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Measures, evolution and management of the quality of learning

Primary schooling in Africa has a bad reputation, as concerns the quality of education and the academic level of pupils at the outcome. However, school learning achievements are indeed the ultimate aim of Universal Primary Education. Although a survey on the scale of the continent is lacking, this chapter makes the most of all available data to draw up a panorama of quality in Africa, and to question the argument often put forward of an exclusive choice between quantity and quality. This argument does not stand up to analysis, since it turns out that some countries have managed to cope with the rise in enrolments, while guaranteeing the same, or even a higher level of quality. This chapter also sheds light on the very significant disparities characterising the education systems, where excellence goes side by side with the absence of knowledge, highlighting the failings in terms of management and steering of the systems.

The quality of learning has become an issue of major concern in the debate on education in Africa. And pessimism is prevalent. Who has never heard that the quality of education was deteriorating? That children learn less today than in the past? These common impressions conceal formidable methodological issues for the analyst. It is indeed not so simple to compare the quality of education over time. First of all, measuring quality is in itself delicate and has to be renewed over time. Next, the goals of education systems have changed and assessing education systems today in the light of the characteristics of education systems 30 or 40 years ago is hardly relevant. What would be the justification of comparing an elitist school, where the main purpose was to train administrative officials, and which had, as such, very few pupils, with a school which aims at being democratic, open to all, and for which the central goal is to contribute to the economic and social development of the African nations?

Great care must therefore be taken when looking at comparisons made, between countries and also over time, even if these are essential for the appreciation of the different national situations. Data comparability constitutes a major challenge for assessing the quality of learning. However, satisfactory data for different periods and in several countries in Africa is still very much lacking. Nevertheless, considerable progress has been made in this respect over the last two decades, through the participation by some countries in international surveys, the development of regional evaluation programmes like PASEC¹ and SACMEQ², and by incorporating measures of literacy in household surveys³, which are now widespread on the continent. The first part of this chapter will draw on different data sources in an attempt to present a panorama of the situation related to the quality of learning on the continent.

An important aspect in the debate on African education focuses on the relationship between quantity and quality. In this respect, the argument, often put forward, is that deterioration in learning quality is the price to be paid for expansion in enrolment. That schooling, in the perspective of Education for All, must enable pupils to acquire basic skills and knowledge, in addition to enrolling all children in primary education goes without saying. In order to give a fuller picture of the evolution of the education systems, it is necessary to connect recent trends in school enrolments to school learning achievements. The purpose of the second part of this chapter is therefore to provide information on this aspect, using once again different data sources.

One of the peculiarities of African education systems lies in the fact that an important share of the differences in school learning achievements can be attributed to schools. The great disparities between schools will be extensively highlighted and discussed in the third section of this chapter. Analyses show that reducing these disparities is one of the major challenges of any policy for improving the quality of education. The significant disparities between schools emphasize the problems of education system management related to the quality of learning.

1 PASEC: CONFEMEN (Conference of Ministers of Education in countries sharing the French language) Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems.

2 SACMEQ: Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality.

3 Examples from MICSS or DHS surveys (cf. box 4.1).



1. Panorama of the quality of learning in basic education in Africa

When attempting to draw up a panorama of the quality of learning in Africa, it is essential to look at this from a double viewpoint. Situating the level of performance in terms of quality of learning in African countries consists, first of all, in making comparisons with other countries in the World. Secondly, it involves comparing African countries with each other in order to determine the variety of situations existing on the continent. These investigations require comparable international data. Two types of data from different sources can be used to this end.

- International survey results constitute the commonest measure in this respect, even if they are not to be interpreted too hastily. These surveys have proliferated and are considered to be the reference in many countries; this is notably the case for PISA⁴ in the OECD countries and also for the TIMSS⁵ and PIRLS⁶ surveys. However, African countries are far from participating sufficiently in these large surveys. The results of the few countries which have participated are all the more interesting as they represent a reference for further comparisons. In addition, the existence of regional learning evaluation programmes like PASEC and SACMEQ makes it possible to compare a number of African countries with each other and to complete the information available.
- A second type of data, little used to present, can be capitalized on; that is literacy data collected more and more regularly in household surveys being developed worldwide (cf. box 4.1). While this is a limited measure, it does however correspond to what is considered an essential dimension of basic education. It is therefore very interesting to determine the relative performances of education systems in terms of literacy. This represents very useful complementary information for a panorama of the quality of learning in Africa.

1.1 The positioning of African countries in international surveys

African countries have only very timidly participated in the large international surveys, as recalled by Kellaghan and Greaney (2004). Very few countries have ventured into this type of exercise and it is therefore not possible to make large-scale comparisons between African countries from this data. However, the results registered do constitute an indispensable reference point for anyone wishing to evaluate the performance of African education systems in terms of school learning achievements.

As a whole, it must be admitted that the results obtained are very modest with regard to those of other countries. African countries rank far behind the industrialized countries but are also often out-distanced by other developing countries. Concerning PISA, which is the most recent large international programme, only Tunisia participated, in 2003 and 2006⁷. Unlike other international programmes, PISA does not target one particular level of the education system but a given pupil age⁸. It strives thus to evaluate pupil learning achievements for 15-year-olds in Reading, Mathematics and Science in the 30 OECD member countries and in many partner countries. The aim of PISA is to assess what students have acquired in terms of knowledge and skills essential for everyday life towards the end of compulsory education. In 2003, Tunisia ranked systematically in the last two or three countries out of 40 countries in the three areas and was very much below the performance of OECD countries (OECD, 2004). By way of example, Tunisian pupils obtained an average score of 359 in Mathematics while the 20 countries performing the best had average scores of over 500: the gap is therefore quite considerable.

4 PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment.

5 TIMSS : Third International Mathematics and Science Study then Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study.

6 PIRLS: Progress in International Literacy Study.

7 The first PISA data collection took place in 2000. Following data collections took place in 2003 and in 2006. The next one is planned for 2009. Only 2003 results are currently available.

8 This implies having individual information on pupils, which is rarely available in educational data bases in African countries.

Tunisia also participated in the TIMSS survey in 2003 with four more African countries: South Africa, Botswana, Ghana and Morocco. This survey aimed at assessing learning achievements in Mathematics and Science after four and eight years schooling. In the 8th grade, Tunisian pupils were 14.8 years old on average, i.e. virtually the same age as the PISA test pupils. One of the noticeable results was that Tunisia, in spite of very modest results, which somehow tie in with the PISA results, came out ahead of the four other countries in Mathematics and Science. In terms of average scores, the gaps were particularly significant with South Africa and Ghana which both had very poor results (cf. table 4.1). The African countries therefore rank at the bottom of the list in this evaluation, with scores relatively far from the international average and which reflect very modest performance. There is however quite a wide range of results depending upon the country.

Table 4.1: The performance of African countries in the TIMSS 2002 survey (8th grade)

| | Average score in Mathematics | Rank | Average score in Science | Rank |
|-------------------|------------------------------|-------|--------------------------|-------|
| South Africa | 264 (5.5) | 45/45 | 244 (6.7) | 45/45 |
| Botswana | 366 (2.6) | 42/45 | 365 (2.8) | 43/45 |
| Ghana | 276 (4.7) | 44/45 | 255 (5.9) | 44/45 |
| Morocco | 387 (2.5) | 40/45 | 396 (2.5) | 40/45 |
| Tunisia | 410 (2.2) | 35/45 | 398 (4) | 38/45 |
| Countries overall | 467 (0.5) | / | 474 (0.6) | / |

Source : Martin M.O. et al. (2004a and 2004b)

These results, at the outcome of eight years schooling, represent learning achievements in Mathematics and Science, corresponding to what is usually considered as basic education. At the time of this evaluation, Mathematics and Science tests were also handed out in the 4th grade, i.e. at primary school, in 25 countries, but only Morocco and Tunisia participated amongst the African countries. These two countries were once again at the bottom of the list and, again, far behind the international average.

