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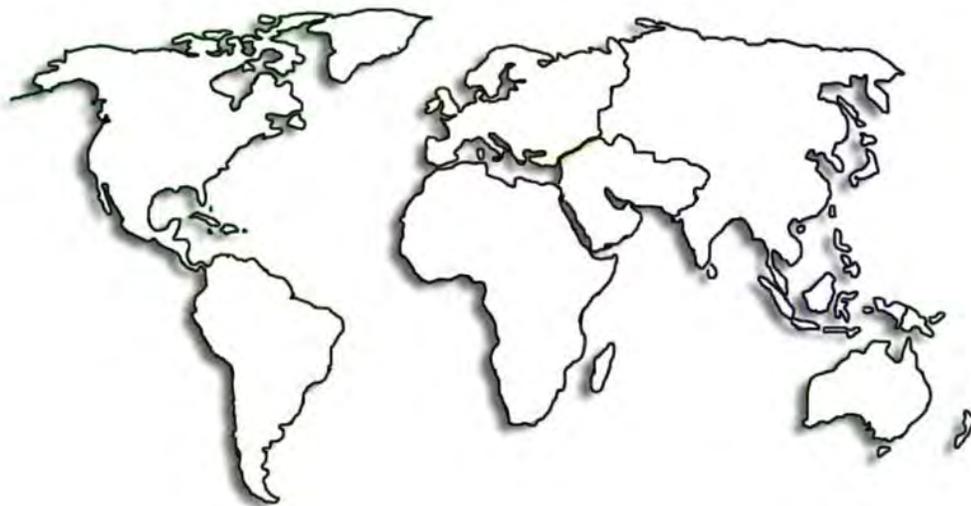
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EQUIP1/AED
Cross-national Synthesis of Education Quality
Annual Report January 2006



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Summary and Status of the Study

The Cross-national Synthesis of Education Quality is a comparative qualitative study that is designed to generate in-depth information on process factors across a variety of national and local contexts that lead to quality improvement at the school, classroom and community levels. This study goes beyond the analysis of input and output factors to provide information on the dynamic and complex processes at the school level that create change and improved quality of teaching and learning. The Cross-national Synthesis draws on data generated in the five ongoing pilot studies being carried out by EQUIP1 partners in India (World Education), Nigeria (EDC), Ethiopia (AED and EDC), and Namibia (AED).

The pilot studies which form the basis of the Cross-national Synthesis continued throughout 2005 with some delays in individual studies. EQUIP1 partners from EDC, World Education, AED, and AIR, along with the USAID/Washington CTO for EQUIP1, formed a panel at CIES in 2005 to present and discuss the Synthesis design and goals. Two other EQUIP1 partners have had involvement in the design of the Synthesis. The Joseph P. Kennedy Foundation participated in earlier discussions in order to strengthen the dimension of special needs education in the comparative study. Michigan State University also engaged in early discussions and will be brought into further discussions of the design in 2006. The EQUIP1 partners have developed preliminary comparative frameworks that will form the basis for the first round of reports. The first Synthesis report, scheduled to be completed in July 2005, will now appear in February 2006. The second report, scheduled for January 2006, will appear in April/May 2006.

In year 4 we expect to complete the two reports scheduled for year 3 and develop a further report. We also expect to present the ideas and results of the Synthesis at two seminars or round-table discussions at USAID. The analysis will be extended from the first round of comparisons as further data are available from the studies and as we explore further issues generated by the study's guiding questions.

Rationale and Focus of the Study

The Cross-national Synthesis of Education Quality is a comparative cross-national study that is generating in-depth qualitative information on process factors across a variety of national and local contexts that lead to education quality at the school, classroom, and community levels. Whereas many studies focus on input and output factors to describe or explain how quality of education is created, this study will provide information on the dynamic and complex processes through which input factors combine at the school level to create change and good quality of teaching and student learning. The Synthesis will provide qualitative "thick descriptions" of cases of process at the school, classroom, and

community levels. This holistic approach focuses on the intense human processes that lead to the desired results of education.

The specific factors of education quality that are being tracked in the first round of the Synthesis are: (i) community participation; (ii) teacher quality; and (iii) curriculum relevance. Although these initial factors are important in each of the studies, community participation is the centerpiece of the India study, curriculum relevance is the focus of the Muslim education studies, and teacher quality is at the center of the Namibia and Ethiopia studies. In addition the Synthesis will investigate concepts of quality in general, whether quality is: (i) relatively uniform across countries or across different contexts; (ii) significantly context specific; or (iii) shifting along a continuum from one to the other between countries and over time.

The Cross-national Synthesis draws on data generated in the five pilot studies being carried out by EQUIP1 partners in India, Nigeria, Ethiopia (two separate studies), and Namibia:

- Pilot Study on Educational Quality in a Transitional Educational Program for Out-of-School Girls in India (World Education)
- Pilot Study on Education in Islamic Schools in Ethiopia (EDC)
- Pilot Study on Education in Islamic Schools in Nigeria (EDC)
- Pilot Study on Teacher Professional Development in Namibia (AED)
- Pilot Study on Teacher Professional Development in Ethiopia (AED)

Study Goals and Guiding Questions

The following overall questions guide the Cross-national Synthesis research:

- Are definitions and constructions of quality of education similar or different across a variety of local and national contexts?
- How are ideas about quality of education constructed?
- What factors lead to change in perspectives on education quality?
- What effects do specific programs have on evolving perspectives of education quality?
- What factors and processes at the local level are related to improving quality of education, focusing on both predetermined and emerging factors/indicators of quality?
- How do these processes change over time?

