
North-South Collaborative Research in Education

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The Organisation of North-South Academic Collaboration

Any discussion of the conditions under which collaborative research takes place between the countries of the richer North and the developing South must be prefaced by some account of why there should be collaboration at all, what is the nature of the currently dominant collaboration paradigm, and whether there is reason to believe that any change in the present arrangements is feasible or even desired.

In this connection it should be acknowledged that in education one of the major reasons for North-South research collaboration is the existence of external aid projects in education in the Third World. Such projects generate the need for appraisal missions, feasibility studies, mid-term monitoring, and final reports or evaluations. These, in turn, are related to demands for accountability in the aid community, or, in some cases, the desire by project to demonstrate that the project has been successful (or that it has not been successful and should be terminated). Although aid projects can be designed, developed and evaluated without the collaboration of Third World researchers, it has become increasingly common, but by no means general, for the evaluation component to involve 'country nationals'. This has happened partly because of a desire by agencies for greater legitimacy in their project evaluations, partly because developing country scholars are less expensive than the consultancy firms in the North, and partly because there is a recognition that developing country scholars may actually have a comparative advantage in evaluating the development or results of a project.

From this perspective, it should be noted that the nature of most aid projects in education determines the kind of collaborative research that is carried out. Which is to say that the research is dependent on the nature of the aid project rather than being an autonomous disciplinary project. This distinction between research evaluating some aspect of aid

projects and research for its own sake is critical, if the nature of much current research collaboration is to be understood. We shall return to the matter of collaborative disciplinary research but here it should be emphasised that much North-South collaborative research is fundamentally some form of evaluation research tied to aid projects. Because it is tied research, it is affected by several factors which distinguish it from many other forms of research:

— as evaluation is built into large aid projects for accountability reasons, the budgets available for feasibility, evaluation and monitoring components are correspondingly large;

— the aid project in education has frequently been implemented by a subcontractor — often a consultancy firm, or university unit — which has been responsible for the implementation as well as the evaluation. Large scale projects whether multilateral or North American bilateral (USAID, CIDA) have frequently used consultancy firms to deliver large training projects, innovations, manpower surveys etc. As budgets for the entire project are very substantial, there is considerable institutional competition in the North to gain these lucrative contracts;

— the North American consultancy mode for such projects has reproduced itself in the Third World. In many countries, large numbers of local researchers operate consultancy firms dedicated to evaluation research on aid projects, whether collaboratively with a northern consultancy firm or through a direct contract with a northern funding agency. In some cases this produces a direct conflict between the researcher's pursuit of his academic discipline and his participation in contracted evaluation research, regardless of topic.

The essentially dependent nature of such research in relation to project aid means that it cannot be satisfactorily understood without analysing the changing priorities in aid itself. Hence the high level manpower surveys of the 1960s were dependent on

assumptions about modernisation and investment in human capital, which in turn related to the massive projects on university expansion throughout the Third World. More recently, the research projects on non-formal education and on the informal sector related to a very different set of aid priorities and assumptions about growth and basic needs. This is not to deny that some contract research is unrelated to a project (whether present, past or future), but this would certainly seem to be a small minority.

Research relations between North and South

Given the project related nature of much of the research traffic emanating from the northern funding agencies, it may be useful to consider whether collaborative research between North and South needs to be thought of in terms of this particular evaluation research mould. For this purpose, the article by Reiff and Cohen provides a useful reference point. Six actors in the collaborative process are analysed: funders (sponsors), analysts and users in the northern donor country, and sponsors, analysts and users in the southern, recipient country. The first thing that becomes clear is that collaboration is not between equals, but between northern donors and southern recipients. Collaboration appears to be a process initiated in the North, and in which the South participates, as a counterpart. The description of how the donor in the North relates to the northern analysts suggests that what is being outlined is the competitive contract research model. The talk is of knowing the 'rules of the game', of 'winners and losers', of project teams writing scripts that conform with the guidelines of the funding agency, and of contracting 'counterpart researchers in the recipient country' to draw them into the collaboration. There is even reference to 'losers joining hands and planting the seeds for the next educational research'.

