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***Cross-national Synthesis on Education Quality Report No. 2:
Professional Development and Teachers' Conceptions of
Educational Quality***



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***CROSS-NATIONAL SYNTHESIS ON
EDUCATION QUALITY REPORT NO. 2:
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHERS'
CONCEPTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL QUALITY***

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INTRODUCTION

This is the second in a series of reports on the Cross-National Synthesis of Educational Quality, a comparative qualitative study focusing on issues of educational quality at the school, classroom, and community levels across national contexts. As discussed in an extensive review of the literature on educational quality developed under the USAID-funded Education Quality Improvement Program 1 (EQUIP1) Leader Award:

Educational quality in developing countries has become a topic of intense interest, primarily because of countries' efforts to maintain quality ... in the context of quantitative expansion of educational provision. ... Whether explicit or implicit, a vision of educational quality is always embedded within countries' policies and programs. (Leu and Price-Rom 2006, p. 2)

Leu and Price-Rom (2006, p. 2) state that often the literature is based on an assumption of "consensus ... on what the term means," although, in fact, "approaches to quality can vary widely." For example, Don Adams and colleagues (Adams 1993; Adams et al. 1995) explain that conceptions of educational quality can focus on a variety of inputs (e.g., facilities, curriculum), processes (e.g., instructional approach and student participation), and/or outputs (e.g., student achievement or attainment). And in line with increased attention to teaching and learning processes in discussions of educational quality (see also UNESCO 2004; Verspoor 2006), Leu and Price-Rom (2006, p. 2) note that "[m]any countries are simultaneously implementing reforms based on more active approaches to teaching and learning, further challenging education systems and, especially, teachers."

Based on insights derived from this literature review, this second cross-national synthesis report draws on information on educational quality obtained from a series of pilot studies also carried out under the EQUIP1 Leader Award: Teacher Professional Development in Ethiopia, Transitional Education Program for Out-of-School Girls in India, Teacher Professional Development in Namibia, and Education in Islamic Schools in Nigeria. More specifically, this report presents a comparative analysis of how, if at all: 1) teachers' conceptions of educational quality are consistent with policy discourses in the respective society; 2) teachers' conceptions of educational quality are consistent with the content and delivery approach of professional development programs in which teachers participated; and 3) teachers and other stakeholders perceive such professional development programs to have influenced teachers' ideas about educational quality.

This second report, thus, builds on the first report (Barrow and Leu 2006). The first report a) found similarities across three settings in teachers' as well as school administrators', parents', and students' conceptions of educational quality teachers and b) hypothesized that teachers' discourse, celebrating active learning and student-centered pedagogies, reflects ideas articulated in policy discourses:

The synthesis demonstrates a remarkable similarity in stakeholders' perceptions of the five quality factors, despite the disparate locations and very different school contexts studied. ... 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. ... 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. (Barrow and Leu 2006, pp. 14-15)

The second report also foreshadows the focus on the third report, which will examine teachers' classroom practice in relation to a) their conceptions of educational quality and the content and delivery approach of professional development programs. The third report is projected to address the question of whether teachers only learned to "talk" about active learning and student-centered pedagogies or whether they also began to implement such reform pedagogies in their work with students.

The purpose of the cross-national synthesis reports is to generate information that will assist in understanding of stakeholders' conceptions of educational quality, what influences their conceptions, and what implications their conceptions have for their actions in classrooms, schools, and communities. The majority of cross-national studies investigate national policy initiatives, training and other reform-support inputs, and the outputs of reform project interventions (e.g., teacher behavior or student achievement). Few cross-national studies provide "thick descriptions" obtained from open-ended interviews with stakeholders (Alexander 2000). This synthesis, therefore, attempts to illuminate what is going on within the "black box" – the space in which educators and others think and act in relation to project inputs with consequences for project outputs. This new way of looking at and talking about educational quality should be helpful not only in strengthening the traditionally weak relationship between policy and practice (Farrell 2002) but also in facilitating dialogue between researchers, on the one hand, and policy makers, program designers, and practitioners, on the other (Ginsburg and Gorostiaga, 2003).

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)¹. 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).

The USAID/EQUIP1 *Pilot Study on Teacher Development in Ethiopia* (Asgedom et al., 2006) was carried out by the Academy for Educational Development in cooperation with the Institute of Educational Research of Addis Ababa University². The study focused on teachers' and principals' perceptions of quality of education in general, quality of teaching, and quality of learning in four of Ethiopia's regional states – Amhara State; Oromia State; Southern Nations,

¹ The EQUIP1 pilot studies in the synthesis were carried out in three very different settings: rural government primary schools in Ethiopia and Namibia; traditional Qur'anic schools in Nigeria; and a transitional school for out-of-school girls in India.

² The study was led by four senior researchers from the Institute of Educational Research; one researcher collected data in each of the regional states and conducted interviews in regional languages.

Nationalities and People's State; and Tigray State. The data summarized in this paper were drawn from in-depth interviews with core teachers and their principals, focus group discussions with teachers at each focal school, and the survey of a wider group of grade 4 teachers. The researchers interviewed and observed the teaching of six core teachers in each regional state, two in each of three focus schools – one urban, one peri-urban, and one rural³. The researchers also interviewed principals⁴ in these schools and conducted focus group discussions with eight grade 4 teachers in each school. The total sample of informants across the four regional states in the in-depth interviews, therefore, was made up of 24 core teachers, 12 principals, and 89 teachers in focus groups. The study also includes a quantitative survey of over 100 grade 4 teachers in each regional state. A total of 439 teachers completed a survey questionnaire that has been used to triangulate the qualitative data from the interviews and observations.

