Chapter 2
On School Quality and Attainment

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Summary

This paper looks at the research on attempts to improve the quality of schools in poor countries, which suggests four basic lessons for refugee education. First, educational quality is understood in different ways, reflecting the values and priorities of stakeholders. It is thus essential to clarify the important meaning(s) of quality to the relevant stakeholders. Second, improvements in educational quality do not necessarily require large investments of resources. Instead, many of these elements depend on the organization and management of inputs, and the participation of critical actors such as parents, teachers and principals, and so forth.

Third, school quality can be understood in several ways, including four interacting sets of factors such as the characteristics of the child, supporting inputs, enabling conditions, and the teaching-learning process. It also includes improvements in the capacities of learners, the supportiveness of learning environments, the appropriateness of content, the effectiveness of learning processes and the achievement of outcomes. Fourth, school improvement strategies are most effective when developed on site and in collaboration with stakeholders and implementers. To improve quality, the role of central authorities is less one of providing quality than of fostering environments that support site-based improvement. Innovations are less effectively "replicated" than promoted. Acting in these ways, however, requires different modes of operation than are common in many relief and development agencies.

Introduction

Most refugee camps and settlements of any duration provide access to some form of formal primary schooling.[1] However, the quality of such programmes varies widely, with great differences in the quality of inputs provided and the attainment of children, the extent of learning that takes place. While varying contexts necessitate differing approaches to education, refugee education lacks an adequate knowledge base that would inform programme planners on promising approaches to meeting refugee children's educational needs. Programmes vary greatly in goals as well as in their success in reaching those goals. There is little sharing of experience on which to build such a knowledge base.

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1   This paper focuses on quality in the context of formal education, that is, schools. This is not intended to ignore or downplay the importance of non-formal or informal education or that of secondary and higher education. Instead, the paper highlights the critical importance of effective basic education programs.

At the same time, outside refugee education, efforts are underway in many contexts to improve quality and increase attainment. These efforts have led to identification of a number of factors, many under the control of school systems that can be changed to foster greater achievement. Given the priorities UNHCR places on both school quality and attainment (UNHCR, 1999), this research aims to provide policy makers and programme planners with the beginnings of such a knowledge base. This initial section outlines what is known about school quality and attainment in poor countries.

Multiple meanings of educational quality

Though often used in discourses about education, quality is a complex term, with multiple meanings reflecting the values and interpretations of different stakeholders.

Educational quality has received a great deal of attention in recent years, as educators and other stakeholders have recognized the need for improved quality in the wake of the tremendous growth of educational enrolments throughout the world in the 1950s-70s. Almost universally, there is agreement that quality needs to be improved: Government plans, international agency documents, officials regularly call attention to the need for improved quality, in poor and wealthy countries alike. Yet there appears to be little shared definition of what improved quality might concretely mean.

The research literature has identified seven common usages of quality: quality as reputation, quality as resources and inputs, quality as process, quality as content, quality as outputs and outcomes, quality as 'value-added' (Adams, 1997: 2-5), and quality as selectivity.

- *Quality as reputation* refers to a general consensus, rarely quantified, of high and low quality, most commonly used in reference to particular institutions of higher education that are "known" for their quality, or sometimes their lack thereof. In this sense, quality as reputation is less useful in refugee education.[2]

- *Quality as inputs and resources* is an extremely common usage of quality. In this sense high quality is seen in high levels of provision of resources such as buildings and other facilities, textbooks and instructional materials. Quality as inputs may also refer to the characteristics of pupils, or those of teachers and administrators, to their number or their levels of education and training. While resources are generally recognized as a necessary but insufficient condition for desirable outputs such as student achievement, the tangible, visible, and quantifiable nature of inputs makes this meaning of quality a common proxy for other, less easily measured aspects of education such as process and outcomes. Unfortunately, educational research has failed to identify in any very convincing and conclusive formulation the inputs most essential to desirable outcomes of education. Nor are the causal relationships between inputs, processes, and outcomes definitely specified or well understood. Subsequent discussion here provides an overview of the current state of understanding.

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[2] Though not commonly used in this way, *reputation among parents and community members* is an important dimension of quality in refugee education, where the attitudes of parents and community members toward schools plays an important role in determining the participation of children.

Education for women returnees in Myanmar. Ngar Khu Ya, Maungdaw District. UNHCR/01.1997/A. Hollmann

- *Quality as process* highlights the need to understand *the use of educational inputs*. Perception of this need is relatively new among policy-makers, who have traditionally focused on the inputs and, when possible, the outputs and outcomes of education systems. However, research has found that schools with similar levels of resources often produce quite different results. Infusions of resources often fail to lead to corresponding improvements in outcomes. As a result, attention turned to the processes within schools. Understandably, teachers and professional educators tend to focus on educational processes. Indeed, to those working in education, successful process may be sufficient: A teacher may feel his or her efforts are well-rewarded if students, for example, become more motivated to learn, regardless of the extent of learning that takes place. Unfortunately, much of the literature on educational processes is theoretical, prescriptive and descriptive in nature, with very little evidence of relative effectiveness. Thus, the empirical linkages between educational processes and educational outputs/outcomes are poorly defined. Nonetheless, a general consensus of the elements and processes of good schools can be described, and is summarized in the discussion below. Even so, the lack of knowledge and the complex and inherently subjective nature of good educational process have made conceptualization and measurement difficult.

