EdQual

A Research Programme Consortium on
Implementing Education Quality in Low Income Countries

TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

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Leon Tikly

University of Bristol

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A Research Programme Consortium on
Implementing Education Quality in Low Income Countries

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The Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol, UK
The Department of Education, University of Bath, UK
The Institute for Educational Planning and Administration, University of Cape Coast, Ghana
The Faculty of Education, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
The Kigali Institute of Education, Rwanda
The Education Policy Unit, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

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ABSTRACT

The paper sets out the evolution of the overall approach and framework for researching the quality of education in Africa. The framework is used by the Implementing Education Quality in Low Income Countries (EdQual) Research Programme Consortium (RPC). The paper commences with the background to the RPC including some theoretical starting points and provides a critique of dominant approaches to researching education quality, namely the human capital and rights based approaches. This provides a basis for setting out the approach and framework adopted by EdQual which emphasises the importance of context in cross border comparisons. The framework is outlined in relation to three intersecting environments of policy the home/ community and the school.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the paper is to set out EdQual's emerging framework towards researching the quality of education in low income countries with a focus on theoretical and methodological issues. Developing such a conceptual understanding has been a key objective of EdQual and has been an ongoing iterative process incorporating the views of different participants and grounded in our ongoing research in a range of contexts. The paper traces the evolution of our thinking. However, it is suggested the framework has a wider relevance for policy makers, practitioners and researchers. Central to the approach is that researching the quality of education involves recognising the complex and contested nature of the debate, including engaging with the wider historical, economic, political, cultural and discursive context within which it is situated and being suitably self-reflexive about the research process itself.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE EDQUAL PROGRAMME

EdQual is a five year research programme consortium funded by the UK Department for International Development (DfID). It is one of three Research Programme Consortia in the field of education with the other two focusing on issues of access to education and outcomes from education. The aim of the RPC is to generate new knowledge to assist policy makers and practitioners in low income countries, DFID and the international development community to implement initiatives that will improve the quality of education in ways that will benefit the poorest people in the world and will promote gender equity. The main focus for the programme is on the African continent. The reason for the primarily African focus was partly because of the strength of existing relationships between partners prior to the establishment of the consortium but also because of the recognition that issues of quality were particularly acute in this region and because Africa is increasingly being left behind by the globalisation process (Scholte 2006). The consortium is led by the University of Bristol and includes partners from the Universities of Bath (UK), Witwatersrand (South Africa), Cape Coast (Ghana), Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) and the Kigali Institute of Education (Rwanda). Despite the African focus, the RPC is also intended to have a more global reach and this is reflected in the inclusion of two associate partners, namely, the Aga Khan University (Pakistan) and in the Universidad de La Frontera (Chile).

There are five main research projects in the areas of school effectiveness, language and literacy, ICTs in basic education, implementing science and maths curriculum change and leadership and management for quality improvement with three smaller scale projects[1]. Whilst the school effectiveness project uses multilevel modelling to perform secondary analysis of the SACMEQ[2] II data set, the remaining projects are intervention studies based on action research methodologies. The areas for research were identified through a series of national consultative workshops with policy makers and practitioners. The consortium has also aimed to create a sustainable resource through supporting African partner institutions to become regional centres of excellence in one or more areas of education quality and through strengthening capacity within organisations to successfully implement change. To this end the RPC is funding ten PhD studentships linked to the large scale projects and has undertaken several capacity building workshops. A focus for these workshops has been on encouraging not only North-South but also South-North and South-South learning.

3. PROBLEMATISING QUALITY

The aim of this section is to set out some of the key starting points in our conceptualisation of education quality that influenced the design of the EdQual programme. A key theoretical

[1] The three small scale projects are in the areas of inclusion, school buildings and the use of ICTs in education to support community empowerment.

[2] In 2002, Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality collected pupil, class and school-level data from around 40 000 Year 6 pupils across 14 countries, namely Tanzania (Mainland), Zanzibar, South Africa, Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, Swaziland, Uganda and Zambia.

challenge was to generate understandings of education quality that are consistent with EdQual's purpose and relevant for the African continent and other low income contexts. This entailed coming to terms with the complex and contested nature of the concept of 'quality' within the wider literature. An early literature review conducted for EdQual highlighted the tensions, for example, between five recurring dimensions in the debate, namely effectiveness, efficiency, equality, relevance and sustainability (Barrett, Challwa-Duggan et al. 2006). More focused reviews in Ghana and in Tanzania revealed a multitude of issues and priorities relating to education quality and a lack of coherence in the way that the concept had been understood and put into practice by national governments and aid agencies (Ankomah, Koomson et al. 2005; Galabawa and Alphonse 2005). Based on a synthesis of the literature, Barrett, Challwa-Duggan et al (2006: 14) have sought to represent this complexity more globally through linking priorities in the field of education quality with the various stages of national development.

Table one: priorities in education quality by level of national development

State	Emphasis within the quality debate
Post-conflict; newly founded states	Subsistence, security, trust – school system, curriculum
Low income countries	Access, livelihoods (coping; lasting; flexibility) – primary schools
Middle income countries	Continuation – secondary schools, disadvantaged groups
OECD countries	Competencies, responsibility, lifelong learning,

The difficulties in developing an initial understanding were compounded by the fact that there is no universally accepted definition of education quality. Indeed, the term 'education quality' does not translate directly into some African languages[3]. A further point is that the indicators of education quality that are most commonly used by governments and international agencies including completion and survival rates and scores in standardised tests often lead to a narrow view of quality that does not capture the range of possible outcomes that may be required by learners in the global era or an indication of the underlying processes.

Competing conceptions are also linked at a deeper level to alternative ontological positions and understandings of the relationship between education quality and development in societies marked by inequalities. Far from being a neutral, 'technical' issue, developing policy involves engaging with the historical nature of these inequalities in postcolonial contexts. A discussion and recognition of the issues faced in implementing a good quality education in South Africa and Rwanda in the aftermath of both countries emerging from apartheid and genocide respectively served to bring this point into sharp focus. Competing policy discourses around quality are played at multiple scales from the global to the local and involve negotiating conflicting interests within the state and civil society (Robertson, Novelli et al. 2007).

