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Changing practices for quality learning

By THERREZINHA FERNANDES KINKIN - HEAD OF IIEP-UNESCO DAKAR

Since the 2000s, the mission to make education accessible to all has triggered a historic wave of school enrolment in Africa. Countries and their partners have mobilized, enabling millions of children to access education. However, one question persists: are these students acquiring the required level by the end of their basic education? The statistics speak for themselves: at the end of primary school, 70 per cent of 10-year-olds can barely read a simple text, and some can’t even write their own names.

Confronting this learning crisis, the Dakar office of UNESCO’s International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) launched a programme in 2018 to support education quality management in sub-Saharan Africa, with the support of the French Development Agency (AFD). To remedy the underlying causes of school failure, this programme instituted a new method of identifying problems and innovative initiatives within the system, in collaboration with educational communities. As part of the programme’s methodology, the ministries of education in the partner countries have sent teams of executives into the field. Their immersion in schools, academic inspections, and ministries generated crucial insights into the strengths and weaknesses of educational systems and the professional practices of stakeholders.

Over a period of six years, 15 countries have benefited from this programme which, following the identification phase of problems and innovative initiatives, has led to proposals for improvements that have been tested in practice with the support of IIEP. Senegal, for example, has noted the lack of pedagogical support for its teachers and has developed ways of improving monitoring.

Similarly, Niger has become aware of the inadequate use of its education data and is now planning communal meetings between mayors, teachers, and parents to find solutions to the difficulties identified through reliable analysis of school data. Teams trained by IIEP then identified an inspiring approach involving forming small working groups supervised by student tutors. What was once a spontaneous response to problems of overcrowded classes and lack of learning time is now a method validated by teacher training institutions.

The success of IIEP’s approach is also evidenced by support for national training institutes for education management bodies to create training modules on quality management for the benefit of national officials, thus ensuring the sustainability of achievements.

With the end of the programme scheduled for June 2024, our institute is now working to integrate the wealth of this experience in supporting the steering of education quality into its offering – in line with its first priority of improving learning through planning and management – in order to assist countries in establishing the essential conditions for the success of all children. ■
The role of school principals in improving learning in French-speaking Africa

The gender of school leaders plays a crucial role in the educational environment, according to an IIEP-UNESCO Dakar study conducted as part of the Women in Learning Leadership (WiLL) programme and based on Education Systems Analysis Program (PASEC) 2019 data from 14 French-speaking African countries. In four of these countries – Benin, Madagascar, Senegal, and Togo – female-led schools show superior results in reading and mathematics. Female school principals have a crucial role to play as role models, especially in the education of girls and the transformation of gender norms. But this improvement in results is not limited to girls: boys also benefit, although the magnitude of the effect varies according to national contexts. School principals’ practices appear to be the key factor in this improved performance. They organize more meetings with parents, offer tutoring, and maintain more rigorous management of teacher attendance records. A lower rate of teacher absenteeism contributes to a collaborative environment conducive to learning. These good results take into account the favourable working environment of female principals, who are often located in urban and more developed areas. The study also reveals disparities related to access to the profession: some countries have only one female principal for every 10 male principals.

A Masters degree in education quality management in Togo

In Togo, a research Masters degree specifically dedicated to education quality management will be launched next academic year. IIEP supported the development of this Masters programme in collaboration with the National Institute of Education Sciences (INSE) at the University of Lomé. Designed entirely around the achievements of the Support for Education Quality Management Programme, this degree is aimed at stakeholders at various levels of the education system, as well as those from civil society and international organizations. The first cohort will commence classes in September at the beginning of the 2024/2025 academic year.

