themselves influenced by the context surrounding the school. Their main contention was that "the characteristics of effective schools that affect student outcomes, and the student outcomes

they influence, are embedded in an institutional, cultural, social and political context that greatly influences how school factors interact with each other and how effective schools can become” (p.18).

School Improvement

School improvement (SI) usually refers to a school’s attempt to implement an innovation with the ultimate aim of producing positively valuable changes in student learning outcomes, in teacher skills and attitudes and in institutional functioning. Because of the strongly established school effectiveness methodologies, the results of SI studies have received criticism because they are alleged to lack objectivity and do not adequately examine curriculum matters (Creemers et al. 1989). However, Miles and Huberman (1984) and Huberman and Miles (1984; 1998), developed methodologies that structure qualitative data on change in school for objective analysis, providing strong support for the validity of the results from such methodologies. The strength of SI research lies in its concentration on how change occurs in schools. Key themes identified by the main researchers on SI (Huberman & Miles 1984; Fullan 1991) include: effective leadership, shared vision-building and support of SI permeating the organisation at both the district and school levels, commitment and acceptance of SI efforts and active initiative and participation. Heneveld et al. (1996) observed that it is disappointing that more research of this type has not been done in developing countries where the implementation of change is a major problem (p.186).

It can be noted that the SI and SE research traditions look at the problem of how to make schools better from different perspectives that complement each other. If educational planners and administrators are to make use of the findings that are common to both traditions, there is need for research methods that combine both schools of thought to make the results available to these decision-makers. This is what Riddell (1997) seemed to be calling for. In an assessment of the designs for SI and SE research in developing countries, Riddell strongly criticised the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of such studies. She observed that many Third World researchers have not seized the opportunity of unifying the increasingly contextualised qualitative research tradition and called for a vital break of this ‘schizophrenia’ The lesson from reform efforts focused on national policies and those based on classroom-level changes need to be united in order to enhance overall understanding between central managers and school or district-level administrators (p.201), she observed.

A Brief Discussion of the Issues

Hallak (1991) observed that, the obstacles to the universal achievement of EFA are many. In the poorest societies, the achievement of EFA will be a long-term process, requiring tenacious effort, strong and sustained political will, and perhaps brighter economic prospects. And as Colclough (1994) also observed, it is obvious that the detailed reasons as to why many children remain out of school in developing countries are complex and that they will differ from country to country- probably with as much variation as is found in the individual

historical, political, social and economic circumstances of different nations. Since the 1960s when the UPE agenda was first tabled, the various policies have not been capable of delivering a school of reasonable quality. Emerging evidence from the Malawi SACMEQ II study for example demonstrates that it is easier to achieve reforms which secure increased access to schooling than it is to enhance robust improvements in schooling quality (Chimombo et. al. 2004).

Issues of Education for all are about the poor and the disadvantaged and the aim of educational policy should therefore be to give every person a chance of developing his/her inherent potential. However, there remains considerable social selection in education and disparities in particular have persisted and it is the low socio-economic groups, which manifest low achievement (Chimombo 1999; Kadzamira & Rose 2003). The development of sound and inclusive strategies to accelerate progress towards good quality education for all is urgently needed. It is increasingly being realized that community involvement is one of the most critical requirement for successful educational reform (Oxfam 2001). Most other innovative approaches to the improving of basic education delivery have included compensatory programs within the formal education system to schools organized and financed by communities. Compensatory programs provided additional funds to the families, to the children themselves or to the schools which enroll disadvantaged children most of which are of fairly low quality. Other programs have included more flexibility in the organization of teaching, mobile schools for nomads, multi-grade teaching and evening courses for working children. All these have been organized because it is believed that in the formal school system, content and teaching methods are often inappropriate to tackle the needs of the disadvantaged children. Work elsewhere (Chimombo & Kadzamira 2001) demonstrated that in as far as problems of schooling predominantly involves the poor, community participation must aim at only sensitizing the communities on the importance of schooling while trying as much as possible to reduce the opportunity cost associated with schooling.

