An investigation of global/local dynamics of curriculum transformation in sub-Saharan Africa with special reference to the Republic of Mozambique

Michela Chiara Alderuccio

Centre for International Education, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK


To cite this article: Michela Chiara Alderuccio (2010): An investigation of global/local dynamics of curriculum transformation in sub-Saharan Africa with special reference to the Republic of Mozambique, Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 40:6, 727-739

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2010.523228

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
An investigation of global/local dynamics of curriculum transformation in sub-Saharan Africa with special reference to the Republic of Mozambique

Michela Chiara Alderuccio*

Centre for International Education, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK

This paper focuses on investigating the dialectic between global and local educational agendas in shaping curriculum transformations in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Curriculum transformations are seen as a way to respond to the challenges of promoting Education for All (EFA), but also reflect SSA traditions, social and economic changes. In this article, the issue of quality relates to the relevance of what is taught in the content of the primary curriculum. This contribution argues that it is not only a matter of producing more relevant curricula, but also of how the new curricula are implemented at local level. The trend in curriculum reforms analysed in this paper is: the vocationalisation of the curriculum for primary education. The findings of this article relate to the interaction between global and local interests in shaping curriculum transformation in Mozambique and the challenges posed by its implementation. They also illuminate dynamics of relevance to the SSA region.

Keywords: curriculum transformation; primary education; vocationalisation; Mozambique; local curriculum

Introduction

The aims to improve the quality of education and expand equal educational opportunities for every child are shaping educational strategies in many countries of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This paper focuses on curriculum transformation in SSA because it is regarded as a key element to address low quality education and respond to the needs of different social groups by teaching children the knowledge they need.

This article identifies a convergence of themes in SSA curriculum transformation, among them the focus given to the improvement of quality education. It also reflects on how the global educational agenda – promoted for instance by the EFA movement and related initiatives – is shaping and influencing country-specific national agendas in the education sector, and therefore curriculum changes in SSA. However, this paper argues that despite a convergence of trends across SSA, any analysis of curriculum transformation needs to consider what is also taking place in a specific context and the reasons behind the change. This is because exploring changes at the political, social and economic levels in a specific country and recognising the degree of external influence on a country’s educational reforms are prerequisites to appreciate curriculum transformation fully, support it, and comprehend what is happening (Rosenmund, 2000).

For this reason, the essay intends to be, firstly, a literature review examining the main arguments and debates behind one of the common trends identified in SSA.

*Email: m.c.alderuccio@sussex.ac.uk

ISSN 0305-7925 print ISSN 1469-3623 online
© 2010 British Association for International and Comparative Education
DOI: 10.1080/03057925.2010.523228
http://www.informaworld.com
curriculum reforms: the vocationalisation of the curriculum for primary education (Jansen 1989). Thereafter, this topic is explored through the Mozambican experience of curriculum transformation as it can offer an interesting opportunity to explore, at local level and in more depth, some issues that are essential to this paper: curriculum transformation as a way to address the problem of low quality education; to deal with increasing disparities among urban and rural populations in accessing education; and to reflect upon the needs of different social groups in modern SSA societies. The sources reviewed to gain a deeper understanding of issues at the heart of the case of Mozambique are key documents published by the Government of Mozambique and key articles with a focus on curriculum transformation in Mozambique, that is Mouzinho et al. (2002) and Castiano (2005a, 2005b).

The overall aims of this study are twofold: (1) to explore the issues and debates behind the current change of the curriculum in SSA – the vocationalisation of primary education; and (2) to consider to what extent the vocationalisation of the curriculum for primary education is an effective tool for promoting quality and addressing disparities in access to education between urban and rural areas.

Setting the scene to analyse curriculum transformation in SSA

Curriculum changes have always been at the heart of educational reforms and have often been introduced after recognising the weaknesses in the education system. Tawil and Harley (2004, 15) define this weakness ‘in terms of the weak relevance of existing curricula in reflecting the ways in which African society has changed’. In this context, the so-called ‘africanisation of the curriculum’ has played a key role in educational reforms in African countries over the last 30 years. The ‘africanisation of the curriculum’ has often meant emphasis on adapting the inherited colonial curricula to serve the needs and values of African societies by revitalising African culture, values and traditions. Although the process of adaptation differs from country to country, one trend can be recognised: the introduction of practical subjects – agriculture, farming, gardening, and so on – into the curriculum of primary education (Eisemon, 1990). In addition, educational strategies in SSA have progressively emphasised the link between education and national economic development. In this framework, the notion of education itself and the real aim of education are under enquiry.