Education Quality Management: A series of results sharing webinars

In late 2023, a series of webinars was organized to present the achievements of the Support for Education Quality Management Programme to technical and financial partners in the education sector. These webinars provided an opportunity to showcase the programme’s innovative approach, such as the support provided to Niger in better utilizing its school data and the support provided to Senegal aimed at evolving the practices of inspectors and school principals responsible for supervising teachers.
WiLL selected by GPE’s KIX research programme

WiLL – has been selected by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) from over 400 research projects to form part of its Knowledge and Innovation Sharing (KIX) programme, ‘Knowledge and Innovation to achieve gender equality and social inclusion in schools’. The project, which aims to promote leadership and management practices associated with inclusive and gender-equitable outcomes, is currently underway in Benin, Ethiopia, Guinea, and Madagascar.
Agrosilvopastoral training for employment and drought mitigation in the Sahel

IIEP Dakar is supporting the second phase of the Regional Sahel Pastoralism Support Project II (PRAPS-2) to improve access to vocational training for young people and women in agrosilvopastoral environments in Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, and Chad. In early February 2024, stakeholders from the six countries convened in Lomé to share the results of a study on the curricula for promising trades in agrosilvopastoral environments and to formulate recommendations to enhance and diversify the skills of the targeted populations.

Support for Education Quality Management: A regional results sharing workshop in Dakar in May

The third regional results sharing workshop of the Support for Education Quality Management Programme is scheduled to take place from 13–16 May 2024 in Dakar. This event will bring together around a hundred participants from 12 different countries, providing a unique opportunity to share the results achieved by the programme over its six years of existence.

Launch of the second phase of GCI

The second phase of GCI begins with the addition of three new African countries: Côte d’Ivoire, Madagascar, and Senegal. Following a successful first phase from 2020-2023, during which eight African countries were integrated into the initiative, Phase 2 will continue its efforts to support ministries and strengthen their capacities to promote gender equality in and through education, while also assisting neighbouring countries in similar endeavours.

Nigeria: Strengthening gender offices for girls’ education

In Nigeria, where 50 per cent of girls do not have access to basic education, GCI organized specific training to strengthen gender offices at the decentralized level. These offices, present in all 36 Nigerian states as well as in the Federal Capital Territory, play a crucial role in making schools safer and in facilitating the continued learning of marginalized students. This direct support from GCI contributes to Nigeria’s efforts to accelerate progress towards gender equality in education.

GCI at CSW 2024 and CIES

GCI participated in the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 2024 in New York to discuss the theme of gender-responsive budgeting in education. This was a timely platform as CSW is the principal United Nations decision-making body dedicated to promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment globally. Additionally, the WiLL programme was presented at the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) conference in Miami in March. GCI’s participation in these major events on gender equality and education positions the initiative as a change agent for better gender mainstreaming in education.

TVET reform in Benin: IIEP Dakar actively supports ADET

Benin established the Technical Education Development Agency (ADET) in March 2021. This agency’s mission is to coordinate all projects related to the national strategy for technical and vocational education and training (TVET). IIEP Dakar is providing expertise to ADET through the implementation of the National Framework for Certifications and Qualifications, the experimentation of a system for recognizing prior learning, and the development of a mechanism for student information and guidance.

Management of TVET: Over 90% success rate for third cohort

The training programme in Management of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (PGEFTP) offered by IIEP Dakar continues to shine. Out of the 63 participants in the third cohort, which concluded in March 2024, 92 per cent successfully obtained their certificates. Additionally, 100 per cent of these learners from nine African countries indicated that the training is relevant to their work. The PGEFTP training aims to strengthen the capacities of public and private sector leaders involved in the management and governance of national TVET systems, with a focus on Africa.
IIEP has published six guidance notes, each presenting a field observation to be taken into account in improving the management of education quality. How were these priority areas selected?

During the diagnostic phase, the programme analysed the quality management practices of stakeholders at all levels of the education system. This highlighted the challenges that stakeholders encounter in their daily work routines and analysed their capacities for managing learning. The result is a detailed, contextualized understanding of the inner workings of education systems. Instead of proposing recommendations, country diagnostics open up areas of work, which serve as levers for systems to strengthen the management of quality and, ultimately, student learning. Through comparative analysis among different countries, a strong convergence around six common areas of work is observed:

1. utilizing assessment data to improve learning outcomes;
2. strengthening pedagogical support mechanisms;
3. identifying and promoting educational innovations;
4. promoting dialogue and collaboration within the education system;
5. supporting policy implementation at the regional education level;
6. fostering collaboration between research and education.

