

Defining Quality in the Midst of HIV/AIDS

Ripple Effects in the Classroom

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i) What did the study aim to do?

Coming after the declaration –Education for All- of the Jomtien Conference in 1990, the aim of this study was to define “Quality” in the midst of HIV/AIDS. Attention was given to the “gap” between quantity and quality i.e. the number of children who have access to schooling and the quality of learning.

ii) What was the approach?

The IEQ Project has formed partnerships with 16 countries to address the issue of quality and to carry out a systematic examination of the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms to pinpoint where improvements could be made. Educators and researchers guide and conduct research activities in a national institution where possible.

What were the key findings?

The study highlighted several factors:

- **Pupil absenteeism** due to parental death, caring for sick relatives and funeral activities.
- **Dropout** is twice as likely to occur when both parents are dead
- **Repetition** rates for children whose parents are dead were 5-15% higher than for children with both parents living
- **Achievement** seems to be unaffected by parental status although other stress factors (economic, illness etc.) were not identified by questions about parental mortality
- **Textbook** use in the classroom was the same for all pupils although pupils whose parents are dead were less likely to study at home. However the reasons for this are unclear.
- **Class sizes** are high with an average of 96 pupils per class resulting in the associated problem of disparate age ranges i.e. the range of skills and in particular literacy and innumeracy
- **Teacher training**: approximately three quarters of teachers had only completed two years of secondary education
- **Teacher absenteeism** was found to be due to illness (50%), funeral activities (10.1%) and training (9.6%). Although AIDS was not specifically discussed teacher infection rates in Malawi range from 13-40%.
- **Teacher mobility**: researchers visiting classrooms found that 50% of teachers were no longer teaching the same class. Some had left permanently (death or posting away) while others had left temporarily (illness and training) resulting in existing teachers struggling to cover colleagues' classes.

All of these factors complicate pupil development and the long-term relationships necessary for successful instruction.

What were the recommendations?

This study puts forward ideas for improving children's learning against the background of the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic such as linking younger and older children in support programmes and providing tailored materials for students who have to miss school. Under-trained teachers could be helped by providing all-inclusive teaching materials and contingency planning put in place for absent teachers.