- *Quality as content* refers to the knowledge, attitudes, and skills *intended* to be transmitted through the school curriculum. Quality as content "reflects the particular bias of a country, community, or institution to some body of knowledge, skills, or information" (Adams, 1997: 6) in such a way that some content is understood as being of higher quality than other.

- *Quality as outputs or outcomes* involves the consequences of education. "Outputs" refer to the short-term consequences of schooling, e.g., students' cognitive achievement, completion rates, certification, individual skills, attitudes, and behaviours, while "outcomes" refer to longer-term, often socially significant, consequences of education, e.g., employment, earnings, health, civic engagement, and the like, as well as social attitudes, behaviors, and skills. The importance of understanding quality in terms of the consequences of education is better understood than the ways of doing so. The difficulty of measuring outputs/outcomes validly and reliably on a large scale has meant that virtually no education systems know empirically whether their schools are achieving their goals and objectives.

- *Quality as valued-added* refers to the extent to which the school/system has improved, often in terms of students, sometimes larger groups or institutions. While related to processes, outputs and outcomes, a value-added focus considers the degree of change rather than the final state or the way in which the change came about.

- *Quality as selectivity*, a final usage of quality not mentioned by Adams, refers to quality as a form of exclusiveness. In this view, the more exclusive, selective, or competitive a school or school system, i.e., the fewer who get or stay in, the higher the quality.

This discussion, summarized in Table 1, highlights the multiple meanings of quality, from which follow several propositions important to a discussion of quality and attainment in refugee education. Because of the several meanings of quality in use, agreement on the need to improve or address quality does not necessarily mean agreement on what improved quality might mean. Similarly, because of the multiple meanings, there is not a single way to improve quality; specification of strategies to improve quality depends on the particular meaning of quality. As a result, quality improvements from one perspective may not mean quality improvements to those holding a different view of quality. Moreover, an important step in improving quality is the negotiation of the meaning and priorities of quality, a process that necessarily involves the often conflicting goals, objectives and interests of important stakeholders.

Different meanings of quality do not necessarily correspond. While a minimum of inputs is certainly necessary for effective education, a high level of inputs – one definition of quality – does not necessarily mean higher quality measured in terms of outcomes or outputs, both of which require the *effective use* of inputs. Thus, increasing material resources alone may do little to improve quality. Financial cost may not be the primary constraint. Indeed, many quality improvements are not costly in financial terms. At the same time, improvements in quality may involve rather organizational or management costs that are not easily captured in budgetary terms.

A final point, elaborated in subsequent discussion, is that unless quality is judged solely in terms of inputs or resources, the quality improvement process is likely to be a complex and murky one, involving poorly-understood variables and relationships. Policy-makers typically work at the level of policy and resource provision. To the extent that quality requires more than the (relatively) simple provision of additional resources, educational leaders must shift their focus to the school and classroom. Research suggests that system-wide improvements in quality can rarely if ever be dictated from outside or above. Instead, strategies must be developed for engaging teachers, and often communities/parents, in the processes of improving quality. Little is known conclusively about these processes. However, a number of instructive models have been developed for improving the quality of schools in poor countries; several of them will be outlined here.

Table 1: Meanings of School Quality

MEANING OF "QUALITY"	MEASUREMENT & CONCEPTUALIZATION
Reputation	• Measured informally, socially • Difficult to quantify, despite general agreement
Inputs	• Measures include: number of teachers; education levels of teachers; class size; number and class of school buildings; background characteristics of students; numbers of textbooks, instructional materials; extent of laboratories, libraries and other facilities • Easy to conceptualize and quantify
Process	• Measures include: interactions of students and teachers; teaching and learning processes; 'Quality of life' of the program, school, or system • Difficult to conceptualize and quantify
Content	• Measures include: skills, attitudes, behaviors, and values to be transmitted through the intended curriculum • Easy to conceptualize and quantify formally espoused values; difficult to identify implicit values
Outputs	• Measures typically include: cognitive achievement; completion ratios; entrance ratios to next/higher level of education; acquisition of desired skills, attitudes, behaviors, values • Easy to conceptualize, more difficult to measure
Outcomes	• Typical measures include: income; employment; health; civic engagement; social cohesion; social levels of desirable attitudes, values, skills and behaviors • Some concepts easy to conceptualize, while others are more difficult, all are difficult to measure
Value-Added	• Measures extent of improvement • Relatively easy to conceptualize, depending on specifics, change is difficult to measure and requires baseline
Selectivity	• Measures include: percentages of children excluded, or failed • Easy to conceptualize, easy to measure

Source: Adams, 1997

UNICEF highlights a similar set of issues in a recent paper on educational quality in which it defines quality in terms of five dimensions:

- "Learners who are healthy, well-nourished, and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by families and communities;

- Environments that are safe, protective, and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities;

- Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy, and skills for life, knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention, and peace;

- Processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities;

- Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society" (UNICEF, 2000: 1).

This five-fold formulation of learners, environments, content, processes, and outcomes well captures current thinking on the essential components of educational quality.

