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Educational Research Contents and Objectives: An Empirical Study on the Schools of River Nile State –Sudan

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Abstract

The study assumes that the faculties of education in Sudan have given a firm emphasis only in the issue of teaching, ignoring completely the development of human resources in the environmental context and regional levels in which these College of Education are founded. These colleges have overlooked the establishment of research centers to develop the human resources in the state or the region .Most recent studies on education indicate the objective of such establishments as to increase the awareness of knowledge in many areas and then apply the appropriate solutions to help direct teacher education and professional development inside schools. To test the validity of this hypothesis the paper has followed the descriptive analysis and distributed a questionnaire to ten of headmasters in primary schools and ten of headmasters in secondary schools in the state of the River Nile. Data was derived from interviews and document analysis of some Arabic references about education research. The questionnaire focused on the extent to which the aforementioned headmaster's schools have benefited from these existing colleges of education in the state and of the University of the Nile Valley during the past five years. The research found that despite the primary aim of these research centers which is to keep pace with the development of staff and the development of education research, but unfortunately such academic bodies are still lacking in the region.

Keywords: Educational research, human resources, Sudan, professional development

1 Introduction

Educational research is unanimously agreed upon by many Arab studies as the activity which aims to provide knowledge that allows educators to achieve educational goals and methods in the most effective ways. This Occurs by studying the environment of the student and to make it a favorable environment for the development of the desired direction in which s/he can grow and get strengthened as much as possible. Many studies in education research have unanimously synthesized the objectives of much educational research in order to help elaborate early detection of information, and then find ways to develop them for the better. Educational research also studies the reality of educational systems and reveals their characteristics and provides statements of the strengths and weaknesses of these systems in order to identify their circumstances and manipulate deeply their nature and diagnose their problems, and also increase their internal and external efficiency.

Educational research is to understand, explain and predict human behavior (Koul: 12). It also determines the effectiveness of the methods and techniques used in the classroom and show how to appropriately develop them and all the educational practices inside the classroom. Educational research also seeks to find the best ways that enable us to develop both qualitative and quantitative outcomes of education. But, nonetheless, these studies do not show how, when, or why research affects education policy? A question which asked by Hess (2008). The concepts of scientifically – based research, engaged researches and syntheses, and applied evaluation, and how to move research to practice need to be more elaborated in the Arab world. For example most of the faculties of education in the Arab world do not synthesize their research findings.

In America for example there are three types of intermediaries who conduct that task. Hess (ibid) shows them as nonpartisan group, membership group, and mission – driven or ideological organization. All of them work towards synthesizing the findings of the done researches. The first he mentioned is a neutral organization whose main concern is synthesizing available scholarship. The second type main concern is to promote research findings to their policy agendas. The third uses the research findings to advance and serve their ideological or philosophical approaches. He identifies that nonpartisan groups do not have the same clout of the membership groups since the former lacks clear audiences and sympathizers . The surveyed attempts of Arab and Sudanese educators on educational researches which this present study reviewed focus mainly on providing only operational definitions of educational research. One of the strategies adopted in this paper is to quote from some Arabic literature on educational research and align it with some international conceptions of educational research in order to create a standard of comparison that can help enrich the present discussion about educational research.

Al-Katib, and Abu Farah , and Abu Samaha (1985: 7) in their book which entitled ' Perspective of Educational Research and Evaluation' show those who actually need educational research as the directors of educational projects, researchers, the authors of the proposals , educational supervisors, reviewers of research, students in the first degree, students of graduate studies who are doing their Masters and PhDs. Education research can work as a general reference to workers in the field of education, and in the sections of research and studies, and in the evaluation of educational projects. From what is said about educational research, we find ourselves in the process of asking the following questions:

1. What are the mechanisms used by educational research to trigger the reality of educational systems and diagnose their problems and work towards the renewal if necessary of their internal and external efficiency?
2. Are there any pragmatic restrictions which justify for the establishment of colleges of education research centers who serve the educational issues and change and supply if it is required the institutional culture with new models and the needed information and resources?
3. Is research centers model that existed in the developed countries the same as the model found in our Arab countries?
4. What is the scientific tool of faculties of education by which they operate, develop and design new programs within the schools? Then receive feedback from schools?
5. How can the manifest syllabi inside schools be renewed and developed? Is it basically a process which entirely depends on the experiences of those who work in colleges of education or is it a variable which needs the expertise of scientific research?
6. Is there any complementary relationship between the process of teaching and student learning, and educational research in the state of the River Nile?

