40 years of educational research in Guinea-Bissau: Mapping the terrain

Rui da Silva\textsuperscript{a,b}, Joana Oliveira\textsuperscript{b}\textsuperscript{⁎}

\textsuperscript{a} Center of African Studies of the University of Porto, Porto, Portugal
\textsuperscript{b} College of Education, Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo, Viana do Castelo, Portugal

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A B S T R A C T

A review of publications about educational research in Guinea-Bissau in the last 40 years is the subject of this paper. Published articles have permitted us to map the research terrain and produce new knowledge without collecting new empirical data. We reviewed 148 studies published between 1975 and 2015 in journal articles, theses, monographs, research reports, conference papers, books, edited volumes and grey literature. Moving from title to introduction/abstract and then the entire text we explored thematic focuses, methods, findings, conclusions and funding. This paper argues that education policy receives more attention followed by language issues and it also suggests that the research agenda is mainly due to external pressure with a tendency for applied research.

1. Introduction

Published studies can be a barometer of the interests and priorities of scholars. They also allow a mapping of the research terrain. In comparative and international education there is a long tradition of surveying published articles in order to achieve this (Foster et al., 2012). However, the practice is carried out in many different ways, although it adopts the same strategy i.e. to determine emphasis on scholarship and to review what scholars have published (Foster et al., 2012). All these different approaches usually review journal articles focusing on the mapping of international and comparative education research. Our starting point was somewhat different. We mapped the educational research terrain in Guinea-Bissau focusing on a review of the research published about the country. We also followed a different approach by reviewing not only journal articles but also theses, monographs, research reports, conference papers, books, edited volumes and grey literature. This stemmed from the fact that an important part of the work in international and comparative education is available in publications other than journal articles (Anderson-Levitt, 2015). Guinea-Bissau is also under represented in comparative and international education journals and also it is under-researched.

The aim of the paper is to map the education research terrain in Guinea-Bissau from 1975 to 2015. Our analysis will attempt to explore the thematic focuses, methods, findings, conclusions and funding. The paper draws on a corpus of documents characterised as existing data published between 1975 and 2015.

The article is organised in three main parts. Following these introductory notes, the paper first provides a brief country overview followed by the methodology and data. Following this overview, we explore the data organised in terms of its thematic focus, research design and source of research funding. The third and final part presents the concluding reflections.

2. Guinea-Bissau: brief social, political and educational context

To put the research for this paper into context, it is necessary to give a brief overview of the country and the programme under scrutiny.

Guinea-Bissau is a small West African state of 1.6 million inhabitants with an average rate of population growth estimated at 3% (MENCCJD, 2011; MEPIR, 2011). In the Ibrahim Index of African Governance it is the lowest of the West Africa countries and it is in position 44 (out of 54 African countries) with 41.3 points out of 100. Since 2011 there has been a deterioration of the indicators concerned with Participation and Human Rights, Sustainable Economic Opportunity and Human Development (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2016). Guinea-Bissau has experienced significant conflict and political and military instability both prior to and following independence (Pelissier, 1989a, 1989b; Sousa, 2012b, 2012a). The economic liberalisation policies

⁎ Corresponding author.

E-mail address: rdasilva.email@gmail.com (R.d. Silva).

For more details see, for example, Foster et al. (2012).

mid-1980s) and the adoption of a political system based on multiple political parties led to the first multiparty elections in 1994 (Cruz, 2007; Temudo, 2008). Since independence in 1974, there have been ten coups and a civil war from 1998 to 1999. The most recent coup was in 2006, which started another cycle of instability that is still under resolution. The country is considered to be one of the “most fragile states in Africa” and the first Africa Narco-State (O’Regan and Thompson, 2013, 1). Guinea-Bissau has one of the lowest gross domestic products per capita in the world (US$1270), poor infrastructure, weak social indicators and a poverty rate of 64.7% (MENCCJD, 2009; MEPIR, 2011; UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2011). At the present time Guinea-Bissau is living through food crises and it is a “failed state” facing a long period of “depeasantization” of the population – apparently as a consequence of the increased participation of children and youth in schooling (Temudo and Abrantes, 2013, 2015).