As far as other subjects are concerned such as Reading or Writing ability, there has been no survey where several African countries have participated as for TIMSS. In addition to Tunisia with PISA, there was the participation of Morocco in PIRLS 2001 on Reading ability in 4th grade. Once again, the results were very far from the international average of 500 with Morocco showing a score of only 350 and ranking 34th out of 35 countries.

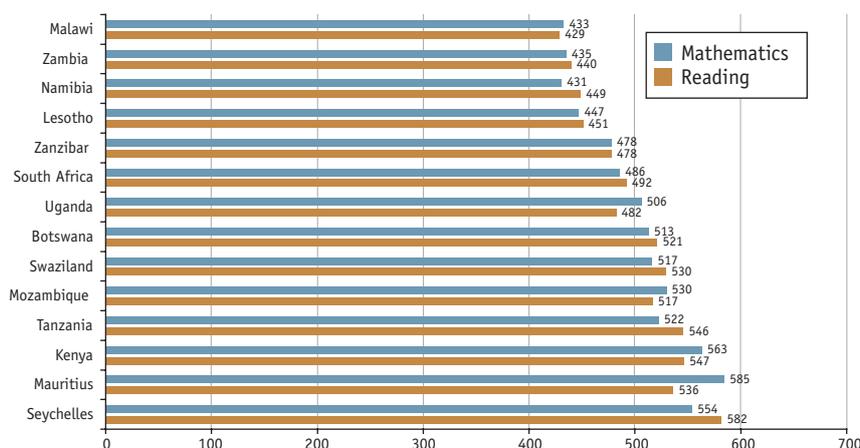
The results indicated do of course need to be put into perspective, particularly as these international surveys were designed mainly for developed countries and that they have been carried out in very different contexts. In spite of all, they do provide very interesting indications on the situation of African countries compared to international standards in terms of school achievements. Two significant observations can be made. Firstly, the performance of African countries in the surveys mentioned is very far from the international average and, secondly, results greatly vary amongst the five African countries taken into consideration. Overall, this provides a partial view of the situation in terms of quality of learning in African countries and needs to be enhanced with other data.

1.2 Major disparities

South Africa and Botswana also participated in a regional survey conducted by SACMEQ between 2000 and 2002 in 6th grade of primary education in 14 Southern and Eastern African countries. The tests covered English and Mathematics. This survey has the advantage of putting the results of these two countries, for which other data is available, into perspective with other African countries.

When looking at graph 4.1, it is immediately obvious that the results are similar to those in the TIMSS survey since Botswana is ahead of South Africa. Moreover, these countries do not appear at all atypical compared to the other African countries. Botswana appears to be somewhat over the average, which is set at 500, both in English and in Mathematics, while South Africa is below average in both subjects. This shows that the previous results gave quite a good picture of the average situation in African countries, namely a very modest average level of learning quality.

Graph 4.1: Scores in SACMEQ II Mathematics and Reading tests



Source: SACMEQ

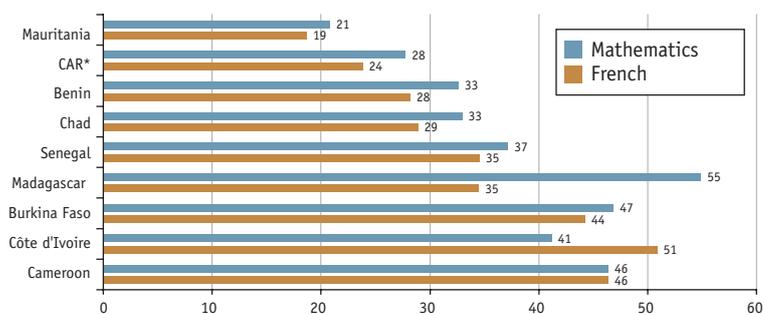
Another significant aspect is the scope of diversity between countries. Considerable gaps are to be observed between countries like Kenya or Tanzania on the one hand, and Namibia, Zambia and Malawi on the other hand, with a whole range of intermediary situations.

Similar information is available for some French-speaking countries through the results of the PASEC programme, which evaluates pupil learning in French and Mathematics in 2nd and 5th grade of primary education (cf. graph 4.2). The results of evaluations carried out in 1996 and 2005⁹ in 5th grade of primary school are indicated here. In the same way as the SACMEQ results, there are major differences between countries, with particularly modest results in Mauritania¹⁰, Central African Republic (CAR), Benin and Chad. Even if these results cannot be connected to those of international surveys as before, they do outline a situation fairly similar to that of English-speaking countries, characterized by fairly modest average scores overall and significant differences between countries.

⁹ With the exception of the Central African Republic where the evaluation was conducted in 2006 by the Pôle de Dakar, using PASEC survey instruments and procedures.

¹⁰ Mauritania differs from the other countries, due to its bilingualism (Arab-French) and this must be taken into account as the PASEC tests are in French.

Graph 4.2: Scores in PASEC Mathematics and French tests in 5th grade (Score out of 100)



Source: PASEC and the Pôle de Dakar for CAR

It should be recalled here that the average score obtained in the knowledge tests is fairly superficial, as it does not take into account, for example, the different situations within the countries. Table 4.2 highlights this diversity for the PASEC results in French and Mathematics, indicating the standard deviation and the variation ratio¹¹. It can be noted that the variation ratio is quite high and ranges from 29% in Côte d'Ivoire to 65% in Mauritania¹². The heterogeneity in pupil results appears therefore to be quite considerable and this is all the more so as the average country score is low. This illustrates the fact that even when a country has a very low average score, this can hide very significant differences in learning achievements between pupils.

Table 4.2: Disparities within countries

| Country | Standard deviation | Variation ratio |
|---------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Burkina Faso | 13.9 | 30% |
| Côte d'Ivoire | 13.3 | 29% |
| Senegal | 15.4 | 43% |
| Mauritania | 12.8 | 65% |
| Chad | 14.1 | 46% |
| Benin | 15.9 | 52% |
| Cameroon | 15.7 | 34% |
| Madagascar | 13.0 | 29% |
| CAR | 14.1 | 54% |

Source: PASEC and the Pôle de Dakar

Generally speaking, in the African education systems, pupils with incomparable learning levels are to be found side by side. If we take the example of Cameroon in Mathematics, it can be seen that a little over 6% of pupils had such low scores that they are below or equal to the score they could have obtained on average if they had replied at random to the tests, while 5% of pupils had scores of over 80 out of 100, i.e. a question of excellence¹³.

The situation of African countries is illustrated well by the example of Cameroon and shows that one must beware of the simplistic picture whereby all pupils would have an extremely poor level. In reality, pupil results show considerable diversity, suggesting a complex situation and perhaps the existence of significant leeway for the improvement of the quality of learning.

11 The standard deviation reports on the dispersion of the results; however, the variation ratio (standard deviation divided by the average) helps to put the dispersion into perspective according to the average. Thus, Mauritania, which has the lowest standard deviation, has the highest variation ratio indicating in fact more significant relative dispersion.

12 This concerns information collected in 1996 for Côte d'Ivoire and 2004 for Mauritania.

13 By way of comparison, Bourdon (2007) obtained an average score of 61 in the PASEC tests given out to French classes selected as being close to the national average.

1.3 Literacy as a measure of the quality of learning in primary school

Literacy appears to be very much at stake in the first years of schooling and, as such, acts as a particularly interesting indicator of the quality of learning. The more extensive use of household surveys means that literacy data is available for a large number of countries (cf. box 4.1). For these countries, it is possible to connect the fact of being literate or not with the number of years study (Brossard and Foko, 2007). One of the advantages of the literacy data is to benefit from a wider comparative base for the African countries than from the schooling surveys, while opening the way for comparisons with other regions in the world. However, this data does have a number of limits, which are to be kept in mind when reading the results. Besides the rudimentary measure of literacy provided¹⁴, it must be mentioned that other important learning dimensions are not taken into account, such as capacity in Maths for example. Finally, the data is collected in the adult population and reflects the situation of the education systems at the time these adults were in school. Thus, the results for 22 year-olds taken into consideration in the following analyses provide information on the situation of education systems in the early 1990's.