Factors associated with achievement

Researchers have focused on cognitive achievement, on the rationale that whatever else schools are intended to do, a basic function is to induce students to learn the content of the curriculum. Thus, a substantial body of research in high and low-income countries has examined factors associated with student's cognitive achievement.[3] This research fits well with this research's concern with attainment. While different schools of thought and methodologies have grown out of this research, a useful synthetic framework for understanding this research in the context of low income countries has been developed by Ward Heneveld, Helen Craig, and associates at The World Bank, a representation of which is shown in Figure 1. This model proposes four groups of factors affecting school quality, as measured by student outcomes:

- Individual (child) characteristics

- Supporting inputs

- Enabling conditions

- Teaching and learning processes

Individual (child) characteristics are what individual students bring with them to school. Though not under the school's control, they affect the child's work at school. School factors may interact with individual characteristics in a positive way to compensate for deficiencies the student brings to school or to enhance the child's capacities, or more negatively to further disadvantage the disadvantaged.

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3   The research bases dealing with school effectiveness and school quality are quite large. One study of school quality and girls' education, for example, examined over 300 articles, reports, and books. This literature represents a broad range of research methodologies and strategies for understanding school quality and as well as strategies for bringing it about. A number of the primary references are listed in the bibliography.

Supporting inputs are those community or system-level factors determined outside the school yet which affect the work of the school. They include community support, policies, and material inputs.

Enabling conditions are characteristics of the school that facilitate effective teaching and learning. Enabling conditions include effective management and organization, including leadership, the teaching force, organization of instruction, curriculum, and time spent in school; as well as the climate of the school, the extent to which the school has created an atmosphere that fosters and values academic achievement.

Teaching and learning processes include classroom level factors that directly affect student learning, including learning time, teaching strategies, and student assessment.

This section attempts to summarize this body research on school quality and school effectiveness, drawing heavily on the work of Craig, but incorporating others' research as well. The research has led to greater understanding of the characteristics of effective schools. The resultant list of characteristics is better understood descriptively than prescriptively. The characteristics of effective schools might usefully serve as an information collection tool, to understand schools along a number of important dimensions rather than to prescribe what a good school should be.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework: A Model of School Quality
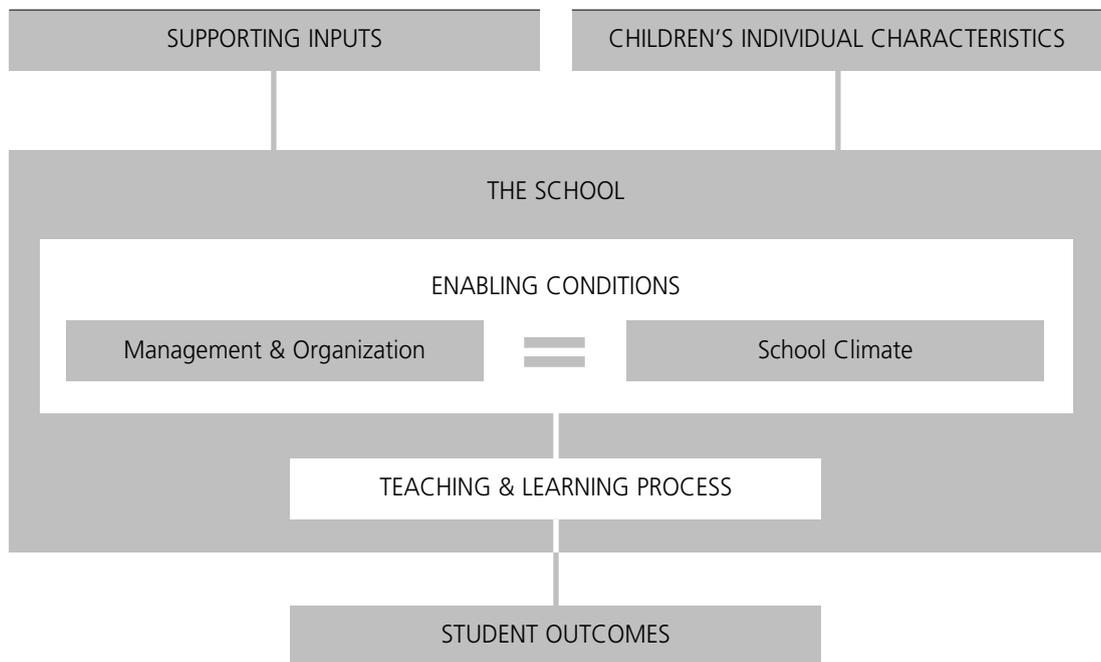
Children's individual characteristics

Perhaps obvious is the claim that children come to school with personal characteristics and individual histories that affect their persistence and attainment. In the general population, these characteristics include the child's health and nutritional status, gender, age, parents' or caregivers' attitudes, and experience with school, including early childhood development or pre-school programmes. In the case of refugee children, relevant factors are also likely to include any trauma the child has experienced as well as the nature and relative well-being or health of her or his "family." See Table 2.

Together, these characteristics affect the child's readiness to learn, which interacts, in turn, with school quality. A child with a high degree of readiness is better able to take advantage of high-quality learning resources, or to compensate for their lack. A child with low readiness is less able to capitalize on learning opportunities, and more vulnerable to deficient learning environments. However obvious these factors are, schools often do little to adapt their programmes to fit the characteristics of the child, especially children on the margin.