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 (Rocha, 2006). This 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. In December 2004, as part of on-going qualitative action research at the school, three project staff conducted in-depth open interviews (lasting, on average, 45 minutes) with eight teachers: 3 male and 5 females. In order to inform staff's decisions regarding appropriate project interventions, teachers were asked to discuss how they: a) understood the curriculum, b) conceived of educational quality, c) participated in and evaluated the professional development activities provided at the Kuchinerla School.

The USAID/EQUIP1 *Pilot Study on Teacher Professional Development in Namibia*, carried out by the Academy for Educational Development in cooperation with the Namibian National Institute for Educational Development (NIED), an institution of the Ministry of Education responsible for curriculum development, teacher preservice and inservice programs, and research. The study addressed the overall issue of how teacher quality and teacher learning, as central elements of education quality, are best supported (van Graan and Leu, 2006). The study was 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 data summarized here are drawn from in-depth, open-ended interviews of a core group of 40 grade 4 teachers as well as of other stakeholders – principals, parents, and students – in 20 rural schools in the Oshana and Oshikoto Regions of northern Namibia. The teachers and the schools were similar except that 10 of the schools participate in the School Improvement Program (SIP) of the USAID-funded Basic Education Support Programs 2 and 3 (BESII and BES3) and 10 of the schools have participated in the more centralized and episodic professional development provided by the regions and a variety of other donors.

³ In the selection process, two schools were chosen in each regional state that had some level of participation in professional development activities organized through the USAID Basic Education Program (BEP) which has supported the government's programs to improve quality of education in Ethiopia since 1995. BEP was formerly called Basic Education System Overhaul Program (BESO I, 1995-2002) and Basic Education Strategic Objective Program (BESO II, 2002-2007, renamed BEP in early 2006).

⁴ Principals in Ethiopia are usually called school directors, although this paper uses the term principal.

The USAID/EQUIP1 *Pilot Study on Education in Islamic Schools in Nigeria* (Abd-El-Khalick et al. 2006), was carried out by the Education Development Center⁵. Its purpose was to explore the characteristics and needs of traditional Qur'anic schools, attended by millions of children in Nigeria, in order to determine if there are possibilities to enlist Qur'anic schools in the goal of achieving universal basic education. Data were collected in February and March of 2005 by a team of international EQUIP1 staff members and former staff members of the Literacy Enhancement Assistance Program (LEAP) during visits to 17 schools on Lagos Island and in Kosofe in Lagos state, in Doma, Keffi and Akwanga in Nasarawa state, and in Kano Municipality and Tsanyawa in Kano state. The instruments used to collect the data included: 1) Classroom Observation Form⁶, 2) Classroom Interaction Recorder⁷, 3) Teacher Questionnaire⁸, 4) Teacher Interview⁹, and 5) Head Teacher Questionnaire¹⁰, and 6) School Resource Checklist¹¹. This report draws mainly on the data collected from a convenience sample of teachers from the 17 schools that had been involved in the Literacy Enhancement Assistance Program, which ended in September 2004. The questionnaire sample consisted of 57 teachers, and 22 of them participated in interviews, featuring more in-depth, open-ended questions regarding the quality of education and teaching.

CASE STUDY SUMMARIES

The authors of each pilot study drew on their data and other sources to develop a case summary focusing on the following components: a) teachers' conceptions of educational quality, b) policy discourses within the school/local/regional/national context, c) professional development programs offered in the context, d) perceived influence of professional development programs on teachers' ideas about educational quality. The four case summaries (Ethiopia, India, Namibia, and Nigeria) are presented below, followed by cross-country analyses of similarities and differences with respect to each component of the cases and in reference to (in) consistencies across components.

⁵ For discussion of earlier, related studies conducted in Nigeria, see Boyle (2006).

⁶ This is a 25 5-point Likert-type item instrument that targets a set of teacher instructional behaviors related to lesson preparation, classroom management and organization, active and student-centered teaching, gender equity, instructional materials and aids, and student evaluation.

⁷ This instrument documents the nature of both cognitive (memorizing, recalling, and figuring out/explaining) and affective (positive, neutral, and critical) interactions in the classroom, as well as the distribution of these interactions among boys and girls and across different areas in the classroom (front, middle, and back).

⁸ This instrument inquires about teachers' background and experiences, use of and participation in the Literacy Enhancement Assistance Program (LEAP) radio programs and Bi-monthly Training Workshops, as well as the make-up of the class and school day and the Parent Teacher Association.

⁹ This instrument asks more in-depth, open-ended questions about quality and relevance of education, the difference between government and Islamic schools, etc.

¹⁰ This instrument poses more in-depth, open-ended questions about quality and relevance of education, the difference between government and Islamic schools, etc., that inquires about the make-up of the school in terms of students and teachers, quality of education in the school, involvement of the Head Teacher and school teachers with LEAP, educational quality in Qur'anic schools, school curriculum, nature of student engagement with teaching and learning, and parent and community involvement with school life.

¹¹ This instrument documents the physical structure of and resources available in the school. All questionnaires and interviews were administered orally by members of the research team.

Ethiopia

Teachers' Conceptions of Educational Quality

Teachers studied in all four regional states reported similar understandings of educational quality, quality teaching and quality learning. Interviews with teachers revealed a focus on input, process, and output factors¹². Below we discuss findings from data collected through individual and focus group interviews as well as through survey questionnaires.

