A good quality education arises from interaction between three enabling environments: policy, the school, and the home and community

Policies aimed at raising the quality of education for disadvantaged learners in sub-Saharan Africa and other low income contexts need to start by identifying key priorities for a specific national or local context.

A good quality education arises from the interaction between three inter-related enabling environments: policy, the school, and the home and community. Creating enabling environments requires a mix of **inputs** and **processes** that interact to produce desired **outcomes**. What the mix might be for a particular context can only be determined through continuous monitoring and evaluation.

Existing evidence suggests the following quality inputs and processes are particularly significant:

Inputs

- Suitably trained, experienced and motivated teachers
- Headteacher training
- Appropriate textbooks and learning materials
- School infrastructure and equipment
- School feeding, child health and early childhood education

Processes

- A national debate on quality
- National assessment, monitoring and evaluation systems
- Greater accountability and transparency
- A relevant and inclusive curriculum and pedagogy
- An enabling home environment

Origins of framework

There is mounting evidence that, to contribute to development goals, education of an adequate quality has to be available (Hanushek and Woßmann 2007). As budgets are cut, decisions have to be made about priorities for achieving quality. This policy brief presents a framework for thinking about where to prioritise investment.

The framework arises from the work of the EdQual Research Programme Consortium, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), and from a review of related literature.

EdQual RPC and education quality

EdQual's research focuses on how to improve the quality of basic education. Education quality is key to attracting and retaining learners in basic education and ensuring education contributes to other areas of development.
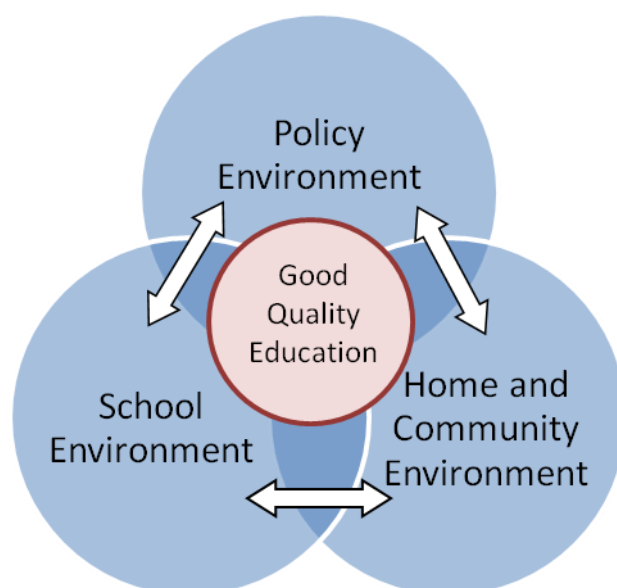
Defining a good quality education

A good quality education is one that enables all learners to realise the capabilities they require to become economically productive, to develop sustainable livelihoods, to contribute to peaceful and democratic societies, and to enhance wellbeing.

The learning outcomes that are required vary according to context, but at the end of the basic education cycle must include threshold levels of literacy and numeracy and life skills, including awareness and prevention of disease.

A good quality education needs to be inclusive, relevant and democratic.

A simple context-led framework for education quality

A good quality education arises from the correct mix of enabling inputs and processes in three inter-related environments.

What is a Good Quality Education?

A GOOD QUALITY EDUCATION …

… enables all learners to realise the capabilities they require to become economically productive, to develop sustainable livelihoods, to contribute to peaceful and democratic societies, and to enhance wellbeing.

The learning outcomes required vary according to context, but must include threshold levels of literacy and numeracy and life skills, including awareness and prevention of disease.

A GOOD QUALITY EDUCATION MUST BE …

Inclusive: All learners have the opportunity to achieve specified learning outcomes.

Relevant: Learning outcomes are meaningful for all learners, valued by their communities, and consistent with national development priorities in a changing global context.

Democratic: Learning outcomes are determined through public debate and ensured through processes of accountability.

Box 1: EdQual's definition of a good quality education

Two perspectives on Education Quality

Two main perspectives dominate thinking on education and development: human capital approaches, which are influenced by neo-liberal economic theories; and human rights based approaches, promoted by UN agencies and many international non-governmental organisations.