What is the purpose of the six guidance notes, and who are they aimed at?

The aim of these guidance notes is to shed light on these areas of work, relying on evidence and observations from the field. For each area of work, the goal is to highlight the issues, challenges, and opportunities, while offering the reader a nuanced perspective on how these issues manifest from one country to another.

Indeed, while the areas of work are common across countries, the underlying causes often differ from one national context to another. Thus, our aim is to demonstrate that these areas of work are complex and require coordinated and concerted responses across different levels of the education system to address them appropriately. Finally, these documents are intended for a wide audience: policymakers, officials from ministries of education, researchers, and technical and financial partners who wish to enrich their thinking on these issues to guide their future actions.

How can highlighting these six areas of work contribute to a better understanding of the real difficulties behind the learning crisis?

It helps to highlight several challenges that hinder effective management of education quality. The analyses show the issues related to these areas of work and how they differ depending on the level of the education system. For example, the reasons for the underutilization of data to manage education quality are not the same for central-level directors as they are for decentralized or local-level actors. A uniform approach would not be sufficient to address this challenge effectively. By highlighting these differences, the guidance notes shed light on the required conditions, both at the individual and systemic levels, to respond appropriately to the challenges associated with each of these areas of work.

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Émilie Martin
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IIEP-UNESCO Dakar
A series of six guidance notes on Education Quality Management

IIEP has identified six priority issues hindering educational stakeholders from addressing the learning crisis. A collection of guidance notes has been developed for each of these issues to shed light on the root causes of the challenges faced by stakeholders and to present potential solutions. In some cases, IIEP’s diagnostics have been followed by concrete experiments, with some results intended for potential replication throughout the entire education system of the country.

1. **Utilizing learning data**

   Evaluation plays a significant role in national policies for improving education quality. Why aren’t educational systems utilizing this data effectively? Factors such as a lack of strategic vision, distrust in data, and time constraints contribute to this situation. This note discusses the conditions necessary for better data utilization.

2. **Strengthening instructional leadership**

   Educational systems rely on pedagogical support to enhance quality. However, across all countries supported by the programme, stakeholders at all levels of the system agree on the inefficiency of existing mechanisms. This guidance note details the reasons for this, and proposes actions to improve pedagogical support practices.

3. **Identifying and promoting educational innovations**

   Is enough attention given to identifying and supporting local innovations? These innovations, derived from locally determined needs and strengths, are by definition tailored to the educational characteristics of a specific context and can benefit from existing popular support. This note presents an approach to better support innovative practices.

4. **Promoting dialogue and collaboration within the education system**

   What are the reasons for the lack of effective and sustainable dialogue among stakeholders at different levels of education systems? And what are the challenges this poses for effective education quality management? This note sets out the issues at stake and suggests ways of creating frameworks for exchange, enabling stakeholders to share their points of view more effectively, in order to promote the coherence and coordination of their actions.

5. **Supporting planning at educational region level**

   How can decentralized actors be better supported and empowered to facilitate the implementation and monitoring of education policy? Decentralized agents occupy a strategic position that should enable them to facilitate the implementation of education policies by adapting them to the local context, while acting as a relay for field players in the policy-making process. In practice, however, many challenges remain.

6. **Bringing research and education together**

   How can national educational research be put at the service of education system issues? Most countries have research institutes, but their work is mainly academic, with the result that neither research nor the Ministry of Education benefits from each other. This note looks at this important issue for effective, contextualized management of educational quality.
RESPONDING TO THE LEARNING CRISIS

REFLECTING ON SIX YEARS OF SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATION OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES
Quality education: Reflecting on six years of sustainable transformation of professional practices

The ambition for every student to complete primary school with the ability to read, write, and count remains unfulfilled in sub-Saharan Africa. Currently, 85 per cent of children on the continent are unable to read and understand a simple text by the age of 101. Despite the significant increase in enrolment since the early 2000s, there has unfortunately not been a corresponding improvement in academic levels, despite governmental efforts to provide quality basic education.