Teachers conceived of educational quality partly in terms of input factors, such as, resources (textbooks, instructional materials, desks), teachers (subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills), and the community (participation and financial contributions). With respect to process factors, teachers emphasized students asking questions and otherwise participating in classroom activities as indicators of educational quality, while also referring to assessing student performance and employing various teaching strategies and instructional materials. For teachers surveyed, important outcome factors included scoring high on exams, completing homework, achieving promotion to the next grade, and demonstrating what they learned in real life situations, though they gave even more prominence to students' behavior in classrooms, notably how students interact and their participation level¹³.

Responses to the questionnaire indicate that teachers in three of the four regions believe that involving students in class discussion and having good relations with students are the most important factors of quality teaching, though in Tigray teachers prioritized "improving student achievement." Teachers surveyed also reported that students' active participation in class is the most important indicator of student learning, ranked above performance on tests and examinations. The importance given here to students' reciting in class suggests that having students actively participate in class may be focused on memorization rather than problem-solving or other higher level cognitive learning goals.

Policy Discourse

When Ethiopia emerged from 17 years of rule by the Derg in 1991¹⁴, the country's infrastructure was devastated and participation in primary education was low and unevenly distributed. Gross enrolment rates in the early 1990s were only about 20 percent, with very little provision outside of urban areas that had been held by the Derg. In a major initiative to address problems related to access, equity, and quality of educational provision, the new government introduced the New Education and Training Policy in 1994 (Transitional Government of Ethiopia 1994). The NETP, supported by articles in the new constitution, sought to decentralize educational authority to the 11 newly created states (based on ethnicity) and called for new paradigms of education based on relevant, active, and student-centered teaching and learning.

¹² As discussed more fully in Leu and Price Rom (2006), scholars and policy makers have distinguished among *inputs* (e.g., infrastructure and resources, curriculum, textbooks, staffing), *processes* (e.g, teacher behavior, teacher-student interaction, and student-student interaction), and *outputs* (student achievement and attainment).

¹³ Teachers also alluded to other outcome factors, such as students adhering to school rules and regulations, being punctual, and having good attendance.

¹⁴ The "Derg" (the "committee" in Amharic) was the Soviet-supported military Marxist/Stalinist regime that overthrew the Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974. After 17 years of armed struggle against the Derg, it was overthrown in 1991 by a coalition of forces.

The 1994 National Education and Training Policy established the foundation for all subsequent policies (Ministry of Education 2005b) and shaped three subsequent Education Sector Development Programmes providing guidelines for translating policy into action (MOE 1997; 2002; 2005). In line with goals of creating “trained and skilled human power at all levels who will be driving forces in the promotion of democracy and [economic] development in the country” (MOE 2005, p. 5), the programs have focused on expansion of the system, increased access for marginalized children and girls, and reduction of attrition. As the rapid quantitative expansion has occurred, but within extreme resource constraints¹⁵, attention has increasingly been directed toward the issue of quality. Improving curricula, providing textbooks, increasing community participation, and augmenting financing for education are among the strategies pursued to address the perceived decline in the quality of education. Moreover, while all policy documents stress the importance of teachers for promoting learning, the emphasis on improving teacher quality is most prominent in the 2005 Education Sector Development Programme (Ministry of Education 2005b). This document states that teacher preparation will focus on improving the teaching-learning process, with the priorities of introducing active learning, practicing continuous assessment, and managing large classes.¹⁶

In-Service Professional Development Activities

In Ethiopia’s decentralized education system both pre-service teacher education and in-service professional development, like other components of the education sector, are funded and implemented (within national guidelines) by the states and, increasingly, the *woredas* (counties). All the states have adopted national policies for the improvement of teachers and teaching, which are presently guided by the Ministry’s Teacher Education System Overhaul program created in 2002/2003, within which continuous professional development is to be conducted at the school and school cluster levels.¹⁷ In-service education, traditionally centralized at the national or regional level, is now carried out entirely by supervisory personnel of the regional states and, increasingly, the *woredas*. In recent years faculty from the 24 teacher education institutions have also begun organizing school- and school cluster-based professional development programs for teachers in nearby schools.

In contrast to the multiplier or cascade models employed in the past, involving centrally run workshops employing large-group lecture formats, recent professional development programs have favored more decentralized and participatory models – using active-learning approaches for teacher-learners in the workshops. Nevertheless, the implementation of school cluster-based teacher professional development activities has varied across states. For example, programs in

¹⁵ As a result of these efforts to increase access Ethiopia has achieved national gross enrolment rates of 95 percent for grades 1-4 and 80 percent for grades 1-8, although these is still severe imbalance among the regional states (Afar and Somali Regional States, for example, have only around 20% GER for grades 1-8).

¹⁶ The Ethiopian discourse in terms of curriculum and instruction has remained primarily on the level of implementing a “problem-solving approach” (often interpreted as students being able to solve immediate problems of their lives rather than using a discovery learning approach or developing higher-order thinking skills) and “relevant education” (emphasizing the use of familiar local references and the practical application of learning) – although neither of these is examined in the grade 8 primary school leaving examination.

¹⁷ Not surprisingly, the degree of implementation of these policies varies among the states. The Ministry of Education adopted localized teacher professional development, carried out at the cluster and school levels, as national policy in 2000, based on successful pilots begun in 1998 in Tigray and SNNP with support from USAID/BESOI.

Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State and, especially, Tigrai (states where the model was piloted) reach most teachers on a frequent basis; Amhara's programs reach many teachers with excellent ongoing support through its new cluster coordinators, though the coverage varies somewhat;¹⁸ and while Oromia has formed its clusters, it has only been able to provide limited support for teachers through its under-staffed and under-funded *woredas*.