A key theoretical influence in the development of our early thinking around the concept of education quality was provided by postcolonial theory as it has been applied to the field of comparative and international education (e.g. Hickling-Hudson 1998; Tikly 1999; Tikly 2001; Crossley and Tikly 2004; Hickling-Hudson, Mathews et al. 2004; Coloma 2009). Broadly speaking postcolonial theory is concerned with recognising the ongoing implications of the colonial encounter and of the 'postcolonial condition' for education. From this perspective, the

[3] In Rwanda, for example, teachers participating in a research workshop were asked to describe what they understood by education quality through the medium of Kinya-Rwanda. Rather than suggesting one term that directly translated, they in fact suggested four inter-related concepts which are: Uburezi bufite ireme, meaning '*Strong, firm or wholesome education';* Uburezi buboneye, meaning '*Appropriate or fitting education';* Uburezi bunoze, meaning '*Refined education';* Uburezi buzirinenge, meaning '*High standard or irreproachable education'.* Karangwa, E., A. Kaleeba, et al. (2009). What do we understand by 'quality'? Perspectives of Rwandan Teachers Views from a Workshop held at Kigali Institute of Education. Kigali, Kigali Institute of Education.

continuing gap in the quality of education experienced by postcolonial elites on the one hand and the majority of the population on the other can be seen as having its roots in the highly unequal forms of provision that existed during colonial times. Key issues here include the continuing Eurocentric and irrelevant nature of many curricula and of text books, the authoritarian and teacher centred forms of pedagogy including the wide-spread use of corporal punishment, the highly gendered nature of schooling and the complexity of the language issue (See also Altbach and Kelly 1978). More recently, growing inequalities between Africa and the rest of the World and within African countries under neo-liberal globalisation have been reflected in the widening quality gap and the development of what Ilon has described as a three tier system of education (Ilon 1994)[4]. Here the quality gap is understood not only to reflect wider relationships of power and inequality in society but as being complicit in reproducing them (Tikly 2001). Recognition of this wider context, provides a potential point of entry for understanding the links between Africa and other regions including South Asia and Latin America which have also emerged from colonialism.

However, regions and countries also differ in the way that they are positioned in relation to global flows and networks and this has implications for the kinds of skills and other outcomes from a good quality education that are required to promote 'successful globalisation'[5] (Tikly, Lowe et al. 2003; Green, Little et al. 2007; Robertson, Novelli et al. 2007). Within the countries represented in EdQual, for example, there are significant differences both in terms of income, levels of poverty and inequality as well as in the prospects for growth. These are reflected in the different developmental paths adopted[6].
A postcolonial analysis also draws attention to the implications of multiple forms of disadvantage. There are differences in the way that the quality of education is experienced and the kinds of barriers encountered by different groups of disadvantaged learners and it is through understanding the interaction between these and other forms of disadvantage that a more holistic understanding of the barriers facing different groups in accessing a good quality education begins to emerge.

At the heart of a postcolonial analysis is the recognition that dominant understandings of quality are written largely by Western writers working within a western *episteme* (ground base of knowledge). Particularly influential in this regard has been neo-classical economics and in particular human capital theory although the literature on rights in education has also proved pervasive. Given the hegemonic nature of Western thought and ways of conceptualising the world it is difficult if not impossible to operate outside of this episteme and this tension is writ small in the work of EdQual itself. Nonetheless, it remains important to problematise and to trouble dominant, Western conceptions of quality if alternative conceptions are to be given the 'space' to emerge. At a theoretical level this involves questioning the assumptions and values that often remain implicit in dominant understandings of quality and to pose alternative understandings. It has also meant seeking out methodologies that reflect as far as is possible the realities of African based practitioners, learners, policy makers and researchers. These concerns have encouraged researchers within EdQual to engage with the structural barriers

[4] Ilon paints a future scenario involving a growing gulf in educational opportunities between emerging global elites and the rest of the population. According to Ilon, 'a national system of schooling is likely to give way to local systems for the poor and global systems for the rich' (p. 99). Within this highly differentiated environment, a top tier will benefit from a private education that will make them globally competitive; a middle tier will receive a 'good' but not 'world class' education, whilst the majority, third tier, will have a local, state education that will make them 'marginally competitive for low-skill jobs' (p. 102).
[5] This is of course a value-laden term. In this context it is used to signify integration into the global economy but on terms that are advantageous to Africa; tackling poverty and gender inequality; and, promoting African cultural values and norms onto the world stage Tikly, L. (2003). "The African Renaissance, NEPAD and skills formation: An identification of key policy tensions." International Journal of Educational Development **23**(5): 543-564.
[6] See Tikly, Lowe et al, 2003 for a discussion of the differing development paths and skills needs of Rwanda and Tanzania for instance. Whilst Tanzania continues to prioritise agricultural production and the service sector including the tourist industry, Rwanda has sought to leapfrog the industrialisation stage and to become a communications hub for the region.

inherent in a Northern-led and Northern-funded research programme such as EdQual that often prevent Southern perspectives and voices from emerging. These efforts have proved only partially successful, however, which suggests the deep rooted, historically pervasive and often subtle nature of the issues involved (see Barrett, Crossley et al forthcoming).

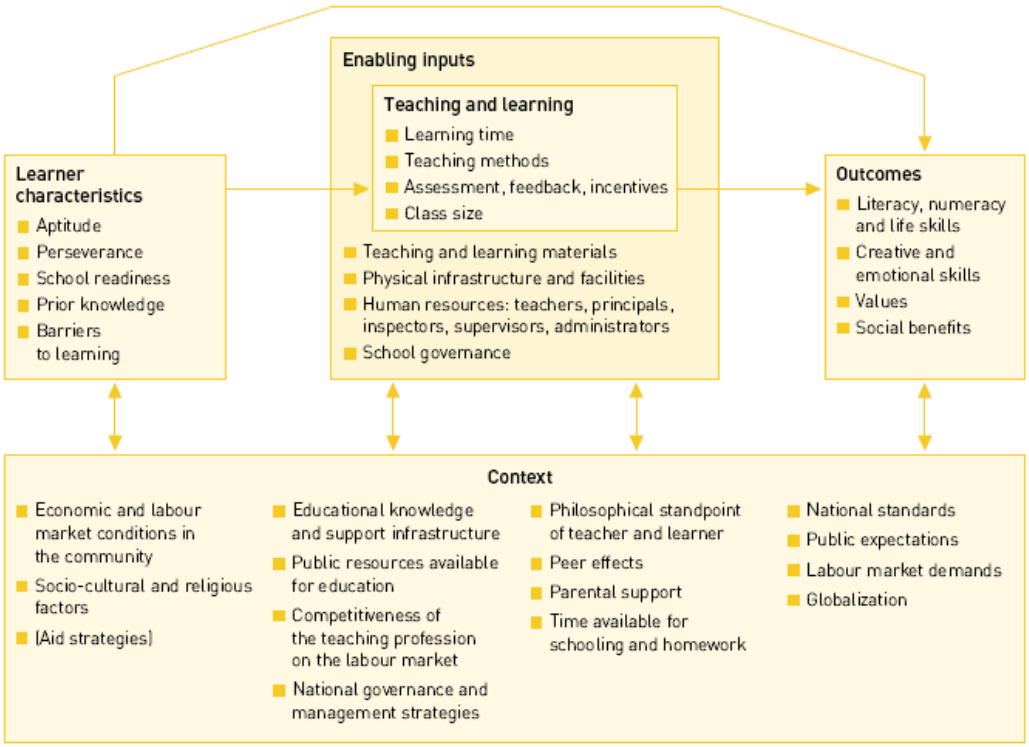
4. THE CRITIQUE OF DOMINANT APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING EDUCATION QUALITY