The researcher of the present work finds that the majority of titles that carry the concept of educational research in the Arab world do focus only on the steps of how to write scientific research totally deviated from concepts of education. That is there is a clear confusion between the concept of scientific research; and scientific educational research in general. Al-Kilni and Al Shareefian (2007: 15) in their book " Introduction to Educational and Social Sciences" confirm this by saying that the definitions that were mentioned for educational research in the Arab world do not differ between an author and the other one . The researcher notes that all the books on educational research in many libraries of the faculties of education in Sudan are mere representations of how scientific based studies are scientifically conducted. Here , however, the researcher asks the following questions: what is the difference between such studies on educational research and books composed specially for descriptive and applied statistics? Is scientific research the same as scientific educational research? What is the difference that can be caused by scientific educational research? To elaborate on this and to create standard of comparison between the message of the faculty of education in Sudan and other countries, the paper has reviewed some related literature in the field.

The faculty of education in the University of Botswana for example see the site (www.ub.bw) has contributed in the promotion of human intellectual capacities of the nation through the teaching of the teacher. This college views the quality of education and quality of life generally rely solely on the quality of the teacher and the work of teaching in the classroom . One of the aims of the faculty is to design programs to train teachers and upgrade the professionalism of the teachers and supervisors and many of those who work in the field of education. This college is also planning studies through which educators, administrators and researchers should obtain knowledge of education which may qualify them to leadership in the community. The college also has created strong links with schools through its research centers . The school then can serve the concept of feedback which normally help develop the schools for the better.

Nwane (2005) differentiates between the nature of scientific research and scientific educational research. Education research psychological problems he mentioned appear in theories of learning, factors affecting learning, memory and oblivion, motivation and maturity, child growth and development. There are also philosophical problems which lie in the logical analysis of concepts, values, right to an education, learning objectives, moral judgments, methods of logic and meaning, the nature and characteristics of knowledge, and problems of evaluation and its process –oriented evaluation and examinations, tools and methods of analysis, the pupil . Content problems he said are the factors that influence the choice of content, format and organization of content. Teaching method problems appear in the teaching methods and educational techniques. The administrative problems are shown by him as how to fund the school, the system inside school, school records, leadership strategies, training of educational staff. The social problems appear in the school community, relationship with the teacher and student, school student relationship, the behavior of students in the classroom, disruptive students.

There are also historical problems which are the institution's history, programs, places and people whose main interest in education may influence the process of education. Perhaps, and by providing these educational models we could provide some answers of the previous questions which have sought to develop a definition of educational research. So what expected from any title of educational research is to find a complete pragmatic educational experience of school projects and processes of teaching and curricula of a particular country. Certainly, the problems of the teacher and the curriculum and student differ from one country to another, so what a reader can expect from a book on educational research is to see the reality of education in a particular framework and culture-specific notion as required by the guidelines of scientific based research.

It has been observed in many educational faculties in Sudan that educational researches show the main characteristics of writing scientific research without providing real educational experiments. For example, the class size in developed countries is less than the class size in third world countries and this may trigger different educational technology in each case. This may have led some educators to link the education technology with the quality of teaching, this view has also led others of educationalists to say that the quality of teaching does not necessarily require high educational technology and that teaching may be good only with the use of the blackboard and chalk, and that the educational process as a whole depends on the quality of teacher and his/her training. What makes the researcher provide the above example is his will to pursue the nature of educational research which always cares about the student environment and the possibility of how those students develop for the better? Comparative education and different environmental conditions may lead to various educational researches while preserving the general characteristics of educational Research.

2. Methodology

According to the merits of school and environmental differences, educational research differs from one country to another. The researcher has conducted some surveys, questionnaires, interview Surveys. The researcher has picked teachers from the interviewed schools to guarantee a proper response. Also, those teachers who have conducted the survey may clarify and explain what is difficult about the raised questions to be considered by the interviewees. All the questions in these surveys focused in the link between education faculties and the schools in the River Nile state Sudan and whether there were any recommendations of educational research to be applied in Schools? Do the schools on their educational processes consult educational researches to acquaint advice and educational expertise? Are there any long-term educational experimentation tested by the schools of the State in the past five years? And so many questions that seek to clarify the relationship of colleges of education to schools of the state. The researcher has used simple statistics and a descriptive analysis by reviewing literature of a number of educational systems and then compares them with the educational system of the state. The goal of this research is to assist in refiguring and developing of the scientific concept of cultural educational research.