Graph 4.3 indicates the probability of literacy for individuals who left school after the 6th grade (CM2) and for individuals who have never attended school. The difference between these two probabilities constitutes what can be called the added value of primary school compared to other factors contributing to literacy¹⁵. If the African countries are looked at initially, then a very great diversity of situations can be observed. Thus, an adult who has benefited from six years schooling has 26 chances in 100 of being literate in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and 98 chances in 100 in Rwanda. The African average registers at 68%, with an added value for six years primary schooling of 60% while the probability of literacy with no schooling registers at 8%. The probability of literacy without attending school also fluctuates enormously, from 0% in DRC to 37% in Mauritania. This gap is connected to the existence and effectiveness of literacy programmes (cf. chapter 5) and/or of types of traditional education as in Mauritania. Naturally, the results must be looked at in the national context, particularly in cases of conflict as for DRC.

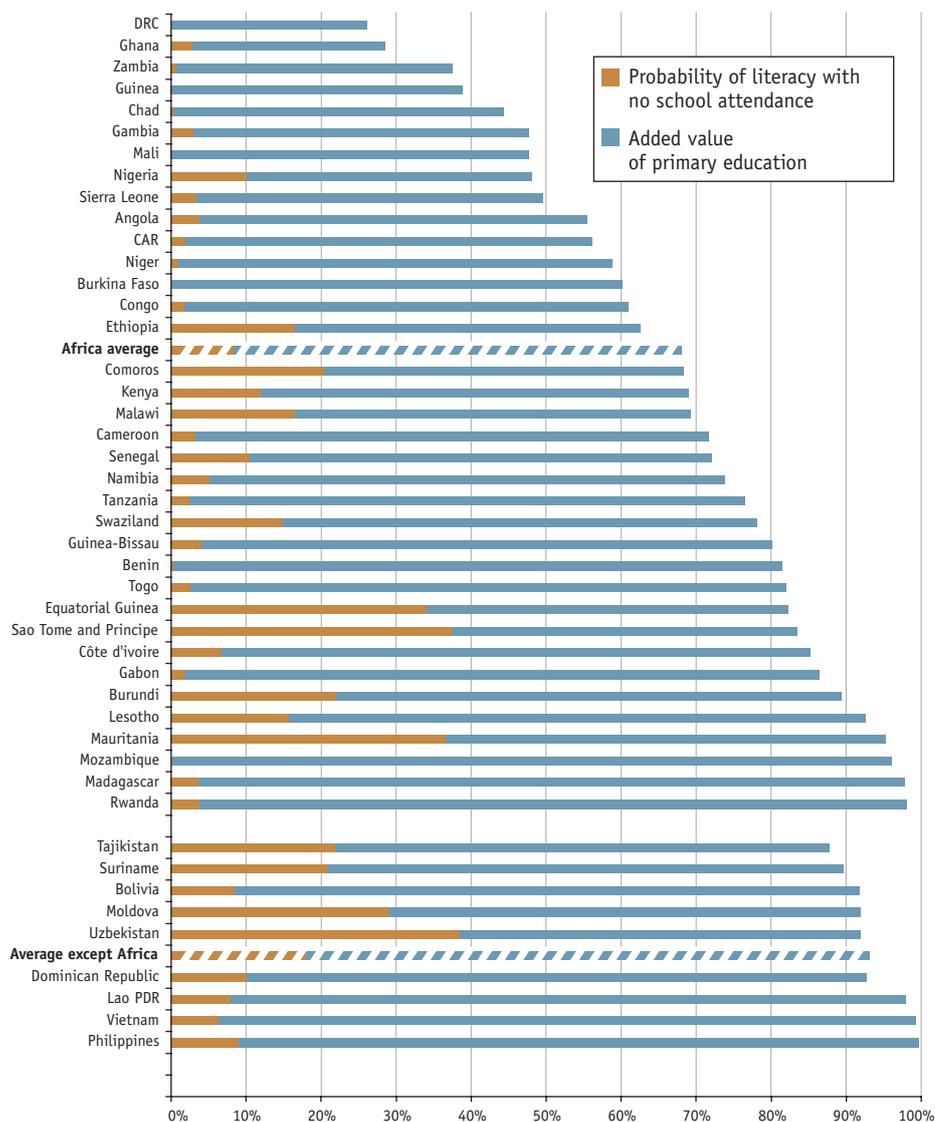


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14 As recalled in box 4.1, according to the surveys, this is founded on the declarations made by individuals or on a simple reading test where the individual must read a few lines. There exist much finer measures such as those developed by the LAMP programme.

15 The added value of school is the difference between the probability of literacy after 6 years schooling and the probability of literacy after no school attendance at all.

Graph 4.3: Measure of literacy after 6 years of primary schooling



The same estimates have been made for nine developing countries belonging to other World regions: the average global probability of literacy registers at 93%, i.e. 25 points higher than the African average. There is also much less variability around this average than in the African countries. However, if only the added value of primary education is taken into account, then the gap seems less at 75% compared to 60% in African countries. In spite of all, this reflects a lesser average effectiveness of the African school than that of the other developing countries taken into consideration here. A much higher probability of literacy without attending school is also noted in the non-African countries, 18% compared to 8%. Part of the gap observed on the global probability of literacy is therefore explained by contextual factors other than the quality of formal education.

Overall, the average effectiveness of primary school in African countries judging from the literacy measure appears lower than that observed in other developing countries. In the early 1990's, the probability of literacy after reaching the 6th grade of primary education was estimated at around 68% in African countries, which means that around one in three pupils was not literate at the outcome of primary education, while this estimation reached 93% in the nine non-African countries taken into consideration. However, the most distinctive feature in Africa is above all the wide variety of situations, which underlines the necessity of taking the situations at country level into account. As a whole, results are relatively coherent with those of the surveys on pupil learning achievements.

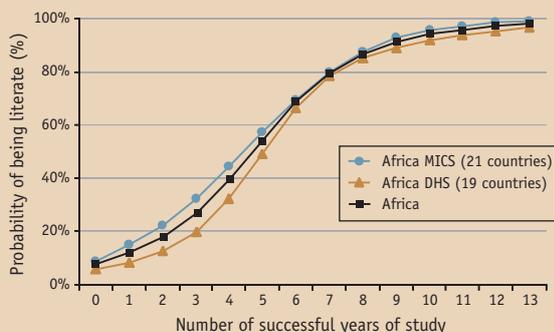
Box 4.1: Measuring literacy in «household surveys»

Three categories of « household surveys » are used in this chapter to estimate the probability of literacy for individuals according to the level of education reached : (i) demographic health surveys (DHS) carried out in over 80 countries with the support of USAID, (ii) multiple indicator cluster surveys (MICS) designed to evaluate progress towards the goals set at the World Summit for Children in 1990 and conducted in around 60 countries with the support of UNICEF and (iii) surveys on basic indicators of well-being (QUIBB) initiated by the World Bank and aimed at collecting indicators of well-being for the analysis and monitoring of poverty in African countries.

These surveys, which aim at collecting information on the social and/or economic environment of individuals, are carried out on large national samples representative of the population. For African countries where data is available, they cover a sample of 6 500 households and 38 000 individuals on average per country for the MICS, 9 000 households and 45 000 individuals for the DHS and 10 800 households and 58 000 individuals for the QUIBB.

