Open access research and policy impact: experiences from developing the African Education Research Database

Is open research really changing the world?

Cambridge Festival of Ideas

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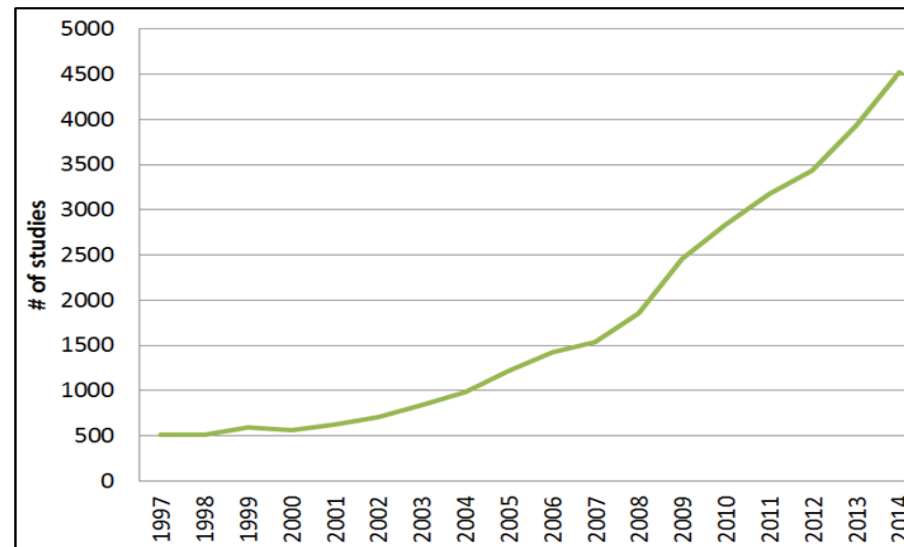
Education in sub-Saharan Africa

- Big increased in enrolment

- More than 55 million young people out-of- school

- Many students not achieving literacy or numeracy (Mugo et al. 2015)

- Research can inform decisions of non-researchers (policy actors, practitioners, etc.) – evidence-informed policy & practice

What do we know about education research in sub-Saharan Africa?

- African education research is often 'overlooked and undervalued' (Maclure 2006)

- Dispersed across a wide range of outlets (Bonini et al. 2015); no central location to access the African research evidence base

- 'Epistemic injustice' (Fricker 2007) – knowledge from Africa is de-valued

- Strong growth in the quantity of African education research over the last 20 years

Peer-reviewed education research outputs by Africa-based researchers

Source: Scopus database, June 2017 (Mitchell & Rose 2017a)

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African Education Research Database

June 2017   +

- Catalogue the work of sub-Saharan African researchers
- Identify key findings & gaps
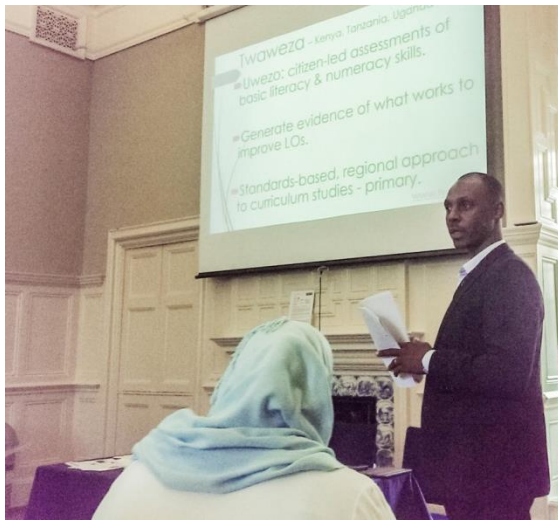- Strengthen the evidence base for policy and practice

http://essa-africa.org/AERD

- Identify **social science research** with implications for **education policy and practice** conducted by researchers **based in sub-Saharan Africa**

- Bibliometric analysis – 2811 studies catalogued to date (August 2018)

- Interviews conducted with 30 researchers based in sub-Saharan Africa
    - *Priorities for research; research impact; experiences of funding, partnerships & collaboration*