It would appear that there is really only a single research paradigm under discussion in this article, and that is the project related evaluation model. This is certainly worth some rather careful attention, since the export of this particular mode to the Third World does need analysis. But it would have been appropriate to recognise that giving pride of place to this model does tend to suggest that collaborative research between North and South is inevitably bound up with donors, projects and counterparts. However, it is possible to point to rather different research relations between North and South.

Other models of North-South research collaboration

It may be useful to lay out other possibilities for North-South research than that associated with the model of the northern sponsors, analysts and users

and **the recipient** (southern) sponsors, analysts and users. The **assumption** behind the six-actors model is that the **northern agency** conceives the research idea, and then the **other actors** move into operation. That is to say that the **mode** is fundamentally one of *contract research*, from the **agency** to the subcontractor in the North and then to the various recipient institutions. There are alternatives.

Non-contract collaborative research In this model, a research idea can be developed jointly between researchers in the North and the South; they approach one of the agencies that supports cooperative research (eg SAREC, CIDA or IDRC). The agency *responds* positively or negatively, but it has not usually initiated the research idea. In this model, the institutions in which the Northern researcher and the Southern researcher (*not* counterpart) **work** respectively, play merely facilitating roles, accounting for funds etc. Contrastingly, in the contract research mode, the Northern agency and its Southern counterpart have the most intensive initial interaction as the research idea gets agreed, almost in a government to government arrangement. The research is then put out to tender in the North, and the competitive bidding begins.

In the non-contract research paradigm, by contrast, the researchers themselves are the dominant negotiators. And it is possible in a joint project for funding either to come from a single agency, or for the Northern researchers to find their funding and the Southern partners to secure theirs independently. It should be added that joint projects are relatively more labour intensive and time consuming to develop, coordinate and pursue to completion. It is therefore necessary to inquire why collaboration takes place at all in this mode, since the situation is clearly very different from the collaboration built into the evaluation of agency-inspired research projects.

The reasons for collaboration in this non-contract mode would include the following:

1. The desire to draw into a single complex project in the South expertise from both North and South. In some cases, Northern researchers have built up over 10-20 years expertise in a particular Third World country, and with researchers in that country. Examples that come to mind are the long-standing collaboration between Jo Farrell of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and Ernesto Schiefelbein of CIDE in Santiago, Chile [eg Farrell and Schiefelbein 1983].

2. More common is cooperation between researchers working on the *same* research problem, but looking at it in their own country, and meeting to exchange insights. There are many examples of this,

from highly formalised cross national networks such as the International Association for the Evaluation of Education Achievement (IEA) to much less formal collaborations such as that associated with Angela Little in Sussex and her colleagues in Nigeria, Japan, India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka.¹

3. Extremely uncommon is collaboration in which an experienced Third World researcher cooperates on a research project *in the North*. Because of funding difficulties, it has been more common for such Southern researchers to become Northerners, in terms of citizenship.

Academic links between North and South Another form of intellectual, non-contract, collaboration between North and South is where university departments (or polytechnics and colleges) develop an academic link to encourage a wide range of shared initiatives, from staff exchange and course development, to staff development and collaborative research. Most industrialised countries have some mechanism for encouraging this, and funding comes usually from the development assistance agency. Sometimes such links have a particular purpose of interest to the aid agency but more normally the joint programme of work is determined by the academic partners. The funding agency for these collaborations is almost invariably in the industrialised countries, but in many cases there is an anxiety in the agency that these schemes be used for ideas which generally are needed in the Third World university, and are requested by it, rather than being ‘ventriloquised’ by a Northern researcher. Again, therefore, there are significant differences from the model of contract research. One example to follow with interest might be the collaboration between McGill University in Canada and Kenyatta University, in the area of cognition and work.