The poor are less able to afford education; they often live in the most remote areas that are farthest from government service providers; and they are most dependent on child labour. Our innovative approaches need to be developed in such a way that they can help overcome problems associated with poverty. The first step in overcoming exclusion involves understanding why the poor do not send their children to school. Participative research has a crucial role to play, because the poor themselves are the best policy advisers when it comes to identifying the causes of exclusion (Oxfam 2001). There is therefore need for participatory in-depth studies or analyses at school, zonal, district, divisional, community levels of specific problems and innovations to zero in on solutions to specific areas of concern for possible development

Oxfam (2001) also summarized other approaches as adapting schools to community (Escuela Nueva programme in Columbia), developing child-centered learning and improving teacher recruitment and standards (BRAC schools in India), and enhancing local control and scaling up. All these of course provide lessons from which other countries which are far from achieving UPE can learn. However, the extent to which these strategies can be

implemented in other countries will depend on the social, economic and cultural contexts. Countries with high T/P ratios, a largely illiterate population, and where political interests dictate what can and cannot happen to the education system may find some of these policy options dysfunctional in their settings. Further, one other major problem with alternative approaches to the delivery of basic education has been that in almost all cases, these programmes tend to provide an education of low quality to the poor and the disadvantaged. In worse situations, rural parents are asked to pay fees or contribute in kind to the construction and maintenance of their schools. In other cases, communities are asked to finance their schools and pay their teachers. Suffice to say that these teachers are mostly insufficiently trained and paid badly and irregularly. As a result, poor people pay for an education, which is free to others. “Unless more resources are devoted to such programmes, the risk embedded in alternative approaches is that poor education will be provided to the poor” (Hallack 2003).

One other challenge to the implementation of policies in developing countries is that of diversity. Experience with implementing a local language policy in Malawi showed that the major challenge was one of feasibility. The evidence also showed that in a multi-lingual country, the institution of such a policy needed information about what languages students and teachers spoke in each district and in the different schools within each district. The Malawi example raised several important questions of how to teach pupils to read well in the face of virtual absence of reading materials; how to develop the pupils’ proficiency in the mother tongue or the second language when the teachers are not proficient in that language; and how to develop positive self-images for the pupils who are members of low status and oppressed minority groups (Kishindo 1998). Williams (1996) observed that:

The problematic issue of language in education in Malawi and Zambia is not only a consequence of linguistic imperialism... and the hegemony of English with the attendant ‘education equals English’ attitude... It is also the result of enclosing groups with differing languages within the same state boundaries. There would be problems in preparing adequate amounts of printed material or adequate numbers of appropriately qualified teachers for the languages of Zambia and Malawi. (p.202)

However hard we try to provide education to all, we still have to leave with the reality that for the mean time, a good number of our people will still miss out on this. Unfortunately, it is the poor who are prone to dropping out and this is contrary to the conventional view, which sees primary schooling as a penance to poverty reduction. The main problem becomes what you do for all children and adolescents who due to their economic situation, ethnic origins, geographical location or gender, did not have access to basic education and training. Another missing key topic has been the recognition of the importance of informal and non-formal education. These types of education are of immense use throughout the world, yet have been sidelined from much of the debate regarding educational achievement. It would seem then that there is need for a different type of education for those who miss out; an education that constitutes a break with the institutional and pedagogical structures of present

education. This education should differ from formal education in its social objectives of equity, occupational flexibility, and integration of education with active life. But there are strong pointers that the provision of this type of education ought to be done outside the formal school system (Thompson 1981).

An increasingly differentiated social structure requires rationalized efforts at integration. Local institutions; the family, church, and village authorities; are grounded in local particulars. Social and economic integration on a nationwide scale requires a universally managed form of socialization (Durkheim 1956). Fuller and Rubinson (1992) further argued that postcolonial societies continue to experience one important legacy of imperial administration: a modern elite defined by their government or corporate employment, surrounded by a largely disenfranchised peasant class. But as has been argued elsewhere (Chimombo 1999; 2004), the state simply lacks the administrative capacity and fiscal resources to penetrate peripheral areas and social classes to provide education of minimum quality to its people. Consequently, “while popular preference for schooling may persist, eroding expectations regarding the benefits of staying in school threatens the stability of already fragile states” (Fuller & Rubinson 1992, p. 23).

The Case for Quality Basic Education Retaliated

Some twelve years ago (Chimombo 1986), I had strongly argued for a case for quality basic education. Making that argument, I supported A.R. Thompson (1981, p.122) that:

The strength of the schools lies essentially in what is usually termed as general education, equipping young people with the tools needed to investigate and inquire, to think, conclude and understand.