Dale (2005) considers the idea of the ‘knowledge economy’ as a supranational phenomenon resulting from the relationship between globalisation and education ‘where knowledge takes over from “production” as the key driver and basis of economy prosperity’ (Dale 2005, 147). Following this argument, education contributes to the creation of the knowledge economy, with a shift in emphasis from education as a human right to education as a commodity in the global market (Dale 2005). I consider this point important to the discussion. Although decisions about curriculum reforms are taken at national level, they are, to some extent, influenced by external factors. This can in part explain the emphasis given to the role of education in promoting economic development across SSA, as well as the convergence of common trends in curriculum reforms.

The call for quality in order to achieve EFA

This paper considers the EFA initiative, and its aim of Universal Primary Education by 2015, as the starting point to understand how the global educational agenda is
shaping and influencing country-specific national agendas in the education sector, and therefore curriculum changes in SSA. The EFA agenda stresses that education systems should respond to the diverse needs of different social groups within society and is concerned with the eradication of disparities in access to quality education by reaching ‘underserved groups’ such as the poor, street children and rural and remote populations. Therefore, based on the assumption that education trends in the rural areas of many developing countries are still far behind those in urban areas, curriculum transformation can be seen as a way to address disparities in access to education by developing more relevant curricula and tackling the needs of different social groups (UNESCO 2004).

However, before moving ahead, what is ‘rural’? How can we define the notion of rurality? And, what exactly does ‘quality of education’ mean and how it has been defined?

As noted by Atkin (2003, 507): “‘Rural” and “community” are both interesting words in that they have no real universal meaning, yet there can hardly be anyone who does not have a mental picture of what they mean to them’. It is central to understand that distinctive criteria to define ‘rural’ do not exist. From my point of view it is interesting to note the following definition given to ‘rurality’ and its implications (Nelson Mandela Foundation 2005, 4): ‘Rurality highlights isolation, vulnerability, lack of opportunity....It also represents ... a sense of community and a commitment to traditional values’. Often, ‘urban’ denotes opportunities and wealth, while ‘rural’ gives a sense of deficit. However, it is important to view rural areas in terms of what they do have – strengths in their commitment to traditional values and affiliation to their communities. This means recognising this value and not defining them only ‘in terms of what they do not have’: economic strengths and resources (Nelson Mandela Foundation 2005, 5). This last point offers an opportunity to think about development in a way that is not directly related to economic strengths and resources. It means that when planning education interventions in rural areas, instead of focusing on the link between education and production, and the need to produce resources linked to economic development, the focus could be on building up the resources – non-material – that rural communities do have. In this regard, Sen’s capability approach as discussed in Saito (2003) is illuminating. According to Sen (cited in Saito 2003, 18; emphasis added) ‘a capability is the ability to achieve’. However, this achievement may not be in economic terms. The achievement of being free to choose how to achieve well-being, and what people are able to achieve within their resources is more important than the resources themselves. In educational terms, I believe this means giving children the opportunity to learn in a suitable environment, which is developed based on values they share within their communities, and widen the choices for their future through effective and ‘qualitative’ learning.

On the other hand, concerning the ‘quality of education’, there are several views about what constitutes this. On the one hand, quality is closely linked to greater relevance in educating today’s children. Often the content of the primary curriculum, because of its academic or theoretical focus, is perceived to be more relevant to the needs of urban children than to those of rural children (UNESCO 2004). According to Little, Hoppers, and Gardner (1994, 6) ‘quality means relevance to local needs, adaptability to local cultural and economic conditions [and] special consideration for marginalised and under-represented groups’. On the other hand, it could also mean raising the outcomes of educational systems in developing countries and providing children with an education that ‘is most likely to help them improve the quality of their lives
when they become adults’ (Bacchus 1991, 6). However, focusing on the introduction of practical subjects to enhance the quality, as well as the relevance of education in rural areas, has challenges for what this ‘innovation’ implies in terms of school resources, teachers’ qualifications and teaching approaches. Therefore, when relating curriculum transformation to the improvement of the quality of education, and quality to the aims of improved relevance and reduced inequalities, I believe that understanding the potential gap between curriculum development initiatives and the local capability to implement them in a sustainable way is crucial to achieve the desired objectives.