3. Literature Review

Aboud (1990: 89) in his book "Education and Ideology" determines ten of the difficulties in discussing the issue of comparative education because of the different terminologies used in the field of education from one country to another. One of the difficulties he mentioned is that research in the field of comparative education needs extensive knowledge of education, pedagogy, economics of education, curriculum and teaching methods, psychology and mental health. It needs also extensive knowledge of economics, politics, sociology, geography, anthropology, philosophy and general history, and history of education and other things. He also spoke about the inaccuracy of the statistics in developed countries, which may be exaggerated, and says that the study of statistics needed to be explained scientifically, for example, the education budget and the share of each learner of this budget requires knowledge of a currency exchange, and value of purchasing, and the level of the sample and the educational levels placed on budget and ambitions and hopes of the people, and so on. Educational research needs what is mentioned and on the top of that it needs to provide for the general public as decision-making source all the results of all the documents and scientific analysis which can be provided by a tool of science. Educational reform is usually done through educational research.

For example if it is assumed that there is a certain change in the curriculum approach without examining the educational knowledge existed, it will be a risky attempt of the student future, or unscientific attempt for satisfying political agendas and convenience of a special political stance. Educational research always protects and fortifies itself from politics and the media through the research centers which have a legitimate explanation, defense and decision-making including funding authorized in the laws of the State. We also say that empirical studies of educational research requires a number of choices which show how to determine the terms or conditions of the experience, and identify all the factors involved in the experiment. Of course, these factors involved in the experiment have its own cultural and intellectual features that differ from one country to another.

And certainly there is a difference in the funding system, and the public education system between countries so it is difficult to apply the absolute results of research education done in a particular country on another country but of course you can benefit to a certain degree commiserating with the terms and conditions of the country's attempt to take advantage of these results. For example how can as a country you benefit from the Scotland model of paper –based tracking system? See, Applied Educational Research Scheme (www.aers.org.uk). The Scotland model aim is to upgrade the educational level of the student; the Scottish educational system has applied a system to know the progress of student achievement in school. The longitudinal study had been financed from the Government for a period of five years. The system provides record showing students academic progress through a number of stages of education.

The objective of this follow-up system was to make all teachers share the private information of students. The philosophy of this system lies in that skills and learning of student development are affected by many factors including the style and quality of teaching, the conditions of the semester, the psychological behavior of the learner. Many things can be read through student record, which lasts with him as long as s/he student under the official system of education in Scotland. Of course, there is interference when the record reflects lack of Progress, and then the problem will be referred to an educational specialist for reconsideration. This study was conducted on six of the schools in Scotland by the number of six researchers and educators. The study has arrived at following:

- Most teachers like to record information on the progress of their students.
- The system of paper - based tracking system has been used in the six schools.
- Only two schools followed the follow-up system through the computer and by doing so they facilitate the administrative information between the school and teachers. This may help all teachers deal with and share solving educational problems.
- One of these schools has used the follow-up by computer showing how the behaviors of students match with the educational objectives . This Technique helps the family know about their student grade average point and then issuing reports and discussing them with sections .
- The former teachers in the six schools have preferred the student registration information in the files of regular monitoring sheets, while the young teachers preferred using the digital technology.

Many of the educationalists in Scotland have criticized the files system assuming that this system does not provide an opportunity for all teachers to participate in the reading of information about their students. This they thought may lead to a lack of comparability between students with low achievement and students with high achievements , and could also be hardly to compare for example different types of girls with boys. From this study which took place in Scotland it can be said that there is always a mechanism combines education scientific research with the schools around . To prove this argument, we find that the University of Queen in Canada has school of education interested in studying the disabled and provide them with methods of teaching process. There are also a lot of researches in disabilities that have been synthesized by this center then delivered to the family and society. This school has also sought to create an independent life of the disabled through which to serve himself and the community in which they live.

