EDUCATIONAL QUALITY IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: TEN PROPOSITIONS AND AN APPLICATION TO THE SOUTH PACIFIC

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Abstract – Over the last two decades, research into the role of education in economic development has begun to pay attention to educational quality and its effect on learning outcomes. In this paper recent research on educational quality is reviewed and its application to the island economies of the South Pacific is assessed. While there is considerable variation among the countries, the paper demonstrates the pervasive nature of school quality problems in the region. Those factors which have the greatest bearing on school quality in the region are isolated. These factors are: the quality of teachers; the availability of learning materials; initial instruction in the mother tongue; the quality of educational management; and curriculum reform. The paper concludes by arguing that strategies to improve quality will fail unless they recognise important complementarities between the factors determining quality.

Zusammenfassung – In den letzten zwei Jahrzehnten hat man begonnen, die Forschung über die Rolle des Bildungswesens in der wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung eines Landes auf Bildungsqualität und ihren Einfluß auf die Lernergebnisse auszudehnen. In diesem Artikel werden die neuesten Forschungen über die Qualität der Bildung aufgegriffen und eine mögliche Anwendung für die Inselwirtschaften im Süd pazifik diskutiert. Dieser Artikel weist auf die überall gegenwärtige Problematik der Schulqualität in dieser Region trotz erheblicher Unterschiede zwischen den Ländern hin. Man fand folgende dafür verantwortliche Gründe heraus: Lehrerqualität, Erhaltlichkeit von Lernmaterialien, Erziehung in der Muttersprache, Qualität der Schulleitung und Reform der Curricula. Der Artikel schließt mit dem Argument, daß Strategien zur Verbesserung der Qualität keinen Erfolg haben werden, solange wesentliche Zusammenhänge zwischen den qualitätsbestimmenden Faktoren nicht erkannt werden.

Résumé – Au cours des vingt dernières années, la recherche sur le rôle de l’éducation dans le développement économique a commencé à prêter attention à la qualité de l’éducation et à ses effets sur les rendements de l’apprentissage. Dans le présent article, on procède à l’examen de la recherche entreprise récemment dans ce domaine et à l’évaluation de son application aux économies des îles du Pacifique sud. Tandis qu’on note une variation considérable entre les pays, on démontre la nature diffuse des problèmes relatifs à la qualité des écoles dans cette région. Les facteurs qui ont la plus grande influence sur la qualité de l’école dans la région sont isolés: qualité des enseignants, existence de matériels d’apprentissage, enseignement initial dans la langue maternelle, qualité de la gestion de l’éducation, réforme du curriculum. Cet article conclut en arguant que les stratégies devant améliorer la qualité dans ce domaine échoueront à moins qu’elles reconnaissent les complémentarités importantes entre les facteurs qui déterminent la qualité.

During the past two decades, the major thrust of research into the economic benefits of education has been in the area of measuring returns to additional
years of schooling. The emphasis in both developed and developing countries has been on questions of quantity: the expansion of educational opportunity has had high priority in most countries, and the research task has been seen primarily as that of measuring the returns to such quantitative expansion. From pioneering studies twenty years ago, the literature is now replete with estimates of returns to the quantity of education (Psacharopoulos 1973, 1981, 1985).

Questions of educational quality have until recently been of secondary importance. It is not hard to find reasons for the comparative neglect of quality issues during the 1960s and 1970s. Researchers were naturally preoccupied with exploring the ramifications of the newly-found correlation between earnings and years of schooling; data to study quality issues were lacking or inadequate; and influential studies from the USA seemed to suggest that variations in school quality did not matter much anyway (Coleman et al. 1966; Jencks 1972). During the last ten years, however, this pessimistic outlook has itself been overturned, and has given way to an active interest in quality issues, including the issue of quality of schooling in developing countries. For example, in its early days of lending for education, the World Bank emphasized quantitative targets in secondary and technical education, but now explicitly incorporates quality issues into its appraisals of educational projects (Heyneman and White 1986).

There are several reasons why the pessimism of the early 1970s has given way to an active interest in quality issues in the process of educational development. Firstly, tightened budget constraints have forced governments in many developing countries to reassess spending priorities, and to seek ways of improving educational efficiency by attending to such quality variables as teacher training, textbook provision, and the effective use of school buildings and facilities. Secondly, many governments have become aware that the rapid expansion of enrollments during the 1960s and 1970s was achieved at the expense of educational quality and that the time is right to shift the balance back in the other direction (World Bank 1978). Thirdly, improved social and economic equity is an explicit goal of virtually every LDC government, and it has become clear that providing more equitable access to education to traditionally disadvantaged groups, especially girls, the rural poor, and children from religious or ethnic minorities, is not just a matter of creating school places, but is inextricably linked with the quality of education provided (see, for example, Finn et al. 1979; Chamie 1983; Kelly 1987). Finally, a major reason for the revival of interest in quality is that progress has been made in dealing with problems of data and methodology (Windham 1988). It is acknowledged that the quality dimension of schooling comprises a complex bundle of inputs rather than a single identifiable variable. Nevertheless, in keeping with the human capital tradition of focusing on economic outcomes, a large literature has emerged in which average expenditure per student is taken as a proxy for quality (Johnson and Stafford 1973; Ribich and Murphy 1975; Link and Ratledge 1975; Rizzuto and Wachtel 1980; Behrman and