I had argued that it is not the duty of the formal school system to train in specific production skills. Others have argued for “opening up curriculum content to African culture as expressed through language, sciences, arts, and religious beliefs (Brock-Utne 2000, p.277) and that quality education means relevance to local needs and adaptability to local culture (Hallak 1991). But can education perform these dual functions? My purpose here is to simply retaliate the case for quality basic education and retaliate the argument that training for the job market is best done by separate institutions. The school has always taught the skills for modern sector while the market for low level skills is already supplied by traditional apprenticeships. My argument was that the formal school is not better placed to offer training than apprenticeships or post-school skill centers. I had argued further that it is not possible to combine skills training and general education to fulfill the school’s dual function and that the later will continue to dominate as long as schooling is selective and general education is the basis for selection. General education is useful in raising the consciousness and the level of receptivity to innovations and the general way of living of the people. On this basis, the school will continue do the inevitable: to encourage a drift of youth and talent to urban areas, and to divorce young people from their communities and cultures.

In culturally and religiously diverse societies which are undergoing industrialization, and in which the external family system is breaking down, an education system can only be relevant if it provides individuals with the intellectual equipment, moral values and skills needed to cope with the changing world. In an era of rapid globalization, differences in access to education will continue to provide an important part of the explanation for existing inequalities in the distribution of wealth between countries and within countries. Countries that fail to develop education system capable of responding to this challenge will fall further behind with the attendant costs to their citizens. Unfortunately, globalization and new information technologies are rapidly increasing the returns to education at a time when there are massive inequalities in educational opportunities. What this means is that for the millions of the poor who are denied quality basic education, globalization clearly points in the direction of rapid marginalisation. Nobody needs to be convinced that the only starting point to reversing this direction is through the provision of quality basic education to all. The implications for this are that developing countries must continue the search for solutions to their problems.

Possible Areas for Further Research

The focus of the agenda for the development of education at the international level is the development of an integrated education system through more self-reliant efforts. This means the exploration of various ways in which African countries can move towards the autonomous development of their education systems and the role of research in informing practice is vital. It is on the basis of this understanding that the following areas are being proposed for further research by African experts so that new ways of projecting the future development of African education can be facilitated.

Studies on School Effectiveness

The provision of quality basic education will necessitate a change in the way schools function. There is much to be learnt from the school effectiveness and improvement studies that have been undertaken (Dalín et al. 1994; Heneveld & Craig 1996; Fuller & Clarke 1994). From a self-reliant perspective, there seems to be need for school based participatory needs assessment and evaluation of school effectiveness. This could be in a form of longitudinal studies aimed at empowering schools to identify their own problems and attempt to find solutions to them. The focus of such studies could be the contrasting of two schools (one good and another bad) within similar localities with the aim of understanding the differentiating factors between them. The aim should be to discover some of the key factors to successful implementation and institutionalization of educational change. The product of such a study could also help towards the establishment of school-based data bases which could be used by school managers to produce school level indicators for decision making and monitoring of schools. Many developing countries do not yet have ongoing programs to measure student learning in a systematic way that will allow trend analysis. The FTI recommends that at international level, an agreement is urgently needed to systematically

measure trends in learning. Such an action research should help us move in this direction.

Studies on Indigenous and Exogenous Complementarity/ Understanding the Transition from Home to School

There are boundaries of secrecy around the bodies of ritually transmitted knowledge that assert and reify the principal social categories of communities. My argument is that it is within these sociological, cultural and ideological settings that problems of schooling need to be understood. At a point when children are entering school, they have already been educated and trained in the patterns of behaviour and morals as well as in the techniques of earning a living, in proper modes of conduct, in interpersonal relations and in the creative expression of their culture. Western education should not be transplanted *in toto* to these African settings, but must be done so that it does not constitute, for the African child, a most serious discontinuity between the school and the rest of his/her environment.

We need to understand the evolution of school cultures over the years and outcomes in the socio-economic cultural context. In this regard, the study of indigenous forms of education becomes crucially important. The focus of such studies should be on the considerations, views, opinions and assessments of past and contemporary educationists who, through research and experience, have become aware of the needs and goals of African societies. The main aim here is to explore how the indigenous forms of education can be used to enhance the delivery of basic education by the formal school system. Education should be inclusive, responding to the diverse needs and circumstances of learners and giving appropriate weight to the abilities, skills, and knowledge they bring to the teaching and learning process (UNESCO 2004). The evidence has shown that something is wrong at that level. If EFA is to be achieved, this problem needs to be urgently addressed. It is this further research, aimed at identifying policy investment strategies and local action, that will be cost effective in raising the quality of primary schools and hence the learning curves of young children.