There is not a comprehensive in-service curriculum or learning plan at the national level or at any of the regional state levels, although materials and programs developed by the Ministry, the regional states, the colleges, and donor programs generally focus on student-centered education, active learning, continuous assessment, managing large classes, and involving teachers in action research.¹⁹ In-service workshops held at the school and cluster level vary, but methodologies in general are highly participatory. For example, some of the topics covered in cluster workshops in Tigrai in the late 1990s include: changing paradigms in education, relationship between the new curriculum and changing classroom methods, action research, assessment techniques and continuous assessment, and learner-centered methodologies (Gidey 2002). In conjunction with and as a reinforcement of such in-service activities, USAID/BESO and the MOE developed "Self-instructional Teacher's Kits" for grades 1-2 and grades 3-4 that are used in all regional states and contain modules on the following topics: how to help students learn more effectively using active learning methods, continuous assessment in primary schools, and how to manage a large class to promote active learning.²⁰

Perceived Influence of Professional Development on Teachers' Ideas

Teachers in all four regions perceived professional development programs as having informed their ideas about education, particularly related to ways to improve the quality of education, their teaching, and student learning.²¹ They reported that professional development activities altered their ideas by increasing their understanding of learners and of the learning process in the context of active learning. For instance, in Tigrai teachers mention how they began to think about how the whole child could be developed through promoting active learning and increasing student-teacher interactions. In Amhara, teachers report that they gained a better understanding of the problems of students growing up in difficult circumstances and how student-centered and active learning strategies would be more effective in meeting their needs. In the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State teachers reported that their professional development activities helped them understand that student-centered pedagogies can be effectively used in academic (as well as non-academic) subjects.

¹⁸ Amhara created the position of a cluster support specialist – an “excellent” teacher re-assigned to provide support, conduct programs, and initiate activities for and with all teachers in the cluster of schools.

¹⁹ For example, see USAID BESO II Project Quarterly Report (October-December 2005, pp. 36-48) for lists of topics included in in-service programs in the 11 regional states.

²⁰ The kits also contain subject-based (content and methods) professional development for math, environmental science, English, and natural science.

²¹ Similarly, principals note that innovations taught in the cluster-level professional development programs have influenced positively teachers' ideas about active learning and student-centered pedagogies. Moreover, professional development experiences helped to promote a culture of collegiality among teachers, thus enabling an on-going collaboration and exchange of new ideas about teaching and learning.

India

Teachers' Conceptions of Educational Quality

An indication of how teachers in Kuchinerla school conceived of educational quality is that they requested training in using new teaching methods, providing emotional support for girls who miss their parents, and organizing extra-curricular activities (such as kitchen gardening and income-generating activities). With respect to new (i.e., quality) teaching methods, teachers referred to using charts, pictures and models; explaining new concepts to children individually; incorporating stories and songs in lessons; and varying teaching methods to reach different children.

Policy Discourses

Since the late 1980s the Indian government has developed policies and initiated programs aimed at increasing girls' access to and achievement in schooling. As part of this effort, the Girl-Child School was established in May 2000 in Kuchinerla, a small village in Andhra Pradesh.²² This "school" provides a one-year, nonformal program for 100 girls aged 7-14 to prepare them to (re)enter the formal educational system. Most girls attending this program "dropped-out" of regular schools, according to them, because of poor educational quality – specifically, teachers' inability to teach basic literacy, numeracy, and life skills. Thus, this program is aligned with national government policies to increase access to and to ensure the educational quality, defined in terms of having curriculum that is relevant to local conditions, employing active-learning instructional methods that are suitable for out-of-school girls, and providing life-skills vocational training to enhance physical and economic well being.

In-Service Professional Development Activities

The Kuchinerla school has eight full-time teachers (five females and three males), most of whom had not received any formal pre- or in-service education prior to being hired. Moreover, although the government sponsors teacher training workshops once a year, only two teachers from each transitional school can attend the workshops and are expected to disseminate what they learned to their colleagues. The government training programs focus on preparing teachers to teach the lessons in the prescribed curriculum (*Abhyasa Deepika*), developed by the State Council for Educational Research and Training. The curriculum is divided into three components, focusing on: 1) basic literacy and numeracy skills (Telugu, English and Math); 2) general and social sciences; and 3) life skills (e.g., embroidery and candle making). Although government teacher training workshops are supposed to utilize active-learning and other participatory methodologies, they offer limited information about how to use such methodologies. Teachers report that workshops are theory-based and do not help them develop their teaching skills.

Starting in 2004, World Education program staff (with input from teachers) developed supplementary materials to be used in the program. Each lesson was designed to incorporate activity-based learning which involves small group activities, discussions, learning by doing, recap, and ways of sharing the learning with their peers and the community. A number of in-service professional development activities were organized to help teachers in using these materials as well as to enhance their knowledge and skills more generally. For instance, a five-day teacher training was conducted in June 2006 by the Movement for Rural Emancipation, an NGO based at Madanapalle, Chittoor District in Andhra Pradesh. Teachers were oriented on

²² The Center for Applied Research and Extension (Care) coordinated the local community effort with funding from the national government and private sources.

using the Experiential Learning Cycle,²³ identifying students' learning levels, teaching in multi-grade classrooms, monitoring class performance and developing instructional materials. During this and other workshops teachers actively participated, for example, in developing supplementary materials and observing classes in selected schools in the area.

Perceived Influence of Professional Development on Teachers' Ideas

Teachers perceived professional development activities as an essential step to improve teachers' ability to teach and to improve the quality of education provided in the school. Generally, they reported that their thinking about teaching had changed and that they had a lot of new ideas about teaching due to their attendance at professional development workshops, especially those organized by the World Education Project linked to the Kuchinerla school. For example, they have learned how non-classroom settings present learning opportunities. As examples, meals can be times to discuss the nutritional components of the food being served and kitchen gardens can be places to teach about science-related topics.