The country relies heavily on the Official Development Assistance, particularly for public services, and education is one of the public sectors, which depends largely on bilateral and multilateral aid (MEPIR, 2011; Monteiro, 2005). In this context, civil society (especially NGOs and the Catholic Church) plays a key role in assisting the population and in consolidating the State. The sectors, where civil society is more active, are education, wealth, human rights, the environment and consolidation of peace (Barros, 2012).

Although the official language is Portuguese, only 5% of the population speak it as their mother tongue, while around 10% purport to speak Portuguese. Most inhabitants speak one or more indigenous languages of which there are 20 (Monteiro, 2005; Benson, 2010; Observatório da Língua Portuguesa, 2009).

After independence (1974) the education system from the colonial period was changed on the basis of the experiences of the liberated zones and by constraints and demands imposed from different external organisations (Carr-Hill and Rosengart, 1982, 1983; Monteiro, 2005; Pehrsson, 1996). However, the structure of the education system remained unchanged until the beginning of 1990, despite several attempts to produce and approve an Education Act, which was only enacted in the 2009/2010 school year (Carr-Hill and Rosengart, 1982, 1983; Monteiro, 2005; Pehrsson, 1996; Daun, 1997). The availability of external funding is the main condition for interventions in the educational system and it seems that there is a lack of co-ordination between the various actors and projects/programmes, even with respect to the same donor (Carr-Hill and Rosengart, 1982, 1983; Monteiro, 2005; Pehrsson, 1996; Furtado, 2005). Because of this, the interventions in the education system are fragmented and limited to the time-frame of the aid projects/programmes with different international organisations playing a key role in decisions at the macro level (Carr-Hill and Rosengart, 1982, 1983; Monteiro, 2005; Pehrsson, 1996; Furtado, 2005; Barreto, 2012b; Silva et al., 2015). Despite the improvements achieved, since independence, the education system still does not reach all school aged children, thus it does not fulfil the goals of the Guinea-Bissau Constitution and the Education Act.

The education system also seems to be shaped by political decision, discontinuities, contradictions, unfinished reforms, inefficiency, instability, great differences between urban and rural areas and it is not appropriate for the reality of the country (Carr-Hill and Rosengart, 1982, 1983; Monteiro, 2005; Pehrsson, 1996; Furtado, 2005).

The school enrolment rates are low. For instance, Guinea-Bissau has the lowest rate in West African countries for pupils completing the first four years of schooling (UNESCO, 2013).

Political and military instability has had an enormous influence on the education system. Ever since independence, for example, 34 ministers of education have taken office (Lopes, 2014 and data of the author). This has resulted in an education system marked by “discontinuities and contradictions resulting from unfinished reforms” (our translation Monteiro, 2005, 131) and the first Education Act was not approved until 2010.

Parents and civil society play an active part in formal schooling, particularly in the creation of schools (community, religious and private), in the payment of tuition fees and by the provision of financial and non-financial incentives to teachers. These community-based schools seem to enjoy a greater reputation among parents and their teaching staff are more respected by the community than those working in public schools (Lopes, 2007; Barreto, 2012c; Ribeiro, 2001; Sanhá, 2011).

The right of teachers to have access to continuing professional development (CPD) activities is present in the 2011 law that established the career status of teachers, even though there is no formal system in place and this law is still waiting for regulations. The CPD activities and programmes are promoted by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international agencies in co-operation with the Ministry of Education.

