The research design

The project was launched in each country early in 2010. The research is beginning with a detailed profile of what is happening in initial teacher education and CPD in each country including the costs of the different programmes. Using mixed methods, including a survey, focus groups, classroom observations and in-depth interviews, the project will collect data from teacher educators, teacher trainees, newly qualified teachers and more experienced teachers who have completed professional development programmes. In each country this will enable comparison between the knowledge, understandings and practices that each programme sets out to promote and those which are adopted or adapted by teachers who have followed the programme. The data analysis will use a system of typologies to show the range of different teacher responses in terms of teaching knowledge, understanding and practices.

In-country national reference groups

Throughout the project country teams will engage with and report to a National Reference Group consisting of policy makers and others with direct interest in the improvement of education. National Reference Groups will enable the research to contribute to discussions of education quality and to strategic plans for improving quality in primary schools in each country.

Research team

In the UK
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Dr Kattie Lussier
Principal Investigators: 
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Dr John Pryor 
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Country Lead Researchers: 
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The context of the research

Two thirds of the way through the worldwide push for Education for All by 2015, a great expansion of primary education is taking place in African countries. Between 1999 and 2005 the numbers of children in school rose by 36% and the trend continues (UNESCO 2008). Such a rise requires a large increase in numbers of teachers, but the task of training so many teachers is daunting. Many countries are turning to schemes for introducing contract or volunteer teachers with fast-track or minimal training as a swifter and cheaper alternative to a traditional college course. Efforts are also being made to equip teachers with enhanced skills and competencies through continuing professional development. However, studies of student achievement offer very little evidence that these types of teacher preparation are having a positive effect on the learning of children in schools. Not enough is known about how teachers working in different educational environments and contexts adopt and adapt the knowledge and skills they have acquired through formal training to address the particular learning needs of young students in their actual schools. Teacher education is becoming a major cause for concern such that UNESCO has recently set up an International Task Force on ‘Teachers for EFA’.

What is becoming increasingly clear though is the importance of teaching in the first years of schooling. Children’s early experiences with learning shape their attitudes and commitment to education and so, more than at any other stage, what happens in the early grades, particularly in reading and mathematics lessons, determines their educational future.

The Teacher Preparation and Continuing Professional Development Project (TPA Project)*, funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, will fill the gap in knowledge about how the initial and continuing education of teachers impacts on the practice of teachers through studies in six African countries.

Project organisation

The project is co-ordinated by Dr Jo Westbrook, Dr John Pryor and Dr Kwame Akyeampong from the Centre for International Education at the University of Sussex, UK. They are working closely and in the field with national teams of researchers from Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda. Each team will produce a study of their country which documents and analyses what goes on in teacher training institutions, primary schools and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes and how what is taught is used in classrooms by recently-trained teachers. The country studies and a synthesis report will seek to stimulate debate about how teacher education can improve the quality of learning in the schools with a focus on early mathematics and reading. The international team from Sussex will also produce a synthesis report analysing the findings across the six countries and engage with international policy on teacher preparation and continuing professional development.

Reporting and disseminating research findings

The outcome of the research in each country will be, in the first instance, a report containing a rich description of how teachers learn to teach and develop their practice in teaching reading and mathematics in the early grades. The reports will be disseminated in each country during the first half of 2011, and should stimulate discussion on how teacher preparation and continuous professional development might be organised to maximise impact on teachers’ performance and on early primary learning outcomes in reading and mathematics.

The synthesis report, prepared by the CIE team will bring together the findings across the six different countries looking for similarities and differences, and identifying gaps in current teacher education practice. It will draw on the international literature on teacher professional development to compare the results with what the literature suggests constitutes good practice as well as identifying examples of promising practice from the studies. The synthesis report will also aim to promote discussion amongst the international education community including teacher educators and development partners on what is successful and cost-effective in terms of improving reading and mathematics skills in the early years of primary school in sub-Saharan Africa.

Country reports will be produced in the official language of the country concerned, with an additional summary report in either English or French. A version of the synthesis report will also be produced in both languages. In addition, each country research team, in collaboration with their national reference groups, may be able to suggest plans linking policy on improving educational quality in each country to specific delivery strategies which draw directly from the research evidence. The project aims to help in moving the debate about improving educational quality in Africa beyond rhetorical statements and targets about improving quality to concrete insights into how practical progress can be achieved through teacher development activities that focus on classroom practice.

* In French speaking countries the project is named Formation Initiale et Continue des Enseignants en Afrique (FICEA).