Overlooked and Undervalued:

A Synthesis of ERNWACA Reviews on the State of Education Research in West and Central Africa

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January 1997

Educational Research Network
for West and Central Africa (ERNWACA)

Support for Analysis and Research in Africa (SARA)
Health and Human Resources Analysis for Africa (HHRAA)

U.S. Agency for International Development
Bureau for Africa, Office of Sustainable Development

The SARA Project is operated by the Academy for Educational Development with subcontractors Tulane University, JHPIEGO, Macro International, Morehouse School of Medicine, Population Reference Bureau, and Porter/Novelli. SARA is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (AFR/SD/HHR) under Contract AOT-0483-C2178-00 (Project number 698-0483).

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Foreword

The eleven-country Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa was founded in 1989 in response to widespread concerns about the deepening crisis of African education and the need to improve national research capacity. By 1993, the Network's Phase I had achieved positive results. The main accomplishment was the completion by each member country of a state-of-the-art report on all relevant educational research undertaken to date within that country. Compiling these reports later enabled the Network to define three major research themes that are presently being studied by ERNWACA researchers in four transnational research projects. These three themes are

- the effect of community participation on educational access and retention;
- the role of community participation in connecting education to society;
- the contribution of nonformal education to basic education for all.

Altogether the state-of-the-art reviews uncovered 1,056 studies, most of which were unpublished and thus, almost completely unknown. In Bamako, in October 1993, the Network's Phase II was launched, and a decision made to proceed to prepare and publish a synthesis of the state-of-the art reviews so as to render information from these studies accessible to a wider audience of researchers and policy makers.

The responsibility for writing the synthesis was entrusted to Richard Maclure of the University of Ottawa—a friend and supporter of ERNWACA from its inception. USAID's Africa Bureau, through the SARA project, provided the financial backing for the preparation and production of this document. We want to thank them for their contribution to the publication of ERNWACA's tribute to the—as the title of the report suggests—the overlooked and under-valued African education researcher.

Educational Research Network
for West and Central Africa
Bamako, Mali

Acknowledgments

I wish to extend my thanks to Sibry Tapsoba and the staff of the International Development Research Centre for having provided me with lodging and office space in Dakar. I am grateful also to Lalla Ben Barka and the personnel of the ERNWACA office in Bamako for allowing me use of their library.

This synthesis would not have been possible without the remarkable collection of materials (see bibliography) gathered by the ERNWACA country coordinators in the Network's member countries. My thanks also to Bréhima Tounkara who contributed valuable insights that informed this work.

Sincere thanks are due to Peter Spain and Jean-Georges Dehasse for their support and patience, and to Renuka Bery for her editing.

I greatly appreciate the commitment of USAID and AED in having initiated and financed this synthesis of the ERNWACA papers under the auspices of its SARA Project. This support goes some way towards enhancing recognition of many African educational researchers and demonstrating the contribution of their scholarship to the course of educational change and policy making in West and Central Africa.

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Acronym List

To the extent possible, the acronyms appearing in the document are listed below. Those not listed are most likely acronyms for local institutions which the author and editors of this synthesis were unable to identify.

BREDA	Bureau régional d'éducation pour l'Afrique (UNESCO/Dakar)
CIRSSED	Centre international de recherche en sciences sociales et éducation pour le développement
DAE	Donors to African Education (now Association for Development of African Education)
DAF	Direction de l'alphabetisation fonctionnelle
DNAFLA	Direction national de l'alphabetisation fonctionelle et appliquée
ENS	Ecole national de sciences
ERNESA	Education Research Network for Eastern and Southern Africa
ERNWACA	Education Research Network for West and Central Africa
IDRC	International Development Research Center
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
INFRE	Institut national pour la formation et la recherche en éducation
INSE	Institut national de sciences en éducation
IPB	Institut pédagogique de Burkina

IPN	Institut pédagogique National
ISFRA	Institut supérieur de formation et de la recherche appliquées
MEN	Ministère de l'éducation nationale
NORRAG	Northern Policy, Review and Advisory Network on Education and Training
ROCARE	Reseau ouest et central Africain de recherche en éducation
RPB	Republique Populaire du Benin
U.B.	Université du Benin
UNB	Université national du Benin
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WARTP	West African Research Training Program

Executive Summary

While African governments have invested heavily in education during the last three decades, it is now generally accepted that social and economic returns from this investment have not met original expectations. Yet critiques of African education and recommendations for its reform have often been founded on limited empirical evidence. In part this has been due to relatively weak research capacities in African countries. In the late 1980s, in response to widespread concerns about the deepening crisis of African education and the need for improved national research capacity, researchers from several African countries established the Educational Research Network of West and Central Africa (ERNWACA). In accordance with its mandate to promote applied educational research and to foster a climate of contact and exchange among researchers in the region, ERNWACA's first major activity was to produce a series of state-of-the-art reviews of educational research in seven member countries. Altogether these reviews uncovered 1,056 studies, most of which have been unpublished and are thus almost completely unknown.

Overlooked and Undervalued, a synthesis of the ERNWACA state-of-the-art reviews, renders information from these studies more accessible to a wider audience of researchers and policy makers. Over 30 broad areas of research have been consolidated into six general themes: Educational Finance and Administration, Learning in Formal Education Systems, Teachers and Teaching, Education and Socioeconomic Integration, Nonformal and Traditional Education, and Educational Reform. Within the framework of each theme, this volume reviews the types of studies cited in the ERNWACA reports and summarizes their most salient points. These studies have yielded an abundance of information that adds to the knowledge base of African education. They provide valuable insights about teachers and teaching, factors affecting pupil learning, local capacities for educational innovation, connections between education and work, characteristics of indigenous education and nonformal adult education, and the dynamics of community and household engagement in local schooling.

This volume highlights the most commonly espoused recommendations for improved educational policy and practice which have emerged from ERNWACA research. Also considered are the caveats of past research and directions for future research as indicated by these studies. In the final chapter, attention is devoted to the role of ERNWACA in fostering an environment that facilitates improvements in research training, collaboration, and dissemination in West and Central Africa.

This synthesis of the ERNWACA state-of-the-art reviews intends to contribute to the enhanced prominence of African educational research. Besides revealing a resilience in the spirit of inquiry among African students and scholars of education, it demonstrates the strength of African research in lending fresh insights into educational scholarship and the discourse of educational practice and policy-making in African countries.

Chapter 1
Introduction

1. ERNWACA and National Reviews of Educational Research

Over the past three decades, African governments have made monumental investments in education. By the end of the 1980s, however, it was evident that the social and economic returns on educational expenditures were not meeting original expectations. Unbounded faith in education was being rapidly subsumed by the realities of strained budgets, declining educational quality, and lack of responsiveness to changing societal needs. Criticisms of African education systems were many, yet recommendations were founded on scanty data and were often fraught with caveats, qualifications, and conditions. In part this appeared to be the results of chronically weak research capacities in African countries. Critics repeatedly pointed to poor documentation services, the inadequacy of information about the systems and processes of education, and the general lack of official interest and demand for indigenous research. African educational researchers themselves generally felt isolated and underfunded--and thence unable to produce the research and provide the analysis necessary for sound educational planning and policy making. Several international donor agencies, having staked much in the development of African education, expressed similar concerns. Acknowledging the increasingly diverse learning needs of a growing youth population in a period of structural adjustment, by the mid-1980s agency reports were highlighting the need to develop the analytical capacities of African ministries and to foster a health research environment as a means of facilitating effective responses to educational crisis.[1]

This convergence of heightened awareness about the plight of African education and the need for improved research capacity led to the concept of networking as a strategy to link the strengthening of research with educational reform. In West Africa a tangible step in this direction occurred in 1989 when a number of researchers representing diverse institutions in 10 francophone and anglophone countries met together under the auspices of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to consider the state of educational research in the region. These deliberations led to the formation of a bilingual association, le Reseau ouest et central african de recherche en éducation/the Educational Research Network of West and Central Africa (ROCARE/ERNWACA). Funded initially by IDRC, the association adopted three broad aims: to establish systems of ongoing contact and exchange among educational researchers in the region; to promote applied educational research through regular interaction among educational researchers and other educational professionals at regional and national levels; and to continue ongoing solicitation of financial and material support for research training and collaborative research programs.

Although much of ERNWACA's mandate has thus consisted of a series of long-term developments, one of its first specific activities was to produce a series of reviews focusing on the state of educational research in each of the 10 member countries. These reviews were undertaken during 1990 and early 1991, but ultimately only seven participating countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Mali, Sierra Leone, Togo) produced bona fide state-of-the-art reports. While procedures for collating material and writing reviews varied, an experienced educational researcher was appointed in each country to compile a descriptive overview of all available published and unpublished research reports on issues relating to education. On completion of this task, a peer review process enabled education specialists to provide feedback on the summaries of national research and to identify future directions and priorities of educational research based on the state-of-the-art documents. Following this review process, the documents were finalized — in some cases by the senior researchers alone, in other cases by subcommittees of peers — and submitted to ERNWACA's regional coordinating office.

Altogether the seven state-of-the-art reviews (henceforth referred to as the ERNWACA documents or ERNWACA papers) uncovered 1,056 studies, most of which are unpublished and almost completely unknown to researchers and policymakers. As discrete reports, the ERNWACA documents differ in content and structure. While all include descriptive bibliographies, some provide brief summaries of research findings only (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Sierra Leone), while others make note of methodologies used — e.g., sample sizes and data collection instruments (Benin, Togo, Ghana). Two reports offer descriptions of national education systems and outline current problems confronting educational policymakers (Benin and Burkina Faso), while others focus entirely on identifying research reports and issues of

research (e.g., Ghana, Mali, Togo). Some provide in-depth critical assessments of national educational research environments (Benin, Cameroon, Sierra Leone), while others devote only cursory attention to factors related to overall national research capacity (Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali). Likewise, thematic organization of bibliographic references differs among all seven of the ERNWACA documents. An example of these differences can be seen in contrasting thematic section headings listed in the documents submitted from Mali and Togo.

Mali: <u>État de la recherche en éducation au Mali</u>

→ L'alphabetisation
→ Les innovations éducatives
→ Les stratégies éducatives integrées
→ Les déterminants de la réussite ou de l'echec scolaire
→ Les facteurs liés à l'intégration école — vie socio-économique
→ Les financements de l'éducation
→ Les changements qualitatifs dans le système d'éducation
→ Le rôle des communautés dans l'administration de l'éducation.

Togo: <u>Recensement des travaux de recherche en éducation au Togo</u>

→ Financement de l'éducation
→ Innovations
→ Changement qualitatifs
→ Processus d'enseignement/apprentissage
→ Éducation et intégration à la vie
→ Rôle de collectivités
→ Contexte général.

These differences in format and thematic emphasis, coupled with the overall volume of the documents (a combined total of 592 pages), limited their dissemination. Approximately 20 copies of each document were produced, and these were distributed to one or two centers of educational research in each participant country, as well as to IDRC's Ottawa and Dakar offices.

In view of their restricted availability, it soon became evident that the ERNWACA documents would be confounded by the same problem that has plagued so much of African research and which the documents were meant to address — namely, that they would lapse into obscurity. For ERNWACA's essential purpose to be fulfilled — enhanced prominence of African educational research — it was clear that the documents should be synthesized into a book-length manuscript that could be disseminated more widely. Because of my familiarity with ERNWACA's early develop-

ment (I was an IDRC program officer when the network was established), I was asked to produce this synthesis under the auspices of the Academy for Educational Development's SARA Project through its administration of USAID's HHRAA Project.

2. *Synthesis Methodology*

Synthesis of the ERNWACA documents entailed three iterative stages of content analysis. First, all titles of studies cited in the state-of-the-art reports were categorized by subject. Because approximately 30 subject categories were determined initially, these underwent a process of regrouping until eventually six major subject themes, each made up of several subthemes, were ascertained. These themes form the basis of Chapters 2–7 in this volume. The second facet of analysis involved an examination of the types of studies listed in the national documents. After three or four rounds of re-grouping, eight types of research reports were identified and quantified. The third aspect of analysis entailed a careful reading of descriptive abstracts and narrative commentaries about research and research results. This element of analysis presented the greatest challenge, because it necessitated a discernment of the different emphases of inquiry in diverse types and levels of education. Although a somewhat crude technique, this process facilitated not just recognition of research themes, but also identification of *patterns* of findings and recommendations, and the implications of these for policy, further research, and research capacity-building. As a way of highlighting these patterns in the following chapters, specific studies are frequently summarized—exemplifying several others that have focused on similar educational issues and produced comparable research results. More complete lists of studies are presented in the footnotes at the end of each chapter.

Content analysis, of course, is rarely without subjective bias. Had it been conducted by another individual, analysis of the seven ERNWACA documents might have resulted in a different configuration of themes and, hence, an alternative set of research categories. Nevertheless, by extrapolating almost entirely from the ERNWACA documents (i.e., not from other scholarly reviews), and by extensively listing the bibliographical references of the ERNWACA documents in chapter footnotes, this volume provides a balanced summary of the seven state-of-the-art reviews and reveals the hidden and potential strengths of educational research in West and Central Africa.

3. *Typologies of Research*

A striking feature of educational research outlined in the ERNWACA documents is the proportional differentiation of research reports. Just over 60 percent of the research listed in all the ERNWACA documents (645 studies) has been produced by students in universities and teachers colleges (*écoles normale supérieures*). Student research is presented in two types of reports:

→ *Mémoires,* which are produced in the francophone countries and are essentially research essays (although some of these papers approach the status of conventional graduate-level dissertations). Studies in this category account for 52.8 percent of all research listed in the seven ERNWACA documents.

→ *Theses*, most of which are written in English (with the exception of a handful of French language dissertations emanating formally from universities in France and Québec). Most of the theses listed in this volume originated in Cape Coast University in Ghana. Altogether, English language theses account for 8.3 percent of all listed research reports. That the number of such reports is much smaller than the number of French language *mémoires* is due to the representation of only two anglophone countries — Ghana and Sierra Leone — in the ERNWACA documents. (Although Cameroon is officially bilingual, the largest proportion of its research has been produced in French.) Clearly, given the absence of Nigeria in the ERNWACA review process (as well as the University of Legon in Ghana), a wealth of English language educational research produced by college and university students in West Africa remains to be uncovered.

Well below the volume of student research summarized in the ERNWACA documents are the other typologies of research. These are listed here according to their representativeness:

→ *government reports* (13.8 percent)—mostly, but not entirely, produced by ministries of education.
→ *published manuscripts* (8.0 percent)—articles that have appeared in national or international scholarly journals, professional bulletins, or popular magazines.
→ *unpublished papers* (7.6 percent)—research papers unearthed in archives which appear to have no connection to directed student research or to any forum of dissemination (e.g., seminars or publications).
→ *external agency reports* (5.2 percent)—although clearly under-representative of agency reports produced in the region, those that are listed in the ERNWACA documents were written either partly or entirely by African nationals and subsequently copied for libraries or ministerial archives.

→ *seminar papers* (3.5 percent) — also very much underrepresentative of this type of report.
→ *joint reports produced collaboratively by officials in national governments and external donor agencies* (0.7 percent) — loosely interpreted as *national* research in view of national government involvement.

While these are the proportionate breakdowns for the combined seven ERNWACA documents, types of research reports naturally vary among each of the countries. This variation by country is shown in Appendix A. In addition, references to specific studies in the succeeding chapters, in the text and footnotes, include their typologies.

4. General Research Themes

As noted, to quantify the range of topics that have been the focus of research in the seven ERNWACA countries, all titles listed in the ERNWACA documents were categorized into a series of subject headings (or subthemes), which were then grouped around six general themes. Categorization of research themes and subthemes is as follows:

Educational Finance and Administration
→ government expenditure and foreign aid
→ community household and parental involvement
→ private schooling
→ materials, textbooks, and infrastructure
→ systems of administration

Learning in Formal Education Systems
→ classroom performance, behavior, and attitudes
→ school enrollment, repetition, and attrition
→ curriculum and learning materials
→ school transition
→ special education
→ examinations and assessments

Teachers and Teaching
→ classroom teaching, guidance, and mentorship
→ teacher training and knowledge dissemination
→ teachers' attitudes
→ conditions of work

→ school leadership and supervision

Education and Socioeconomic Integration
→ school, work, unemployment, and agriculture
→ school and local society (values, delinquency, community views of schooling)
→ educational disparity and mobility (gender and socioeconomic status)
→ vocational and technical education

Nonformal and Traditional Education
→ literacy
→ indigenous education
→ history of education
→ adult education (health, rural extension, etc.)
→ Islamic/Arabic education

Educational Reform
→ system-wide reform, policy, and planning
→ classroom innovations
→ school mapping

This categorization of subthemes is somewhat subjective because many research reports contain more than one theme. For instance, research on national languages for instructional purposes relates to school reform policies, nonformal education, and classroom teaching and learning. Other topics of research, notably that of girls in education, have not figured prominently, but are nonetheless considered in several studies that are categorized into different themes. In effect, the categories listed here are presented to indicate the emphasis of research and the general direction of findings and recommendations. Readers should not conclude that all — or even most — of the ERNWACA research is divided quite so thematically. Additional information on the proportional variance of themes in the seven countries and across types of research reports is provided respectively in Appendices B and C.

These six general themes form the basis of the next six chapters. As a way of synopsis, it is useful to draw the reader's attention to patterns of evidence that are highlighted in each of the following chapters.

Chapter 2 presents a summary of research grouped under the general theme, *Educational Finance and Administration.* A repeated finding of this research is the significant role of local communities in the maintenance and relative success of schooling, even prior to structural adjustment policies. Three general conclusions seem to emerge from the ERNWACA studies on community involvement in schools. First,

all efforts to institute revenue-generating cooperative or farm schools in the context of community economies have failed. In most cases it would seem that learning has not been integrated effectively with production activities, nor have production levels and revenue management practices proven satisfactory. A second common finding is that community involvement in school affairs, while often demonstrable initially, appears to dwindle over time. Local interest and participation in school administration are usually high when a school is first established, but ERNWACA research suggests that as time lapses, parents' attendance at school meetings generally declines and input in educational decision-making wanes. In part this tendency of gradual disengagement from school affairs is the result of local people being relegated to a consultative or marginally supportive position by school authorities. In part, too, there is some indication that many people concur with this type of disconnected relationship between community and schooling, because there continues to be a widespread assumption that formal education is primarily the responsibility of the state and educational professionals, so it need not concern community inhabitants, many of whom may have had little or no formal education themselves. A third interesting finding from some of the research on educational administration — one that is implied from the results — is that notions of community financing of schooling should be regarded more precisely as *household* financing, because ongoing support for children's education usually concerns parents and guardians rather than all inhabitants of local communities. If viewed in this way, further research may demonstrate that if financial support for schools is devolved increasingly to community levels, disparities in children's education may be linked to differential household interests in schooling and to their varying capacities to pay for it.

Studies of classroom learning and teaching are reviewed respectively in Chapter 3, *Learning and Attrition in Formal Education Systems*, and Chapter 4, *Teachers and Teaching*. In contrast to widely held notions about the "black box" of African schooling — i.e., that little is known about what goes on in African schools and classrooms — in fact there appears to be a wealth of research material on this topic in the libraries and archives of the ERNWACA countries, most of it conducted by student researchers. By and large these studies are descriptive and are based on observations, interviews, and in some cases questionnaires that have been circulated. As outlined in the ERNWACA documents, evidence indicates that learning and teaching processes frequently are below expected standards. In general it seems that pupil learning is affected adversely by three interrelated factors: a) tenuous links between family situations and school environments; b) the dichotomy between traditional norms and community needs on the one side, and the ethos of modern schooling (with its orientation to public sector employment

and a monied urban economy) on the other; and c) shortcomings in the school system itself, notably administrative weaknesses, infrastructural and material deficiencies, and ineffective pedagogy. This last point leads to the general issue of teaching. Research on classroom pedagagy indicates a number of factors that have seriously undermined the effectiveness of teachers: a) teacher training that has little bearing on actual classroom situations; b) living and working conditions that are demoralizing for many teachers; c) the prevailing rigidities of established curriculum and end-of-school examinations that stifle creativity and innovation in teaching; and d) absence of reading environments, which thus restricts scope for professional development and innovation among teachers.

Chapter 5, *Education and Socioeconomic Integration*, reviews research that examines connections of education with work, community life, and social mobility. Studies in this loosely defined area, most of which appear to have been conducted through government and donor agency auspices, suggest mixed results. Some research, for example, indicates that apart from the certification function of formal education, on the whole schooling contributes relatively little to the occupational livelihoods of many school graduates. Research also indicates that projects aiming to connect schools more closely to the sociocultural and economic contexts of local societies rarely last beyond experimental pilot stages. Generally this is due to widespread perceptions that link such efforts with donor agency or government sponsorship rather than with local community interests. With little sense of "ownership," the propensity of local people to assume responsibility for long-term community-based schooling is limited. Likewise, the role of teachers as key actors in such projects is often undermined by inadequate incentives, insufficient training and professional support, and lack of knowledge about the communities in which they work. As for linkages between education and economic activity, although research is sparse, several studies indicate that levels of employment and productivity should not be correlated with educational investment. Instead, unemployment and low economic productivity are consequences of a structural crisis — i.e., they are a function of economic stagnation, population increase, and fundamental sociocultural change. By way of contrast, some case study evidence points to a positive link between formal education and productivity in informal economic sectors, particularly comparisons between apprentices who have been exposed to schooling and those who have received no formal education.

Chapter 6 covers research that has centered on *Nonformal and Traditional Education*. As indicated in the ERNWACA documents, nonformal education (NFE) appears to have received relatively little attention from African researchers. Likely explanations for this are that: a) NFE has been vastly overshadowed by formal schooling and therefore has not had the same attraction for researchers; and b) NFE has been supported and managed substantially by internationally funded NGOs and has thus

been the subject mainly of countless unpublished "in-house" evaluations that are not publicly available. Despite the limited amount of independent national research in this domain, the ERNWACA documents suggest the following findings from inquiry into NFE: a) literacy training is commonly perceived by local people as mainly a utilitarian skill — i.e., as a means of increasing income; b) NFE programs for women are frequently flawed because they take little account of the domestic burdens that limit women's scope for participation; and c) when considered in their entirety, the cumulative impact of NFE programs has been weakened by lack of coordinated planning and implementation. In contrast to nonformal education, which is generally regarded as oriented toward modernization and change, traditional forms of teaching and learning have been subjects of substantial research interest, mainly from students. Several descriptive *mémoires* of indigenous education suggest that school reform efforts could be enhanced if greater heed were paid to traditional educational processes more closely. Less prominent in the ERNWACA documents are references to research on Islamic education, in part perhaps because educational research is largely a product of Western education, and therefore has been more attuned to an assessment of issues related to modern schooling.

Chapter 7 covers research that has focused mainly on *Educational Reform*. Most such research has been funded externally and is presented in diagnostic reports. However, a number of case studies have focused on the capacities of local actors — especially teachers — to implement educational innovations. Evidence indicates persistent problems with local level implementation that stem from: a) inadequate planning; b) local resource scarcity, which generates dependency on sustained external support; c) the pilot project "syndrome," typified by the abandonment of initiatives following the disengagement of external support; and d) poor preparation and support of local actors, especially teachers and community leaders.