The education system of Guinea Bissau is one of the sectors, which have received more foreign aid in the last forty years. Donors include multi-lateral agencies (e.g. the African Bank for Development, UEMOA, UNICEF, World Bank), bilateral agencies (e.g. Sweden, Holland, Portugal) and non-governmental organisations (e.g. Plan International, Fundação Fê e Cooperação). Over time donor presence in education in Guinea-Bissau has shaped the education system, particularly through conditional aid (especially with regard to financial issues) making it similar in terms of structure to that of Western countries (Pehrsson, 1996; Silva et al., 2015). However, this should not overshadow the fact that, ever since the armed struggle for independence (1964–1974), Guinea-Bissau has strived for universal education for all in order to achieve the levels of progress of other countries and this has been actively pursued by the Guinean State with the support of international organisations (Carr-Hill and Rosengart, 1983; Pehrsson, 1996; Monteiro, 2005). Despite these discontinuities and the enormous fragility of the schools in terms of lack of material resources, poor infrastructure and lack of trained teachers, the school system has proved to be tremendously resilient. Evidence of this resilience can be found in the following examples: (i) communities mobilised after Independence (and before Independence in freed areas) to gain and continue access to education; (ii) the 1998–1999 conflict did not affect the growth in gross school enrolment rates in the following years; (iii) during the school years 2009–2010 and 2010–2011, which have been the most politically stable years in recent times, key legislation was approved, national exams took place and the school years ran smoothly without any major interruptions (Monteiro, 2005; MENCCJD, 2013, 2011; MENCCJD, 2011). However, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) initiatives are scarce.

3. Methodology and data

In order to identify relevant studies we conducted a systematic search of 41 databases in Portugal, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal and online. The online search included ERIC, Google Scholar, JSTOR, B-on, Education Resources Information Center, Portuguese Open Scientific Repository, DiVA at Borås University (Sweden), Sussex Research Online, Bristol University Repository, Coimbra University Repository, Porto University Repository, ISCTE-IUL Repository, Minho University Repository, Algave University Repository, Lisbon University Repository, Beira Interior University Repository, Guinea-Bissau Docs, UNESCO – International Institute of Educational Planning, National Institute of Studies and Research (Guinea-Bissau), British Library for Development Studies, Guinea-Bissau United Nations Centre of Information and Documentation, ilisafrica – Internet Library for Sub-Saharan Africa, Web of Science, Web of Knowledge, Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations Union Catalog, Open Access Theses and Dissertations; Repositório TEL, Memórias de África e do Oriente,
We were able to conduct the screening process from February 2013 to December 2016. We reviewed all studies published in the period under analysis. We conducted a full text screening after an in depth analysis. The studies reviewed regarding the Students theme point that the achievements of students are not valued in the classroom by teachers. In these two periods the top two themes were the same. However, the studies that focused on language issues were higher in the first period of time (2012–2016). The language studies were about Portuguese language and different national languages. In the second period of time (2012–2014) the language studies were about Portuguese language, as a second language.

In relation to the thematic focus, the theme Teachers first arises in 1985 and continued until 1997 and in 2011 this theme emerged again. The theme Project Evaluation emerged in 1993 and went until 2013. In relation to the theme Schools the periods from 1988 to 1997 and 2005 to 2014 were the periods of time that this theme is found. Project evaluation studies were higher in 1996 (5), 2005 (4) and 2014 (6). With regard to the theme Teachers the periods from 1988 to 1997 and 2005 to 2014 were the periods of time that this theme is found.

The thematic focus and distribution of the studies are presented in Table 1. From the total studies reviewed 130 were in Portuguese, 15 in English and 3 in French.

4. Exploring the data

4.1. Thematic focus

Fig. 2 shows the distribution of the reviewed studies by year of publication. It can be seen that the majority of the studies were published during the periods from 1994 to 1998 and from 2012 to 2014. However, 1994 stands out with the highest number of studies (13). In the period from 1994 to 1998 the predominant themes were education policy, language and students. In the period from 2012 to 2014 the predominant themes were education policy, language and teachers. In these two periods the top two themes were the same. However, in relation to the language issues in the first period of time (1994–1998) the studies were about experimental designs of bilingual education with different national languages. In the second period of time (2012–2014) the language studies were about Portuguese language, as a second language.

Table 1

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- **Students**

- **Project evaluation**

- **Schools**

- **Language**

- **Education Policy**

- **Teachers**
focused on the Portuguese language and mathematic subjects achievements by testing the students using writing tests (Fazzio and Zhan, 2011; Fazzio et al., 2011; Boone et al., 2013; Pereira and Costa, 1994). These studies reported that the gender imbalance was high in the subjects tested. The boys had better results than the girls, although the overall results are low. The student’s family cultural and social economic background influence the test scores and education success (Ahlenhed et al., 1991; Cissoko et al., 1987; Carr-Hill and Rosengart, 1982). However it varies more according to the families’ jobs, religion and ethical group.

