

Exploring the fault lines of quality and equality in education

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The issue of gender equality reveals a geographical fault line in comparative education. Whereas in highly industrialised countries much of the recent research has focused on male underrepresentation in the teaching force and poor performance by boys, almost the opposite holds true in many developing countries, where women and girls are grossly underrepresented, both in front of the chalkboard and facing it. As a result, for decades girls' education has been a high development priority, reflected, for example, in the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All goals. The commitment to gender equality in education will also be central to the post-2015 development agenda (UN 2014). Primary school enrolment figures for girls are well below those for boys in most African countries, and the disparity only grows at secondary level. There are multiple reasons for this, including those financial and sociocultural expectations reflected in the proverb that “Educating a girl is like watering a flower in another man’s garden” (Roby et al. 2009, p. 348). Achieving gender equality therefore requires a multi-pronged approach. One remedy, strongly supported by research, is to increase the numbers of female teachers, since girls are more likely to enrol, remain and succeed in schools where there are female teachers. However, until now there is a gap in the research analysing the effects of being taught by women teachers on girls' educational experience, especially in African countries.

Our first article in this issue, entitled “Increasing the number of female primary school teachers in African countries: Effects, barriers and policies”, by *Caitlin S. Haugen, Steven J. Klees, Nelly P. Stromquist, Jing Lin, Truphena Choti and Carol Corneilse*, examines quantitative and qualitative empirical evidence showing that increasing the number of female teachers improves girls' educational achievement and attainment. The article literature on the impact of women teachers on girls'

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educational experience and identifies challenges many female teachers face. Finally, cognisant of the diversity of experience within this vast region and the consequent difficulty of drawing general conclusions (for example, the proportion of female secondary teachers ranges from 4% in Liberia to 64% in Lesotho), the authors suggest ways of attracting and retaining women in Africa's teaching force.

A further barrier to educational quality and equality in Africa – this time socio-economic rather than gender-based – is the enduring predominance of non-African languages as the medium of instruction in African schools. It is probably hard for most readers to imagine sending their children to school to learn in a language which they do not speak at home, which they rarely hear spoken on the street, and which is mastered neither by their classmates nor their teachers. Yet, the reality of education for the vast majority of Africans is just that, an enforced estrangement from their most precious cultural possession. Half a century after the great wave of national liberation which swept across the continent, this facet of the colonial legacy is as deeply entrenched as ever. Not only schools, but also national parliaments, courts and newspapers, tend to employ the languages of former colonial masters. Even adult education, intended to compensate for deficient or insufficient schooling, is frequently carried out in a non-indigenous language. To talk of education for democracy and citizenship in such a context is difficult at best.

An argument frequently advanced by governments and development agencies against using African languages as languages of instruction (LOIs) is that there are so many of them, and it may be problematic to select one as an LOI. But is this really the case? And does one need to select one language? In their article entitled "Using African languages for democracy and lifelong learning in Africa: A post-2015 challenge and the work of CASAS", *Birgit Brock-Utne* and *Malcolm Mercer* look at the work of the Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS) in Cape Town, which harmonises the written forms of African languages by identifying structurally and lexically related language "clusters". This facilitates a process whereby the mutual intelligibility of local languages in their oral form can be translated to the written form. The article examines the work of CASAS in detail, revealing both its successes and challenges. It also shows that the political process of getting the harmonised languages adopted is more difficult and unpredictable than the linguistic work.

At the opposite end of the global socioeconomic spectrum are a different group of students who learn through a non-native language – those attending international schools. Long the province of diplomats' children, international schools have mushroomed in recent years, as the internationally mobile workforce has rapidly expanded and the burgeoning middle classes of the developing world have come to value the benefits of an international education. In 1995, there were an estimated one thousand international schools in the world. Ten years later their number topped 4,000, and is projected to rise to approach 10,000 schools by 2020 (Brummitt 2007). These figures, while inexact (the diversity of this sector and lack of a clear definition make the compilation of more exact data difficult), indicate that a form of schooling which was once rare, expensive and exclusive is now, if not quite mainstream, at least far more prevalent and accessible and commonplace. What was once a "well-kept secret" is fast becoming a staple element of the educational landscape (Hayden

and Thompson 2008), especially with the adoption of international curricula such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) at state schools in many countries.

In his note entitled “Which preparatory curriculum for the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme is best? The challenge for international schools with regard to mathematics and science”, *M. Sencer Corlu* compares student performance in the two curricular models which predominate at international schools: the IB Middle Years Programme (MYP) and the Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE). The former was developed in the mid-1990s and is currently being relaunched in a 21st-century approach. The latter was developed in 1985 and has become popular in recent years among British domestic and international schools worldwide due to the clarity of its learning content. The prevailing uncertainty about which curriculum is best to prepare students for the IB Diploma Programme represents a challenge for international schools. The purpose of this study was to explain the relationship between student performance in the IGCSE and the Diploma Programme, specifically in relation to mathematics and science. The author analysed external examination scores of 250 students who attended a private international high school in a major city in Turkey between 2005 and 2012. To do so, he developed two structural equation models; the first model employed a maximum likelihood estimation, while the second model used a Bayesian estimation with a Markov Chain Monte Carlo method. His analysis suggests that the IGCSE provides a better foundational preparation for the Diploma Programme in mathematics and science.