Having identified some of the initial concerns that informed the EdQual team, attention will now turn to a discussion of how these were subsequently used to inform the development of our overall approach that has in turn informed the development of our framework for understanding education quality. A starting point was a critique of dominant discourses on education quality, namely the human capital and rights based approaches. What is presented here is a summary of ideas we have discussed at length elsewhere (Barrett and Tikly 2009; Tikly and Barrett forthcoming). In outlining the approaches the focus is on the underlying view of human development; the rationale for a research and policy focus on education quality; the underlying view of quality and; the key foci within the quality debate.

Starting with the human capital approach, this has been the dominant discourse in terms of the quality debate, particularly within the global financial institutions (see Robertson, Novelli et al. 2007 for example). It has also been influential in shaping the policy discourses of donor agencies and has influenced the development of the influential UNESCO 2005 quality framework (UNESCO 2004) (see below, although as we argue, UNESCO has generally been more influenced by human rights based discourses). Within the human capital approach the central rationale for investing in education (including, more recently education quality) lies in the contribution that education can make to economic growth. Here GDP is understood as the most significant indicator of development[7]. It is in this context that economists working within a human capital framework have begun to show a keen interest in the quality of education (e.g. Wils, Carrol et al. 2005; Hanushek and Woßmann 2008; Vegas and Petrow 2008). Hanushek and Wößmannn (2008) argue that there is a statistically and economically positive effect of the quality of education on economic growth that is far larger than the association between quantity of education and growth. They suggest that quality, as measured by student achievement on standardised tests, correlates more strongly with economic growth than simply years spent in school. It is also argued from a human capital perspective that countries which have the highest levels of inequality in the education sector (of any kind) also have the slowest national growth rates (Wils, Carrol et al. 2005). Although these findings are based largely on empirical work in high and middle income countries, it is claimed that there are lessons for countries in Africa and elsewhere given the deep seated and pervasive nature of educational inequalities. Human capital theory does not in itself provide a framework for understanding education quality. Influential texts on education quality published by the World Bank, for example, have therefore often adopted school effectiveness approaches (Lockheed and Verspoor 1991; Heneveld and Craig 1996). The preferred school effectiveness frameworks are often based around a linear input-output model. Inputs, in the form of financial and material resources, teachers and pupil characteristics are acted on by educational processes producing outcomes. The best known quality framework to have emerged in recent years has been heavily influenced by input-output models.

[7] The role of education in relation to economic growth, however, has shifted over the years. An initial focus on manpower planning gave way in the 1970s to understanding better investment choices at different levels of education through rates of return analysis. In the context of the shift from the Washington to the Post-Washington consensus (see Robertson et al, 2007), human capital theory has begun to complement a continued interest in rates of return with an interest in education's role in alleviating poverty and promoting social welfare, including women's welfare, as a basis for promoting growth and human security.

Figure 2: GMR2005 Framework for understanding education quality
(UNESCO 2004:36)



In terms of strategies to raise the quality of education, human capital theorists typically propose market-led solutions. These are often premised on a version of rational choice theory in which humans are presumed to act in their own economic best interests. Hanushek and Wößmann (2008), for example, emphasise three key areas that reform initiatives will have to address to raise quality. These are creating greater choice and competition between schools which will encourage schools to improve outcomes; greater school autonomy including local decision making, fiscal decentralization, and parental involvement; and greater accountability through the publication of school performance data, the use of external examinations and benchmarking including participation of countries in international tests.

There are several criticisms that can be levelled at the human capital approach given some of the starting assumptions identified earlier. For example, it is problematic to assume a linear relationship between inputs, processes and outputs of education that is often implied by an input-output model such as the GMR framework above. Rather the inter-relationships between pupil background, resource inputs, educational processes and outputs are complex, multi-directional and vary according to context. Even where models such as that presented in the GMR 2005 framework do appear to take account of the range of factors that might impact on education quality, these are presented as being of secondary importance and there is limited scope in the factors to be fully discussed or their implications analysed. The colonial legacy and the specific way that globalisation has impacted on countries in Africa leads to different implications for education quality not only between Africa and other regions of the world but also within and between African countries themselves. The danger with process models is that they lead to a 'one size fits all' approach to quality that is insensitive to the learning needs of different groups of learners and to diverse learning environments. Further, the over-reliance on standardised assessments of cognitive learning as a measure of quality can also be problematic as Barrett argues in her contribution to this special issue. Readily measurable cognitive outcomes shift from being privileged indicators of quality to *defining* quality. When this happens, qualitative indicators and a concern with the processes of teaching and learning in classrooms can be easily overlooked (see also Alexander 2008).

Further, the empirical evidence linking education quality with growth needs to be treated with caution. As Hanushek and Wößmann (2008) themselves point out, for education quality to lead to increased wages, a strong macroeconomic and labour market environment are necessary. This is significant for many countries in Africa where the macro-economic environment has become increasingly vulnerable in the context of the global financial crisis and where large sections of the historically disadvantaged population are unemployed or involved in the informal sector (Scholte 2006). The danger is that a good quality education is perceived as a panacea for problems that have their root causes elsewhere in the wider economy and society. There is also a contradiction between the concern with educational inequality in human capital theory and some of the market-led 'solutions' that are proposed. As a recent UNESCO report has highlighted, policies based on greater 'choice', competition, decentralisation and local accountability often exacerbate rather than reduce inequality (UNESCO 2008).