Faced with the urgent need to improve educational action, IIEP implemented a Support for Education Quality Management programme in sub-Saharan Africa in 2018, with the support of the French Development Agency (AFD). This programme examines the educational realities country by country, identifying the root causes of students’ poor performance at all levels of the education system.

Operating in 12 African countries, this innovative programme has worked to develop concrete solutions aimed at the sustainable transformation of professional practices. The diagnostic phases, formulation of action plans, and experimentation with solutions have all been conducted hand-in-hand with those who are involved in education on a daily basis.

"It’s a true methodology that has been created, one that refuses to offer solutions based on simple recommendations disconnected from the contexts and experiences of local actors. Instead, the solutions have been built from within, with those who understand the real constraints."

Patrick Nkengne
Head of the Support for Education Quality Management Programme at IIEP Dakar

Awareness of challenges... and opportunities

Central to this approach is a crucial initial diagnostic phase, which six countries in the region have benefited from (Burkina Faso, Burundi, Madagascar, Niger, Senegal, and Togo). This hands-on immersion was led by education stakeholders themselves – officials from all levels of the national education system, designated by local authorities, working with the guidance of international education quality experts. They spent several weeks observing in a dozen primary schools in their respective countries, as well as in decentralized services such as academy inspections and within the central administration of their supervising ministry.

Focus on three key educational issues common to many countries

1) Lack of use of assessment data: In all supported countries, quantitative and qualitative data collected through learning assessments are generally not analysed, even though they could be useful for designing education policies tailored to local realities. The underutilization of this data is a concrete problem that can be addressed.

2) Lack of pedagogical support: Teachers suffer from insufficient support from their superiors. Inspectors who oversee them, too few in number and naturally infrequent in their classroom visits, lament this situation that is attributed, among other causes, to excessive workloads.

3) Lack of recognition of local initiatives: Local innovations are often poorly identified and promoted within the system. Despite emerging from grassroots needs, they are relevant responses to the challenges faced by stakeholders.

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This diagnostic analysis represents a colossal effort to raise awareness of the challenges and opportunities specific to each country’s education system. Between each immersion period, exchange sessions were planned to compare, validate, and share observations with dozens of other schools from various inspections. Only once all these steps were completed were the education-related issues formally identified. The programme’s contribution has been to understand why countries struggle to address these issues and to reveal levers from which solutions can be built.

But an in-depth analysis of educational practices only makes sense if it triggers lasting change. Based on the diagnosis conducted and the obstacles encountered, improvement proposals were formulated. With the support of IIEP, three of these avenues were then tested by education system stakeholders in the form of interventions in a restricted environment.

First experiment: Leveraging data for educational quality insights

In Niger, where student performance is concerning, immersion teams realized that no use was being made of the collected school data such as statistics, assessment results, and various reports, despite their potential to provide a precise picture of difficulties, which could then be highly useful for developing pedagogical strategies tailored to the needs. An experiment was thus conducted in two pilot communities where school data was analysed to identify priority challenges during education dialogue days called ‘Shawara Karatu’. During these meetings, various stakeholders were brought together at the local level, from inspectors, school principals, and assessment officers, to municipal officials, local leaders, associations, and village or religious leaders. During the experiment, these stakeholders identified the most challenged schools in their community and jointly defined short-term, actionable steps to improve educational provision. Two to three times a year, a new meeting is organized to evaluate the effectiveness of implemented changes and to propose new ones.

“With ‘Shawara Karatu’ days, we identified all the struggling schools, and within these schools, all the struggling classes, especially in core subjects. Sharing with the community is important so they know what’s happening at each school. Once the results are shared, everyone can take action.”