As the marketisation of education proceeds apace throughout the world, and especially in economically resurgent Asia, parents and students vie for competitive advantage. As discussed in the previous issue of this journal, private tutoring centres (PTCs) have seen a proliferation which rivals (and in some ways mirrors) that of international schools (Berberoğlu and Tansel 2014). But whereas international schools offer discrete curricula and structures different to those of traditional state and private schools, PTCs exist in the shadow of formal state schooling, promising to boost the chances of its students to gain access to coveted places in higher education. Perhaps precisely to compensate for this “shadow” status, PTCs tend to adopt flashy tactics to attract students (again, in marked contrast to the more demure approach of international schools). This is particularly the case in Hong Kong, where PTCs have achieved such ubiquity that the question most high school seniors and their parents ask is not whether to attend a PTC, but which one to attend. Influencing this decision is the work of a vast array of advertising, often featuring “celebrity teachers” and extravagant claims.

In his article entitled “The ‘magic’ of tutorial centres in Hong Kong: An analysis of media marketing and pedagogy in a tutorial centre”, *Aaron Koh* examines the marketing strategies employed by these tutorial centres. Combining theories of marketing semiotics and emotion studies, he investigates the pivotal role of media marketing in generating a certain mystique. He also maps out the pedagogy he observed in an English tutorial class, seeking heuristic insights into the kind of teaching students in the study were looking for. He argues that part of the “magical” attraction of what are essentially “cram schools” is their formulaic pedagogy of teaching and reinforcing exam skills. Finally, the paper considers the social

implications of the tutorial centre industry in terms of the marketing of education and unequal access to tutorial services. Since PTCs are an established phenomenon throughout East Asia and are expanding rapidly in South Asia, Southern Europe and parts of North Africa (Bray 2013), this article has considerable international relevance.

The imperative to gain entry to third-level education is not only boosting the growth of PTCs, it is also placing immense psychological and financial stress on millions of Asian families, particularly in China, Japan and Korea. Whereas in China, where higher education institutions (HEIs) have mushroomed, particularly in the private sector (Li 2012), the main competitive aim is to gain access to certain elite HEIs (Larmerdec 2015; Jacka et al. 2013), in much of South Asia students strive to gain access to any HEI. With average incomes far lower in South Asia than in East Asia, the potential for private HEIs to fill the gap is also lower. This situation is particularly vexing in Sri Lanka, which is the top performer in basic education in the region, demonstrating remarkable success in terms of literacy rates and enrolment in primary education. Its 15 state universities, which charge neither enrolment or tuition fees, have only around 22,000 places a year for new entrants, representing about 3 per cent of the school-leaving age cohort. Lacking the financial power to greatly expand its state university system, the government of Sri Lanka has instead identified distance education as a way to relieve the bottleneck.

In their article entitled “Developing government policies for distance education: Lessons learnt from two Sri Lankan case studies”, *Tharindu Rekha Liyanagunawardena, Andrew A. Adams, Naz Rassool and Shirley A. Williams* investigate the implementation of ICT-enabled distance education in two universities offering programmes under the government’s Distance Education Modernization Project (DEMP), funded by a loan from the Asian Development Bank. They identify several factors which prevent successful participation by the majority of Sri Lankans who wish to study at tertiary level. These include a lack of infrastructure/resources, low English language proficiency, weak digital literacy, poor quality of materials and insufficient provision of student support. In the hope that future implementations of ICT-enabled education programmes can avoid repeating the mistakes identified by their research, the authors conclude their paper with a list of suggested policy options.

As the above articles suggest, access to higher education has become a kind of holy grail for an entire generation of young people in the developing world. The final article of this issue moves to Europe, where young people in many countries appear to experience less difficulty entering university than remaining there until graduation. In France, for example, a recent study found that one out of every three students drops out of the course they enrolled in by the end of the first or second year (MESR 2010). In their article entitled “The social, educational and cognitive factors of success in the first year of university: A case study”, *Sophie Morlaix and Bruno Suchaut* evaluate a sample of first-year students enrolled at the University of Burgundy, France, in 2010–2011, to understand the factors determining success in the first year of university.

The originality of this research lies in the inclusion of specific indicators of students’ skills when they start university within the explanatory models of

educational achievement. These include measures of academic performance (written comprehension skills) and cognitive abilities. While the impact of cognitive abilities on educational success has been examined at primary level in France, the present study is among the first to do this at higher level, with the additional consideration of students' educational and social backgrounds. The results show a significant impact of educational background (repeated years, type of baccalaureate and baccalaureate grade) on success. The authors also found that written comprehension skills and cognitive abilities alone play a limited role in explaining success, since the impacts of these variables are apparent throughout a student's educational career (and not just in higher education). Another important finding was that subject choice based on specific career aspirations is an important factor associated with success, qualifying the impact of educational background.

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