The literacy measure results, on the one hand, from declarations made by the individuals in the QUIBB and MICS surveys. On the other hand, for the DHS at country level, the individual undergoes a fairly simple reading test. So, it is expected that the evaluation of the degree of literacy for individuals in the QUIBB and MICS surveys will be biased (upward). This point is checked to ensure that it is within a reasonable limit, when data from different surveys is available for the same country. Moreover, as around forty data bases have been used for Africa (21 MICS, 19 DHS and 3 QUIBB), it has been possible to compare the evolution in the individual probability of literacy according to the number of years of study, depending on the type of measure used. The graph below illustrates the comparison of the average results obtained from MICS and DHS data. It shows that the assessment of the average performance on the continent, in terms of probability of literacy according to the number of years of study, leads to similar results whether DHS or MICS data is used.

Comparison of the probability of literacy according to the number of years of study for adults aged 22-44.



In conclusion, drawing up a panorama of the quality of learning comes up against two major obstacles, which are the complexity of the notion of the quality of learning and the flagrant lack of data on this aspect. We have gathered together here the different information that exists and made new analysis: the fact of putting together information related to international assessments, regional and household surveys, results in a heterogeneous whole which, in the absence of finer analysis, does however make it possible to appreciate the prominent features in terms of learning quality. Indeed, some convergence between the different sources of information can be observed, which tends to bestow a certain degree of reliability on the results. Two major conclusions can be drawn from the different analysis. First of all, when compared with the rest of the world, the average performance of African countries, whatever the measure of learning applied, appears very much poorer than elsewhere. That a problem exists, as to the quality of learning in African education systems, is therefore relatively well supported by the facts, even if the outline is still somewhat imprecise. And for good reason, as indicated by the second observation: there is a wide variety of situations according to the country and this certainly covers very different realities from country to country. Besides, there is also great diversity within the countries. Simplistic conclusions are therefore to be avoided, such as the level of all pupils in African education systems is low; on the contrary, excellence often goes side by side with an absence of elementary knowledge. This observation highlights the major equity problems within the education sector but it also brings hope in that it shows that it is possible to provide quality education in the contexts studied.



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2. Expansion of primary enrolment and quality of learning: far from the generally accepted ideas

The general situation of the quality of learning outlined in the previous section shows that African countries are confronted with notable difficulties in this area. This is of particular concern in some countries. These results tend therefore to confirm the widespread idea that the quality of education in Africa is poor, even if it has been shown that this idea very much deserves to be qualified. This observation contributes to fuelling talk on the deterioration of the quality of education which is moreover not the prerogative of African countries. However, in Africa, this supposed decline in education standards is often put down to the massive growth in pupil numbers. The issue of a trade-off between quantity and quality emerges here, with the simple idea that necessarily a choice must be made between quality education and generalized access to school.

Since the early 1960's, the scale of African education systems has undeniably changed with considerable progress in terms of school coverage, even if major efforts must still be put in to reach Universal Primary Education, on the one hand. On the other hand, relatively little is known about the evolution in quality of learning, principally due to a lack of data on the issue. There are few factual studies on the relationship between the expansion of enrolment and the quality of learning. In order to shed light on this topic, at the heart of the issue of EFA, new analysis has been carried out based on two types of data used in the previous section, i.e. school learning achievement measures and information relating to literacy. These different measures of the quality of learning are compared with the enrolment indicators to test the hypothesis of a negative relationship between quantity and quality.

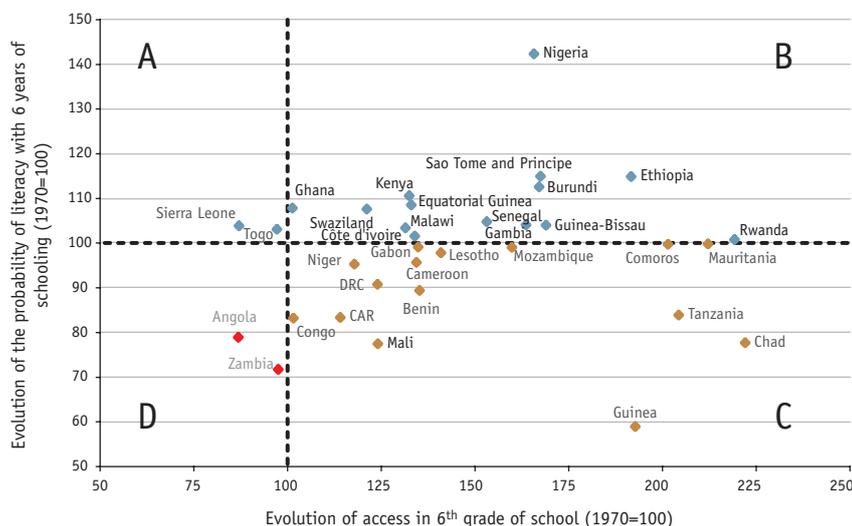
2.1 Dynamics in terms of enrolment and literacy between 1970 and 1990

Measuring literacy on individuals from several age groups, as in the household surveys available, provides information on the education systems at different times. Thus, individuals aged 22, questioned in the early 2000's, provide information on the education systems of the early 1990's when they were attending primary school. In the same way, individuals aged 42 reflect the education systems of the early 1970's. It is therefore possible, in a way, to go back in time and compare education systems 20 years apart on the basis of their capacity to provide pupils with sustainable literacy.

In graph 4.4, the evolution in the probability of literacy for those reaching 6th grade is related to the evolution in the access rate to 6th grade. The beginning of the 1970's, considered as base 100, is represented by two dotted lines. The intersection of the two corresponds to the situation of each country at the beginning of the 1970's so it is very easy on reading the graph to appreciate directly the trend for each country. Quadrant B corresponds to those countries that have progressed both quantitatively and qualitatively. It comes out that there are a fair number of countries in this case, the majority English-speaking, but if Nigeria is excluded, then progress in terms of literacy is much less distinct than that relating to access to 6th grade of primary school. This does show nevertheless, in an interesting way, that a significant number of countries have been able to enrol an increasing number of pupils while

improving the quality of education measured here by the propensity to create literacy. Countries situated in quadrant C progressed in enrolment but there has been a fall in the probability of literacy after six years in school. This time, French-speaking countries are in the majority. Again, there is a limited variety in the evolution of the probability of literacy. Finally, quadrants A and D indicate the rare countries that have regressed in terms of enrolment and have shown a variety of trends in terms of literacy during the period. It should however be noted that many countries are situated very close to the horizontal line measuring the probability of literacy at the beginning of the 1970's. Changes at this level have therefore been quite limited unlike access to 6th grade where notable progress has been accomplished in the vast majority of countries (cf. chapter 2).

Graph 4.4: Relationship between quantitative and qualitative progress over the 1970-1990 period



Sources: DHS, MICS and QUIBB data, 2000 or closest year and authors' calculations

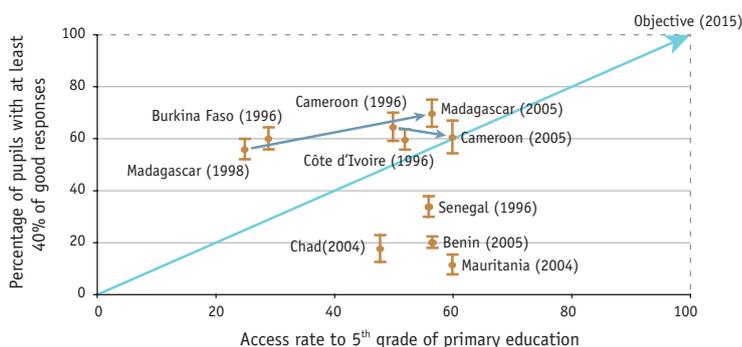
These results clearly indicate that the idea according to which any growth in enrolment would inevitably bring about deterioration in the quality of education is unacceptable. Over the period from the beginning of the 1970's to the early 1990's, characterized by a high growth in enrolment (access rate to 6th grade grew by 34%), trends in the quality of learning can be seen to have been moderate, sometimes positive, sometimes negative, depending upon the country. This observation distinctly differs from generally accepted ideas on this issue. Of course, it may be objected that the measure of literacy available is too imprecise, that this aspect of learning constitutes the minimum requisite in learning achievements in primary education and that other learning dimensions should be taken into account. In addition, this data corresponds to a fairly long period of time and is already out of date. It is therefore of interest to complete these results with more recent data, corresponding to EFA dynamics, and also more accurate in measuring learning achievements.