In contrast to the human capital approach, the human rights approach is interested in rights to education, rights in education and rights through education (See for example Subrahmanian 2002; Unterhalter 2007). Whereas in human capital approaches economic growth is the object of development, in rights based approaches it is the realisation of fundamental human rights. These include the enactment of negative rights such as protection from abuse, as well as positive rights, for example celebration and nurturing of learner creativity, use of local languages in schools, pupil participation in democratic structures and debate. Whilst classroom processes have typically been treated as something of a 'Black box' within human capital frameworks, teaching approaches that are broadly identified as learner-centred and democratic school structures are promoted. The human rights discourse has become increasingly influential globally. The framework adopted by UNICEF (2007) and the Global Campaign for Education (GCE 2002) based on a learner-centred view of education quality has been particularly influential. It is organised around the five dimensions of what students bring to learning; environments (are they healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive?); content (are curricula and materials relevant?); processes; and outcomes. GCE (2002:4) included a sixth dimension of responsiveness, explained as being responsive to individual learning needs of learners, being responsive to local needs of communities and being accountable to parents, communities and taxpayers for education outcomes.

UNAIDS also places the learner firmly at the centre of its framework for considering HIV&AIDS in relation to quality education (see figure 2) and raises a similar set of questions. At the level of the learner it asks that an education system seek out learners; acknowledge what the learner brings; provide a conducive environment; consider the content and enhance learning processes. At system level, it asks questions of policies, legislation, resources, outcomes, management and administration.

Figure 2: Framework for considering HIV&AIDS and the quality education

(Inter-Agency Task Team (IATT) on Education 2006:9)

Learner-centred frameworks such as that developed by UNICEF and UNAIDS ask searching questions about how well our education systems are meeting the needs of particular groups of disadvantaged learners. However, as we have argued elsewhere (Barrett and Tikly 2009) in privileging learners' needs both frameworks tend to atomise learners, rendering them as independent units isolated from the economic and social forces that influence what they bring to learning and their experiences of schooling[8]. This is in part attributable to the ontologically individualistic nature of both discourses that stand in contrast to the more communal and collective ways of conceptualising identities and ideas about progress and development in many non-Western traditions (Tikly 2004). Rights based approaches have further potential limitations. One of these is that the discourse of rights that underpins, for example, the Millennium Development Goals is pitched at the level of legislation and policy. In this sense rights based discourses (at least those of multilateral agencies and national governments) tend to be predominantly top down in orientation and pay little heed to the importance of grass roots campaigns for a better quality education, campaigns that have a long history on the African continent. They are also often oriented at realising negative rights in education, e.g. that no child should be denied access to a quality education or that girls should not be discriminated against. Whilst ensuring negative rights has a crucial role to play in advancing the quality debate in practice, a consequence is that the area of positive rights and freedoms such as the right to learn in ones mother tongue as well as a language of wider communication or the right to have ones identity reflected in the curriculum of the school is often given less prominence.

[8] A few less mainstream perspectives on education quality do attempt to locate learners within communities as we point out (Barrett and Tikly, 2009).

5. THE SOCIAL JUSTICE APPROACH

Our own approach towards understanding education quality is based on principles of social justice (Tikly and Barrett forthcoming). It draws on recent theoretical developments in the area of international and comparative education and develops and extends insights from human capital and rights based approaches whilst remaining critical of aspects of both. It also addresses some of the theoretical issues identified above. Through emphasising the importance of participation and voice in defining what a good quality education might entail it also chimed with our concerns to forefront the voices and experiences of marginalised groups in Africa. In this sense, although many of the ideas including the idea of social justice itself have their origins in the Western epsisteme, more recent work has sought to problematise this and we argue the approach allows space and scope for alternative voices and for critical perspectives to emerge (see also Tikly and Dachi 2009).

In terms of understanding the underlying purpose of education, our approach draws inspiration from the work of Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum and others working within the area of human capabilities. These have been developed by a group of feminist scholars working in the field of education (see, for example, Robeyns 2006; Walker 2006; Unterhalter 2007; Walker and Unterhalter 2007). From a capabilities perspective both economic growth and the realisation of human rights are important in their own terms but also as a means for achieving fundamental freedoms and wellbeing both at an individual and at a collective level and it is this wider vision of development that underpins the approach. Capabilities are the opportunities that individuals and groups have to realise different 'functionings' that they may have reason to value (Sen 1999; Sen 2009). In keeping with human capital concerns, Sen identifies education as having an instrumental value in terms of supporting livelihoods, generating income and reducing human insecurity. Departing from the human capital approach, however, Sen and Nussbaum also identify education as having a great deal of intrinsic worth as a capability in its own right. Indeed, Nussbaum describes the capabilities approach as a species of the rights based approach (Nussbaum 2000). Thus whilst capabilities in education may indeed include outcomes such as literacy and numeracy and basic scientific knowledge, they are not reducible to these. The capabilities that are associated with a good quality education will necessarily vary depending on context but can potentially include capabilities such as autonomy, critical thinking and emotional intelligence (Walker 2006: 168). Of importance here is that an understanding of the range of capabilities that individual, their communities and society at large has reason to value must emerge from a process of public debate and cannot be predetermined. The role of locally relevant research is to inform public debate about the kinds of capabilities that may be relevant, the factors that impact on these and how they can be measured (see below).

Some researchers, however, qualify these claims with recognition that schooling can and in some cases does contribute to capability deprivation, often through reproducing existing inequalities[9]. Here our own approach also draws inspiration from the work of Nancy Fraser on global social justice. Fraser highlights the institutional and wider structural barriers that can stand in the way of realising human capabilities in the context of globalisation. Here she is referring to economic structures that deny access to resources that individuals and groups may need in order to interact with others as peers; institutionalized hierarchies of cultural value that may deny them the requisite standing; and, exclusion from the community that is entitled to make justice claims on one another and the procedures that structure public processes of contestation. Combining the insights gleaned from Fraser's work with a capability approach and with some of the dominant themes emerging form the earlier analysis of the literature leads to the identification of three inter-related principles that it is argued provide a benchmark against which social justice within an education system can be evaluated[10].