Namibia

Teachers' Conceptions of Educational Quality

When discussing how they conceived of quality education, Namibian teachers identified input, process, and output factors.²⁴ Input factors included resources (e.g., sufficient classrooms, textbooks, instructional materials); qualified, competent, and dedicated teachers; as well as cooperation among, teachers, principals, and parents within and among schools. In describing process factors teachers highlighted the importance of learner-centered education, in which learners actively participate, ask questions and contribute to class discussions; continuous assessment to gauge whether students are actually learning and make adjustments to their teaching strategies to reach different children; and making environment conducive to student learning through supportive and friendly interactions and physically attractive and stimulating classrooms. Teachers referenced the following output factors: individual-level cognitive development (gaining reading and writing skills, getting good grades, or passing an exam), individual-level social/moral development (exhibiting good behavior and social skills; being responsible, disciplined, punctual, and respectful; listening well), and the community/society level benefits (learning to contribute to and work for one's community).

Policy Discourse

The South West Africa People's Organization that led Namibia to independence in 1990 used education in its efforts to transform the society, promoting equity and democratic participation. After independence, the government dramatically expanded access to education, achieving primary enrolment rates of nearly 90%, and adopted policies that emphasized constructivist and learner-centered pedagogies (Van Graan et al. 2005, p. 19).²⁵ For instance, the government created a new pre-service teacher education program, the Basic Education Teacher Diploma,

²³ The Experiential Learning Cycle explores the cyclical pattern of all learning from *experience* through *reflection*, *conceptualization*, *action* and on to further *experience*.

²⁴ Teachers' discussion of educational quality, as well as quality of teaching and quality of learning, tended to be formulaic, repeating the phrases of policies (learner-centered education, knowing learners' needs, relating teaching to learners' environment, etc.) without really explaining those phrases when probed.

²⁵ Even while in exile in the mid-1980s, SWAPO launched the Integrated Teacher Professional Development Programme, a pre-service preparation program based on principles of social constructivism, knowledge integration, conceptual learning, critical and transformative pedagogy, learner-centered and democratic teaching, and reflective practice (Dahlstrom 1991, p. 7).

which like its pre-independence predecessor, was based explicitly on the principles of social constructivism, deep conceptual and situational understanding, and critical pedagogy, and promoted teachers as reflective practitioners, researchers, and social change agents (Dahlstrom 1995, p. 281; NIED 2003; Van Graan et al. 2005, p. 65).²⁶

However, within ten years the Namibian education system was being criticized for a) falling short from achieving its goals (NIED 2003), b) ranking at the bottom of a group of southern African countries in SAQMEC (Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality) assessments (UNESCO 2004), and c) adopting approaches that do not raise student achievements (World Bank 2005). Concerned with declining quality, the government developed the Strategic Plan for the Education and Training Sector Improvement (ETSIP) Programme (GRN 2005), which maintained the constructivist principles but placed more stress on standards, competencies, and testing.²⁷ For example, in the early-1990s the Namibian government's stated that "[e]xaminations are considered to assess only a limited range of achievements and would therefore never be sufficient as our sole indicator of the quality of education" (MEC 1993, p. 37).²⁸ In contrast, a decade later the government argued that "[t]he curriculum, the teacher, materials and the learning environment should all be of a high standard. Those standards need to be defined so that the quality of education can be monitored and improved where necessary" (NIED 2003, p. 5).

In-Service Professional Development Activities

Regional education departments in Namibia are responsible for conducting in-service professional development according to national policies. The programs are implemented by the regions, but they are not guided by a consistent national program²⁹ and little budget is allocated for this purpose.³⁰ Generally, in-service professional development programs are organized for teachers working in a cluster of schools, a structure established initially with support from the

²⁶ Namibian teachers, including graduates of the new pre-service preparation programs and especially those who were trained during the colonial period or who have only limited professional preparation, have found it difficult to interpret and practice the new education policies, especially in the context of extreme overcrowding and severely limited resources (NIED 2003).

²⁷ The World Bank has strongly encouraged a focus on assessment in Namibia and the pre-service teacher education curriculum is presently undergoing changes to reflect more attention to standards, competencies, and testing.

²⁸ This document continues: "The skills children need to master go beyond mastering basic reading, writing and numbers and the need for learning about citizenship in a democratic society or respect for others' culture and values are realized" (MEC 1993, p. 40).

²⁹ In part, because many have been implemented through donor-funded projects, most teacher in-service programs in Namibia vary in scope and content and are short lived – lasting only while the project exists and having few major elements incorporated into the education system. Programs include Inservice Training and Assistance for Namibian Teachers funded by the European Union and British Council; the English Language Teacher Development Project funded by the British Government; the Life Science Project funded by DANIDA (Danish International Development Assistance); the Namibia Early Literacy and Language Project funded by DfID (Department for International Development); the Upgrading African Languages in Basic Education in Namibia Project supported by GTZ Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit; the lower primary teachers in mathematics program supported by the Africa Group of Sweden; and the school management project funded by NORAD (Norwegian Agency for Development) and the Hans Seidel Foundation.

³⁰ Namibia's total education budget is overwhelmed by the relatively high salaries that teachers are paid, leaving little budget flexibility elsewhere in the system.