2.2 Recent dynamics

Measures of school learning achievements made in the PASEC and SACMEQ programmes provide both more precise and more complete information on the quality of learning, but concern a more limited number of countries and more restricted periods of time.

PASEC, drawing inspiration from Michaelowa's work (2001), strives to take both qualitative and quantitative dimensions of the education systems into account. To do so, it relates the proportion of individuals with a level of achievement deemed satisfactory in the PASEC French and Maths tests (at least 40% correct answers) to the proportion of an age-group cohort reaching the 5th grade of primary education¹⁶, the level at which the tests are administered. The combination of the two gives an interesting indicator of the effectiveness of an education system, since it takes into account both quality and quantity¹⁷. Graph 4.5 illustrates this approach and shows the trend over time¹⁸ for two countries: Cameroon and Madagascar.

Graph 4.5: Learning achievements and access to 5th grade of primary education in the perspective of Universal Primary Education by 2015



Source: PASEC

While the goal of good-quality UPE requires meeting 100% of the two dimensions on the 2015 horizon, it is to be noted that no one country is close to this goal. A group of four countries (Benin, Mauritania, Chad and Senegal) are seen to present particularly poor results at learning achievement level. Even if it is necessary to update data for Senegal which dates back to 1996¹⁹ and that the bilingualism of the Mauritanian system must be taken into account, the situation of these countries is of concern. Regarding access to 5th grade, the results seem relatively modest, as the highest rates amongst these countries are around 60%. This shows the extent of progress still to be made, in order to reach enrolment for all children through to the 6th grade of primary school and to attain a higher level of quality.

As for the temporal perspective, one must point out the remarkable evolution of Madagascar between 1998 and 2005 where the access rate to 5th grade rose from 25% to 56% and, at the same time, the proportion of pupils obtaining at least 40% of correct answers in the test rose from almost 56% to almost 70%. This shows that significant progress can be made simultaneously in the qualitative and quantitative dimensions²⁰. The case of Cameroon appears less spectacular but the progress registered in terms of access to 5th grade is appreciable since it rose from around 50% to around 60% between 1996 and 2005 without any significant effect on pupil learning achievements²¹.

16 This is the access rate in 5th grade calculated from school data and population data.

17 It estimates the proportion of individuals from an age-group cohort that reach a minimum level of learning achievements.

18 The tests used in the two waves of evaluations only differed in some exercises; comparable scores have therefore been calculated on the common part of the tests.

19 A new PASEC evaluation is ongoing for the year 2006/2007.

20 If we had only taken into account the average score at national level, we could have arrived at different conclusions as this score decreased between 1998 and 2005 whilst the proportion of pupils reaching a minimum desired level of learning grew; this tends to underline the importance of the learning quality indicator taken into consideration for calculating evolution, the average score not being the most appropriate.

21 The slight drop on the graph is not statistically significant.

In these trends, it is important to underline that democratisation in school access allows for greater intake of children from underprivileged backgrounds. Table 4.3 gives an idea of the wider access to school for children from underprivileged backgrounds in Cameroon and Madagascar, where a comparison over time is available regarding access and the quality of learning. In this way, the proportion of children who declared they did not have running water at home rose from 61% to 81% in Cameroon and from 78% to 88% in Madagascar.

Table 4.3: % of pupils in 5th grade not benefiting from specific facilities or not owning specific durable goods at home

| | Cameroon | | Madagascar | |
|-----------------------------|----------|---------|------------|---------|
| | 1995/96 | 2004/05 | 1997/98 | 2004/05 |
| Running water (tap at home) | 61% | 81% | 78% | 88% |
| Refrigerator | 59% | 85% | 87% | 95% |
| Television | 45% | 68% | 69% | 75% |

Source: PASEC

The same tendency is observed for ownership of durable goods such as refrigerators or televisions. These results clearly show a modification in the composition of pupils and in particular that there are more and more children from underprivileged segments of the population who have access to school in these countries. Indeed, increasing pupil numbers does not only have quantitative effects, it also implies taking in different populations who did not attend school before. Most of the time, this means children faced with difficult living conditions, including malnutrition, no assistance with homework at home and very much in demand for different domestic and/or productive chores. In this context, a fall in the quality of learning is to be expected, which makes the performance of countries like Cameroon and Madagascar all the more remarkable.

We have been able to follow a comparable procedure for some countries having participated in SACMEQ surveys. Indeed, SACMEQ carried out two waves of evaluations between 1995-1998 and 2000-2002²² in five English-speaking countries. It is therefore possible to compare quantitative and qualitative evolution of the education systems for these countries. For the qualitative dimension, tests in English were administered, made up of eight reading levels. The quality indicator taken here is the proportion of pupils reaching 4th grade²³, which can be considered as the desired minimum for all pupils²⁴.

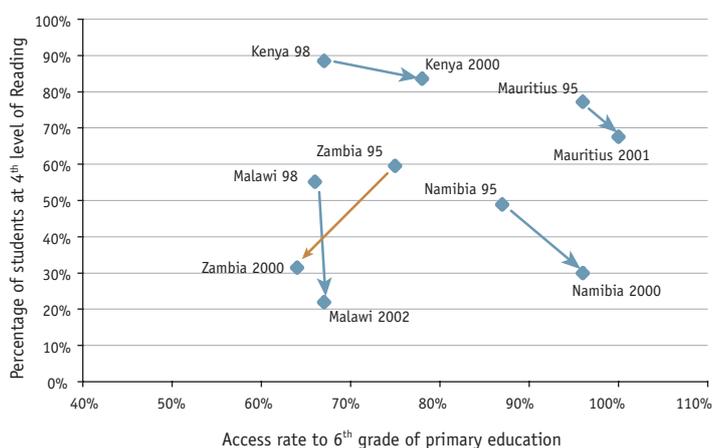
While performance in terms of school coverage is distinctly higher than that of the French-speaking countries studied by PASEC, the trends in the quality of learning (graph 4.6) are of some concern, since all countries have registered a fall in performance. It can be noted, however, that Kenya which shows the highest increase in rate of access to 6th grade has obtained relatively stable results for reading performance, but it is true that the performance was measured only two years apart (compared to four to six years for the other countries) which limits any possible evolution. Here, it would be necessary to take a longer period of time into consideration to see if the slight downward trend continues or not.

22 A third wave is ongoing on writing this report.

23 This corresponds to pupils who read and are capable of connecting pieces of information to be found in different parts of the text and also of interpreting it (cf. Murimba, 2003).

24 Although the procedure is similar, this indicator cannot be directly compared to the one taken for the PASEC countries.

Graph 4.6: Pupil learning achievements and access to 6th grade of primary education



Source: SACMEQ, UIS and the Pôle de Dakar

Countries like Zambia, Namibia and Malawi are seen to experience marked drops with 32%, 22% and 30% of pupils respectively reaching the 4th reading level in the early 2000's, which corresponds to very modest levels of learning. In addition, the access rate to 6th grade has dropped from 75% to 64% in Zambia. This country seems therefore to have been faced with a particularly difficult educational situation during this period, since performances, in terms of school coverage and quality of learning, have both significantly fallen. However, the latest available figures for 2004 seem to indicate that this trend has not continued as the access rate to 6th grade has risen to 67%. As for Malawi, pupil numbers have exploded with the introduction of free schooling in 1994. The education system has had to accept over one million extra pupils, i.e. an increase of 70% in pupil numbers in the space of two years (World Bank, 2004). The drop in performance observed is therefore to do with this sudden increase in pupil numbers²⁵, which has obviously greatly disturbed the education system and seems to have had an effect on the quality of learning. The potential consequences of a massive influx of pupils into an insufficiently prepared education system must be underlined here. Whilst the connection between growth in school coverage and quality of learning has appeared much more complex than usually supposed, the example of Malawi shows that an uncontrolled increase in pupil numbers can have harmful consequences on the quality of learning.