[9] Unterhalter illustrates this with reference to the prevalence of gendered violence against girls by male teachers or pupils in South Africa and consequent exposure to HIV. Unterhalter, E. (2003). "The Capabilities Approach and Gendered Education." Theory and Research in Education **1**(1): 7-22.

[10] A fuller discussion of these principles and of how they can be concretely applied to an analysis of education policy has been given elsewhere Tikly, L. (forthcoming). "A roadblock to

The first of these, that education should be inclusive, is concerned with ensuring that all learners achieve specified learning outcomes. The focus here is not only on access to the necessary resources to learn but on overcoming economic, social and cultural barriers that prevent individuals and groups from converting these resources into desired outcomes or functionings. A social justice approach does not require all learners to have access to the same kind of quality inputs. Past injustices along with differing educational needs mean that learners require different kinds and levels of resource in order to develop their capabilities. It draws attention to the need to monitor the extent to which desired outcomes are realised and to make effective and efficient use of scarce resources in order to maximise outcomes for all learners. The second principle is that a quality education must be relevant, i.e. that learning outcomes must contribute to sustainable livelihoods and wellbeing for all learners, must be valued by their communities and consistent with national development priorities in a changing global context. The third principle is that education should be democratic in the sense that learning outcomes are determined through public debate and ensured through processes of accountability.

6. AN EMERGING FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING EDUCATION QUALITY

The framework that is emerging from the EdQual programme reflects our own view of the complexity of the issues surrounding what constitutes a good quality education. It draws on but repositions elements of dominant approaches. At the heart of the framework is the concept of a 'good quality education'. Our own definition is underpinned by the three core principles outlined earlier. The principles provide a normative basis for evaluating competing policies in the area of education quality. EdQual has developed its own working definition based on a reading of the Dakar Framework for Action which despite its limitations did represent a process of dialogue albeit largely between governments and at a global scale (Galabawa and Alphonse 2005). Nonetheless, we suggest it can provide one possible point of departure in more localised debates about the meaning of education quality.

> A good quality education is one that enables all learners to realise the capabilities they require to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance wellbeing. The learning outcomes that are required vary according to context but at the end of the basic education cycle must include threshold levels of literacy and numeracy and life skills including awareness and prevention of disease.

6.1 The importance of context

Whilst EdQual has developed its own working definition what counts as a good quality education, including the normative basis depends on context and will vary form country to country and even within countries. Our emerging framework seeks to take account of the importance of context. It encourages policy makers to take cognisance of changing national development needs, the kinds of schools that different learners attend and the forms of educational disadvantage faced by different groups of learners when considering policy options.

A good quality education arises from interactions between three overlapping environments, namely the policy, the school and the home/ community environments. Creating enabling environments requires the right mix of **inputs** into each**.** Much more so than is the case with traditional input-output models of education quality, however, the EdQual framework highlights the importance of accompanying **processes** within each environment that are key for ensuring that inputs get converted into desired outcomes. Whereas traditional understandings are often based on a linear model our framework is more akin to making a tasty soup in which the outcomes (a good quality education) depend on the particular mix of ingredients (inputs and processes) and the interaction between environments. The success of the 'recipe' is only determined by measuring the desired outcomes over time.

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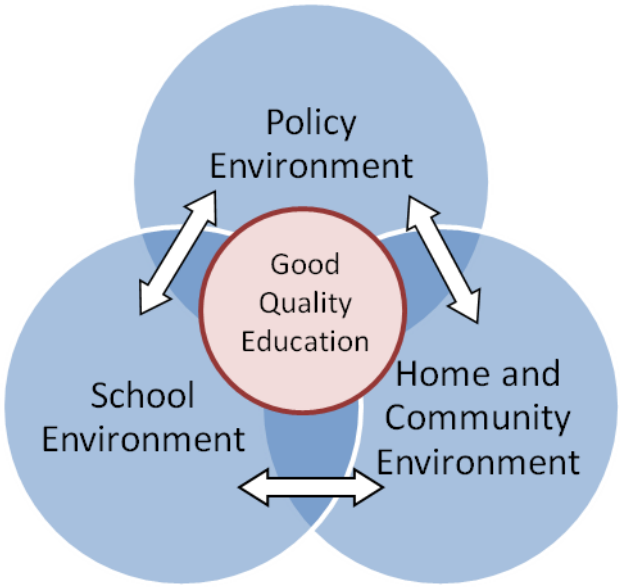
social justice? An analysis and critique of the South African Education Roadmap." International Journal of Educational Development **31**.

Creating a good quality education involves paying attention to the interface between each environment and ensuring that enabling inputs and processes have the effect of closing the gaps that often exist between them creating greater synergy and coherence. For example, overcoming the so-called 'implementation gap' between national policy and its implementation at the school level requires engaging with the experiences and views of teachers and headteachers, ensuring that initial and continuing professional development opportunities are consistent with the demands of new curricula and other initiatives, and providing support for schools in implementing and monitoring change. Closing the 'expectations gap' between the outcomes of education and what parents and communities expect education systems to deliver requires paying attention to the relevance of the curriculum, listening to the voices of parents and of communities in national debates and developing greater accountability within the system. Addressing the 'learning gap' that often exists between learning that takes place in schools and the home/ community environment requires focusing on the health and nutrition of learners and working with parents to create an enabling home environment to support learning.

Figure three: A simple context-led model for conceptualising the quality of education



6.2 Policy Priorities

In the section below evidence from EdQual and related research, largely gathered within an African context is presented. Whilst this evidence is useful for identifying broad priorities that policy makers need to take account of it needs to be interpreted and set against careful analysis of local needs and realities. Rather than offering 'magic bullets' it provides starting points for debate and suggestions for ongoing research and evaluation about what works in national contexts.

7. QUALITY INPUTS

7.1 Suitably trained experienced and motivated teachers.

Africa faces a severe shortage of suitably qualified and experienced teachers (UNESCO 2008). However, evidence suggests that initial teacher education and training and experience has a significant impact on achievement (Michaelowa 2001; Smith and Barrett 2010). Evaluation of

existing teacher in-service programmes and the challenge of training new and existing teachers for Education for all (EFA) has led to calls for more school-based teacher education and professional development (see O'Sullivan 2001 for example; Dladla and Moon 2002; Lewin and Stuart 2003). A major finding across the EdQual projects is that for training to impact positively on outcomes for disadvantaged learners it needs to be consistent with the demands of the curriculum. It must focus on improved pedagogical practices including the use of 'structured pedagogy'; effective teaching of language and literacy in multilingual settings (Ofitska nad Clegg, this issue); effective use of ICTs to support learning (Rubagiza, Were et al. 2010), and; strategies to promote inclusion (Barrett, Ali et al. 2007; Polat forthcoming).

