Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
What is SACMEQ

The *Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality* (SACMEQ) was officially launched in Harare, Zimbabwe, in February 1995. This landmark for the Southern Africa sub-region consolidates a four-year period of capacity-building programmes in educational planning undertaken, thanks to the Funds-in-Trust agreement between UNESCO and the Italian government, as co-operative activities by the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIPE) and Ministries of Education and Culture in Southern Africa.

The main aim of SACMEQ is to provide policy advice to key decision-makers on educational quality issues considered as high priority by their respective ministries of education. In order to meet this objective, the project has been designed to provide opportunities for educational planners in the Southern Africa sub-region to work together, learn from each other, and share experience and expertise.

More than 50 educational planners from ministries of education in the sub-region have already participated in training programmes on designing and implementing research projects to monitor the quality of basic education systems. Eight of these ministries, (Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Tanzania (Mainland and Zanzibar), Zambia, and Zimbabwe) are the founding members of SACMEQ.

In each country, a *National Research Co-ordinator* (NRC) is responsible for implementing SACMEQ’s projects. Each NRC is assisted by a national *Policy Steering Committee* and a *Technical Committee*.

- **The Policy Steering Committee** decides what projects SACMEQ should undertake, monitors quality standards, timelines and project budgets. It is composed of senior members of the Ministry and is chaired by the Director General or Permanent Secretary of Education, who also sits on the SACMEQ Governing Board.

- **The Technical Committee** is responsible for helping with the technical and logistic details of studies and is chaired by the NRC.

SACMEQ is a real *policy research* project which goes beyond a simple *monitoring* exercise. It has three main ingredients that optimize its contributions to educational planning in the Southern Africa sub-region. Firstly, SACMEQ focuses on addressing policy issues which have been earmarked as high priority by key decision-makers. Secondly, SACMEQ is a co-operative initiative which operates through a strong network of ministries of education and culture. Thirdly, SACMEQ’s programme of educational policy research is defined by consensus among the participating ministries and the role of external agencies is limited to contributing when formally invited.
POLICY EVALUATION PHASE

Programme implementation including formal and/or non-formal evaluation

Policy reform and new agenda for action

Consultation, discussion and debate

Suggested policy options

Specific research questions and design of data tabulation

Data collection and analysis

Interpretation and reporting of research results

General policy concerns of decision-makers

POLICY DEVELOPMENT PHASE

POLICY RESEARCH PHASE
From Zimbabwe to SACMEQ

In 1991, the IIEP and the Ministry of Education and Culture in Zimbabwe conducted a research study on *Indicators of the Quality of Education*. Through this study, the members of the Policy and Planning Unit received intensive training on the preparation of questionnaires and tests, the training of field staff, sampling, project management methods, computer-based data preparation, and the basic steps of computer-based file building and data management. The information contained in the report prepared by the participants in this study provided important guidelines for ministerial decisions on the provision of classroom supplies, teachers job satisfaction, reading performance of pupils, etc. The Zimbabwe study was considered as a *model* to be emulated in other countries of the region.

Based on this experience, a course on *Data Building and Data Management* was organized in Harare, in September 1992, in order to provide educational planners in the region with the technical skills and research materials required to undertake a national survey of primary schools.

For selected planners in the sub-region, further *hands-on* training on all aspects of computer-based data processing was provided during a seminar on *Data Processing for Policy Report Preparation* held in Harare in September 1993. It was during this seminar that participants prepared a proposal for countries in the sub-region to launch a joint research project to monitor progress on the achievement of the educational quality goals defined by the Jomtien Conference for *Education for All* in 1990.

It was decided that the proposal for a sub-regional education project should be further developed into a detailed *Project Plan Document* for the SACMEQ’s *Initial Project* before proceeding further. This was achieved during two meetings:

- **A Working Group Meeting** (Paris, July 1994) at which a first draft of the *Project Plan Document* was prepared by the six authors of the original proposal and other resource persons.

- **An Editorial Group Meeting** (Harare, September 1994) at which the instruments and manuals (i.e. pupil reading test, pupil, teacher and schoolhead questionnaires, pilot study manuals for national research co-ordinators and the data collectors) were finalized by NRCs.

The second part of the Editorial Group Meeting was dedicated to an intensive course on *Techniques for Data Entry, Data Cleaning, and Pre-processing of Educational Planning Information*, using the information collected during the SACMEQ trial data collection exercise and using a special *Data Entry Manager* (DEM) software. Since 1993, IIEP has been involved in developing this software in order to devise a user-friendly computer software for educational planners to improve their educational survey research techniques. This work involved the creation of a new user interface which works with the original DEM software, and the preparation of a *User Guide*. 
The intensive course not only provided training on the use of the software but also an opportunity to validate the software.

After having completed the training needed to pursue a national policy research project and finalized the instruments and manuals, the NRCs in the eight countries concerned embarked on a Pilot Study from October to December 1994. The meeting at which it was launched (Harare, February 1995) was in fact a working meeting, at which all technical arrangements for implementing SACMEQ’s Initial Project were finalized.

**SACMEQ Initial Project**

The Initial Project involved the activities described below.

**Identifying policy issues and research questions**

The educational policy issues at the country level were identified by interviewing senior decision-makers in the sub-region’s Ministries of Education and Culture in order to establish their priorities concerning the quality of education. A short list of five questions was then generated, in which those rated as high priority in most countries had been selected. All five questions focused on primary schooling because this part of the education system was seen as crucial to ensuring that all children receive a high quality basic education. Reading was selected as the measure of educational outcomes because of its acknowledged importance as the key to effective learning. The final list of questions to be addressed in each country report includes the following:

- What are the baseline data for selected inputs to primary schools?
- How do the conditions of primary schooling compare with the Ministry of Education and Culture’s own benchmark standards?
- Have educational inputs to schools been allocated in an equitable fashion?
- What is the level of reading achievement of pupils at the upper primary school level for the three main domains of reading literacy (narrative, expository, and documents)?
- Which educational inputs to primary schools have most impact on pupil reading achievement at the upper primary level?