The different data available on the quality of learning have again been mobilized to question the quantitative and qualitative evolution of the African education systems. Although this data is still insufficient in some aspects, it is however a source of important lessons. Firstly, the procedure used here highlights the need to take into account both the dimensions of school coverage and quality of learning to arrive at a more complete picture of the performance of education systems. Secondly, trends have been relatively varied depending upon the country, which tends to question the idea that an increase in pupil numbers inevitably leads to deterioration in the quality of learning. We have seen, for example, countries like Madagascar where significant progress has been made, both in terms of school coverage and quality of learning. Even if the growth in pupil numbers puts undeniable pressure on the education systems, depending upon the policies implemented, this pressure does not necessarily result in a deterioration in the quality of learning. The case of Malawi is there to remind us that an explosion in numbers can have dramatic consequences on the quality of learning. However, recent trends in English-speaking countries, which have higher levels of enrolment than French-speaking countries, raise the question of the growing difficulty in ensuring satisfactory quality of learning when approaching UPE. In this respect,

²⁵ Increase previous to 1998 and so not visible on the graph.

it is important to take into account the change in pupil population that goes along with the increase in enrolment. Children, from the most underprivileged backgrounds, are going to school in ever-increasing numbers, which has repercussions on the context of education. A moderate fall in the average level of pupils is therefore not synonymous of deterioration in the quality of education but corresponds to a greater proportion of children from the poorest families in the classrooms. One of the major challenges of EFA is to lead all pupils to a satisfactory level of learning achievement and not only elite as it was the case in the past.

In addition, the need to observe the performances of the education systems over sufficiently long periods of time is also clear, in order to have a better view of their evolution. In this respect, the increasing number of evaluations initiated in the SACMEQ and PASEC programmes, already mobilized here, will provide valuable information on the evolution of the education systems over time, should the number of countries concerned be extended. This goes hand in hand with the development of national assessments, which should also be encouraged.



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3. Disparities between schools and between classes at the heart of the problem of the quality of learning

The results of the earlier section show that with the expansion in enrolment, results in terms of quality of learning are relatively varied from country to country. Above all, it is to be noted that a drop in the level of pupil learning is not inevitable with the democratisation of access to school. From this observation, it transpires that other factors are at work and it is therefore necessary to identify them. The many scientific studies devoted to this issue have not always made it possible to reach such clear and definite conclusions as desired. Some results are nevertheless of particular interest in the African context and it is timely to take these into account here. Thus, the differences in performances between classes and between schools appear very significant in the African context and deserve to be given special attention, particularly in a perspective of comparison. Their impact on the average level of school learning raises the unavoidable question of management in the debate for improving the quality of learning.

3.1 The weight of the different factors in the learning process in African schools

Since the Coleman report (1966) was published in the United States, much research has been conducted with the aim of identifying the factors that can contribute decisively to improving the quality of education. It must be noted that the great majority of these studies were carried out on developed countries and mainly on the USA. However, since the early 1980's, a number of studies have been conducted on developing countries. One of the distinctive features is the diversity in results depending upon the studies²⁶ made. It is therefore not easy to draw operational conclusions for educational policy from this very rich whole. Thus, to the question «which factors should be privileged in educational policy in order to improve the quality of education?», there is no single answer and the most rigorous of researchers will emphasize the importance of the context²⁷. So, the results of these studies show that there is no single infallible recipe for the improvement of educational quality in all countries. A multitude of factors have to be taken into account and vary according to the context; it is therefore essential to benefit from studies made at country level to fuel the considerations being given to education.

These studies, even if they are still rare, have been carried out more extensively during the past decades on the African continent and enable a number of lessons to be learned. The purpose of this chapter is not to review all the results, which would be redundant with other summaries, including the one carried out by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) in 2005, in line with its 2003 biennial. Like elsewhere, it is hardly possible in Africa to generalize the results to several countries with only few rare exceptions. Thus, Jarousse and Mingat's pioneer research (1993) in Togo placed the accent on the importance of school textbooks and this was confirmed later by many studies, including the PASEC studies (Behaghel, Coustère and Lepa, 1999). Results relating to repetition are also very similar from country to country²⁸ (Bernard, Simon and Vianou, 2005) and highlight the educational ineffectiveness of this measure and its unfairness. Other than these, analysis of the other different factors (teacher training, class size, etc.) gives relatively varied results, depending upon the contexts which hardly allow for generalization. It should be underlined that if the results are varied, it is also very often because countries realities are very different. For example, professional training for teachers is not identical from a country to another and it is quite possible that these differences in training result in unequal performances.

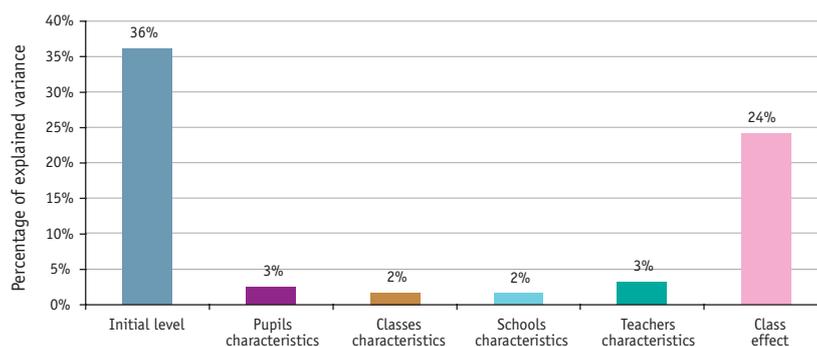
26 Which has led to scientific controversy (Hanushek, 1995, 1997, 2003; Kremer, 1995; Krueger, 2003).

27 He will also mention the necessity of developing more precise measures with new methodology (cf. Duflo, 2005; Kremer, 2003; Glewwe, 2002).

28 They are also the subject of general consensus amongst researchers.

In an attempt to reach an overall view, it is useful to group the factors together in several categories and to measure the share of differences in pupil results that each category can explain. In graph 4.7, six major categories of variables have been looked at. The contribution of these to explain pupil scores over the school year were calculated in 2nd and 5th grade for 10 countries having participated in a PASEC evaluation. It is noted that the level of the pupils, at the start of the year, is the most significant element in explaining the differences in results between pupils at year-end (explaining 36% of these differences). This is obviously not very surprising insofar, as this variable incorporates the pupil's schooling history as well as a share of his/her personal characteristics (including his/her intellectual capacities). However, the other pupil characteristics (gender, standard of living, age, repetition, etc.) are seen to explain a more limited share of the score variances (2%). This observation is also valid for the characteristics of the classes (2%) and the schools (2%) and, more surprisingly, for those of the teachers (3%). One should beware of considering that these categories play an insignificant role; simply, their contribution to the quality of learning is more modest than what one might have thought and, above all, other dimensions are more massively involved. This is particularly disconcerting with regard to teachers whose professional training, status and experience are generally put forward as determining characteristics in the quality of learning. Now, on average, these characteristics, as a whole, account for only 3% of the differences in results between pupils. It is clear that the teacher effect is not limited to these characteristics and that there are other contributing factors. This is in part the interpretation on observing the class effect²⁹ on graph 4.7 (24% of the explained variance). This effect indicates that the fact of being in one class rather than another, with identical pupil and context characteristics, results in very significant differences in school learning achievements. This result highlights the strong inequalities running through the education systems, which is not without raising sensitive questions for educational policy.