Many African countries also face a crisis in teacher morale. Within a human capital framework, the issue is addressed through the introduction of incentives and accountability mechanisms to improve learning and enhance equity; and strengthen the use of regional, national and school-level assessments to support policy design aimed at these same ends (Muralidharan and Sundraraman 2006; Hanushek and Woßmann 2008). Within a human rights framework the emphasis lies more on supporting teacher professionalism and development as well as issues relating to pay and conditions of service (e.g. UNESCO 2008) (see also Bennell and Akyeampong 2007; DFID and VSO 2008). A major finding of the EdQual projects is that where teachers and headteachers have been empowered to identify and act on issues of quality through forms of professional development they have been motivated to do so (Bosu, Dare et al. forthcoming).

7.2 Headteacher tranining.

EdQual research has underlined the importance of school leadership in implementing education quality. Successful leadership requires a shift in the traditional role of headteachers in Africa as custodians of property to leaders of learning. Successful headteachers focus on mobilising resources, using resources such as ICTs efficiently, developing and motivating staff, maximising time on task and empowering parents to support children's learning. They also play a key role in promoting inclusion and implementing girl friendly approaches (Bosu, Dare et al. forthcoming). A key recommendation to come out of the EdQual project is that headteacher training should be mandatory for headteachers in Africa (Oduru and Bosu 2010).

7.3 Appropriate textbooks and learning materials.

Textbooks play an important role in raising learner achievement (Barrett, Ali et al. 2007; Yu 2007). Textbooks are critical for supporting the teaching and learning process, particularly in disadvantaged contexts and where teacher subject knowledge is limited. A key challenge is the avoidance of corruption and mismanagement of resources that can prevent the right textbooks reaching disadvantaged learners (UNESCO 2008). EdQual research has drawn attention to the fact that if textbooks and other learning materials are to be effective they need to be appropriate to the environment and to the cognitive level and the language of the learner and accompanied by teacher training in their use (Ofitska and Clegg, this issue).

7.4 Investing in basic infrastructure and resources including ICTs

Investing in infrastructure and resources can impact on achievement of disadvantaged learners (Smith and Barrett 2010). A key challenge for policy makers is to ensure that funding is sufficient to meet need and is efficiently distributed to schools. Ghana makes use of a capitation grant to fund non-salary expenditure. However, whilst the grant has impacted positively on enrolments it has not significantly impacted on achievement (Osei, Owusu et al. 2009). A key issue according to headteachers surveyed by EdQual is the overall size of the grant and inefficiencies in its administration (Dare, Atakpa et al. 2010). A related issue is to ensure that the finding is targeted at disadvantaged learners (Smith and Barrett 2010). In this regard South Africa makes use of an infrastructure grant linked to a school index of need although results have been mixed (Sayed in this issue). A further challenge is to ensure that once resources are available in schools that they are used effectively in a ways that promote teaching and learning. A finding from the EdQual ICT project is that computers are often not used for teaching and learning purposes and that schools and teachers need to be supported in their use (Sutherland 2010).

7.5 School feeding, child health and early childhood development.

Evidence from the analysis of the SACMEQ data reveals that for the most disadvantaged learners, addressing issues of nutrition and health can have a relatively greater impact on achievement than in-school factors (Smith, this issue). Provision of breakfast and of school feeding and nutrition programmes can lead to improved scores in academic tests, especially for more socio-economically disadvantaged learners (Uduku 2010) as can de-worming (see Kremer et al, 2007). Similarly, improved access to pre-school education can enhance both education outcomes and equity. Pre-school interventions show most significant effects relative to later interventions on children born into families below the poverty line (UNESCO, 2008).

8. KEY PROCESSES UNDERLYING A GOOD QUALITY EDUCATION

8.1 A national debate on education quality.

Implementing a good quality education requires that policy making is informed by processes of dialogue, consultation and debate both within the state and between the government and interest groups including teachers and teacher unions, non-governmental and community organisations representing parents and other interests with a stake in education. A characteristic of education policy in countries that have successfully integrated into the global economy is that there has been a good match between education priorities and outcomes and changing labour market needs facilitated by processes of inter-governmental dialogue (Green, Little et al. 2007).

Access to a good quality education has been an historic demand of anti-colonial movements on the African continent (Tikly 2003; Tikly 2010). In many postcolonial African countries as elsewhere, policy making has remained the preserve of economic, social and cultural elites. Key interest groups such as teachers and their organisations have often not been consulted and in some cases have been actively discouraged from participating in the policy making process. Yet, engaging the perspectives and experiences of educational professionals in decision making is particularly important in closing the implementation gap because of their role as change agents in schools (DfID and VSO, 2008). Other constituencies and interests including women, the poor, rural dwellers, indigenous peoples and members of religious and cultural minorities that have less 'social voice' (Chisholm 2004) have also remained excluded. Increasingly, however, there is evidence that grass roots organisations are making their views heard in national debates about education (Tikly 2003). It is important that policy makers as well as non-governmental and community organisations are aware of the processes and mechanisms by which policy relating to education quality is determined and how these reflect different interests within the state and civil society.

It has been argued in previous sections, however, that issues relating to education quality are inseparable from a consideration of the wider context including the historical legacy of colonialism, the nature of the quality gap and of educational inequality and disadvantage, the role of education in relation to national and local development priorities, the impact of global and regional agendas and the role of the state and of the private sector in providing access to a good quality education. Consideration of these issues is important for those involved in leading an informed public debate on education quality form a social justice perspective and for beginning to elucidate a normative basis to guide future policy (Tikly 2010; Tikly and Barrett forthcoming).