Refugee girls from Mali. M'Berra Camp School, Mauritania. UNHCR/11.1996/G. Matoso

Table 2: Individual Characteristics and Children's Individual Characteristics

FACTORS FROM RESEARCH	IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL QUALITY & ATTAINMENT
Health and nutritional status – Research has documented a number of ways in which children's health and nutritional status affects their ability to attend school, concentrate, and learn. Children's attendance and persistence are related to their nutrition and health.	A number of health and nutritional problems can be remedied through low-cost community and school-based interventions, with consequent improvements in attendance, enrolment, persistence, learning, and overall attainment.
Gender – Virtually everywhere, girls are less likely to enroll and persist in school; often less likely to do well academically, especially in some fields such as science and mathematics; and less likely to pursue highly-skilled professional academic tracks.	Many aspects of school quality differ for girls and for boys. Almost all aspects of school quality have gender implications (Modi, Williams, and Winter, 1998).
Age – Under-age children may not be socially or develop-mentally ready for school. Over-age children may experience social difficulties unless accommodations are made. Family/community expectations for school children may change with adolescence. Similarly, children's attitudes toward school may shift with adolescence, as social and family expectations change, and income-generation and household responsibilities increase.	Techniques can be introduced through training, teachers' guides, pamphlets, etc. for working with under, or over-age children, or heterogeneous, multi-grade classes. Schools can vary school schedules to accommodate children's other responsibilities. Curriculum can include subjects of greater relevance.
Parental attitudes – Parent/caregiver expectations, positive or negative, toward school and the child's capacity, have a great impact on the child's enrolment, persistence, and attainment. The more positive the parent's attitudes toward education, the school, and the child's capacity, the more the child is likely to be able to take advantage of learning opportunities.	Steps can be taken to foster parental and community involvement in schools if needed. Awareness campaigns can be developed to work toward greater parental support.
Prior schooling, including early childhood/pre-school programmes – Prior educational experience will shape the child's response to schooling. High quality early childhood education is associated with greater academic success. The more positive the child's experience with school, the greater the child's readiness. Less academic educational activities such as organized recreation and extra-curricular activities are also likely to enhance the educational program.	Programmes may need to be adapted for work with children lacking prior education or positive educational experiences. Educational programmes need not be limited to academic work. In the refugee context, recreation and other activities may be essential.
Trauma – Children who have experienced trauma likely need services and support in addition to the standard academic offerings.	Additional programmes may need to be developed to provide support to children suffering from trauma or with weak family support.
Nature and "health" of family – Children with separated or traumatized families may also need additional support and services to supplement academic programs at school.	

Source: Craig, 1995

Supporting inputs

Supporting inputs refers to community or system-level factors that, while not under the control of the school, provide the school with essential support and, in a sense, the raw materials of education. Parents and communities provide the children, of course, and often, in emergency contexts, the schools as well (Sommers, 1999). In addition, parental and community attitudes and expectations promote or impede the work of the school (Modi, Williams & Winter, 1998: 24). Parents and communities may also provide the school with material inputs in cash or in kind and perhaps expertise in particular areas. The education system supports schools when it enacts appropriate educational policies, provides appropriate instructional and technical support, and supplies schools with sufficient and appropriate material inputs. Table 3 summarizes these inputs.

Child readiness and school inputs. To the extent that children's readiness for school is low, as described earlier, schools may need to compensate the standard offerings. Malnourished or hungry children, for example, need shorter lessons with more physical activities because of their shorter attention spans (Levinger, 1996: 45). Schools, in turn, may need assistance from the larger system to successfully adapt their programmes to meet the needs of such children.

Policy questions. In addition, a series of policy issues not highlighted by the school quality and effectiveness research but relevant to refugee contexts includes decisions about:

- **Language of instruction** – Whose language(s) should be used for instruction and for what grades?

- **Curriculum** – What curriculum should be used (that of the host country, that of the country of origin, or another curriculum)?

- **Purpose of education vis a vis refugee status** – Is education intended to integrate children into the economic and social life of the host country, or to prepare children for life in the country of origin?

- **Teacher qualifications** – What credentials should be required of teachers?

- **Credentials/articulation with existing system** – What credentials should graduates of different levels of refugee education receive, and how can these credentials be articulated with recognized credentials outside the refugee education system?

- **Second chances** – Do the school and system provide appropriate opportunities for children (and adults) to pursue schooling if they have missed out on opportunities at an earlier point?