**Vocationalisation of primary education: debates and main critique**

During the 1960s and 1970s, the relevance of a ‘western type of education’ – namely academic-oriented education – was questioned because it was unable to prepare children with knowledge relevant outside the classroom (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)-International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) 2006). The introduction of subjects like agriculture, rural science, farming and gardening from the early stages of primary education combined with academic subjects is often referred to as vocational primary education, focusing on practical or ‘life skills’. This pragmatic orientation is based on the assumption that learning is enhanced when the knowledge transmitted is related to ‘real-life’ problems and it can be applied to solve those problems. On the other side, the World Bank stressed more directly the link between education and production, and the economic relevance of education in advocating the introduction of practical subjects in the curriculum (Holmes & Maclean 2009). Once again, the assumption is that students with practical skills will be more productive than those without such skills in terms of economic development of their countries (Bacchus 1991).

In the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Malawi, Burundi and Burkina Faso engaged in curricular reforms to introduce practical activities in rural primary schools. However, these reforms did not produce the desired outcomes at the economic level and resulted in failure due to lack of school resources, inadequate teacher preparation to teach practical subjects and, often, the reluctance of parents to send their children to school to learn manual activities that could be taught at home (FAO and UNESCO-IIEP 2006). Since then, the issue of the vocationalisation of the primary curriculum is still highly debated. Despite the failure of these first attempts this debate has never been fully set aside in SSA, attracting controversy around sometimes open-ended but relevant questions such as: what is the real aim of primary education and to what extent can a practical-oriented education promote the development of rural areas?

Soon after independence SSA risked remembering a colonial ‘second track of practical-oriented education’ (FAO and UNESCO-IIEP 2006, 59; emphasis added) for ‘black children’ who were taught vocational subjects, while ‘white children’ received a formal academic education. It has been argued that the risk of creating a parallel system separated from general education and leading to certificates that are not perceived as equally valuable can prevent children from going beyond primary education. In this regard, one main concern relates to the value given to practical activities during the assessment process. Teachers tend not to value practical activities at the same level as academic subjects. At the same time, while certain standards for measuring knowledge are accepted and broadly recognised, there is little guidance on how to assess the outcomes of this sort of vocational education (Eisemon 1990).
Nevertheless, during the 1990s in SSA the issue of vocationalisation has been ‘re-opened’. In Niger, for instance, the curriculum was divided into modules. Some modules were nationally defined, while others were adapted to the needs of local areas. Uganda also went through a curriculum reform in the 1990s with the introduction of practical activities, crafts and gardening at local level (FAO and UNESCO-IIEP 2006). Once again, the emerging concern is the availability and qualification of teachers, which also applies to teachers of academic subjects, but it risks widening the urban/rural gaps with the teaching of practical subjects. If it is accepted that in rural areas teachers could be younger and under-trained, they might not have the necessary knowledge to teach some of the ‘new practical’ subjects.

In conclusion, there are two parallel debates going on. On the one hand, debates move around questions concerning to what extent education influences economic and rural development. On the other hand, SSA countries are implementing curricula with a local and practical focus based upon the recognition, not only of the role of education in economic development, but also as a means of improving the quality of education by increasing the relevance and reducing urban/rural disparities. In between these two debates are issues of the quality of education itself and of how reforms are implemented. Poor quality is often synonymous with failure. Moreover, on the quality-equity side, the discourse is quite controversial; the introduction of practical subjects aims at promoting relevance in order to increase quality and equity of educational opportunities. However, I believe that the introduction of practical subjects itself generates other problems of how to qualitatively implement these reforms and not risk increasing urban/rural disparities in terms of human – the teachers – and material resources – the cost of the equipment – needed to implement these reforms. I also argue that it could also imply taken-for-granted assumptions about the future of these children, namely only a few will be able to access secondary education and it is therefore better to offer them ‘life skills’ as early as possible.