5. Implications for Policy and Research

In synthesizing the ERNWACA documents, this volume also highlights the most commonly espoused policy recommendations and implications that have emerged from ERNWACA research. While varied in terms of context specificity, proposals for improved educational practice in West and Central Africa that arise directly from national educational research can be itemized briefly as follows:

→ efforts should be devoted to more efficient management of financial, material, and human resources within educational systems;
→ more decision-making authority should be allocated to parents' associations, and channels of communication among all public education stakeholders should be

improved;
→ national languages should be given greater prominence in classroom teaching and learning;
→ traditional forms of learning and teaching should be considered as examples and sources of inspiration for educational innovation and change;
→ teacher education and the conditions of professional support should be improved;
→ a few local schools should be selected as centers of on-site observation and training for educators, parents, and community leaders; and
→ closer links should be established between local schools and nonformal education programs.

One broader recommendation also tends to emerge from the ERNWACA documents, one that nonetheless directly impinges on education:

→ *direct state intervention in national economic activity should be reduced and should be accompanied by a concomitant rise in state management of, and support for, vocational and entrepreneurial education.*

Issues that relate specifically to the methods, content, and future directions of educational research in West and Central Africa have also been gleaned from the ERNWACA documents. While these will be dealt with more fully in the following pages, three aspects of ERNWACA research should be noted at the outset. First, at best only scanty indications of research methodology appear in the documents. Given the scholarly isolation experienced by many African educational researchers — manifested by severely limited access to books, academic journals, and other forums of scholarly exchange — it is safe to assume that a proportion of ERNWACA research is flawed methodologically, at least according to standards of Western scholarship. Undoubtedly, too, the variability of research methods might invalidate efforts to generate cross-national comparisons of past ERNWACA research. A second point to be made about many of the studies outlined in the ERNWACA documents is the apparent imbalance between diagnostic description and broader theoretical conceptualizations of educational issues. Although an accurate assessment of the theoretical premises of ERNWACA research ultimately must entail in-depth perusal at source — namely, a reading of research reports in the libraries and archives where they are housed — much educational research in West and Central Africa is likely to be theoretically weak in comparison with studies emanating from research institutions in more amply endowed Northern countries. Implicitly, therefore, theoretical and methodological shortcomings might weaken the credibility of some of the studies outlined in the ERNWACA documents. Yet such is the volume of ERNWACA research that it is impossible to discount the knowledge about education in West and Central Africa that it conveys, as well as the implications and questions that this body of work has raised. Moreover, critiques of African educational research on the grounds of methodological or theoreti-

cal weaknesses should be tempered by recognition of similar shortcomings in much externally conducted research.[2]

The third aspect of ERNWACA research relates to issues of education that have received little attention so far from African researchers. This, in fact, was a key purpose of the state-of-the-art review process — to reveal not only the research that has been done and has lain in obscurity on archival shelves, but also to indicate caveats in research and to outline new directions of inquiry. While gaps in research and suggestions for new fields of study are dealt with thematically in the following chapters, suffice it to say that educational research in West and Central Africa will require a much improved scholarly environment if it is to move beyond its present subterranean state. This will be a particular challenge for ERNWACA, because research environments today require vigorous professional and scholarly networking. As will be discussed in the final chapter of this volume, for educational research to develop and flourish in ERNWACA countries, consideration should be given to the creation of an up-to-date regional data bank that links national archives and libraries, the establishment of a small grants fund for student research, the development of a "culture" of research dissemination and publication, regular provision of training for librarians and young researchers, encouragement of coordinated cross-national research projects, and ongoing advocacy for independently conducted African research as a basis of educational policy and planning in African countries.

6. Summary: The ERNWACA Documents in Perspective

The ERNWACA documents represent a significant step toward improving educational research in West and Central Africa. By updating bibliographies of national educational research, which previously had remained largely unknown beyond restricted institutional and national boundaries, and by providing descriptive summaries of existing educational research which is contained in national libraries and documentation centers, the seven national research reviews have provided a solid basis for development of a regional data bank. While no such resource base has yet been established, copies of the ERNWACA documents have been distributed among educational research institutions in all member countries, thus greatly extending information about a wide range of African-based educational research.

Perusal of the ERNWACA documents confirms many of the claims about the financial and institutional constraints on educational research in West and Central Africa, and about the need for an environment that encourages research and facilitates research training, collaboration, and dissemination. However, if this was their only contribution to knowledge about the state of educational research in the region, the

ERNWACA papers would warrant no more than passing attention. The most striking aspect of these documents is that overall, far from indicating a moribund research environment, they instead reveal a resilience in the spirit of inquiry. Fragmented, and in many cases not without methodological shortcomings, nationally conducted research throughout West and Central Africa nonetheless has yielded an abundance of information about a wide range of critical policy-related educational issues in the region. What the ERNWACA documents have clearly shown is that extensive national research exists — albeit most of it unpublished and therefore not easily attained — and that cumulatively it adds greatly to the information base of African education. Significant, too, by demonstrating the latent substantiveness of African educational research, the ERNWACA documents convey a strong signal that if judicious support for training and dissemination is available, many as yet unknown African researchers will likely lend fresh insights into educational scholarship and the discourse of educational policymaking in the future. Besides offering recognition to deserving individuals, increased prominence of African educational research could also serve as a counterweight to donor agency sector studies that not only have exacerbated the marginalization of indigenous African research, but may have painted a misleading picture of what is and is not known about education in West and Central Africa. It is hoped that this synthesis contributes to a rectification of this current state of affairs, and a much greater appreciation of the concealed and potential strengths of African educational research.

Endnotes

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Chapter 2

Educational Finance and Administration

1. Introduction

With African education systems increasingly confounded by expanding learning needs on one side and insufficient financial, material, and human resources on the other, concerns about educational finance and administration have become acute. Yet as the ERNWACA documents attest, so far there has been relatively little in-depth research in this area. Much of the information on educational finance is descriptive, centering principally on levels of public expenditure, and there is still a paucity of knowledge about community-level finance and administration. Nevertheless, as will be discussed below, a smattering of case studies indicates that what is commonly described as *community* involvement in school finance and administration is in fact mainly a household affair. This distinction will likely have an impact on efforts to decentralize educational administration and encourage greater local support for education.

2. Evidence of Government and Donor Agency Expenditures

Nationally conducted research in the corresponding domains of educational finance and administration in West and Central Africa appears to be in its infancy in most ERNWACA countries. So far, the most prominent studies in this aspect of education have been those commissioned by central government ministries and international donor agencies, mainly for educational projection and planning. Research has concentrated almost entirely on state and donor agency financing

of formal school systems.[1] Partly this is because of the substantial capital and human resources that have been invested in schooling, and partly too by the relatively easy access that researchers have had to information on official ODA disbursements and public sector capital and recurrent expenditures.

As the ERNWACA summaries of this research attest, until the mid-1980s state expenditures on formal education in West and Central Africa consistently commanded fairly high percentages of national public spending, even during the early years of major austerity measures. What the research also shows, however, is that recurrent expenditures of African governments were far from being evenly distributed. The salaries of educational personnel have commanded much the highest proportion of educational expenses.[2] In addition, throughout the 1970s and 1980s unit educational expenses from government ministries in several countries were highest in tertiary education and technical training institutions. In contrast, unit outlays of public funding were substantially lower at secondary and primary levels of schooling.[3]

Figures on external assistance for formal education are also reasonably transparent. Several studies provide evidence of donor funding being channeled predominantly into capital inputs (mostly for infrastructure development and pedagogical support)[4] and through technical assistance directed toward tertiary and vocational education.[5]

Overall, descriptive accounts of disaggregated government and donor agency expenditures on formal education appear to have been commonly available to the authors of these various country reports. However, what is not made clear in the ERNWACA papers, is the degree to which information on the most recent state and donor agency allocations for education is open to public scrutiny. The fact that the most detailed evidence of educational expenditures is contained in officially commissioned reports suggests that such information may not be attained as easily through independently conducted inquiry.

3. Critiques of International Aid

Several studies noted in the ERNWACA papers have been sharply critical of the deployment of foreign assistance for African educational systems. Generally accorded in the form of large projects, external aid to national education has been provided by numerous bilateral and multilateral organizations and has typically been oriented toward achieving comprehensive sets of quantitative and qualitative objectives in predetermined time frames. Unfortunately, however, this pattern of assistance has undermined pronounced aims of developing long-term capacities to expand

and simultaneously improve the quality of national education. In Togo, for example, until lately planning and administration of external educational assistance were rarely harmonized, and little effort was made to integrate aid projects with ongoing ministry operations.[6] Conditions attached to educational aid (e.g., the necessity to purchase textbooks and to rely on technical consultants from specific donor countries) rendered educational policies and subsequent allocation of resources subject to the interests and agendas of the different donors rather than to the need for a cohesive development of Togo's educational system. As noted elsewhere, despite the sizeable contribution of foreign aid which has allowed for the expansion of education, it has not ameliorated the overall conditions and quality of African education significantly.[7]

Such critiques, deriving from research conducted in the 1980s, undoubtedly have contributed to initiatives aimed at improving donor consultation and collaboration, best exemplified by the creation of the Donors to African Education working groups.[8]

4. Community and Household Financing of Education

In more recent years, perennial levels of external aid and government expenditure have been unable to sustain the rates of educational expansion that were experienced during the first two decades following the formal independence of most ERNWACA member states. Today, in the wake of structural adjustment measures, virtually all hope of providing universal public schooling has been dashed. This changed fiscal situation has led researchers to consider additional dimensions of educational administration and finance. Although there is as yet no comprehensive picture of the myriad costs of education in West and Central Africa (e.g., direct financial expenditures, inputs of time and labor, and long term opportunity costs), the widening scope of inquiry as indicated in the ERNWACA papers has led to two revelations. First, the real costs of education have risen relentlessly, at least since the early 1980s. This has resulted in pressures on various sectors of civil society to complement government funding of education and, in particular, to absorb many of the recurrent costs of schooling.[9] Second, a number of case studies have provided disaggregated evidence indicating that in many regions the maintenance and improvement of schooling already are heavily dependent on the recurrent support of parents and local communities. Besides signaling avenues for further study, the research outlined in the ERNWACA papers may give policymakers reason for pause before pronouncing on the merits of substantially reducing government expenditures on schooling.

While empirical evidence of nongovernmental and local expenditures on education is still sparse, initial analyses of the structures of educational

finance, and the various levels and modes of participation within these loosely configured structures, suggest that support for education varies widely among different localities. In fact, as studies of formally organized community expenditures on schooling have shown, not only does local nongovernmental financing vary considerably from region to region, but in many communities it would seem that *collective* support for the recurrent costs of schooling is often negligible.[10] Findings also suggest that periodical introductions of "coop" or rural vocational schools, whose ostensible purpose is to combine learning with production, have consistently fallen short of revenue-generating expectations. In Benin a prediction in 1975 that coop schools could be expected to finance 20 percent of nonsalary school expenses was dashed when evidence indicated that the proportion of revenues generated had only amounted to 0.5 percent of nonsalary operating costs.[11]

Despite evidence suggesting that overall community support for schooling may be less than has often been assumed, research summaries in the ERNWACA papers indicate that parents sometimes do go to considerable lengths to keep their children in school. Documented parental contributions include materials for infrastructure, labor for construction, and money for expenses such as school fees, uniforms, books and stationery, food, lodging, and travel.[12] What seems to emerge from studies on community financing is that much local financial and material support for schooling is actually discrete *household* support, and that this is highly differentiated on the basis of household economics and individual family decision making.[13] Indeed, as household support for local schooling has reached its optimal capacity in some regions, further required increases in household funding are becoming a key factor in pupil abandonment and falling school enrollment.[14] The ERNWACA papers suggest, therefore, that the conceptual notion of local or community financing of schools should be regarded more appropriately as parental or family financing of schools, and that further research should examine more closely the different resources and reasoning processes underlying *household* interest in and support for local schooling.

5. Educational Administration at the Community Level: Insights into PTAs

The notion of community has become integral to the common lexicon of educational and development discourse. In very general terms it can be said to refer to different groups of local people having common interests. These interests in turn serve as the bases for collective action oriented to the well-being of the

members of all groups in the community. Beyond this rather generic understanding, however, the use of the concept *community* often fails to elucidate the complexities of social relations in specific situations.[15] Although there is no mention in the ERNWACA papers of a specific study that examined the composition of communities and the dynamics of collaborative local actions directed toward common goals, the Beninois national network has argued that clear and comprehensive definitions of communities within their specific historical and cultural contexts are prerequisites for research that focuses on community involvement in schooling.[16] In view of the growing interest in local participation in educational administration, this argument is pertinent for good reason. First, for years African governments and international donor agencies have expounded much rhetoric on the significance of schooling for local communities, as well as on the need for local community support to ensure good quality schooling. Yet apart from research that has evoked the various types of capital inputs (materials, equipment, and labor for school construction) that communities now invariably provide for local schools in West and Central Africa, the ERNWACA papers suggest that few educational researchers in the region have thoroughly examined the remarkably differentiated and evolving nature of communities in sub-Saharan Africa. Nor is there much evidence about the dynamics of community involvement in the day-to-day *management* of schools.

There is, however, one apparent exception to this knowledge gap. A number of student theses and *mémoires* offer potentially useful descriptive accounts of parent teachers' associations (*les comités des parents d'élèves*).[17] These studies, most of which were conducted at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana, have entailed firsthand observation by student researchers themselves. Site visits reportedly have been complemented by interviews with community leaders and teachers and, on occasion, by the circulation of questionnaires. Unfortunately, there is no way of ascertaining the relative comparability of these studies because the ERNWACA papers provide only limited information on the number of research subjects interviewed and questionnaires tabulated. Yet, taken at face value, these studies appear to demonstrate a general pattern of community mobilization when village schools are proposed and first established. In most instances support is manifested by collective labor for school construction and by fund raising for initial operating expenditures. Over time, however, active local participation in school-related activities tends to be succeeded by waning attendance at PTA meetings and by a decline in parental engagement in PTA activities. Cumulative evidence in Ghana, for example, suggests that at the end of the 1980s many Ghanaian communities had witnessed the virtual demise of PTAs as viable local groups, although this is not always acknowledged directly in official district reports.[18]

Numerous reasons are cited for this shift from early organized enthusiasm to later collective disinterest in school affairs. Common to all cases is the general view that PTAs are supposed to play a responsive and supportive role rather than a directive one in school affairs. Decisions allocated to PTAs are usually those related to questions regarding *how* support is to be organized rather than to *what* should be supported and *why*.[19] Despite repeated government pronouncements about the responsibility that families and communities must assume for local public schooling, in practice routine school administration, the determination of school curriculum and time tabling, the hiring and placement of school personnel, and processes of evaluation are all controlled and managed by professional educators, not by parents and local community leadership. In many respects this appears to be due to a commonplace inability or unwillingness of local school officials to cede the authority necessary for engaging parental participation in educational decision making.[20] One study suggested that minimal parental involvement in school affairs stems directly from the absence of community animation and leadership training for teachers and school directors.[21]

Lack of accountability on the part of school personnel has also been identified as a cause underlying the low status of PTAs. Within the typically hierarchical framework of national education systems, teachers are formally responsible to their ministerial seniors rather than to the local people whose children they teach. PTAs therefore have very limited means of sanctioning teachers and school directors for poor quality teaching, absenteeism, and other forms of nonprofessional conduct.[22] In turn, this lack of discretionary responsibility in the management of local school affairs appears to have generated a popular conviction in many regions that schooling is primarily a state affair, and that once communities have expended collective efforts to *establish* local schools, the bulk of recurrent expenditures should emanate from the state.[23]

Still another reason for the apparent ineffectiveness of many PTAs arises from evidence of burgeoning parental disenchantment with the processes and outcomes of schooling itself. On the one hand, private opportunity costs for sending children to school have risen steadily.[24] On the other, in many regions pupils are unable to pass common entrance examinations into higher levels of education, thus leaving them (and their parents) with frustrated aspirations and three rather stark choices. Children can opt to spend an additional year preparing to repeat the examinations. They can try to seek other educational opportunities, although these tend to be rare for most school "push-outs." Or they can decide to abandon formal education altogether. In choosing the last course, their prospects are often limited to languishing in home communities with few job opportunities or migrating to futures that are becoming increasingly uncertain for poorly educated youth.[25] Moreover, because there is widespread evidence that the socioeconomic return (usually in the form of public sector employment) for

individuals with school certificates appears to have fallen dramatically in the last decade, private investment in education has become an uncertain venture for growing numbers of families. A state institution that previously extended benefits to individuals and their families, at minimal direct expense to them, school today is expected to become more of a *community* institution (i.e., one that is more vigorously supported by local people), but one that paradoxically now proffers fewer benefits and entails more cost to families. As the luster of schooling has become tarnished in the eyes of many parents, so too has their interest in PTAs and invitations to support local schooling.[26]

While the admittedly limited number of studies examining PTAs paints a rather gloomy picture of civic involvement in school affairs, not all the research cited in the ERNWACA papers has elicited negative findings. One Ghanaian study revealed a high level of collaboration among teachers and parents, with PTAs contributing effectively to the resolution of numerous school problems.[27] Another research report has purportedly shown a demonstrable link between teachers' support of active pupil involvement in the administration of secondary schools and reduced incidence of discipline problems and school mismanagement.[28]

Clearly, of course, because the evidence available on PTAs and community involvement in local school administration remains case-specific (and mostly confined to Ghana), regional generalizations on this issue are still speculative.

6. Prescriptions for Policy and Research

Most of the studies of educational finance surveyed in the ERNWACA papers have been diagnostic and prescriptive, aiming quite specifically to compile data on the sources and allocation of educational funding and to make policy recommendations. Prescriptions for policy tend to fall into three categories:

a. Augmentation and diversification of funding

Some researchers argue that governments should increase their financial commitments to education.[29] Others argue that new modalities of funding must be drawn from the private sector and from local communities and that, therefore, a key policy endeavor should be to mobilize broad sectors of civil society to support education.[30]

b. A reallocation of funds directed to different levels and types of schooling

As noted earlier, some studies conclude that state funding and external assistance

have been skewed too heavily in favor of tertiary and formal vocational education, which together account for a relatively small proportion of enrollment in formal education systems.[31] Since this has resulted indirectly in households shouldering a disproportionate and ever-increasing burden of the nonsalary costs of primary and general secondary schooling, the authors of these studies argue that a greater equilibrium should be established. Simply put, more state and donor funding should be directed to secondary and basic education as a means of alleviating many overstretched household budgets. In turn, more support for tertiary and vocational education should be forthcoming from the private sector and from affluent households (whose offspring are more likely to succeed to tertiary levels).[32]

c. More effective management of existing modalities and levels of educational finance

A critical issue of educational finance, one that is frequently overlooked by repeated expostulations about the chronic lack of resources available for education, is the *administration* of current educational resources.[33] Yet apart from critiques of international educational assistance, little in-depth national research has been conducted in this area. One study in Burkina Faso indicated that national educational planning and the establishment of priorities have been plagued by political uncertainty and inadequate policy analysis capacity. The inevitable outcome has been poor coordination and management of educational finances.[34] The implication of this type of assessment is that appeals for greater educational expenditures would be more compelling if they were preceded by thorough investigations of existing management practices of public and private sector educational finance. The search for optimal financial management has become as significant as the need to mobilize greater resources for education.[35]

Recommendations pertaining to educational finance generally emanate from diagnostic studies having little or no theoretical framework. The same applies to prescriptions focusing on educational administration and aspects of community participation in school activities. Little of this work appears to be grounded in theory. For example, several studies appear to be critical of African states for retaining centralized control, and thus contravening official espousals of community and parental participation in local schooling. Yet as the ERNWACA papers indicate, the authors of these studies generally conclude by recommending actions that imply continued intervention by the central state. These include: a) improving the image of the school by persuading parents that formal education is far more than preparation for civil service selection; [36] b) augmenting in-service training for teachers, with particular focus on methods of community mobilization and skills of negotiation; [37] c) reducing the

private costs of schooling, which many households either cannot afford or are reluctant to pay; [38] d) encouraging greater female participation in formal education and reducing the institutional and social barriers preventing pregnant girls and young mothers from continuing their education; [39] e) introducing curricular reform— e.g., the use of national languages as principal media of instruction and the adoption of participatory child-centered forms of pedagogy;[40] and f) decentralizing certain facets of administration and training, and coordinating the development of complementary forms of schooling — e.g., Arab language and Islamic schooling, various Christian denominational schools, and fee-paying private schools.[41]

In all such proposals, African states are expected to play major decision making and facilitating roles. Yet without an explicit theoretical overview of the African state, the research findings on educational finance and school administration as outlined in the ERNWACA papers are unable to address the implication that recommended state initiatives might have for more participatory nongovernmental school administration. While some of the ERNWACA studies have contributed to a general diagnosis of the complexities and problems of community participation in local school management, ensuing arguments for more enlightened state responsiveness to potential community input suggest possible conceptual weaknesses inherent in some of these studies.

An exception to the paucity of theoretical reflection is an external study summarized in ERNWACA's Beninois review. Jointly funded by UNESCO and UNDP, the study highlights state monopoly of the school system as being at the heart of the educational finance crisis.[42] Just as central governments in West and Central Africa have attempted to monopolize the management of national economies, so too have they exercised tight control over formal education. Private schooling and denominational schools have been discouraged, and local household input has been restricted mainly to provision of additional resources, not to significant influence over the administration and content of schooling. Only professional teachers' unions have exercised strong influence over education, but this has been restricted mainly to defensive stances on behalf of teachers' own interests. Except for initial enthusiastic construction of schools, the populace at large has never felt any sustained degree of "ownership" of education, generally because this was not encouraged. From this perspective, the current financial crisis of schooling parallels, and is closely connected to, the critical plight of national economies whose private sectors have been unable to flourish because of rigid state control of commercial activity. In effect, economic stagnation and an impoverished education system are direct functions of the crisis of the state itself in West and Central Africa.[43]

7. Research Methodology

Although the ERNWACA papers present only an overview of national educational research, the synopsis of research in educational finance and administration hints at fundamental shortcomings in design and methodology. While a number of studies appear to have presented tabulated data, most appear to suffer from inadequate elaborations of data-gathering methods and analytical techniques. Lists of compiled government statistics cannot be accepted as uniformly reliable, nor should evidence obtained through interviews and circulation of questionnaires be considered as valid without detailed descriptions of sampling techniques, selections of indicators, and adjustments for bias. In many cases, too, it would seem that the parameters of research are too limited to afford reliable generalization of findings. Moreover, given the variability of research and its largely descriptive orientation, it is difficult to attempt valid comparisons. Restricted and outdated literature reviews further undermine the value of research, as does the lack of cross-national referencing in the region which is an indication of how little educational researchers in West and Central Africa are apprised of each other's interests and work.