The majority of the studies reviewed stated that the results of the students were linked to the low quality of teaching and learning. This stemmed from the fact that there was a lack of school materials and the teachers had low salaries and insufficient or no training. However, the results from the Daun (1997) study must be taken in consideration. This study mentioned that: “Pupils do not have more success, when teachers have the teacher training that has been a requirement, since independence. Even when the level of instruction and level of teacher training are combined, and one of them is controlled for, no relationships in the expected direction emerge.” (Daun, 1997, 67). These results were also in line with, Lepri (1998) who reported that the improvement of the teacher qualifications on their own did not have a direct link to better results of the students.

4.1.2. Project evaluation

The studies reviewed highlight that the major programmes present in the published studies were those supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) [4 studies], the World Bank [1 study] and the Portuguese Development Cooperation Agency (IPAD) [5 studies].

The Swedish aid support was more evident during the period from 1969 to 1999. This development co-operation was bilateral and focused on the education sector, as a whole. It played a key role in the 1990 educational reform and the capacity building of the National Institute of Educational Development (Andersson-Brolin et al., 1990; Ballara et al., 1996). However, it stated that to some extent the lack of success was related with the strategies adopted, which stemmed from the fact that the strategies adopted were not appropriate for the context, because they had taken a top-down approach during the negotiations. They also assumed that the programme management could be undertaken by the partners and that the technical assistance would be able to contribute to a fundamental change in the education system.

The World Bank began supporting the country from 1985 onwards. The action that seems to have been more influence was the Firkidja Project (Banco Mundial, 2005). This project was implemented from 1997 to 2005 with an interruption during the period of the civil war (1998–1999). This project was considered critical for the education system in this period and it seems to have influenced a higher participation of civil society in the education system. It also contributed to the elimination of tuition fees for primary education, the promotion of school construction and rehabilitation, the supply of school materials and the payment of overdue salaries to the teachers (Banco Mundial, 2005).

The Portuguese Development Cooperation Agency has supported
the country, since its independence (Afonso et al., 2008). The priorities over time were the strengthening of Portuguese language, direct teaching of students, in-service and pre-service teacher training and also the training of school principals. However, the Portuguese language issues over time were overvalued. Nevertheless, these language issues, the projects seem to fit within the national policies for the education sector (Caetano, 2012, 2013; Laranjeiro, 2009; Afonso et al., 2008).

4.1.3. Schools

The studies of the theme Schools (e.g. Landim, 2010; Campos, 2009; Lopes, 2007; Baldé, 2012) allowed us to determine that the types of schools in Guinea-Bissau are: public, self-governing, private, community, korianic, madrassa, popular, government run, tutorial and foreign. However, what was considered a community school in one region could have been seen to be different in another, so at the national level we needed to be aware of this variation.

From the studies reviewed (Lopes, 2007; Barreto, 2012c; Sanó et al., 2012; Baldé, 2012; Sanhá, 2014; Sobral, 2012) is evident that the majority of community schools were situated in the Eastern part of the country and mainly in the Bafatá Region. In general schools were characterised as fragile in relation to the quality of the school buildings, access to subject content and to teaching and learning materials.

The families and civil society maintained a very active participation in the schools. The main roles were in school construction, the payment of school fees and the provision of monetary and non-monetary compensation for teachers (Landim, 2010; Campos, 2009; Cunha and Ba, 2008; Lopes, 2007; Ribeiro, 2001; Moreira, 1997; Furtado and Bamba, 1994; SINAPROF, 1995; Barreto, 2012c; Sanó et al., 2012; Koudawo and Gning, 1998; Baldé, 2012; Jao et al., 2006; Barbosa and Pereira, 1994; UNICEF, 2002; Fontán et al., 1993; Sanhá, 2014; Sobral, 2012).