Graph 4.7: The weight of the different categories of factors in the school learning process in 10 sub-Saharan African countries³⁰



Source: PASEC

It remains to be seen what this class effect conceals. The predominant hypothesis is that this effect should be attributed essentially to the teacher. Since this result is observed, although the principal characteristics of the teacher are checked in the analysis (professional training, experience, etc.), the greater part of this class effect could depend upon characteristics not noted, such as the teacher's motivation, charisma or teaching ability. In fact, in primary education, there is usually only one teacher per class, so it is the teacher, above all, that changes from one class to another. Besides, the literature often mentions the teacher effect for this type of measure. However, some authors challenge the idea that the class effect would be purely a teacher effect and put forward other factors involved at class level (Bressoux, 2000). This questioning is even more acute in the African context where the effect

²⁹ Technically, this effect is measured by the introduction in the statistical model of indicational variables identifying each class.

³⁰ Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Togo.

observed seems particularly significant and distinctly higher than what is observed in developed countries³¹.

3.2 The extent of the disparities between classes and schools

The above results indicate that there are important differences between classes in terms of school learning achievements, even after the effects of the characteristics of the pupils and the context have been neutralized. This seems to imply a specificity which could have important consequences in terms of educational policy. To confirm the above results, a comparative analysis was carried out on developed countries and on African countries. This analysis looked into the share of variance of the results at learning tests to be explained by the differences between classes³². For the developed countries, the TIMSS 2003 data in Mathematics for the 4th grade were used. The share of variance that can be attributed to the differences between classes for the 11 countries studied was 23%. However, when looking at the African countries that participated in this survey, i.e. Morocco and Tunisia, it is noticed that the figure is around 35% for these two countries. In order to extend the comparison, similar analysis was made, in Mathematics once again, on PASEC and SACMEQ³³ data, i.e. a total of 23 countries. These results converge with over 37% variance of Maths scores attributed to differences between classes. The disparities between classes, and especially the existence of classes, where the level of learning is abnormally low, may explain a significant share of the low average levels of learning observed in African countries

3.3 Disparities between classes and performance of the education systems

The observation of high disparities between classes is a distinctive feature of African education systems. As recalled by Bernard, Nkengne Nkengne and Robert (2007), in most countries, classes where pupils learn very little coexist with high-performance classes.

Table 4.4: Comparison of minimum and maximum average scores in PASEC French tests in 5th grade of primary school

| | Average score in the class | |
|---------------|----------------------------|---------|
| | minimum | maximum |
| Burkina Faso | 19.2 | 84.7 |
| Cameroon | 31.4 | 87.3 |
| Côte d'Ivoire | 31.6 | 80.2 |
| Madagascar | 22.3 | 89.4 |
| Mauritania | 3.2 | 61.2 |
| Senegal | 17.5 | 76.3 |
| Chad | 11.1 | 79 |

Source: Bernard, Nkengne Nkengne and Robert (2007)

31 Rowan, Correnti and Miller (2002) find teacher effects of between 4% and 18% in the USA; Bressoux (2000) indicates that class effects explain between 19% and 14% of variance at elementary school in France.

32 In the absence of control variables, as for earlier results, this is therefore a gross class effect.

33 These are tests corresponding to the 4th grade of primary school for PASEC and 6th grade for SACMEQ.

Different simulations have been carried out based on PASEC data, in order to study the consequences of these disparities. The idea was to identify schools showing results very much below the average³⁴ and to estimate the impact of these schools on the average level of pupils in a given country. To do so, new scores were estimated for the pupils in these schools, taking into account their personal characteristics (including their level at the start of the year) but assigning them an average class effect. In fact, an econometric estimate was made of the scores these pupils would have obtained if they had been enrolled in a class with somewhat average results rather than in a poor performance class. It was therefore possible to appreciate the impact of the low performance classes on the overall performance of the education system. In this respect, one looks at both the evolution of the average score but also the proportion of pupils who obtained at least 40% of correct answers in the tests (cf. table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Impact of low performance classes on the quality of learning within the education systems

| | | Average score (out of 100) | | Proportion of pupils with at least 40% of correct answers | |
|------------------|-------------|----------------------------|-----------|---|-----------|
| | | real | simulated | real | simulated |
| Mauritania | French | 20.9 | 23.3 | 10% | 10% |
| | Mathematics | 22.9 | 26.1 | 16% | 17% |
| Madagascar | French | 31.4 | 32.8 | 22% | 22% |
| | Mathematics | 51.3 | 53.4 | 77% | 84% |
| Cameroon | French | 45.1 | 48.8 | 60% | 72% |
| | Mathematics | 46.4 | 50.9 | 64% | 77% |
| Chad | French | 28.8 | 32.8 | 22% | 24% |
| | Mathematics | 32.6 | 37.7 | 31% | 46% |
| Average increase | French | 2.9 | | 3.8% | |
| | Mathematics | 3.7 | | 9.1% | |

Sources: PASEC data and authors' calculations

The simulations made arrive at an average increase in the test scores for the four countries of almost three points in French and almost four in Mathematics. As for the proportion of pupils who reach the threshold of 40% of correct answers in the test, i.e. the threshold deemed to be desirable for all pupils, there is an increase of almost 4 percentage points in French and slightly over 9 percentage points in Mathematics. Even if there is seen to be a slight variation according to the countries and the indicator used³⁵, overall, the estimates provided by the simulations leave no doubt as to the impact of these deviant schools on the quality of learning at country level. Aside from the serious problems of equity raised by the existence of schools with performances far below average, this is also seen to penalize the average performance of the education systems. It therefore appears that special attention should be given to this issue in the running of the education systems.

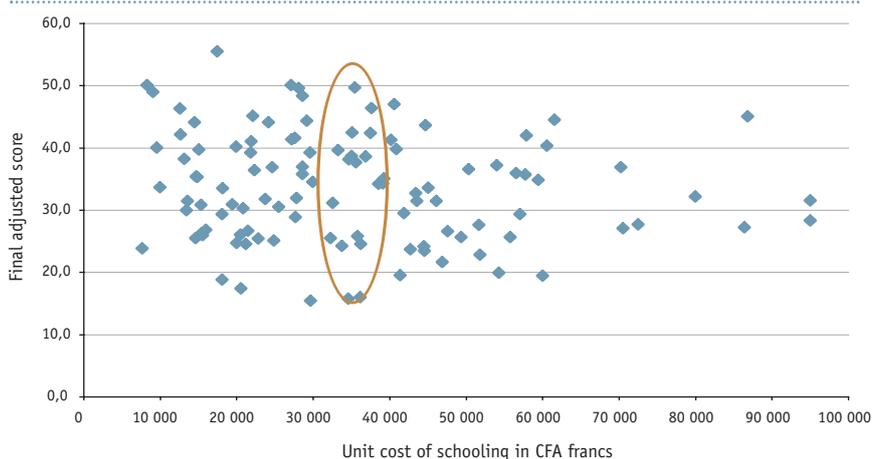
34 The criterion was an average class score under the average pupil score by at least 0.75 standard deviation. That represents between 10% and 20% of the schools in the sample according to the country.

35 Thus, for Mauritania, a fairly distinct effect is noted on the average score but very little effect on the proportion of pupils reaching the threshold of 40% of correct answers, which is explained by the pupils' generally poor level.

3.4 How can disparities between classes be reduced?

One of the first reasons that comes to mind, in order to explain the considerable disparities observed, is that of resources available at school level. Indeed, problems of allocation of resources to the different schools are well recognized just as the differences in resources between public and private schools. However, this being said, most studies devoted to this issue highlight the low relationship established between resources and results. Graph 4.8 is in line with the earlier analysis. It illustrates, through the example of Cameroon, this observation which is common to the African countries.