Direct funding for research in the South by research councils This too covers many different mechanisms, some of which give funds to northern nationals to work in the South, others give funding directly to the South. In some schemes a Third World scholar can apply directly to the agency for research funding. The obvious examples of this are IDRC and SAREC. With these, there is no requirement for the research proposal to be mediated via a Canadian or Swedish institute; indeed, in the case of IDRC, most project funding in the social sciences will quite specifically *not* involve northern researchers. Strictly speaking, these fall outside the purview of collaborative research, since there is no northern counterpart researcher. In these circumstances it is increasingly necessary for the officials in the research funding agencies to have research expertise, and to be responsible for

conducting the dialogue about the value of the research. This means in effect that there is something approaching a melding of the donor and northern researcher roles in the body of the programme officer in such agencies.

The donor as collaborative researcher

We have identified the informal researcher role of the donor in certain agencies. However, in other agencies the donor has a cell, section or unit dedicated to initiating research in collaboration with developing countries. In these agencies (IIEP and the Education Department of the World Bank, for example), the personnel are expected to carry out research which to varying degrees involves the participation of researchers in the developing countries. The themes of the research are decided in the agency and are usually part of an agreed programme of work (in the case of IIEP) or are seen to relate very directly to the wider project funding of the agency (World Bank). It is quite possible, however, in these donor-cum-researcher situations that the research themes selected may correspond with academic interests and professional strengths of Bank and IIEP staff. The result can be that the South then participates in projects where a good deal of the design work has already been completed in the North, and where the critical definitional, data analysis and interpretation tasks may remain in the agency. There is no doubt that a strong structuring role is relatively efficient in terms of research production, as may be the centralisation of the data processing in the donor agency, and the ability to disseminate the results through the agency’s publication and dissemination channels. On the other hand, the Third World contributors may not be able for logistical reasons to participate as fully in all stages of the project.

In summary, then, there are several important variations of collaborative research between North and South. These tend to be differentiated along a series of bands or spectra which may be useful for classifying various projects:

- from a strong relation to an associated education project
— to —
- a weak or nonexistent relationship to a larger education project
- from agency dominated contract research
— to —
- agency-reponsive non-contract research
- from strongly evaluative research
— to —
- disciplinary or action research
- from a northern researcher-southern counterpart model

¹ See ‘Students Learning Orientations and Adult Work (SLOG)’ by Angela Little in this volume.

— to —

a professional peers model

from donor-defined importance

— to —

relevance to researchers in developing countries

from visibility associated with formality, scale, foreign teams

— to —

visibility associated with research product.

The Nature of the Education Research Environment in Developing Countries

Some comment may also be appropriate on the nature of the education research environment into which these different varieties of collaborative research enter, and the systems available for disseminating and absorbing research products that result from such research. There is an easy impression that all educational research in developing countries is owed to external funding bodies. Yet there are *national* research councils, research funding from *regional* bodies (for examples CODESRIA or CLACSO) and research funds of national universities and public and private research centres. Now, undoubtedly in recent years these institutions have often been affected by severe cuts in research money or division of research funds to salaries and other more basic requirements. But research funds are still very significant in many universities (for example the University of Zimbabwe) and in government research councils and other bodies (for example, India's ICSSR and NCERT). Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of a full account of cooperation in education research, which does not pay attention to the strength or fragility of these national research agencies and councils.

The tendency to overlook them is significant for a further reason. Arguably, the very strength and visibility of the *external* agents and sponsors in research funding is related casually to the weakness of the national institutions. External projects can be mounted and evaluated by direct negotiation with the ministry of education (or other relevant ministry), and we have already referred to the possibility of external research cooperation bypassing the national universities and research centres, and being located in private consultancy firms staffed by university or ex-university personnel. It is therefore not surprising that in a research paradigm, that is basically one of contracted evaluation research, there should be little or no attention given to the role of national research institutions. Some indication of what is missed in this approach may be seen by looking at some of the national studies of educational research environments, recently available in Shaeffer and Nkinyangi [1983].