The community schools usually followed the public school model and had a good reputation in their communities. All studies with specific reference to community schools stated that these schools always had an external organisation supporting their creation (e.g. NGOs, Catholic Church, Associations and State entities) (Lopes, 2007; Barreto, 2012c; Sanó et al., 2012; Baldé, 2012; Sanhá, 2014; Sobral, 2012).

4.1.4. Language

The language issue is complex and full of ambiguity. The studies associated with this theme allowed us to define that it was not agreed whether the official and schooling language (Portuguese) should be taught as a foreign language, as second language and/or as the only instructional language (Barbosa e Bizarro, 2011; Barbosa, 2012; Benson, 2010, 2003, 2002, 1994, 1993; Candé, 2008; Hovens, 1994, 2002; Gomes, 1997, 2007, 1994; Santos, 1997, 1994; Ballara, 1985; Saní, 1996; Baldé, 2013; Bachmann, 2014; Djaló, 1987; Callewaert, 1995; Fonseca, 2012; Scantamburlo, 2012, 2005; Solla, 2005; Ichinose, 1996). However, it seems to have been agreed that the Portuguese language should be used in the education system.

The absence of a national language policy was identified as a key constraint concerning the resolution of the language problems and ambiguities (e.g. Benson, 2010; Hovens, 1994, 2002; Monteiro, 2005; Scantamburlo, 2012). The language issue was identified as one of the key issues that prevented students from learning and which had led to low results for students and schools and high retention rates (e.g. Barbosa, 2012; Benson, 2010, 2005, 2002, 1994, 1993; Hovens, 1994, 2002; Gomes, 1997; Santos, 1997; Ballara, 1985; Saní, 1996; Baldé, 2013; Scantamburlo, 2005, 2012).

Most of the studies stated that the students that used Guinean Creole, as a home language and/or as mother tongue, had better school results than the other language combinations, when taking into consideration the many languages of the country (Hovens, 1994, 2002; Gomes, 1997, 1994; Santos, 1997; Ballara, 1985; Saní, 1996; Callewaert, 1995; Scantamburlo, 2005, 2012; Solla, 2005; Benson, 2003, 2002, 1994, 1993).

The studies that examined bilingual education stated that the students in these programmes had better school results (particularly in language subjects) and the learning environments were more positive and comfortable (Benson, 2002, 1994; Hovens, 2002).

4.1.5. Education policy

The studies about this theme (e.g. Barreto, 2012b; Cá, 2005b; Furtado, 2005; Monteiro, 2005; Lepri, 1985, 1996; Carr-Hill and Rosengart, 1983, 1982; Pehrsson, 1996; MENCCJD, 2011, 2009; Lopes, 2014; Guterres et al., 1986; Yonemura, 2015; UNESCO, 2013, 2013; Silva et al., 2015) allowed us to have a wide panoramic view of the education system. In this way it was possible to determine that the colonial education system was changed by taking into consideration the experiences of the liberated areas during the liberation struggle. Another issue that arises from the studies reviewed was that the education system was dependent on foreign aid and the availability of external funding was the main condition for interventions in the education system. So the changes introduced have always included conditions by the donor countries and agencies. It was also stated in the studies that there was a lack of co-ordination between the various actors and projects/programmes, even when funded by the same donor. The influence of donors was more visible after the political and economic liberalisation in 1986. Nevertheless, due to the instability of the country and constant government turnovers, the structure of the education system remained unchanged until the beginning of 1990, despite several attempts to produce and approve an Education Act, which was eventually enacted and published in 2010 (e.g. Furtado, 2005; Monteiro, 2005; Carr-Hill and Rosengart, 1983, 1982; Pehrsson, 1996; MENCCJD, 2011, 2013; Silva et al., 2015).

The interventions in the education system also have been fragmented and limited to the time-frames of the aid projects/programmes, even when different international organisations have played a key role in the macro level (Barreto, 2012b; Cá, 2005b; Furtado, 2005; Monteiro, 2005; Lepri, 1985, 1996; Carr-Hill and Rosengart, 1983, 1982; Pehrsson, 1996; MENCCJD, 2011, 2009; Lopes, 2014; Guterres et al., 1986; UNESCO, 2013; Silva et al., 2015).