Graph 4.8: The differences in performances within an education system with identical resources: the example of Cameroon in 5th grade (French-speaking sub-system)



Source: PASEC

Firstly, one can observe a problem of allocation of resources with some schools showing an average expenditure per pupil of below 20 000 CFA francs while for others it is over 50 000 CFA francs and can in extreme cases be in the neighbourhood of 100 000 CFA francs. Therefore, schools are not all treated in the same way, and disparities can even be said to be acute. However, the ellipse on the graph shows that in a group of classes disposing of comparable resources, the same pupil can see his/her score vary considerably at the end of the school year, as a result of being in one class rather than in another³⁶. This shows that beyond the problem of resources available at local level, the effective and efficient use of these resources is of just as much concern. This is a major observation for most African countries: **quality of learning is not confined to a question of resources; it is also closely linked to the way these resources are managed.** What needs questioning is the capacity of the schools to transform allocated resources into school results.

The sometimes considerable and continuing performance gaps between schools are not, or almost not, taken into account in the management methods of education systems at the present time. The short-sightedness of the education systems speaks in favour of a change in school management. Local management should become a priority, where results in terms of access to school, survival and learning achievements would be the principal management concerns. Identifying schools with major difficulties and giving priority to supporting them does not seem out of reach for the African school administration and it would have massive

³⁶ Each dot represents the score that the average pupil in Cameroon would obtain in a class in a given school by controlling the characteristics of the pupil and the school context.

impacts on enrolment, quality of learning and also on equity. That implies, on the one hand, redefining and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders of the education system and, on the other hand, providing those concerned with the tools necessary for this meticulous job³⁷. With this in view, using the national exams for a system of evaluation could be a relatively simple solution to implement.

The principal levers to be given priority with a view to improving the quality of learning still need to be identified. The results presented above highlight the fact that traditional factors, such as the professional training of teachers, their experience, pupil textbooks, etc. do not provide the explanation for most of the performance gaps between schools. Although these factors must not be neglected, it does seem timely to look for other levers. It is true that there are few factual elements in the different studies to draw upon. However, there is one lead to be prioritized, although not yet well documented, which concerns the basic ingredient of any educational process, i.e. total number of teaching hours or time spent in school³⁸. Indeed, many observations in the field converge towards the fact that actual teaching time is distinctly insufficient in African schools but also unevenly distributed between schools and classes (cf. box 4.2). This factor, far from perfectly measured in the studies available, could explain a large part of the very significant differences in results between classes, as it is fundamental for learning. In an evaluation carried out in India, Duflo and Hanna (2005) have shown the positive relationship between the length of time the teacher is present and learning achievements.

Although complementary studies are still necessary for a better understanding of this dimension, field observations do give us an idea of the extent of the problems related to the time spent in school. From now on, this must be taken into account as a major challenge for African education systems. **Indeed, one can hardly hope to improve significantly the quality of learning in basic education in Africa today if pupils are not ensured of benefiting from a number of teaching hours comparable to that of pupils in developed countries.**

However, a solution to the problem of teaching hours will only be found if those in charge of education look into both the length and adaptation of the school calendar, as well as, teacher absenteeism. Difficult socioeconomic conditions often place strong constraints on the populations and there is little hope that they will manage to break out of these in order to respond to school requirements. It therefore appears clear that, in this type of situation, school must adapt as much as possible to its environment. These simple observations give rise to the idea of introducing some flexibility into the school calendars, in order to adapt them to the local contexts. This would however need to be run effectively at local level and would involve working together with the communities. Finally, teacher absenteeism, which is particularly high in Africa and has multiple causes (health, administrative reasons, etc.), should also be considered a priority in view of its potentially very negative impact on school learning achievements. In fact, **the priority for the authorities should be to ensure that the recommended volume of hours is applied in each school**, which implies developing specific tools for measuring the number of school hours.

37 The AGEPA Initiative, also called IEMAC/AGEPA (Improving Education Management in African Countries Initiative) has been working on these issues since 2003 in several African countries including Benin, Madagascar, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal.

38 This point has also been highlighted in researches conducted in developed countries (cf. Bressoux, 2000).

Box 4.2: Time spent in school: a major factor in the quality of learning

While international norms recommend 900 hours teaching time per year for primary school (OECD, 2002), an increasing number of obstacles prevent many African schools from providing their pupils with such a time volume.

One factor is of general order and has to do with the way the school year is organized. The school calendar cannot be envisaged in the same way throughout a country's territory. It is still common to have a single school calendar in African countries although there are often distinct local differences. Thus, all pupils are supposed to start the school year at the same time. Now, field observations have revealed that this is in practice rarely the case. Some areas, for different reasons (climate, accessibility, etc.), cannot start school at the projected date. In addition, in rural areas, there are problems connected to harvests or transhumance of livestock, often requiring children to help their family. This results in pronounced pupil absenteeism at these periods if they do not coincide with school holidays. These examples show that the length of the school year is not the same for everyone and that this varies greatly within the different education systems. Thus, schools, which start one month late and have high pupil absenteeism and/or an «early» end of school year, may have a deficit of 200 to 300 teaching hours per year compared to schools that respect the official calendar. It is easy to imagine the massive consequences such differences can have on pupil learning.

Another point to be taken into consideration is teacher absenteeism which is relatively high³⁹ and has multiple causes. Naturally, there are many health reasons on the continent where pandemics are common, HIV/AIDS of course, but malaria is also one of the biggest reasons for absence. Strikes should also be mentioned as these can take on considerable proportions in some countries. There are other less justifiable reasons such as problems connected to payment of salaries, which sometimes oblige teachers to be absent for several days, or absence for no acceptable reason. Whatever the causes, the difficulty lies in the incapacity of most African education systems to lessen the impact of teacher absence. On the one hand, it is not usual to replace absent teachers and, on the other hand, for short-term absences, it is very unusual for the teacher to catch up on the lessons missed. It should be borne in mind that if a primary school teacher is off two days a month on average throughout the school year and does not catch up on the lessons missed, and is not replaced, this is the equivalent of a reduction of around one hundred hours learning time for the pupils over the year.

When the different elements are joined together, we rapidly reach two conclusions: (i) actual teaching time over the school year is globally insufficient, and (ii) there are major inequalities in school time within the education systems. In fact, in most cases, African pupils benefit from a total teaching time that is very far from the international norm of 900 hours of lessons per year at primary school. For some classes, with combined difficulties, teaching time can be estimated at hardly more than 400 hours, i.e. the equivalent of half-time school, whilst pupils in the highest performance schools will benefit from 800 to 900 hours of lessons.

³⁹ In the PASEC surveys, teachers have declared from two to four days of absence per month, depending upon the country.

4. Conclusion

In the framework of EFA, it is essential to grant equal importance to school access and survival and to what pupils actually learn in school, as learning is the ultimate aim of all education. However, it is difficult to have an objective view of the situation regarding the quality of learning in Africa due, first of all, to the lack of adequate data. The poor participation by African countries in international surveys on the assessment of learning achievements, such as PISA or TIMSS, and the absence of such a survey at continental level, as well as the lack of national evaluations all contribute to hindering diagnosis. It is therefore essential to expand the exercise of measuring the quality of learning on the African continent, especially for measures enabling comparisons between countries.

The overall low level of performance of the African education systems and the very significant disparities between and within countries, sway in favour of placing greater importance on managing the quality of learning. The situation is complex, with excellence often going side by side with an absence of basic learning in the same education system; school management must tackle this very distinct heterogeneousness. This will only be possible if current management methods change, in order to incorporate in their common practice, performance in terms of enrolment, quality of learning and equity of schools. One of the direct consequences would be to redefine the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders in the educational chain. **Local management should be at the heart of the issue of the quality of learning and, beyond that, of the improved running of education systems.**

The major lesson learned from the variety of situations observed on the continent is that nothing is inevitable but that it is the policies implemented that make the difference.



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