Table 3: Supporting Inputs for School Effectiveness and Quality

CONCLUSIONS FROM RESEARCH	NAME OF INDICATOR
Parent and community support is effective when: • Children arrive at school healthy, ready to learn • Parents and community provide schools with financial, in-kind, and/or psychic support, as able • School staff and parents communicate regularly • Parents and community members assist with instruction, as they are able • The community has a meaningful role in school governance	 • Health and learning readiness • Community support for school • School-parent communication • Parental assistance in instruction • Community role in school governance
Schools are effectively supported by the school system when: • The system communicates expectations clearly; expectations include high academic performance • Schools are delegated with the authority and responsibility to improve themselves • The system provides schools with the technical and instructional support needed to achieve their objectives. Assistance is not limited to administrative matters and enforcement of rules • The system monitors and evaluates schools' academic performance, school improvement efforts • The system helps schools adapt their programmes according to the needs/readiness of their children	 • Clear academic expectations • Delegated responsibility and authority • Instructional support • Monitoring and evaluation • Adapting schools to children's readiness
The system provides schools with adequate material support when: • Schools have sufficient numbers of relevant textbooks and other reading material in an appropriate language for children to use • Teachers have guides for each subject that outline content and methods of instruction along with diagnostic and evaluatory material • Students have sufficient paper and writing implements to practice what is taught • The school has enough classrooms to hold all students in reasonably sized classes • Classrooms have blackboards and chalk, desks for all children, and appropriate visual aids • Textbooks, instructional materials, and classrooms are appropriate to the readiness of children to learn	 • Textbooks • Teachers' guides • Paper and writing implements • Classrooms • Classroom equipment • Appropriateness of instructional inputs

Source: Craig, 1995

Enabling conditions

Research into successful schools found that the effects of inputs on teaching and learning are mediated by the leadership of the school head, the management and organization of the school and the school climate. When favorable, these "enabling conditions" provide a context in which inputs lead to effective teaching and learning. When unfavorable, these conditions reduce the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Particularly important is the role of the school head in providing strong leadership and good school management. A good principal serves as a role model and guide, providing instructional leadership, setting a climate of high expectations, and mobilizing resources for the whole school (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991: 43-44). In terms of quality, research has found the *instructional* leadership role especially critical.

Research has identified eight enabling conditions for high quality schools, discussed in more detail in Table 4:

- Effective school leadership
- Capable teaching force
- Autonomy in school decision-making
- Order and discipline
- Positive teacher attitudes
- An organized curriculum
- Incentives for academic success
- Maximized learning time in school

U.S. nun teaching Spanish to Guatemalan refugees. Keste Camp, Campeche, Mexico. UNHCR/06.1990/H.J. Davies

Table 4: Enabling Conditions for School Effectiveness and Quality

CONCLUSIONS FROM RESEARCH	NAME OF INDICATOR
School leadership is effective when the school head: • Works to ensure adequate resources are available to support teachers, provide learning materials, maintain an adequate learning facility • Sets high academic standards for teachers and students • Is visible and accessible; communicates regularly, effectively with parents, community, teachers	• Adequate resources • High instructional standards • Accessibility & communication
Teachers are capable when they: • Have mastered the material they teach • Can use the language of instruction • Have several years of teaching experience • Have worked together for several years	• Knowledge • Language of instruction • Teaching experience • Stability
Effective schools have enabling autonomy when they can: • Determine how school time and resources can best be used to improve academic performance • Seek resources from constituencies as needed	• Autonomy regarding time and resource use • Autonomy in external resources
Schools are effectively ordered and disciplined when they are: • Perceived as safe by students, teachers, parents • Well-organized (student and teacher attendance is high; classes begin on time, routines are smooth and efficient, noise levels are appropriate, etc.) • Disciplined (student discipline is appropriate, fair)	• Safety • Order • Discipline
Teachers have positive attitudes that enable high performance when they: • Have confidence in their teaching abilities • Are committed to teaching and to students • Cooperate with each other and school	• Confidence • Commitment • Cooperation
Curricula are effectively well-organized when: • Basic skills are emphasized (rather than ideal but unrealistic breadth of curriculum) • Learning objectives are sequenced, integrated across grade levels, and matched to teaching strategies, available materials, and students' developmentally-appropriate needs • Organized in a way that permits teachers to adapt materials to students' needs and to produce local teaching materials and aids	• Emphasis on basic skills • Instructional design • Locally adaptable
Effective schools reward academic performance (symbolically, ceremonially, publicly)	• Academic recognition
Schools are effective to the extent students spend time in school (days of year, hours in day)	• High time in school

Source: Craig, 1995

Teaching and learning processes

With teaching and learning at the core of education, quality improvements involve changes in the classroom interactions between teachers and pupils. Unlike supply of inputs and policy change, both of which can largely be managed from a central office, changes to the teaching and learning process require that teachers act differently, in ways that are poorly understood and difficult to bring about on a large scale, even in resource-rich countries such as the United States (Elmore, 1996: 2-3). See Table 5.

Nonetheless, some researchers feel that changing teaching practices may be the most promising quality intervention in poor countries. Research consistently finds that whole-class, teacher-centered instruction, lectures (frontal instruction), and rote memorization of abstract material are less effective in terms in fostering student learning than more participatory and varied teaching strategies. Effective teaching requires that students participate actively, and be allowed to practice and apply their lessons to their own experience (Tatto, 1999: 7-8). Teachers need to be able to modify their presentations based on

Refugee and returnee children and their teacher in a 'classroom'. Madhu, Sri Lanka. UNHCR/07.1999/M. Kobayashi

student feedback, and use alternate instructional methods such as individual or small group instruction, cooperative learning, or group problem solving. Teachers need to be able to recognize students' differential learning needs and to match their instructional techniques accordingly.

Most studies agree that time on task or time teaching is an important condition for learning (Fuller, 1986: 86). In many schools, a great deal of classroom time is spent on discipline, waiting between activities, idle time or administrative matters. Another characteristic of high quality schools is the assigning and correcting of homework.

