African-led education research – what do we know about productivity and funding?

Samuel Asare, Education Sub Saharan African (ESSA)
Pauline Essah, ESSA
Pauline Rose, REAL Centre, University of Cambridge UK

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Outline of this presentation

• Overview of the African Education Research Database & its objectives
• Design of this study – bibliometric analysis of publications
• Findings – overview of outputs, links between funding and education publications in the region
• Conclusions
• Online catalogue of education publications by researchers based in 48 countries in sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa)
• Peer-reviewed publications identified through structured searches of academic databases
• 5000+ studies published between 2010-2021

Objectives

• Increase the visibility and impact of education research from sub-Saharan Africa
• Strengthen the use of African research evidence in education policy and practice
• Support the community of education researchers, policymakers and other stakeholders in the region

https://essa-africa.org/AERD
Analysis of funding and education research publications

- Objective: explore links between funding and education research publications in sub-Saharan Africa
- Of 5000+ studies in the AERD for the period of analysis, a sample of 1650 studies:
  - English language
  - 2010-2021
  - Peer-reviewed articles in international journals
- Details for each publication recorded in Excel, e.g.:
  - Abstracts; country, affiliation & gender of authorship; nature of collaborations; journal impact factor; funding, etc.
Overview of outputs

High outputs in recent times

Research is concentrated in fewer countries
Higher education receives ever-increasing focus
The proportion of female authors is declining.
More articles are being published in higher impact journals

![Bar chart showing the increase in publications in higher impact journals over the years 2010-2013, 2014-2018, and 2019-2020. The percentage of publications in higher impact journals in each period is 57%, 56%, and 62%, respectively. The chart also shows the percentage of publications in lower impact journals, which decreases over the years.]
What did we learn about funding?

- Majority of studies are unfunded (84%)
- Of those receiving funding, funding comes from external sources (85%)

Funded studies (257) - 16%

Unfunded studies (1393) - 84%

Internal funding (38) - 15%

External funding (219) - 85%
What are the links between funding and research collaborations?

- Collaboration between African-based & external researcher/s: 136 (53%)
- No collaboration: 95 (37%)
- Collaboration between researchers within country: 18 (7%)
- Collaboration within SSA: 8 (3%)

Funding is concentrated in few countries

Comparative education research publications in the region
A comparatively larger proportion of publications on primary education are funded.
Most funded studies are published in higher impact journals

75% of funded publications are published in higher impact journals, compared to 25% in lower impact journals. The respective percentages for unfunded publications are 48% and 52%.
Funding is NOT being used strategically to include female researchers

- 71% of funded studies
- 29% female
- 68% overall studies
- 32% female
Conclusion and steps to addressing the problem

Conclusion

- Funding for African-led education research needs urgent attention
- Very limited funding for research collaborations within the region
- Target funding towards female researchers (and other disadvantaged groups)
- Mobilise research funding and direct towards priority areas – as defined by the Africa-based researchers themselves
Steps to addressing the problem

ESSA and the REAL Centre have received funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Conrad N. Hilton Foundation to identify research priorities and professional development needs of researchers based in selected African countries, who are focusing on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) and Early Childhood Development (ECD), respectively. Relevant opportunities can then be explored to provide targeted support to these Africa-based researchers.

Please get in touch by contacting:
Dr Pauline Essah: pauline@essa-africa.org or Professor Pauline Rose: pmr43@cam.ac.uk