Souleymane Aliou
Primary Education Inspector of N’dounga, Niger

Improvements are already visible, particularly with the revision and streamlining of the data transmission form, aimed at minimizing errors during dissemination. A thorough reflection is also underway regarding the causes of academic failure within the community, focusing on the declining performance of Grade 5 students, especially girls. These efforts demonstrate the catalytic effect of Shawara Karatu days on stakeholders’ commitment to improving the local education system.

Second experiment: Student group work — small innovation, big potential

In the face of challenges, educational actors often demonstrate resilience and creativity. Some teachers come up with solutions that could be used as leverage to improve the quality of education across the entire territory. This is the case in Niger, where a locally successful practice was discovered during immersion periods in the local education system: supervised micro-teaching workshops. These are small working groups where a willing and capable student leads their peers around topics into which the teacher wishes to delve deeper. It’s a concrete idea that provides students with more learning time, while motivating them through the ‘peer effect’.

An experimentation was thus envisioned to promote this local innovation so that it could potentially be integrated into the entire Nigerien education system. To do this, two teacher training colleges in Niger embraced the practice and adapted it to the Grade 3 reading learning process, transforming it into a method for future teachers that could, if necessary, be used throughout the country under the best possible conditions.
“The supervised micro-teaching workshops are a solution to teachers’ difficulties as they promote independent work and collaboration among students. It’s also useful for a teacher who finds themselves with very diverse profiles within the same class and can thus divide the students into small working groups.”

Idrissa Moussa
Director of Studies at the Teacher Training College of Niamey, Niger

Thanks to the IIEP programme, the Nigerien authorities have become aware of the existence of this promising educational practice that excites students. This initiative has now received official validation, and there is ongoing reflection on its future expansion.

Third experiment: Better teacher support

Pedagogical support has an enormous role to play in strengthening students’ learning outcomes. But the diagnostic periods in the Senegalese school system revealed a lack of this support for teachers. At the root of the problem is the approach of inspectors, which is deemed too directive while paying little attention to the needs of their school colleagues.

“Currently in Senegal, there are two teacher support mechanisms. Either the inspector visits a school, which is rare because they are overloaded with work, or they convene several teachers within a pedagogical animation cell to address specific themes. In both cases, these mechanisms have a limited impact on improving teachers’ skills.”

Émilie Martin
Educational Policy Analyst at IIEP Dakar

To find solutions to this issue, volunteer inspectors and school principals from Thiès in the west of the country were invited to engage in self-analysis exercises of their professional practice. They filmed themselves at work, and the footage was viewed and analysed among peers. This exercise enabled these supervisors to question themselves, to consider their own evolution in practices regarding teachers, to exchange advice, and to test solutions in their workplaces. The self-analysis of practices has already had a significant impact on the participants in the experimentation, who have revised their way of supervising and supporting teachers.

Shaping the school of tomorrow

Currently, the teams at IIEP Dakar and the national institutes for education personnel training in Burundi, Senegal, and Togo are dedicated to developing training modules on quality management for education sector supervisory staff. The aim is to equip them with the skills to independently identify the real challenges on the ground.

Meanwhile, the experiments have each been followed by reflections on possible options for expansion across the entire local education system, including the establishment of monitoring committees and making recommendations to policymakers. Finally, to ensure that this expertise benefits the greatest number of people, the programme’s major successes will be shared with other countries in the region.
Quality of education

Sub-Saharan Africa is the region hardest hit by the global learning crisis.

70% of children cannot read and understand a simple text by the age of 10

25% of young adults are illiterate

40% of teachers do not have the minimum qualifications required
1) With the support of IIEP, Niger has carried out a diagnostic study of its educational quality management practices. What findings emerged? How was the national team involved?

A team from our ministry was formed and went out into the field under IIEP’s coordination to observe and analyse Niger’s education system. They made an effort to get as close as possible to the actors responsible for implementing education policies, from personnel working both in schools and at the central level, to regional inspectors, school management committees, parent-teacher associations, and mother educators associations. On the ground, these experts identified the difficulties preventing Niger from achieving its education quality goals. Among their findings was the rigidity of certain pedagogical practices, caused by top-down directives. For example, when educational counsellors visit a school, they merely check whether the method used for reading or maths instruction meets their expectations. However, these counsellors fail to recognize that teachers often need to be more imaginative to engage students in learning. The national team also realized that our education system generates numerous innovative initiatives that would benefit from being shared. Yet there is no formal framework for sharing these experiences. Although we have pedagogical support units, they currently do not serve this purpose. This lack of communication among stakeholders directly affects teachers’ work and education quality.