From the above we can say faculty of education can prepare a good teacher through its courses. It can also support through its research centers and bear all the negative aspects of the community around it as well. Faculty of education at the same time can promote a culture of educational research and dissemination of results and their application through the process of teaching in schools. This will be achieved through its publications and seminars and through its research, innovation and the provision of an advice and counseling. For example, see Wisconsin in the site www.were.wise.edu and how this center and its several branches discuss many issues of education. For example the Centre of integrative research, the center for education children and families and schools, the center for overlapping sciences of Education.

This center has reached to that the loss of academic skills of students is due the weak health of the student, and the increased rates of pregnancy, prison, mental illness. We have mentioned these results to say that it is not all the time that the educational research results can be generalized to different cultural circumstances. And it is, however, believed by some educators that the holding of educational research cannot be apart from the teacher. That is to say the teacher should be a genuine part of making a research, not a sample as it is always used to be. Research centers (www.jstor.org/stable/20404109) are different between developed countries and some countries in Africa and Arab countries. In developed countries the faculties of education always have research centers as affiliated bodies to develop human resources and the human cadre in schools, but in most Arab countries, usually there is a national center for Educational Research, see the website of the Ministry of Education and educational in Egypt site(moa.gov.eg/Arabic/about/perfe

We find that there are longitudinal studies carried out by the National Center for Examinations and Educational Evaluation in collaboration with the National Center for Educational Research and Development to measure the impact of reform and the application of national standards for high quality performance in the education foundation. This has proven our argument which claims that Arab countries are not following the same system of the research centers that followed in many countries in Europe and some of the African countries. Another example of an Arab country which is the Sultanate of Oman is Al- Asadee's (2006) study on "The Possibility of applying the recommendations of the Educational Research". He mentioned in this scientific paper the extent of possibility in implementing the recommendations of educational research in national development projects. He shows that the research centers of education in Oman are affiliated bodies of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, and not the Ministry of Education.

He said that educational research in Oman is always conducted by regional and international organizations backed by the United Nations. He identifies three types of educational research prevailing in Oman. The first is the descriptive research which deals with the problems that affect the success of the educational process such as the failure of students and drop-out and the conditions of learning and educational technology and evaluation of teacher performance. Secondly, there is the empirical research and this type cares about the styles and teaching methods. Thirdly there are the theoretical studies which are studies in the history of education and comparative education and the historical development of education, and the theories of education philosophy. He concludes that all of these patterns of research designs conducted in Oman add valuable information to the reality of education and they suggest ways to improve it according to international experience. He suggests in his article that the results and recommendations of education research received in accordance with the requirements of the reality of education in the Sultanate should propose some lights to decision-makers in the Sultanate which he elaborated as follows:

- There should be annual Cooperation with research centers concerned with science and educational psychology programs.
- Encourage evaluative researches (curriculum, teacher, and student)
- Committees of each curriculum should be established to issue quarterly reports of what can be added, deleted. These committees should be associated with the educational decision-makers directly.
- There should be a Coordination between officials educators, and members of the House of Representatives concerned with the education system to raise educational problems with the overall impact on the educational system . Educators should send recommendations to the Council of Ministers to question or invite those responsible for educational decision-making in the country .
- Provision of adequate financial budgets in coordination with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education is deemed to be of necessary .
- There should be an annual conference by the Ministry of Education to discuss education issues.
- Educators should Participate in international conferences to benefit from the experiences of others.

To conclude this literature by Hess' (2008) paper which entitled "When Education Matters" and in which he mentioned that "most discussion of education research has focused on how to identify 'best practices' or 'scientifically based methods' to use research findings". He tries to answer the questions of how ,when , or why research affects education policy. He mentioned that not all the same research finding have impact on students achievement. To prove that he provides the STAR legislators and their class size reduction program which has been applied in California with \$1.7 as a cost. He said that because policymakers were inattentive to the nuances of the different setting in which the educational research was conducted, this experiment was failed in California state. He said that "The class size example highlights the degree to which research is not a purely technical endeavor but, rather, it must be understood as part of an ecosystem of interpreters, advocates, funders, and policymakers"

4. Conclusion:

In this paper we try to provide different views about educational research to deepen Hess's concept of ecosystem and why this concept is not till now clearly understood in Sudan and most of the Arab world. We said in the beginning of this paper that most written books by Arab authors of educational research are considered as mere attempts of writing about descriptive statistics and how scientifically based researches are done ignoring entirely the education cultural side. A questionnaire was devised to test our hypothesis which claims that schools in River Nile State in Sudan stand as isolated islands receiving only trained teachers and nothing else from the educational establishments (faculties of education), . Below is the analysis of the questionnaires and the surveyed interviews conducted by the researcher.