In order to investigate these debates in more depth, at ‘local’ level, the next section is going to explore the introduction and implementation of the local curriculum in Mozambique.

The challenges for implementing the local curriculum in Mozambique

From 1997 to 2002, Mozambique undertook the process of curriculum reform for primary education. In 2004, Mozambique introduced the new curriculum in all schools in the country, after having piloted it in 22 primary schools, two in each of the 11 provinces. The new curriculum consists of two components: core curriculum and local curriculum. The core curriculum is centrally planned and constitutes 80% of the national curriculum, while the local curriculum is locally designed and allows schools and communities to decide on 20% of the national curriculum. Therefore, this component is based on contents, defined locally, to be integrated within the national curriculum, by extension of the content of the core curriculum or by adding new subjects considered relevant to the integration of children into their communities (Castiano, 2005a).

Therefore, the local curriculum should not be regarded as a ‘discipline on its-own’, and its introduction does not imply implementation in rural areas alone. However, by reflecting on how the promotion of a more relevant curriculum might address educational disparities between urban and rural areas, this paper looks at issues and challenges for its implementation in rural areas.
At least in theory, the introduction of the local curriculum is meant to reflect
the needs of local communities, local authorities, teachers and pupils. In this regard
it is interesting to note the definition of community and local by the Ministry of
Education. Community is seen as ‘all the people involved in the education of children’ (Instituto Nacional para o Desenvolvimento da Educação (INDE) cited in
Castiano 2005a, 17). That is, the parents and the teachers, on the one hand, and the
local authorities, the civil societies and the people representing the national institu-
tions at local level, on the other. Local can be considered a small village, but it can
also be extended to the district or the province where the school is located. Consid-
ering the definitions given to community and local, contrasting interests shaping the
local content could already emerge, that is the aspirations of parents and communi-
ties, on the one hand, and on the other, there is the ‘power’, in terms of different
degrees of influence, of each community at district and provincial level, and the
people representing national institutions at local level.

Parents, communities and teachers at local level were involved through meetings
and questionnaires in defining the contents relevant to the community to be included
in the local curriculum. The teachers, in a second phase, had the responsibility of
organising the contents of local interest within each subject of the National Curricu-
riculum, and according to the level of the class, or introducing new subjects into the
programme for primary education (Castiano, 2005b).

This process raises a number of difficulties in line with debates highlighted earlier,
especially if teachers are not well trained and lack experience. However, in my opinion
changes could also challenge the existing teaching practices, with a shift from a teacher-
centred approach to a child-centred approach. Teachers are no longer asked to transmit
knowledge but to produce it, based on inputs received from the communities. Therefore,
the potentiality of this innovation goes beyond the simple recognition of local needs
in the curriculum. It could promote a ‘critical literacy’ by enhancing pupils’ opportu-
nities to learn in a more dynamic environment, where the national content of the curric-
ulum can be explored in more depth through ‘knowledge’ that is ‘local’ and relevant
to children. It is interesting to note that if teachers did not have the experience or knowl-
dge to teach selected local subjects, the school would avail itself of the opportunity
to ask the collaboration of parents or people in the community, therefore, in this way
they are directly involved not only in the selection of content, but also its teaching
(Castiano, 2005b). However, this point opens up other questions on the real possibilities
for implementing curriculum changes and on how to support the involvement of
communities constantly. Schools need more resources to produce practical learning and
support community involvement, and at the same time there is a need for qualified teach-
ers, who are able to cooperate with the community and review their teaching methods.