Within human capital approaches, a good quality education is associated with cognitive achievement and improvements in scores in standardised tests. Threshold levels of literacy and numeracy are important outcomes in their own right, but also lay the foundation for the development of broad-based cognitive skills in later stages of schooling that are key for economic growth, income distribution and returns to investment in education (Hanushek and Woßmann 2007).

By way of contrast, human rights based approaches emphasise a wider set of outcomes, including not only basic literacy and numeracy, but also life skills, including social attitudes, basic knowledge such as HIV/AIDS awareness, and practical skills.

Combining these approaches, EdQual has developed its own definition based on the Dakar Framework for Action (box 1), which reflects EdQual's focus on disadvantaged learners in difficult delivery contexts.

EdQual's Framework for Implementing Quality

A good quality education arises from interactions between three overlapping environments, namely policy, the school, and the home/ community. Creating enabling environments requires the right mix of **inputs** into each**.**

Accompanying **processes** are key for ensuring that inputs get converted into desired outcomes. Rather like cooking a tasty soup, when planning a good quality education the outcomes depend on the particular mix of ingredients (inputs and processes) and the interaction between environments. The success of the 'recipe' can only be determined by monitoring the quality of education over time.

Creating a good quality education involves paying attention to the interface between each environment and ensuring that enabling inputs and processes have the effect of closing the gaps that sometimes exist between environments.

For example, to overcome the 'implementation gap' between national policy and school level practice it is important to engage with teachers, to ensure teacher education and continuing professional development are consistent with new curricula, and to support schools to monitor quality.

Figure 2: Context-led framework for implementing education quality

Closing the 'expectations gap' between the outcomes of education and what parents and communities expect education to deliver requires paying attention to the relevance of the curriculum, listening to the voices of stakeholders in national debates, and developing accountability and transparency.
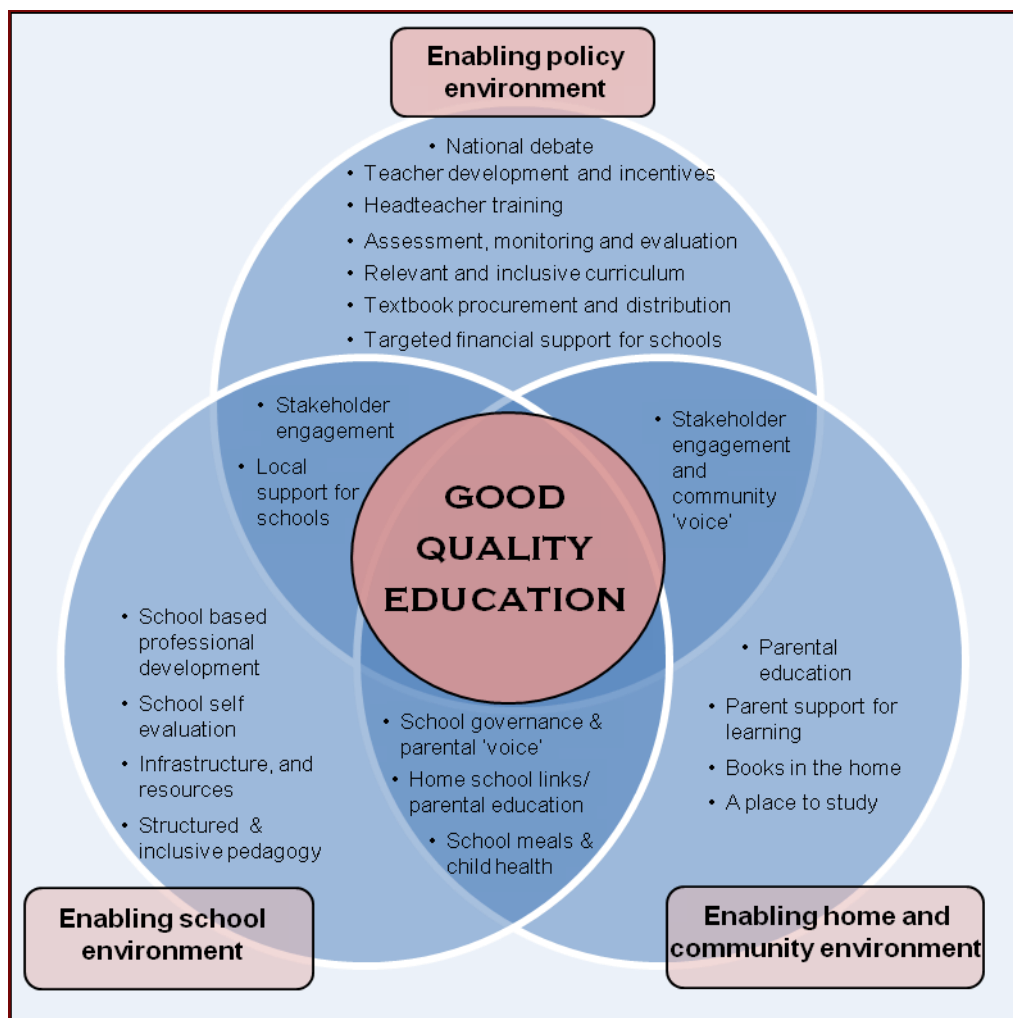
Addressing the 'learning gap' that often exists between learning that takes place in schools and the home/ community environment requires focusing on the health and nutrition of learners and working with parents to create an enabling home environment to support learning.