Studies on Community Participation and Decentralisation (Using PRA)

Reducing the high dropout rates at the lower level requires policy changes that are based on a proper understanding of the linkage in the transition from homes to school. And this transition depends on the school-community relationships. Any attempt to integrate the school into the community and genuinely provide for EFA requires an understanding of this relationship. The growing body of research on the performance of organizations (Hoppers 1998) shows that the most effective governance of any organization occurs when authority for decision-making is located as close as possible to the site where actions are taken. The 2005 global monitoring report calls for a “strong partnerships within schools, between the head teacher and classroom teachers and between the school and the local community, with proactive support from district education authorities” (UNESCO 2004, p.171). But the exercise of authority will also be mediated by variations in culture, resources and capacities of the context in which decisions are made. Collaboration between different actors is crucial

to successful policy reform. It is increasingly being understood that solutions to the global crisis in education will have to be built on the foundation of partnership between governments, local communities and organizations working with the poor. A common feature of case studies of innovative approaches to improving basic education indicate that they are built on community participation, with government scaling up imaginative and innovative ideas developed at the community level into district-wide and national plans, thus improving the coverage and quality of education systems.

School Level Action Research

The school is a complex social institution that operates within a wider socio-cultural and political context. Accumulated evidence has demonstrated the need for “governments to develop policies that place schools at the forefront of improving educational quality. This involves the important questions regarding the levels of authority, responsibility and accountability that should lie with those who work directly in and with schools” (UNESCO 2004, p.168). Schools however, cannot effect meaningful change without sufficient capacity and considerable ongoing support. This calls then for head and teachers to be equipped with the necessary skills that will make schools be part of and own attempts at educational reform. Thus, schools need information on their performance so as to identify their strengths, weaknesses and priorities, in motivating rather than demotivating ways. Further, the teacher is the key factor in the teaching learning process. And yet, in most cases, they are the forgotten lot in the change process. Further, teachers in developing countries operate under very pathetic conditions such as overcrowded classrooms, wide variations in age, and with little or no materials for teaching. Most worrying of course is the fact that these teachers are ill equipped to cope with such situations. Schools and hence teachers need to be empowered with skills which will enable them identify their own problems (administrative or pedagogical) and seek solutions to these problems. Being called upon here is the use of action research as a means of addressing the implementation of educational reform e.g. teacher led action research in the classroom. Such studies would complement what is usually lacking from the formal teacher training systems.

Research on appropriate forms non-formal education

According to the latest issue of the EFA Monitoring report, 104 million children of primary school age were not enrolled in school in 2000. The majority of these were in Asia and Africa. The evidence has demonstrated that issues of attrition will take time to be overcome. However, if governments are to forge ahead with good governance and democratization, these people cannot just be ignored. There is need for policies and strategies that target these dropouts to give them alternative types of education and vocational training, focusing on developing life skills. African universities have a greater role to play in this. Rapidly changing technologies and increasing globalization means that better education and training will become essential for sustained livelihoods and the competitiveness of rural economy. Research by the university should lead to the development of innovative ways of

equipping the youths with skills that will enable them to lead a better life.

Studies on the Effects of Aid dependency

After over three decades of international assistance in education the goal of UPE has remained elusive. In some cases, some countries have witnessed a downward trend in the development of their education systems. It may be of interest to African scholars to take stock and ask in what ways has increased reliance on aid affected education decision making process and priority setting and indeed the whole educational planning process?

Studies on the Impact of HIV/AIDS

AIDS is having a very devastating impact of the economies of developing countries and indeed on the education systems of these countries. More studies are still needed to understand the dynamics of the pandemic and the effect this is having on the education system.

Conclusion

For more than 40 years, different stakeholders have partnered to support the development of basic education throughout the developing countries. Education is one of the most powerful instruments for reducing poverty and inequality and for laying the basis for sustained economic growth. Education also has powerful synergistic effects on the other development objectives: empowerment, better health, and good governance. The literature has shown that the continued under-enrolment of some children may be caused as much as by lack of demand for schooling as its supply. All the evidence is pointing to the fact that education should be inclusive, responding to the diverse needs and circumstances of learners and giving appropriate weight to the abilities, skills, and knowledge they bring to the teaching learning process.

What is clear is that another decade of failure on the par with that which followed Jomtien conference will have devastating consequences for the millions of people around the globe who endure poverty and inequality. The post-Dakar challenge is to develop more effective strategies and policies at the national level, and, through international action, to provide the financial resources necessary to ensure that such policies succeed. While the reform requirements of achieving EFA for both donors and recipient governments are substantial, more research is still needed that should help in shaping the future of education in developing countries.

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