8.2 Improved accountability and parent/ community voice.

Related to the above are issues of creating greater accountability in the education system as a means for driving up quality for disadvantaged groups of learners. However, whereas exponents of human capital theory associate greater accountability with increasing parental choice within a market led system, from a social justice perspective accountability is linked to increased parental and community voice. Initiatives such as *Uwezo* in Tanzania and *Pratham* in

India make the results of independently collected assessment data available to parents and in this way seek to make schools and governments more accountable for the quality of education[11]. Similarly, the South African government has committed itself to making its own assessment data relating to the performance of individual schools available to parents as part of its drive to raise quality for disadvantaged learners (DOBE 2010). The success of such initiatives, however, depends on parents and communities being empowered to interpret the information that they receive in meaningful ways and to act on it. In some instances community based organisations have taken a lead in this although there is also a role for school governing boards in empowering parents through forms of training.

8.3 Effective assessment, monitoring and evaluation of quality.

Developing policy relating to education quality involves consideration of the quality gap in education both between and within countries and of the nature and extent of educational disadvantage. Monitoring the quality of education presents particular challenges for researchers. Unterhalter (2007), for example, has drawn attention to the difficulties associated with existing Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) related to the unreliability of data and to the potential of more participative approaches to collecting relevant data such as those used by NGOs, where the process as well as the data itself can be used to evaluate capabilities. Participation in international assessment exercises such as the Trends in International Maths and Science Study (TIMMS) and Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS) can provide information about existing levels of quality in national systems although caution is needed in interpreting data (Barrett 2009). The advantage of regional initiatives such as SACMEQ is that comparisons can be made with countries sharing similar socio-economic, historical, political and cultural characteristics. In the case of SACMEQ assessments can also be linked with pupil background, school context and process variables that provide insights into the determinants of quality (Smith and Barrett 2010). A key priority is to strengthen national systems of assessment, monitoring and evaluation including making available longitudinal data relating to schools and individual pupils. These can assist in identifying trends in achievement over time and can play an important diagnostic role in identifying strengths and weaknesses in the system, highlighting groups at risk of underachieving and areas for possible intervention. At the level of the school, EdQual research has highlighted the importance of making use of data as part of school self–evaluation and the importance of local support for schools in interpreting data and implementing change (Bosu, Dare et al. forthcoming).

8.4 A relevant and inclusive curriculum and pedagogy.

EdQual research has emphasised teacher subject knowledge in implementing mathematics and science education and the importance of coherence in aims and content within and between phases of the curriculum (Barrett, Ali et al. 2007). Pedagogy has increasingly been seen to lie at the heart of the debate about quality (Barrett, Ali et al. 2007). For example the World Bank led Fast Track Initiative (FTI 2008) has supported a range of interventions to support reading although these have yet to be evaluated. Within a rights based approach, the debate focuses on conceptions of learner-centeredness. EdQual research has highlighted that successful initiatives share characteristics of 'structured pedagogy' i.e. they promote careful planning of lessons, with a clear introduction that links to the previous lesson and sets out learning objectives as well as use of formative assessment. They often encourage teachers to make use of a range of strategies including talking to the whole class from the front, question and answer with the whole class, individual exercises or reading, group discussion and practical activities depending on their context, learners' needs and subject matter.

A key issue relating to the accessibility of the curriculum is that of the medium of instruction used in schools. Regular use of the medium of instruction in the home and community environment is a good predictor of achievement (Smith and Barrett 2010). There is a polarisation in the debate about medium of instruction between those who believe that African led development is best served by using indigenous languages as the medium of instruction and those who argue for the use of European languages (ADEA 2005). Issues relating to language and cultural identity are rarely acknowledged within a human capital framework although they are more so within rights based approaches (Tikly and Barrett forthcoming). Faced with

[11] See http://uwezo.net/

conflicting perspectives and complexity, African countries are increasingly adopting a phased bilingual or even trilingual approach, favouring indigenous languages in the early years and global languages such as English in the later years (Heugh 2005). EdQual research has highlighted the reality that in many African classrooms a mixture of languages are used for teaching and learning and has focused on developing practical strategies for using more than one language in the classroom.