8. Areas of Further Research

The ERNWACA papers reveal that much research remains to be done in educational finance and administration, particularly in light of impending structural changes. Two areas of investigation would appear to require much greater emphasis than has been the case so far.

a. Comparative in-depth examinations of community participation in schooling

In view of the likelihood that efforts will continue to be made to shift educational costs away from central governments, there is urgent need for microlevel inquiry that will focus on: (i) household opportunity costs and cost-benefit equations of individual children's schooling (e.g., firstborn versus younger children; girls versus boys); (ii) factors affecting household decision making and the specific contributions of key household actors to children's schooling; and (iii) factors that facilitate or impede organized community financing of local schools (e.g., contributions of parents' associations, alumni groups, etc.). In addition, studies should assess changing community attitudes toward current educational options for children, shifting parental aspirations for their children, and new modes of parental and community organization. Not only can such research be useful for government policymakers, it also can help to inform the growing numbers of nongovernmental actors who are intervening actively in

the basic education of children and youth.

b. Investigations into the financing of nonformal education programs

Because most government and donor agency educational expenditures have been directed toward sustaining formal school systems, very little attention on the part of national researchers has focused on the administration and financing of nonformal education. This is likely to be a fruitful area of inquiry, particularly because nonformal basic education is increasingly regarded as a serious alternative for youngsters unable to gain access to schooling, or for whom schooling has failed in providing basic life skills.[44]

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Chapter 3

Learning and Attrition in Formal Education Systems:

Factors Affecting Content, Quality, and Effectiveness

1. Introduction

The ERNWACA documents cover several domains of research that focus on pupil learning in schools — the curricular content of learning, the quality of learning as reflected in pupil performance, and the efficacy of learning. Included in the coverage of pupil learning are not only those factors that influence different levels of classroom learning and achievement levels, but also related determinants of pupil repetition and early school abandonment. In aggregate terms the research presents a bleak picture — a chronicle of problems in schools and communities that have contributed to a fundamental weakening of the educational quality of public schools.

2. Classroom Learning and Achievement

The ERNWACA documents provide an overview of ample research on classroom learning and achievement in a range of curricular subjects. Most of this research has been conducted by tertiary education students and is reported in their unpublished *mémoires* and theses. As outlined in the ERNWACA documents, virtually all of these studies have entailed classroom-based fieldwork in which some or all of the following methods were used: a) observations of teaching and pupil activity; b) the administration of questionnaires and ability tests; and c) interviews with school principals and classroom teachers, and sometimes with parents and pupils. What follows is a selective summary of studies that have investigated factors affecting student learning and performance in different subject areas.

a. Reading

Two studies noted in the ERNWACA documents focus on students' reading habits and abilities. In Ghana Tettey tested the reading skills of deaf primary school students and revealed levels that were below expected norms. Lack of suitable textbooks and adequate equipment and infrastructure were cited as the principal explanations for poor reading.[1] In Benin Satoguina examined the reading habits of a cohort of secondary school and university students.[2] Findings from this study indicated that students read mainly for study purposes, but that very little time was devoted to leisure reading. In addition, while textbook exchanges were common, only 20 percent of university students who were interviewed bought books on a regular basis. Financial constraints, coupled with limited leisure reading, were cited as factors inhibiting the purchase of books.

b. Orthography

Two studies, one in Mali and one in Togo, drew on a series of tests designed to examine the orthography of primary school pupils.[3] Both sets of tests revealed that students' writing skills were below the expected averages for children of similar ages and grade levels. On the basis of subsequent interviews and questionnaires, both studies indicated numerous factors likely to retard pupils' advancement in handwriting, including large class sizes and inadequate didactic materials, insufficient writing practice, pedantic teaching methods, and poor or nonexistent home study environments. As the Togolais study also noted, because of these factors, many children appeared to demonstrate little interest in improving their handwriting skills. Extrapolating from this evidence, the study suggested that when confronted with a host of factors that restrict opportunities to learn and to improve newly acquired skills, children's motivation to learn is likely to diminish.[4]

c. *Narrative writing*

Three independently conducted studies in Togo provide evidence of the written narrative skills of secondary students. In one study, interviews with students about particular events described in homework assignments, coupled with content analysis of these same assignments, revealed students' difficulties in recounting events in writing. According to the author, poor teaching is the primary cause of poor grammar and weak written narrative skills.[5] A second study, which included observations of classroom teaching and an analysis of teachers' notebooks and lessons plans, found much the same low proficiency levels. The researcher revealed that the poor written grammar of pupils corresponded with teachers' own weak grammar and uninspiring teaching methods.[6]

The refrain of poor teaching is also expressed in the third study of pupils' narrative writing. Nonon-Kpam observed the common use of rote teaching methods that apparently were regarded by teachers as ways that would best enable pupils to absorb the rules of language.[7] Whatever the truth of this, potential learning benefits were limited because teachers rarely seemed to correct children's written work, an example of the general lack of feedback teachers accorded to pupils. As part of this third study, Nonon-Kpam administered a French *dictée* language to pupils. Some intriguing results emerged: younger students did better than older students, girls outperformed boys, and new pupils outperformed repeating pupils. Unfortunately, the ERNWACA papers do not offer any explanation for these results.

Besides eliciting some interesting findings about children's learning of written narration, these three studies also provide examples of useful graduate student field research that unfortunately all too often lies unnoticed in documentation centers throughout West and Central Africa.

d. Oral communication skills

Three studies noted in the ERNWACA documents focus on pupils' oral communication skills. In Benin, Moudachirou examined oral language use among school graduates and was able to argue that French language and maternal language speech patterns were characterized by the interplay of opposing words and grammatical constructions.[8] This evidence of "linguistic interference" was also documented by Amevigbe, who revealed how secondary school students in Togo strove to learn French by memorizing words, but often without a clear understanding of their meaning.[9] This was due in part to ineffective methods of teaching and learning, and in part because of everyday use of Ewe, the students' mother tongue. As a result, spontaneous or impromptu communication tended to leave many students without the appropriate French words, and thus with a propensity to revert to Ewe words and phrases to fill in gaps. In such circumstances, it was apparent that students experienced unease in oral communication as they struggled to express themselves in two distinctly different linguistic forms.

Teachers, it seems, are not immune to such language "schizophrenia." Mungah's research in Cameroon demonstrated that because teachers themselves are susceptible to linguistic "interferences," their nonstandard use of conversational French has an evident impact on children's learned oral communication capacities.[10] Mungah found that differences in teachers' command of language directly influenced their pupils' relative mastery of oral communication.

The common thematic thread of these three studies is the striking discontinuity between French language use in formal education and the use of maternal languages in common everyday speech. As the authors of these studies demonstrate, a major stumbling block for student learning is the compulsory use of an essentially foreign language as the principal means of instruction in the early years of school. In effect, the researchers have shown that when formal education is conducted in a language that is foreign to the children's environment, it can actually *retard* their capacity to learn.

e. Science and mathematics

The ERNWACA documents refer to four case studies focusing on students' grasp of science and mathematics. Of the four, two Togolais studies indicate low performance levels.[11] In an assessment of physics learning conducted through testing and a questionnaire survey, Agbedanu concluded that the pupils had only a vague and intuitive understanding of physics concepts. The second study, an examination of the math abilities of sixth-year primary school pupils, indicated that there was a correlation between poor language ability and low math scores. Both studies attributed weak

science and math performance to poor teaching. On closer examination, teachers did not appear to master the curricula. In the two cases this was seen as a direct consequence of insufficient academic and professional training. Two research papers in Sierra Leone also focus on the shortcomings of science classes in rural primary schools.[12] Given the fiscal and demographic pressures on formal education systems, these findings suggest the emergence of a pernicious cycle in which poorly educated teachers transmit less than satisfactory education to students, many of whom in turn will be recruited as teachers in response to the demands of a steadily growing educational system.[13]

3. Factors Affecting Pupil Learning

While some studies have assessed pupil learning in different curricular specialties, other research reports are centered on indicators of overall scholastic performance. In this regard, many researchers have relied on national examination results for empirical evidence. Examination statistics, along with rates of pupil repetition, are compiled regularly by ministries of education and provide easily tabulated indicators of the so-called internal efficiency of schools. As documented in ministry and donor agency reports, and in numerous internationally published articles that draw from statistics compiled by African education ministries, cumulative evidence suggests that overall educational quality has declined in recent years. It also points to high rates of pupil repetition, especially in the last years of primary and secondary school, which are the critical stages when pupils are preparing for highly competitive terminal examinations. It is curious, however, that few accounts offer comprehensive assessments of the myriad factors that affect student learning and compel many youngsters to repeat a year or more of the same school grade because of below-average achievement levels. Nevertheless, the aggregation of evidence compiled from the summaries of research in the ERNWACA documents provides a useful overview of the determinants of children's scholastic performance.

a. Social factors

Much of the research in this area has singled out family background as the most significant factor affecting pupils' performances and relative happiness in schools. The range of critical family variables cited include families' economic status,[14] children's nutritional intake,[15] parents' educational level,[16] parental affection and the proximity of parents to their children,[17] and levels of parental familiarity with local school activities and support for their children's scholastic endeavors.[18] While some of these studies would seem to indicate that much of the responsibility for students' success in schools

lies directly with parents, three studies covered in the ERNWACA papers highlight the cultural contradictions that exist between the informal education of family life, with its grounding in indigenous languages, customs, and social values, and the formal education of school systems, which is conducted in metropolitan languages, managed largely by the state, and oriented toward values and jobs that have little direct relation to life in local communities.[19] It is not surprising, therefore, that in many situations the two most influential spheres of children's socialization — the family and the school — are not mutually reinforcing. Inevitably, as the evidence appears to show, this has a negative impact on children's learning and compels many to repeat a year or two. Apart from reflecting poorly on the efficacy of formal education, these findings suggest that improved channels of communication between schools and parents should be a policy priority.[20]

A few studies have also focused on individual pupil attributes as affecting scholastic performance and grade repetition. Research in Benin has identified affective characteristics such as personal ambition, worries about future prospects, and desire to please teachers and other mentor figures as key variables in determining scholastic achievement .[21] These findings are useful beyond their inherent value as unique research results in that they also serve as a cautionary note. Alongside the influence of parents and families, which obviously affects children's scholastic abilities, the individual characteristics and attitudes of students should not be overlooked as variables of school success and failure. It is clear from the ERNWACA documents that much scope remains for further psychological and pedagogical research in African schools.

b. The effects of school type

Another limited body of research has focused on the effects of different types of schooling on scholastic achievement. Through analysis of test scores and interviews with pupils and teachers, one notable study in Ghana revealed that aggregate pupil performance in single-sex schools outweighed aggregate performance in coeducational schools. While levels of performance in all-boys schools was only marginally better than in coed schools, achievement in all-girls schools was significantly higher than in the other two school types.[22]

Another study in Cameroon indicated that private schools were more qualitatively effective than public schools, a conclusion based on a comparative assessment of the examination scores of private and public secondary students.[23] Unfortunately explanations of why private school students outperformed public school students are not available in the ERNWACA (Cameroon) document. However, one possible source of differentiation is suggested in a study showing direct correlations between academic

achievement and the state of school infrastructure. The research indicated, not surprisingly, that student performance suffers in conditions where school construction is only partially completed, where infrastructure has deteriorated and remains unrepaired, and where schools are inadequately supplied with classroom materials and library facilities.[24] Given these circumstances, and in view of diminished state resources, it is increasingly likely that private schools may be as well furnished as public schools — and sometimes more so — and that this will have a comparable influence on student achievement.

Yet another body of research identified poor coordination among different subsystems of formal education as a source of pupil alienation and low achievement in schools.[25] In particular, the transition from the last year of primary school to the first year of secondary school is made difficult by the absence of synergy between the two subsystems. The discontinuity arising from fundamental differences in curriculum content, methods of teaching, and composition of student bodies (because pupils in the same secondary school often hail from different — and sometimes distant — communities) has been mentioned as a critical source of confusion for some pupils, resulting in low levels of achievement or school abandonment.

4. Early School Abandonment

In terms of volume, research focusing on early school abandonment figures prominently in the ERNWACA documents. This may be explained in part by the easy availability of reasonably reliable enrollment and attendance data which are collated annually by education ministries. Although much of it is descriptive in nature, cumulative research on early school abandonment in numerous ERNWACA countries has demonstrated that despite high demand for formal education, a host of compelling factors has weakened the quality of formal education in West and Central Africa. Consequently, popular disenchantment with schooling has risen, especially among rural children and those living in poverty.

Taken as a whole, the ERNWACA research indicates three general factors that provoke early school abandonment.

a. Family imperatives and constraints

Research into the disjunction between family and school has generally identified domestic poverty and low levels of parental education as causes of weak family commitment to the long-term education of children in some regions. Faced with the rising costs of schooling and dubious socioeconomic returns from investing in their children's

formal education, many poor and illiterate parents withdraw their children after two or three years of primary school.[26] None of the ERNWACA documents reveals whether such parental action is undertaken willingly or reluctantly. Yet several studies do conclude, that household poverty often compels parents to keep their children out of school to work.[27] As noted earlier, when parents know little about school activities and demonstrate minimal interest in their children's scholastic performance, there is evidence that children tend to be alienated from school and are more likely to abandon formal education than children whose parents express a genuine commitment to follow the educational progress of their offspring.[28] Unfortunately, the former situation appears to be quite common in West and Central Africa, in part because integration between schooling and local communities in many regions is lacking.

b. Sociocultural imperatives and the schooling of girls

Rates of early school abandonment are higher among girls than boys. While there are economic reasons for this, the ERNWACA research suggests that in many situations sociocultural factors are at the heart of gender imbalances in education. For example, girls and women are widely valued for their reproductive capacities and domestic labor.[29] Neither of these attributes requires lengthy attendance in schools. Likewise, because education is a form of social security investment for many families, the education of girls — most of whom are likely to be married by their early to mid-20s — is often seen as potentially unrewarding since the fruits of women's labor are usually reaped by husbands and in-laws, not by women's families of origin.[30] Other more draconian reasons for girls' abrupt departure from school have been related to unwanted pregnancies,[31] worries about sexual advances from teachers,[32] and forced marriages of female teenagers.[33]

Given these various prejudices about female roles in society, three ERNWACA studies have suggested that among girls who are attending school, deep-seated sociocultural norms often impede the development of behaviors that are otherwise necessary for scholastic achievement — e.g., out-of-class reading, regular evening homework, and in-class oral expression.[34] Accordingly, social context factors appear to foster girls' early abandonment of schooling, yet another instance of the dichotomy between local traditional norms and the ostensible modernizing tendencies of schools.

c. Internal educational shortcomings

Forces within schools themselves precipitate children's early abandonment of formal education. Low scholastic performance and grade repetition are cited as

demoralizing factors for pupils and can lead many to give up the quest for a school certificate.[35] There is also evidence that trepidation of sitting for final examinations, or the anticipation of poor exam results, is sufficient cause for some students to drop out of school.[36] For many pupils, too, the attitudes and behaviors of teachers appear to have a significant influence. Poor teaching, teacher absenteeism, and injudicious exercise of authority have been identified as reasons for pupil unhappiness and early abandonment. [37]

Likewise, several structural factors have been cited as factors contributing to student dropout, including:

→ the use of foreign languages as the principal media of instruction, which (as discussed earlier) can be a source of frustration for some pupils, and a constant impediment to their learning;[38]
→ poor school mapping, which frequently results in inequitable geographical distancing of schools, thus effectively preventing some children from walking to school on a daily basis;[39]
→ lack of school supplies and equipment, which hinders teaching and learning; [40] and
→ inadequate and outmoded curricula, which simply leave many students bored, restless, and easily susceptible to nonschool activities.[41]

5. *Policy Recommendations*

A useful aspect of ERNWACA research is its identification of a range of factors, within and outside schooling, which over the years have steadily weakened the quality and effectiveness of formal education in West and Central Africa. Some of these factors — notably diminishing returns from education and lack of parental involvement in schooling — now appear to be contributing to falling rates of enrollment and early school abandonment.[42] On the basis of these indicators of educational decline, research reports invariably have concluded by proposing numerous policy options. The most common proposals have been in curriculum reform, especially as there is an obvious need to link pedagogy much more closely to the social and economic preoccupations of local communities. Although a perennial issue of debate since the colonial era, curriculum reform remains a central object of policy discourse in light of the deterioration of national economies and evidence that in future most school-leavers will only be able to work in informal economies.

Recurring themes of curriculum reform include:

→ *Greater prominence of national languages in reading materials and as media of instruction*. The rationale here is that more widespread use of indigenous languages in the formal school setting will reduce the alienation and linguistic schizophrenia that have retarded children's classroom learning. It is assumed, too, that official recognition of local languages in schools will allow parents and other community inhabitants to become more closely connected with school learning.[43]

→ *A stronger rural orientation of schooling*. For this to occur, some researchers have argued that schools should evolve into centers of community learning, with functional literacy and other forms of nonformal education offered regularly (e.g., in health, agriculture, and in basic technical and commercial skills), and that consideration should be given to the establishment of children's preschooling.[44]

→ *The establishment of closer working relations between parents' associations and local school management*. As several research reports have indicated, improvements in children's learning depends on better channels of parent-teacher communication and more effective collaboration among local school authorities and community stakeholders.[45] In particular, there should be a devolution of authority and greater teacher accountability to parents and community leaders.[46]

6. Methodological Issues and Avenues for Future Research

While cumulative ERNWACA research has added knowledge about the obstacles to learning in formal education systems, there appears to have been little cross-referencing of national scholarship on this issue. Rarely do these studies seem to have built on previous related African research, in part because most of the research is not published. Once produced, studies tend to be relegated to archival shelves, remaining all but hidden from public view. This is unfortunate because lack of dissemination has greatly restricted scope for comparison. Instead, much of the research has been conceptualized and designed largely on the basis of the personal interests of researchers themselves, many of whom are students and have had limited methodological training and supervision. Consequently, research into factors affecting school learning remains exploratory, revealing case specific findings that are not easily extrapolated beyond stringent limits of time and place.

A further caveat in research on pupil learning is the paucity of evidence that goes beyond the shortcomings of current classroom situations and can identify clearly the determinants of improved educational efficacy — e.g., demonstrable factors that contribute to higher-quality teaching, improved pupil achievement levels, better attendance records, and reductions in early school abandonment. As the ERNWACA documents indicate, future research should focus on examining the linkages between

school-related factors and out-of-school contextual influences that impinge on improved student learning.[47] Likewise, comparative retrospective assessments correlating key indicators of educational quality and the existing socioeconomic conditions of young adults (e.g., 18 to 30 years of age) of different educational backgrounds would enable all stakeholders in education to understand better the differentiated effectiveness of different types and levels of schooling. In addition, more national research should examine different and changing parental perceptions of schooling.[48]

To facilitate such comparative in-depth studies, national systems of research networking must be strongly encouraged (see chapter 9), with incentives for researchers at all levels and in all institutions to share results in a timely fashion, to build on each other's work, and to conduct inquiries that are integral to a number of specific and cohesive regional research agendas. For research to move beyond case study critiques that risk becoming unoriginal and repetitive, a key aim of research networking should be to disseminate the results of research and to ensure as much as possible that future studies be oriented toward illuminating structures and processes that can enhance children's learning.

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Chapter 4

Teachers and Teaching

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1. Introduction

A highlight of the ERNWACA papers has been the identification of a substantial amount of qualitative research on teachers and teaching. The range of evidence on classroom teaching that has been uncovered in the archives of ERNWACA member countries is significant, for it belies widely held notions about the "black box" of schools and classrooms— i.e., that researchers know little about the daily activities of teaching and classroom processes. A more accurate assessment is that little effort appears to have been made to disseminate the findings of research on teachers and teaching. In large part this may be due to the fact that much of this work has been done independently over the last 15 years by young African researchers. In almost all of the countries reviewed, an accumulation of student theses and *mémoires* has produced a vivid picture of teaching and classroom interaction. Most of these studies are based on the firsthand observations of the student researchers themselves. In most cases, too, observational data are complemented by one or more of the following methods: interviews (usually with teachers and pupils), classroom testing, and questionnaires. While the ERNWACA documents do not provide an in-depth assessment of the methodological rigor of these studies, and while some of the graduate student findings are probably questionable because of methodological weaknesses, the overall body of research presents a compelling picture of teachers and teaching that warrants greater attention than has so far been the case.

Unfortunately, the picture is a disturbing one. With very few exceptions, the research reveals a persistent pattern of poor working conditions, ineffectual pedagogy, and a generally demoralized teaching profession. Of all the research topics covered in the ERNWACA documents, teaching appears to pose the greatest challenge for educational systems in West and Central Africa. What follows is a summary of the key themes highlighted in the ERNWACA research on teachers and teaching.

2. Classroom Pedagogy

Numerous studies have presented descriptive assessments of teaching in different subject areas. Almost all indicate substantive pedagogical weaknesses and failings. In language arts case studies have noted the following instructional shortcomings:

→ Teachers fail to see the necessity of teaching correct grammar, in part because many of them have an uncertain grasp of the grammatical construction of the languages they are expected to teach,[1]
→ Teaching of reading skills emphasizes oral pronunciation, but fails to instill among pupils the capacity to fully comprehend what is being read,[2]
→ Instructions to copy from blackboards and textbooks are the common way that children are taught writing skills, so that pupils often are unable to express their own ideas clearly in written form,[3]
→ English language instruction presents "a uniform picture of ineffective teaching and poor ability among pupils to read and write."[4]

Other researchers have focused on science and mathematics teaching, with equally disquieting results. Several studies conducted in Togo in the early 1980s discerned the doctrinaire nature of science teaching. A case analysis of primary school Grade 3 pupils described how children were taught to memorize lessons in physics, but had great difficulty in recognizing that the information committed to memory had a direct relation to natural phenomena.[5] Similar findings resulted from a study of secondary school teaching in which science lessons were observed to be heavily grounded in textbook narratives but did not enable students to transfer these narratives to the natural world around them.[6] The same observations were made in 30 science classes in which children were provided with information but had little opportunity to conduct experiments and to link concepts with natural surroundings.[7]

Two other studies indicated that in spite of formal curriculum guidelines stressing the need to study the local milieu as part of science classes, teachers tended to rely solely on textbook content. According to Ayate, this is because teachers generally attribute far greater significance in their classroom teaching to abstract, textbook-based information than they do to the immediate surroundings and life experiences of their pupils. In Segbefia's view, however, the explanation for the gap between content of classroom instruction and the local environment is more straightforward: teachers suffer from "leur incapacité notoire à réaliser une adaptation originale de leur cours" [their notorious inability to make an original adaptation of their courses].[8] Classroom observations have likewise shown that poor math teaching and generally weak classroom organization are directly linked to poor math skills among pupils.[9] A major reason for poor science teaching is said to be lack of qualified personnel.[10] Yet traditional methods of student assessment have also taken their toll on student learning. Kpadja noted, for example, that secondary school teachers evaluated only the information that students had memorized and that could be articulated in test situations. Broader capabilities of theorizing and logical thinking, although ostensibly essential aims of the science curriculum, were not tested.[11]

In history and geography, Koudama recounted how a combination of uninspired teaching and poorly written, underillustrated textbooks contributed to low student interest in, and comprehension of, these subjects.[12] Likewise, in an analysis of the lesson plans and instructional practices of 53 secondary school history teachers, Mawusi explained that the plans of only 12 teachers demonstrated a reasonable connection with subsequent classroom instruction and interaction.[13]

Several other classroom-based inquiries covered in the ERNWACA documents do not appear to be subject specific; nonetheless, they do add further evidence of poor teaching. In a study of multiple-choice testing procedures, Zinsou raised doubts about the ability of teachers to adapt new ideas and methods into their classrooms.[14] In another study involving interview observations of classroom practice, and assessments of lesson plans, Gnavo concluded that teachers' inexperience and lack of sound pedagogical knowledge resulted in poorly conceived and implemented lessons.[15]

Other researchers have noted the following:

→ Teachers who are unable to formulate objectives in their lessons and manage large classrooms in ways that can facilitate learning among all the pupils,[16]
→ Lessons which are sometimes incoherent and have little pertinence to children's learning needs or the stipulations of the established curriculum,[17]
→ Teachers who fail to exploit their own general knowledge and experiences in classroom settings and carry on their own informal research,[18]
→ Rote memorization of rules and information, which stultifies creative, logical, critical thinking, and renders pupils unable to apply their limited learning beyond the narrow context of classroom walls.[19]

Research has also highlighted teacher-pupil relations as critical to learning. Studies in Benin, for example, have shown how teachers' attitudes toward girls can prove to be a significant factor in female performance and enrollment longevity.[20] Likewise, teachers' relations with parents, local authorities, and supervisors — and with each other — play a key role in professional motivation and performance.[21]

More generally, teaching methods have been described variously as failing to generate expected levels of knowledge among children,[22] as "anarchic,"[23] and — most critical of all — as directly contributing to poor academic achievement, low self-esteem, and aptitudes ill-suited for eventual entry into the world of work.[24]

3. Teacher Training

In addition to descriptive accounts of the problems and shortcomings of classroom teaching, the ERNWACA documents have uncovered substantive research into the *causes* of poor teaching in West and Central Africa. Not surprisingly, teacher training has been singled out in several research reports as a key factor affecting levels of teaching proficiency. Numerous studies have identified links between the formal training of teachers and variables such as:

→ teaching proficiency in the classroom,[25]
→ pupils' academic achievement,[26]
→ teachers' methods of student evaluation, and[27]
→ teachers' interest in student welfare and in the teaching profession itself.[28]

In all these cases, the research suggests that formal qualifications, which are considered as proxy for the amount and quality of training received, are strong predictors of pedagogical proficiency. Higher-level qualifications are generally linked to better classroom teaching. Unfortunately, however, apart from one exception, all such studies have a common lament: teacher training is on the whole insufficient. The exception is Adjei-Kwarteng's survey of teacher trainees and college staff in Ghana.[29] Yet here, too, there are gaps, for although the author concludes that teacher training is satisfactory and is relevant for subsequent field experiences, nothing is said about the subsequent postings of teachers or about teachers' retrospective views about their training after having taught school for two or three years.