Finally, among the content introduced in the local curriculum there was a
request from local communities for integrating practical activities such as agricul-
ture, carpentry, craft and horticulture, as well as the history of the region, local
dance, music and language (Castiano, 2005b). This suggests a contextualised type
of learning based on the context surrounding the children’s experience and aimed
at bridging the gap between the home, school and community. What emerges is not
just a contextualisation of the content of the curriculum, but it is also the kind of
knowledge that is oriented towards forming the competencies of children from the
early stages of schooling. It is no longer based on the transmission of knowledge
but on the use of the knowledge, it is ‘saber fazer’, namely ‘know how to do’
(INDE/Ministério da Educação (MINED) 2003, XV).
Considering curriculum transformation as a way to promote integration and, at the same time, address the needs of diversified groups in society, requires caution as the curriculum can reproduce the existing barriers in the society by selecting the kind of knowledge that reflects the needs of those who have the power to select it (Apple 2004). In my opinion, in the case of Mozambique, this point relates not to the knowledge selected, but to the way the innovation has been implemented. The innovation is meant to produce changes in the methodology of knowledge transmission that will have a beneficial influence on the whole of society, in terms of national unity as well as economic development. I believe poor implementation can reproduce the existing barriers in the Mozambican education system, exacerbate inequalities and promote ‘a change without change’.

Castiano (2005b) highlights differences in implementing the new curriculum between rural and urban areas. Schools in rural areas faced more difficulties in implementing the practical activities planned for the local curriculum, due to a lack of adequate resources, than schools in urban areas. Communities in rural areas were more willing than those in urban areas to contribute in terms of experience to teach practical subjects, giving rise to the problem of how to reward community involvement. Finally, teachers in rural areas had enormous difficulties integrating the local curriculum components into the core national curriculum due to insufficient training and lack of new textbooks (Castiano, 2005a).

Considering quality, the role of teachers as well as the involvement of communities is central to the success of the implementation of the local curriculum. Hence, it is important to act at two different levels. On the one hand, there is the need to train teachers, perhaps through in-service training programmes and a mentoring system to overcome the difficulties of combining the national and local curriculum and create a network of teachers experiencing similar difficulties in the same areas. On the other hand, there is the need to continuously involve the communities by creating a system that can reward the active community members for their contributions of material resources and expertise in implementing the practical activities offered. I believe that these are key points for the qualitative implementation of the local curriculum. Curriculum reforms aimed at promoting effective changes need to pay attention to the reality of classroom practice, to understand what can realistically be achieved and how to sustain lasting and effective changes. In this regard, I believe that qualitatively implemented curriculum transformations are at the heart of the matter.

**Reasons behind the curriculum transformation undertaken in Mozambique**

The main vision presented in the strategic papers produced by the Government of Mozambique since 1997, is summarised, although not exhaustively, firstly, because I believe that through these papers the progressive link between the goal of promoting economic development and the education system’s aims, in terms of equality and quality, becomes clear. Secondly, to show that the increased relevance given to the role of culture, traditions and values reflects the changes adopted in the new curriculum.

During the development of the Education Sector Strategic Plan I (ESSP I), 1997–2001, the perception was that ‘greater equity in education opportunities will result in a reduction in imbalances in economic opportunities between the south and other regions of the country’ (World Bank, n.d., 5–6). Therefore, the objective of the ESSP I was ‘to provide increased and equitable access to higher quality education and to
improve the management of education for economic and social development in Mozambique’ (World Bank 1999, 2).

The Action Plan for the Reduction of Absolute Poverty 2006–2009 (PARPA II) almost 10 years later, again reaffirms:

the relationship between education and poverty is significant … education acts directly and indirectly to reduce poverty—directly, because education is a basic human right and part of human development … Indirectly, education contributes to poverty reduction because it is essential to accelerate economic growth. (Government of Mozambique (GoM) 2006, 84–5).

Within this framework, the promotion of education is instrumental in supporting economic and social development in the country. On the other hand, I note that since the end of the 1990s, themes such as ‘inefficient curricula in relation to rural children’s socio-economic situation’ (World Bank 1999, 2), or the need to improve the quality of education ‘by transforming the basic education curriculum to be socially and culturally relevant’ (Mouzinho et al. 2002, 7) have emerged. PARPA II clearly states that the Mozambican Government ‘will continue to give attention to the development of a more vocationally-oriented primary education so as to ensure that the graduates of these subsystems are capable of adapting to the life of the community and the job market’ (GoM 2006, 100).

