



40 years of educational research in Guinea-Bissau: Mapping the terrain



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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Education research
Education policy
Teaching and learning
Guinea-Bissau

ABSTRACT

A review of publications about educational research in Guinea-Bissau in the last 40 years is the subject of this paper. Published articles have permitted us to map the research terrain and produce new knowledge without collecting new empirical data. We reviewed 148 studies published between 1975 and 2015 in journal articles, theses, monographs, research reports, conference papers, books, edited volumes and grey literature. Moving from title to introduction/abstract and then the entire text we explored thematic focuses, methods, findings, conclusions and funding. This paper argues that education policy receives more attention followed by language issues and it also suggests that the research agenda is mainly due to external pressure with a tendency for applied research.

1. Introduction

Published studies can be a barometer of the interests and priorities of scholars. They also allow a mapping of the research terrain. In comparative and international education there is a long tradition of surveying published articles in order to achieve this (Foster et al., 2012). However, the practice is carried out in many different ways, although it adopts the same strategy i.e. to determine emphasis on scholarship and to review what scholars have published (Foster et al., 2012). All these different approaches¹ usually review journal articles focusing on the mapping of international and comparative education research. Our starting point was somewhat different. We mapped the educational research terrain in Guinea-Bissau focusing on a review of the research published about the country. We also followed a different approach by reviewing not only journal articles but also theses, monographs, research reports, conference papers, books, edited volumes and grey literature. This stemmed from the fact that an important part of the work in international and comparative education is available in publications other than journal articles (Anderson-Levitt, 2015). Guinea-Bissau is also under represented in comparative and international education journals² and also it is under-researched.

The aim of the paper is to map the education research terrain in Guinea-Bissau from 1975 to 2015. Our analysis will attempt to explore the thematic focuses, methods, findings, conclusions and funding. The

paper draws on a corpus of documents characterised as existing data published between 1975 and 2015.

The article is organised in three main parts. Following these introductory notes, the paper first provides a brief country overview followed by the methodology and data. Following this overview, we explore the data organised in terms of its thematic focus, research design and source of research funding. The third and final part presents the concluding reflections.

2. Guinea-Bissau: brief social, political and educational context

To put the research for this paper into context, it is necessary to give a brief overview of the country and the programme under scrutiny.

Guinea-Bissau is a small West African state of 1.6 million inhabitants with an average rate of population growth estimated at 3%. (MENCCJD, 2011; MEPIR, 2011). In the Ibrahim Index of African Governance it is the lowest of the West Africa countries and it is in position 44 (out of 54 African countries) with 41.3 points out of 100. Since 2011 there has been a deterioration of the indicators concerned with Participation and Human Rights, Sustainable Economic Opportunity and Human Development (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2016). Guinea-Bissau has experienced significant conflict and political and military instability both prior to and following independence (Pelissier, 1989a, 1989b; Sousa, 2012b, 2012a). The economic liberalisation policies

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¹ For more details see, for example, Foster et al. (2012).

² In a search in the web of science in the web of knowledge, in JStor and in the reference international journals like Compare, International Journal of Educational Development, and Comparative Education Review we only can find the following articles with specific reference to Guinea-Bissau: Benson (2002, 2010), Carr-Hill and Rosengart (1983), Daun (1997), Hovens (2002), Portugal and Aveleira (2009), Silva et al. (2015).

(mid-1980s) and the adoption of a political system based on multiple political parties led to the first multiparty elections in 1994 (Cruz, 2007; Temudo, 2008). Since independence in 1974, there have been ten coups and a civil war from 1998 to 1999. The most recent coup was in 2012, which started another cycle of instability that is still under resolution. The country is considered to be one of the “most fragile states in Africa” and the first Africa Narco-State (O’Regan and Thompson, 2013, 1). Guinea-Bissau has one of the lowest gross domestic products per capita in the world (USD1.270), poor infrastructure, weak social indicators and a poverty rate of 64,7% (MENCJJD, 2009; MEPIR, 2011; UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2011). At the present time Guinea-Bissau is living through food crises and it is a “failed state” facing a long period of “depeasantization” of the population – apparently as a consequence of the increased participation of children and youth in schooling (Temudo and Abrantes, 2013, 2015).

The country relies heavily on the Official Development Assistance, particularly for public services, and education is one of the sectors, which depends largely on bilateral and multilateral aid (MEPIR, 2011; Monteiro, 2005). In this context, civil society (especially NGOs and the Catholic Church) plays a key role in assisting the population and in consolidating the State. The sectors, where civil society is more active, are education, wealth, human rights, the environment and consolidation of peace (Barros, 2012).