The appropriate use of assessment is an essential element of effective teaching and learning. It is useful to distinguish four types of assessment (Capper, 1996: 13-14): Regular classroom assessment provides the way to see whether students are acquiring and teachers teaching the desired curriculum. This kind of continuous feedback is essential to teachers and their supervisors working to improve instructional quality. Commonly, however, classroom assessment is used simply to grade students and not to improve instruction. Class examinations represent a second type of classroom-based assessment. Typically given at the end of a school term, class examinations assess the extent to which students have learned certain material. Such examinations tend to be used to grade students rather than to inform or change teaching practice. In many cases, the remaining two types of assessment are combined – standardized examinations given to students at different points in the school career, and selection examinations used to select students for higher levels of education. Selection examinations, because they hold the key to higher levels of education, are particularly likely to "drive" the curriculum and determine de facto teaching practice in the classroom.

A final characteristic of effective teaching and learning is the inclusiveness of teacher interactions with students. Research has documented systematic gender bias, for example in a number of countries, low and high income (Modi, Winter, & Williams, 1998). In some contexts, ethnic or linguistic groups may be systematically ignored or devalued in the classroom.

Table 5: Teaching and Learning Processes for School Effectiveness and Quality

CONCLUSIONS FROM RESEARCH	NAME OF INDICATOR
Teaching and learning is effective to the extent that: • Teachers use varied teaching techniques • Students are actively engaged in learning activities • Instructional time is maximized • Homework is assigned frequently, and prompt feedback provided	• Varied instructional techniques • Student engagement • High learning time • Homework
Student assessment is effective to the extent it: • Is regular and integrated into classroom, school, system • Has as its primary purpose provision of diagnostic feedback to students, teachers, school leaders • Is fed back to students continuously	• Regular assessment • Diagnostic assessment • Continuous feedback

Source: Craig, 1995

Student outputs

In addition to the preceding measures of inputs and process, school quality is demonstrated by high levels of participation and achievement. See Table 6.

Table 6: Participation and Achievement

CONCLUSIONS FROM RESEARCH	NAME OF INDICATOR
Effective schools have high participation when: • Attendance is high throughout the year for all groups of students • The numbers of repeaters and dropouts are low • The numbers of students continuing education is high • High proportions of children complete schooling	• Attendance • Promotion • Transition rate • Completion
High quality schools have high achievement in: • Reading and writing • Mathematics • Core subjects • Other valued skills (e.g., problem-solving skills)	• Literacy • Numeracy • Subject matter knowledge • For example, score on problem-solving test

Source: Craig, 1995

Quality in the context of refugee education

Though the primary purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of components and approaches to school quality, it is useful to highlight at least four ways in which school quality can be expected to vary in contexts of refugee education:

- In refugee contexts, learning readiness is likely to have been compromised by the traumas of refugee life. Similarly, families and communities may be less able to provide support to their children. Psycho-social interventions are likely necessary for students to be able to take part in academic activities.

- Teachers are also affected by the chaos and turmoil of refugee life, and may need psycho-social work in addition to more conventional pedagogical training.

- The provision of protected and safe learning environments is likely to assume greater importance in refugee contexts.

- Lacking the structures, resources, and social-economic networks of permanent communities, refugee children are likely to be in greater need of recreational opportunities as well as explicit instruction in skills that fall outside the narrower mandates of formal schooling. Such skills include income generation, peace education and conflict resolution, HIV/AIDS prevention, and the like.

Toward an approach to improving school quality

A description of the characteristics of high quality schools, of course, is not the same thing as a strategy for how to move from low to higher quality. Unfortunately, quality improvement strategies are much less well documented than the features of high quality schools, especially in poor country contexts, where resources are more tightly constrained and governance more centralized than in the U.S. or U.K., from which much of the literature from industrialized nations derives.

This review has suggested that the "quality" of inputs, while a common way of understanding school quality, is less useful than considering the *use* of inputs as seen in terms of desirable outputs and outcomes. The review has highlighted the multiple ways in which school quality is understood, hence the need for decisions about the type of quality to be enhanced. Finally, I have asserted, on the basis of considerable research that space does not permit me to discuss here, that quality improvements – because they reach into the classroom and involve changes in teacher practice – are more difficult to manage externally than changes that can be dictated from above.

It would be possible to derive a list of essential elements of quality. Such lists have been developed by researchers on school quality. Craig, for example, lists the following as likely to have the "greatest bearing on the quality of schooling" in the Pacific:

> … the availability of books and other learning materials; Initial instruction in the mother tongue; capability of the teaching force; the autonomy, flexibility and accountability of educational management; instructional time available and use of that time; and the curriculum (the development of general education rather than vocational programs. (Craig, 1995: 5)

Outdoor classes for returnee children. Tajikabad, Shaartuz District, Tajikistan. UNHCR/05.1995/A. Hollmann

She cautions that quality improvements must be considered as a package because the factors are not independent of each other. Thus, for example, teacher training is unlikely to improve quality if appropriate textbooks and equipment are not available.

Lockheed and Vespoor, based on extensive review of project documents and empirical research, place the dimensions of school quality into the five categories of "promising avenues" and "blind alleys." See Table 7.