Finally, there is one aspect that has not been given explicit reference in previous papers: the link between education, culture and the eradication of poverty. Recognition and appreciation of the Country’s cultural diversity is an asset to consolidate Mozambican identity, national unity and development. Thus: ‘The strategies seek to ensure better access to the values and products of Mozambican culture, the promotion of knowledge, and dissemination of that culture’ (GoM 2006, 88). Culture is seen ‘as a tool for raising the quality of education, instruction and a source of wealth’ (GoM 2006, 90).

The world-system theory (Rosenmund, 2000) explains the convergence of certain themes in curriculum transformation in different countries as driven by external and supra-national values. In my opinion, in this specific case, there is a convergence of themes in SSA – the focus given to the improvement of the quality of education, the promotion of equal opportunities and the adaptation of curriculum to the local needs. On the other hand, there are the supra-national values – the global agenda of EFA, the declaration, for example, of Human Rights (1948) and the convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) ratified by almost every country in the world. Meyer et al. (1997) argue that at country level, government policies are developed from the acceptance of values expressed at a worldwide level, and not as a result of locally emerging needs and current situations. Therefore, the existence of a world society and culture shapes the internal processes of individual nations in their movement towards socio-economic development. Instead of seeing single nations as a product of their society, internal histories and social forces, pressure also comes from outside the state and affects policy formulation and the implementation of strategies or programmes.

This world-culture model embedded in organisations such as the World Bank, the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and so on has a network within each nation state that contributes to the standardisation of, in this case, the education agenda (Meyer et al. 1992). Within this framework, themes emerging in the Mozambican educational agenda – quality and equality, curriculum transformation for a more relevant and job-oriented curriculum – are the same as those embraced by
many other developing countries and are directly driven by global educational agendas such as EFA or Millennium Development Goals.

I believe that this approach could explain general trends that the commitment to EFA of a single nation state implies: strategies aiming at increasing enrolment and improving quality, the need to fix common standards to create easily comparable data across countries, increased expenditure and investment in education as a percentage of the government’s total expenditure. However, single nation state developing countries often do not have an adequate budget or the necessary human resources to implement the reforms these strategies imply. Therefore, because of their limited resources, developing countries might rely on ‘some external influences’ ‘even if many external elements are inconsistent with local practices’ (Meyer et al. 1992, 154). Moreover, this approach does not give enough emphasis to the socio-economic and political conditions that exist at national level. Understanding the economic and social changes within the country under examination can help situate the role given to education and what was done in the past to adapt the curriculum to the values shaping the country. An understanding of this background may mitigate some of the difficulties that the implementation of curriculum transformations is likely to encounter.

Since 1998, as noted, the government has put the emphasis on expanding access to primary education, improving quality and transforming the curriculum. Both the economy and society have been profoundly transformed since then. Mozambique was emerging from more than a decade of conflict into a challenging situation and the immediate need to promote economic recovery and stability as well as to reconstruct national identity. Between 2001 and 2005, Mozambique made remarkable progress in promoting macroeconomic stability as well as infrastructure reconstruction and the recovery of the education, health and rural development sectors (GoM 2006). Education during these years was perceived as the key to these changes to improve people’s welfare across the country and to promote a balanced economic and social development (GoM 2006), even if these achievements were accompanied by strong regional diversities.

Therefore, I believe that the main transformations of the national curriculum in Mozambique are strictly linked to the role given to education by the Mozambican Government to support the goal of national economic development and reduce regional disparities. Education is strictly linked to the eradication of poverty and with the objective of ‘constructing a prosperous Mozambican Nation’, consolidating peace and democracy and providing a ‘guarantee of individual freedoms’ (MoE 2006, 28; emphasis added).

The assumption, even if arguable, is that better educated children with the required skills for wealth creation will help Mozambique emerge from poverty and be competitive within Africa and within the global society (GoM 2006). Strictly linked to this point is a more practical kind of education oriented to the job market, and the recognition of what knowledge counts for future generations.