One aspect of teacher training and proficiency that has been overlooked occasionally, but which is emphasized in two Togolais studies, is the degree to which the sensitization and training of teachers affects major school reform efforts.[30] Normally, educational policy changes are succeeded by a series of workshops and seminars designed to inform teachers of the rationale behind decisions, and to explain how decisions are to be implemented. Yet, as both these studies revealed, training rarely manages to bridge the gap between the conceptual objectives of reform policies on the one hand, and teachers' operational objectives and routine classroom activities on the other. Training, in other words, is regarded as a discrete, formalized, and relatively short-term exercise meant to pass information down through the educational hierarchy, rather than as an essential channel through which teachers, administrators, and educational policymakers can engage in the exchange of ideas and become mutually involved in planned educational change.[31]

Several studies distinguish between in-service and preservice training. On the basis of observations and a questionnaire circulated among teachers, Malato indicated that history teachers regarded in-service training as providing little useful input into

their teaching.[32] Amevigbe's research into the training of teacher aides found that in-service courses were inconsistent in quality and appeared to be designed without considering recipients' opinions about their own needs.[33] The propensity to standardize training, combined with a failure to consult with teachers' aides, undermined the potential effectiveness of many of the courses. Yet another in-service problem is revealed by Teguide in a study of professional development courses for school principals.[34] Established to help principals disseminate new ideas to their teaching staff and carry out more effective supervisory roles, the courses did not have the desired long-term effect. As the research revealed, principals who had been exposed to the training did not systematically transmit new pedagogical knowledge to teachers. In-service training appeared to be a stimulating diversion for individual beneficiaries, but did not result in fundamental changes in the subsequent routines of daily pedagogical supervision and practice.

Research into preservice training reveals similar limitations. In their investigations of preservice teacher training in Togo and Cameroon, respectively, Karenzi and Ongadnzi have concluded that initial training frequently does provide demonstrations of good classroom teaching methods and can have immediate positive effects on individual attitudes toward the teaching profession.[35] Yet as these same authors point out, too often preservice training fails to inform prospective teachers about the actual conditions they will face once they begin their professional careers. Sadly, such conditions are often far from the relatively attractive professional environs of teacher-training colleges.[36] As much of this research suggests, the formal aims and content of preservice and in-service training of teachers generally have little relation to the actual day-to-day conditions of working teachers.

4. Conditions of Work

While extension and improvement of teacher-training programs appear to be necessary, training alone is not sufficient for augmenting overall teaching proficiency in African schools. As other ERNWACA researchers have shown, the living and working conditions of teachers significantly affect their comportment. Again and again teachers are reported to be dissatisfied with low salaries and professional benefits,[37] and with lack of pedagogical materials and decent housing.[38] Researchers in Ghana have pointed out the mental stress suffered by teachers[39] and the tendency to absent themselves from classrooms during school hours to engage in commercial activities.[40] In a survey of 297 Malian teachers, Ky revealed that the majority of teachers consider early resignation from the teaching profession in a positive light.[41] Dissatisfaction with the job itself, and the perceived low social status attributed to teaching, were the most commonly cited

reasons for abandoning a teaching career.

5. *Social Status and Attitudes*

Poor teaching, coupled with evidence of rising concerns among the populace about the diminished rewards of a school education, seem to have led to a decline in the social status of teachers. This is confirmed in several ERNWACA studies.[42] One report observes that the "feminization" of teaching has affected its status in the eyes of the public. Besides the sheer numbers of personnel engaged at the primary school level in some areas, the relatively high number of female teachers has apparently been a factor in lowering the public's esteem of primary school teaching in comparison with other professions in which women are less well represented![43]

Low social status and difficult working conditions have tarnished teacher morale. Various ERNWACA studies have cited teachers' loss of interest in the social and intellectual development of pupils[44] and in their own professional improvement.[45] In Cameroon Tsafak revealed that levels of teacher morale were most strongly correlated with their conditions of work.[46] In a survey of 124 teacher trainees in three Ghanaian colleges, Afegra discovered that the majority held strongly negative attitudes toward being assigned to schools in rural regions even though most of the trainees had come from rural villages.[47] Lomdo found that in Togo many teachers did not consider education as a process that could generate social change, and few saw themselves as agents of change. Instead, the majority viewed teaching as a means of transmitting testable information to their pupils.[48] Another Togolais study conducted by Amoudji indicated that primary school teachers felt little need to maintain close contact with parents, thus resulting in situations of minimal communication and frequent mutual misunderstanding.[49] In Benin Agbo and Capo-Chichi referred to the individual and collective malaise of teachers, and Saizonou has written about a crisis of morale in the teaching profession.[50]

6. *Curriculum and Supervision*

While the quality of teaching is often viewed as a discrete problem in its own right, a number of ERNWACA studies suggest that it is largely symptomatic of two additional factors: outmoded curricula and lack of guidance and supervision. A major study in Togo observed that the highly tenuous relationship between the formal school curriculum and the world of work tended to have a negative, albeit indirect, effect on teaching.[51] Instead of pointing to uninspired rote teaching as the major *causal* factor of poor education, the study concluded that poor teaching was mainly a *consequence* of

stale, examination-oriented curricula. A similar conclusion was reached by Evoda in a *mémoire* highlighting the mutual reinforcement between weak teaching and lack of curriculum diversity and novelty.[52] These studies suggest that the inherent monotony and irrelevance of much of school curricula generally contribute to the lackluster nature of classroom teaching.

Research has also demonstrated a clear link between the proficiency and morale of teachers and the levels of professional guidance and supervision they receive. Studies have noted, for example, the chronic absence of pedagogical literature and guidelines for school teachers,[53] the failure of school directors to provide systematic pedagogical assistance,[54] and a general lack of professional supervision of teachers, especially those posted to rural schools.[55]

7. Materials and Reading Habits

As is well known, school systems in West and Central Africa are plagued with shortages of books and didactic materials. Numerous ERNWACA studies have chronicled the plight of teachers who are expected to instruct children with only the barest of pedagogical resources (e.g., chalk and decrepit blackboards). Koudama described history and geography lessons that drew from limited numbers of outdated and poorly illustrated books.[56] Wokwenmendam observed similar problems confronting teachers trying to conduct lessons in mathematics and science.[57] Five other studies in Togo showed that a key focus of teacher complaints was lack of materials and documents.[58] This was reiterated in a study in Benin that concluded that insufficient teaching material and equipment, and the lack of school libraries, were significant factors in poor teaching and learning and manifestly contributed to low morale among teachers.[59]

While the absence of books and pedagogical material appears to be a critical problem that affects teaching, some researchers have cautioned about placing too much faith in the significance of material resources. Instead, as several studies suggest, even when books and pedagogical materials are available, teachers' reading habits and capacity for initiative are less than desirable. A survey of 100 teachers in Togo revealed that many had little interest in reading and research.[60] Another survey report indicated that teachers appeared to have little interest in self-study or self-directed professional improvement.[61] Likewise Anku observed that teachers do not read on a regular basis and concluded that "cette situation les appauvrit culturellement et influence négativement leur pratique pédagogique" [the situation culturally impoverishes them and negatively influences their pedagogical practice].[62] A particularly interesting study of

general secondary school reading habits, which involved a series of interviews with librarians, went so far as to suggest the existence of a "reading crisis."[63] This was explained not only as a consequence of poor economic conditions and lack of reading materials, but also as a function of sociocultural factors and poor library systems.

8. Caveats and Areas of Further Research

The ERNWACA documents have highlighted the wealth of research on teachers and classroom teaching that exists in scholarly archives throughout West and Central Africa. What the research has revealed is a litany of problems that have had a negative impact on the quality of teaching and the general morale and status of teachers. Yet in the mid-1990s, as growing numbers of children and adolescents are denied prolonged access to schooling, and as educators and policy makers become increasingly concerned about the relationship between education and the learning needs of local communities, research on teaching would do well to extend beyond the function of teachers within classroom walls, and should begin to examine the activities of teachers within the communities in which they work. As the Benin national network report observes, "Face aux besoins de développement identifiés aujourd'hui il paraît important de relancer le débat sur le rôle d'animateur du milieu que l'enseignant continue de jouer. Dans ce cadre-là, il serait intéressant de voir, par exemple, la perception que les populations ont de l'enseignant aujourd'hui, surtout quand il s'agit d'une femme." [With the needs of development identified today, it is important to continue the debate of the role that the teacher plays. In this context, it would be interesting to see, for example, what perceptions the people have about teachers, especially from a woman's perspective.][64]

In addition, with an accumulation of knowledge about poor teaching now widely available, researchers would be well advised to devote greater attention to the personal and professional attributes of teachers, as well as to the contextual conditions that are the foundations of good teaching. If scholarly research is to facilitate the improvement of teaching in African schools, researchers must seek out *good teachers*, and explain how good teaching can occur. Professional improvement, after all, often hinges on the models of excellence that are identified and can be emulated.

Research also should examine more closely the teaching processes that occur in nonformal educational spheres. In particular, so-called "Freirean" methods of pedagogy in literacy training, health education, and community mobilization should be considered for application in the more formal settings of school classrooms. In short, more comparative research on teachers and teaching methods, within and across different educational systems, should be conducted in the coming years.

And finally, studies of teachers and teaching should increasingly involve teachers as research participants. Participatory research is now generally recognized in education as being a useful means of bridging the gap between research and action. Certainly in classroom teaching it has the potential to facilitate pedagogical and classroom management practices. In addition, by involving the individuals who live regularly with the issues in question, it can enhance the reliability of research results. The encouragement of participatory action research, particularly as it relates to teaching, should gradually become a function of research networking in West and Central Africa.

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Chapter 5

Education and Socio-Economic Integration:

Issues of Employment, Community Schooling and Social Disparity

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades there has been growing apprehension in ERNWACA member countries about the apparent failure of formal education to enhance the employment prospects of those who leave school and to facilitate productivity and economic growth in West and Central Africa. For African educational researchers, the contradictory specter of national education systems engaged in the development of "human resources" that too often remain unused, and in many cases are maladjusted to the changes affecting African societies, appears to have emerged only recently as a pressing area of study. Likewise, there seems to be relatively belated attention devoted to the connection between economic and social disparities on the one hand and educational inequities on the other. As indicated in the ERNWACA documents, researchers in West and Central Africa have barely begun to address the conundrum of educational systems that, far from rectifying social disparities, have tended to reflect and reinforce societal stratification.

2. Education and Work: Diagnostic Survey Research

Parallel to research in educational finance and administration, the ERNWACA documents reveal that the general issues of education, employment, and sociocultural integration have mainly been the foci of government and donor agency research rather than university-based inquiry. Most of the commissioned research on education and employment has been descriptive and diagnostic, outlining the general context of shifting labor markets and the problems confronting educational policies striving to improve the "external efficiency" of schools. In some studies demographic and employment figures have been liberally compiled, primarily as a means of demonstrating the major challenges confronting government planners and bureaucrats. An example of this is a study summarized in the Benin ERNWACA report that attempted to project trends in so-called "educated unemployment."[1] According to the authors, in 1989 some 2 million able-bodied persons between 15 and 45 years of age were under- or unemployed in Benin. Following contractions in public service and parastatal jobs — by 15 percent in 1990 alone — joblessness of those who left school is expected to rise steadily in the coming decade. With fecundity rates estimated at seven children per married woman, and population rising at roughly 3.1 percent per year, demographic tendencies are viewed as a partial explanation for grim unemployment projections. Yet the authors also argue that the employment crisis is due in part to complacent popular dependence on the school-state nexus as a means of allocating and utilizing human capital. In turn, this has resulted in widespread lack of professional, technical, and

managerial aptitudes among potential workers. The authors conclude that besides being unable to resolve the problem of under used labor, schooling seems actually to have contributed to high levels of unemployment by failing to provide children and youth with skills and aptitudes for work outside the public and parastatal sectors of the national economy.

Relying on available labor and education statistics, the Benin ERNWACA report also estimated that during 1989–90 there were 35,450 *urban* job seekers. Of this group, 6,520 had received some degree of higher education, 6,100 had attended general secondary school, and 1,690 had received secondary technical training. Unfortunately, in contrast to this number of unemployed youth, the study concluded that fewer than 18,000 jobs were being generated annually in the country.[2] (What was not clear from the Benin report was the number of job-seekers who had received at least a few years of primary schooling. Also no indication was given as to whether — or to what extent — education was an advantage in attaining work.)

Results of a similar study, which focused on unemployment and the informal sector job market in Lomé, the capital city of Togo, estimated that urban unemployment in the city stood at approximately 17 percent in 1984, but was likely to rise to 40 percent by 1990. Most of the unemployed were thought to be young and with some formal education.[3] As the aggregate data of these three studies show, the commonly held dream that possession of a school diploma inevitably leads to socioeconomic success is an illusion for a growing majority of school-leavers in West and Central Africa.

While the foregoing studies are extensive in scope and necessarily have relied on approximate demographic figures, the ERNWACA documents have also summarized several microlevel inquiries into education and work. A good example of this is a Togolais study undertaken by Dougna that tracked a cohort of early school-leavers in an effort to identify the types of employment they undertook. Results showed that work obtained could be classified as either domestic household labor or informal sector jobs.[4] In general there was a mismatch between jobs attained by school-leavers and their aspirations while still in school. In an earlier related survey examining the situation of university graduates, Dougna also revealed a high incidence of underemployment and frustration among the graduates. The study concluded that there was a serious qualitative and quantitative maladjustment between formal schooling and the changing job market in Togo.[5]

Tchekambou in Cameroon observed similar rates of joblessness among university graduates, but offered an additional explanation for "educated unemployment."[6] Noting a high expatriate presence in Cameroon's modern business sector, Tchekambou showed that foreign-controlled businesses tended to be staffed by expatriate senior and

middle-level managers. This had an adverse effect on the employment of Africans with comparable or even higher educational qualifications. "Brain drain," a devaluation of diplomas, and common perceptions among many African students about the diminishing benefits of schooling were all, according to the author, consequences of the evident dysfunction between university education and the modern sector labor market. Yet a further explanation of "educated unemployment" is the practice of fixing salary scales to types of diplomas received. According to Atangana-Mebara *et al.*, fixed wage and salary rates have minimized the elasticity of public and modern sector employment, thereby creating a sharp stratification of the work force and an inexorable process of class formation and reproduction in West and Central African countries.[7]

In another Cameroonian study, an investigation of school-leavers in the informal sector of two *quartiers* of Yaoundé revealed a striking dysfunction between work opportunities and the general and technical education offered to young people. Schooling apparently did little to prepare students for the work they ultimately undertook.[8] Other studies have arrived at parallel conclusions: that the orientation of formal education toward producing government bureaucrats and clerical workers has changed very little since the colonial period, that school graduates have been unable to adapt to a changed socioeconomic climate, and that, consequently, unemployment and the incidence of youth delinquency have grown.[9]

The discrepancy between the provision of formal education and agricultural development in rural regions has also been the subject of ERNWACA research. In contrast to the hopes of many educational reformers, evidence has consistently shown that learning and teaching in schools are oriented toward objectives that are often entirely different from those related to the livelihoods of most farming communities. The result has been a steady exodus of young school-leavers from rural areas over the last three decades. In examining rural outmigration among the young, some studies have emphasized the contextual factors surrounding decisions to migrate from rural home communities. Poor infrastructure, deterioration of the natural environment, and declining work prospects have all been cited as reasons for departing.[10] Other researchers have highlighted the discrepancy between the socialization processes of schools and the sociocultural milieu of local communities. Atayi's examination of Togolais textbooks, for instance, demonstrated that few children could perceive reflections of themselves and the lives of their families in the narratives and pictures of requisite schoolbooks. Images presented tended to be those familiar to well-to-do urban children, not the realities of subsistence rural social economies and poor urban peripheries.[11] Studies have also shown how teaching in the classroom, and the general orientation of daily school activity, have little connection with local community occupations and concerns.[12] In ironic contrast to universal educational policy statements, the research has demonstrated that in many situations formal education appears to contribute little to the occupational livelihoods of most graduates.

3. Education and the Informal Economic Sector

While school systems confront the necessity of adjusting to the socioeconomic realities of local communities and to the lifelong needs of individual pupils, few studies noted in the ERNWACA documents have focused on the relationship between education and work in the so-called informal sector of national economies. This is hardly surprising as schooling has always been structured as a form of human resource development for government administration and modern capitalism. Yet as far back as the mid-1970s, with growing recognition that many school-leavers would not be able to obtain public and modern industrial sector jobs, some researchers were attempting to assess the employment capacities of the vast informal economies of West and Central Africa. In 1979, for example, a census of the informal sector in the Malian capital of Bamako was undertaken, in part as a means of identifying areas of work that demonstrated productivity and a high absorptive capacity for labor.[13] The study revealed that in general terms not only did the informal sector of the economy possess substantial potential for youth employment, but that it also was a fertile repository of myriad training activities. On the basis of aggregate quantitative and descriptive data, the study suggested that informal productive and commercial activities — until then largely neglected by ministries of education and labor — were vibrant alternatives to state-sponsored industrialization and import substitution policies. The study concluded that ministries of education and labor should no longer ignore this sector by assuming that it could flourish independent of any attention from policymakers. Instead, governments should establish concerted action programs to foster greater linkages between state-sponsored human resource development and the expansion of informal industry and commerce.

A more recent case study, also in Mali, considered the relationship between the informal sector activity of 203 self-employed traders and artisans and their educational and training backgrounds.[14] Through a comparative examination of hours worked and income earned, Konaté showed that average weekly income among those surveyed tended to be higher than the top salary levels of public sector workers of similar age and educational background. A further finding was that the majority of the individuals surveyed were well into adulthood before becoming engaged in their current work. The ERNWACA summary of the study does not explain why this was so. It does point out, however, that delays in the establishment of self-employed enterprises often stem from difficulties in raising start-up capital. Of particular note was the revelation that while formal general education was considered to have some antecedent influence in enabling informal sector entrepreneurs to begin their businesses, vocational training and informal experiential learning were considered to have contributed more signifi-

cantly to the acquisition of skills needed for commercial management and productivity.

This last conclusion was reiterated in Togo by a Université du Benin research project that examined the evolution of informal sector workshops in Lomé.[15] Noting the relatively low level of formal education among patrons and apprentices alike, the study indicated that work-related learning was based primarily on traditional apprenticeship methods of on-the-job observations and "learning-by-doing." Formal education was seen, however, as contributing to the efficiency and productivity of the workshops observed. The study concluded, therefore, that although the value of traditional apprenticeship was not in question, formal vocational training did enhance informal sector productivity. A reorganization of formal vocational training was proposed so that a more effective integration could be developed between traditional and more modern forms of vocational training.

A graduate student *mémoire*, also emanating from the Université du Benin in Togo, echoed this argument.[16] Following an inquiry into the relative impact of schooling on productivity and management in 10 informal sector activities, Sidibé revealed that on average apprentices had been exposed to more formal education than their patrons. Interestingly, most of the latter indicated that they themselves would probably benefit from formal technical training if such opportunities were available to them. Concurrent with suggestions made in similar studies, Sidibé concluded by pointing out the need for new educational modalities integrating modern technical training with ongoing informal sector activities.

Little educational research into the link between education and women's roles in the informal economy appears to have been conducted. One exception noted in the ERNWACA documents is a study that reports on the underrepresentation of women in artisanal jobs and in small-scale productivity and trading in northern Togo.[17] Houensassou-Houangbe offers numerous reasons for women's limited commercial activity — traditional attitudes toward the social status of women, colonial policies that discounted women as economic producers, and ongoing political and economic marginalization of girls and women. She concludes her study by arguing that greater feminine access to education will enhance the prospects of greater feminine participation in the work force, and thus improve women's earning power.

4. Policy Efforts to Integrate Schools and Communities

The imbalance between schooling and the shifting requirements of labor markets in West and Central Africa, confirmed by numerous ERNWACA studies, has become

readily apparent not just to thousands of formally educated job-seekers, but also to educational administrators. Consequently, for at least the last two decades there have been widespread appeals, in and out of school systems, to shift the orientation of schooling away from the outdated expectation of white collar public sector office jobs toward employment that is more attuned to current and prospective local realities and needs. Schools, it has been said, need to be readjusted.[18] The accent of education must be on technical mastery rather than simply on the absorption and regurgitation of information. Vocational aptitudes should be the emphasis of learning, especially in an era of economic crisis.[19]

This persistent rhetoric about the need for education to respond more effectively to changes in employment patterns has occasioned periodic efforts to connect the activities of schooling with the routine occupations of local societies. Many such innovations have comprised some form of educational "ruralization" aiming to foster the acquisition of manual skills and a propensity among pupils to gravitate toward rural work after completing school. In practice this has usually involved implementation of small-scale agricultural production activities as part of local school curricula.[20] Other curricular initiatives have included the use of national languages as the primary medium of teaching, and instruction centering on health and nutrition, population, and environmental issues.[21]

As the ERNWACA papers have shown, however, most attempts to render schooling more integral to community socioeconomic life have rarely gone beyond experimental stages. One critical problem relates to the question of dissemination. As several studies have noted, actions deemed successful in initial pilot stages tend to falter once efforts are made to extend them throughout educational systems. The reasons for failure to disseminate innovations are varied of course, but most commonly cited are:

→ inadequacies in the overall qualifications and training of teachers not attached to pilot projects,
→ insufficient or rudimentary local equipment in the school system at large, that makes adaptation of innovations difficult,
→ poor management throughout the educational bureaucracy, and
→ lack of recurrent funding.[22]

This last difficulty is closely connected to another issue singled out as a principal weakness in policies aiming to develop symbiosis between schools and local communities — namely, heavy reliance on international donor agencies. Aid agencies have become key players in efforts to improve the quality of schooling in West and Central Africa. As a result, local educators and the populace frequently regard concerted attempts to "ruralize" schools as *donor agency projects*. As such, while usually begun

with great fanfare, reform projects tend to be abandoned once the sponsoring agencies begin the inevitable process of withdrawal. In effect, as Sy has pointed out, efforts to integrate schools and local communities, and to render formal education more relevant to the long-term learning needs of pupils, are now widely perceived as being central to the mandates of many donor agencies.[23] In Sy's view, this critical factor explains the failure of school "ruralization" in many regions. The essential problem has not been lack of funds and equipment, but rather a missing sense of popular "ownership" of new educational methods and ideas. Other obstacles to the extensive "ruralization" of education have been lack of technical competence outside the sponsoring agencies, insufficient attention to local training needs, and limited faith in the sustainability of donor-sponsored innovations.