As a consequence, the education system has been shaped by political indecision, discontinuities, contradictions, unfinished reforms, inefficiency, instability, great differences between urban and rural areas and it has not been appropriate for the reality of the country.

A homogenisation of the organisation of the education system has occurred and the education policies were undertaken with reference to other countries and regions of the world. Around 94% of the education budget was used to cover the salaries of teachers (MENCCJD, 2011, 2009; UNESCO, 2013; Silva et al., 2015).

From the studies we can also delimit that the educational reforms implemented usually did not take into account the country specific features that would have promoted a critical review of educational transfers from other countries and contexts (Barreto, 2012b; Cá, 2005b; Furtado, 2005; Monteiro, 2005; Lepri, 1985, 1996; Carr-Hill and Rosengart, 1983, 1982; Pehrsson, 1996). The promotion of private schools and a market orientated approach towards the education system was and still is present in the country (Furtado, 2005; Monteiro, 2005; Lepri, 1985, 1996; Carr-Hill and Rosengart, 1983, 1982; Pehrsson, 1996; MENCCJD, 2011, 2013; Silva et al., 2015).

4.1.6. Teachers

The studies under review stated that teachers were critical about the improvement of the education system (Santos et. al, 2012; Benavente e Varly, 2010; Campos and Furtado, 2009a; Portugal and Aveleira, 2009, 2007; Aveleira, 2006; Cá, 2005a; Dâmso, 1997; Daun, 1997; Rosabal, 2005; Landim and Bamba, 1994; Costa, 2014; Correia, 2013; Oliveira, 2009; CUNHA, 2005; Hovens, 2002).
In-service teacher training at national level started in 1975 with the Study Committees (Comissões de Estudo). However, this training had little or no impact on teaching practices or on career progression, so it promoted the creation of unrealistic expectations regarding the impact of in-service training on the quality of teaching and learning (Benavente and Varly, 2010).

The main challenges identified by the teachers were the cultural and language diversity of the country, Portuguese language, mathematics and civic education teaching (Benavente and Varly, 2010; Campos and Furtado, 2009a; Dâmaso, 1997; Monteiro, 2005). The studies about pre-service teacher training highlighted that this training faced several challenges (Santos et. al, 2012; Benavente and Varly, 2010; Campos e Furtado, 2009a; Portugal and Aveleira, 2009; Cá, 2005a; Dâmaso, 1997; Daun, 1997; Rosabal, 2005; Landim and Bamba, 1994; Costa, 2014; Correia, 2013; Lepri, 1988; Medeiros, 2005; Monteiro, 2005; Barbosa e Bizarro, 2011; Barreto, 2012b; Andersson-Brolin et al., 1990; Candé, 2008). When particular initiatives like the Study Committees were examined, we could see that these initiatives were re-vitalised in 1997 by a World Bank project. This seemed to have led to an improvement in lesson planning and the teaching methods of the teachers (Dâmaso, 1997; Monteiro, 2005). It was also clear from the studies under review that the teachers predominantly used the blackboard, oral presentation of their subjects, exercises in textbooks (when they were available) and student evaluation was by means of written tests (Benavente and Varly, 2010; Campos e Furtado, 2009a; Dâmaso, 1997; Daun, 1997; Rosabal, 2005; Landim and Bamba, 1994; Correia, 2013; Oliveira, 2014; Monteiro, 2005; Barbosa e Bizarro, 2011; Barreto, 2012b; Andersson-Brolin et al., 1990).