At the sub-regional level, another set of five policy questions were generated. These address issues that have recently been the subject of much debate in educational policy and planning offices of the Southern Africa sub-region. The questions are not applicable to any specific country and they can only be addressed by analyzing cross-national data.
- Are the sources of job satisfaction for primary school teachers the same or different across countries?
- What, if any, are the differences in the reading achievement of boys and girls in primary schools and do these differences vary across countries?
- Are some primary schools in some countries better at improving the educational performance of children who live in disadvantaged communities?
- What are the characteristics of an effective primary school and do these characteristics differ across countries?
- Can a sub-regional list of the essential schooling conditions be drawn up for countries to use as a target as they develop their primary education systems?

For each general policy issue, a set of specific research questions was prepared, which provide clear guidance concerning the indicators that would be required and the way in which these indicators should be tabulated.

**Constructing the instruments and manuals**

For each specific research question, indicators were identified and corresponding data collection instruments were prepared.

*Questionnaires* were designed for pupils, teachers and schoolheads. The pupil questionnaire contains questions about pupils' home background and school life, while the teacher questionnaire asks about classrooms, teaching practices, and job/living conditions and the schoolhead questionnaire collects data on teachers, enrolments, school operation, facilities and management.

The *reading test* was based on three sources of information: reading tests used by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) in its literacy study; reading tests developed for the IIEP Zimbabwe Grade 6 study conducted in 1991; and newly-drafted test items contributed by the NRCs of participating countries. The test items were reviewed in the training workshops and put together into a validated 60-item test.

Together with the instruments, four manuals were produced:

- Pilot Study Manual for National Research Co-ordinators;
- Pilot Study Manual for Data Collectors;
- Manual for National Research Co-ordinators
- Manual for Data Collectors
Each manual gives a step-by-step guidance for all actions to be taken by the NRCs and data collectors.

Based on the Pilot Study results and field experiences, the questionnaires, tests and manuals were finalized in March 1995 and master copies sent to the NRCs for reproduction and administration.

**Defining the target population and sample**

The target population is defined as “all pupils at the Grade 6 level in 1995 who are attending registered government or non government schools of the country”. Grade 6 was chosen as the target population because it is the grade level where the basics of reading should have been acquired and all pupils should be able to read with comprehension. Also, for nearly all countries in the sub-region, Grade 6 is the penultimate grade of primary school at which pupils are beginning to prepare themselves for the primary school leaving certificate and for transition to secondary school.

A stratified two-stage sample design was used. Schools were selected at the first stage with probability proportional to the Grade 6 enrolment. Each NRC first prepared the sampling frame data for primary schools in each country. About 150 schools were selected by a special computer software using a random procedure which ensures that data gathered in each country would provide valid information at national and regional levels. Pupils are selected at the second stage within sample schools by drawing a simple random sample of 20 pupils across all Grade 6 classes in the school.

**Managing data collection and data entry**

The main testing is expected to take place in Malawi in June 1995 and in other countries in September/October 1995. In each participating country, NRCs are currently involved in activities such as:

- contacting the selected schools;
- printing the required number of copies of instruments and manuals
- packaging and distributing the instruments and manuals to training centres;
- training data collectors as well as data enterers; and
- setting up the specialized DEM computer software.

**Analyzing the data and preparing the policy reports**

At the country level, the main focus of the research effort in SACMEQ Initial Project is concerned with preparing policy reports for each country. These reports seek to provide clear answers to policy issues that are currently challenging senior education decision-makers in the Southern Africa sub-region. The country reports are drafted and produced by the NCRs.
Three reports are planned for the sub-regional level. The first is a technical report which gives a detailed account of all procedures and research materials used in the project and provide some summary results in association with estimates of their sampling errors. The second report is based on a comparative analysis of the patterns that emerge across countries for the answers to the five country-level policy questions listed above. The third report consists of a set of short research papers on the five sub-regional educational policy questions listed above.

**SACMEQ Research Documents**

Up until March 1995, the main document produced was:


This document specifies all the technical and administrative arrangements required to successfully implement the SACMEQ Initial Project. Also included in this document are:

- Pupil Reading Test
- Pupil Questionnaire
- Teacher Questionnaire
- School Head Questionnaire
- Pilot Manual for National Research Co-ordinators
- Pilot Manual for Data Collectors
- Manual for National Research Co-ordinators
- Manual for Data Collectors

Access to the above instruments and manuals is subject to permission in writing from the IIEP Director and SACMEQ Acting Co-ordinator.

Several reports will be published once the data analysis is completed in each country:

- Technical Report on SACMEQ Initial Project
- Eight country reports with policy suggestions
- Comparative analysis report on country-level policy questions
- Five short research papers on: job satisfaction on primary teachers; gender difference in reading achievement; issue on the disadvantaged community; effective primary schools; and essential schooling conditions in the sub-region
**Related Products**


This is a user interface to the original “Data Entry Manager” (DEM) software. This interface makes the software more user-friendly enabling educational planners to set up structure files and enter and clean data without the aid of professional statisticians.


This publication is a manual which gives tutorial lessons on creation of structure files and entering data using a hypothetical questionnaire.

Access to the above products is subject to permission in writing from IIEP Director.

**Published documents**


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