GTZ (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit – Society for Technical Cooperation) (MBESC 2002), with additional support and supervisions provided by Advisory Teachers and Circuit Inspectors. A related strategy, supported by the USAID-funded Basic Education Support Programs carried out in the north of Namibia, introduced a comprehensive School Improvement Program that includes school and teacher self-assessment activities.³¹ The school and teacher self-assessment process identifies areas in which support is needed for school improvement and teacher professional development, and this information contributes to the design and content of future activities.

The in-service programs, which are organized by regional education departments, use an episodic cascade model, in which selected teachers participate in district- or cluster-level workshops and then are to disseminate what they learned to their school colleagues (without a structured way of implementing or supporting this school-level dissemination). In contrast, the Basic Education Support project-supported in-service programs include all teachers in all schools in the focus areas, mainly through the teacher self-assessment element of the School Improvement Program.³² Generally, workshops and other professional development activities in Namibia focus on knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to learner-centered education (e.g., basing lessons on learners' knowledge and experiences, actively engaging learners in classroom activities, having learners talk and act more than listen in class, facilitating students' learning by doing, encouraging learners to initiate questions), continuous assessment (e.g., using learning objectives to assess students, giving learners regular and immediate feedback, adapting lesson plans based on assessment), and managing large classes.

Perceived Influence of Professional Development on Teachers' Ideas

Graduates of the pre-service Basic Education Teacher Diploma program reported that that experience informed their thinking about learner-centered education and active learning approaches – e.g., teachers acting as facilitators rather than knowledge transmitters, students being involved in their own learning and interacting with learners – as well as democratic classroom practices (which was described as primarily respecting the opinions of others), continuous assessment, and child development.³³ Teachers involved in in-service professional development also noted the following ideas that they had acquired during workshops: the need for teachers to be facilitators rather than knowledge transmitters, the possibility of integrating subjects across the

³¹ The SIP was initiated as a pilot in 2000 in BESII and is now expanding with support from BES3 to all 770 schools in the six northern regions: Caprivi, Kavongo, Oshikoto, Oshana, Omusati, and Ohangwena. In the Namibia Pilot Study, drawn on for this report, 10 of the 20 sample of schools and 20 of the 40 interviewed teachers (from mainly rural areas of Oshana and Oshikoto Regions) participated in SIP for at least three years.

³² An important part of the School Improvement Program is the development of a School Development Plan, which is based on findings derived from a School Self Assessment. The School Self Assessment process engages teachers, principals, and parents in reflecting on questions such as: What are the purposes of education? How can we work with schools to create change? What can be changed? The use of School Self Assessment to develop School Development Plans, based on the model of School Improvement Program, has now been institutionalized as the national policy for all schools in the country.

³³ Many teachers seemed to appreciate the importance of theoretical knowledge, and that their pre-service preparation helped them apply instructional theories to practice. However, some teachers noted that theory and practice were often far removed from one another – pre-service courses provided no connection between the theory taught and its practical application to practice.

curriculum, the value of the use of group work for students, and the importance of teachers reflecting on their own practice.³⁴

Nigeria

Teachers' Conceptions of Educational Quality

When asked to describe a quality primary education, the 22 teachers interviewed cited a total of 48 responses. Of these 48 responses, 9 focus on inputs factors (e.g., the school environment, availability of resources), and 9 address process factors (e.g., curricular content and type of subjects taught) and 15 refer to output factors (e.g., test scores, child preparation for future schooling, able to read and write, etc). Only 7 responses call attention to the quality of instruction as a key factor, and the remaining 8 responses highlight that a quality primary education would develop social skills, morality, physical and spiritual development and good citizenship.

Interviewees provided an even greater number of responses (71) when asked to describe the teaching of a “skilled teacher.” These included preparing a good lesson plan (mentioned by 9 of the teachers) as well as giving homework and understanding and using teaching aids (each mentioned by 3 teachers). Of particular interest, there were 16 responses (from 12 teachers) that focused on areas integral to a student-centered teaching approach: a) helping students, establishing friendships with students, being patient with students (each mentioned by 3 teachers); b) using student-centered teaching and using interactive teaching (each mentioned by two teachers); as well as c) encouraging pupil participation in class, using group work, and checking for understanding (each mentioned by one teacher).

Policy Discourse

In the context of “Education for All,” the government of Nigeria is interested in counting children who receive an education in Islamiya schools in the tally of those enrolled in and receiving education. For the government to do so, however, the schools must meet some minimum standards in terms of what is taught, that is, implementing the national curriculum. In 2002, as the USAID-funded Literacy Enhancement Assistance Program (LEAP) was getting underway, the government, especially in the Northern Islamic state of Kano, was interested in trying to regulate the Islamic school sector. An Islamic Education and Social Affairs Board had recently been created to help Qur’anic schools become Islamiya schools, which resemble the public schools more closely, for instance, by teaching elements of the public school curriculum and giving students exams.³⁵ Hence, the notion of quality implicit in the policy discourse regarding Islamiya education focuses on students being exposed to the same curriculum content and, to some extent, the same teaching quality that their government secular school counterparts are getting.

³⁴ Teachers who participated in programs organized by regional education departments and those involved in the School Improvement Program (SIP) activities felt that professional development had changed their ideas about teaching and learning. However, some of the non-SIP teachers said most of what they knew about teaching was acquired during their pre-service program (and not their in-service program) experiences.

³⁵ The Qur’anic schools generally are one- or two-room schools, run by a single teacher with apprentices, serving pupils of varying age, focusing on religious subjects almost exclusively. The Islamiya schools tend to group children in age-segregated classrooms, use grade levels, teach more than religious subjects (i.e., they include elements of the public school curriculum), and give students exams. Islamiya schools can stretch all the way up through high school, although the ones in this study tended to go up to grade 6.