Relevance of the Study

The Synthesis is a research program meant to generate information that will assist USAID and education program planners in their approaches to developing the most effective ways of improving education quality in a variety of contexts. The Synthesis will identify, track, and compare a range of key quality factors or indicators over time and analyze how processes influence the impact of quality inputs. The quality factors being

tracked in the first round of analysis are: (i) teacher quality; (ii) community participation; and (iii) curriculum relevance (see conceptual framework below). The Synthesis is tracking quality factors in the context of program or project inputs in order to include evidence on the impact of these inputs.

One outcome of the Synthesis will be an analytical framework that will assist USAID education program planners to ask the right questions to deepen their understanding of what leads to education quality in different contexts and thus include these understandings in their program design. The Synthesis is generating information that will assist USAID and other education program planners and implementers in their approaches to developing the most effective ways of improving education quality in a variety of contexts. The Synthesis is relevant for the following reasons:

- The Synthesis draws results out of five “thick descriptions” of cases, using a holistic approach to complex processes at the school, classroom, and community levels often missed in studies that focus more narrowly in input/output factors.
- Both the specifics of the thick descriptions as well as the “way of looking” should be of interest to education planners and program implementers.
- The Synthesis will provide a new kind of information - information usually not included in studies that find correlation between factors but do not reveal the nature of what happens in the process to produce the correlation.¹
- Investigation of similarities and differences in concepts of quality of education across countries may help planners avoid “cookie-cutter approaches” to program design, implementation, and evaluation.
- The Analytical Framework that will be developed through the Synthesis should assist USAID education program planners to ask the right questions to deepen their understanding of what leads to education quality in different contexts and thus include these understandings in their program design.
- The Synthesis is more holistic than many studies and will make better use of information from students, families, and communities than many studies do.
- The design of the Synthesis allows for modifications and refinements over time as we learn more about what is happening in the field.

Conceptual Framework

The matrix below outlines the conceptual framework for the first round of analysis. As outlined above, each of three pilot studies involved in the first round of analysis has a different focal point (underlined in the matrix), although all studies contain information on community participation, curriculum relevance, and teacher quality as important factors of overall education quality. The first round of analysis focuses on these factors

¹ For example, the Ethiopia Pilot Study of Teacher Professional Development is of particular interest to the Ministry of Education and USAID/Ethiopia because national student assessments indicate a correlation between teacher professional development and student achievement at the grade 4 and grade 8 levels, although the assessment process does not give any information on why and how this correlation works or the kind of teacher professional development that promotes better student learning.

and also focuses on the concepts of quality as expressed by informants in the three studies.

Cross-national Synthesis of Education Quality		
<i>India</i>	<i>Nigeria</i>	<i>Namibia</i>
<u>Community</u>	<u>Curriculum</u>	<u>Teachers</u>
Curriculum	Teachers	Community
Teachers	Community	Curriculum
<p>-----Concepts of quality over time-----</p> <p>-----Practice related to quality over time-----</p> <p>-----Change in concepts and practice over time-----</p>		

Study Design and Methodology

The five individual pilot studies were initially planned to be carried out over a period of three years, tracking groups of quality of education factors or indicators over that time. Although many aspects of each study will be unique, there will also be common elements among them, which include: (i) an emerging set of *consistent variables* related to education quality; (ii) three years of data collection capturing evolution and change within quality factors; (iii) similar qualitative data collection procedures within the pilot studies; and (iv) similar reporting strategies.

The three-year study is ongoing but has a shifting focus. The factors being tracked in the first round of the Synthesis are: (i) community participation; (ii) curriculum relevance; and (iii) teacher quality. In subsequent rounds the focus will shift to other factors generated by the data.

The Synthesis uses a comparative case study approach, each of the pilot studies constituting a case study, intensive “thick descriptions” and analyses of single units or “bounded systems” under study (Merriam 1998; Yin 2003). A constant comparative method is used to group and compare similar segments of data across countries – identifying segments of data over time and comparing across studies to determine similarities, differences and change (Bogdan and Biklen 2003; Creswell 2003).

Although the first round of the study has deductive elements since the selection of pilot study topics and focal points are built initially on pre-existing notions of education quality (the assumption that teacher quality, curriculum relevance, and community

participation are key elements), the overall study uses an inductive approach. The study uses an inductive method of building theory, grounded theory, to understand aspects of practice that are grounded in the real world. One purpose of the study is, therefore, to build theory about the dynamic and context-related dimensions of quality of education factors.

Starting in late 2005 EQUIP1 partners started pooling and synthesizing data from the first round of individual studies according to a set of initial frameworks developed by the group. The first two analytical frameworks are contained in the annex. Using these frameworks, the first round of analysis concentrates on a comparison across countries (India, Nigeria, Namibia) of data falling into five categories: (i) perceptions of quality (data from teachers, principals, parents); (ii) perceptions of quality related to teacher professional development (data from teachers and principals); (iii) quality of teacher practice (data from classroom observations); (iv) relevance of curriculum (data from teachers); and (v) community/parental involvement (data from teachers, parents, learners).

The data from this first set of analyses will be available in February 2006 and the first report will be available in March/April 2006.

References

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