On the other hand, curriculum transformation in Mozambique was linked to the need to create a national identity and promote national unity by reframing national culture and identity through specific educational policies. Mozambique is trying to promote ‘unity in diversity’ through cultural diversity in the curriculum to address disparities in access to education and this discourse started soon after the end of the war (1994) in a divided society.

The discussion above illustrates the dialectic influence of the global/local and a continual dialogue between global and local, which influence educational agendas. The inclusion of local subjects is clearly seen as a means of improving the quality of
education through relevance. Relevance, in this case, means the introduction of subjects that are of local interest and therefore promote inclusion and avoid discrimination. At the same time, there is a shift in the evaluation of local knowledge in the new curriculum, reflecting the government’s goal to improve the quality of education, promote equality of opportunities in education, as well as demonstrating its commitment to achieve the EFA target.

Overall findings: lessons learnt

The case of Mozambique can be used as an example to reflect on the SSA region when implementing curriculum reforms. My intent is not to generalise the challenges and issues that might be encountered in SSA, but to reflect on and reconsider the practical possibilities for qualitatively implementing curriculum transformation in order to actually bring about desired educational and economic outcomes – quality and equity of education, as well as the fostering of economic development.

Reflecting on the creation of a knowledge economy – as a supranational paradigm resulting from the relationship between globalisation and education – there is a convergence in the role given to education to foster economic development. As noted, this can mean that what is valued as knowledge is the knowledge of knowing how to do, a kind of practically oriented knowledge because it relates to the future employability of school leavers. Within this framework, I believe that failing to take account of countries’ socio-economic and political backgrounds, their aspirations, expectations and history can help explain why strategies aimed at achieving improvements in enrolment rates or the quality of education did not achieve the expected results in the SSA region.

For example, it could explain the failure of vocational primary education implemented in the 1960s and 1970s. The common world-driven belief was that equipping children with skills that are valued in their rural areas would promote economic development, but such interventions failed because they did not recognise the local needs and circumstances within which they were implemented – what parents want for their children, the resources available for teacher training and whether teachers were ready to implement the changes or not. Moreover, in the past – the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s - the introduction of practical subjects has been regarded as second-rate education for rural children, mainly due to its legacy from the colonial period and the concept of a parallel system which was not equivalent. These are the major differences between what happened in the past and what is happening now in Mozambique.

I explain my view through the example of the experience of Mozambique which may have some wider relevance in the SSA region. The newly implemented curriculum in Mozambique is meant to be an integrated curriculum. The national and local components need to be considered as the overall curriculum reflecting national educational aims and objectives. In this context, vocational versus academic education in SSA should not be seen as one excluding the other, but rather as complementary, as the case of Mozambique shows.

The local curriculum allows the introduction of local knowledge regarded by local communities as practical knowledge, but it should not be considered in isolation. In these terms, the introduction of practical subjects aims to increase the relevance of the education offered and enhance learning. Within this framework, in Mozambique, parents seem to support the new practical orientation shaping the new curriculum. However, challenges exist that might compromise its implementation and risk to perpetuate the same failures identified in the literature review at the SSA level.
For instance, Castiano (2005b) highlighted differences in implementing the new curriculum between urban and rural areas – insufficient teacher training, lack of experience among teachers and unavailability of adequate resources. Therefore, while the innovation is meant to produce changes in the methodology of knowledge transmission that will have a beneficial influence on pupils’ learning, the poor innovation implementation can reproduce the existing barriers in the Mozambican education system and exacerbate inequalities. Caution is required with regard to the implementation of curriculum transformations in order to not perpetuate previous failures. If curriculum transformations are meant to address disparities and produce changes in society, they need to be sustained by other reforms to address the problem of quality at every level. Teachers not only need to be prepared to integrate local knowledge into the curriculum at local level, they also need to be committed to implementing changes and ready to reconsider their role and teaching practices, schools need to be able to reward communities’ participation, to invest in and maintain adequate equipment and to sustain the general running costs of practical subjects.