Teachers, of course, are the key actors charged with enhancing the passage of youngsters toward adult responsibilities and the world of work. Yet teachers often possess little knowledge about the localities where they are assigned to teach, and they tend to be constrained further by lack of training, professional isolation, frequent posting transfers, and uncertain economic futures. All of these factors militate against whatever inclination teachers might have to deviate from their "culture of conservatism" and to invest substantial time and effort into altering the direction and ethos of the schools they serve.[24]

Elsewhere, research has pointed out that the gap between schooling and the societies from which pupils come, and to which they must return, is structural. In part, as noted in a Benin study, this is due to the multiplicity of conflicting objectives foisted on educational systems.[25] For instance, the idea of education as a means for people to find jobs is fundamentally different from the notion of education as a vehicle for economic development and national productivity. Likewise, education oriented toward citizenship and sociocultural integration of school-leavers is fundamentally different from education for professional certification and competitive job selection. After decades of expansion, the aims, curricular content, and organizational and administrative systems of formal education have changed little since the genesis of colonial schooling. National public education systems are still characterized by centralized organizational structures and by inherent conservativism that prohibits the changes needed if schools are to facilitate the integration of their graduates into the social economies of local communities.[26]

Yet another body of work noted in the ERNWACA documents focuses mainly on prevailing political and socioeconomic contexts. This research differs from the work discussed above in that it does not point to flawed education systems, or even prolonged donor dependency, as the essential reasons for failed policies of school-community integration. Instead, these studies suggest that the disjunction between education and social integration is explained mainly by broader structural obstacles.[27] Because the

under use of educated youth is a function of economic crisis, population growth, and government mismanagement, efforts to augment the "relevance" of school curricula through additional agricultural activities and vocational training cannot significantly improve the employment opportunities of school-leavers. In fact, according to Nihan *et al.*, a seemingly unsatisfactory status quo will probably remain precisely because "inappropriate" schooling has become a useful scapegoat for the phenomenon of educated unemployment.[28] Persistent efforts to connect schools more closely with local communities may present a veneer of positive action aimed at resolving economic and employment problems. Yet these problems are derivatives of deep-seated social and economic structures, not of specific forms and styles of schooling. From this perspective, improving the social and economic opportunities of educated youth cannot be achieved through incremental attempts to revise schooling, but rather can only come through fundamental structural changes.

5. Educational Disparities and Children at Risk

Assessment of social context also comes to the fore in studies centering on the regional and gender disparities that continue to mark education systems in West and Central Africa. Several such studies covered in the ERNWACA documents consist of little more than statistical summaries of educational discrepancies disaggregated by age, gender, and region.[29] The pattern presented by the data is uniform and now generally well known:

→ Fewer girls than boys attend schools, and female rates of early abandonment are consistently higher than those of boys,[30]
→ The location of schools is a critical factor in children's attendance, and in many cases political considerations have determined the placement of new schools rather than the ostensibly apolitical norms of school mapping,[31]
→ The socioeconomic status of children is a useful predictor in identifying students' scholastic performances and their chosen academic tracks (e.g., general versus vocational schooling),[32]
→ The effect of socioeconomic origins on school performance is sometimes overshadowed by qualitative differences among schools.[33]

Such findings, while useful, are largely descriptive and generally mirror comprehensive information that is gathered routinely by government departments and major donor agencies.

A more analytical approach is evident in some studies that have focused specifically on female disparities in education. In Ghana, for example, a study drawing on

interviews with more than 200 parents in four different regions showed that girls' opportunities for education were negatively affected by domestic responsibilities, family financial difficulties, peer influence, and early pregnancy (or fear of it). These factors also militated against the scholastic performances of girls who remained in school.[34] Similar research in Mali has revealed that the social and religious status of girls, their domestic and infant care responsibilities, and the prejudices of teachers (usually reflected in methods of instruction that favored boys over girls) all tended to hinder female participation in school activities.[35] In Benin's Mono region, research showed how girls, far more than boys, are subject to social pressures compelling them to conform to traditional norms of behavior. According to the authors, social pressures generally reduce the time girls can set aside for schoolwork which in turn dampens their long-term personal and occupational aspirations.[36] The same study also noted that girls were often as disadvantaged in nonformal education spheres as they were in formal school settings.

A number of studies in Benin have focused on the influence of mass media and illicit drug use on children's education. While television and popular films have the potential to contribute to children's general knowledge and can have a positive influence on their curiosity and propensity to learn, mass media appear to have had disturbing effects on the values and aspirations of urban youth, giving rise on occasion to a false sense of liberty and a search for short-term gratification.[37] Concerns about illicit drug use have also generated seminars on the causes of juvenile delinquency and have led several researchers to shift their attention to the plight of unemployed and undereducated street children who are generally the victims of drug abuse.[38]

6. *Research Recommendations*

While substantial research remains to be done on education, employment, and socioeconomic disparity, the ERNWACA papers indicate that studies in this area have proposed recommendations that can be grouped into two categories: policy proposals for expanding and rationalizing informal economic activity, and policy proposals for reforming education. In terms of economic policy, the studies cited in the ERNWACA documents demonstrate increasing awareness of the significance of informal sector activities. A key policy objective, it would seem, is to strengthen the productivity of this sector. Accordingly, it is argued that governments must

→ institute customs reforms for imports;[39]
→ eradicate stringent lending regulations that prohibit access of credit to small businesses (particularly businesses owned and operated by women);[40]

→ offer incentives to organizations and enterprises for youth job training;[41] and
→ coordinate the development and dissemination of simple and affordable technologies that can enhance economic productivity without drastically displacing human resources.[42]

All such recommendations imply an end to state monopoly in many economic activities that presumably could be undertaken more efficiently by private enterprise. In effect, as several ERNWACA studies have proposed, governments should divest themselves of heavy-handed economic planning and management, and instead develop policy frameworks that facilitate private sector growth that would translate into more jobs for educated and semiliterate youth.[43] At the same time, however, governments should develop programs specifically to enhance the productive and entrepreneurial skills of young people.[44]

Such programs would clearly be educational in nature. However, as the ERNWACA documents have indicated, because present-day school systems appear to have been singularly unable to respond to the employment needs of a large proportion of the youth populace, major educational reforms are required if schools are to relate more closely to evolving socioeconomic needs and realities. School reform, it has been suggested, must begin through a fundamental redefinition of educational objectives and a reevaluation of the inherent values of teaching and learning in modern schooling.[45] This should be accompanied by the creation of new educational planning and delivery systems, methods of technical training that allow for a more symbiotic connection between formal and nonformal education, and the establishment of dynamic mechanisms of coordination between youth education and economic development.[46] ERNWACA researchers have also recommended formal accreditation of apprentice training,[47] more extensive professional development of vocational trainers who work in formal and nonformal educational settings,[48] more systematic vocational guidance for young people,[49] and the creation of low-interest loan funds for school graduates to encourage small business initiatives.[50]

Educational authorities, it has been suggested, should also be more alert to the rising population of disadvantaged children who have limited or no access to school. More opportunities for school dropouts should be developed — e.g., structures that will enable them to undertake out-of-school training and become engaged in legitimately productive and remunerative activities.[51] International assistance can be particularly beneficial if directed toward NFE programs for out-of-school youth.[52]

Some recommendations point to the need for school-based change as well. For example, Houedanou has suggested that educators try to temper the aspirations of pupils and their parents by demonstrating that the endgame of schooling is no longer

public sector employment in state-managed economies.[53] The argument is that this can be done by establishing closer school-community contact, heightening youth understanding of the limitations as well as the possibilities of education in light of changing economic and human resource conditions, and encouraging the learning of skills that would enable school-leavers to cope with and integrate themselves into the shifting socioeconomic landscape.[54] Such change would also require modifications of curricula and examination systems. The underlying thrust of these recommendations is that radical sociocultural and economic changes now confront African youth. Therefore, the function of education systems must be transformed fundamentally so that young people will be able to cope and adjust. Sadly, however, as the ERNWACA documents have noted, governments have done little more than pay lip service to such recommendations. Beyond acknowledging the seriousness of the dysfunctional connection between formal education and the life prospects of many young people, governments have consistently ignored the implications of research findings. Lack of financial resources and political will are the usual reasons offered.[55]

7. Gaps and Limitations in the Research

The ERNWACA documents indicate that inquiry into the connections between formal education and informal sector employment remains sparse. A partial explanation for this may be the difficulty in delving deeply into the great diversity of activities that are conducted in informal economies. As the ERNWACA documents acknowledge, analyzing the contribution of informal industry and commerce to national development, and comprehensively understanding the trends and the overall nature of many informal sector activities, have proven to be highly elusive. Likewise, because the informal economy extends to rural and urban areas alike, and employs individuals of all ages working at different hours for different forms of remuneration, forecasts of the informal sector's capacity to absorb human resources can be only highly tentative at best. Longitudinal assessments of young people's insertion into social and vocational life during the years following their schooling are necessarily costly and methodologically complex. Such conditionalities are generally beyond the limited means available to African researchers. While micro case studies are feasible and indeed have been undertaken by student researchers, more comprehensive analyses of the tenuous linkage between schooling and the informal sector are needed.

Another probable reason for the relative scarcity of research on education and the informal sector is the surprisingly persistent assumption (because it appears to remain widely held) that formal schooling is structurally linked to state employment and modern industrial sector development, and that the integration of young people into

the informal economic sector should be confined largely to amorphous nonformal education programs. Certainly for two decades and more this conceptual dichotomy helped sustain popular notions about the disparities in prestige between modern office jobs (requiring school and university degrees) and informal sector employment (requiring manual skills and market savvy that are usually best learned on the job). Since the early 1980s, however, it has become clear that the dichotomy no longer exists. As research on educational disparities has shown, schooling has failed to become an instrument of social leveling. Moreover, while vast numbers of youth are exposed to either formal or nonformal education, very few now have access to modern sector work — and indications are that such accessibility is increasingly a function of class and gender. Instead, growing numbers of educated and semiliterate young people must try to insert themselves into informal technical and commercial spheres. In light of these evolving circumstances, as the ERNWACA documents demonstrate, researchers examining the economic and social value of formal education now face two key related questions:

→ How can formal schooling complement ongoing nonformal educational programs?
→ How can formal schooling facilitate the necessary insertion of school-leavers into informal sector jobs?

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Chapter 6

Nonformal and Traditional Education:

Burgeoning Fields of Inquiry

1. Nonformal Education

In contrast to extensive research on formal schooling, nonformal education (NFE) does not seem to have been a significant area of research by ERNWACA scholars. There are several likely reasons for this. In terms of overall national impact, NFE is greatly overshadowed by formal education. In contrast to the millions of children who attend primary and secondary schools five to six days a week for approximately two-thirds of every year, a much smaller proportion of the general population is exposed at any one time to nonformal education. Consequently, fewer financial and human resources have been devoted to NFE. Another probable cause for the limited scholarly attention devoted to nonformal education is its fragmented nature. Apart from comprising a host of different areas of learning, NFE in West and Central Africa has been managed by different government departments (as opposed to a single ministry of education) and by a vast array of nongovernment organizations, many of which are foreign operated and depend solely on foreign funds. It has thus not been easy for researchers to delve into such programs to produce generalizable findings. Nor, given the substantial foreign involvement in much NFE, has this been an area of major attraction for African educational researchers.

Despite the smaller amount of research devoted to nonformal education, the ERNWACA papers do list numerous NFE studies, most of which are research essays on dissertations written by student researchers, or program evaluations undertaken by sponsoring ministries or donor agencies. As such they tend to be oriented toward

identifying specific target populations and evaluating the content of training, the logistics of program delivery, and short-term results. Thematically these sector studies can be broadly categorized as follows:

→ evaluations of literacy training and its contribution to autonomously managed community development, [1]
→ assessments of agricultural extension programs, [2]
→ inquiry into the learning needs of out-of-school youth, and ways that NFE can complement formal schooling, [3] and
→ research into the training needs of rural women and the motivational factors that impinge on their receptiveness to NFE.[4]

Methodologically, these sector studies tend to rely on local reports of NFE activities and, occasionally, on interviews with extension workers and auditors.

The ERNWACA research into nonformal education in West and Central Africa generally has reinforced the findings of international studies on NFE in Africa and in other regions of the world. Several researchers, for example, have pointed out the cost-effectiveness of NFE. In Mali, Guindo's study of Protestant and Catholic mission programs in 108 villages revealed that some 5,000 people had benefited from training in one or more of the following areas: functional literacy, health and hygiene, agricultural production, environmental protection, and revenue-generating skills (e.g., machine sewing).[5] The study concluded that literacy training was strongly linked to improvements in these other learning domains. This has been reinforced by Touré, who discovered that intensive functional literacy (240 hours of learning) contributed significantly to better managerial skills among members of agricultural co-ops.[6] The study also showed that with newly acquired literacy skills, village people tended to be less reticent when dealing with outside entrepreneurs (e.g., bank officials, transporters, and other intermediaries).

The functional effectiveness of literacy was also examined in an assessment of women's literacy programs in Mali.[7] When linked with revenue-generating projects, literacy was not only embraced more eagerly by trainees, but it also enhanced women's productive potential. Similar findings were reported by Akpaka and Gaba in Benin, where literacy was seen as a key factor in motivating people toward further learning.[8] This was especially evident when the women perceived a connection between literacy and practical ends such as increased revenue and better systems of cooperative management. In Cameroon, by sampling popular views about NFE, Kpumbu also determined that functional literacy and numeracy were widely regarded as potentially *profitable* forms of learning.[9] This circular link between literacy and immediate community aspirations was demonstrated further by Dembélé, who revealed that literacy training in

the context of Malian communities with active village development committees could have a positive impact on agricultural production.[10] As all these studies show, literacy is not perceived as an end in itself in societies where oral communication remains predominant, but rather is commonly regarded as an instrumental means toward utilitarian ends.

The relationship between NFE and subsequent job performance has received little attention so far. An exception is Kudaya's report on the different educational backgrounds and the differential earning power of commercial managers in Togo. This study revealed that entrepreneurs working in the informal sector enjoyed a somewhat higher economic advantage than many fixed wage-earning managers in the formal industrial and commercial sectors of the economy.[11] In view of the fact that skills acquired via NFE were oriented toward informal sector jobs, and that general education obtained through formal schooling has been linked traditionally to public and modern industrial sector employment — both of which are experiencing severe human resource bottlenecks — Kudaya concluded that expanding NFE would likely enhance the effectiveness of national investment in potential growth sectors of the economy.

Research also suggests that policies should aim toward a closer symbiosis between NFE and formal schooling. Coulibaly's study of radio and functional literacy in Mali, for example, showed that although instruction via public radio had only a modest impact on popular knowledge about health, agricultural, and environmental issues, sufficient evidence indicated that a more systematic coordination between radio broadcasts and NFE programs would likely lead to more effective community learning.[12]

2. The Limitations and Shortcomings of NFE

ERNWACA research does not present a uniformly benign picture of NFE. Instead, the benefits of literacy are limited. Systems of accountability, for instance, have not emerged automatically as a result of more literate cooperative memberships, nor have increased levels of farmer literacy reduced obstreperous attitudes of politicians and bureaucrats toward farmer co-ops. According to Touré, while literacy can enhance individual proficiency in certain tasks, its effectiveness is limited as a means of generating political change and local empowerment.[13]

Women's educational programs are likewise flawed. Béridogo has observed that NFE for women does not always consider the extensive and fatiguing domestic work that all too frequently hinders their participation in training sessions.[14] Elsewhere,

research has shown that training is too dispersed and insufficiently designed to accommodate and respond to women's local needs.[15] Similar problems have been identified in NFE for youth. An assessment of an out-of-school youth literacy training project indicated that the project was conceived too narrowly and did not include needs articulated by youth groups themselves. The report advised that in future, for youth programs to realize any sort of positive outcomes, adolescents must become actively involved in program decision making, implementation, and evaluation.[16]

Evidence has also revealed the almost complete lack of NFE coordination in some countries, and the incoherence of teaching methods applied by different programs operating in the same regions.[17] NFE is often fragmented into discrete subjects such as preventive health care, environmental protection, literacy, and agriculture. Conducted over brief periods of time for different "target" groups, these programs normally only transfer basic skills or technical knowledge. They tend to be myopic, and lack explicit philosophical or ideological foundations evident in popular education movements in Latin America and Southeast Asia.[18] Additional research has demonstrated that nonformal education as practiced is often pedantic and authoritarian, quite the opposite of the concept of NFE as a form of education that is more participatory and interactive than formal schooling. One reason for this gap between the ideal and the actual practice of NFE is that many extension workers themselves have been educated in the peremptory atmosphere of authoritarian school classrooms. Their "top-down" approach to instruction reflects years of exposure to similar methods applied by their own former teachers.[19] Similar critiques of traditional apprenticeships are based on observations of the poor living and working conditions that patrons sometimes foist on their apprentices, thus reducing opportunities for learning.[20]

3. Historical Research and Traditional Education

As uncovered in the ERNWACA documents, a number of student research papers have examined colonial and precolonial education. Most of these studies appear to be narrative accounts of missionary and pre-Independence schooling.[21] Rather more striking are the numerous studies of traditional education also conducted by graduate students. Research on traditional education has examined the sociopolitical and religious rationales underlying rites of passage, including rituals of excision and circumcision,[22] the roles of oral narratives,[23] and the place of music and dance in children's socialization.[24] One notable study, a 1973 *mémoire* by Houenassou, highlights the striking differences between traditional education and modern schooling.[25] According to the author, traditional schooling was a function of harmonious social systems derived from community environments and the livelihoods of all local people.

By way of contrast, modern schooling emerged from a colonial heritage that has fragmented communities, eroded traditional values, and strongly favored the interests of a privileged and mostly urban elite at the expense of the needs of all members of society.

In light of serious present-day concerns about the value and direction of modern formal education, several studies have attempted to highlight indigenous forms of knowledge generation and transmission as potential frameworks for current educational reform efforts. Dembélé, for example, presents a conceptual view of traditional education in Mali that, he argues, can serve as the cultural genesis of a new integrated system of national education.[26] In his view, government education policies have had little effect in responding to educational needs and problems of rural communities, largely because most local communities are only loosely linked to modern state structures. From case study findings that discern local opinions about modern schooling and about what children's education ought to instill, Dembélé proposes to develop community-owned schools where altenative curricula are offered, where pedagogical aims and methods are rooted in secular local practices, and where the criteria for staff selection extend beyond formal credentials. His overall argument is that historical knowledge, local grassroots sentiments, and current local needs should be juxtaposed with formal schooling. Educational reform, in other words, ought to fuse traditional educational forms with selective aspects of modern nonformal and formal educational structures and curricular content.

Similar suggestions are offered by Kingah. After comparing traditional and modern educational systems in the historical context of Cameroon, the author argues that measures of educational reform should draw selectively on traditional methods and structures that have been discounted by modern educators for too long.[27] In an examination of functional literacy training among the Dogon people, Douyon asserts that traditional, nonformal, and formal systems of education offer useful examples that can serve as the basis for the emergence of a more integrated and ultimately more effective national system of education.[28] The author cites examples of interactive forms of traditional Dogon pedagogy that contrast with the common tendency of authoritarian forms of instruction in modern schools. In addition, education should rely more heavily on the use of national languages as means of instruction and be more oriented to practical skills training. In Benin, Kpadonou and Awouekou have also attempted to show how traditional storytelling, songs, and dancing can be integrated more effectively into the formal education of children.[29]

One area of "premodern" education — koranic schooling — remains as yet under-researched. This perhaps is not surprising, given the close connection between Western education and policy-oriented social science research. Several studies in Mali

nonetheless do shed light on the continuing powerful sway of Islamic education. In a series of structured interviews among the Dogon people, B. Togo revealed that many retain a strong attachment to Muslim learning and have correspondingly sharp criticisms of Western schooling.[30] Another research project examined different types of Muslim schooling, as well as different strategies of learning encouraged by Islamic teachers and supported by parents.[31] These and other studies clearly demonstrate that Islamic education is vibrant in some regions of West and Central Africa.[32] Moreover, in view of the persistent and obvious shortcomings of modern Western schooling, coupled with the continuation of Middle Eastern financial aid to many Western Sahel countries, Koranic schooling is likely to expand. With these developments in mind, researchers in Mali have suggested that closer connections should be established between Islamic education and government-sponsored formal schooling.

4. Conclusion

While the ERNWACA research into NFE does not add substantially to the rich international literature on this subject, several of the studies noted in the ERNWACA documents do reinforce the view that nonformal education has the *capacity* to be more democratic, cost-effective, participatory, and attuned to local needs and realities than heavily bureaucratized school systems. Besides pointing to avenues of research that are likely to become prominent in coming years, ERNWACA research also suggests a number of policy options. Several researchers conclude that more tangible connections need to be established between NFE and national school systems, and that applied research should demonstrate ways of operationalizing such connections.[33] Others have argued that national education policies should foster the attributes of NFE within school systems, particularly through the development of closer links between the education of children and the world of work and revenue generation — prime concerns among impoverished people.[34] Likewise, policies should aim to transform local schools into permanent centers of learning for children, adults, schoolteachers, and extension workers, so that continuity — rather than discontinuity and alienation — becomes a central feature of African education. In extending NFE, aid agencies and governments alike should work to ensure that NFE instruction *facilitates* learning rather than *transmits* information. Training and monitoring of nonformal educators should be strengthened constantly. Likewise, criteria for selecting extension agents should include indicators of personality in addition to demonstrable knowledge.[35]

In the current era of educational crisis and change in West and Central Africa, the search for more effective educational systems and structures is intensifying. At a time when resources available for public education have either peaked or are declining,

and as population levels continue to rise, other forms of education outside the modern school system are becoming more prominent. Growing numbers of children have no access to public school, and many others are abandoning primary school at a young age. It seems that parents are turning to more traditional forms of education, particularly to Koranic schooling. Thus historical and anthropological investigations of traditional methods and systems of education among different ethnic groups may prove to be increasingly useful for purposes of educational policy and practice. Applied research in NFE is likewise becoming more crucial for policymakers, administrators, teachers, and learners. A more profound understanding of the growing appeal of Islamic schooling is also needed. In the next decade or so researchers in West and Central Africa are likely to devote more attention to areas of educational research that were considered peripheral to the central concerns of modern public schooling.

