

Understanding Schooling in Rural Mozambique

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SUMMARY

Our study was aimed at finding out what was happening in primary school classrooms in rural Mozambique.

From a study of 63 schools in Cabo Delgado in rural northern Mozambique it was found that children from linguistic and ethnic minorities were at a disadvantage from the start and that it was hard for them to stay in school.

The study focused on the early school grades. The study demonstrated the need for programs that helped children to learn and bridge the gap between their mother tongue and the national language of instruction, Portuguese.

Mozambique has a population of 20 million people with 69% living in rural areas. Although we found more girls are now entering school than in the past, few children finish primary school.

If we look at the context and challenges to find out what is going wrong, there are a number of issues.

Portuguese is the medium of instruction, even though few children can read, write or understand it. The classrooms are multi-age, with children in some cases who look far older than primary school kids.

There is a high rate of school leavers. Seven enter and one finishes. There are not enough schools and not enough teachers, so often the classes are held in shifts with some children coming in the morning and some in the afternoon. There is a lack of teachers who speak the local language.

We looked at school materials and carried out interviews with teachers and students. We saw what was working and what was not working. We carried out oral, reading and writing tests. The level of reading, writing and letter recognition in grade three was poor. In one test, 51% of grade three children could not read a single letter in Portuguese. In another test, 59% could not read one word on a page in one minute.

Is there something we can say? There are not a lot of differences between children in grade three, though boys tend to do better, but then these are mostly over age.

What we did find that children who do speak multiple languages do better. We want to look into this further.

Why these results? Our findings are not finished yet.

We need to look into teacher recruitment. Most couldn't communicate with the children. There is a lack of print materials. There are cultural differences. The issues around community involvement are a disappointment. There is not a good relationship between the parents and the teachers. In some cases, the parents come and take their children out of class during the class sessions.

Moving forward, we will continue to analyse and work more on a plan of action with the local government.

DISCUSSION

Question: Given that some children find it difficult to come to school early, is it not possible to have a later start, say at 10.00 a.m.?

Answer: Children live at different distances from the school. Often the school is at the end of the village, close to the water point. Often it takes children up to an hour to walk to school. In some cases, parents send their children to an annex school which is closer to their home.

Changing school hours is possible. But there are not enough classrooms and teachers. The times are not working and we need to look at alternatives.

Question: Could you tell us more about the quality of the teachers?

Answer: We analysed this. We looked at what languages they speak. Most speak Portuguese. The teachers tend towards rote learning. Teachers have good rapport with the children. But there is no regularity. The teachers arrive at different times and the students arrive at different times. Lots of issues don't support the teachers. The teachers are from outside and they don't get support.

Question: I don't quite understand why you were not told that the language policy has changed. Since 2002, the government has introduced a policy of using the mother tongue in primary school education.

Answer: Maybe I can continue with Carol afterwards.