2) Following the diagnosis, a first experiment called ‘Shawara Karatu’ was conducted on the use of local data. What results and insights were drawn?

‘Shawara Karatu’ is a term from Hausa, the most spoken language in Niger, meaning ‘school consultation’. ‘Shawara Karatu’ thus refers to bringing together all school stakeholders at the municipal level to discuss issues related to schooling and academic success. Through these discussions, concrete and relevant actions were identified for short-term implementation.
Two Nigerien municipalities were selected for this initial experiment: N’Dounga and Hamdallaye in the Tillabéri region. Initially, both qualitative and quantitative school data such as school enrolment reports, inspection reports, assessment results, and school statistics. Then, local community members – religious leaders, traditional chiefs, mayors, parents, teachers, and so on – were brought together to brainstorm ways to improve their schools, considering the data collected. Through these exchanges, participants highlighted, for example, that some data were inaccurately recorded to showcase one school’s results over another. This issue led to the promotion of students to the sixth grade without even being able to write their own names. These exchanges are very productive and help identify real problems. Furthermore, changes in behaviour have already been noted among participants in ‘Shawara Karatu’. These local community members know they will have to be accountable for what they have done to improve school quality in their municipality.

3) Another experiment conducted by Niger involved organizing tutored micro-teaching workshops with the Teacher Training College. What does this method entail, and what is its significance?

The second experiment took place at the Teacher Training College in Niamey and focused on teaching first grade French. Groups of seven to eight students were formed around a French exercise. Each group was led by a tutoring student who had understood the lessons well. Meanwhile, the teacher worked with a group of students that was struggling more than the rest. The exercises, such as fill-in-the-blank or word-ordering activities, were based on texts previously read in class. The sessions were recorded and the different sequences were then analysed for improvement. In Niger, we have multi-level classes with many students across grades. We found that this method allows the teacher to better manage these large class sizes and that struggling students receive better support. Additionally, this experiment promotes collaborative learning among students and enhances the teacher’s pedagogical practices in planning and executing their work.

4) How can Niger use the results of this programme in its education policy? How can the capacities developed by ministry officials be utilized?

Niger has embarked on major reforms for a qualitative transformation of its education system. The results of this programme, which align with innovative pedagogical practices, will be considered for expansion throughout the country. We have launched an extensive programme of continuous training and revitalization of pedagogical support units to ensure that good initiatives are shared between educational supervisors and teachers. Ministry officials have been heavily involved in this programme throughout its process. The capacities they have developed will be invested in the National Teacher Training Plan to make the system more effective.
Policy Briefs for the Support for Education Quality Management Programme

Assessing Student Learning, Yes, but What Next? IIEP-UNESCO Dakar, 2023

Strengthening Instructional Leadership IIEP-UNESCO Dakar, 2023

Identifying and Promoting Innovations IIEP-UNESCO Dakar, 2024

South Sudan – Education Sector Analysis 2023 IIEP-UNESCO Dakar, 2023

Diagnostic des pratiques de pilotage de la qualité de l’éducation au Togo (French only) IIEP-UNESCO Dakar, 2023

The Role of Women School Principals in Improving Learning in French-Speaking Africa IIEP-UNESCO Dakar, 2023

Prendre en compte le genre dans les stratégies et pratiques du ministère de l’Éducation au Burkina Faso (French only) IIEP-UNESCO Dakar, 2024

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Fighting the learning crisis is the challenge of our time if we do not want to lose this generation of children and youth. This is a global challenge, and a collective effort is needed to raise awareness and support national efforts.

STATE OF GLOBAL LEARNING POVERTY: 2022 UPDATE