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Chapter 7

Educational Reform

1. Educational Reform and Research: An Overview

Questions about the quality and efficiency of schooling are perennial concerns of policymakers, administrators, and the population as a whole, so educational systems in West and Central Africa for years have been subjected to a range of initiatives directed at organizational, curricular, and pedagogical changes within school systems. During the 1980s these reform efforts were given added impetus by the increasing evidence of a looming educational crisis. Despite high government expenditures on schooling, it was obvious that no country was going to achieve universal enrollment, and that existing enrollment ratios were heavily skewed in favor of boys over girls. Questions of internal efficiency were highlighted by poor scholastic performances and rising numbers of pupils who were repeating grades or who were leaving school before completing the full school program. Uncertainties about the practical value of formal education and the contribution of school curricula to the long-term economic and social needs of youth — a common complaint since the colonial era in all countries — were exacerbated by mounting levels of school-leaver unemployment and the rising tide of rural outmigration among school-leavers disenchanted with their home communities.[1] Above all, as the decade wore on, economic stagnation and subsequent structural adjustment measures made it painfully clear that governments would not have the capacity to manage satisfactorily the education systems they had been so strongly committed to developing in the years after colonialism.

In light of these dramatic changes, efforts to implement educational reforms in

West and Central Africa have been driven primarily by concerns about the internal and external efficiencies of schooling. Four common objectives are at the rhetorical heart of educational reform policies: a) to adapt modern education to the sociocultural milieux of African communities; b) to render education more responsive to national economic and human resource needs; c) to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in schools; and d) to reduce public expenditure on schooling.

While an extensive number of innovative measures have been the subject of research and evaluation during the last 25 years, the ERNWACA papers indicate that African educational researchers generally have attempted to examine five aspects of reform: a) organizational structures and administrative processes of national education systems; b) academic curriculum and related pedagogy, especially in science, mathematics, and metropolitan languages (French and English); c) the "ruralization" of schooling, with particular focus on curricular changes and links between schools and rural communities; d) vocational education and school production activities; and e) national languages as media of instruction.

The scope and foci of these studies generally appear to be related to the sponsorship of the research and the status of the individual researchers or research teams concerned. For example, studies undertaken by UNESCO and World Bank officials are often designed as comprehensive audits of the operational aspects of national systems— e.g., administrative and financial structures, planning and evaluation capacities, material and infrastructure needs, and methods of staff deployment. A central aim of these studies is to assess the technical capacities of educational systems to sustain new programs in general secondary and tertiary education, vocational education, and teacher training. These studies are uniformly descriptive and compelling in their presentation of quantitative data. They are also prescriptive in intent, with conclusions usually formulated as recommendations for change in policy or organizational structure.[2]

Several government ministry reports that examine issues of reform are also noted in the ERNWACA papers. These too are broadly diagnostic, assessing diverse aspects of national systems — cost-efficiency, vocational training, the financial and contextual constraints of planned educational change. Recommendations cited in the ERNWACA papers include use of rigorous school mapping,[3] extension of national languages in schools,[4] integration of schools in local communities[5] and restructuring of junior secondary education.[6] Unfortunately, reports of government-sponsored research and seminar discussions tend to be highly descriptive in nature and say little about research methodology or the bases of interpretations and conclusions. In addition, while such studies may be presented as directives for ministry reforms, there is an underlying suspicion that in many cases government-sponsored diagnostic reports serve

mainly as justification for policies that have already been adopted.

In terms of volume, most of the ERNWACA research examining educational innovation and reform processes is in the form of field-based case studies conducted by individual researchers. Here the trend has been to conduct microlevel investigations, particularly inquiries into the capacities of key local actors — especially teachers — in implementing new programs. Many of these case studies have been conducted by university students and independent researchers, and are presented in the form of theses, *mémoires*, and research essays. Their subjects include:

→ general secondary education,[7]
→ curricular innovations,[8]
→ adoption of innovative pedagogical methods,[9]
→ "ruralization" of schooling,[10]
→ national language instruction in formal education,[11]
→ modes of educational expansion and delivery,[12]
→ efficiency of planning, financial management, and deployment of personnel,[13] and
→ methods of monitoring, supervision, and evaluation.[14]

It is interesting to note as well that the ERNWACA documents present a fuller outline of the research methodologies of several of these studies — notably in the Ghanaian network report — than they do of the methodologies of the more comprehensive government ministry and externally commissioned sector studies. While this may be due to omissions by editors of the various national ERNWACA papers, reference to dissertation methodology suggests some good field-based student research that has remained unpublished and thus concealed from public view.

2. School Reform: Obstacles and Shortcomings

As outlined in the ERNWACA papers, the most striking aspect of the accumulated research into educational reform is the revelation of many obstacles that have continually thwarted efforts to improve formal education systems in West and Central Africa. The following is a synthesis of the research that has exposed the inherent shortcomings of educational reform policies and the structural constraints that impede their implementation.

a. Poor planning

Several studies have highlighted inadequacy of preparation as the root of many failed educational projects and policies. Ironically, in light of the wealth of research documentation uncovered in the ERNWACA papers, poor preparation is often the result of insufficient preliminary research or attention to existing research results. Inaccurate or incomplete assessments of financial, material, and human resources have fettered the implementation of new initiatives.[15] Underestimation of resource needs has been complemented by failure to consider public attitudes and perceptions, not only about proposed reforms, but also about the problems that reforms are meant to redress. As at least two studies have noted, campaigns to sensitize popular opinion and solicit public views about proposed changes have not always accompanied reform planning and policymaking.[16] Too often, it would seem, new modes of education (school production projects, indigenous language literacy classes, and alternative nonformal modes of basic education for youth) have been introduced without considering the aspirations of parents and youth. While policymakers and administrators have worried about the disconnection between formal academic schooling and the socioeconomic environment of communities, local people themselves frequently have resisted perceived deviations from standard formal schooling for fear of lessening their children's prospects of mobility. Indeed, in some situations, local people have regarded educational innovations as surreptitious efforts to channel their children into forums of learning whose prestige and long-term socioeconomic returns are viewed as less than the status and rewards of "classical" formal schooling.[17]

b. Resource scarcity and external dependency

A perennial problem has been the dearth of resources necessary to sustain planned educational change. Lack of financial backing has been a common complaint, along with shortfalls in materials and equipment needed to ensure effective implementation.[18] In addition, underscoring the resource needs for educational reform has been the critical issue of institutional support. Several studies covered in the ERNWACA papers have singled out the central role that international donor agencies have assumed in providing the requisite capital for new programs.[19] A striking relationship seems to exist between externally funded infusions of material and technical inputs and the maintenance and extension of educational reforms in the ERNWACA countries. In contrast, autonomous government initiatives rarely have been extended beyond short-term experimental stages. This is partly because necessary public funds are lacking, but also is a consequence of the continuing pressure on governments to devote substantial attention to responding to, and collaborating with, more amply endowed external donor agencies.[20] In short, as the ERNWACA studies demonstrate, external dependency has become a common inherent characteristic of major educational reform projects.

c. *The critical position of teachers*

Parallel to the extensive international literature on educational reform, the ERNWACA papers reveal the significance of teachers in affecting processes of planned educational change. More often than not it seems that the professional and human dimensions of teaching have proven to be critical obstacles to reform. One major problem stems from the relatively circumscribed skills and aptitudes of teachers. A disturbingly high proportion of teachers in the ERNWACA countries have limited teaching qualifications, a situation that is virtually impossible to rectify through sporadic supervision and infrequent (and usually short-term) in-service training programs. Lack of fully trained personnel, therefore, is commonly cited as a significant handicap in attempting to implement changes in curriculum, alternative methods of teaching, and closer operational linkages with local communities.[21]

Lack of training, however, is not the only issue. Research has also revealed that educational plans all too often refer to the professional teaching force as a somewhat technical and rather homogeneous assembly of human resource "inputs" to be factored into the quantitative equations of reform programs.[22] A common result is that the attitudes, perceptions, and morales of teachers, coupled with their frequently penurious conditions of work, are either not understood fully or are taken for granted. In such situations, assumptions about teachers' commitment to their profession, and expectations about their levels of teaching proficiency and their capacity to accept and implement new ideas, often are not matched in actual practice.[23]

A further problem lies in the dysfunction between efforts to reform key aspects of schooling and prevailing personnel policies of education ministries. For example, as Cissé and Tiero have both observed, teachers rarely receive any incentives for working in disadvantaged rural regions.[24] On the contrary, rural postings tend to be allocated to new and inexperienced teachers (usually single males), who are expected to cope with housing difficulties, shortages of school materials, and often dilapidated school infrastructure. Many teachers view postings in poorly functioning schools as a stigma of inferiority rather than professional confidence in teachers' abilities to meet critical challenges. Likewise, evidence suggests that teachers are often disquieted by the prospects of change; sometimes because they are wary about the efficacy of proposed initiatives, and sometimes because they are reluctant to depart from familiar methods and routines.[25] In all such circumstances, training to foster professional understanding and implementation of new educational initiatives has tended to be insufficient.

What is clear from the ERNWACA papers is that rarely have teachers been directly involved in conceptualizing and planning educational reform proposals. Instead, teachers are regarded as practitioners in need of new ideas emanating from

"above," or as foot soldiers expected to apply new policy measures complacently in accordance with ministry directives.[26] In view of the evidence illustrating the restrictive circumstances confronting teachers, it hardly seems surprising that most appear to be sorely tested when called on to embrace new educational initiatives with enthusiasm and commitment.

d. Pilot project evaluations

Several of the studies outlined in the ERNWACA papers appear to have been designed primarily as evaluations of specific reform efforts. The conclusions of these evaluations suggest mixed results. In some cases reform programs have been deemed reasonably effective. For example, efforts to "ruralize" schools are viewed as appropriate measures for the learning needs of children despite inevitable problems of resource scarcities and administrative difficulties. As Carton and Fino argue in the Beninois context, expansion of rural artisanal schools, school cooperatives, and indigenous language schools is to be championed. Problems, they suggest, are not inherent in the "ruralization" of education itself, but rather stem from lack of resources and administrative capacity to fully realize program ends.[27] By contrast, research in other countries and regions indicates that experiments in alternative teaching methods have been adapted poorly, that changes in curricular content have been ill conceived, and that school farming has failed to further the integration of schools in local communities.[28]

Regardless of variation on the relative success or failure of reform efforts, evaluations tend to focus mainly on the pilot phases of reform programs. None of the research reports covered in the ERNWACA papers provides any indication of fundamental reforms that have been disseminated and institutionalized effectively in national education systems. Instead, educational reform appears as a parade of piecemeal innovations that often create a flurry of activity for short periods of time in a limited number of schools within fairly restricted geographical areas. Unfortunately, as the ERNWACA documents attest, without strong institutional and resource bases, efforts to reform and innovate are usually abandoned or relegated to perpetual pilot status.

e. Uncertainties of long-term outcomes

Yet another shortcoming noted in several of the ERNWACA papers is the apparent failure of some educational reforms — notably, the ostensible "ruralization" of school curriculum and variations of vocational training — to improve the post-school prospects of adolescent learners. While the focus of reform is mainly on the content of education and the process of delivery, less attention has been paid to the comparative outcomes and opportunities generated by alternative modes of formal and nonformal

education. While none of the listed ERNWACA research entailed a longitudinal survey that tracked students for more than a year after finishing school, the evidence that exists offers conflicting assessments of the long-term effects of educational innovations. One investigation of artisanal training indicated fairly rapid post-instruction assimilation into the work force and relatively high levels of productivity and employer satisfaction with program graduates.[29] Another study concluded that initial instruction in children's maternal language enhanced scholastic performance, especially in the middle and later years of primary school.[30] In contrast, however, other studies suggest that alternative education programs for youth have failed to generate substantially better outcomes than standard formal education. Assessments of student learning indicate that aggregate test scores remain fairly similar among students enrolled in different programs[31] and that prospects for work are often no better for youngsters completing vocational or agricultural training than for pupils finishing general academic schooling.[32] In fact, in some cases, the major difference is that alternative schooling is often considered as the terminal stage of formal education, which is distressing for many youth who are often unwilling to give up their aspirations to enter, or re-enter, the more general academic streams.[33] Indeed, indications seem to be that educational reforms have minimal effect on altering the attitudes and aspirations of students.

While little has been done to document the effectiveness of educational reforms in enhancing the life chances of youth, these studies do suggest at least that the planning, implementation, and evaluation of educational innovations and reforms are centered far more on process issues than on outcomes and tangential socioeconomic effects.

3. Research Recommendations

Most of the ERNWACA studies assessing educational innovation and reform conclude by proposing recommendations aimed at improving the conditions that too often impede the implementation of educational initiatives. An especially common theme is that because reform efforts depend substantially on teachers, greater attention must be devoted to supporting teachers whose conditions of work are frequently unsatisfactory. The most widely identified types of needed support in this area are more effective channels of communication between educational administrators and teachers,[34] more opportunities for training and professional development,[35] increased levels of supervision and teacher evaluation,[36] adequate supplies of pedagogical materials in all schools,[37] and better living conditions for many teachers posted to rural communities.[38] As much of the research has indicated, planned educational change

stands little chance of success without due regard for teachers. They must be consulted early in the conceptualization and planning of reform measures,[39] and their working and living conditions should be regarded as an integral facet of every reform policy.[40]

Another common admonition of the ERNWACA studies is that more effective communication needs to occur between the proponents of educational reform and the population at large. Rather than announcing predetermined reform measures to local communities, as frequently seems to be the case, educational authorities should consult with community leaders and parents throughout planning and early implementation stages. The sensitization of local people should be an ongoing process that aims to ensure genuine popular acceptance of new policies rather than halfhearted acquiescence to sequential short-lived pilot projects. Widespread popular conviction that educational change will convey benefits to children and communities is a necessary condition for long-term sucess of reform policies. Yet it is a condition that should not be considered as a fact accompli on the basis of a few preliminary speeches and meetings. Instead it must be regarded as a significant aspect of the reform process — from conception through sustained institutionalization.[41]

Other recommendations focus on the adequate and timely provision of all didactic materials required for effective implementation of new programs,[42] the establishment of clear policy directions which are understood by all stakeholders,[43] and the strengthening of evaluation capacities, which not only can enhance the monitoring of current reform efforts, but also can augment the information base of future educational policymaking.[44]

Of the various educational initiatives that have been the subject of ERNWACA research, two of these initiatives — the "ruralization" of schools and the central use of national languages in school instruction — have received consistently favorable commentary. While the research has revealed the flaws, miscalculations, and oversights associated with these reform efforts, there appears to be unanimity among the authors of the studies that such problems should not be viewed as evidence of irrevocable failure, but rather as lessons and foundations for corrective measures. Viewed in this way, efforts to establish closer linkages between schooling and rural socioeconomic activities should continue to be developed, and national language classes should be expanded progressively throughout primary school systems.[45]

4. Flaws and Caveats in Existing Research

The ERNWACA papers reveal that national researchers have provided useful insights into the checkered history of educational reform efforts in West and Central

Africa. Yet the coverage of national studies currently available, entails a number of caveats. Little is said in the ERNWACA papers about research designs and methodologies, yet these certainly have a bearing on the validity of interpretations and conclusions. Almost certainly the numerous studies of different educational reform efforts vary in the type and quality of the data collected, in the analysis of findings, and in the formulation of interpretations and conclusions. Moreover, considering the lack of explicit comparability in research design and methodology, a degree of uncertainty about quality and validity hangs over most of the studies discussed in the ERNWACA documents. These are not reasons, however, to discount national research. Instead, questions about design and methodology should serve as an incentive for future researchers and for educational planners and administrators to peruse this body of work which is compiled mostly in libraries and archives.

In terms of content, ERNWACA research has focused heavily on the antecedents and conceptual weaknesses of reform policies, and on the contingencies that result in less-than-expected outcomes. Yet there is little analysis, of the *processes* of implementation. Likewise, there appears to be little understanding of the impact that educational innovations and reforms have on the key actors charged with implementing them, and on the school populations and local communities that are the targeted beneficiaries of educational change. The residual effects of *efforts* to generate positive change, and perceptions of relative success or failure at different levels of educational bureaucracies and in local communities, still remain largely undisclosed.

Another point of observation is that research on educational reform has focused mainly on large-scale initiatives promoted by national governments and multilateral donor agencies. Far less attention has been devoted to more microlevel initiatives undertaken autonomously by individual school personnel, parent-teachers associations, and students themselves. In addition, very little attention has been devoted to the role of NGOs in fostering educational reform. This is surely a fundamental gap in the research, because not only have NGOs been prominent in the arena of adult education for two decades, but in recent years they also have begun to assume a more significant role in the education of children and adolescents. While the research highlights the sluggish processes of large-scale government- and ODA-sponsored reforms within formal education systems, it has revealed little about incremental changes in the fragmented and multitudinous sphere of nonformal education. Because much of the responsibility for nonformal education has been with NGOs, past research into educational reform may have been too skewed in its focus.

A common complaint voiced in the ERNWACA papers is that national educational research appears to have had virtually no effect on educational policymaking. In

part this is attributed to the tendency of governments to minimize the significance of research in relation to more pressing economic and political considerations that weigh on policy decisions, especially when the research is undertaken by nationals. In part, however, the non-use of research is also seen as a reflection of the pervasive lack of an evaluation culture within the domain of social policymaking and social service delivery.[46] Research and evaluation generally are deemed as activities that are quite distinctive from implementation, as intrusions that can be unsettling and even threatening in their presumed quest to expose weaknesses in design and errors in judgment. As a result, research in educational reform has often been undertaken either as independently conducted inquiries (usually by students) or as summative project evaluations commissioned by funding agencies. It has not been an acknowledged part of the reform process itself, as a means by which the process can be understood better by those who have conceived of and attempted to implement progressive educational change.

A more deep-seated critique of ERNWACA research in educational reform is that there is proportionately very little theoretical discussion in these studies about the role of education in African societies. Formal education, inherited from the colonial era and oriented toward facilitating access to cultures and economies closely connected to Northern metropoles, has represented a massive historical deviation from traditional forms of education that served community-based sociocultural integration. Because of its identification as an essential means of mobility to remunerative urban-centered employment, formal education has supplanted traditional education in its popular appeal.[47] Yet in so doing, it has become a powerful force of cultural discontinuity and has contributed to the alienation of countless school-leavers unable to attain the expected rewards of a school certificate. Given such circumstances, efforts to reform schooling, and to render it more "relevant" to community needs and interests, perhaps have been little more than ineffectual tinkering at the margins of a system that has emerged as a bulwark of state capitalist economies, and as a force for entrenching the privileged positions of national elites within these economies.

Yet another perspective, also largely discounted, is that as the capacity of governments to manage social change has weakened, policies aiming to reform schooling may signify in many instances attempts to sustain the legitimacy of fragile or autocratic states. While substantial international literature has been devoted to this thesis, virtually none of the research cited in the ERNWACA documents conveys such a theoretical framework. Instead, virtually all studies of educational innovation and reform are based on conventional technocratic assumptions and modes of analysis.

5. *Directions for Future Research*

The ERNWACA papers have shown that national research into educational reform in West and Central Africa has elicited valuable insights and laid the basis for future scientific inquiry. Because efforts to reform educational systems will continue unabated, and because educational change is an inexorable process (whether it is planned or not), two general areas are identified in the ERNWACA papers as requiring further research. First, much remains to be learned about the relationship between educational reforms and the post-educational prospects of the beneficiaries of education. What are the comparative opportunities confronting youth who graduate from different forms of education? Is there a causal link between the differential content of education and different forms and levels of socioeconomic activity? What are the comparative cost-benefit ratios of educational reform measures? Clearly, what is needed is a series of longitudinal studies that track students through processes of educational reform and on into their later lives as they strive to enter the social economies of rural and urban communities. In effect, studies of educational reform need to consider reform as a *process* that facilitates longer-term ends, rather than as an end in itself. Future research should aim to demonstrate a link between the long-term ends of reform and cross-sectional examinations of the operational means of reform.

The second area of suggested research is the burgeoning link between formal and nonformal education. As growing numbers of children have little or no access to formal public schooling, there is now ample evidence indicating that educational alternatives are increasingly being sought in the nonformal educational arena. In view of the critical state of school systems in West and Central Africa, it is likely that innovations in the nonformal sector will influence reform efforts in the formal sector. Applied research should be directed to enhance this linkage, and should facilitate mutually advantageous learning opportunities that have been overlooked in the past.

Studies of educational reform in the ERNWACA countries, if they are to serve a constructive purpose, should be policy-related whenever possible. This is particularly critical in the current era of economic stagnation and government austerity because policy planning is highly susceptible to the exigencies of economic rationality and cost-benefit directives. National researchers, therefore, should seek to identify how educational change can most effectively generate better prospects for young learners who are already disadvantaged and how educational decision can account for the needs of the poor and powerless. Research, in other words, should strive to enhance the *social* aspect of policymaking in all educational spheres, not just the fiscal and technical dimensions of formal public schooling.

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Chapter 8

Educational Research in West and Central Africa:

A Fertile and Underexploited Field

1. Introduction

Overall the ERNWACA documents have provided a useful disclosure of the wealth of educational research in West and Central Africa. This synthesis of the ERNWACA documents has drawn from a bibliography of 1,056 studies produced in seven of the 10 ERNWACA member countries between the late 1960s and 1991. Apart from a very few exceptions, most of these studies are unpublished and have therefore been known only to their authors and perhaps a few thesis supervisors and librarians. What is also evident is that the ERNWACA documents by no means have unearthed all educational research in the region. Three country documents, those of Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, and Nigeria, while providing overviews of educational trends and critical issues for research, did not include bibliographical sources. This indicates a substantial gap in general knowledge about existing research. Nigeria alone, with its rich educational history and massive investment in post-Independence education, is undoubtedly the repository of a great deal of educational research that has yet to be brought to light. In fact, in terms of sheer quantity, the volume of Nigerian educational research conceivably might equal — and even surpass — the research that has been covered in the existing ERNWACA documents. This is a gap that one can only hope will be addressed within the next few years. In addition, given that no systematic educational research data bases have been established in West and Central African countries, certainly many unpublished and generally unknown studies will have been produced during the half-decade since the compilation of the ERNWACA documents. The studies that have been reviewed in this synthesis, therefore, cannot be regarded as

reflecting the full extent of existing educational research in West and Central Africa. A more complete bibliography needs to be undertaken, a task that should be a central and ongoing concern of the entire regional network (see Chapter 9).

While not exhaustive, the essential value of the ERNWACA documents — particularly the seven-country annotated bibliographies — is their revelation of the volume and range of research that exists, the various facets of education that have been examined, and the findings and recommendations that have ensued. If there is one central admonition that arises from these documents, it is that research into many aspects of education in West and Central Africa is *not* an uncharted terrain. Information and analyses abound, and it is important for current researchers to seek out and consult previous work in their prospective fields of inquiry, just as it is imperative for those who place great stock in research to disseminate and publicize studies that heretofore have lain dormant.

In this chapter we will summarize what seem to be the most salient points of the educational studies covered in the ERNWACA documents. What follows is a review of the types of studies cited in the documents, the essential thematic content of the studies, and various subsequent policy recommendations. We will conclude by highlighting several notable caveats in the ERNWACA documents, as well as the directions for future research that are suggested in the documents themselves.

