

*International Journal of Multidisciplinary
Perspectives in Higher Education*
Volume 4, Issue 1 (2019), pp. 136-139
<https://www.ojed.org/jimphe> Print ISSN
2474-2546 Online ISSN 2474-2554

Transforming Education Outcomes in Africa: Learning from Togo

Editors: Johannes Hooegeven & Mariacristina Rossi

Publisher: Palgrave MacMillan

Date: 2019

ISBN: 10.1007/978-3-030-12708-4

Pages: 100

Reviewed by: *Derrick Grubb, Morgan State University*
(degru1@morgan.edu)

No matter where one lives in the world, education is significant to one's life. Education impacts one's income, life choices, health, development of family, and community. It has the capacity of transforming one's life. Johannes Hooegeven of the World Bank, and Mariacristian Rossi, et al, have researched education in Togo, focusing on student enrollment and learning outcomes. Togo's educational challenges are comparable to other sub-Saharan African countries allowing for research to be replicated. There was significant data available for analysis. Their book, *Transforming Education Outcomes in Africa*, is relevant for those who want to know what impacts education on the continent and what may be possible solutions.

The five-chapter book starts off by examining primary education in Togo. The effects on political upheaval and economic decline in the 1990's led to limited spending in the public sector overall impacting the quality of education. This caused parents to opt for private schools significantly more than public schools. The lack of economic support for education created a void which ultimately caused limited hiring, dependence on "contract teachers" who worked for minimal income and were less qualified than civil servants. After this period of economic decline and political upheaval, the Togolese people began to send their primary aged children to public school

in greater numbers more consistently. Between the years of 2000 -2005 school enrollment significantly increased. Because of limited spending in the public sector, private school enrollment further increased for those that could afford it, along with local initiative schools, Ecole d'Initiative Locale (EDIL) particularly in rural areas. Prior to the start of the 2008-2009 school year, the government of Togo abolished school fees and enrollment increases continued. It was suggested by the authors that increased enrollment reduced inequalities. Data from the Nation Yearbooks of School Statistics and performance on the Programme of Analysis of Education Systems (PASEC) were used for analysis. The authors suggested that free education gave rise to increased enrollment and over time a reduction in inequalities.

The PASEC results seemed to suggest that there were challenges to the quality of education. With that concern school resources were examined such as the drivers of performance, school aspects, and non-school aspects. The analysis of Questionnaire des Indicateurs de Base de Bien-etre (QUIBB) survey of household data (non-school aspects) revealed consistent inequalities between the various regions of the country. The predominantly low income region of Savanes has a higher student to teacher ratio, higher student per classroom, less spending per student, and less salary per student compared to more middle income regions. Comparatively the data is reminiscent of Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* as he examined inner-city schools and the disparities they faced. Though in the case of the United States one must consider race and class.

Enrollment by school type, wealth of households for those (6-11) who are not enrolled, enrollment by region, region of those (6-11) not enrolled, students per teacher, per classroom, a place to sit, access to water, salary spending per student, and investment spending per student are all analyzed. Regression results from stochastic frontier analysis are also used.

Chapter four the authors investigate individual learning outcome drivers via the Survey and Delivery Indicators (SDI). Data captured here examined student and teacher knowledge of grade four. Although there had been a steady increase of students into the school system, many failed to acquire basic skills and many teachers showed skill deficiencies.

The SDI key results examined student learning outcomes via French, math, and non-verbal reasoning. In all categories private school students performed better on all test (66% average French score out of 100, 52% math score out of 100). Accounting for teacher knowledge, again private school teachers scored highest (49% out of 100).

Teacher effort was examined. School absent rate, classroom absence rate, time spent teaching per day compared to scheduled teaching time per day show abysmal results. Resource availability i.e. student-teacher ratio, textbook availability, teaching equipment availability, and infrastructure availability all were low, negatively impacting student learning overall. The data again is suggested to be similar to other countries. The authors concluded

that the increase in student enrollment meant an increase in teachers that were not adequately prepared to teach.

The authors concluded by assessing four challenges and suggesting solutions in chapter 5 “What can be done?” First, there is a “stock and flow problem”. Existing teachers (stock) need to upgrade their content knowledge and pedagogical skills. Future teachers (flow) must be better prepared at the college level. The authors offered that, “Higher quality individuals will need to be attracted to teacher colleges, with better salaries and conditions, changes that will have major fiscal consequences.”

What is meant by “higher quality individuals” is not spelled out here but is surely a curious choice words to call teachers. Nonetheless, the authors seem to suggest more rigor in the pre-service stage for these individuals. Likewise the in-service cadre must be upgraded without disrupting schooling in real time and is affordable. A cascading model is suggested where a group of teachers are centrally trained and they become trainers of their peers. This approach will be attached to evaluations that identify the needs of teachers. The option of scripted instruction, though criticized as stultifying, may give structure to teachers who lack rigor of instruction and have inadequate training. A fourth approach could be the use of e-learning. This approach would be dependent on the capacity of the school structure to handle such technology as well as schools being equipped with the technology.

One glaring question is what impact does the French language have on the Togolese people’s lived experiences? The national languages of Togo are Ewe and Kabiye out of 39 distinct languages, though the official language of an African people is French, a non-indigenous language, a holdover of the effects of colonialism. The use of French as the lingua franca of school learning does not make it so for the language in one’s household, community, and region. How does this influence performance in school by all stakeholders, students, teachers, and administrators?

If wealth affords one the opportunity to send one’s children to better equipped schools to learn and be tested in French, then enculturation is the driver for education which all Togolese may not have signed up for. The French language may very well be a barrier itself that negatively impacts the education of the Togolese people overall. If French is the lingua franca of Togo, how did this come to be and how does it impact education overall? If an indigenous language is the primary language at home and French is used predominantly in school, then the language of school is actually a second language and would lend itself to some explanation as the challenges to achievement in school, not the quality of the educators or the ability of the children.

A systematic search for solutions through the Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) was suggested. Its four elements 1) aim to solve particular problem relevant to local contexts via 2) the creation of an environment that encourages experimentation and positive deviance, which

gives rise to 3) active, ongoing and experiential learning and iterative feedback, doing so by 4) engaging broad sets of agents to ensure that solutions are viable, legitimate and relevant (pg 95). The authors suggest that Togo is uniquely placed to adopt this approach. This approach lends itself to qualitative research in which one can investigate how math is learned in local communities, what language is most used, and what language should instruction be given in. Furthermore what are we educating children for? This process affords each school, community, and region the opportunity to identify its needs and to consider how to innovate and experiment to make education meaningful for the Togolese people. Overall this book will give the reader much to consider for the continued education development for African countries in the age of neocolonialism.