Table 7: Lockheed & Verspoor's View of Strategies to Improve Student Achievement

PROMISING AVENUES	BLIND ALLEYS
Curriculum: • Improving the implemented curriculum	• Adjusting the intended curriculum
Learning Materials: • Good textbooks and teacher guides	• Computers in the classroom
Teaching Quality: • In-service training • Interactive radio instruction (with pupils) • Programmed materials	• Lengthening pre-service pedagogical training
Teaching Time: • Setting and maintaining standards for instructional time: 25 hours of instruction per week for core subjects	• Lowering class size
Teachability: • Preschools (targeted at disadvantaged) • Nutritional interventions – school snacks/ breakfasts, micronutrients, treat parasites • Vision and auditory screening	• School lunches

Source: Lockheed and Verspoor, 1991

However useful such lists are heuristically, we take Sommers' cautionary notes seriously in thinking of such lists as prescriptions. Sommers cautions against the dangers of external agencies going in to refugee settlements with pre-existing solutions to refugees' educational needs (1999: 26).

Consistent with these recommendations, we suggest a collaborative, inquiry-guided approach to the improvement of school quality and attainment, building on what has gone on before the intervention. The following steps provide a rough overview of one possible approach:

Step 1. Understand first what's going on educationally in a particular settlement; assess what is wanted by the various stakeholders, especially the parents, children, community members, and teachers as well as NGO and UN advisors perceptions of educational needs and values.

Step 2. Develop a collaborative process for assessing the current and desired states of quality, and for designing plans to achieve the desired state. The process should include:

• Explicit, legitimate ways for all stakeholders to participate meaningfully, especially those who will be affected and those who will implement change;

• Facilitated methods to bring to the surface and come to agreement about the goals of education in the setting, the shared meanings of quality, and evocative descriptions of "high-quality" schools (descriptions that inspire action);

- Structured ways to collect, analyze and share – widely – information about the current status of educational efforts in the community, and the status of school quality and attainment. The approach should seek to include discussion of the relevance to the setting of findings and ideas from external research on school quality;

- Facilitated process for developing a school quality improvement plan, for understanding tradeoffs, developing buy-in, making commitments and decisions and developing plans to monitor implementation and make necessary mid-course corrections.

Step 3. Come to agreement about the goals of the system and objectives of the "reform," the meanings of quality and attainment to be utilized, and a rich description of the current system and the characteristics of a higher-quality system.

Step 4. Develop qualitative and/or quantitative measures of educational quality.

Step 5. Working with implementers, school staff, managers, and parents/community members, create a meaningful, i.e., achievable, list of minimum quality standards for the school, along with responsibilities and timetables for achieving those standards, and indicators of successful implementation. Such a list would likely include standards covering teachers, place, textbooks, teachers' guides, blackboards, paper and writing implements.

Step 6. Develop longer-range strategies for acquiring other necessary inputs, improving school governance, increasing external instructional support, developing school leadership, and promoting the ongoing professional development of teachers.

Examples of school improvement strategies

Two examples of comprehensive strategies to improve school quality may help to illustrate some of these points:

Fundamental Quality Level Indicators in Benin. Begun in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Benin, the Fundamental Quality Level Indicator (FQL) strategy attempted to engage community members, school teachers and directors, district and national Ministry of Education officials, and external funders in a process of defining minimum standards of quality which all schools were expected to achieve. Under the extremely tight resource constraints facing the country, it was felt that school quality improvement would not be feasible if high levels of "quality" inputs were required for all. Instead, the strategy focused on establishing minimum standards realistically achievable by all schools and felt necessary for effective teaching and learning to take place (Horn, 1992). The standards were discussed widely through an extensive series of meetings. Critically important, standards considered processes and outcomes as well as inputs. The existence of standards provided a way for Ministry officials to target schools needing inputs most urgently. The elaboration of standards of process provided ways for schools to improve quality independently of Ministry provision. The existence of standards provided parents and community members with concrete expectations for which schools could be held accountable. The negotiation and definition process provided a mechanism for stakeholders at all levels of the system to discuss educational issues related to quality.

Minimum standards were adapted to local needs and conditions, with certain national bottom line conditions set. Example criteria include:

- **Pedagogic-Related Inputs**
  There should be between 30 to 45 students per classroom and per teacher. At least one complete set of "approved" language and mathematics textbooks is available for the use of every three students (distributed to the pupils).

- **Quality-Related Process**
  Reports prepared by school inspectors or circuit officials indicate that classroom teachers report to school daily, and that head teachers or their deputies visit and observe in every classroom at least once per day. District reports indicate that a district or higher-level inspector observes in the school at least twice a year.