In particular, by analysing who conducts research in specific countries, and with what funding, it is possible

to understand better the pressures that are in many cases continuing to undermine the effectiveness of local institutions.² An important question is the extent to which foreign aid flows influence the direction and priorities in educational research at the national level. This is given very full treatment in the country case studies available in Schaeffer and Nkinyangi [1983]. For example, David Court has commented on the role of the technical assistance agencies as follows:

Technical assistance agencies constitute a powerful reward structure that inevitably influences the content as well as the style of research. Because technical assistance agencies see part of their responsibilities as keeping in touch with the major international concerns of educational research, they tend to favour these issues when considering support. A sequence of international fashions or emphases has shaped educational aid and, hence, the direction of research in the past 10 years in Kenya as elsewhere. The path has been from higher education, to secondary, to primary, to basic, to nonformal, to vocational, to preschool education. Making support available for the study of these topical concerns is a helpful means of concentrating local attention on the critical global issues of our time that are, after all, fairly widely shared. However, from the standpoint of the long-term development of national research agendas, excessive provision for one topic or one approach can distort the natural evolution of the way in which local realities are translated into research projects.

(p182)

One thing that does become abundantly clear in these country-specific studies of research environment is how much the conditions of research do vary, and how cautious one must be in generalising about 'the donor' and 'the recipient'.

It is not being suggested that external agency demands upon researchers have skewed an otherwise healthy research environment. But it is clear that national researchers have somehow to develop their own professional reward structure, their own professional associations, conferences etc. It seems possible that external agency demand for evaluations, appraisals and feasibility studies does not contribute to strengthening this essential local reward structure, but may even contribute to weakening it further. Should a situation develop in which a significant number of the country's best research minds leave academic research to work on a series of short term consultancy contracts (whether collaborative or not), then it cannot but reflect on the health of the university, the reproduction of good graduate students, and the development of any longer term academic commitments.

² See especially D. Court and J. Nkinyangi's articles on Kenya in Schaeffer and Nkinyangi [1983].

A final point may be made about a research environment that is oriented to external agency demand for evaluation research. There is a tendency for the products of the research to be restricted, classified, or at least difficult for the scholarly community to gain access to. Instead, the consultant reports are kept in the agency concerned, and are frequently more easily consulted by other agency personnel, or by influential northern researchers than they are by local scholars in the country where the study took place.

It could be argued that national scholars have only themselves to blame if they choose to follow this particular, or other, external paths. Indeed, it is argued that there is too much loose talk about “imperialistic” educational research paradigms . . . imposed on a fragile national research community’, which suggests that such talk betrays a belief in the incapacity of Third World scholars to know what is best for themselves. Instead of such negative attitudes, it is urged that positive attitudes of confidence on both donor and recipient sides are required.

There is in fact an important point here. It is difficult for westerners to be criticising Third World participation in consultancy research, or in, for example, the international IEA network, without their appearing to be patronising, or without seeming to know better than the local researchers what is good for them. On the other hand, there is a great deal of evaluation research which is constantly being pursued, much of it on projects that were designed elsewhere, and over whose implementation local researchers had little or no control. Therefore, analysing the nature of the terms on which local researchers can collaborate with the North and the impact of such cooperations on local research institutions is an important task, and one that is essential to understanding the educational research environment in Third World countries.

Accountability, Quality and Collaboration

All these three terms are used a good deal in discussions of research in developing countries, but it seems that their essential interrelatedness has not been sufficiently analysed. A number of propositions will be made now to suggest that there is a dynamic interaction amongst these three terms which needs to be understood, if one is to propose appropriate forms of collaborative research:

— donor concerns about *accountability* for project aid are responsible for the very large numbers of evaluation research activities;

— desire for the projects to be legitimised in the eyes of the recipient country encourages the use of national researchers in such evaluations;

— uncertainty about the *quality* of Third World research capacity encourages donors simultaneously

to prefer to use northern researchers in such evaluation work, on the grounds that their quality is more measurable, their products more predictable and the entire evaluation procedure more easily controlled;