In-Service Professional Development Activities

Islamiya schools were included in LEAP, at least partly to involve their teachers in professional development programs, since as employees of non-government schools they were not included in government-run, in-service training programs.³⁶ It is important to note that 34 of the 56 teachers interviewed for the pilot study stated that they had participated in LEAP-conducted, in-service activities.³⁷

The LEAP in-service training program consisted of 11 workshops, focusing primarily on student-centered teaching in English and mathematics in primary grades three to six. The basic notion of educational quality that LEAP espoused was that student-centered instruction would result in better student learning overall. The workshops gave attention to “Lesson Planning for Student-Centered Teaching: Presentation, Practice, Performance (the 3 Ps)” as well as “Six Student-Centered Teaching Strategies” (Multi-level Thinking, Cooperative Learning, Modeling, Multi-Sensory Learning, Student Self-Assessment, and Continuous Assessment). The U.S. and Nigerian staff facilitating the workshops, organized by the Education Development Center, sought to promote student-centered philosophy and practices not only through workshop goals and content, but also through the materials distributed and the activities they implemented as part of – and as follow-on to – the workshops.³⁸

Perceived Influence of Professional Development on Teachers’ Ideas

While teachers and head teachers interviewed offered generally positive assessments of their experiences in the LEAP-organized workshops and other in-service professional development activities (i.e., they found them to be well-organized and stimulating), they did not identify specific ideas that were learned during those experiences.

DISCUSSION AND COMPARISON OF CASE STUDIES

The case studies conducted in a range of school and community settings in specific regions of Ethiopia, India, Namibia, and Nigeria offer insights into how teachers’ conceptions of educational quality may have been developed in recent years. The discussion below, of course, is limited by the fact that we do not have data on teachers’ conceptions of educational quality prior to the emergence of current policy discourses and prior to their involvement in the identified in-service professional development activities. While such baseline data would be useful, we have sought to fill this gap by drawing on teachers’ and other stakeholders’ perceptions of the influence that in-service professional development experiences had on teachers’ ideas about educational quality.

³⁶ In contrast to LEAP, in-service professional development, especially that organized through international development projects, tends to be structured as programs for advanced certification and last a year or more, often necessitating teachers to relocate for a year or more to attend a course.

³⁷ While all of the schools involved in the pilot study were a part of LEAP, of 56 teachers interviewed, 27 cited that they had participated only LEAP in-service activities, 7 named both LEAP as well as other training programs, 12 named only other programs, and 10 reported that they had not been involved in any in-service professional development.

³⁸ In addition to the training manuals used in each workshop, LEAP provided resource kits containing books, sample student-centered lesson plans, and instructions for developing learning materials from local resources. Moreover, student-centered teaching strategies were modeled in the interactive radio instruction program broadcasts, which completed the face-to-face workshop sessions.

With these limitations in mind, it is interesting to note how teachers' conceptions of quality reflect key elements of the policy discourses in each country as well as the content included and approach employed in in-service professional development programs. Below we will review the cases in relation to this point, focusing particularly on the value given to using active and student-centered learning instructional practices.

In describing their views of educational quality, teachers in Ethiopia mentioned "student participation" and "students asking questions" (what we have termed process factors) and "how students interact" and students' "level of participation" (what we have labeled output factors). The larger sample of teachers who responded to the survey questionnaire referenced "involving students in the classroom" and having "good relations with students" as indicators educational quality and "reciting in class" and promoting the "active participation of students in class" as indicators of student learning.³⁹ These teachers' conceptions of educational quality reflect the national policy discourse, calling for a new paradigm of education based on relevant, active, and student-centered teaching and learning and stressing that the way to improve the teaching-learning process is by employing active learning and continuous assessment strategies. Their conceptions of educational quality also mirror the content of some of the in-service programs offered, both in their attention to issues of "student-centered education," "active learning," continuous assessment, and teachers engaging in action research"⁴⁰ as well as their use of "active learning" approaches in the workshops for teachers. It appears that the similarity between teachers' conceptions and the ideas highlighted (through the official and hidden curriculum) of in-service professional development programs is not a coincidence. According to the teachers interviewed, these programs influenced their ideas; they thus came to better understand learners and the learning process in the context of active learning, appreciate more fully how active learning can help students who are experiencing significant social problems, and see that student-centered instruction could be used in classes focusing on academic as well as non-academic subjects.

In India teachers in Kucherinla School signaled their conceptions of educational quality by asking for in-service programs about "new teaching methods" and when they responded to interview questions about quality teaching by referring to teachers explaining things to individual pupils and teachers varying their instruction depending on the individual child's needs. While not articulating it as such, their ideas are certainly in line with notions of active and student-centered approaches to teaching. Their ideas, thus, reflected the national policy discourse promoting active-learning teaching methods – along with relevant curriculum – at least for programs for out-of-school girls. The teachers' conceptions also reflected the content and processes included in in-service programs, especially those developed by the USAID-funded project. The content of the on-going series of workshops (organized to help teachers use newly developed supplementary materials, which incorporated activity-based learning) focused on the importance of identifying students' learning levels and monitoring class performance and developing instructional materials, and the approach used in the workshops actively involved the teacher-learners in

³⁹ Recall that interviewees in Tigray gave more emphasis to improving student achievement than to any specific instructional approaches. However, note that in Tigray as the other regional states teachers tended to highlight student participation in class as the preferred indicator of student learning.

⁴⁰ It is noteworthy that "action research" represents a process active learning for the teachers (in relation to the in-service instructors guiding their efforts), thus perhaps reinforcing ideas related to active learning being used with school pupils.

observing instruction and making supplementary materials. Teachers' conceptions of educational quality (emphasizing active learning approaches) were directly influenced by their participation in the in-service programs. They illustrated this by citing examples of new methodologies, such as using meals and girls' everyday life experiences and the local environment for teaching certain subjects.