On a more critical note, the emphasis given to ‘practical education’, as a prerequisite for economic development, as identified in the documents produced by the Mozambican Government, in rural areas is questionable. ‘Education contributes to economic growth, but by itself will not generate growth’ (King, Palmer, and Hayman 2005, 11). Factors external to education systems at the macroeconomic level influence development and changes in other sectors. As noted by Foster (1965) it is not the subjects learnt in the curriculum that influence the job aspirations of children, but rather, the economic context and the job market surrounding them. This suggests that SSA countries’ promotion of vocational education in rural areas could be linked to the ‘recognition that the possibilities for expansion of secondary education are limited’ (Eisemon 1990, 71). If vocational education is meant to address urban/rural inequalities the outcomes are unclear if based on the assumption that most rural children will not access secondary education. I regard this proposition as self-contradictory: reforms aim to address disparities at a primary level, at the same time, they want to anticipate and eradicate disparities that school leavers are likely to encounter in their future ‘academic’ and ‘employability’ choices. In this regard, I explored Sen’s capability approach (see Saito 2003) to education as a way of giving children the opportunity to learn in a suitable environment to widen their future choices through effective and good quality education. However, the completion of primary education if not followed by the possibility to access secondary education, does not widen children’s choices.

An interesting view emerging from the Mozambican Government’s documents is the fact that curriculum transformation is regarded as s way to reframe national identity. In this context, the introduction of local knowledge in the curriculum can be seen as a way to promote national unity. To consider this view I refer to the socio-structural approach of Bernstein (1999) through which, once again, education can reproduce social inequalities. Bernstein talked about a horizontal discourse as well as a vertical discourse. He referred to the horizontal discourse as ‘common sense’ knowledge that is common for everyone, often local but not equally important for every one, neither organised nor structured. By contrast, the vertical discourse is knowledge hierarchically organised. He is concerned about how these two discourses interact with each other (Bernstein 1999). I believe that the introduction of local knowledge in the curriculum of Mozambique – therefore the introduction of a ‘common sense’ knowledge into the discourse of knowledge hierarchically organised – can open a dialogue among the two spheres, integrate them and consequently promote national
unity. The horizontal discourse has become institutionalised and is integrated into the curriculum promoting the circulation of this knowledge to enhance children’s learning, and at the same time to reflect different values. On the other hand, I believe the vertical discourse integrating the horizontal will promote a dialogue between national and sub-national levels. This has the potential to fill the gaps between what is planned at central level and what it is implemented in schools.

Conclusions

This paper has reflected on curriculum transformation in terms of changes institutionalised within the content of primary education, as well as the reasons influencing curriculum transformation in SSA with special to the Republic of Mozambique. This topic has been first explored through a literature review examining the main arguments, issues and debates behind the vocationalisation of the curriculum for primary education in SSA, and, furthermore, through the Mozambican experience of curriculum transformation.

Overall there seem to be two parallel discourses going on at global level: the link between education and economic development and the need to improve the quality of education. In this context the article has explored the world-system theory that explains the convergence of these themes as driven by external and supra-national values (Rosenmund 2000). However, this paper argued that understanding the historic, economic and cultural changes within the country under examination can help situate the role given to education and mitigate some of the difficulties that the implementation of curriculum transformations is likely to encounter. For this reason the contribution reviewed the main vision presented in the papers of the Government of Mozambique on the one hand, and the challenges of practical implementation of curriculum transformation in Mozambique on the other.

This paper has also reached the conclusion that in Mozambique, to achieve effective change, reduce disparities and improve quality, it is not only a matter of developing a more relevant curriculum, but also a matter of the quality of the way these transformations are implemented. Even if my intention was not to generalise about the challenges and issues that might be encountered in SSA, the case of Mozambique can be viewed as an interesting opportunity to reflect on SSA when implementing curriculum reforms aiming at improving quality of education and promoting equity. It has been argued that the introduction of the local curriculum, while meaning to promote quality, raises many questions about how to qualitatively promote its implementation. In order for curriculum transformations to be successful, they need to reflect the real needs of the actors that will implement them in the daily reality of the classrooms, and the potential for the country to promote and sustain these reforms. For this main reason, within the main framework of curriculum transformations in SSA, the paper has explored the case of Mozambique. This helped to appreciate what can be realistically done to promote curriculum transformation that incorporates and promotes good quality education.

References