— there is therefore often a tension between accountability and quality: accountability towards the Third World government encourages the use of local researchers; accountability towards northern governments encourages ‘high quality’ evaluation with rigid deadlines executed by northern researchers;

— one way round the donor’s assumption that research quality is higher in the North than the South is collaborative evaluation research, in which the northern collaborator provides quality control and the South provides legitimacy;

— there is a further contradiction between accountability and quality: that although accountability pressures produce the demand for evaluations, the products of such evaluations are not exposed to the quality control of the larger academic community, whether in the North or the South. Evaluation research is done for a particular sponsor, and the research product is frequently restricted to the agency concerned, which is not obliged to disseminate more widely the resulting reports. This means that effectively evaluation research is very often unobtainable, and that the wider research community cannot get access to the activity. Much of the most relevant data on Third World countries is in the form of agency-specific evaluation reports.³

There is a tension also between the quality of the aid project, accountability pressures, and the high rewards of evaluation research. Should an aid project be a failure, there are real difficulties in the evaluation teams — whether northern or southern — publicising such failure. Responsibility to professional, academic standards may thus be in conflict with the need not to offend either government or donor in a highly visible project. In addition to which very low academic salaries in the Third World make attractive the additional income from contract, evaluation research. Not too great a distinction should, however, be drawn between these compromises on quality and accountability in evaluation research and the ability to criticise fearlessly in ordinary unsponsored research. In a number of Third World countries, as Nkinyangi has argued, the academic community has censored itself from fear of government repercussions. ‘This has made it difficult, if not outright dangerous, for students and faculty to engage in any critical analysis, the supposed preoccupation of people in institutions of higher learning’ [Schaeffer and Nkinyangi 1983:212].

³ A notable exception being the widely available evaluations sponsored by Swedish SIDA.

These, then, are some examples of the sort of tensions and compromises that can arise, when different kinds of accountability are at issue, and when dissemination of research results is itself affected by the mode in which the research is conducted.

The final paradox therefore is that evaluation research (or short term contract research) is pursued for reasons of accountability, but in terms of openness and dissemination it is the mode which is often least accountable to the wider academic community and the public at large.

In conclusion, one would want to argue that there is an urgent need to discuss more openly appropriate forms of North-South academic collaboration. This paper has analysed one particularly dominant collaborative research paradigm, and has pointed to other forms which are perhaps less open to the objections which have been raised here. Whether the problem is the current lack of a universally testable research paradigm (as Reiff and Cohen seem to argue) is debatable. Indeed it might be argued that there is a need for a much greater *diversity* of research paradigms, and that particularly in the field of evaluation research, alternative evaluation methods need urgently to be explored.⁴

For this reason it could be said that the problem is not so much the conditions of (northern) educational research in and with developing countries; the urgency is rather to explore the conditions under which southern scholars participate in the analysis of Third World research at the international level. At the moment, the situation is broadly that *global* analysis of Third World education is carried out in the North by northern research centres and multinational agencies, whilst southern scholars are restricted for various reasons to the analysis of their own single

country, and even in that task compete at some disadvantage with foreign scholars. One rather urgent need, in the eyes of the Research Review and Advisory Group (RRAG), itself a somewhat unique collaborative research project, is to explore the current conditions of southern participation in what could be termed the 'international education research environment'. This ground is still largely dominated by northern based research. Hence the tendency continues for the multinational and bilateral agendas for educational action to derive from such centres and agencies. There is a need to develop more even-handed southern participation in the critical international agenda-setting for educational research. At present, it goes on almost naturally and exclusively in the North, since northern academic centres alone collect data and expertise transnationally, and can afford to offer, whether to students or to agencies, an expertise that can claim to analyse Brunei as readily as Burundi.

References

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⁴ For an exploration of these alternative evaluation approaches, see papers from the workshop on 'The evaluation of educational programmes in the Third World', University of Leeds, 30 March 1984, and in particular B. Avalos, 'The evaluation of projects in "popular" education: an example from Chile' for an exposition of a highly unconventional collaborative evaluation.