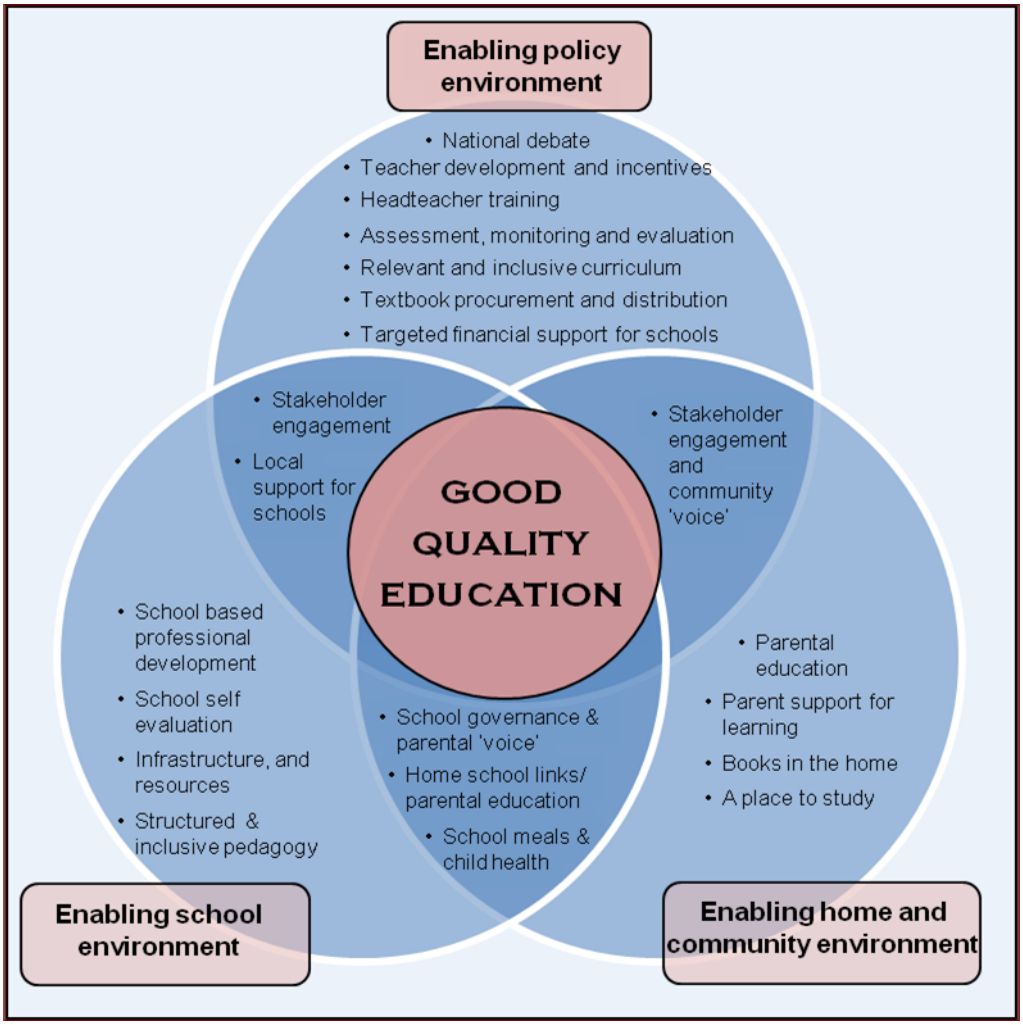
8.5 School, home and community links

EdQual analysis of the SACMEQ data (Smith and Barrett 2010; Smith Forthcoming) points to the central importance of the home and community environment in relation to determining the quality of education particularly for the most socio-economically disadvantaged groups of learners. Living outside of a stable family environment, having a lack of basic resources including books in the home and a place to work, malnutrition and exposure to disease and lack of exposure to the medium of instruction outside of the school context are all predictors of low levels of literacy and numeracy. Indeed, as Smith (Forthcoming) points out, these variables are more significant in explaining underachievement than in-school factors at least as far as low income groups are concerned. In other low income contexts, both paternal and maternal literacy and other forms of cultural capital impact on literacy levels of children (Smith, Barrett et al. Forthcoming).

Within the human capital approach, for example, the role of parents and of the community is principally to hold schools to account and to make contributions in the form of fees and other contributions. Within a rights based approach and the concept of the child friendly school, the school is perceived as having an insulating role from dynamics in the wider community. A social justice perspective has potential, however, for developing and extending the way that the home and community context is traditionally understood. A starting point for analysis is the recognition of the home and of the community as sites within which wider economic, political and cultural inequalities are produced and reproduced. Whilst the education system and schools cannot solve these issues which have their roots in wider dynamics of inequality they can play a role in mediating them through fostering improved links with the community. For examples schools can provide adult basic education opportunities to parents and can educate them about ways to create a more enabling home environment for their children (Ngcobo and Tikly 2010; Bosu, Dare et al. forthcoming). They can play a role in helping to overcome conflict (e.g. Bush and Salterelli 2000; Davies 2004) for example through fostering an inclusive climate that is responsive to cultural difference (Hickling-Hudson 2004). They can also be responsive to local labour market needs, through being more flexible in the way that the school year and the school day is organised (Dachi and Garrett 2003).

The diagram below attempts to encapsulate the various quality inputs and processes referred to in the sections above within the EdQual framework.

Figure four: A framework for understanding education quality in Africa



9. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN RESEARCHING EDUCATION QUALITY FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Researching the quality of education from a social justice perspective raises considerable methodological as well as theoretical challenges. In the context of the EdQual research programme, a mixed methods approach has been embraced. Whilst there are several possible rationales for adopting a mixed methods approach in educational research (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003; Cresswell and Garratt 2008), our own rationale is based on an underlying philosophical commitment to social justice principles[12]. Here the emphasis is on recognising the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the issues relating to the quality of education as they impact on different groups of disadvantaged learners. In this regard, Robeyns (2006) and Walker (2006) have both also drawn attention to the use of interdisciplinary research and mixed methods to capture the range of capabilities in a field such as education. Data arising from different methodologies are brought together to provide a thick description of the issues

[12] This is similar to the transformative-emancipatory rationale for mixed methods in social scientific research proposed in Mertens, D. (2003). Mixed methods and the politics of human research: the transformative-emancipatory persepctive. Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioural Research. A. Tashakkori and C. Teddlie. London, Sage**:** 135-166.(2003).

involved and in order to answer the research questions. Thus in the context of the EdQual programme large scale quantitative enquiry using multilevel modelling techniques has sought to model the impact of student background, community and school context variables on basic levels of literacy and numeracy through secondary analysis of the SACMEQ II data set. As Smith indicates in her contribution to this special issue, this has involved going beyond more standard quantitative techniques to recognise the differential impact of variables on different groups. Quantitative modelling has evolved iteratively in relation to the use of qualitative techniques that have shed light on the underlying processes involved. Participative research methodologies including action research can play an important role in identifying capabilities either on their own terms or when considered in relation to different sources of information (see also Walker 2005). In this sense, data arising from different methodologies can be used not only to verify findings from elsewhere through processes of triangulation but also to extend and to problematise findings and models arising from different methodologies. The use of participatory approaches together with a self-reflexive approach at a programmatic level (see Barrett et al in this special issue) have helped to ensure that choices of methods and the findings that arise from these resonate with the experiences and priorities of African based policy makers, practitioners and researchers (see also Mertens 2003).

10. CONCLUSION

Through outlining the evolution of EdQual's approach the intention has been to contribute to a wider debate about how the quality of education experienced by disadvantaged learners in difficult delivery contexts can be understood. An overarching observation relates to the process of theory building itself. Rather than a neat, linear progression of ideas, what has emerged is something of an amalgam of sometimes conflicting and contradictory perspectives within the context of a large research consortium. In this sense the framework is presented, unapologetically as open ended and evolving rather than fixed and closed. Recognising this open-endedness is also to acknowledge the enormous potential for further research. For example, research could fruitfully explore the implications of environmental catastrophe and of climate change, of ongoing conflict and violence including sexualised violence and of the impact of the economic downturn and changes in the flow of aid on the quality of education experienced by the most disadvanatged. It is also to acknowledge the need to continue to seek innovative approaches and methodologies that can actively include the voices and perspectives of the marginalised including the poor, rural dwellers, indigenous peoples, religious, linguistic and ethnic minorities, girls and women, learners with disabilities, victims of HIV/ AIDS orphans and vulnerable children if our understandings are to better reflect the experiences of these groups and to begin to shift discourse and policy in a way that more accurately reflects their interests.

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EdQual RPC
- Implementing Education Quality in Low Income Countries

Contact:

EdQual RPC
Graduate School of Education
35 Berkley Square
BRISTOL BS8 1JA
T 0044 (0)117 331 4288
F 0044 (0)117 925 7584

www.edqual.org

University of BRISTOL