2. Types of Study

In terms of the quantity of educational studies revealed in the ERNWACA papers, the most striking observation is the extensive investigative work that has been conducted by university students and by those earning diplomas in *écoles normales supérieures*. More than half of all studies cited in the documents consists of francophone *mémoires*. A much smaller number of anglophone theses figure in the documents (mainly Ghanaian B.Ed. honors papers), although the volume of theses would be considerably greater if student research in Nigeria had been included. While questions must be raised about methodological rigor and the validity of student findings (see below), the fact remains that over the years many young African researchers, as well as older students with experience as teachers, have examined and written about education in their respective countries. Student fieldwork invariably has involved micro-level case studies centering on classroom teaching, specific aspects of children's learning in school classrooms and the factors that affect learning, and the working conditions and attitudes of teachers. Most of the research on traditional education, educational history, and nonformal education listed in the ERNWACA documents has been conducted by students. Likewise, students have written critical commentaries on

curriculum and educational reform (particularly as these relate to local milieux and to the capacities and concerns of teachers).

Reports of national ministries of education and the sector studies produced or funded by international aid agencies, as well as reports presented as joint government-aid agency endeavors, account for just under 20 percent of the sources cited in the ERNWACA papers. Government ministry reports tend to be descriptive and broadly diagnostic, assessing diverse aspects of national systems — enrollment ratios and attrition rates, the financial and contextual constraints of educational expansion, the relative quality of teaching, and issues of curricular reform. International agency studies and those published jointly with national governments, which appear to be undertaken most often by external consultants, generally take the form of comprehensive audits designed to assess administrative and financial structures, staff deployment, material and infrastructure needs, links between education and employment, and the planning and evaluation capacities of national systems.

Three other types of studies — categorized in this synthesis as published papers, seminar presentations, and unpublished papers — cover a wide variety of issues that relate to the individual expertise or interests of their authors. Most of the published papers seem to have appeared as nonrefereed publications, many with limited circulation. This underscores a common thread that links almost all of the research highlighted in the ERNWACA documents — namely, that dissemination of African educational research, in whatever form it has been presented, has been exceedingly limited and is thus generally unknown or is quickly discounted as lacking credibility.

3. Research Content: Themes and Findings

The following is a summary of the major themes and findings discussed in the previous six chapters.

a. Educational finance and administration

Research on educational finance is slight and has been conducted mainly in the form of diagnostic sector studies commissioned by governments and donor agencies. Consequently, the conventional wisdom of educational finance — certainly at a macro level — is that which has been amply expounded in aid agency publications. More interesting, however, has been tentative case study research into community and household financing of education and local participation in school administration. Although much remains to be examined, there is evidence that communities have not

sustained recurrent school financing, and that instead local expenditure on schools is a family responsibility and can vary widely according to the means and dispositions of discrete households. This suggests, therefore, that the conceptual notion of *community* or *collective* support for schooling — a concept that is used repeatedly as a basis for current policy trends toward educational decentralization — is too simplistic. Descriptive case study accounts of parent-teachers' associations in particular suggest that PTAs normally are expected to respond to and support initiatives generated from within the school system. Yet in many regions a combination of household poverty and marginal household involvement in the management of local schools suggests that long-term decentralization of educational finance and administration is likely to result in widening disparities of educational access and quality.

b. Learning and attrition in formal education systems

The ERNWACA documents indicate fairly extensive inquiry into pupil learning in schools. Within this general topical framework, two often overlapping areas have been the focus of research: descriptions of learning and factors that affect pupil learning. Most of the descriptive assessments of scholastic performance draw from research on specific classroom settings, and while some studies focus on certain curricular subjects such as history, mathematics, and science, almost all examine children's acquisition of basic skills in areas such as reading, writing, communication, and cognitive recall. The bulk of the descriptive work suggests that children's potential for learning often is far from realized in school classrooms. This often leads to considerations of the factors that affect — and usually impede — pupil learning and can lead to grade repetition and early school abandonment. Principal among these are the lack of symbiotic connections between children's roles and activities in household situations and school environments, and the broader cultural divide that exists between the conventional norms of community life and the modernity ethos of formal schooling. Beyond such contextual factors, the most influential in-school determinants of pupil performance are the quality of teaching, the relative availability of books and pedagogical material, and the state of school infrastructure. As outlined in the ERNWACA documents, much of this evidence seems somewhat superficial and anecdotal, and it generally confirms what is widely known about the determinants of differential scholastic performance. What should be noted, however, is that substantial national research on classroom learning has been conducted in ERNWACA member countries. This body of work has underscored a number of critical issues and should stimulate more in-depth research in this area.

c. Teachers and teaching

Contrary to widespread perceptions that little is known about classroom activity

and teaching process in African schools, the ERNWACA documents indicate that a great deal of information has been gleaned from qualitative studies of teachers and teaching. Although almost all the research cited attests to doctrinaire and pedestrian modes of pedagogy, studies have illuminated the arduous circumstances confronting African teachers. Not surprisingly, inadequate training and professional supervision are highlighted consistently as explanations of poor teaching. Yet case study evidence has also disclosed: i) the difficult living and working conditions of teachers; ii) outmoded curricula that do little to stimulate imaginative teaching; iii) assessment structures that continue to be based almost entirely on externally set, nationwide, selection-oriented examinations; iv) a general lack of reading material and restricted intellectual stimulus for teachers; and v) deterioration of public views about teaching in general. Considered in their entirety, ERNWACA studies on teachers and teaching provide ample evidence to explain pedagogical shortcomings and low teacher morale in African school systems. This is the richest area of educational research in the region, one that should not be ignored by those wishing to pursue future studies on teachers and classroom teaching.

d. Education and socioeconomic integration

The connection between education as a means of developing human resources and the evident underuse of these resources has not been an especially prominent area of educational research in ERNWACA member countries. Although no specific explanation for this is offered in the ERNWACA documents, it is reasonable to assume that: i) many researchers with experience as teachers or educational administrators have been more inclined to examine issues that are internal to the school system; ii) research on relations between schooling and employment is not as amenable to short-term qualitative case study inquiry as is classroom-based research; and iii) limited training in research methods, combined with minimal funding, have narrowed the scope of inquiry. In addition, until the relatively recent era of structural adjustment measures, employment probably was not viewed as a priority for educational research.

Most of the cited research on education and work, conducted mainly under donor agency and government ministry auspices, has been broadly diagnostic, focusing on general indicators of shifting labor markets and the so-called external efficiency of schooling. Several case studies, however, have revealed the dysfunction between education proffered and available work, as well as prevailing discontinuities between the orientation of schooling and predominant community issues and occupations. In particular, where state employment is nonexistent, formal education does not contribute directly to occupational livelihoods in agriculture or in what is loosely referred to as the informal sector economy, nor has it enhanced the ability of school graduates to adapt to economic climates that have been affected dramatically by structural adjustment.

Burgeoning evidence does suggest, however, that not only does the amorphous informal economy possess greater potential for youth employment, but by its very nature it affords opportunities for on-site technical, managerial, and entrepreneurial training. In addition, tentative findings indicate that the general academic orientation of schooling has an accelerating effect on subsequent vocational training and experiential on-the-job learning and thence, indirectly, on work productivity. Such results appear to support perennial appeals to render schooling as a bona fide community institution and to integrate it more effectively into community life. Yet as is well known, most such attempts have rarely moved beyond pilot project status. In this respect, ERNWACA research has revealed that a major stumbling block is lack of genuine identification with — and ownership of — modern schooling. This issue is not easily resolved, because as the ERNWACA documents suggest, formal education is still widely viewed as a state institution (presumably based on an equally widespread perception that central governments are disconnected from local communities). Likewise, educational reform measures — e.g., ruralization of curricula and extension of national languages as media of instruction — generally are seen as predominantly government or donor agency projects. Given the historical antecedents of school expansion, and its continuing heavy reliance on public and foreign financing, such views are rational and seemingly difficult to dislodge. They also underscore the uncertainty of enhancing occupational prospects of young people through efforts to improve the "relevance" of school curricula.

This uncertainty is reinforced by studies that have focused on regional and gender disparities. Some of this work is almost entirely descriptive and has drawn mainly on statistics that reveal enrollment and performance differentiations. Elsewhere research has highlighted economic and sociocultural factors underlying the scales of educational advantage, especially those that almost always weigh against gender parity in schools. A more novel area of research, and one that is likely to draw more attention in future, is that which has begun to touch on relations between educational and social disparity on the one hand, and the effects of mass media and growing evidence of urban delinquency on the other.

In sum, while ERNWACA research on what we have defined as the relationship between education and socioeconomic integration is rather thinly spread, it has nonetheless provided valuable insights for researchers and educators.

e. Nonformal and traditional education

Although the research on NFE is relatively sparse, several sector studies focusing on literacy training and rural extension programs are identified in the ERNWACA documents. Given the vast scope and diversity of NFE in West and Central Africa,

research results are so far relatively case-specific. Nevertheless, when considered in light of what is known about NFE elsewhere, studies in ERNWACA member countries indicate that NFE enjoys substantially lower unit costs than formal schooling. In addition, NFE's functional orientation to immediate community needs and concerns, along with its tendency to foster a more participatory learning environment than is generally seen in formal schooling, are sources of popular appeal. Yet evidence also shows that NFE is not beyond reproach. Programs designed to assist women have proven on occasion to be little more than additional burdens, while elsewhere nonformal training is conducted in ways that do little to encourage learner engagement. Because most NFE has been heavily sponsored by externally funded nongovernment agencies, it has also remained fragmented and uncoordinated, and oriented mainly to alleviating perceived basic needs rather than heightening political sensitivity and more extensive democratic practices. Critical investigations of NFE are useful, because as out-of-school education increasingly seems to offer a potentially feasible cost-effective complement to formal schooling, it needs to be subjected to rigorous analysis (as opposed to chimerical claims and outlandish expectations) if its potential is to be realized in different contexts.

Histories of education and studies of traditional education have emanated mainly from universities and *écoles normales supérieures*. While most of these are fairly straightforward descriptive narratives, several of the accounts cited in the ERNWACA documents are thinly veiled arguments for validating indigenous forms of knowledge transmission and for integrating aspects of traditional learning into modern education as a way of enhancing classroom pedagogy and the sociocultural basis of schooling. In a similar vein, the few studies of Islamic education covered in the ERNWACA documents indicate a sphere of learning that has maintained its popular appeal in the Sahel region of West Africa, in part because of the community-based spiritual and cultural foundations that tend to have eluded or been ignored by modern schooling.

f. Educational reform

ERNWACA research on educational innovation and reform has been fairly extensive in scope, ranging from comprehensive evaluations of national systems by multilateral agencies to individually conducted field-based case studies of specific reform efforts — e.g., formalization of national languages for instructional purposes, and curricular changes directed toward "ruralization" of schools. Setback and failure have been common themes underlying most of the critical assessments of reform measures. Overall, the ERNWACA documents highlight numerous reasons for the shortcomings of educational reform. Insufficient preliminary research has often resulted in an underestimation of resource needs for new initiatives and inadequate accomodation of the needs and views of key local stakeholders — notably teachers,

parents, and youth. Teachers in particular are often considered as a relatively homogeneous group of human resource inputs that can be counted on to implement curricular changes and new approaches to teaching. Too little heed has been paid to the daily difficulties confronting many teachers, and to the personnel policies of education ministries that often serve to undermine the pivotal role that teachers inevitably have to play in school reform. Above all, as the ERNWACA documents indicate, it seems that teachers have rarely been involved in the conceptualization and planning of reform proposals. The research thus highlights the pervasive gap that exists between educational planning and the human contingencies inherent in the *implementation* of plans.

The ERNWACA documents have also pointed to a recurrent pattern of educational reform as a series of incremental innovations, often beginning with ample financial backing so as to ensure successful pilot phases, usually in relatively limited geographical areas, followed by gradual loss of dynamic activity once the process of planned change attempts to move into a broad dissemination phase. The primary reasons that are cited for this pattern of waning momentum are: i) weak resource bases that are incapable of sustaining the long-term institutionalization of fundamental change, ii) uncertainties and sometimes wariness on the part of local stakeholders about the effects and outcomes of specific educational reform policies, and iii) persistent dependence on support from donor agenices, which themselves are subject to shifts in program aims that are usually beyond the ability of Africans to influence. As with other areas of research, studies of the various aspects of educational reform that have been outlined in the ERNWACA documents offer cautionary insights that educational policymakers and planners working in West and Central Africa would do well to heed.

4. Recommendations

Rarely can educational researchers resist offering recommendations for enlightened policy, improved administrative procedures, or more effective teaching and learning. As gleaned from the ERNWACA documents, numerous recommendations and proposals have been promulgated fairly consistently by researchers who have worked independently in different regions, and even sometimes on different subjects.

a. Finance and administration

Studies of educational finance have generally concluded by suggesting one or more of the following proposals: i) an augmentation and diversification of funding; ii) a reallocation of funds directed to different levels and types of schooling; iii) more effective management of existing modalities and levels of educational finance; and iv)

more genuine local community involvement in educational decision making and school administration. With regard to the first two proposals, apart from agreement concerning the need for *more* funds for education, there is no consensus on how funds are to be attained or distributed. Some authors advocate greater state expenditure on education. Others argue for the mobilization of civil society to obtain more financial support from community sources and the private sector. Conflicting views are likewise evident in proposals for reallocation of educational funds. While most researchers agree that more government expenditure should be allocated to basic education, there are clear differences of opinion about the reconfiguration of public educational finance. Should reductions be made in state financing of higher education? Should secondary and tertiary education gradually shift toward greater privatization? Should systems of means testing, school loans, and scholarships for economically or otherwise disadvantaged students be introduced? These questions, and the debates they generate, usually are founded on political and ideological interests, with research results used as a means of supporting one side versus the other.

Arguments for more cost-effective systems of educational management, better coordination of educational finances, and greater local participation in school decision making and administration, while seemingly reasonable enough, rarely go beyond such general statements and almost never consider potential contradictions and pitfalls. In part this is because most studies of educational finance and administration are either broadly technical and descriptive, or they are designed as fairly circumscribed case studies. Very few of these studies have been situated in comprehensive theoretical frameworks. Consequently the technocratic orientation of most recommendations, and the tendency to assume that improvements can be had simply by rationalizing state resources and by fostering popular interest and goodwill, are suggestive of the need for more theoretically framed research and for proposals that acknowledge the political implications of major financial and administrative changes within national education systems.

b. Learning and teaching

Discrete studies of pupil learning and the practice of teaching generally have resulted in quite similar recommendations, presumably because of the connection between learning and teaching in school classrooms. Several research reports have concluded that national languages should figure more prominently in school textbooks and should continue to be promulgated as principal media of instruction. Likewise, despite past shortcomings, arguments continue to be made for an authentic community orientation of schools, with the various curricular and organizational changes that this implies. Such changes are promoted as critical measures for reducing the linguistic (and hence learning) difficulties confronting many children and minimizing their

alienation in school classrooms. In addition, given the critical influence of home environment on children's learning and scholastic achievement, researchers have called for establishment of more effective channels of parent-teacher communication and more genuine parental involvement in their children's schooling. This necessitates a devolution of authority, with teachers in particular becoming more accountable to parents and community leaders than they have been in the recent past.

Teachers are central in all proposals for more effective learning. Consequently, researchers who have examined methods of pedagogy and classroom management, and have inquired into the working and living conditions of teachers, almost always argue for the need to improve preservice teacher training, and to vastly strengthen systems of in-service training and professional supervision. Improvements in basic living and working conditions of teachers, and consideration of more effective incentive structures, are likewise broached in general terms as necessary for improving the quality of teaching and the learning opportunities of school children.

c. Educational reform as a response to evolving social needs

The conjunction between education and the occupational needs of youth in the context of changing economies has also attracted two broad sets of policy-related suggestions. The first set, which tends to focus mainly on national economic policies, argues for the expansion and concerted support of private sector economic activity as a way of absorbing educated young people and unleashing their productive potential. Generally this implies government disengagement from economic activity and the formulation of strategies that will facilitate private sector investment and job creation. The second set of proposals centers more directly on educational policy making by advocating substantially greater investment in basic education and skills training and more interactive ties between formal and nonformal educational spheres. Such changes in particular should enable economically disadvantaged youth to have access to good-quality education beyond the conventional — and for some, costly — confines of competitive, textbook-based, examination-oriented school systems. Proposals for more utilitarian educational strategies have been reinforced by researchers investigating NFE and indigenous forms of education. Their results often lead to acceptance of the need to incorporate selective pedagogical and organizational attributes of nonformal and traditional education into formal schooling. As a means of ensuring the development of symbiotic ties between modern schooling and other spheres of education and training, researchers have also argued for more effective coordination and monitoring of nonformal and traditional education.

Although the ERNWACA documents provide only broad outlines of research-based policy proposals to revitalize the role of education as a force for social engineering

and economic development, what has emerged is a growing consensus that if African youth are to cope with and adjust to the dramatic social and economic changes that have swept over African societies, public education systems — and the government policy agendas that sustain these systems — need to be fundamentally transformed.

5. Methodology and Theory

In reviewing the overall state of educational research in West and Central Africa, the ERNWACA documents have provided useful descriptive summaries of the content and results of research. In addition, reference is made frequently to various methods of data collection such as questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Yet the synopses of the studies offer virtually no critical assessments of research methodology. Clearly, however, as research is considered to be a scientific enterprise — i.e., adhering to generally accepted methodological principles that ensure the validity of the information attained and the credibility of ensuing interpretation and argumentation — more specific knowledge is needed about the methodological foundations of current educational research in West and Central Africa, and more discussion on issues of methodology should be encouraged. Remarks here stem mainly from queries and comments that arise from the ERNWACA documents and should be interpreted as a way of stimulating further consideration of methodological issues and research training needs in ERNWACA countries.

In view of the range of studies covered in the ERNWACA papers, from national government documents, seminar communications, and international consultancy reports, to doctoral dissertations, post-graduate *mémoires*, and baccalaureate research essays, questions concerning degrees of methodological rigor must be addressed. For instance, evidence obtained through interviews and questionnaires needs to be validated by explicit information on methods of sampling, on identification of key variables, on questions posed as a means of eliciting information pertinent to selected variables, and on structures of interviews and the situations in which they were conducted. Likewise, methods and contexts of observation must be spelled out clearly, including techniques of data recording (either during or after observational periods). Similarly, the processes of analyzing quantitative and qualitative data should be fully described. Only by undertaking such elaborations of data-gathering and analysis techniques can researchers demonstrate that their scientific research is distinguishable from journalistic reporting. As noted, methodological coverage of this sort is lacking in the ERNWACA documents. It is hoped, therefore, that educational researchers will peruse the ERNWACA studies carefully not only for the results they provide, but also for the methods by which the results have been attained.

Far more transparent are the relatively limited parameters of research. A large proportion of the studies cited in the ERNWACA documents have been undertaken by tertiary education students who necessarily have tended to confine themselves to cross-sectional case studies, many of which lack systematic comparability with previous research. As a result, although the temptation is to formulate policy-oriented generalizations, findings in fact may have little to say beyond case-specific situations. Naturally enough, exhaustive detailed reviews of case studies on classroom teaching can lead to reasonably plausible general statements about the quality of teaching and what should be done to improve it. Nevertheless, a clear signal of the ERNWACA documents is that educational research in West and Central Africa must increasingly comprise in-depth longitudinal investigations, and for more comparative inquiry that builds upon previous research and enhances the generalizability of results — and hence improves prospects for influencing policy.

Another feature of much of the research is the apparent paucity of theoretical discussion. As outlined in the ERNWACA documents, most studies are largely descriptive with no — or very limited — theoretical reference points. In part this may explain why there is a seeming lack of *comparative* research and why case study evidence is unavoidably restrictive. Be that as it may, without connections to broader theoretical frameworks, the insight and understanding to be had from case-specific empirical evidence unfortunately may be limited and may result in conclusions or recommendations that at best reflect the best of technocratic thinking — but at worst arise from spurious evidence and muddled interpretations.

6. Directions for Educational Research

Following from their comprehensive state-of-the-art reviews, the ERNWACA documents suggest several directions for future educational research. In the broad domain of educational administration and finance, two general areas of inquiry are proposed. First, in view of what appears to be an inevitable trend toward the gradual privatization of education and, certainly, the diffusion of recurrent expenditures for public schooling, comparative studies of the dynamics of community participation and differential household support for schooling should be undertaken. The opportunity costs absorbed by families with one or more children in school, and the factors affecting their financial and material involvement in local schooling, should be examined more extensively. Researchers also should conduct comparative investigations into the differing opinions and expectations of schooling in households of varied affluence, and in different regions and different habitats. Second, with basic education encompassing spheres of instruction and learning that extend well beyond the realm of formal primary schooling, and that may increasingly offer equal and even better social and

economic returns than the formal system, research should focus far more on the financial and administrative underpinnings of community-based nonformal education programs.

Studies of pupil learning, while continuing to focus on modes of classroom-level pupil-teacher interactions and levels of pupil performance in different subject areas, nonetheless should move systematically toward identifying the determinants of effective learning among children in different localities. Included here should be comparative assessments of in-school factors that appear to enhance learning — e.g., methods of teaching, numbers of pupils, availability of books and learning materials. Research should also center on local contextual factors affecting pupil learning — e.g., time devoted to homework and to extracurricular chores, levels of parental support, general home environment, etc. Longitudinal studies that correlate indicators of educational quality and types of education received with subsequent social and occupational positions of school graduates should likewise be considered. Such research undoubtedly will heighten insights into the long-term effects of learning in different spheres and levels of education.

In similar fashion, research on teachers and teaching should begin to concentrate on identifying the factors that contribute to exemplary teaching in different circumstances. For example, while studies of teaching quality consistently conclude that longer and more effective teacher training and in-service support programs are needed, researchers should begin to examine the extent to which preservice and in-service training does in fact enhance teaching and, ultimately, pupil learning. Comparative investigations of the living conditions of teachers, their activities and relationships in the communities where they work, their personal and leadership qualities, their attitudes about teaching, and their long-term professional plans should be conducted in order to discover how good teaching can occur in difficult circumstances. Research on teaching should also focus on methods of adult nonformal education, which over the years has been informed by "Freirean" notions of the interchangeability of the learner and the educator, and of dialogue as a form of knowledge acquisition. Such research can evaluate the relative impact of literacy training, health education, and agricultural extension programs, particularly on aspects of community development. Research in this area can also shed light on the conditionalities for adapting more participatory learner-centred methods of pedagogy in formal school classrooms.

Perhaps most importantly, researchers who inquire into the conditions and professional performances of teachers should engage their subjects of research — the teachers themselves — as active participants in some or all aspects of the research process. As ample literature on participatory action research attests, not only can the involvement of teachers as research partners strengthen the quality of data accumulated, but in addition there is far greater likelihood that the research will directly influence

teaching practice. In view of widespread appeals for greater application of research in West and Central Africa, teachers' participation in action research — with appropriate incentives and time frames firmly established — should become an objective for educational research in ERNWACA member countries.

Educational researchers should also begin to pay greater heed to the determinants that facilitate the integration of school-leavers into productive and fulfilling occupations. Until recently, of course, government employment was the generally acknowledged occupational arena for most aspiring graduates. Yet in the wake of structural adjustment policies and trends toward privatization, and with evidence that school-leavers are having to seek jobs in the "informal" market economy, researchers should track the occupational courses of school-leavers in an effort to assess the varying comparative effects of general and vocational education on subsequent job performance. Likewise, in view of the prevailing significance of nonformal education as an alternative for youth who are unable to progress through the formal school system, and as a relatively low-cost, short-term means of acquiring specific occupational skills, researchers should attempt to examine more closely the structures and processes of nonformal education, and the effectiveness of NFE as a social change agent and as a means of improving individual livelihoods. Researchers should also investigate complementary aspects of formal and nonformal education, and how collaborative connections can be generated between the two systems, particularly in local communities. The transformation of traditional schools into more fully used community learning centers, for example, would be just such a topic for research. Equally compelling would be further comparative research on Islamic education and on traditional forms of skills and cultural transmission.