According to the interviewed Namibian teachers, educational quality includes students actively participating, asking questions, and contributing to discussions (i.e., learner-centered education) as well as teachers being reflective practitioners and researchers.⁴¹ Their conceptions were definitely in line with the policy discourse, which since 1990 had celebrated constructivist and learner-centered approaches to teaching and learning. Interestingly, teachers' did not incorporate newly emphasized elements in the national policy discourse – i.e., standards and testing – which emerged after the World Bank critiques around the turn of the 20th century. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that in-service programs, including those organized by the USAID-funded project, maintained a strong focus on knowledge, skills, and attitudes concerning learner-centered education (basing lessons on learners' knowledge and experiences, actively engaging learners in classroom activities, etc.) and continuous assessment. Certainly, the teachers interviewed mentioned that their ideas about educational quality had been influenced by their experiences in in-service programs, mentioning ideas about teachers as facilitators, student group work, and teachers' reflecting on their own practice.

In Nigeria, while only a small number (7 of 48) of teachers' responses mentioned "quality of instruction" as an element of educational quality, when teachers were asked to describe a "skilled teacher," more responses (14 of 71) listed things that can be considered as components of student-centered and active learning approaches. These included helping students, establishing friendships, being patient, encouraging student participation, and interactive teaching. Moreover, it is less clear that even the relatively few references to active learning approaches are in line with the national or state discourses on educational quality, in that such discourses appeared to highlight curricular issues in the development of Qur'anic schools into Islamiya schools. Nevertheless, that some teachers' conceptions of educational quality incorporate notions of student-centered and active learning instructional approaches does reflect the content and processes of the in-service education programs organized through the Literacy Enhancement Assistance Program. These programs emphasized knowledge and skills related to student-centered learning in teaching English and mathematics, and reinforced these content messages in the strategies they employed in the workshops and in the materials that were developed for teachers to use in their classrooms. Whether this is a coincidence or a matter of program influence, though, is not clear, since interview data only tell us that those participating in the programs evaluated them positively.

CONCLUSION

Before summarizing what we believe can be learned from this second cross-national synthesis on educational quality, we want to acknowledge the limitations in the data sources. Samples are relatively small and certainly not selected in ways that represent teachers in each country. Moreover, the data were collected once, thus not allowing us to trace changes in conceptions and perceptions over time and experiences. As with any qualitative research, however, the value of

⁴¹ See discussion above (in footnote) regarding how action research can be considered a form of active learning for participants, whether they be teachers, students, or community members.

the four pilot studies (and their comparison) is in the insights they may stimulate for scholars, policy makers, and practitioners involved in similar settings. Thus, we encourage readers to reflect upon the general conclusions drawn from the comparison of the four studies, while not taking any of the details as “facts” that can necessarily be generalized to all situations during all time periods in these four, let alone, other societies.

The four case studies in Ethiopia, India, Namibia, and Nigeria reinforce what was presented in the first cross-national synthesis report – that teachers do tend to articulate their conceptions of educational (and instructional) quality with terms normally associated with student-centered and actively learning approaches to teaching and learning. The questions we sought to address in this second report is whether their conceptions reflect the policy discourses in the given contexts and whether their conceptions mirror (and have perhaps been influenced by) the in-service teacher education programs in which they have participated.

Based on these pilot studies, we can see that in Ethiopia, India, and Namibia there is clear correspondence between teachers’ conceptions of educational quality and the ideas expressed in policy discourses. The Nigerian case does not provide evidence of such correspondence, in part because the government policy discourse stressed changes in curriculum (more so than pedagogy) and because the Qur’anic and Islamiya schools involved in the studies are not government schools.⁴²

Again, based on the pilot studies, we can conclude that in all four contexts teachers’ conceptions of educational quality (highlighting student-centered and active learning) correspond to the formal and hidden curricular messages they encountered during in-service teacher education programs.⁴³ In most cases, both the content of these programs (the “formal” curriculum) and the processes employed in implementing the programs (the “hidden” curriculum) focused on these reform pedagogies. Moreover, especially in Ethiopia, India, and Namibia, teachers interviewed report that their experiences in in-service teacher education programs influenced their ideas about educational quality, specifically in conveying the value of student-centered and active learning; in Nigeria we lack data to address this question.

We assume that readers want to know more than what we have discussed in this second cross-national synthesis report. While it has been argued that an important dimension of professional socialization is “learning to talk” (Bucher and Stelling 1977; Clark 2001), is changing teachers conceptions of educational quality enough. Undoubtedly, policy makers, project implementers, educators, and other citizens are interested to know: a) if the reform discourses and the in-service professional development activities have resulted in more student-centered and active learning instructional practices in classrooms and b) if such changes in teachers’ behavior have led to improved learning outcomes. While the pilot studies do not allow us to address the issues in “b,” we will draw on these data to address the issues in “a” in the forthcoming third cross-national synthesis report.

⁴² An interesting question concerns the focus of (local, national, and international) policy discourse among officials and educators directly or indirectly responsible for organizing Islamic education in Nigeria. This issue is worth exploring, given the longer historical debate within Islamic education regarding the students’ role, which is framed around the poles of memorizing versus reasoning (see Günther, 2007).

⁴³ Note, however, that in the Nigeria pilot study, student-centered and active learning was not as strongly evidenced in teachers’ conceptions of educational quality, compared to the findings from the other three pilot studies.

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