Hub (2009: 233) describes the Oxford Calculating Method as an arithmetic mean of 1, 0 to 2.4 which means the absence of more weak points of the phenomenon or it is not at all used. The arithmetic mean of 2.5 to 3.4 means that an average over again refers to the existence or use of the phenomenon sometimes. And the arithmetic mean of 3.4 to 5.0 means that there is high persistence and repeated use of the phenomenon. Having calculated the arithmetic mean of the ten primary schools and ten secondary schools, the researcher has drawn the result of the arithmetic mean as follows :

Table shows the occurrences of the schools and the arithmetic mean

Secondary schools frequency	Mean	Primary schools frequency	Mean	
24	2.5	23	2.3	Yes always
18	1.8	24	2.4	Yes sometimes
52	5.2	47	4.7	never

The Main questions which test the hypothesis of this paper which claims the importance of research centers in developing the educational process, acculturate families, develop curriculum , do longitudinal studies, and train teachers have received the lowest frequency results. Some surveyors added that there are only some guidance from the Ministry of Education of how schools should work. Results confirms that the main concern of colleges of educations in River Nile State in Sudan is just training teachers and completely ignoring when education research matters. The paper concludes the following:

1. There was not any longitudinal study funded over the past five years in the schools of River Nile State testing what it works inside the schools of the region.
2. Colleges of education have a fixed role which is graduating teachers to serve teaching process in the basic and secondary levels. These colleges do not implement, scale up, sustain, and evaluate research proven programs in the learning environment.
3. There are no educational research centers as affiliated bodies to colleges of education as is the case in developed countries.
4. Colleges of education in the State have no role in the research and methods of teaching the disabled (social and physical handicapping). The only institute in the State for that (Institute of broader horizons for the disabled) is belonging to the Ministry of education in the State where its supervision and management lie over a foreign organization.
5. The feedback of schools is stifled since there is no research centers that offer advice and guidance .The school and staff strive alone by taking advantage of the possibilities available to maintain good learning outcomes. The question which remains unanswered is what about the quality of learning outcomes if they are conducted alone by schools?
6. The issues of educational research are discussed as abstracted concepts (Reification). There were no procedural concepts (Operational) that can appropriately measure the research hypotheses. This leads to sweeping generalizations which do not suit the nature of educational research.

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Appendix

Mr. / Headmaster of School River Nile State

Your response may be of interest to serve the scientific educational research in the state. Your answers will be confidential. The main hypothesis which generates all the questions of the questionnaire is about receiving as a headmaster any kind of recommendation from educational centers during the past five years.

The Questionnaire:

1. Are there any recommendations urging you to apply new techniques in the process of learning at your school?

Yes, always () Yes, sometimes () Never ()

2. Are there any recommendations on how to educate the family and to keep up with the first stages of education?

Yes, always () Yes, sometimes () Never ()

3. Are there any recommendations regarding the applied evaluation, "the teacher, the student, the curriculum" and the relationship of the family and the student?

Yes, always () Yes, sometimes () Never ()

4. Are there any recommendations regarding the general education curriculum? Modification, addition or deletion?

Yes, always () Yes, sometimes () Never ()

5. Does the role of the Faculty of Education in the state confine merely to the preparation of a good teacher?

Yes, always () Yes, sometimes () Never ()

6. Are the education problems in your school similar to that of other countries?

Yes, always () Yes, sometimes () Never ()

7. Do you recommend transferring the others' experiences in education research to your school?

Yes, always () Yes, sometimes () Never ()

8. Do you agree on the employment of those educational experiences derived from outside in your school ?

Yes, always () Yes, sometimes () Never ()

9. Are there longitudinal studies funded in coordination with the Center of educational research urging you as a headmaster to implement new programs or apply a certain evaluation on the running educational experience you are in?

Yes, always () Yes, sometimes () Never ()

10. Are there any training programs or teacher workshops for your teachers discussing the publication results of local and global educational research findings?

Yes, always () Yes, sometimes () Never ()