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CAPE VERDE

MAURITANIA

MALI

NIGER

CHAD

SUDAN

ERITREA

DJIBOUTI

SENEGAL

THE GAMBIA

GUINEA-BISSAU

BURKINA
FASO

GUINEA

SIERRA
LEONE

LIBERIA

COTE D'
IVOIRE

GHANA

TOGO

BENIN

NIGERIA

CAMEROON

CENTRAL AFRICAN
REPUBLIC

SOUTH
SUDAN

ETHIOPIA

SOMALIA

EQ. GUINEA

SÃO TOMÉ
AND PRÍNCIPE

GABON

CONGO

DR CONGO

UGANDA

RWANDA

BURUNDI

KENYA

SEYCHELLES

TANZANIA

ANGOLA

ZAMBIA

MALAWI

COMOROS

MOZAMBIQUE

MADAGASCAR

MAURITIUS

NAMIBIA

ZIMBABWE

BOTSWANA

SWAZILAND

LESOTHO

SOUTH AFRICA

≥ 100
≥ 50
≥ 20
≥ 10
< 10

Research outputs by country

	Country	# of studies	% of total studies (n = 2811)
1	Nigeria	662	23.6%
2	Ghana	260	9.2%
3	Mozambique	258	9.2%
4	Kenya	257	9.1%
5	Uganda	151	5.4%
6	Tanzania	145	5.2%
7	Ethiopia	131	4.7%
8	Botswana	124	4.4%
9	Zimbabwe	121	4.3%
10	Angola	107	3.8%
11	Cape Verde	81	2.9%
12	Malawi	59	2.1%
13	Mauritius	45	1.6%
14	Zambia	42	1.5%
15	Namibia	40	1.4%
16	Cameroon	38	1.4%
17	Rwanda	33	1.2%
18	Swaziland	23	0.8%
19	Lesotho	21	0.7%
20	Sudan	21	0.7%
21 - 26	Burkina Faso, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Madagascar	<20	<0.7%
27 - 37	Benin, Côte D'Ivoire, Eritrea, Gambia, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Togo	<10	≤0.3
38 - 49	Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Guinea, Mauritania, Republic of the Congo, Seychelles, Somalia	<5	≤0.1%

Peer-reviewed articles

Country	# of peer-reviewed articles	% not in reputable journals
Nigeria	591	37.2%
Ghana	226	8%
Kenya	228	17.5%
Uganda	127	7.9%
Tanzania	125	4%
Ethiopia	120	6.7%
Botswana	102	9.8%
Zimbabwe	112	16.1%

N.b. Details for countries with >100 peer-reviewed articles where English is dominant language of scholarly communication.

Quality assurance <u>matters</u>

- "It has to go through scrutiny on the impact factor of the journal, and the reputability of the journal. If it's not reputable, it will not be awarded; it's not eligible...So if you send your article to India – there are so many predatory journals – that doesn't count." (*Male researcher, Ethiopia*)

- "They have their *own* journals unfortunately, within Nigeria…You'll find that every university has a journal. And some people have their own journals…We had one professor from Nigeria at [our] university [who] had that kind of journal. I had to say to him: '*Look, stop this…You can't have a journal running like that. Who is the publisher?!*'" (*Male researcher, Southern Africa*)

Characteristics of 'not reputable' journals/publishers

- Open access titles – immediate publication, no peer-review or copy editing

- Pay-walled – often appears to be genuine scholarship, but publications are very expensive; "write-only" business model, or "vampire press"

What does OA mean in sub-Saharan Africa?

- Around 1/3rd of publications in AERD are OA
- Many SSA-based journals are exclusively OA
- Commercial databases (Web of Science, Scopus) require subscriptions
- ICT infrastructure

"We don't have internet provided by the university. Each teacher has to – you just manage by yourself. So I don't want to say it, but I think it reflects – our research is poor because we are poor. See what I mean?" (Female researcher, Burkina Faso)

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Use of research outside academia

Researchers expressed *desire for local relevance*, encouraging changes in policy and practice by:

- working with teachers, principals, other institutional stakeholders, or

- informing policy actors and decision-making processes at regional and national levels

- "In all of my research I always think…"*What is the policy implication?*" Unless it has some policy relation, then I never enter into any kind of research...That is a standard [set] by myself, in my heart." (*Male researcher, Ethiopia*)

Use of research outside academia

Growing interest from policy actors in using *evidence to inform decision-making*

- "we are experiencing what seems like intractable problems in the education system, at primary and secondary school level...And **for the first time we are now being called upon to help in addressing that problem.** And so my feeling is that: this is the right time to engage with those fellows, the policymakers…They will definitely give me a hearing, because they are also desperate for solutions." (*Male researcher, Botswana)*

- "Many Ministries and senior people, they like research. They like evidence, they like making decisions that is based on evidence. In Kenya **we are seeing that kind of trend going on**." (*Male researcher, Kenya*)

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Routes to policy impact

Understanding priorities of policy actors – developing relationships with key individuals over time

- Documents – reports, policy briefs

- Face-to-face – meetings, workshops, events

- "Once you finish writing the report the real work starts, because you have to start making bookings – you have to start approaching the Ministries. And it's not like they will tell you to come tomorrow! They can postpone five times, and you don't give up." (*Male researcher, Kenya*)

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