- **Quality-Related Outcomes**
  Over 75% of primary 1 entrants complete primary 6. At least 80% of primary 6 students attain specific performance standards in the areas of literacy and numeracy as measured by a criterion-referenced assessment.
  Source: Horn, 1992

Improving Educational Quality Project. Funded by USAID beginning in 1991, the Improving Educational Quality (IEQ) Project has evolved a strategy for working with school systems to improve educational quality in Ghana, Mali, Guatemala, Uganda, and South Africa. The strategy uses: "real information about what children are (or are not) learning; engages school staff and community members in reflection on how the school and home environments and day-to-day teaching affect children's learning; and uses this information and reflection to informal sectoral policy". (Hartwell, DeStefano, and Schubert, 1998: 2)

The process has three components, beginning with *assessment*. Measures of achievement, observations, and interviews provide data on individuals' and group experiences in schools. Meetings, dialogue, seminars, and conferences are used to *assimilate* the findings from the assessment phase. Data are presented to generate discussions about the quality of the education systems in terms of teacher training, for example, or policy, or textbook preparation, distribution, and use. Third is *action*, where decisions are taken on the basis of information and discussion to improve the system: policies are changed, for example, so that teachers are not held accountable for damage to textbooks (thus making teachers less likely to distribute textbooks to pupils); a community learning center is established to help pupils with school work, and so forth. Evolution of this strategy is guided by three fundamental principles:

1. "Meaningful discussion and action to improve the quality of education must include concrete information about pupils in the classroom, including instructional practice, pupil performance, and the classroom environment. All attempts to reform any aspect of education ultimately must reach the classroom. What happens there must be known and shared with diverse audiences.

2. "The priorities of the nation must guide the process of improving teaching and learning within a country. Findings and information gathered in one environment may not apply to others. Learning occurs in context, and it is the contextual knowledge about a nation's schools that opens the door to understanding how the system can be improved.

3. "Partners are united in the common purpose of improving the quality of education. The traditional technical assistance mode is replaced by a new spirit of collaboration whereby people learn from and teach one another. Host country researchers take the lead in their respective countries. Collaboration crosses hierarchical lines". (Hartwell, DeStefano, and Schubert, 1998: 5). In the context of refugee education, "nation" and "country" might be replaced with "community."

Next steps: assessing school quality – with stakeholders and implementers, on site

As an initial step in understanding issues of school quality in particular contexts, a series of questions could be developed from the material presented in this overview. To be most useful, such questions would best be generated collaboratively by researchers and beneficiaries on site.

To illustrate, questions could be generated from each of the sections above, as for example, the following questions from the "Children's individual characteristics" section:

*   Are children suffering from health and nutritional problems? Can these problems be alleviated? Short-term hunger? Eyesight and hearing screening? Immunizations? Micro-nutrient deficiencies – Vitamin A, D, Iron, Iodine? Helminth infections? Protein-energy malnutrition?

*   Do girls and boys enroll and persist at the same rates throughout school? At what grade level and age are the differences significant?

*   Are there significant numbers of under- or over-age children in school? Are classes relatively homogenous in terms of age? Are adolescents enrolled at the same rates as younger children? Do the rates differ between boys and girls? How? What are the reasons different actors give for differences in participation for children at different ages and of different sexes?

*   Who is not in school? How many out-of-school individuals are of school age? Beyond school age? Male and female?

*   What kind of education do parents and community members want for their children? In general and for particular groups of children? How do parents and community members feel about the education their children are offered?

*   Do a significant number of children suffer from trauma? What is the nature and degree of trauma? How intact are children's families? How "healthy" are those families?

*   Have there been any adaptations to the organization of school, the curriculum, or teacher training in order to accommodate the special needs of refugee children?

*   Has there been an assessment of the needs of refugee children?

Assessment tools such as these, developed collaboratively between educators in the community and educators with international experience, can be used to begin the process of quality improvement.

Conclusion

Research on attempts to improve the quality of schools in developing countries suggests four basic lessons for refugee education:

1. Educational quality is understood in different ways, reflecting the values and priorities of stakeholders. As a result, it is essential to clarify the important meaning(s) of quality to the relevant stakeholders in a particular context. Improvement strategies will vary, depending upon whether stakeholders are interested in improving quality as reputation, as inputs and resources, as process, as content, or as outputs/outcomes.

2. Improvements in educational quality do not necessarily require large investments of resources. A number of the elements of educational quality identified in the preceding discussion do not rely primarily on large outlays of resources. Instead, many of these elements depend on the organization and management of inputs, and the participation of critical actors such as parents, teachers and principals, and so forth. Thus, the primary constraint to quality improvement is not necessarily cost. However, quality improvements are likely to require more organizational capital than simple provision of inputs, and are more difficult to control from centralized authority or from afar.

3. School quality can be understood in several ways. One formulation involves four interacting sets of factors—the characteristics of the child, supporting inputs, enabling conditions, and the teaching-learning process. A school improvement strategy that ignores one or more of these factors risks missing an essential component of the whole. Another formulation sees quality in terms of five factors—the capacities of learners, the supportiveness of learning environments, the appropriateness of content, the effectiveness of learning processes, and the achievement of outcomes. Again, quality improvements must attend to all five dimensions.

4. School improvement strategies are most effective when developed on site and in collaboration with stakeholders and implementers. External assistance may be needed to provide a broader perspective on school quality as well as needed resources. Stakeholder-implementer buy-in and participation, however, are essential for the effort to be grounded in local realities and needs, especially when dealing with non-resource based aspects of quality. Careful attention to collaboration in the process by which problems are identified and solutions planned is essential for quality improvements to be sustained and to develop local capacity for ongoing implementation. To improve quality, the role of central authorities is less one of providing quality than of fostering environments that support site-based improvement. Innovations are less effectively "replicated" than promoted. Acting in these ways, however, requires different modes of operation than are common in many relief and development agencies.

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