In venturing along new paths of research, educational researchers in West and Central Africa should adhere to three overriding aims. The first is to improve the knowledge base of all aspects of education in the region — outside as well as within formal public schooling. In so doing, their essential purpose should be to augment general understanding about the inevitable changes affecting education, and thus sharpen the analytical comprehension that is needed for making choices and managing educational change. The second aim is to examine the process of planned educational change itself — that is, to scrupulously evaluate innovations and reforms at all levels, from innovative classroom pedagogy to systemic administrative changes. Here, too, study should focus on the progression of managed change, from planning and implementation to short- and long-term (and indirect) consequences. By carefully tracking the reform process, researchers will be better able to appreciate the social, cultural, and political dimensions of planned change that are often overshadowed by more visible financial and technical factors. The third aim of educational research should be an ideological one — namely, to reassert the function of education as a means of reversing situations of disadvantage and inequity. ERNWACA researchers should expose

educational practices that reinforce socioeconomic marginalism. At the same time they should aim to identify policies and practices that not only broaden opportunities for learning, but also augment social and occupational prospects of the beneficiaries of education.

These directions for research, and the underlying aims suggested as guides for research, cannot be expected to emerge simply on the basis of greater understanding and heightened goodwill. In West and Central Africa, national and regional research strategies need to be developed. This is central to the mandate of ERNWACA, and will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

Chapter 9

Capacity Building and Conditions of Regional Networking:

Lessons for ERNWACA

1. Introduction

Since at least the mid-1970s research networking in sub-Saharan Africa has attracted growing attention and support. A review of previous experiences of African research networking is essential, therefore, if the ongoing aim of ERNWACA is to enhance the quality, impact, and general environment of educational research in West and Central Africa. Referring to ERNWACA's early years and to two other African educational research networks that predate ERNWACA's creation, this concluding chapter will highlight the difficulties confronted and the lessons learned by these research networks. It will outline what are generally considered to be the conditions for successful research networking in Africa and offer additional cautionary comments on aspects of electronic networking. The chapter concludes by proposing ways that ERNWACA might enhance the educational research environment in the coming years.

2. First Years and Primary Objectives of Educational Research Networking in Africa

The creation of ERNWACA in 1988 was not a novel initiative. It was preceded by two earlier educational research networks, the erstwhile West African Research Training Program (WARTP), which originated in 1974 with support from The Ford Foundation, and the current Educational Research Network of Eastern and Southern

Africa (ERNESA), which was created in 1984 with support from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Similar to ERNWACA, although characterized by somewhat different objectives and priorities, the essential purpose of these networks was to strengthen regional educational research. WARTP encompassed only Francophone countries, and as its name indicated, one of its primary goals was to upgrade the policy evaluation and research capacities of its member countries. To this end WARTP's main activities encompassed graduate student training, publication of student research and reports of innovative experiments, and a series of workshops that enabled researchers and educational leaders to discuss innovative activities and to "exchange . . . information and experiences between institutions and countries."[1] WARTP lasted for just over a decade, ending with the termination of Ford Foundation support.

Following Ford's lead, in the late 1970s IDRC established its own program of assistance for African educational research. Initially this took the form of support for discrete educational research projects in numerous African countries. After several years, however, it became apparent that financing small independent projects did little to enhance overall research capacity or to strengthen the influence of research on educational policy making and administration. Consequently, having already assisted educational research networking in Latin America (REDUC) and Asia (SEARRAG), IDRC agreed to facilitate the creation of ERNESA in 1984. Four years later ERNWACA was established. Although conditions of support for the two networks differed somewhat, both focused on four common aims:

a) to foster bridge-building among national and international educational research communities (in West Africa this included fostering links between francophone and anglophone researchers),
b) to sponsor research projects with common themes that allowed for transnational collaboration and information sharing,
c) to contribute to the improvement of educational research capacity through periodic research methods workshops and dissemination of research results, and
d) to develop cohesive African research agendas that would be relevant to current educational policy issues and enhance the influence of African researchers on national policy decisions.

By the early 1990s the record of educational research networking in sub-Saharan Africa was mixed. As was to be expected, there were numerous frustrations and setbacks. Yet several decided accomplishments were achieved, including the production of the ERNWACA documents reviewed in this report.

3. *Constraints and Deficiencies*

In reviewing commentaries and evaluations of network experiences, four general categories of problems have hindered African educational research networking.

a. *Limited communication*

A fundamental *raison d'être* of the three educational research networks noted above — WARTP, ERNESA, and ERNWACA — has been communication and exchange among researchers and those with a stake in research. Networking has faltered frequently, however, precisely because of poor communication. In commenting on this issue, Namuddu has faulted donor sponsors for a certain naiveté about institutionalized networking as a means of stimulating professional communication.

Donors who are used to the smooth operation of basically informal networks among communities of scholars in the industrialized world have attempted to entice African scholars to create institutionalized networks, without first understanding that the absence of locally initiated and sustained communication is in itself the most important evidence that the necessary community structures and beliefs needed to support functional networks have yet to emerge from within Africa.[2]

Such naiveté appeared to be evident during the existence of WARTP and in the earliest period of ERNWACA. Writing about WARTP, Diambomba noted that although a number of scheduled meetings funded by The Ford Foundation took place, they "did not . . . lead to spontaneous exchanges between the network members once they returned to their home institutions. . . . Even within the countries involved, the network did not succeed to break the bureaucratic barriers which separate even institutions carrying out similar educational experiments."[3] According to Diambomba, members did not demonstrate a shared attachment. Instead, whether at formally scheduled network workshops or other meetings, participants regarded themselves as representatives of their respective institutions and countries rather than as individuals sharing a common interest. At international get-togethers, "even during meal time the participants tended to cluster along national and institutional lines."[4]

The first years of ERNWACA were characterized by a similar lack of communication among network members. Hampered by ineffectual regional leadership, cross-national interchanges were sporadic at best and concerned mainly administrative and

financial matters. No bulletins or newsletters were produced. Communication was substantially better *within* a few countries, but was focused entirely on amassing educational research state-of-the-art reviews — the ERNWACA documents — which was the central network project of the first phase. A pattern of regular contact was also established between regional network coordinators and IDRC program staff, mainly for administration and monitoring. At times, in fact, the extent of IDRC input exposed initial network dependency on donor logistical support and the need for able and committed regional and national leadership.

b. Network membership

The majority of network members in ERNWACA are senior university professors and ministerial personnel. While the engagement of such individuals as network members is essential if research is to influence government policy, there are risks if *only* senior people are involved. African university professors usually have burdensome teaching and administrative duties and thus have very little time for independent research. When they do, given their relatively low pay scales, senior professors tend to undertake internationally commissioned contract research. As such they are often obliged to relinquish full-fledged ownership of their research and cannot disseminate the results independently. Equally problematic has been the propensity among donor-supported educational researchers to view themselves not as beneficiaries of a potentially improved research climate, but as consultants.5 As for ministry personnel, while many have research backgrounds — usually as graduate students and sometimes as university lecturers — and may even openly espouse the significance of research and the need to enhance research capacity in their own countries, rarely are they implicated directly in the conduct of research. Indeed, although they are potentially important consumers of research results and are sometimes in a position to support research, they usually are preoccupied with administrative and political demands. A critical weakness of research networking, therefore, has been the tendency to rely unduly on established personalities who are too busy to maintain the commitment necessary for network sustainability. Overlooked as prospective network participants have been university and advanced teachers' college students, NGO researchers and evaluators, and lower echelon educational administrators and teachers.

c. The dilemma of strong North-South connections

The three educational research networks cited here originated largely as a result of discussions between African researchers and donor agencies, specifically The Ford Foundation and IDRC. Although donor funding by itself is not detrimental to the

long-term sustainability of networking, a key problem has been the failure to diversify sources of external funding. In the case of WARTP, when The Ford Foundation was no longer in a position to support the network to the extent that it had, the network's demise soon followed. Until quite recently ERNESA and ERNWACA were also wholly dependent on IDRC funding.

It is understandable that in view of the predominance of these donor agencies, their program staff assumed active roles in promoting network activity. While this is an essential aspect of their support function, without which educational research networks would not have been developed, signs exist that the centrality of donor involvement undermines the credibility of networking as a truly national and regional activity, and so hinders local commitment to the enterprise. This points to an awkward dilemma: Despite frequent enthusiastic national rhetoric in support of research networking and the objectives of enhancing regional research capacity, parallel institutional commitment to network activities has not been as easily forthcoming. In part, as Diambomba observed, this may reflect weak or nonexistent human resource development policies of member institutions. Yet undoubtedly, in the current era of structural adjustment, it reflects the severe financial and administrative constraints confronting most African institutions. In such circumstances, externally initiated research networking has always retained the veneer of being yet another form of outside technical assistance, which fragile national institutions accept in principle but are unable or unwilling to complement beyond superficial endorsement. This has led to the Northern partner institutions sometimes being identified more strongly with African educational research networks than African universities themselves. Stanford and Laval universities were key graduate student training centers for WARTP, and Harvard University has had close ties with ERNESA. (Most recently Ohio University has been the site of attempts to initiate a new network whose mandate is to establish further North-South links among Africanist educational researchers.[5]) The prominence of these and other Northern universities in African educational research is not surprising in view of their resource bases, which are far more substantial than those of African universities. In addition, Africa clearly offers Northern universities fertile ground for research, and their Africanist expertise serves as a means of attracting funds and maintaining international prestige. The perpetuation of strong North-South ties, while seemingly necessary, nonetheless has exacerbated the painstakingly slow pace by which the networking foundations are developed nationally and regionally.

d. The current political economy of applied research

An additional problem confronting African educational research networks can be summarized as an environment in which national ownership of applied educational research is close to being nonexistent. This is largely due to government disregard of

research results as a basis for policy making and increased donor agency appropriation of African educational research. Because African states are uniformly confronted with fiscal belt-tightening and political uncertainty, most have a difficult time simply maintaining the educational status quo. In view of the political risks and financial costs attendant on most proposed educational changes, African research not surprisingly has had relatively little effect on educational policy making. The tendency instead has been for educational change to be undertaken either as a function of political expediency or in response to donor agency initiatives. While representing a challenge for educational research networks, the generally disinterested official environment hampers efforts to expand and encourage local commitment and participation.

The pervasiveness of multilateral and bilateral donor agency influence on African education has also created an environment that counteracts indigenous research networking in Africa (despite donor support for networks). After two or more decades of investment in educational systems, not only do most major donor agencies have a stake in African education, but agendas of educational reform also are now strongly influenced by these agencies, and in particular by The World Bank. This has led the agencies to fund research directly related to their own educational support programs. The result has been the emergence of what Samoff defines as a "financial-intellectual complex" [7] in which much influential educational research is generated by aid agencies, and either conducted "in-house" or contracted out to seasoned researchers, many of them Africans. In effect, with ample resources for hiring qualified educational researchers and determining the questions and terms of reference for research, major donor agencies have become de facto "owners" of much of the publicized research on education in Africa. This has placed burgeoning educational research networks at a serious disadvantage and has diminished their attractiveness to national researchers. It has also hindered their capacity to develop alternative research agendas and to voice perspectives that differ from the pronouncements and policies of international donors and government ministries.

4. Conditions for Successful Networking

A review of evaluations and commentaries by those with experience in developing or funding research networks indicates that, while the structures and processes of networks have varied considerably, a number of congruent conditionalities are essential if research networks are to be viable and sustainable.

One obvious conditionality for successful networking is a set of shared interests that can serve as a key incentive for participation. Collegiality and knowledge sharing, besides being essential functions of networking, are essential for continued membership. In this sense, just as social interaction is both a means and an end, the processes and purposes of research networking are closely intertwined. Although external incentives (e.g., attendance at meetings, financial remuneration, advancement of one's career or institution) are not excluded, by themselves they are not sufficient for long-term network viability. Communication and interaction — which form the essence of networking — should motivate and reward participants. For that reason, common research interests must be a significant feature of networking and should be cultivated to ensure ongoing and expanding member participation.

As with any other organization, the structures of networks differ according to their activities. As King has observed, successful networks reflect the character of the tasks they undertake.[8] They can range from "commentary groups," which depend heavily on informal exchange of information and ideas among like-minded individuals, to "documentalist" networks whose essential function is to collate and disseminate policy-oriented knowledge and to rely much less on frequent communication among its membership. A network may serve as a professional association, for example, a sort of ongoing *Who's Who* list that enables individuals to keep in touch with one another, to be aware of colleagues' work, and to formulate collaborative ties whenever feasible. Or its primary purpose may be to enhance general knowledge and awareness among its members about specific research results on a particular subject. A network may act as an information clearinghouse, or its central aim may be to foster research training and to generate collaborative policy-oriented research. It can serve as a professional advisory group with researchers and policymakers to maintain regular contact. While a network may combine several of these functions, to be sustainable it must address a fundamental need and allow for development and retention of a committed constituency.

Once their mandates have been defined, networks should be developed by a number of limited but clearly determined measures. Initial activities normally might include some of the following:

→ establishment of national and/or regional data banks,
→ circulation of periodical bulletins and newsletters, either through regular mailings or, increasingly, electronic transmission,
→ organization of training workshops,
→ development and implementation of collaborative research projects, and
→ formulation of policy advocacy strategies.

Such activities inevitably hinge on planning capacity, available resources, and administrative capabilities.

The most critical and immediate task, however, and one that has been characterized as giving life to networks,[9] is the development and expansion of network membership. This can be done in a number of ways. A constituency can be developed by circulating short biographical forms to be filled out and returned by individuals. Upon receipt, the information should be printed in network bulletins and sent to an ever-widening readership. Other means of extending membership lists include letters of solicitation, commentaries, and short articles for subsequent publication in network bulletins and newsletters. In sum, developing research networks entails incremental steps that adhere to feasible, clearly focused ends — i.e., those that are not too expensive or overly ambitious.

However their structures evolve, two critical issues to consider are the extent of communication among members and the balance between maintaining informal relations on the one hand and formalizing network structures (i.e., establishing offices, financial bookkeeping procedures, etc.) on the other. In the view of some proponents, networks that operate on the basis of regular informal contact among individuals who have common interests tend to be more dynamic than those featuring links among organizations. Individuals obliged to work with each other, for instance, will look readily to small informal networks that can facilitate professional development and intellectual autonomy. Yet if left at this initial informal level, it is unlikely that networks could evolve into effective pressure groups and assume advocacy positions capable of influencing government policy making. For this to occur a more effective approach to networking lies in the formation of collaborative institutional linkages.

Regular information-sharing among research institutions with similar mandates and agendas can extend the scope of communication, attract large-scale funding, and have more potential for exerting effective criticism and influence on government policies. Yet here, too, there are potential drawbacks in the formalization of networks. Institutional attachment to a research network may result in the reduction of an organization's capacity to independently solicit and control all of its research funding. Network membership may also result in an organization incurring additional unforeseen administrative costs that may not be recouped promptly. When the internal communication channels of many institutions in Africa are already weak, and when contact with institutional counterparts is sporadic, it is unlikely that the capacity and organizational will for networking will match the expectations of proponents and sponsoring agencies. Additional obstacles ranging from cumbersome bureaucracies and rigidly hierarchical and authoritarian structures to lack of institutional cohesiveness and

stability can undermine prospects of regular interaction among the personnel of member organizations.

Although membership ideally will be extensive, key institutions participating in educational research networks must be university faculties, teacher-training colleges, and *écoles normales supérieures*. To be sure, given the major constraints confronting all African institutions of higher education — severe financial restrictions, burdensome teaching and administrative loads of faculty members and their generally poor conditions of work, few institutional links with other universities or research institutions — participation of these institutitions in network development may be difficult and limited. In contrast, most NGOs and established planning and evaluation units in government ministries may be far more attractive as network participants in many contexts. Yet the fact remains that universities and teacher-training institutions are not only repositories of knowledge, but they are also the institutional bases of student researchers who, as revealed in the ERNWACA documents, have accounted for a vast proportion of documented educational research in West and Central Africa. Networks focusing on educational research, therefore, can ill afford to ignore the professors and students whose acknowledged task is to teach and learn about critical educational issues in their own and neighboring countries.

While the jury may still be out in terms of the primacy of individual linkages over more formal organizational ties, there is common acknowledgment that networking does involve personal interchange, and that, as such, membership stability is crucial to the long-term viability of networks. At the same time, however, while ideally egalitarian and nonhierarchical in structure, these networks invariably need a group of key actors — a dynamic "inner circle" or core — who are distinguishable from the peripheral or "outer" circle of the network. When small, a network can remain relatively informal and egalitarian, with the distinction between the core and the periphery remaining fairly minimal. As membership in a network grows and as the number of activities conducted under its auspices expands, the distinction between core and periphery becomes more marked. This is because key actors — the coordinators — must assume responsibility for routine network administration and for "marketing" the network by recruiting new members, soliciting funds, and lobbying on behalf of the network and its objectives. This presents a potential problem for growing networks, because if they are to remain credible associations of regular interchange, a significant degree of personalization needs to be retained if those on the periphery are to continue as active contributors. A delicate balance needs to be maintained between the administrative and institutional needs of an expanding network, and the necessity of regular and fairly informal communication among all network members, which is the network's ultimate *raison d'être*.

Given that a common purpose of networking is to generate regular interaction and exchange among members, a "culture of correspondence" must be inherent in research networks. Unfortunately, in sub-Saharan Africa a host of infrastructural, political, economic, and social obstacles have impeded widespread professional correspondence. Consequently, in addition to the assurance of communication infrastructure, a culture of regular communication must be developed among network members. As it is, the logistics and artifacts of the culture — e.g., letters, bulletins, newsletters, and various electronic and telecommunication media — are often already in place, or can be established fairly easily and quickly. More demanding of attention, and far more significant, is the culture itself — i.e., the attitudes, norms, and standards of regular research-sharing and communication. The more "locally driven" the network is, as opposed to being "donor driven," the greater the likelihood of sustainable participant commitment. While research networks in Africa have often had to rely on external support — and will likely continue to do so in the foreseeable future — the dynamic for national and regional networking should reside primarily with its membership. When networks do not have this internally established culture of correspondence, experience has shown that no matter how easily available and sophisticated are the cultural artifacts at hand they soon lapse into obscurity.

5. Computer Networking in Africa: Advantages and Cautionary Notes

As elsewhere in the world, computer networking and electronic mailing systems are expanding in Africa. These developments open up enormous potential for communication across Afrcian national boundaries, which hitherto has proven to be more difficult than intra-country communication and North-South exchanges. As telephone lines are becoming more extensive, even many rural centers now have the same access to electronic communication as large urban centers. This enhances network prospects, because electronic mail is generally more efficient and less expensive than fax machine transmissions. Documents sent via e-mail can be computer-edited by recipients and stored on disk, thus facilitating the establishment of common data banks among network participants.

There is no doubt that electronic networking offers exciting possibilities for research communication and collaboration. Yet researchers and network sponsors should be cautious about becoming too enamored with electronic technology and

should avoid perceiving it as the critical factor that will galvanize effective networking. In many parts of Africa telephone systems function intermittently, and costs to users are greater than they are in Northern countries. Even receipt of electronic messages through use of the phone system can be costly to users in Africa. While these problems are due to poor infrastructure and economic constraints, it must be recognized that in some countries governments are not averse to restrictions on the free flow of information. The advent of networks, with their paraphernalia of faxes and e-mail systems, can accelerate information exchange and democratize knowledge production and dissemination. This may not be to the benefit of powerful interests, particularly if they view research networking as a potentially destabilizing force. In such circumstances, high user costs and poorly functioning telephone systems may be chronically persistent.

This last point underscores the fact that the technology of telecommunications is not socially neutral. Technological advances have a tendency to benefit those living in regions that are relatively well off (e.g., centers that have 24-hour-a-day electricity and reliable phone systems) while further marginalizing those living in disadvantaged regions (where electricity and phones are not reliable). Another problem is that even where electronic communication functions well, there is the risk that these systems may serve to advance the agendas of the "big users" at the expense of the "little users." For example, Southern links with Northern institutions (e.g., universities and donor agencies) can result in the latter group determining the course and content of dialogue, as well as the terms of reference for research. It is essential, therefore, that local, national, and regional users of computer networking develop their own local "list-serves" that are relatively independent of larger international linkages. Put simply, the users of "small technology" should be encouraged to counterbalance the forces of "big technology."

The introduction of new technology can also be costly, not just in terms of capital expenses, but also in terms of the human expertise needed to operate electronic systems. Training programs for future users are likely to absorb fairly high proportions of donor budgets. Yet concurrent to the expense that network technology entails, many donor agencies are now experiencing tighter budgetary restrictions, the result of political and economic machinations in their home countries. This raises serious questions about resource allocation. If more money is to be allocated to electronic technology, what will this mean for existing research budgets? Funds spent on sophisticated tools designed to facilitate research dissemination and information flow ironically may reduce allocations for actual research and training in research.

Yet another consideration is that the technology of communication must not be

regarded as synonymous with research networking *per se*. Research networks are essentially *social* relations that are built on collegiality and personal rapport, and it is these relations that need to be nurtured and supported constantly. While electronic technology can be useful to facilitate these relations, the critical focus of networks (and donor agencies supporting them) should not be ongoing perfection and expansion of technology, but the development and expansion of personal contacts. The former is the handmaiden of the latter.

Another cautionary note relates to information overload, a problem that has mushroomed with the advent of the so-called "information super-highway." Paradoxically, a successful computer network can prove to be a headache for individual researchers if it results in greater demands and multiplying interactions having little focused purpose. As researchers in Africa become attached to electronic networking, a key question will be: Is ever-widening communication and information-sharing useful, or does much of it risk becoming an additional annoyance that has to be factored out of valuable research exchange? While the usefulness of electronic communication is likely to be gauged through trial and error, there are indications that those using it find it most useful as a means of interacting with an intimate coterie of colleagues. In contrast, when one is connected to many institutions and "list-servers," electronic mailing can become an encumbrance. This hearkens to an earlier point: research networks need to have a clearly focused set of objectives — and telecommunications must *serve* those objectives, not subsume them with vast quantities of superfluous text. In sum, an informal code of content should be established for each network whereby members are selective in relaying information pertinent to network objectives and interests.

Endnotes

[1] M. Diambomba, *Why the Francophone West Africa Research Training Program Did Not Evolve into an African Network: A Exploratory Analysis Using Elements of Network Theory*. Unpublished paper, Université Laval: Québec, 1990, p. 9.

[2] K. Namuddu, "Networking, Restriction of Information, and Democratization in Africa," in K. King, ed., *NORRAG News: Special Issue—Networking in Education and Training*, no. 13: December 1992, p. 10.

[3] Diambomba, 1990, p. 20.

[4] *Ibid.,* p. 32.

[5] Diambomba, 1990.

[6] Its formal title is the African Educational Research Network (AERN).

[7] J. Samoff, "The Reconstruction of Africa," *Comparative Education Review,* 32(2): 1993, pp. 181–222.

[8] K. King, "Networking as a Knowledge System," in NORRAG NEWS: December 1992, pp. 2–5.

[9] R. Myers, "Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development," in NORRAG NEWS: December 1992, pp. 15–16.

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