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4.2. Research design and source of research funding

The research designs in the reviewed studies were diverse but the qualitative approach was central. The data collection methods selected by the majority of the studies were interviews and surveys, as well as documentary reviews or historical analyses. Most of the studies under review did not identify their funding source. However, in the period from 1994 to 1997 the funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) played a key role in various studies produced in the country (Ba, 1997, 1996; Gomes, 1997, 1994; Hovens, 1994; Landim and Bamba, 1994; Namoni, 1994; Pereira and Costa, 1994; Pereira and Namoni, 1994; Santos, 1997, 1996). The majority of these studies were conducted by Guinea-Bissau nationals, particularly Ministry of Education officials. These Ministry of Education officials were almost all from the National Institute of Educational Development that benefited from a capacity building programme. More recently, the majority of the studies conducted by Guinea-Bissau nationals (from 2010 to 2015) were carried out by graduate students studying in Brazil and/or Portugal (Baldé, 2011, 2013; Djaló, 2014; Barreto, 2012c; Sucuma, 2013, 2015; Sani, 2013; Fandu, 2013; Correia, 2013; Bedeta, 2013; Gomes, 2014; Namone, 2014; Sanhá, 2014; Cá and Câ, 2015; Barbosa, 2015).

Although it was not possible to identify the sources of funding, Brazil and Portugal provided grants to Guinea-Bissau students to go to their countries to study in undergraduate and graduate courses. In this way, future research could examine the contribution of these grants in the training of the new generation of scholars and researchers of the country and whether or not this strategy will deliver similar results to the Swedish Cooperation of the 1990s.

5. Concluding reflections

This article reviewed 148 studies published between 1975 and 2015 about educational research in Guinea-Bissau in order to map the research terrain and to produce new knowledge without collecting new empirical data.

The revision allow to have rich information about the type of studies and relative emphasis during the period under analysis (1975–2015), the evolution of educational policies and practices, the role of foreign assistance, the importance parents give to education, the education status and educational research, and also how institutions such as schools and education survive in a country that experience considerable political and military instability and uncertainty. Our review shows clearly that the majority of the research was applied research and mainly due to external pressures on the country. Yet some consistent patterns have emerged. Among the studies carried out the Education Policy theme was the most frequent (41%) followed by language (19%) and then schools (12%), teachers (12%), students (9%) and project evaluation (7%). Thus education policy received more attention followed by language. This seems to be linked to the donors’ priorities and the particular needs for applied research to support educational reform(s). Nevertheless, the studies reviewed in the Education Policy theme allowed us to have a wide panoramic view of the education system and the status of education in the country. It is also possible to conclude that the educational reforms implemented usually did not take into account the Guinea-Bissau specific features.

The periods with the highest number of studies per year were from 1994 to 1998 and from 2012 to 2014. However, 1994 stands out with the highest number of actual studies (13). These studies were associated with the funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the majority of the studies were authored by Guinea-Bissau nationals from the National Institute of Educational Development (9 out of 13).

The Students theme highlight that the students’ results in the assessments tests were linked to the low quality of teaching and learning. It is also possible to conclude that the language and mathematical experiences of students are not valued in the classroom by teachers and the gender imbalance was high in the subjects tested. The assessments focused in the students’ writing tests achievements in Portuguese language and mathematics.

The studies under the theme Schools allowed us to conclude that there is 10 different typologies of schools in Guinea-Bissau. However, at the national level we needed to be aware that there is a variation in the definition of the same school(s) typology(ies). It is also possible to conclude that the families and civil society have a very active participation in schools. Although, the main roles played by the families and civil society are related with school construction, the payment of school fees and the provision of monetary and non-monetary compensation for teachers.

The Language issue studies allow us to conclude that this theme is complex and full of ambiguity. The absence of a national language policy was identified as a key constraint in this matter. Although it seems to have been agreed that the Portuguese language should be used in the education system, there is no consensus it should be taught as a foreign language, as second language and/or as the only instructional language. The teachers are identified as critical to improve the education system. Although some studies did not find a casual relation with...
students’ tests performance with teachers with training. Nevertheless, we can conclude that the main challenges that teachers face are the cultural and language diversity of the country, Portuguese language, mathematics and civic education teaching.

Finally, future research could examine the contribution of the grants from Portugal and Brazil in the training of the new generation of Guinea-Bissau scholars and researchers and whether or not this strategy will deliver similar results to the Swedish Cooperation of the 1990s.

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