Identifying Policy Priorities

EdQual and related research, largely gathered in sub-Saharan Africa, suggest some policy priorities towards achieving education quality. This evidence needs to be interpreted and set against careful analysis of local needs and realities. Rather than offering 'magic bullets', it provides starting points for debate and suggestions for ongoing research and evaluation about what works in national contexts.

Quality Inputs

Suitably trained and motivated teachers

Some countries in Africa face a severe shortage of suitably qualified and experienced teachers (UNESCO 2008). Initial teacher education and experience has a significant impact on achievement (Michaelowa 2001). Many African countries also face a crisis in teacher morale related to poor salaries, working conditions, and limited opportunities for professional development (Bennell and Akyeampong 2007; DFID and VSO 2008). Evidence from India suggests that incentives can boost performance. A key challenge is getting qualified and experienced teachers into rural schools.

Headteacher training

EdQual research underlines the importance of school leadership (EdQual Policy Briefs 4, 5 and 6). Effective headteachers focus on:

- mobilising resources and using them efficiently
- developing and motivating staff
- maximising time on task
- encouraging parents to support children's learning
- promoting inclusion and implementing girl-friendly approaches

However, headteachers need training in how to monitor school quality and initiate school improvement.

Appropriate textbooks and learning materials

Textbooks need to be appropriate to learners' language abilities

Textbooks play an important role in raising learner achievement (Barrett et al. 2007). A key challenge is the avoidance of corruption and mismanagement of resources (UNESCO 2008). Textbooks and other learning materials need to be appropriate to the environment and to the cognitive level and language abilities of the learner and accompanied by teacher training in their use (EdQual Policy Brief 2).

Infrastructure and resources

Investing in infrastructure and resources can impact on the achievement of disadvantaged learners. A key challenge is to ensure that funding is sufficient and is efficiently distributed to schools (Osei et al. 2009; Dare et al. 2010). A related issue is to ensure that funding is targeted at disadvantaged learners (EdQual Policy Brief 1; Sayed and Rashid forthcoming).

In schools, resources need to be used in teaching and learning. For example, computers are often not used because schools lack support in their use (EdQual Policy Brief 3; Rubagiza et al. 2011).

School meals and child health

For the most disadvantaged learners, improvements in nutrition and health have a relatively greater impact on achievement than in-school factors (EdQual Policy Brief 1). Provision of meals at school and other nutrition programmes can lead to improved scores in academic tests, as can de-worming (Uduku 2011).

Early childhood care and education

Improved access to pre-school education can enhance both education outcomes and equity. Pre-school interventions have a greater positive impact compared to later interventions for children born below the poverty line (EdQual Policy Brief 9).

Pre-school interventions have greater impact for children born below the poverty line

Quality processes

National debate on education quality

In countries that have successfully integrated into the global economy, there has been a good match between education outcomes and changing labour market needs, facilitated by inter-governmental dialogue (Green et al. 2007). Consultative processes can assist in closing the gap that often exists between the national policy context, what goes on in schools, and parental aspirations and expectations.