Although the official language is Portuguese, only 5% of the population speak it as their mother tongue, while around 10% purport to speak Portuguese. Most inhabitants speak one or more indigenous languages of which there are 20 (Monteiro, 2005; Benson, 2010; Observatório da Língua Portuguesa, 2009).³

After independence (1974) the education system from the colonial period was changed on the basis of the experiences of the liberated zones and by constraints and demands imposed from different external organisations (Carr-Hill and Rosengart, 1982, 1983; Monteiro, 2005; Pehrsson, 1996). However, the structure of the education system remained unchanged until the beginning of 1990, despite several attempts to produce and approve an Education Act, which was only enacted in the 2009/2010 school year (Carr-Hill and Rosengart, 1982, 1983; Monteiro, 2005; Pehrsson, 1996; Daun, 1997). The availability of external funding is the main condition for interventions in the educational system and it seems that there is a lack of co-ordination between the various actors and projects/programmes, even with respect to the same donor (Carr-Hill and Rosengart, 1982, 1983; Monteiro, 2005; Pehrsson, 1996; Furtado, 2005). Because of this, the interventions in the education system are fragmented and limited to the time-frame of the aid projects/programmes with different international organisations playing a key role in decisions at the macro level (Carr-Hill and Rosengart, 1982, 1983; Monteiro, 2005; Pehrsson, 1996; Furtado, 2005; Barreto, 2012b; Silva et al., 2015). Despite the improvements achieved, since independence, the education system still does not reach all school aged children, thus it does not fulfil the goals of the Guinea-Bissau Constitution and the Education Act.

The education system also seems to be shaped by political indecision, discontinuities, contradictions, unfinished reforms, inefficiency, instability, great differences between urban and rural areas and it is not appropriate for the reality of the country (Carr-Hill and Rosengart, 1982, 1983; Monteiro, 2005; Pehrsson, 1996; Furtado, 2005).

The school enrolment rates are low. For instance, Guinea-Bissau has the lowest rate in West African countries for pupils completing the first four years of schooling (UNESCO, 2013).

Political and military instability has had an enormous influence on the education system. Ever since independence, for example, 34 ministers of education have taken office (Lopes, 2014 and data of the author). This has resulted in an education system marked by

“discontinuities and contradictions resulting from unfinished reforms” (our translation Monteiro, 2005, 131) and the first Education Act was not approved until 2010.

Parents and civil society play an active part in formal schooling, particularly in the creation of schools (community, religious and private), in the payment of tuition fees and by the provision of financial and non-financial incentives to teachers. These community-based schools seem to enjoy a greater reputation among parents and their teaching staff are more respected by the community than those working in public schools (Lopes, 2007; Barreto, 2012c; Ribeiro, 2001; Sanhá, 2014).

The right of teachers to have access to continuing professional development (CPD) activities is present in the 2011 law that established the career status of teachers, even though there is no formal system in place and this law is still waiting for regulations. The CPD activities and programmes are promoted by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international agencies in co-operation with the Ministry of Education.

The education system of Guinea Bissau is one of the sectors, which have received more foreign aid in the last forty years. Donors include multi-lateral agencies (e.g. the African Bank for Development, UEMOA, UNICEF, World Bank), bilateral agencies (e.g. Sweden, Holland, Portugal) and non-governmental organisations (e.g. Plan International, Fundação Fé e Cooperação). Over time donor presence in education in Guinea-Bissau has shaped the education system, particularly through conditional aid (especially with regard to financial issues) making it similar in terms of structure to that of Western countries (Pehrsson, 1996; Silva et al., 2015). However, this should not overshadow the fact that, ever since the armed struggle for independence (1964–1974), Guinea-Bissau has strived for universal education for all in order to achieve the levels of progress of other countries and this has been actively pursued by the Guinean State with the support of international organisations (Carr-Hill and Rosengart, 1983; Pehrsson, 1996; Monteiro, 2005). Despite these discontinuities and the enormous fragility of the schools in terms of lack of material resources, poor infrastructure and lack of trained teachers, the school system has proved to be tremendously resilient. Evidence of this resilience can be found in the following examples: (i) communities mobilised after Independence (and before Independence in freed areas) to gain and continue access to education; (ii) the 1998–1999 conflict did not affect the growth in gross school enrolment rates in the following years; (iii) during the school years 2009–2010 and 2010–2011, which have been the most politically stable years in recent times, key legislation was approved, national exams took place and the school years ran smoothly without any major interruptions (Monteiro, 2005; MENCJJD, 2013, 2011; MENCJJD, 2011). However, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) initiatives are scarce.

3. Methodology and data

In order to identify relevant studies we conducted a systematic search of 41 databases in Portugal, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal and online. The online search included ERIC, Google Scholar, JSTOR, B-on, Education Resources Information Center, Portuguese Open Scientific Repository, DiVA at Borås University (Sweden), Sussex Research Online, Bristol University Repository, Coimbra University Repository, Porto University Repository, ISCTE-IUL Repository, Minho University Repository, Algarve University Repository, Lisbon University Repository, Beira Interior University Repository, Guinea-Bissau Docs, UNESCO – International Institute of Educational Planning, National Institute of Studies and Research (Guinea-Bissau), British Library for Development Studies, Guinea-Bissau United Nations Centre of Information and Documentation, ilissafrika – Internet Library for Sub-Saharan Africa, Web of Science, Web of Knowledge, Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations Union Catalog, Open Access Theses and Dissertations; Repositório TEL, Memórias de África e do Oriente,

³ For an in depth discussion about the language issue in the country see, for example, Benson (2010).

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