Accountability and parental and community 'voice'

Increased accountability and parental and community 'voice' are often perceived as important for driving up quality. Initiatives such as Uwezo in East Africa make the results of independently collected assessment data available to parents. The South African government has committed itself to making its own data on the performance of schools available to parents. Ghana has recently introduced school management boards that provide new avenues of accountability and 'voice'. The impact of these and similar initiatives will need to be evaluated over time, although they have been an important part of efforts to drive up standards of achievement elsewhere in the world.

Assessment, monitoring and evaluation

A key priority is to strengthen national systems of assessment, monitoring and evaluation (Barrett forthcoming), including making available longitudinal data relating to schools and individual pupils (Peng et al. 2004). These can assist in evaluating the quality of schools, taking into account pupil intake. Schools can be supported to collect and interpret data for school self–evaluation (EdQual Policy Briefs 5 and 6).

Relevant and inclusive curriculum and pedagogy

Coherence in aims and content within and between phases of the curriculum is key. Movement towards outcomes or competencies based curricula across sub-Saharan Africa has met with mixed success, largely because the support and training needs of teachers are underestimated (Chisholm and Leyendecker 2008). Training needs to be consistent with the curriculum and to focus on teaching practices, such as:

- Use of 'structured pedagogy' (Barrett et al. 2007)
- Strategies for multilingual settings (EdQual Policy Brief 2)
- Use of ICTs to support learning (EdQual Policy Brief 3)
- Strategies to promote inclusion (EdQual Policy Briefs 6 and 7)

School, home and community links

Home and community environment can be an important influence on learning outcomes, particularly for the most socio-economically disadvantaged (EdQual Policy Brief 1). Living outside of a stable family environment, lacking basic resources, poor nutrition, and learning in a language not commonly used outside of school are all predictors of low levels of literacy and numeracy.

Wider economic, political and cultural inequalities are often reproduced within homes and communities. Education systems and schools can play a mediating role through fostering improved links with the community. Schools can play a role in educating parents on how to support their children's learning, providing adult basic education and supporting community development (EdQual Policy Brief 6; Ngcobo and Tikly 2010; Uduku 2011). There is potential for schools to work more closely with other areas of social welfare, including health.

About the Research

The framework and policy priorities presented in this paper are the product of theoretical work on education quality developed over a five year period, including literature reviews (Barrett et al. 2006; Tikly and Barrett 2007; Tikly and Barrett 2011). It also draws on findings from across EdQual research programme.

The brief summarises an article forthcoming in *Comparative Education*, see Tikly (forthcoming) in further reading.

Further Reading

Tikly, L. (forthcoming) Towards a framework for researching the quality of education in low income countries. *Comparative Education*.

EdQual Policy Briefs

No. 1: Determinants of primary students' attainment in Africa, A. M. Barrett & M. Smith

No. 2: Language of instruction and quality of learning in Tanzania and Ghana, J. Clegg, C. Rubagumya & Y. Ankomah

No. 3: Using ICT to support science and mathematics education in Rwanda, R. Sutherland

No. 4: Primary school leadership for education quality in Tanzania, H. A. Dachi

No. 5: Leadership and management of change for quality improvement - Ghana, G.K.T. Oduro & R. Bosu

No. 6: Primary school leadership for education quality in Tanzania and Ghana, G.K.T. Oduro & H. A. Dachi

No. 7: Inclusive education in Papua New Guinea (PNG), G. Le Fanu.

No. 8: Research eapacity building: Learning from the EdQual RPC, A.M. Barrett, M. Crossley & H.A. Dachi

No. 9: Early Childhood Care and Education in Ghana and Maharashtra, R.C. Duggan.

This policy brief was written by Leon Tikly.

For more EdQual Policy Briefs or further information please see www.edqual.org or contact EdQual UK:

Tel: +44 (0)117 331 4284
Email: angeline.barrett@bristol.ac.uk

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The Research Team

Leon Tikly, University of Bristol, UK

Angeline M. Barrett, University of Bristol, UK

University of BRISTOL

www.edqual.org

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EdQual partner institutions are:
University of Bristol, UK (lead)
University of Bath, UK
University of Cape Coast, Ghana
University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
Kigali Institute of Education, Rwanda
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa