THE RESEARCH CAPACITY STRENGTHENING STRATEGY FOR EVIDENCE-BASED EDUCATION POLICY AND PRACTICE IN KADUNA AND KANO STATES, NIGERIA
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Executive summary

Appropriate and effective education policy can be usefully informed by appropriate and effective education research. However, policymakers typically fail to make use of research produced by academics and academics typically fail to make their research accessible to policymakers. In Northern Nigeria, and elsewhere, this significantly weakens opportunities to improve the education sector in general and the primary education sector in particular. The comprehensive literature review in the annex to the main report highlights the extent of this problem.

Education Data, Research and Evaluation in Nigeria (EDOREN) designed a research capacity strengthening strategy that requires practitioners (acting as proxies for policymakers) to collaborate with and work alongside academics in designing and delivering rigorous policy-focused research. The strategy, which is described in detail in the main report, has five key components: (i) engaging in policy-driven research; (ii) partnership; (iii) mentoring; (iv) repeated policy feedback; and (v) hands-on support. The strategy was integrated into the EDOREN project Identifying, Recruiting and Deploying Effective Teachers in Kano and Kaduna States which started in 2016.

Research teams comprising senior and junior practitioners and academics were formed in Kaduna and Kano States and were tasked with generating policy-focused research that was then used to inform a series of appropriate policy recommendations. At the time of reporting, the Education Secretaries from the two States had broadly accepted these recommendations and there was evidence of some recommendations being implemented at the Local Government Area level.

All members of the research teams were interviewed at the beginning, mid-point and end of the project about their experiences of the project in the context of the strategy's five components. These five components—except for the mentoring—were successfully realised and contributed to the broad acceptance of the policy recommendations to date. The research capacity strengthening activities and the realisation of the components for research capacity strengthening are detailed in the main report.

The main report also explains how and why three issues influenced the research capacity strengthening strategy.

The researchers (both academics and practitioners) initially saw the main study as a mostly academic exercise. This disrupted the fundamental principle of academics and practitioners collaborating as co-researchers with equal status and equally important contributions to make. This issue was partially resolved as the main study progressed and as the practitioners demonstrated the value of their knowledge and skills.

The study highlighted considerable deeply embedded mistrust between the academics and practitioners. It was disguised by the rhetoric of collaboration but its origins are traced to the belief that neither side respects the potential contributions to education policy and practice of the other. The extent of this mistrust inevitably varies between individuals but it presents significant barriers to successful collaboration. It was partially negotiated as researchers from both sides acknowledged and accepted the value of what their colleagues contributed to the main study.

A third party was needed to help the researchers negotiate this mistrust. EDOREN provided necessary technical support to the State-based research teams. This enabled the provision of the brokerage that allowed most of the researchers (both the practitioners and the academics) to negotiate the mistrust and to acknowledge and appreciate what their colleagues contributed to the main study.

The potential exists for collaboration that will improve the quality of primary education in Northern Nigeria. That potential is currently limited by the mistrust identified in this study. However, this study also identified strategies for negotiating it and so increasing the potential for improving the quality of primary education through collaborative research.
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<td>ASC</td>
<td>Annual School Census</td>
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<td>CPD</td>
<td>Continuing professional development</td>
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<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department for International Development</td>
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<td>EDOREN</td>
<td>Education Data, Research and Evaluation in Nigeria</td>
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<td>ESSENCE</td>
<td>Enhancing Support for Strengthening the Effectiveness of National Capacity Efforts</td>
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<td>ESSPIN</td>
<td>Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria</td>
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<td>IDS</td>
<td>Institute for Development Studies</td>
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<td>LGA</td>
<td>Local Government Area</td>
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<td>LoI</td>
<td>Letter of interest</td>
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<td>NCE</td>
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<td>NEHSI</td>
<td>Nigeria Evidence-Based Health Systems Initiative</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>OPM</td>
<td>Oxford Policy Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCT</td>
<td>Randomised control trial</td>
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<td>SACMEQ</td>
<td>Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality</td>
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<td>SMO</td>
<td>Social Mobilisation Officer</td>
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<td>SMOE</td>
<td>State Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>SSO</td>
<td>School Support Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUBEB</td>
<td>State Universal Basic Education Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>TDR</td>
<td>Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases</td>
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<td>TEHIP</td>
<td>Tanzania Essential Health Interventions Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>TLRP</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning Research Programme</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
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Introduction

Appropriate and effective education policy can be usefully informed by appropriate and effective education research. However, Education Data, Research and Evaluation in Nigeria (EDOREN) highlighted the problem that policymakers in Northern Nigeria typically fail to make use of research when formulating education policy and academics typically fail to make their research accessible to policymakers (2015a, b). The extensive literature review in this report makes clear that this is a common problem throughout Nigeria and the rest of the world. In Northern Nigeria, it significantly weakens opportunities to improve the education sector in general and the primary education sector (the main focus of EDOREN’s work) in particular.

There are significant problems with the identification, recruitment and deployment of effective teachers in Northern Nigeria. Recruitment and deployment policies are often ineffective (e.g. they do not consider whether teachers are willing to fill vacant positions in specific schools) and are undermined by a system of patronage. These problems are compounded by this lack of policy-relevant research. Policymakers typically do not consider evidence-based research and academics fail – and often refuse – to engage with policy and policymakers. That is, the two sectors rarely work together1.

In response to this problem, EDOREN designed a research capacity strengthening strategy (2016) that focuses on supporting the capacity to use evidence from education research to support public primary schools in Northern Nigeria. Given the decentralised nature of education provision in Nigeria, the main emphasis here lies with supporting policymakers from the State Ministry of Education (SMOE) and the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) in the States EDOREN works in as well as academics from State research institutions.

This strategy was embedded into the study on the identification, recruitment and deployment of effective teachers (Allsop and Watts, 2017). Two State-based research teams from Kaduna and Kano worked on that study. The teams were comprised of senior and junior practitioners and academics. It should be noted that the research capacity strengthening strategy makes reference to the collaborative involvement of policymakers but few of the researchers from SMOE/SUBEB had the authority to influence or initiate policy. They are therefore referred to here as ‘practitioners’ to avoid the risk of overestimating their potential to influence or initiate policy. However, it should also be noted that the teams had access to policymakers through the practitioners2.

The research capacity strengthening strategy is detailed in the study design but its main premises are that by working together in inter-sectoral collaboration:

- academics can generate appropriately-focused research providing evidence for informing policy; and
- practitioners can focus that research and help make it accessible and therefore usable.

The first year of the Effective Teachers Study made clear that such inter-sectoral collaborations can work and can strengthen research capacity. The developing collaboration is summarised below in the summary of those activities that are characterised here as the rhetoric, the reality and reflections on collaboration.

The strategy identified five key components with the potential to contribute to the research capacity strengthening design: (i) engaging in policy-driven research; (ii) partnership; (iii) mentoring; (iv) repeated policy feedback; and (v) hands-on support. This study found that most of them were successful in making significant contributions to research capacity strengthening (although the mentoring component was weak). The study also identified the significant problem of deep inter-sectoral mistrust that impacted on most of

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1 We use the term ‘sector’ here to identify the policy-makers/practitioners and the academics as it is commonly used in this sense in Nigeria. Elsewhere, however, the term ‘agency’ may be used instead (e.g. ‘multi-agency working’ in the UK).

2 One of the senior practitioners initially named in the Kano State Team, for example, was promoted to Permanent Secretary, and although this meant he had to stand down from the study he maintained a strong interest in it.
these components. This mistrust was disguised throughout much of the study by the rhetoric of collaboration. It is important to note that it did not surface as dislike. The team members appeared to work harmoniously for most of the time from the outset of the study and some inter-sectoral friendships emerged from it. However, the significance of this mistrust cannot be underestimated as it helps to explain why policymakers and practitioners fail to collaborate with academics in Northern Nigeria to work towards the common goal of improving the primary education sector.

Most of the researchers negotiated that mistrust – some much more quickly than others – as they learned to appreciate the contributions their colleagues made to the study. The negotiation of this inter-sectoral mistrust is addressed throughout this report. The report makes clear that the inter-sectoral collaboration needed to generate evidence-based policy recommendations is possible. However, it does require a third party (the part played here by EDOREN) to broker that negotiation.
2 Literature review

There is a great deal of emphasis on the importance of collaboration between policymakers and academics (World Bank, 2005, 2009; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2007; World Health Organization (WHO), 2008) as it can generate rigorous evidence-based policies that have the potential to address significant practical problems. However, the comprehensive literature review conducted for this report (included here as Annex A) highlights the very limited consideration of how such collaborations might work in practice.

The need for collaboration between policymakers and academics is often recognised at the political level (OECD, 2007; Bridges and Watts, 2008; Moloi and Chetty, 2010). This is important because policymaking is a complex process that needs to balance different considerations while taking account of research-based evidence. Although it has been suggested that there is a ‘lack of political will on the part of government to create a sustainable partnership between policymakers and researchers’ in Nigeria (Uneke et al., 2012, p. 757) Nigerian policymakers have shown their willingness to participate in academic research (Ogboro et al., 2013; Akiri, 2014; Awe and Vance, 2014; Onwujeke et al., 2015; Babalola and Sowunmi, 2016). This provides insight into how policymaker-academic relationships might be managed. For example, Babalola and Sowunmi concluded that senior education policymakers in Oyo State base their decisions on evidence (2016) but added that they felt the evidence was often limited and sometimes ambiguous. These are significant problems if academic research is to inform policy but such problems can be addressed through collaborative workshops that provide the clarification and explanation policymakers may require (Uneke et al., 2012, 2013; Ogboro et al., 2013; Babalola and Sowunmi, 2016).

For their part, Nigerian academics have called for greater collaboration with policymakers (Uneke et al., 2012, 2013; Ogboro et al., 2013; Abimbola et al., 2014; Awe and Vance, 2014) but they typically fail to explain how such collaboration should take place in ways that maintain academic integrity and promote the academic role of research. There is some acknowledgement from Nigerian academics that they could be more active in promoting their work and making it more policy-relevant (Ogboro et al., 2013; Awe and Vance, 2014; EDOREN, 2015a, b). However, the underlying problem seems to be that academic researchers lack a clear understanding of policymaking processes and so ‘are producing research evidence that is irrelevant to [the] policymaking process, and even when policy-relevant evidence is produced [it is] often inaccessible to policymakers’ (Uneke et al., 2012, p. 751).

The work of the Southern and Eastern Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) provides a useful template for addressing these problems in Sub Saharan Africa. It is based on the understanding that effective policy research needs to be genuinely participatory. Continuous dialogue between policymakers and academics enables policy-relevant research and eases the reporting of potentially contentious or sensitive findings (Moloi and Strauss, 2005; Murimba, 2005a, b; Moloi and Chetty, 2010) as well as helping ‘policy-makers understand the implications of findings’ (Murimba, 2005a, p. 85).

Such help is often necessary because policymakers and academics typically approach research with different mindsets. Appropriate space and support is therefore needed to facilitate collaboration (Murimba, 2005a, b; Vally and Spreen, 2008; Dawson and Sinwell, 2012; Uneke et al., 2012, 2013). Successful collaboration also requires the acknowledgement of different types of expertise (Murimba, 2005a; Uneke et al., 2012, 2013; Urwick, 2014). However, collaboration does not come out of nowhere: appropriate training is needed to negotiate the problems arising from the clash of those different mindsets (Uneke et al., 2012, 2013; Huaynoaca et al., 2014; Iyengar and Ifeyinwa, 2014; Chukwudzie et al., 2015; Iyengar et al., 2015; Babalola and Sowunmi, 2016).

There is a concern that these different mindsets lead to different understandings of what counts as reliable, rigorous and robust research (Bridges and Watts, 2008; Watts, 2010). On one level, this is less of an issue in Nigeria where policymakers and academics tend to presume that quantitative research methodologies
should be used. As discussed below, this presumption can be problematic when other methodologies may be more appropriate. However, collaboration can help negotiate those problems. Onwujekwe et al. (2015) examined the value different stakeholders in Nigeria placed on evidence generated in health-based studies and concluded that ‘formal evidence’ (e.g. survey reports) was more likely to inform policy because it was understood to be rigorous and easier to translate into policy. However, the policymakers in their study indicated that they were willing to consider other forms of evidence if they added value and were justified.

Justifying particular types of evidence necessarily requires the collaboration that is the hallmark of successful capacity building. This, though, has sometimes proved problematic in Nigeria, particularly at the Federal level. Allsop et al. argue that there is ‘a need for continued engagement and advocacy to encourage and respond to a high-level commitment to improving basic education’ (2015, p. 47). At the State level, enthusiastic rhetoric for collaborative work is often undermined by ‘insufficient knowledge and skills on the concepts of advocacy, policy influencing as well as facilitation techniques’ (Adediran and Bawa, 2010, p. 1). EDOREN (2015a) highlights the lack of clear guidance on the engagement between academics and policymakers in the pursuit of sustainable research capacity development in the field of education.

Collaboration requires an appreciation of different understandings of common problems. This can be achieved through the use of research tools developed to improve policy implementation (Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR)/WHO, 2008; World Bank, 2009; Enhancing Support for Strengthening the Effectiveness of National Capacity Efforts (ESSENCE), 2014) but it necessitates appropriate technical training and training in the soft skills of communication.

Academics need to be taught how to work with policymakers to identify relevant research and make it accessible and the training needs to be evaluated to ensure that it is appropriate (Nchinda, 2002; Court and Young, 2003; TDR/WHO, 2008; Ryan et al., 2012; ESSENCE, 2014; Ogundahunsi et al., 2015). Appropriate training for policymakers is also necessary to the success of collaborative programmes (Court and Young; 2003; World Bank, 2008; de Grauwe, 2009; Mugabo et al., 2015). Formal networks can facilitate training but some work far better than others and the reasons for these differences seem to be poorly understood (Court and Young, 2003).

Ownership of the research is reported as a key issue that may go some way to explaining this. Academics need ownership of their projects (Ager and Zarowsky, 2015; Ogundahunsi et al., 2015) but so too do policymakers (Nchinda, 2002; Court and Young, 2003; Mugabo et al., 2015). The concern with collaboration clearly implies joint ownership of research (Akogun et al., 2001; Court and Young, 2003; Neilson and Smutylo, 2004; TDR/WHO, 2008; Okeibunor, 2010; Uneke et al., 2010; Ogundahunsi et al., 2015) but this is not always a straightforward process.

However, Ogundahunsi et al. (2015) offer a potential solution in their recent review of the Special Programme on Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR). They concluded that research capacity in low- and middle-income countries could be strengthened by collaborative teams of policymakers and researchers applying for competitive tenders. The key arguments here are that the use of competitive tenders for grants enhances the quality of the research and helps integrate such work into the global academic community (Gomo et al., 2011; Ager and Zarowsky, 2015). Altbach sums up these concerns in his reflection on the development of research universities in the Global South when he states that a ‘system of competitive awards encourages innovative ideas and granting funds for the best projects’ (2009, p. 20). It may be an imperfect solution but, as reported below, it has considerable potential.
3 Study design

3.1 EDOREN’s response

EDOREN analysed education outputs produced in Nigeria and research capacity development experiences in Nigeria and other countries (2015a) and then proposed approaches for enhancing national capacities for the production and use of policy-relevant research for education. In light of this analysis, EDOREN announced a competitive grant to local research teams which would be composed of senior and junior academics and policymakers/practitioners. These teams would be mentored by EDOREN’s consultant researchers. The research teams were to focus on the policy-relevant research issue of the identification, recruitment and deployment of effective teachers (i.e. the Effective Teachers Study). This research would enable EDOREN to examine and explore the hypothesis that evidence for education policy and practice is enhanced through the mentoring of collaborative research teams comprising academics and policymakers.

The specific objectives of the investigation were to: (i) document the processes that influence the collaboration between academics and policymakers/practitioners; and (ii) assess and evaluate the level of capacity that can be developed in a collaborative research team through the components listed below.

Piloting a strategy developing ‘linkages between the demand and supply for policy-relevant research and information’ and ‘strengthening capacity through training and organisational development support’ to respond to need for evidence offers a way to assess the potential for the promotion of the strategy in education research for policy and practice (EDOREN, 2015b). The overall approach is intended to strengthen the capacity of policymakers to demand relevant evidence from academics (suppliers) and to use the evidence that is produced (Figure 1). The study was therefore explicitly designed to examine the potential capacity to demand and supply evidence for education policymaking and practice.

The design for pilot testing individual and organisational capacity development strategies was integrated into the EDOREN thematic research on identifying, recruiting and deploying effective teachers (Allsop and Watts, 2017) funded by the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID).

As indicated in the figure below, five components were identified as having the potential to contribute to the research capacity strengthening design: (i) engaging in policy-driven research; (ii) partnership; (iii) mentoring; (iv) repeated policy feedback; and (v) hands-on support. The assumptions behind the key elements of this design are:

Engagement in policy-driven research. Practitioners taken out of their daily routine will be able to directly engage in extensive policy assessments through the research process. This is envisaged as enabling an improvement in their ability to understand and make use of evidence. The ability of the academics, on the other hand, will improve when engaged in policy-driven research.

Partnership. The interaction between practitioners and academics is aimed at fostering the closer interaction and understanding necessary for strengthening capacity for the demand, supply and use of evidence in policymaking. The design deliberately encourages: (i) intergovernmental collaboration between SMOEs and SUBEBs; (ii) inter-academic collaboration between different academic institutions and departments; and (iii) individual collaboration between practitioners and academics. The partnerships are intended to provide a method of peer-learning that is likely to provide capacity strengthening across both technical and political dimensions.

This, in turn, is intended to improve: (i) the policymakers’ ability to obtain reliable assistance in solving future policy challenges; and (ii) the academics’ ability to better understand the policy priorities of policymakers thus allowing them to produce more relevant research and attach greater importance to solving policy challenges.
Mentoring. The ‘organisational habits’ that the process is trying to affect (i.e. improving the production and use of evidence in education decision-making) are passed down between senior and junior members. By asking members to operate in a different manner, senior members may provide a good example and even provide a mentoring role to more junior members of their organisations. This will, in turn, spread the capacity strengthening benefits to a wider audience and provide more internal pressure to shift organisational behaviours. It may also provide a better way to deliver the research as it is expected to combine senior officers with more authority (vital for policy impact) and junior members with more technical skills (vital for research outcome). Both should therefore be able to learn from each another.

Repeated policy feedback. This is intended to provide external pressure to utilise evidence for policy and effectively demonstrate how best to communicate research findings to a policy audience.

Providing hands-on technical support. The provision of hands-on technical skills for data gathering, processing, interpretation and packaging for policy use is expected to be an important input into the study design.

3.2 Description of study sites

Two States, Kano and the Kaduna, were selected because of their current involvement with DFID education projects. Kano had demonstrated a significant commitment to improving teacher quality. The leadership of the SMOE and SUBEB had shown commitment to education reform. Kano State supports the Teaching Skills Programme for Grade 1 to 6 teachers and has an ambitious three-year programme to upgrade over 15,000 teachers to attain a minimum Nigerian Certificate of Education (NCE) qualification. Kaduna State has demonstrated a serious intent to improve the teacher recruitment system by initiating a new process that enforces a formal application process for head teachers. Learning and building on this initiative will open up significant opportunities for reform. Both States have excellent education institutions, including the Ahmadu Bello University, the National Teachers Institute and Bayero University. The DFID projects Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN) and the Teacher Development Programme were active in both States at the time of recruitment to this study. The research on identifying, recruiting and deploying effective
teachers was to be carried out in both States thus making the study on capacity strengthening strategy in both States compelling.

3.3 Grant-making and award conditions

The call for letters of interest (LoIs) required the formation of inter-sectoral State research teams (State Teams) consisting of practitioners (SMOE and/or SUBEB) and academics (university, colleges of education and/or research institutions). Each State Team was required to have: (i) a Team Lead who would have a position of at least Director (SMOE/SUBEB) or Professor/Dean of Education (academia); (ii) a Deputy Team Lead of similar rank who would be either a practitioner (in the case of the Team Lead being an academic) or academic (in the case of the Team Lead being a practitioner); (iii) two Senior Researchers (one from the SMOE/SUBEB and another from academia) to serve as institutional mentors of research assistants; and (iv) four Research Assistants including at least one early career entrant to academia (e.g. a graduate assistant/assistant lecturer) and one early career entrant to the SMOE/SUBEB (e.g. an Education Officer Grade II).

To ensure that the appropriate audience received the call and responded to it, a forum to launch the ‘call for Letters of Interest’ was organised in Kaduna. Invitations were sent to those that were most likely to be interested (including Deans of faculties of education in universities and colleges of education in both States, Directors of Education Planning and Research at SUBEB and the SMOE). Representatives of the Federal Ministry of Education and the Universal Basic Education Commission witnessed the launch since it would be their responsibility to ensure continued Federal government involvement.

Requirements for the LoI included the proposed approach for answering the two research questions and the policy impact content to guide how the evidence (recommendations) would be absorbed into State policy (including stakeholder analysis and dissemination plan).

3.4 Team selection and orientation

On behalf of EDOREN, a team of education experts reviewed all LoIs that were submitted on time on the basis of three criteria: (i) team composition (30%); (ii) proposed strategy for answering the research questions (30%); and (iii) policy impact potential (40%). The most outstanding LoI from each of the States was selected.

The members of the two teams with successful proposals were invited for an orientation session before signing their Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with EDOREN.

Following the signing of the MoUs, a proposal development workshop was held to review the teams’ initial proposals and to develop the joint research protocols, the instruments of data collection and, where required, formulate State-specific research questions. The meeting was also used to develop a detailed research plan (calendar, budget, workshop dates and follow-up policy impact plans).

At the end of the proposal development workshop, an orientation session for project management was conducted. The conditions of the award were outlined, financial procedures explained and the teams submitted budgets not exceeding 10 million Naira (£35,000 at the then current exchange rates). The budgets were reviewed and finally approved by EDOREN and team accounts were opened. The amount covered fieldwork expenses and workshop attendance, meetings, stationery and supplies, stakeholders’ processes, communication and the costs of follow-up advocacy. To ensure financial accountability, the funds remained with EDOREN but were released to the teams as reimbursement following the receipt of appropriate invoices.
3.5 Research capacity support

To ensure high quality research by the teams, consultants (hereafter referred to as the EDOREN facilitators) guided each research activity by first holding a workshop to discuss the theoretical underpinning of the activity and the methods for carrying it out. Each team was then assigned a mentor to contact during the process. The mentor was also responsible for providing advice, vetting reports and signing off on research activity before reimbursement was made for that activity. The mentor played multiple roles as research supervisor responsible for the quality of data collection and delivery as well as trainer on research management, specific research skills, ethics and attitude. EDOREN created the environment for team bonding by bringing the team members together for joint activities including proposal development, research and instrument design, data collection and analysis and stakeholder workshops.
4 Research methodology

To enable a rigorous evaluation of the research capacity strengthening, specific interview schedules were designed for the practitioners and academics that followed the capacity strengthening components and recognised the different sectoral roles. Each member of the State Teams was interviewed at the baseline, midline and endline points of the research process. Semi-structured interviews were used. This meant all researchers were asked the same key questions but it also allowed other key issues to be addressed as appropriate. This ensured the study’s methodological reliability and validity.

These interviews addressed the individual experiences of the five components of research capacity strengthening (i.e. engagement in policy-driven research, partnership, mentoring, repeated policy feedback and hands-on support) as well as key time-specific issues (e.g. team formation). Sector-specific information was also collected on the demand for evidence by policymakers and practitioners, the supply of evidence by the academics and the use of evidence in education policymaking and practice.

Interviews with workplace colleagues of selected members of the State Teams were conducted at the midline and endline stages to ascertain the wider implications of the research capacity strengthening exercise.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Additional corroboration was provided by observational data generated by the EDOREN facilitators and interviews with the wider EDOREN team.

For the data analysis, each individual interview was considered as a separate case study (Stake, 1995). These individual cases were then grouped into team-based cases. The individual and team-based cases were informed by the observational data generated by the EDOREN facilitators. Each of the cases was thematically analysed for evidence of the five components of research capacity strengthening identified in the study design and other emerging issues (particularly the mistrust undermining potential inter-sectoral collaboration).

Further analysis considered this evidence in the context of the individual researcher’s sectoral and seniority status (i.e. whether s/he was a practitioner or academic and senior or junior). This analytic process was repeated for the midline and endline interviews. Chronological analyses for the individual and team-based cases were also made to identify changes over time. These three stages are characterised below as the rhetoric, the reality and reflections on collaboration.

Comparing the team members’ responses in the baseline, midline and endline interviews, and drawing on the corroborating datasets, the study was able to make a reasonable claim to evaluate the capacity strengthening that was happening. Moreover, by conducting two additional process evaluations, it allowed for a simple form of process tracing (Bennett and Checkel, 2014) that explained how and where capacities were strengthened within the process. For policymakers and practitioners, the aim was to improve their understanding and use of policy-focused evidence. For academics, the objective was to ensure the production of better and more relevant education policy-focused evidence.
### Table 1: Summary of indicators for assessing capacity

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<th>Capacity strengthening objective</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Guide the formation of two inter-sectoral, collaborative multidisciplinary State research teams (State Teams) composed of academics and practitioners for the production of high quality research evidence with the potential to influence the policy and practice of teacher identification, recruitment and deployment in Kaduna and Kano.</td>
<td>• Organise a launch event to call for Lols with senior-level policymakers and practitioners (SUBEB/SMOE) and members of academic institutions from selected Northern Nigerian States as described previously. The event included: (i) a group discussion on the main problems of ‘identifying, recruiting and deploying effective teachers’ and a definition of the evidence that will be required to solve it; and (ii) a formal call for Lols, including the requirements of team composition, time commitment and deliverables, content, support and selection criteria.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Evaluate the prevailing capacity for demand, supply and use of evidence in policy making and practice of teacher identification, recruitment and deployment.</td>
<td>• Review the submitted Lols. Select the most promising teams that meet the grant conditions. Provide feedback on Lol structure, team composition and proposal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Develop capacity on research process and proposal writing skills.</td>
<td>• Award research grant to the most promising team from each State. Sign MoUs between EDOREN and State Teams.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Develop capacity for qualitative research skills including in-depth interviews, observations, note-taking and transcription.</td>
<td>• Conduct baseline survey using semi-structured interviews with education practitioners (SUBEB, SMOE) and academics (faculties of education, colleges of education, others) and team members on: (i) use of evidence in education policymaking; (ii) demand and supply for evidence; (iii) research capacity skills; and (iv) collaborations between policymakers/practitioners and academics.</td>
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<td>• EDOREN research methodology workshop to: (i) provide training on research processes (to improve proposal writing, attitude, implementation, reporting, financial accountability, knowledge management); (ii) develop detailed proposals to incorporate State-specific ‘effective teachers’ research questions, policy impact strategies and follow-up plans; and (iii) develop the data collection instruments, calendar of activities and expectations.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• EDOREN qualitative research methodology workshop attended by State Teams to: (i) acquire skills on qualitative and quantitative research techniques of data collection including interviewing, focus group discussions,</td>
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observations, note-taking, recording and transcription; and (ii) train on the use of software for data analysis in qualitative research.

- State Teams participate in interviews with teachers, SUBEB and Local Government Area (LGA) actors and engage in note-taking and transcription.

- Develop capacity for research analysis: qualitative data analysis.

- EDOREN qualitative data analysis workshop attended by State Teams to: (i) acquire skills on qualitative data analysis; (ii) analyse qualitative data collected during fieldwork; and (iii) present the findings following joint discussion. Decide on major recommendations.

- Evaluate changes in capacity to demand, supply and use evidence in policy making and practice of teacher identification, recruitment and deployment in Kaduna and Kano.

- Conduct midline semi-structured interviews with education policymakers and practitioners (SUBEB, SMOE) and academics (faculties of education, colleges of education, others), team members, mentors, facilitators, fund administrators on: (i) use of evidence in education policymaking; (ii) demand and supply for evidence; (iii) research capacity skills; and (iv) collaborations between policymakers and academics.

- Develop research report writing skills.

- State Teams to draft State-level reports with EDOREN support.

- Improve research uptake, follow-up and policy impact at the State level.

- State Teams mentored to develop detailed dissemination, follow-up and policy impact plans for States based on the draft reports.

  - State Teams develop documents to support dissemination (e.g. user-friendly policy briefs for State, LGA officers).

  - State Teams develop documents to support policy impact (e.g. potential guides, manuals or handbooks on proposed new teacher recruitment system for State and LGA officers).

  - EDOREN provides quality assurance of content, design and printing of dissemination/policy impact documents.

- Evaluate changes in capacity to demand, supply and use evidence in policy making and practice of teacher identification, recruitment and deployment in Kaduna and Kano.

- Conduct endline semi-structured interviews with education policymakers and practitioners (SUBEB, SMOE) and academics (faculties of education, colleges of education, others), team members, mentors, facilitators, fund administrators, ment...
- Identify indications of policy impact in Kaduna and Kano by monitoring State Teams’ usage of follow-up and policy impact plans.

- Develop case studies using process tracing to identify possible indications of policy impact and capacity building.

- Identify indications of policy impact by EDOREN monitoring State Teams’ usage of follow-up and policy impact plans.
5 Overview

By the end of year one, the teams had worked together to generate several evidence-based policy protocols that had been broadly accepted at State-based stakeholder meetings attended by the Education Secretaries. There was also evidence that some of the protocols were being put into practice in at least one LGA.

Those protocols are presented elsewhere (Allsop and Watts, 2017). The purpose here is to examine the research capacity strengthening process. The researchers’ previous experience of research and collaboration and an account of the team formation are noted below. The process of collaboration is then summarised, with the three main stages being characterised as the rhetoric, the reality and reflections on collaboration. The five key components of research capacity strengthening identified in the study design are then addressed in turn in the following section. A key issue identified in the study was the extent of mistrust between the two sectors. Its impact can be seen in the consideration of most of the key components and is then explained in greater detail when the role of EDOREN is addressed via the fifth of these components (i.e. the provision of hands-on support).

This mistrust was disguised throughout much of the study by the rhetoric of collaboration and the mostly harmonious inter-sectoral teamwork. Practitioners (representing the policymakers in this study) are concerned that academics produce theoretical studies that criticise their own work but offer no practical focus. Academics are concerned that practitioners and policymakers do not listen to them and so do not bother engaging them in their research. The evidence of this mistrust here is corroborated by close examination of the Nigerian academic literature on education policy. These views have hardened and significantly limit the potential for effective partnerships and so limit research capacity strengthening within and between the two sectors.

However, as the chronological activity summaries indicate, this mistrust can be negotiated.

5.1 Previous research experience

Most of the researchers – all the academics and some of the practitioners – had previous research experience but it was broadly defined in their descriptions. For the academics, this included doctoral level studies, personal research and externally funded consultancies. For the practitioners, it included post-graduate level study and data collection for the Annual School Census (ASC). As the study progressed, and encouraged by the facilitators, several other practitioners acknowledged that their work (e.g. discussing problems with teachers to identify training needs) could be recognised as research.

The Effective Teachers Study was mostly qualitative but few of the researchers had previous experience of qualitative research. Some of the academics had worked on internationally funded projects, including earlier EDOREN projects, that had required them to conduct qualitative research. Some of the practitioners who subsequently acknowledged that their work constituted research recognised its qualitative nature.

Most of the academics struggled to make links between their consultancy work and policy. Most of the links that were made concerned knowledge production and baseline studies. The strongest links were made by those who had worked on earlier EDOREN projects. None of them made links between their personal research and policy although some had involved policymakers as participants in their research. Reasons for this lack of policy engagement included not being responsible for the dissemination and implementation of commissioned research, insufficient funding for policy-related studies and a lack of interest from policymakers (who were typically described as not being interested in, or able to understand, their research findings). Several also explained that it was not their job to do policy-related work.

The practitioners who initially acknowledged their engagement in research typically described different forms of assessment (e.g. the ASC) but some linked it to other projects (e.g. ESSPIN). Some, but not all, linked
their research to policy through knowledge production that had the potential to inform policy decisions (e.g. school funding allocations). Several practitioners also saw their work as being able to contribute to academic research and wondered why academics did not seek to work with them. They all suggested that evidence-based research could and should inform their own work.

5.2 Previous collaboration

Academics and practitioners all had deeply entrenched views of the other sector. There had been very limited academic-practitioner collaborations and these had mostly been through workshops.

The academics’ research typically lacked any policy focus so they did not seek to work with practitioners or policymakers unless they were involved as participants in their research.

The practitioners reported no previous engagement with academics. Some had worked with projects such as ESSPIN but did not recognise them as research projects. They did not use research findings in their work but accepted they could be useful if usefully presented.

5.3 Team formation

The initial one-day meeting to introduce the main study was dominated by academics who formed core groups to prepare their research proposals and recruit the practitioners.

Several teams were formed in both States. There were two proposals from Kaduna and three from Kano, with a fourth Kano team not submitting a proposal. The report only focuses on the two successful teams.

There were two approaches to the academic recruitment. In Kaduna, academics from two institutions were involved and this would go on to generate some minor tensions within the team. In Kano, academics from one institution were involved which meant the team fitted within an existing hierarchy. The junior academics invited to join both teams were all keen to be involved in the study. Three of the four junior academics had more research experience than their status suggested but they were willing to accept that status to be part of their teams.

Both teams used the need for State-level permission to conduct the study as an opportunity to recruit the practitioners. They were typically recruited through senior officials although this was facilitated by personal contacts in Kaduna. Both teams reported attempts to have unsuitable candidates attached to them. However, they both used the EDOREN documentation specifying the requirements for team membership to challenge this attempted patronage. Senior practitioners in Kaduna were invited to join the team and junior practitioners were nominated. All the practitioners in Kano were nominated. Some of the junior practitioners from both teams reported being initially unaware of what involvement in the study would mean for them.

The Kano team was disrupted at a very early stage as the most senior practitioner nominated was promoted and felt unable to meet the requirements of team membership (although he maintained interest in the team’s work). His replacement only joined the team after the initial proposals had been submitted and the teams selected. The team also failed to recruit a second senior practitioner and remained incomplete throughout the study.

Both teams acknowledged the importance of gender and sectoral balance. The Team Leader and Deputy Team Leader in Kaduna were both female and in Kano they were both male. The Kaduna team had a stronger balance between gender and seniority. The Kano team was less balanced with three of the four academics being male and all three female members allocated to junior roles.
The gender divide in the Kano team had a clear impact on the collaboration within the team that was observable during the workshops and reported (although typically indirectly) in the interviews. The limited interaction between female and male researchers reduced opportunities for overall collaboration in general and the mentoring in particular. It increased the inter-sectoral collaboration between the female researchers (one of the junior academics and the two junior practitioners) although the limited engagement of the junior practitioners (Watts et al., 2017) undermined the potential for this gender-based collaboration to inform the team’s work.

Whether invited or nominated, all team members reported their willingness to participate and this was supported by their descriptive accounts of engaging with their team and the study.
6 Baseline study: the rhetoric of collaboration

The baseline study gave participants the opportunity to reflect on the development of their team’s proposal and the early stages of the inter-sectoral collaboration. Both teams were incomplete as the proposals were being written because not all the practitioners had been recruited (senior practitioners were absent from the Kano team and junior practitioners were absent from the Kaduna team).

It was generally acknowledged that there had been clear guidance concerning the writing of the proposals (although there were some complaints that no feedback was offered on drafted versions) and that all team members could and should contribute to address all the key issues.

Both teams divided responsibilities with the academics generating the literature reviews and methodology sections and the practitioners focusing on the policy implications. Regular meetings were held to facilitate the development of the proposals. The importance of experience and seniority in shaping them was recognised but it was agreed that all members then in the teams contributed. There was also general agreement that good leadership was provided throughout the process.

All the proposals from Kano were presented to a wider audience of senior stakeholders before being submitted.

Both successful proposals (as well as the unsuccessful proposals) were weak on the policy implications (although it should be remembered that the Kano team lacked any senior practitioners at this stage). The greater focus on the research elements of the proposals in this initial stage placed a greater emphasis on the contributions of the academics as the research experts. This was recognised by both sectors but academics and practitioners all acknowledged each other’s contributions.

However, with limited inter-sectoral engagement at this stage of the study, there was evidence of the stereotypes underneath these reports of team harmony. As reported in the wider literature (Annex A), these perceptions were generally negative.

The academics described the practitioners (acting as proxies here for the policymakers) as uninterested in their work and subject to political control. A common concern was that any evidence generated by their studies would be ignored and this had hardened into a reluctance to share it. This lack of engagement was often emphasised by a focus on the theoretical nature of their work which was typically described as being too complex and technical for policymakers to understand; and some academics indicated that this was a source of pride. Such views were reinforced by the belief that research units in government offices are ‘punishment posts’ (a point also made by some of the senior practitioners) which confirmed the perception that policymakers do not take research seriously. The need to reach out to policymakers was tempered by the feeling that those policymakers should make the effort to understand academic research as presented.

The practitioners typically saw the academics as remote from the day-to-day realities of the educational world in which they worked. They emphasised the abstract nature of academic research and most compared it unfavourably with the work they did going into schools. They acknowledged the potential for academic research to inform their own work if it was more user-friendly (i.e. not so theoretical) but saw little evidence of the academics wanting to engage with them.

The early stages of the project can therefore be characterised as a willingness to work together for the purposes of the study but with a sense of entrenched mistrust undermining that rhetoric. The study itself was interpreted as academic research and so the teams – both of which were headed by academics – saw it as being academic-led.

The proposal writing had been dominated by the academics: both teams were missing some of the practitioners at this stage and the policy sections were poor in contrast to the literature reviews and
methodology sections. So, although the teams had met on several occasions, the practitioners were typically seen as playing little more than a supporting role.

The first workshop (6th – 10th June 2016) required greater interaction between the academics and practitioners. The teams were required to consider the characteristics of effective teachers and plan the data collection and the facilitators emphasised the need for policy-focused research. This provided the practitioners with opportunities to draw on their experiences when contributing to the research plans. The senior practitioners were typically more forthcoming than their junior colleagues and the facilitators had to repeatedly encourage the latter to participate (e.g. by sharing their experiences as Social Mobilisation Officers (SMOs) or School Support Officers (SSOs)).

Intra- and inter-team discussions highlighted the limited school-level engagement of the academics and the greater school-level engagement of the practitioners.

Methodological discussions focused on the most appropriate means of obtaining the necessary data. The Kaduna team had initially considered a mixed methods approach, including a survey and individual interviews, and the Kano team had initially favoured a large-scale survey. The facilitators then encouraged the practitioners to share their experiences of working with effective teachers. Both teams subsequently decided to take a more qualitative approach to the research, organising focus group discussions with SSOs and head teachers and interviewing the effective teachers they identified. The intervention of the facilitators led to a change in the dynamics of the team discussions. The earlier discussions had been dominated by the academics with some contributions from the senior practitioners. Following the intervention, the senior and junior practitioners made more contributions. The junior practitioners needed to be encouraged to contribute, but that encouragement increasingly came from within the teams. At the same time, however, some of the senior academics began addressing more of their concerns and questions to the facilitators rather than discussing them within their teams.

By the end of the week-long workshop, both teams had planned their methodologies for the first phase of the main study and it was clear that the practitioners had contributed to them.

Formal and informal interview data indicated that the practitioners were becoming more involved in the main study.

Those interviews also indicated that researchers from both sectors were increasingly willing to acknowledge the potential of the academic-practitioner collaboration. They were all pleased that their proposals had been selected and were ready to recognise the knowledge and skills each team member had contributed.

Despite misgivings about having their research ignored, the academics acknowledged the importance of engaging with policymakers and saw their work with the practitioners as a means of achieving that. They typically focused on the experience of the practitioners, particularly the insights they provided concerning bureaucratic processes and the significance of political interference. They also appreciated the value of their school-based work but this was a secondary consideration for most (which may be explained by the need for the facilitators to raise it). However, as they emphasised the importance of listening to the practitioners’ accounts of working with schools, they had clearly paid at least some attention to them.

The practitioners appreciated the research experience of the academics and some commented on their theoretical approaches to research being beneficial (although those benefits were never specified). Some, but not all, of the practitioners recognised the contribution they could make to the main study but some of the senior practitioners indicated that this was likely to be a struggle. Others, particularly the junior practitioners, struggled to identify how their contributions might add to the study.

The first phase of the main study was geared towards data collection and discussions tended to be dominated by the academics. Most of the practitioners seemed to accept this as they saw the research demanded by
the study as the province of the academics. However, educational research in Nigeria tends to be quantitative and the earlier quantitative approaches suggested by the teams (including the mixed methods approach suggested by the Kaduna team) seems to have influenced understandings of what the practitioners could contribute, even those with survey experience. Their individual experiences of working in schools was initially seen as less relevant to the study but the shift to more qualitative methodologies gave greater significance to those experiences.

The researchers from both sectors were typically generous when considering what could be learned from their colleagues. The interview data were corroborated by observational data indicating increasing team work involving all the researchers. However, the increasing participation of the junior practitioners only happened following the interventions of the facilitators.

6.1 Summary

Phase I of the main study was more research-oriented and so favoured the academics. The interviews confirmed the initial reluctance of the academics and practitioners to engage with the other sector but also highlighted the growing confidence in the inter-sectoral collaboration.

The preparatory stage had been dominated by the academics. This is unsurprising given the attendance at the initial meeting, the interpretation of the main study as academic research and the difficulties (particularly in Kano) of recruiting practitioners to the teams. However, the first workshop saw a hierarchical shift with status given to:

- senior academics
- senior practitioners
- junior academics
- junior practitioners.

The interviews typically indicated a democratic process of collaboration and this was confirmed by observational data indicating a shift in the team dynamics. This shift can be accounted for by the importance given to seniority in Nigeria but it also acknowledges the growing recognition of the role of the practitioners.

There was a growing recognition, framed by the terms of the research, of the need to move the study from a typically academic study (i.e. one that focused on theory rather than policy implementation). The need to consider policy matters led to the practitioners being called upon (with the encouragement of the facilitators) to add their knowledge of teachers and their working conditions to the discussions.

The shift to more qualitative methodologies for Phase I of the main study disrupted the skills-based hierarchy of the academics to some extent: drawing on their experience, they could argue for more quantitative studies and so reassert the validity of their skills but they were encouraged to discuss different approaches to the research. The initial hierarchy was further disrupted by the facilitators and their encouragement of the practitioners to share their school-based experiences.

The shift was generally smooth but both sectors acknowledged the importance of EDOREN, acting as a third party, in facilitating it.
7 Midline study: the reality of collaboration

The midline interviews were conducted during the second workshop (3rd – 7th October 2016) held in Kano. They took place after the teams had completed the fieldwork for Phase I and as they were preparing for Phase II. The workshop reviewed Phase I and focused on ways of making use of the data to engage policymakers in potential reform in Phase II.

It had been necessary to reschedule the workshop as too many participants had been required to attend work-related meetings. This may explain the fractiousness that was observed within the Kaduna team.

In the interim, the Kano team had been given an additional workshop (22nd – 25th August) – which focused on reviewing their work for Phase I and preparing for Phase II – in response to concerns that they were struggling. This may explain why they were less concerned about the rescheduling of this workshop.

The teams had discussed how best to conduct the fieldwork for Phase I of the main study. It was generally accepted that the academics had led these discussions. There was some recognition from the academics that the practitioners had made practical contributions to these discussions (e.g. on the importance of including observational data) but this was mostly downplayed. Nevertheless, the practitioners appreciated having been involved in those discussions.

Both teams had paired academics and practitioners in the field. They both took explanatory, exemplary and experiential approaches to the fieldwork with the academics explaining how to conduct interviews before leading on the earlier interviews and then the practitioners being given opportunities to lead on subsequent interviews. Most of the academics reported that the practitioners did good interviews (although one complained that it would have been better if the academics had done them all) and the practitioners reported being delighted with the support and encouragement they had received from their academic colleagues.

Individual team members took responsibility for transcribing the interview data. There were some complaints from the academics that the practitioners had been reluctant to do their transcriptions.

The analysis was led by the academics. The practitioners reported that they appreciated this because it helped them understand how to make use of the data. However, the data analysis was basic (i.e. interpreting and aggregating spoken responses to non-complex questions and providing illustrative quotations).

The development of the reports for Phase I of the study was led by academics who had some experience of policy-related research.

Most of the researchers – academics and practitioners – expressed surprise at the conditions under which primary school teachers are expected to work. The academics typically noted their surprise but did not suggest any action. Several senior practitioners noted that they should act on the information generated by the research (e.g. by reporting to their seniors). The junior practitioners, who typically had the highest rates of school-level engagement, expressed the least surprise at these conditions.

The study required academics and practitioners to work together and researchers from both sectors acknowledged the contributions of their colleagues. The concept of what constitutes research was broadened for most of them.

Both teams made use of the practitioners’ knowledge and networks to conduct the fieldwork.

Most of the academics appreciated the engagement of the practitioners. They had previously talked about what their colleagues might contribute and the fieldwork had given them something on which to base their judgements. They were mostly favourable (e.g. the practitioners had helped with the methodology and had identified key participants in the research). Those judgements were enhanced by the practitioners’
willingness and ability to conduct the fieldwork. Some of the academics used this as an opportunity to reflect on their previous research experiences and to look for possible policy links (although they struggled to find any). There was also a growing understanding of the bureaucracies the practitioners need to negotiate.

The practitioners appreciated the technical support received from the academics on how to conduct different types of research. They also reported a greater interest in future opportunities to make use of the research generated by academics. However, they also emphasised the inaccessibility of most academic research.

Researchers from both sectors focused on the technical aspects of their learning rather than the process of collaboration. However, there was a general lack of complaints about that collaboration which suggests the development of a good working environment. Some – but not all – researchers from both sectors emphasised the importance of collaborative research and there was a noticeable increase in the term ‘our research’ in the interviews. One academic complained that the research was not being conducted properly (i.e. it did not follow the usual conventions of academic research and did not use technical language) but this was a lone voice.

Although most researchers continued to applaud the democratic approach of the research, some cracks began appearing in the rhetoric. There was some concern from the academics that the practitioners were not shouldering their responsibilities, particularly when it came to transcribing the interview data. For their part, some of the practitioners had assumed the academics would do this because it was seen as part of what academics do when conducting research.

Some of the researchers – senior academics and junior practitioners – complained about the lack of commitment from colleagues who were struggling to balance their responsibilities to the study with other work. The junior practitioners typically accepted the problems faced by their colleagues. The senior academics who complained rejected those problems.

The workshop briefly reviewed the Phase I findings and then considered how they might be used for Phase II. The facilitators suggested various protocols but the work on realising them was done within the teams. The facilitators also reminded the teams of the need to focus on policy matters but there was now less need for such reminders.

The workshop had been rescheduled and this caused particular problems for the Kaduna team as the Team Leader was absent at an international conference and the Deputy Team Leader was distracted by urgent work meetings.

The focus on the fieldwork, including the use of the findings in Phase II, meant that the academics were more dominant at the beginning of the workshop. However, the need to develop evidence-based protocols and present them to stakeholders gave the practitioners increased authority. As the workshop progressed, there was greater involvement from the practitioners and more sectoral balance in the team discussions.

The practitioners commented on current policies and practices and how the protocols might be received. The Kano team reported that stakeholder concerns about theoretical presentations had been defused as the practical implications were explained. The practitioners were also responsible for arranging the validation processes and this shift in focus – from fieldwork to reporting and validation – placed greater emphasis on their role.

There was a growing appreciation that this was ‘our’ research and that the involvement of the practitioners – in teams and as stakeholders – might lead to better chances of implementation.

Most of the researchers acknowledged the benefits of collaboration and that inter-sectoral work had the potential to benefit all educational stakeholders including academics (who would benefit from the practical implementation of their research) and practitioners (who would benefit from the greater insights provided
by the academics). Several researchers also commented on the greater authenticity and conviction of such collaborative work. It was interesting that few of the researchers looked beyond the collaboration to the potential benefits it might bring to the primary education sector.

There was a general recognition of the role played by the senior practitioners in facilitating the validation process, particularly in securing access to senior stakeholders.

One of the practitioners complained that the learning process was like being lectured to and one of the academics suggested that the collaborative effort to date simply reaffirmed the point that policymakers have no interest in academic research. However, most researchers reported being enthusiastic about the collaboration and there was a lot of aspiration about how research might be conducted and implemented. Again, though, there was limited consideration of how it might benefit primary education.

### 7.1 Summary

Most of the researchers agreed that the opportunity for inter-sectoral work emphasised the benefits of collaboration. Although there were some tensions, most acknowledged that the common purpose of the study encouraged negotiation. The only dissenting view was from one of the academics who felt that the study was undermined by not following the typical academic methodology practised in Nigeria and by not being theorised.

The researchers’ comments on what they were learning from the collaboration were mostly aspirational (e.g. this will lead to change – although the change was typically unspecified) or standardised (e.g. the academics were learning about policy-related bureaucracies and the practitioners were learning about research) without specific examples of that learning. However, although these comments were general, they did indicate increased collaboration through discussion and practical experience.

Most – but not all – of the researchers applauded the growing relationships and described them as friendly. Most also noted the importance of EDOREN as a broker to those growing relationships.
8  Endline study: reflections on collaboration

The interviews took place during the final workshop (23rd – 27th January 2017) and looked back on the main study. They did not include data on the final workshop itself which was concerned with reviewing the data, stakeholder feedback, reviewing the protocols and preparing for the main stakeholder meetings.

The frustration grounded in the rescheduled second workshop had dissipated and there was a greater emphasis on the potential for collaboration with more evidence for how it could be realised. However, with the end of the study in sight, some researchers took the opportunity to reveal concerns that had obviously been moderated in the earlier interviews. Other researchers were less reflective and simply fell back on the use of stock phrases.

The workshop focused on the validation exercise and preparation for the stakeholder meetings. This involved the teams finalising the protocols in consultation with the facilitators.

The shift from Phase I to Phase II of the main study had given the practitioners opportunities to make use of their knowledge and networks. Some of them were pleased that their contributions had been acknowledged in the development of the protocols. Others had clearly been given less work to do but this appears to have been a consequence of their earlier limited contributions.

Most of the practitioners had used their networks and professional relationships to secure access for the trialling of the protocols and this was generally acknowledged and appreciated. One of the senior practitioners suggested that their involvement added authenticity to the protocols and helped alleviate stakeholder concerns about being presented with theoretical research. One of the junior practitioners added that some stakeholders had been worried that the protocols would be critical of them. There was a clear implication that this was because of the academics’ involvement but the involvement of the practitioners had reassured these stakeholders that they shared the same educational aims. Several academics acknowledged that their practitioner colleagues had facilitated access to the stakeholders. However, they were considerably less ready to acknowledge other contributions such as their understanding of the primary education sector.

Several academics commented on the difference between this and their usual validation processes, noting that engaging with stakeholders provided opportunities for better and more useful feedback. They suggested that this had the potential to improve their own research but, although accepting that it was a consequence of their collaboration with the practitioners, they tended not to clearly acknowledge it.

Problems relating to scheduling meetings with some stakeholders were a source of frustration for the academics. However, they were typically ready to acknowledge the general benefits of this inter-sectoral engagement and the increasing role of the practitioners in conducting fieldwork and contributing to the analysis and interpretation of the data. There was also a growing recognition that the stakeholders appreciated what one academic described as ‘well thought out documents’ (with an implicit and favourable comparison made with the theoretical reports usually ignored by policymakers) and that the involvement of the practitioners had helped make those documents more accessible. The importance of this point was generally recognised by the researchers from both sectors.

The consideration of one protocol, the case studies, provided insights into the changing inter-sectoral relationships. The case studies themselves are addressed in the main report on the Effective Teachers Study (Allsop and Watts, 2017, section 4.1). Here, most of the researchers viewed them as an academic-led protocol because they are a means of reporting on academic research. The draft case studies had included positive and negative experiences of teaching and it was suggested during the validation process that the negative aspects be removed to make the profession seem more appealing. Some of the academics were keen to do this and several practitioners agreed with them. However, one of the senior practitioners explained that senior policymakers reading positive case studies would probably then claim that there were no problems to
address. Despite the academics’ enthusiasm for using the case studies, they listened to their practitioner colleague and agreed that they should be dropped.

Many of the researchers, especially the academics, commented on how straightforward Phase II of the research had been compared to Phase I. This was mostly attributed to logistical matters, particularly the problems of getting to schools in Phase I, but it also indicated the input from the practitioners. As one academic explained, Phase II was easier because of the articulation between the way the primary data had been used to inform the protocols and the views of the stakeholders involved in the validation of those protocols. The greater focus on policy matters in Phase II, together with their knowledge of bureaucracy, allowed the practitioners to contribute more to the study. They were pleased that their contributions had been acknowledged but, whereas they had been previously pleased for this recognition of their contributions, they were now more likely to be pleased that these contributions could help improve evidence-based policy decisions.

Looking back on the validation processes, several academics believed their concerns about policymakers had been justified. However, their views had been modified. They no longer saw a simple rejection of academic research. Some acknowledged that their theoretical research was not as useful as this policy-focused work and there was a growing realisation that policymakers might see academic research as an attack on their work and their positions. For some of the academics, this change in perception was framed by a sense of surprise that policymakers might take their work seriously if it was presented in more useful ways.

The academics continued to recognise the benefits of collaboration but their main focus was on how evidence-based studies might improve their own research agendas. They were more willing to accept other approaches to research and how that research might be used. The favourable responses from the stakeholders seems to have been a catalyst for many of them.

Most of the academics appreciated that the engagement of the practitioners made the research more accessible and relevant and so made it more likely to inform practice. Although their main focus was on their own research agendas, most of the academics did recognise the significance of the inter-sectoral collaboration in this process.

The practitioners also recognised the different ways in which they and the academics viewed the same educational problems. However, they were more willing to acknowledge the validity of the academics’ perspectives.

The practitioners were typically more modest about their contributions but were pleased that they had been acknowledged and appreciated within the teams. Reflecting on what they had learned from their participation in the study, all the practitioners noted that they had improved their research skills (and some of the junior practitioners saw no other benefit). This helps to explain the modesty which can, perhaps, be accounted for by the continuing belief that the study was primarily academic research and therefore the preserve of the academics.

Nevertheless, some of the practitioners (including both the senior and junior practitioners) also described a growing confidence in their ability to critically evaluate research processes and findings. There was also a growing recognition that academics were not simply ‘egg heads’ or ‘armchair researchers’ and that they could usefully inform policy if their research findings were presented in more user-friendly reports such as those arising from this study.

8.1 Summary

The researchers from both sectors made repeated use of the notion of ‘sensitising’ colleagues in their teams and in their workplaces. By the time the endline interviews were conducted, the rhetoric of collaboration
that had echoed around the earlier stages of this study had been grounded in the conduct of the research and the development of evidence-based protocols that had been presented to stakeholders. The need to work together enabled the researchers – both the academics and the practitioners – to reflect on the shift from rhetoric to reality.

The interview and observational data indicated that the collaboration needed to develop rigorous evidence-based policy recommendations had shifted from rhetoric to reality and that researchers from both sectors acknowledged its importance. It was clear that being required to work together facilitated that shift as some researchers from both sectors admitted in these endline interviews that they had maintained concerns throughout the study.

The interview data suggest that the benefits recognised by the researchers reflected their positions within the team hierarchies. So those who had the most influential positions (i.e. the senior academics) acknowledged fewest benefits whereas those who had the least influential positions (i.e. the junior practitioners) acknowledged the most. However, these self-reported benefits do not necessarily indicate the extent of the research capacity strengthening. To take two examples: the research findings, for which the senior academics took most responsibility, were shaped by the experiences shared by the junior practitioners; and those junior practitioners may have appreciated what they learned about conducting qualitative research but it is not necessarily relevant to their work. Here, then, enthusiastic recognition is a poor proxy for actual benefit.

The shift in appreciation for inter-sectoral collaboration was remarkable given the problems indicated in the baseline interviews and confirmed by some of the endline interviews. Researchers from both sectors described how that collaboration allowed them to appreciate the insight and critical thinking enabled by the collaborative process. Some, but not all, reflected on their own understanding of the purpose and practice of research. This was made possible by the contributions made by the researchers from both sectors and the growing realisation that they all had something to contribute to the improvement of primary education in Northern Nigeria.
9 Engagement in policy-driven research (impact on work)

Aim: Engagement in policy-driven research. Practitioners taken out of their daily routine will be able to directly engage in extensive policy assessments through the research process. This is envisaged as enabling an improvement in their ability to understand and make use of evidence. The ability of the academics, on the other hand, will improve when engaged in policy-driven research.

Collaboration required the researchers to think more carefully and critically about their work. For the practitioners, this involved explaining education policies and their impact on practice. It also involved consideration of how research data could be reported to make it more accessible and how the study’s findings could be put into practice. For the academics, it involved thinking about what sort of data would be needed for policy-relevant research and how it should be collected, analysed and reported. For all the researchers, this required extensive inter-sectoral collaboration – something none of them had done before – to generate an evidence-based and policy-focused study with viable recommendations for improving practice.

At the time of reporting, the research teams – comprising academics and practitioners – had generated a series of evidence-based protocols intended to improve policy and evidence was emerging that some of these protocols were being used (Allsop and Watts, 2017). The longer-term impact inevitably remains to be seen.

All the researchers – both academics and practitioners – had been taken out of their daily routines to work on the study. Their commitment included attending the EDOREN workshops, meetings with their team-based colleagues and undertaking fieldwork. Most of the researchers met these commitments. The senior researchers, particularly the practitioners, experienced some problems balancing their commitment to the study with their other work, especially when responsibilities to the study were announced at short notice.

It should be noted that the researchers tended to see the study as an academic exercise. The routine of committing to the study therefore articulated more with the routines of the academics than with the routines of the practitioners.

This perception of the study as an academic exercise influenced the contributions of the researchers and what they learned from it. There was a lot of rhetoric at the beginning of the study about the potential for and significance of inter-sectoral collaboration. As the study progressed, it became clear that at least some of the researchers were acting upon what they had learned. However, it necessarily remains open to question whether this will be sustained. It is not unreasonable to suggest that sustainability will depend on the implementation of the protocols. If at least some are successfully implemented, it will act as a focal point justifying the inter-sectoral collaboration. If none are successfully implemented, then the researchers may ask why they bothered to engage with the exercise.

When interviewed about what they had learned, the practitioners focused on the research skills they were acquiring and what they had learned about the conditions of primary education. It could be argued that the research skills – including data collection and analysis – may have been interesting (and several practitioners explained they were thinking of registering for post-graduate studies) but irrelevant to their work. After all, the study only required modest research skills and it can be presumed that the practitioners engaged in data collection (e.g. for the ASC) had sufficient work-based training. However, this had a greater significance as it provided a better understanding of the research process and its potential relevance to their work.

Most of the practitioners, and all the senior practitioners, claimed that they would be more willing to make use of research in their future work. Most of them had complained that research in Nigeria is too theoretical, irrelevant to the needs of the education system and/or makes unsubstantiated criticisms of policy (and, in fairness, the literature review broadly corroborates this view). By engaging with the research process, they realised the need for links (often missing in Nigerian academic research) between evidence and
recommendations that have the potential to usefully inform policy. This greater significance frames their repeated claims that they would make use of research and suggests the rhetoric may become reality.

The practitioners also reported on the importance of the study’s findings and several immediately tried to make use of them, either though sharing their new knowledge or acting upon it. Most of the practitioners, and all the senior practitioners, explained that they had been surprised to discover the working conditions of the effective teachers taking part in the study. This lack of understanding about the contexts of primary education may be worrying but it highlights the importance of the practitioners’ involvement. Their responses necessarily depended on their seniority.

Most of the senior practitioners talked about sharing the study’s findings and most highlighted its significance in terms of workshops, training sessions and continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers. Several also noted the importance of gathering relevant data and communicating it effectively. This suggests that they were becoming more aware of the need for appropriate research. The senior practitioners all explained that they would act on their new knowledge. They intended sharing the findings with their colleagues to initiate change. The stakeholder meetings indicated that the Education Secretaries were more willing to listen to the study’s findings because of the practitioners’ involvement and it is not unreasonable to assume that other senior colleagues will also be more willing to listen.

However, at the time of reporting, two of the senior practitioners had moved on from this rhetoric and were acting upon their involvement in the study. The first example is incidental to the study but no less important because of that. Interviews with the teachers had alerted one of the practitioners to the use of inappropriate textbooks and she had reported back to her senior colleagues to prevent an order for further copies being sent. The second example directly concerned recruitment policies with another of the senior practitioners explaining that new practices would be immediately put in place in one of the LGAs. As with most of the practitioners, she had simply not appreciated the scale of the current system’s failings (the particular problems she focused on were not taking actual vacancies or subject specialisation into account) but she had the authority to act on the evidence generated by the research.

The junior practitioners were obviously more limited in what they could do but they also explained the potential for CPD and the importance of sharing the findings with their colleagues, particularly their senior colleagues (e.g. Education Secretaries) who might be able to act on them. They were also generally aware that senior colleagues would be more willing to consider the findings of evidence-based research if they knew that the practitioners had been involved with it.

This highlights the importance of the study’s inter-sectoral collaboration. The practitioners’ involvement had made them more aware of the potential uses of evidence-based research. They also recognised that they could help make such research more useful, particularly by helping to keep it evidence-based and policy-focused, and that their involvement gave it greater authority in the eyes of the policymakers. It therefore falls to the academics to engage with them to produce such research.

The potential impact on the academics’ work was summed up by one senior academic who reflected at length on the constraints of expectation (including the peer reviewing of papers) that limit academic research in Nigeria.

Most of the senior and junior academics acknowledged the potential benefits of this inter-sectoral collaborative research and explained how they might make use of it. They all appreciated the improved research skills they had acquired although they attributed this to EDOREN rather to their engagement with the practitioners. They also appreciated the new knowledge they had learned about primary education. Most noted that they would be placing greater emphasis on policy issues and policy-relevant research in their own teaching.
Academic research in Nigeria is typically quantitative and most of the academics wanted to replicate this in Phase I of the study. Discussions with EDOREN and the school-based practitioners focused on the sort of data they might need and how they might get it. As a consequence, the study became more qualitative (although it must be acknowledged that it was uncomplicated qualitative research) and, as the study progressed, the academics recognised the value of this approach. Several went on to explain that they would be more willing to use more qualitative research in their own work, particularly as it yielded data that would enable them to more readily address policy-related issues.

Most also explained that they would be more aware of policy issues in their own research (with some of them thinking clearly enough to recognise that this might improve funding opportunities). Some were willing to work closely with practitioners and policymakers in future but one remained adamant that they should only be involved as participants rather than as co-researchers. Importantly, though, the other academics recognised that close engagement could improve their future research by giving it greater focus and enabling them to present it in ways that might be acceptable to policymakers. Several explained that the validation processes used in the study could enhance the reporting of their own research and they acknowledged the practitioners’ contribution to this new understanding.

There was no significant distinction between the potential impact of the study on senior and junior academics. None of them noted that junior academics are less likely to initiate research projects but the stronger evidence of mentoring has the potential to address this.

There was no evidence of the academics implementing the changes they discussed but the greater understanding of the significance of policy-focused research (whether for their own personal research agendas or for the system-building some described) suggests most might try to realise the rhetoric. However, it was generally recognised that the collaboration would not have been possible without EDOREN acting as a sectoral broker and that future collaborations might be more difficult to arrange. Several noted that the longer-term impact would depend on whether policymakers started listening to their research findings but, importantly, most acknowledged that they had a responsibility to make that research accessible.

Interviews with the researchers’ work colleagues clearly indicated that they were discussing the study with them. Their colleagues generally corroborated their accounts of sharing the findings and they tended to be enthusiastic about the study and its potential. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the radical change to recruitment policy was singled out for particular attention. When talking about engaging with academics, though, the practitioners’ colleagues mostly focused on baseline studies and monitoring. Meanwhile, although the academics’ colleagues enthused about policy engagement, they typically interpreted it as noting policy and perhaps involving policymakers as research participants. That is, the more significant capacity strengthening aspects of the study – the inter-sectoral collaboration – had not filtered through to the researchers’ workplaces.

This should not be surprising, however, as the researchers – both the academics and the practitioners – had needed a long time and intensive support to begin appreciating this point. Their workplace colleagues were often uncertain and confused about the study and this suggests limited institutional capacity building at the time of reporting. Yet the comments from these colleagues highlights one important very important point: the study was building momentum.

All the practitioners had engaged in extensive policy assessment through the research process and had come to appreciate the practice and potential use of research. Some of the senior practitioners had already started making use of the evidence generated by the study. It remains open to question whether the junior practitioners will be able to make similar use of the evidence but at least some of them were sharing the evidence with their senior work colleagues who were therefore becoming more receptive to the potential use of research.
The academics had shifted their focus from theoretically-driven to policy-focused research. That some of the evidence-based protocols generated by the study were already being put into practice clearly indicates that their ability to contribute to policy-focused research had improved.

However, the most significant potential impact on the current and future work of the researchers – both academics and practitioners – concerns their willingness to collaborate in this inter-sectoral study. When the early rhetoric of their enthusiasm is stripped away, it becomes easier to recognise the time and effort this took. Most of the practitioners needed to take part in the study to understand the problems of primary education in Northern Nigeria. All of them needed to take part to appreciate what research can contribute to addressing them. Most of the academics also needed to take part in the study to understand those problems. All of them needed to take part to appreciate the importance of designing and generating policy-focused research to help address the problems. All the researchers acknowledged the importance of EDOREN in facilitating this study and explained that it would not have happened otherwise. The counterfactual, then, is clear here: without EDOREN to facilitate the researchers’ engagement in the study, their work would have continued as it had done and the inter-sectoral mistrust they described would not have been replaced by the inter-sectoral collaboration impacting on their own work and on primary education in Northern Nigeria.
10  Partnership

Aim: The interaction between practitioners and academics is aimed at fostering the closer interaction and understanding necessary for strengthening capacity for the demand, supply and use of evidence in policymaking. The design deliberately encourages: (i) intergovernmental collaboration between SMOEs and SUBEBs; (ii) inter-academic collaboration between different academic institutions and departments; and (iii) individual collaboration between practitioners and academics. The partnerships are intended to provide a method of peer-learning that is likely to provide capacity strengthening across both technical and political dimensions.

This, in turn, is intended to improve: (i) the policymakers’ ability to find reliable assistance in solving future policy challenges; and (ii) the academics’ ability to better understand the policy priorities of policymakers thus allowing them to produce more relevant research and attach greater importance to solving policy challenges.

The main study was based on the idea of partnerships that would enable inter-sectoral peer-learning leading to a series of evidence-based policy recommendations. It was intended that knowledge and skills would be exchanged, with researchers from both sectors learning from their colleagues from the other sector, and that this would strengthen research capacity. This happened but it took time for some researchers to share their knowledge and experience and for others to listen to it. Technical learning occurred from the outset and informed the researchers’ collaborative work. The study was initially seen by the researchers as a largely academic exercise and this undermined the full benefits of partnership, particularly in terms of what the researchers were willing to share with and learn from each other. However, this unequal relationship improved throughout the course of the study.

The structure of the main study demanded equal partnership across the two sectors. The original call for proposals (in the form of the LoIs) made clear that the two sectors had equal status: it required equal numbers of academics and practitioners; and leadership and seniority were to be shared across the sectors. One of the teams lacked a second senior practitioner from the outset but this structural imbalance did not undermine the development of the inter-sectoral partnership.

However, the main study was perceived as a mostly academic exercise from the outset and this inevitably influenced the perception of sectoral status. The most obvious reason for this perception was that it was a research project and research is generally recognised as the work of academics rather than practitioners (even though some of the practitioners claimed to have conducted research). This perception was reinforced by the study’s methodological structure which required research-focused fieldwork (again generally recognised as the work of academics) before the findings were considered in terms of policy recommendations. Several other factors also had an influence. Most of those attending the study’s launch were academics and they led the team formation and proposal writing. The leaders of both selected teams were academics. They also had the advantage of being able to draw on close networks to select the academic team members but typically had to seek advice on recruiting the practitioners. This gave the academics a greater sense of unity which allowed them to take charge of the early stages while the practitioners were familiarising themselves with the study.

Researchers from both sectors contributed to this perceived imbalance in status with some of the academics believing they were leading the study and most of the practitioners initially accepting that. The immediate consequence was that some practitioners were reluctant to share their knowledge and experience, partly because they did not recognise its value in this academic context, and some of the researchers were reluctant to listen to them.

Capacity building in the usual sense happened throughout the course of the main study. It commenced prior to the main study’s start as researchers from both sectors worked together to develop the proposals (despite
the perceived imbalance in sectoral status). The result for the selected teams was a successful proposal leading to the series of evidence-based and policy-focused proposals noted in the main study. The teams had worked together to identify the characteristics of effective teachers and to then generate a series of policy recommendations. Researchers from both sectors acknowledged the importance of inter-sectoral partnerships in making this happen. This was facilitated by the knowledge and skills acquired through the collaboration. This technical learning was important. More importantly, though, particularly in terms of sustainable change, most of the researchers learned to appreciate the benefits of working together.

To achieve this, they needed to negotiate the sectoral differences identified in the literature review and given voice by the researchers. The academics did not see the practitioners (here acting as proxies for policymakers) as being interested in education research. The practitioners, on the other hand, saw the academics as only being interested in theoretical research with limited, if any, practical application.

The Lols offered the first opportunity for partnership. Both the successful proposals, as well as all the unsuccessful ones, were poor on the policy considerations. In fairness, the need to recruit practitioners to the teams and the limited timeframe meant there was little time to fully integrate those considerations. However, some of the researchers had not properly read their successful proposals. The practitioners all acknowledged what they could learn from the academics but several academics were sceptical about what they could learn from the practitioners.

The initial preparation for the fieldwork in Phase I was dominated by the academics. Some practitioners in one team remained silent and were shouted down in the other until the EDOREN facilitators suggested and then insisted that the practitioners with school-based experience might have something to contribute. Those experiences went on to shape the research design and most of the academics acknowledged their value. Some, though, argued that they could have obtained this information through involving the practitioners as research participants rather than as co-researchers (a point that was somewhat undermined by their failure to 'interview' the practitioners about their experiences before proposing their own research designs).

The practitioners, however, believed they were learning a lot from the academics as they were being shown how to conduct the fieldwork and were delighted to receive credit for the interviews they conducted. As noted above, this acquisition of technical skills was only indirectly beneficial in terms of the study’s main inter-sectoral research capacity strengthening purpose in that it gave them a greater appreciation of the potential for educational research to inform policy. Here, though, it had a greater significance as it allowed the partnerships to develop. However, these partnerships were developing within a framework that prioritised one sector (the academics) over the other (the practitioners). Indeed, several academics commented that the practitioners were becoming more like academics and the practitioners, perhaps inevitably, responded favourably to this.

The second phase of the main study was an opportunity for the practitioners to share knowledge and experience that the academics valued. A constant complaint of academics is that policymakers never listen to them. This is as true in Nigeria as elsewhere and that complaint was heard throughout the study (although most of the academics repeated it less as the study progressed). Now, though, the practitioners helped shape the findings into practical recommendations for policy change. They also used their networks to facilitate the validation processes with senior education stakeholders and provided insight into the revision of the draft protocols.

The academics typically expressed surprise at the responses of these stakeholders. They had been conditioned to seeing their own research ignored (so much so that some did not bother making it available to policymakers) but now they were seeing it discussed and broadly accepted by the LGA Education Secretaries attending the stakeholder meetings. They all acknowledged the contributions of the practitioners and most recognised that it was enabled by the close and constant working partnerships that had developed throughout the study. That is, most – but not all – of them realised the importance of involving the practitioners as co-researchers rather than just as research participants to be interviewed.
The concept of partnership extends beyond the sharing of knowledge and skills as it implies equality – what could be described here as horizontal capacity building. The acquisition of new knowledge and skills is important but the developing partnerships here in the main study enabled inter-sectoral appreciation of what the academics and practitioners contributed to the generation of evidence-based policy recommendations. In this sense, the concept of partnership involves ‘give and take’ and it is therefore worth examining what the researchers gave to and took from their involvement in the study.

The practitioners shared their knowledge of the primary education sector (which shaped the data collection) and their experience of policymaking processes (which allowed them to advise on making the research findings more accessible). They also facilitated the validation process by securing access to stakeholders. In return, they developed their own research skills and acquired a better understanding of how academic research might be used.

The academics shared their research skills (although the level of research, including the data analysis, was uncomplicated) and encouraged greater critical thinking. In return, they acquired a better understanding of the practice of policymaking and its bureaucratic contexts and this provided them with opportunities to improve their own research, including making it more accessible and policy-relevant.

The practitioners were more willing to acknowledge what they had learned from the academics and some of the senior practitioners were already making a policy impact by the close of the study. It could be concluded from this that they had benefitted more from the collaboration. However, neither their contributions to the study nor the factors influencing its recognition should be overlooked. The final workshop allowed the practitioners to reflect on how the study’s inter-sectoral collaboration had allowed them to develop their own capacity and how this had been influenced by their greater appreciation of policy-informed research. Some repeated the initial rhetoric of the importance of research but were at best vague on how this might be put into practice. Others, however, had moved beyond this earlier rhetoric and were keen to explain how the collaboration was changing their practice.

Seniority was a key factor here. They all emphasised the importance of what they had learned from their academic colleagues but their opportunities to make use of that typically depended on their own practice-based roles. Most of those simply repeating the rhetoric that remained unchanged throughout the study were in junior positions that provided very limited opportunities to initiate change. Most of those seeking to change practice were in senior positions with the authority to make or influence change. However, their self-reported contributions to change do not tell the whole story. The junior practitioners – particularly the SMOs and SSOs – whose practical experiences of primary education had made significant contributions to the development of Phase I of the study, did not describe significant changes. Yet while they may have been unwilling to acknowledge their own capacity development, except in the vague terms of sharing the findings and research practices with colleagues, they played an important part in developing the research methodologies that had enabled their senior colleagues to initiate change. Moreover, that change had been initiated by the school-based experience that had given authority to the evidence-based study.

The difficulty in assessing the contributions of the practitioners to the research capacity strengthening exercise is that the study was seen primarily as an academic exercise by both the academics and the practitioners. This allowed the practitioners to acknowledge what they had learned from the collaboration but limited their opportunities to acknowledge what they had contributed even when, as in Phase I, their contributions had helped progress the study. Some, but not all, of the senior practitioners were able to claim that they had started to change policy and practice. However, their junior colleagues, lacking such authority, were typically left to fall back on the rhetoric of change.

This has significant implications for research capacity strengthening. The practitioners may have developed their individual research capacity (although this remains open to question as the technical skills they acquired had only indirect value to their usual work) but their contributions to institutional capacity building are likely
to be limited by institutional inertia and overshadowed by the power structures that prioritised the role of the academics.

The final workshop, signalling the end of the study, also provided the academics with opportunities to reflect more openly on the collaboration. Some emphasised their initial concerns about working with the practitioners, explaining that they did not know what they might contribute. One persisted in complaining that their engagement undermined the academic value of the research. However, most of the academics were more positive and acknowledged the importance of recognising what each sector contributed to the study.

Few of the academics had been aware of the problems identified in Phase I of the study (and those who were least surprised had worked on previous EDOREN studies). This was, in part, a methodological issue as education research in Nigeria is overwhelmingly quantitative and few of the academics had experience of the qualitative approach used in the main study. Being made aware of those problems led to a greater appreciation of the purpose of the study and of the part that the practitioners could play.

As with most of the practitioners, the academics tended to describe Phase I as being more difficult. Much of this was to do with logistics (e.g. travel to the research sites) but, even allowing for the different methodological approach, Phase I should have been easier to work through than Phase II. In the wider context of the inter-sectoral collaboration, Phase I was more difficult because they were still negotiating their relationships and Phase II was easier because they were working together in partnership.

This change was framed by a growing appreciation of what the practitioners were contributing to the study. They had conducted fieldwork, assisted with the data analysis, provided contextual information, helped the development of the protocols and enabled access to stakeholders. For most of the academics, the more the practitioners contributed, the more their academic colleagues recognised the authority of inter-sectoral collaborative work. Here, the practitioners’ contributions to the study were a necessary stage in that recognition.

Peer-learning took place throughout the study but at different rates. The practitioners typically claimed to have learned more from the academics during Phase I and the academics typically claimed to have learned more from the practitioners during Phase II. This can be accounted for by the structure of the main study. However, there was more to learn than most of the researchers (particularly the academics) acknowledged. The growing sense of partnership, based on a ‘give and take’ approach, enabled greater peer-learning as the study progressed.

Capacity building took place as the researchers acquired new skills (e.g. data analysis) and new knowledge (e.g. of bureaucratic procedures). Not all these new skills were directly relevant to the researchers’ own work (e.g. the research skills acquired by the practitioners) but this learning facilitated the study and there was evidence of it being used to inform the researchers’ work beyond it. However, although the acquisition of skills and knowledge was an important contributor to the success of the study, its real significance was that it enabled the partnership that allowed inter-sectoral appreciation of what each of the researchers brought to the study. This more effective peer-learning allowed the teams to produce relevant research that, at the time of reporting, had been acknowledged by State policymakers.
11 Mentoring

Aim: The ‘organisational habits’ that the process is trying to affect (i.e. improving the production and use of evidence in education decision-making) are passed down between senior and junior members. By asking members to operate in a different manner, senior members may provide a good example and even provide a mentoring role to more junior members of their organisations. This will, in turn, spread the capacity strengthening benefits to a wider audience and provide more internal pressure to shift organisational behaviours. It may also provide a better way to deliver the research, as it is expected to combine senior officers with more authority (vital for policy impact) and junior members with more technical skills (vital for research outcome). Both should therefore be able to learn from each other.

Mentoring describes a two-way relationship between those with more and less experience and knowledge. It requires a willingness to share and to learn. It is generally considered less formal than teaching as it does not necessarily have specified learning aims.

Mentoring was central to the research capacity strengthening strategy. It was anticipated that it would take place in two spaces:

- senior team members mentoring their junior colleagues, which can be seen as vertical mentoring; and
- inter-sectoral mentoring, which can be seen as horizontal mentoring (section 10, above).

The intra- and inter-team working relationships that developed throughout the study were generally good. The senior researchers from both sectors inevitably took the lead but their junior colleagues had opportunities to contribute. This provided a framework for the mentoring. However, there was considerable evidence of horizontal mentoring between the sectors but less of the vertical mentoring taking place within them.

The senior and junior academics had broadly similar roles (e.g. research, teaching) requiring similar knowledge and skill sets. They were also joining colleagues from their own institutions. The practitioners had a greater variety of roles in their work that required different knowledge and skills. Although they represented the same institutions (i.e. SMOE and SUBEB) they worked in different departments and did not necessarily know each other prior to the main study taking place.

The inter-sectoral mentoring was also influenced by the dominant perception that research is the preserve of academics. This influenced the willingness to both share and learn from experience as both the mentor and mentee need to recognise the value of the experience.

At the outset of the project there was general approval of the mentoring opportunities it offered, whether to share or to learn from experience.

Most of the researchers described work contexts that encouraged mentoring.

The senior and junior academics gave several examples of work-based mentoring (e.g. meetings, workshops) that took place within a context of institutional familiarity. There was some focus on seniority and experience (e.g. how to write academic papers) but the main emphasis was on the democratic nature of academic mentoring and the opportunities it provided to learn from anyone with anything to share. However, this was not always evident in the project workshops as some of the senior academics used them as opportunities to lecture their colleagues.

The senior practitioners were also pleased with the opportunity to share their knowledge and experience and gave similar examples of work-based mentoring. Their junior colleagues tended to be more reserved, though. They acknowledged the potential for mentoring within the project but gave vague examples of mentoring at work. However, there were wide power differentials between the senior and junior
practitioners and these were exacerbated by the lack of personal familiarity enjoyed by their academic colleagues.

There were some references to the Team Leaders encouraging junior colleagues to contribute to the proposal writing. However, this was clearly more a matter of delegating responsibilities (which were subsequently checked) than of mentoring.

The potential benefits of inter-sectoral collaboration were acknowledged but there was no indication of mentoring beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills. At this early stage of the study, there was more emphasis from the practitioners on what they could learn from the academics (e.g. research methods).

During the workshops, the senior researchers tended to engage with the facilitators and then address their junior colleagues. However, all the researchers participated in the team activities and the exchanges between senior and junior colleagues, within and across the sectors, offered a framework for mentoring.

There was an overall sense of familiarity with the notion of mentoring and optimism that the project would enable it.

Phase I of the main study involved planning, conducting and reporting on the fieldwork and therefore provided opportunities for mentoring. Again, it was often described in idealistic terms – experience and knowledge were recognised and respected in a spirit of democratic cooperation – but there was some evidence of it taking place. The fieldwork was more concerned with inter-sectoral partnering rather than the senior/junior relationships but most of the researchers addressed the intra-sectoral mentoring. However, whether they were senior or junior researchers, the examples they gave tended to be generalised and vague.

The senior/junior academic relationships were described as good, with senior academics explaining their encouragement of their junior colleagues and those junior colleagues acknowledging and appreciating this. Several clear examples (e.g. conducting interviews, data analysis) were given. However, it should be noted that some of the junior academics came to the main study with strong track records and so how much they actually learned from the mentoring remains open to question. Nevertheless, the development of personal connections established in their institutions was emphasised. The mentoring within the study can therefore be seen as an extension of institutional mentoring which benefitted from dedicated time being given to the process. Several senior academics also described encouraging the junior practitioners.

Unlike their academic colleagues, the practitioners were not developing existing working and mentoring relationships and so had to develop new relationships. The senior practitioners also described encouraging their junior colleagues but in more general terms. Some of the junior practitioners commented on being given responsibility and growing in confidence because of it. They also noted that the study provided more opportunities for learning than their usual workplaces and one emphasised the importance of learning from senior colleagues from other departments. These practitioners benefitted the most from the mentoring opportunities. Others, though, suggested that it was not easy working with senior colleagues they did not already know and they benefitted the least from the mentoring opportunities.

There was also evidence of inter-sectoral mentoring. All the researchers commented on what they had been learning from their colleagues. This was more pronounced between senior and junior colleagues across the two sectors with the junior academics highlighting what they had learned from the senior practitioners and the junior practitioners emphasising what they had learned from the senior academics. There was more limited evidence of mentoring and support between colleagues of equal status. The three female junior researchers from the Kano team reported growing personal and professional relationships. This needs to be contextualised by the gender divide of the State-based culture but it provided a framework for inter-sectoral mentoring. Inter-sectoral relationships between senior colleagues were generally reported as being good but there were also some clashes when individuals felt their advice and experience were not being heeded.
Overall, though, there was considerable evidence of intra- and inter-team collaboration which provided a framework for mentoring.

The reflections shared at the end of the project indicated the gaps between mentoring opportunities for the academics and practitioners. However, despite the growing recognition of themselves as researchers, it should be noted that the teams still interpreted the study as a primarily academic exercise.

The senior academics were typically keen to emphasise those opportunities and this enabled them to be more supportive. They were more aware of what they could offer their junior colleagues as their work (e.g. research, teaching) was similar, even if conducted at different levels, and specific academic skills (e.g. research design) were easier to share. One of the Team Leaders carefully described listening to colleagues’ ideas and involving junior colleagues in the project design (e.g. designing research instruments, analysing data) rather than simply imposing tasks on them. Research training – explanatory, exemplary and experiential – framed the junior colleagues’ development as researchers. Regular meetings, involving the whole team, facilitated this active mentoring. It was also facilitated by the existing relationships between the senior and junior academics. Working in the same or similar institutions as their junior colleagues made the senior academics more sensitive to power differentials when reflecting on the mentoring process. This was appreciated by the junior academics who acknowledged the advice, guidance and support offered by their senior colleagues. Even though several of them already had considerable research experience, they explained that being given responsibilities made them more confident.

The senior practitioners were less forthcoming as they reflected on the mentoring process and focused more on what they had learned from the academics. They explained that they intended sharing their new learning, including the importance of inter-sectoral collaboration, with work colleagues (e.g. through training sessions) but this was distinct from mentoring within the teams. However, it should be recognised that the practitioners – senior and junior – had a wide array of jobs that required different knowledge and skills. This necessarily made mentoring more difficult. The junior practitioners spoke favourably of the mentoring process but they also tended to focus on what they had learned from the academics. However, other junior practitioners struggled to make sense of such opportunities. They tended to engage less and so were given less responsibility and therefore learned less.

There was greater evidence of mentoring in the academic sector. It clearly helped that the junior academics already knew at least one of the senior academics before the main study commenced. It also helped that they all had similar work-based roles (e.g. teaching, research). This made it easier for the academics to transfer mentoring opportunities from the workplace to the study and the year-long focus of the study then provided sustained opportunities for that mentoring. That is, the study replicated and highlighted existing institutional mentoring opportunities. This was beneficial to the junior academics but, along with the widely held perception of the study as academic research, it limited their opportunities to benefit from seeing their senior colleagues operating in a different manner until the end of the study. Nevertheless, seeing those senior colleagues recognising the benefits of partnership and recognising the usefulness of repeated policy feedback will have given them some experience of being responsiveness to this new type of research.

The practitioners had none of these institutional advantages and consequently struggled to realise the potential for effective mentoring. To improve future mentoring opportunities, and to address this sectoral imbalance, a more structured approach should be taken and research teams should be required to develop a mentoring plan alongside their research plan.
Revised policy feedback

Aim: This is intended to provide external pressure to utilise evidence for policy and effectively demonstrate how best to communicate research findings to a policy audience.

The literature review clearly indicates the absence of repeated policy feedback and its consequences in Nigeria and elsewhere. Academic research is typically critical of education policies and rarely offers viable solutions to identified problems. This is very much the case in the context of Nigerian academic research. At the same time, while it is generally recognised that policy is shaped by more than evidence (Bridges and Watts, 2008; Watts, 2010), evidence is too often dismissed in favour of other considerations. Again, this is very much the case in the context of Nigerian education policy.

Repeated policy feedback requires appropriate communication channels. These are typically absent in Nigeria and where they exist (e.g. ESSPIN) evidence from this study suggests they can be rendered less effective than they should be by inter-sectoral mistrust (Watts et al., 2017).

These issues were highlighted by the researchers. They all reported limited or no experience of policy feedback on research methodologies or findings. Some of the researchers had been involved in policy-focused research but this had all been commissioned by external agencies (including EDOREN) and even here there was no evidence of repeated policy feedback. Few of the academics had given any consideration to policies when designing and conducting their own research. Some of them had involved practitioners and/or policymakers in that research but the validation processes (where they were used) do not appear to have involved engaging them in the analysis and interpretation of the data or the reporting of the findings. Some of the practitioners had used what they described as research findings in their work. However, this typically involved using data from monitoring exercises such as the ASC. None of the practitioners taking part in this study had commissioned research to inform policy. Some of the practitioners reported using their school-based knowledge to inform education practice (e.g. through training workshops) but, although this is commendable, it demands very loose definitions of ‘research’ and ‘policy’ to suggest repeated policy feedback.

The main study demanded repeated policy feedback. The inter-sectoral composition of the teams meant that there was – or should be – continual internal feedback from the practitioners. The concern with external pressure to utilise evidence for policy and for effectively demonstrating how best to communicate research findings to a policy audience was addressed through the formal validation processes in Phase II.

The involvement of the practitioners in the teams meant that there were opportunities for internal processes of policy feedback. Interviews with the practitioners and their work colleagues indicated that the practitioners were discussing the study with their work colleagues (including the senior colleagues of the junior practitioners). The potential impact of this extended internal policy feedback was not explored in depth or detail because it was only just beginning to emerge at the time of reporting. However, the potential of its more focused impact (i.e. from within the research teams) was clearly indicated by reports of a discussion between some of the academics and practitioners.

It had been suggested that the research data from Phase I could be presented as a series of case studies of individual effective teachers that could be used for recruitment purposes and to provide policymakers with context-specific insight into the working conditions of those teachers (Allsop and Watts, 2017, section 4.1). It was therefore agreed that the case studies should include the ‘highs’ and ‘lows’ of teaching. During the validation process, NCE students argued that the ‘lows’ could act as a deterrent. However, as the academics were preparing to revise the case studies, one of the senior practitioners, drawing on his experience of working with policymakers, made a very important point – that not including the ‘lows’ could lead to policymakers denying that there are problems to be addressed. It was subsequently agreed to discontinue further work with the case studies. This clearly indicates the significance of policy feedback: it could have
been counterproductive to report the research findings in this particular manner (i.e. through case studies only addressing the ‘highs’ of teaching).

External pressure was exerted through two stages of the validation process.

The first stage concerned trialling the draft protocols with a wide range of stakeholders, from students through to senior officials. It was organised by the researchers who made use of their contacts and networks. The academics arranged meetings with teaching staff and students. The practitioners arranged meetings with senior officials. These stakeholders were presented with the draft protocols and asked to comment on them. The stakeholders with an understanding of education policies were asked to comment on them with reference to those policies. All stakeholders involved in this stage were asked to make suggestions for improving them. The stakeholder responses were then used to review and revise the draft protocols as necessary.

The second stage involved presenting the revised protocols to an audience of LGA Education Secretaries at separate State-based stakeholder meetings. This was organised by EDOREN but with some support from the senior practitioners. The researchers presented the protocols and then invited feedback. The Education Secretaries were placed in groups and asked to assess the protocols in terms of: (i) the ease of implementation; and (ii) the value of the outcome. They were then invited to discuss the protocols and their assessments of them. These assessments were intended to identify those protocols that could be most easily implemented. The discussions were intended to provide further opportunities for revision if necessary. The overall intent was to ensure that the Education Secretaries were – and felt that they were – part of this process of generating evidence-based policy-focused research.

There were significant differences in the stakeholder responses in these two stages. There was considerably more disagreement with the draft protocols in the first stage and widespread agreement with the revised protocols in the second stage. This was not surprising because the first stage was intended to trial the drafts and then revise them, as and if necessary, following informed feedback. However, a second factor soon became clear: some of the researchers had been uncertain about explaining and justifying the draft protocols in the first stage but were more ready to do so in the second stage.

The evidence generated in Phase I of the main study was used to draft a series of protocols concerning the recruitment and deployment of effective teachers. That is, the draft protocols were evidence-based. Their design was – or should have been – shaped by the policy-based knowledge and experience of the researchers, particularly the practitioners. However, sectoral differences spilled over into this design stage. Too often, the response of the practitioners was to suggest that anything suggesting change could not happen because the system could not change. The problem of challenging the status quo was noted in the conclusions to the report of the main study:

> We note and acknowledge the continuing undercurrent of scepticism regarding the ways in which these instruments may be undermined by political decisions (often legitimate) and patronage (never legitimate). Our response is simply that policy-related research of this kind can only provide the tools by which transparent processes can occur if there is a supportive political will. We have to presume that the development of quality primary schooling for all children is a high order political priority in both States (Allsop and Watts, 2017, p. 33).

Here, and at this stage of the study, the capitulation to the status quo can be attributed to its prevailing power and the continuing influence of sectoral differences. Broadly speaking, the academics favoured the evidence and the practitioners favoured the status quo and meaningful negotiation of the divide was deadlocked until brokered by the facilitators.

The draft protocols that were to be presented to the stakeholders were feasible in that they were evidence-based and acknowledged policy concerns. They had been approved by the research teams but it remained
open to question, at that stage, whether or not that approval was anything more than a willingness to appease the facilitators.

The feedback from the various stakeholders on these draft protocols inevitably varied. Even within States, where feedback is going to be shaped by the local political economy, it is not unreasonable to assume that NCE students and Education Secretaries will have different views on educational policies and practices. What was far more pertinent in terms of research capacity strengthening at this stage was the response of the researchers to this feedback. The initial response of one of the State-based research teams was to simply acquiesce to the negative feedback from the stakeholders with more authority. This effectively expunged the possibility of any meaningful change and therefore demands greater scrutiny. It is worth focusing on that team’s experience as it is representative of the wider problem and therefore illustrates the potential for addressing that problem.

Closer scrutiny of this team’s approach to the first stage of the validation process indicated that they had failed to explain and justify the draft protocols with reference to the evidence that informed them. This, in turn, also requires closer scrutiny.

The study was very much seen as an academic exercise, particularly at this point, and the literature review indicates a clear pattern in the reporting of academic research. Data (which are typically quantitative) are collected and analysed and then recommendations (which are typically critical of policy) are then presented. There is rarely any context-specific argument or discussion linking the data analysis and the recommendations. As the study was still very much seen as an academic exercise, it is not surprising that this stage of the validation process should follow that same pattern.

This, though, does not fully explain the general failure to take account of the internal policy feedback. The practitioners were typically reluctant to provide or defend such feedback and the academics were typically reluctant to encourage or respond to it. This becomes easier to understand when considered in the light of the inter-sectoral mistrust shaping the professional identities of the researchers. Despite the rhetoric of collaboration expressed throughout the main study, most of the researchers came to the study with deeply embedded preconceptions about their colleagues representing the other sector: the academics did not expect their practitioner colleagues to pay attention to or even understand their research; and the practitioners expected their academic colleagues to generate theoretical findings that paid little, if any, attention to the real world (as they saw it) of primary education. Any intra-team disagreement with the draft protocols therefore simply confirmed general expectations. Consequently, as the study was seen as an academic exercise by team members from both sectors, the academic line was followed.

This approach to the study also helps explain the capitulation to negative feedback from the stakeholders. The draft protocols had been designed from an academic perspective. The academics had been conditioned to seeing their recommendations ignored by policymakers and the practitioners had been conditioned to seeing policymakers ignoring academic recommendations. There was, therefore, nothing unusual in evidence-based recommendations (i.e. recommendations perceived as being academic) being ignored.

The intervention of the facilitators at this point was significant. The research teams were required to review their protocols and the feedback on them and to then assess the viability of the protocols in the light of the comments from the various stakeholders. As indicated above, some of the protocols (i.e. the case studies) were abandoned at this stage. The teams were also required to generate arguments in support of those evidence-based protocols that had been judged as viable. These arguments included justifications for them and counter-arguments to the objections raised in the feedback they had received and that might reasonably be expected.

This stage also introduced a new protocol concerning online advertising and the electronic submission of teacher applications. This idea had been raised in feedback from one State and inter-team discussions compared it with the current practice for secondary teachers in the other State.
The responses from the Education Secretaries at the stakeholder meetings were generally favourable and supportive. There were fewer objections to the protocols and the objections that were raised by the Education Secretaries were challenged by the teams and discussed.

Several factors influenced the broad agreement from the stakeholders. Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, the revised protocols had addressed legitimate concerns raised in the earlier stage of the validation process. That is, they were simply better. Secondly, the presentation was also better. The teams had learned from the experiences of the earlier stages. They were ready with supporting evidence from Phase I and the earlier validation, they justified the protocols instead of simply presenting them and they were ready to defend them. Thirdly, and perhaps most interestingly, there was a greater expectation of inter-sectoral collaborative agreement. This was best explained by one of the junior practitioners who reported a conversation with several Education Secretaries prior to the stakeholder meetings. They had been concerned that the meetings would be another academic exercise criticising them and their work. However, they were reassured to learn that the practitioners had been participating in the study and contributing to the design of the protocols. Knowing this, they were more ready to listen and engage. That is, the inter-sectoral barriers founded on mistrust can be seen but they can also be seen to be negotiated through the inter-sectoral collaborative process.

The negotiation of those barriers and the developing partnerships facilitated the acceptance of external pressure to utilise evidence for policy and to effectively communicate the research findings. In turn, this enabled the successful presentation of the policy protocols to the Education Secretaries at the State-based stakeholder meetings.

It is not unreasonable to presume that repeated policy feedback can help strengthen evidence-based and policy-focused research capacity. Understanding policy concerns should lead to the generation of more robust policy proposals. Here, it could be seen in improvements to the protocols addressing recruitment policy through the inclusion of proposals to make use of online applications and in the decision to abandon the case studies. However, careful examination of the validation processes identified several problems including the failure of some researchers to properly explain the draft protocols and then abandon them in the face of disagreement. This can be put down to inexperience (and it was disappointing to note that several senior researchers displayed this inexperience) but that does not fully explain the problem.

To understand the problem fully, it is necessary to consider the influence of expectations. At least some of the academics did not expect needing to justify their draft protocols or even having them taken seriously. At least some of the practitioners did not expect their academic colleagues to listen to their concerns. The formal channels for policy feedback (i.e. the structure of the study) were at least partially blocked by the weight of expectations. Negotiating those expectations through ongoing collaboration enabled the policy feedback that allowed the researchers to present robust policy recommendations and the stakeholders to engage with them.
13 Hands-on support

Aim: The provision of hands-on technical skills for data gathering, processing, interpretation and packaging for policy use is expected to be an important input into the study design.

EDOREN’s support was essential to the success of the research capacity strengthening exercise. It initiated the study, provided the necessary funding, gave technical support and enabled the development of the partnerships that were key to the successful collaboration.

There is a lack of collaboration between policymakers/practitioners and academics in Nigeria’s education sector. This was acknowledged by all the researchers, none of whom had any previous experience of such partnerships. The academics recognised that their own research was rarely policy-relevant and the practitioners accepted that their work rarely made use of rigorously conducted research. Most explained that they would almost certainly not have changed these approaches to their usual work or engaged in intersectoral collaboration without the support of EDOREN.

EDOREN organised the stakeholder meetings that closed the first year of the study. It was generally acknowledged that its institutional reputation and financial support made this possible. Some of the researchers also suggested that EDOREN’s reputation gave the work authority and credibility and that the stakeholder meetings would not have been so well attended without that.

EDOREN provided funding for conducting the study including travel and accommodation costs to attend the workshops and for the fieldwork. It did not include salaries for the researchers. These conditions had been carefully explained during the main study’s launch and in the guidance provided to interested parties. Most of the researchers accepted this but there were still some complaints that the study was under-funded. However, and despite the technical support made available to the teams, this was linked to one team’s constant struggle to report to and invoice EDOREN promptly and correctly.

Some of the researchers were concerned that it would be difficult to secure funding for future collaborative projects. Others, though, noted that such collaboration could improve their chances of securing funding.

Most of the researchers, particularly the senior researchers, recognised the importance of the initial guidance they were given at the main study’s launch and through the supporting documentation. One of the senior academics, who remained unable to see the study as anything other than an academic project, complained that there had been no formative feedback on the LoIs. The others appreciated the clear guidance they were given on the study’s collaborative approach and the team composition (and it was particularly interesting that several of the Kano researchers highlighted the importance of guidance on gender balance).

EDOREN provided considerable technical support throughout the study. This support included all aspects of the research process – research design, the methodology and methods used, participant selection, data analysis and reporting – and was broadly appreciated by all the researchers, including most of the academics. It also included encouraging the practitioners to share their knowledge and experience. Again, this was broadly appreciated.

The initial research designs proposed by the teams included the large-scale surveys that are typical of academic research in Nigeria. EDOREN encouraged the school-based practitioners to share their understanding of effective teachers and then encouraged the teams to consider other research approaches that might enable the collection of more appropriate data. This necessitated technical guidance on mixed methods and qualitative methodologies and their application to policy-focused research. Most of the researchers, including some of the academics, were unfamiliar with such research and appreciated the opportunity to learn about it. As the study progressed, most of the researchers also appreciated that the methodological guidance had usefully informed the study and enabled them to generate evidence-based policy recommendations.
The EDOREN facilitators were needed to bridge the inter-sectoral gap by guiding research-focused discussions (e.g. on how to construct and conduct interviews). Some of the academics acknowledged that they had a technical understanding but no practical experience of qualitative research. Most of the researchers realised the importance of this technical support and appreciated it. Several academics noted that they would not have taken the methodological approach that was used if they had conducted the research themselves. This was slightly worrying as the teams had been encouraged to make use of their new methodological knowledge and then choose what they considered the most appropriate approach. It gives some additional credence to the complaint of one academic that EDOREN was simply pursuing its own agenda to the detriment of local expertise. However, most of the academics who had noted that they would have used a different approach in their own research went on to explain that they only realised the significance of using qualitative approaches once they had conducted the fieldwork and then seen the stakeholders, including senior policymakers, engage with the evidence-based policy recommendations.

The need for such support was anticipated and is understandable in the context of educational research in Nigeria. Other weaknesses (e.g. problems with preparing PowerPoint presentations) were more surprising and worrying.

EDOREN also provided technical support in the preparation of the draft protocols. It had been anticipated that the teams might struggle to identify appropriate protocols and so several options had been prepared. The teams were invited to add to them, and the practitioners were encouraged to explain what they would find useful, but the researchers agreed to focus on the protocols identified by EDOREN. This might be interpreted as passive acceptance of guidance from EDOREN (an interpretation that should not be completely dismissed) but it also indicates some of the less technical, and so less tangible, support provided.

Throughout the study, EDOREN encouraged discussion in and between the teams and between the academics and practitioners. Most of the practitioners, particularly the junior practitioners, were initially reluctant to contribute to the discussions. As noted above, this was partly because they did not expect the academics to listen to them. However, Phase II of the study gave greater prominence to their knowledge and experience and they were more ready to share them. The academics were also more ready to listen to them. Importantly, the teams had progressed from simply arguing opposing views to seeking agreement. Most of the researchers acknowledged that such discussions would have been considerably more difficult without the earlier encouragement of EDOREN. Agreement was not always achieved but EDOREN’s moderating role was appreciated.

EDOREN’s insistence on all the researchers contributing to the discussions was appreciated in theory if not always in practice. This indicated the broadly democratic approach to facilitation that was established from the outset when it was determined that the team members should recognise themselves, and be recognised, as researchers rather than as academics or practitioners. This, in turn, contributed to the researchers moving beyond their sectoral differences and encouraged them to think more broadly. It was acknowledged that this would not have happened without EDOREN’s support.

There were inevitably some complaints. One of the workshops had to be rescheduled and this caused some disruption, particularly for the senior practitioners. Scheduling problems (e.g. when conducting the fieldwork) arising from work commitments led to some frictions within the teams but these were typically easily resolved. Some of the researchers felt the study was under-funded but this is hardly an original complaint in the world of research. Others struggled to report to and invoice EDOREN properly and promptly but this was a team responsibility. It was felt in some quarters that some of the teams and their leaders would have benefitted from greater reassurance and support. This was evident in the mentoring opportunities for the junior practitioners. The greatest concern from the teams, though, was the anticipated difficulties of generating similar research in future.

It seems clear that such a collaborative study would not have taken place if not for EDOREN’s initiative and funding sourced from DFID. It seems equally clear that it would have been a significantly different study...
without the technical support provided. However, EDOREN’s most significant input, particularly in terms of sustainable research capacity building, was the inter-sector mediation. This enabled the researchers to negotiate deeply held inter-sectoral mistrust and so provide a template for future collaborative work. The importance of this cannot be overstated. Funding and technical support may have led to the evidence-based protocols but, by themselves, they would have only papered over the inter-sectoral cracks that inhibit collaboration.

It is important to recognise that this inter-sectoral mistrust did not surface as dislike. From the outset, the team members appeared to be working harmoniously and some inter-sectoral friendships emerged from the study. Moreover, that mistrust was felt more by some researchers than others.

The study was full of rhetoric about the benefits of inter-sectoral collaboration but this masked a long-standing problem that was clearly revealed at the end. Some of the practitioners voiced their concerns that the academics were going to produce theoretical findings with no practical application. Several academics voiced their concerns that the practitioners would have contributed nothing to the study as co-researchers and then ignored their findings. Not all the researchers voiced these concerns but the tensions they indicate could be glimpsed throughout the study. However, it was only at the end – when a series of protocols had been successfully generated – that they were articulated as clearly as this.

The literature review and the interviews with the researchers and their work-based colleagues make clear that these are widely held concerns. Individual academics and practitioners may not have experienced these problems but they typically recognise them. This is what social psychologists sometimes refer to as ‘in-group identification’ and ‘out-group derogation’ (see Watts et al., 2017 for a more detailed explanation). People identify themselves as members of social groups with certain shared characteristics. They draw distinctions between the ‘in-group’ (i.e. the group with which they identify) and ‘out-groups’ (i.e. groups with which they do not identify). They typically enhance the status of their own in-group by emphasising the importance of its characteristics. Out-groups lacking those characteristics are then devalued. Inter-group comparisons (such as, here, between academics and practitioners) can lead to individuals showing strong in-group favouritism, especially if the group is believed to be unfairly devalued.

This helps to explain the mistrust between the two sectors that, for some, persisted through to the end of the study (and it also helps to explain why some of the academics considered it a matter of pride that their research was ignored by policymakers). The individual’s need to believe in the value of her or his social identity, which often finds expression through work, often necessitates the devaluing of others. This is usually a subconscious process but often finds its way into conscious expression when individuals feel their social identities are being devalued by others. This is exacerbated in the context of Northern Nigeria’s education system where long-standing problems remain unresolved. Put more simply, those involved in education typically need to blame someone else for its failings. The irony, of course, is that this then inhibits opportunities to address those problems.

The provision of hands-on technical skills for data gathering, processing, interpretation and packaging for policy was an important input into the study. However, it had a far greater significance in that it fostered the inter-sectoral partnerships that enabled the researchers to learn from each other in ways that generated evidence-based policy recommendations which, at the time of reporting, had been favourably received by some policymakers.

What EDOREN was able to do through this research capacity strengthening exercise was redefine the researchers’ in-groups so they were no longer two separate groups – academics and practitioners – but one in-group of researchers working towards a common end. This inevitably takes time as the individual must recognise the value of the in-group and want to be part of it. This was an incomplete process for some of the researchers but most of them – academics and practitioners – came to recognise the value of this newly formed group. Being part of the same group erased the mistrust they had started with and allowed them to work more closely for the common purpose of generating evidence-based policy recommendations.
Conclusion

The evolving nature of this research capacity strengthening exercise – framed by the unique nature of the main study – means it is more appropriate to offer a conclusion based on a question and answer format.

Did the study enable the improved identification, recruitment and deployment of effective teachers?
Yes. The researchers identified the key context-specific characteristics of effective teachers. They critiqued existing policies for the recruitment and deployment of teachers. Research data were used to generate a series of draft protocols intended to address policy-related problems. These were validated through meetings with stakeholders and revised as necessary. At the time of reporting, these protocols had gained widespread approval from the two States’ LGA Education Secretaries.

Was this approach to the research different?
Yes. Several significant factors distinguished this study from others and make it a worthwhile template for future studies. Qualitative research was used to generate evidence about the characteristics and practices of effective teachers. This was then used to design a series of evidence-based protocols that were subjected to validation processes to ascertain their potential and viability. They were then revised as necessary before being presented to policymakers. The process, nature and extent of the collaborative work makes this study significantly different. It meant that the research was geared towards policy engagement rather than simple critique which, together with the authority arising from the collaboration, predicated a greater chance of the recommendations being accepted and put into practice.

Did the study enable research capacity strengthening?
Yes. Researchers from both sectors – the academics and practitioners – acquired greater knowledge and skills about the design and conduct of collaborative inter-sectoral research. Importantly, they obtained a much greater appreciation of how such research can be used to address policy issues. This was facilitated by the attitudinal shift that led to most of the researchers obtaining a much greater appreciation of the contributions their cross-sectoral colleagues made to primary education (below). Some inter-sectoral learning took place but it needed considerable support from EDOREN.

Did the study need inter-sectoral collaboration?
Yes and no. No, because it is possible that the same protocols could have been generated through a different project with less or no collaboration. However, the teams’ draft proposals suggest that a different project would still have required the technical support given here by EDOREN. Yes, because the collaboration made the research – particularly the validation – easier. More importantly, the collaboration enabled the change of attitude across the sectors and so provides a template for future collaborative projects.

Was the use of a competitive tendering process successful?
Yes and no. The caution indicated here recognises that this is a relatively novel approach to conducting research in Nigeria (even though competitive tendering is often used for academic research). The principle of requiring teams to submit proposals to be judged against other proposals is sound because it should focus their attention on producing high quality proposals addressing the key criteria of the study. Here, the two successful teams produced proposals that were of a significantly higher quality than the others and it was suggested that the desire to be involved in a DFID-funded study (i.e. one with the status that comes from internationally funded work) helped focus them. That is, the study was conducted by the teams producing the best proposals – even if those proposals could have been better (below). It should be noted that the process effectively excluded independent researchers because it was assumed that salary costs would be
carried by the researchers’ institutions. It should also be noted that EDOREN received several sub-standard proposals. Nevertheless, should this process become embedded in Nigeria, the likelihood is that the desire to be associated with such studies will lead to more high quality proposals in future.

**Did the use of a competitive tendering process facilitate inter-sectoral collaboration?**

Yes. The criteria for the LoIs clearly specified the need for consideration of the study’s policy implications and both successful teams addressed them. Both teams, though, could have addressed them in greater detail. The lack of detail can be attributed to two factors: (i) the presumption that this was a primarily academic study; and (ii) the timeframe which that limited opportunities to fully engage with policymakers and practitioners in designing the proposals. The first point, particularly when considered in the context of the early stages of the study, suggests that a more generous timeframe would not have significantly improved the proposals. However, the desire to participate in a DFID-funded study (above) clearly encouraged the academics to engage with the policymakers/practitioners in preparing the proposals. This then established the bases from which the inter-sectoral collaborations developed throughout the course of the study.

**Was it necessary to spend so long doing this research?**

Yes and no. No, because the same policy recommendations could have been made through a different, and quicker, project. Yes, because the attitudinal shift demanded extended periods of close and constant collaboration between the two sectors. It is possible to rush to criticism but the reflective engagement that here enabled the negotiation of mutual inter-sectoral mistrust takes time. The significant benefits of this study arose from the time it took the researchers to genuinely appreciate the contributions of their inter-sectoral colleagues. However, it should be noted that the main study’s methodology required a considerable amount of time in the field and it is not obvious whether the policy recommendations – with or without the inter-sectoral collaboration – could have been achieved with a lower time allocation.

**Will it be necessary to spend so long doing future research?**

Yes and no. No, because the same findings and recommendations can be generated through shorter timeframes. Yes, because although this study provides a template for future collaboration, the long-standing mistrust between the sectors will need more than one study to redefine the relationship between academics and practitioners/policymakers. However, this study marks an important first step in that process.

**Was the engagement in policy-driven research successful?**

Yes. This was the fundamental principle of the main study. There is a demonstrable lack of the use of evidence in designing education policies in Nigeria. At the same time, evidence generated through academic research typically goes unused and potential policy-focused research is not commissioned. The situation can be explained by the inertia of common practice and deeply embedded inter-sectoral mistrust. Requiring researchers from both sectors – academics and practitioners – to work together enabled them to negotiate this mistrust and share their knowledge and skills to produce a series of evidence-based policy recommendations.

**Were the partnerships successful?**

Yes. This was perhaps the most important aspect of the research capacity strengthening exercise as it led to the negotiation of the inter-sectoral mistrust that has habitually blocked the potential for policy-driven research. As the partnerships developed, the researchers began working together more closely. Forming meaningful partnerships required researchers from both sectors to ‘give and take’ and this necessarily took time. However, those partnerships led to the production of the protocols which, at the time of reporting, were being taken seriously by the State-based policymakers.
Was the mentoring successful?
Yes and no. This was the weakest of the components identified as contributing to increased research capacity. Mentoring for the junior academics typically replicated institutional mentoring and so added little of value beyond the concentrated opportunities for that mentoring. There was no obvious mentoring of the junior practitioners. In part, this was because the diverse roles of the practitioners made it difficult to identify the knowledge and skills to be transferred from senior to junior colleagues. However, there was some evidence of inter-sectoral mentoring through the partnerships.

Was the repeated policy feedback successful?
Yes. There was internal policy feedback from the practitioners and external policy feedback from the stakeholders involved in the validation processes. Both were clearly successful as the State-based stakeholder meetings held at the end of the first year broadly endorsed the policy recommendations. The developing partnerships allowed internal policy feedback after a slow start caused by the practitioners’ reluctance to share their knowledge and the academics’ reluctance to listen to it. This process of ‘give and take’ improved as the partnerships grew stronger. The partnerships also facilitated the external policy feedback as policymakers were more likely to consider the protocols because the practitioners were engaged with the study as co-researchers.

Was the hands-on technical support successful?
Yes. The support provided by EDOREN was very successful. Research skills – from research design to policy analysis to reporting – were shared with the two State-based teams and informed the study. Both teams would have benefitted from greater support for project management (although not to the same extent) and this need was clearly underestimated. However, the most significant aspect of the technical support was that it provided a means of bridging the inter-sectoral divide and enabled the researchers to negotiate the mutual mistrust underlying the study and so develop the viable partnerships that were necessary to the success of the main study.

Was the inter-sectoral mistrust a significant problem?
Yes. The mistrust acknowledged by some of the researchers and recognised by most of the others is a serious problem. It is founded on the expectation of academics that their work will be ignored and the expectation of the practitioners that it will be too theoretical to be of practical value. Despite the rhetoric of collaboration, mistrust initially undermined all the collaborative processes required of the main study and so impeded its purpose. The evidence of this mistrust in much of the Nigerian literature reviewed here suggests it is a common problem. The researchers on this study acknowledged that a third party (such as EDOREN) was needed to broker the inter-sectoral divide caused by and continuing this mistrust. This suggests the potential for other inter-sectoral collaborations is likely to be limited until the mistrust can be properly addressed.

Can this inter-sectoral mistrust be negotiated?
Yes. The main study clearly indicated that this deeply rooted mistrust can be negotiated. However, as the endline interviews indicated, it is likely to take time: the researchers had been working together in inter-sectoral collaboration for a year before some finally felt more willing to trust their colleagues’ engagement with the research and this required the successful completion of the study (i.e. here, the stakeholders’ willingness to engage with well-presented evidence-based policy-focused recommendations). Given the extent of the mistrust revealed during the research capacity strengthening exercise, it is hardly surprising that it should take so long to negotiate it. Key factors here included: (i) sufficient incentives to bring academics and practitioners together in a collaborative study; (ii) a common purpose; (iii) the willingness to ‘give and take’ through the sharing of knowledge and skills and a shared workload; and (iv) a third party with sufficient authority and resource to act as broker between the sectors.
References


Annex A  Comprehensive literature review

Whereas persons who commission evaluations complain that the messages from the evaluations are not useful, evaluators complain that the messages are not used (Cronbach et al., 1980, p. 47).

This concern remains pertinent but the literature on collaborations between educational policymakers and academic researchers that might address it is surprisingly sparse given the significance of these relationships. The World Bank (2005, 2009), the OECD (2007) and the WHO (2008) all emphasise the importance of such collaborations but the arguments tend to be theoretical rather than practice-based and all too often descend into squabbles over what constitutes evidence. The academic community is equally culpable here as it typically skips over these collaborations. As David Bridges explains:

in the English region of the East of England all the researchers involved with research into widening participation in higher education meet annually with policy makers and practitioners in the field to review the latest research work, to assess their implications for policy and practice and to identify what else needs investigating (Bridges et al., 2008, p. 11; see also Bridges and Watts, 2008).

Yet neither the research reports (e.g. Watts and Bridges, 2004; Kukhareva et al., 2007) generated by this agenda nor the published papers associated with those reports (e.g. Watts and Bridges, 2006; Watts et al., 2008) address the policymaker-academic relationship except to note that the research is policy-relevant. This oversight is typical of the major educational research initiatives reviewed here with the exception of the work of SACMEQ which focuses on the assessment, rather than the evaluation, of educational initiatives3.4.

The point here is not that collaboration between educational policymakers and academics does not happen. It is that such collaborations are rarely documented. Nevertheless, the review identifies key issues relating to the policymaker-academic relationship and considers: (i) the different perspectives of policymakers and academics, including different perceptions about the purpose of research (e.g. for assessment or evaluation); (ii) the significance of finding common ground and establishing collaboration; and (iii) pertinent methodological issues.

The review was conducted using a public search engine (Google) and a university search engine. Key words used with both included evidence, based, education, research and policy. These searches were then refined using the terms Nigeria and Africa. The university search engine was also used to find literature citing publications arising from the UK government funded Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) project on evidence-based educational policy (Bridges et al., 2008). Further searches ‘snowballed’ these results (e.g. SACMEQ). These searches generated four types of literature:

- research making policy-based recommendations
- research on policy
- research involving policymakers
- theoretical/philosophical reflections on policy.

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3 Educational assessments are a means of measuring progress (e.g. how well a student is doing or has done) that is marked against identified criteria (e.g. through tests or exams). They are typically concerned with the measurement of knowledge and/or skills. Educational evaluations are evidence-based studies conducted in order to: (i) form judgements on how well processes, programmes and/or practices are working; and (ii) identify areas for future development and improvement. Although assessment and evaluation have much in common – and are often confused – they therefore require different skills sets and tools.

4 SACMEQ’s work has expanded over subsequent cycles to include associated evidence (e.g. on teachers, resources) that has an evaluative dimension.
Very few of these results directly addressed policymaker-academic collaborations (see also EDOREN, 2015a, b, 2016). Most of them concerned the first of these types (i.e. research making policy-based recommendations) and they were discarded unless they informed the nature of these collaborations. The literature reviewed here prioritises research relating to education in Nigeria, then Sub Saharan Africa and then globally. It addresses the breadth rather than the typicality of key issues.

A.1 Different perspectives

The importance of collaborations between policymakers and academics is recognised at the political level. In South Africa, Angie Motshekga, Minister of Basic Education, highlights the significance of the work of SACMEQ (Moloi and Chetty, 2010, p. 3) which is addressed in more detail below. In their contributions to the OECD’s report *Evidence in Education: linking research and policy*, Johnny Nilsson, former State Secretary at the Swedish Ministry of Education and Science (2007) and Maria van der Hoeven, former Minister of Education, Culture and Science in the Netherlands (2007) recognise the potential of such collaborations.

Writing about the Dutch *Kenniskamer* (Knowledge Chamber), which was established to strengthen relationships between policy and research (see also Lingard, 2013), van der Hoeven notes that politicians do not always have time to gather sufficient evidence for policy changes. Similarly, Nilsson calls for ‘more frequent interaction between researchers and politicians’ and suggests that ‘state-of-the-art report[s] from researchers about actualities that we as politicians wrestle with, could probably help the researchers to find new blind spots that could lead to more research’ (2007, p. 149). The implication is that close collaboration can enable academics to address problems confronting policymakers. David Blunkett, former Secretary of State for Education in the UK, addressed this issue more directly when he explained that ‘we need researchers who can challenge fundamental assumptions and orthodoxies… If academics do not address it, then it is difficult to think of anyone else who will. We must recognise its importance’ (Blunkett, 2000, in Bridges and Watts, 2008).

However, Blunkett also articulated concerns about academic priorities that can inhibit such collaborations when he suggested: ‘Too much social science research is inward-looking, too piecemeal rather than helping to build knowledge in a cumulative way and that ‘issues for research are too supplier-driven rather than focussing on the key issues of concern to policy-makers, practitioners and the public at large’ (Blunkett, 2000, in Bridges and Watts, 2008). It is inevitable that politicians will focus on policy-relevant research (Bridges et al., 2008; Bridges and Watts, 2008) and it is reasonable to consider that focus to be right and proper. However, there is a presumption that they favour the large-scale quantitative studies and randomised control trials (RCTs) that borrow from the medical approach to research and drive the ‘what works’ agenda (Smeyers and Depaepe, 2006, 2010; Cook and Gorard, 2007; Lingard, 2013; Tröhler, 2015).

It is also inevitable, perhaps, that politicians focus on the importance of collaboration rather than its processes. This indicates the desire for engagement even if it does come with the caveats expressed within the wider academic community and noted below. However, it has been suggested that this desire is absent in Nigeria:

> Among the identified causes of existing gaps between researchers and policymakers was a lack of political will on the part of the government to create a sustainable partnership between policymakers and researchers (Uneke et al., 2012, p. 757).

Nevertheless, the potential for such partnerships can be found in lower levels of government. The importance of evidence that is mutually acceptable to policymakers (who might act upon it) and academics (who are likely to generate it) is emphasised by the World Bank (2005), the OECD (2007) and the WHO (2008). Thus, the World Bank explains that:

> Evaluators are often asked the question by senior decision-makers: why should I take evaluation seriously, and devote time and effort to doing it well? The answer to this question centers on
the value of the information and understanding which evaluation can offer in support of ongoing management, decision-making, resource allocation, and in accounting for results achieved (World Bank, 2005, p. iv).

The OECD reports that policymakers typically welcome research interventions (2007) but it offers no evidence to explain how such collaborations may happen in practice. Fortunately, in the context of this study, Nigerian policymakers have shown their willingness to participate in academic research (Ogbodo et al., 2013; Akiri, 2014; Awe and Vance, 2014; Onwujelewke et al., 2015; Babalola and Sowunmi, 2016) and so provide insight into how policymaker-academic relationships might be managed.

Babalola and Sowunmi (2016) surveyed 290 senior policymakers from the Ministry and Board of Education in Oyo State and concluded that they based their decisions on evidence. Although their responses were self-reported and not pursued by the researchers, this supports the OECD’s assertion. The work of Uneke et al. (2012), based on a workshop for Nigerian policymakers and academics in the health sector, offers a pragmatic explanation of this:

> government officials and policymakers are under intense pressure to make the health sector functional and deliver democracy dividends to the public or risk losing popularity... Such pressures have left policy actors with no choice but to be ‘open-minded’ to any possible solution that can make the health sector more result oriented and meet the expectation of the populace. Thus, the policymakers in this study identified with the effort to promote evidence-informed policymaking as they were convinced it will enhance sound, socially relevant and ethically acceptable guidance for more effective, efficient and sustainable health policies and systems (Uneke et al., 2012, p. 759).

A significant problem reported by policymakers was that they had to deal with limited and sometimes ambiguous evidence (Uneke et al., 2012; Ogbodo et al., 2013; Babalola and Sowunmi, 2016). Looking beyond Nigeria, there is a presumption that policymakers as well as politicians prefer quantitative surveys and RCTs (Lingard, 2013, p. 118) as they preclude the unpredictability that is a ‘no-go topic for planners and forecasters’ (Tröhler, 2015, p. 762). However, writing about the need for better statistics education in Nigeria, Awe and Vance argue that explaining the different perspectives of key stakeholders facilitates collaboration. Others (Uneke et al., 2012, 2013; Ogbodo et al., 2013; Babalola and Sowunmi, 2016) note that collaborative workshops can provide the necessary clarification and explanation that may be required by policymakers.

Nigerian academics acknowledge that policy decisions rely on more than just evidence (Babalola and Sowunmi, 2016) but repeated arguments that policymakers should be doing more (Uneke et al., 2012, 2013; Ogbodo et al., 2013; Akiri, 2014; Aluede and Idogho, 2014; Abimbola et al., 2014; Domike and Odey, 2014; Huaynoca et al., 2014; Onwujelewke et al., 2015; Aladebola and Jaiyeola, 2016) indicate dissatisfaction with policymaking processes. Several authors have called for greater collaboration with policymakers (Uneke et al., 2012, 2013; Ogbodo et al., 2013; Abimbola et al., 2014; Awe and Vance, 2014) but they provide only limited – and typically indirect – evidence on how such collaboration should take place in order to maintain academic integrity and promote the academic role of research.

There is a wider concern with the different roles and responsibilities of policymakers and academics. This is neatly summarised by Lingard who, commenting on the OECD report, argues that formalised research policy brokerage relationships have ‘potentially reductive effects on the width and scope of research agendas in education, attempting to focus such research on matters of interest to policy-makers’ (Lingard, 2013, p. 125). Reflecting on four Africa-based educational projects, Urwick calls attention to a further problem in such relationships: ‘there is a high risk that research aimed at policy will appear to fail politically and to have no immediate impact’ (Urwick, 2014, p. 552). This is an understandable worry that may dissuade academics from collaborating with policymakers. However, it may be that Nigerian academics aim too high. After all, Uneke et al. (2012, 2013) and Babalola and Sowunmi (2016) all report high levels of State-level engagement. Moreover, Abimbola et al. in their assessment of national policy (2014) and Domike and Odey in their review...
of the primary curriculum in Cross River State (2014) all highlight the importance of collaboration at State
level. This concern certainly articulates with the argument put forward by Harris (2013) that academics often
overstate the significance of their policy recommendations.

Nevertheless, there is some acknowledgement from Nigerian academics that they could be more active in
promoting their work (see also EDOREN, 2015). The senior researchers taking part in one of the health
education workshops organised by Uneke et al. complained that ‘their research outcomes were less
frequently made available to policymakers, and policymakers rarely consult them for research evidence’
(2012, p. 762). Ogbodo et al., writing about knowledge production in Nigeria’s higher education sector,
acknowledge that academics could do more to make their research more relevant to policy (2013) and Awe
and Vance suggest that unspecified disruptions in the sector inhibit collaboration (2014). The underlying
problem is summed up by Uneke et al. who note that:

most researchers in [low- and middle-income countries] lack the knowledge of the policymaking
process and are producing research evidence that is irrelevant to policymaking process, and even when policy-relevant evidence is produced they are often inaccessible to policymakers
(Uneke et al., 2012, p. 751).

Across Sub Saharan Africa, these concerns need to be contextualised by institutional issues including high
staff turnover, poor institutional links with policymakers and an incentive system that favours research for
promotion over policy-oriented studies (Bennell, 2010). Moreover, Vally and Spreen (2008) and Urwick
(2014) argue that the ‘distant aloofness of government officials’ (Vally and Spreen, 2008, p. 133) can restrict
attempts at collaboration. However, reflecting on their own research in South Africa, Dawson and Sinwell
(2012) and Wood (2014) suggest that academics’ own agendas can also limit collaboration. Wood notes that
the desire to safeguard intellectual autonomy can be problematic and Dawson and Sinwell suggest
‘[rethinking] the practical value of academic work’ (2012, p. 178). While it may be going too far to equate
social activists (the focus of Dawson and Sinwell’s work) and policymakers, Dawson’s consideration of her
own research indicates the frustration indicated above by politicians and policymakers:

It struck me that I had a very different research agenda to that of the activists. They expected
me to do something practical with the information I was gathering, while my motivation was to
gather and analyse data in order to draw theoretical conclusions (Dawson and Sinwell, 2012, p.
182).

A.2 Common ground and collaboration

Reflecting on an educational action research project in Ghana, Griffiths explains that there are good political
and ethical reasons for collaboration between policymakers and researchers because ‘research is better done
‘with’ others rather than ‘on’ or ‘for’ them’ (2000, p. 385). She also notes pragmatic reasons including access,
dissemination and impact as well as common ownership of the research. However, she adds that she:

could find very little detailed, concrete evidence about processes of collaboration. The first
problem in investigating the practice of collaboration is a lack of evidence about the details of
specific instances (Griffiths, 2000, p. 385).

A decade and a half later, that problem remains largely unchanged. The OECD report (2007) emphasises the
significance of collaborative dialogue because it is more democratic and therefore more effective and so
generates better and more relevant educational research, policy and practice. However, it includes little in
the way of practical guidance. Similarly, the East of England Development Agency projects (Watts and
Bridges, 2004; Kukhareva et al., 2007) and TLRP research projects (Bridges et al., 2008; James and Pollard,
2011) advocate and briefly describe collaboration without exploring it in any detail. Thus, James and Pollard
assert:
From the evidence cited above, we feel able to claim that TLRP’s attempt to distil and synthesise diverse project findings into a coherent and accessible representation was successful at the level of engaging many of the key organisations that mediate between researcher, practitioner and policy maker communities. *We see such engagement as being, in normal circumstances, a necessary condition for real impact on the ground* (James and Pollard, 2011, p. 316, emphasis added; see also OECD, 2007, Chapter 12).

The literature on SACMEQ also highlights the importance of collaboration but provides greater insight into its practicalities. It was formed in 1995 and consists of 16 Ministries of Education in Southern and Eastern Africa. Although it focuses on assessment, the literature addressing SACMEQ enables some understanding of what can make policy-research collaborations successful.

SACMEQ’s work is based on the understanding that effective policy research needs to be genuinely participatory. There is, therefore, a policy thread running throughout the research cycle involving continuous dialogue between policymakers and academics. It is argued that this commitment to collaboration enables policy-relevant assessments and eases the reporting of potentially contentious or sensitive findings (Moloi and Strauss, 2005; Murimba, 2005a, b; Moloi and Chetty, 2010).

Country-level steering committees consist of: (i) key policy- and decision-makers who provide policy guidance; and (ii) technical committees made up of research coordinators which take the lead in conducting research and training activities (Murimba, 2005a, p. 77). Policymakers highlight issues and concerns to be addressed through the research. So SACMEQ II considered basic numeracy and literacy (Moloi and Strauss, 2005; Murimba, 2005a) and SACMEQ III addressed HIV/AIDS education (Moloi and Chetty, 2010). Researchers then coordinate with lower level officials as they conduct the studies, before findings are shared with their senior colleagues. Reporting on SACMEQ II in South Africa, Moloi and Strauss explain that:

> One of the distinguishing features of the SACMEQ Projects has been that their research results have been widely used for policy and planning purposes. This successful outcome has occurred because SACMEQ research reports were designed from the very beginning to address the high-priority policy concerns of decision-makers in Ministries of Education (2005, p. 14).

This continuous engagement facilitates the critical dialogue that may be needed to implement potentially problematic findings as researchers may need to ‘help policy-makers understand the implications of findings’ (Murimba, 2005a, p. 85). The collaborative process seems to ensure the high-level support needed for evidence-based change. Thus, the SACMEQ III country report for South Africa has a foreword from the Minister for Basic Education (Moloi and Chetty, 2010, p. 3) and an introductory statement from her Director General who explains that participation in SACMEQ:

> helps us strengthen national capacity to evaluate our schooling system using appropriate methods and valid instruments. *This is critical for producing credible evidence which then forms the basis of our planning and delivery* (Moloi and Chetty, 2010, p. 4, emphasis added).

Collaborative spaces are necessary in order to be able to negotiate and understand the different perspectives of key stakeholders in policy-research relationships (Murimba, 2005a, b; Biglan and Ogden, 2008; Vally and Spreen, 2008; Dawson and Sinwell, 2012; Uneke *et al.*, 2012, 2013; Detrich *et al.*, 2016). Successful collaboration is likely to require appropriate support to negotiate the habitual demarcations between policy and research and the mindsets they generate.

In Nigeria, the collaboration between LGAs and Columbia University to secure funding for primary and secondary education through the Federal Conditional Grants Scheme – Local Government Areas policy required significant input from the US partner (Iyengar and Ifeyinwa, 2014; Iyengar *et al.*, 2015). At the outset of the project, LGAs typically failed to incorporate data into cogent and persuasive arguments. Appropriate and necessary support led to ‘tremendous progress’ (Iyengar *et al.*, 2015, p. 88) but the process was not easy:
Understanding the Education systems in terms of organization structures and funding lines between different Ministries has been a relentless process. Understanding the inter-linkages between different Ministries, the structures at the federal, state and local levels, their functional powers and funding flow in a decentralized country, took immense amount of time (Iyengar and Ifeyinwa, 2014).

Successful collaboration also requires the acknowledgement of different types of expertise (Murimba, 2005a; Pring, 2007; Uneke et al., 2012, 2013; Urwick, 2014; Tröhler, 2015) as:

excluding professionals and concerned parties (parents, the public) and of other forms of research in education from politics affects the set of mutual relations between professional experience, politics, and research (Tröhler, 2015, pp. 761-762).

A necessary corollary to this is the ‘need to recognise that policy-makers (and practitioners) can also be researchers, as well as utilisers of research’ (Lingard, 2013, p. 118).

As noted above with SACMEQ’s work, such collaboration facilitates the critical dialogue that is recognised as being essential to effective policy research relationships (Murimba, 2005a, b). In the Nigerian context, Uneke et al. (2012, 2013), Huaynoca et al. (2014), Iyengar and Ifeyinwa (2014), Chukwudozie et al. (2015), Iyengar et al. (2015) and Babalola and Sowunmi (2016) all highlight the potential such collaborations have for allowing the clarification and explanation that can make these relationships successful.

In their review of the implementation of Nigeria’s national policies on school-based comprehensive sexuality education, Huaynoca et al. (2014) report the problem of managing the different values of key stakeholders. They highlight the importance of collaboration in terms of justifying and achieving technical consensus about appropriate educational innovations and making complex interventions manageable. This requires critical discussion to ‘keep all the stakeholders (including funders) motivated and engaged’ (Huaynoca et al., 2014, p. 205). Similarly, Chukwudozie et al. note the importance of dialogue and transparency to manage the expectation of stakeholders (2015) and Uneke et al. report that participants in their workshops:

identified the need for partnership and collaboration between researchers and policymakers in order to inform policymakers of evidence regularly produced by researchers, and to align researchers more specifically to operational problems inherent in the health systems (Uneke et al., 2012, p. 757).

The wider literature on attempted collaborations identifies paradigmatic and methodological differences (which are addressed below), unreasonably high expectations, the failure to clearly demarcate roles and responsibilities, poor communication and additional workloads as barriers to successful collaboration (e.g. Gannon-Leary et al., 2006; Morrison and Glenny, 2012; Coburn and Penuel, 2016).

Returning to Nigeria, these problems can be managed through strong political leadership (Huaynoca et al., 2014) and appropriate training (Uneke et al., 2012, 2013; Huaynoca et al., 2014; Iyengar and Ifeyinwa, 2014; Chukwudozie et al., 2015; Iyengar et al., 2015; Babalola and Sowunmi, 2016). Reviewing the work of SACMEQ, Murimba notes that this training should extend beyond technical skills to the more specialised – or soft – skills including:

management of the consultative process that facilitates dialogue with policy-makers at every stage of the research cycle, the dissemination of research findings to the different stakeholders and the creation of linkages with other partners who might benefit from the use of the information generated. Several experts have viewed this form of policy development as one of the most potent, especially in the African context (Murimba, 2005b, p. 97; see also Sayed and Kanjee, 2013).
A.3 Methodological issues

In their contribution to the OECD’s report on linking educational research and policy, Burns and Schuller suggest that the idea of evidence-based policymaking implies ‘too tidy and rational an image of policy-making as some kind of clinical and objective operation’ (Burns and Schuller, 2007, p. 16). The underlying problem is that policymakers typically want clear guidance whereas academics have a habit of problematising and questioning issues (Griffiths, 2000; Bridges and Watts, 2008). The most contentious methodological issue in this ongoing debate is what constitutes sufficient and reliable evidence. In short, although policymakers may be susceptible to ‘human interest stories’ (Watts, 2010) there is a general presumption that they favour the large scale quantitative studies and RCTs that many academics contest (e.g. Smeyers and Depaepe, 2006, 2010; OECD, 2007; Bridges et al., 2008, 2009). The use of surveys when conducting research with policymakers (e.g. Akiri, 2014; Babalola and Sowunmi, 2016) may reinforce this presumption.

As noted above, collaboration and critical dialogue can go some way to resolving these inherent tensions. The importance of engaging participants in the design and delivery of research in Nigeria is highlighted by Iyengar and Ifeyinwa (2014), Chukwudozie et al. (2015), Hoechner (2015) and Iyengar et al. (2015). Although not concerned with policy, Hoechner’s reflections on her filmmaking work in Kano highlights the problems of superficial attention to participatory research:

For research to be ‘empowering’ it is not enough to pick a method from the ‘participatory menu’ during data collection. Ideally, participants are involved not only in the creation of data but also in the formulation of research goals and the interpretation and dissemination of findings (Hoechner, 2015, p. 636).

However, the most salient report on methodological issues comes from Onwujekwe et al. (2015). They considered three different health policies in Nigeria and constructed case studies based on document reviews and interviews with key stakeholders including government policymakers, health workers and academics. They concluded that evidence was more likely to be used to shape policy if it was considered to be context-specific, accessible and timely. What they term ‘formal evidence’ (e.g. survey reports) typically fitted this bill because it was considered to be more rigorous and easier to translate into policy. This articulates with the general perception that large scale quantitative studies and RCTs are the most acceptable form of research. However, the policymakers in their study were willing to consider other forms of evidence:

evidence obtained from opinions and experiences of experts in the field were considered important by some respondents, especially the policy-makers. They claimed that this form of evidence helped to augment the findings from the baseline survey... reports from expert consultations were perceived by the respondents as useful in the policy drafting stage because they now built on the information provided by the surveys to improve the body of evidence used. The expert consultations brought in a practical aspect to the policy development because most of the evidence generated from this source was based on hands-on experience of the stakeholders, which added value to the evidence obtained (Onwujekwe et al., 2015, pp. 7-8).

As they argue, what policymakers consider to be rigorous evidence depends on the rigour of the argument justifying it:

different policy actors need to be aware of the understanding of the concept of evidence by others, including their preferences for robust evidence. In the longer term, different policy actors can work towards developing a shared understanding of robust evidence... the knowledge of different types of evidence and their importance would enhance the use of both formal and informal types of evidence which should improve the quality of evidence generated for policy (Onwujekwe et al., 2015, p. 11).
A.4 Strengthening educational research capacity in Nigeria

This necessarily requires the collaboration that is the hallmark of successful capacity building but this has sometimes proved problematic in Nigeria, particularly at the Federal level, with Allsop et al. noting a lack of political will for routine inter-agency cooperation that is partly rooted in institutional weaknesses (2015, p. 22). They go on to argue that there is ‘a need for continued engagement and advocacy to encourage and respond to a high-level commitment to improving basic education’ (p. 47). At the State level, there is evidence of political engagement through the ‘building [of] a common vision and ownership of a shared reform agenda’ (p. 16). Other reports indicate enthusiasm for collaborative work at the school and community levels to improve basic education (Adediran and Bawa, 2010; Bawa, 2012) but this may be tempered by ‘insufficient knowledge and skills on the concepts of advocacy, policy influencing as well as facilitation techniques’ (Adediran and Bawa, 2010, p. 6).

This literature review and the earlier EDOREN reports (2015a, b, 2016) all highlight the paucity of clear guidance on the engagement between academics and policymakers in pursuit of sustainable research capacity development in the field of education. It is therefore necessary to look elsewhere, particularly to the health sector, to develop a better understanding of how such engagement might be achieved. This wider review still offers little on the actual collaboration between these key stakeholders (Uneke et al., 2010) but it does indicate what needs to be done to facilitate it. This includes providing clear aims, understanding institutional contexts, securing buy-in at governmental and local levels and the provision of appropriate training.

ESSENCE on Health Research is an initiative by funding agencies to improve the coordination of research capacity initiatives. It suggests that this can be achieved by: (i) enhancing the capacity of individuals and organisations to carry out, manage, share and apply research; and (ii) promoting national and regional research systems that support research and the linkage between research, policy and practice (ESSENCE, 2014). It is important to remember the differences between health and educational research and the growing influence of the former on the latter (Smeyers and Depaepe, 2006, 2010; Cook and Gorard, 2007; Lingard, 2013; Tröhler, 2015) but ESSENCE identifies seven principles for good practice that can and should inform educational research (2014, p. 9):

- network, collaborate, communicate and share experiences;
- understand the local context and accurately evaluate existing research capacity;
- ensure local ownership and secure active support;
- build in monitoring, evaluation and learning from the start;
- establish robust research governance and support structures, and promote effective leadership;
- embed strong support, supervision and mentorship structures; and
- think long-term, be flexible and plan for continuity.

TDR, the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases hosted by the WHO, is a global programme of scientific collaboration that helps facilitate, support and influence efforts to combat diseases of poverty. It proposes an implementation process of six stages (TDR/WHO, 2008):

- contextualising challenges;
- developing a proposal;
- planning and carrying out the project;
- analysing and presenting findings;
- disseminating findings; and
- evaluating impact.
These two structures frame an approach that enables the shift from accessing knowledge and information (‘know-what’) through increasing skills and competencies (‘know-how’ and ‘know-why’) to integration in knowledge-based networks (‘know-who’) (World Agroforestry Centre, 2014, p. 4).

In their review of 50 case studies based on research-policy links in developing countries, Court and Young highlight the importance of involving policymakers in research projects (2003). Nchinda (2002) takes this further and argues that policymakers should set the research agenda. Reflecting on the Nigeria Evidence-Based Health Systems Initiative (NEHSI), Uneke et al. (2010) emphasise the need for ‘multi-stakeholder triads, consisting of researchers, community members and policy makers, to jointly establish local health research agendas’ (2010, p. 122). ESSENCE cites NEHSI as an exemplar of joint local ownership but notes that:

There is often a delicate balance that needs to be struck between seeking high-level support for capacity strengthening, ensuring appropriate leadership of the programme and seeking active support (ESSENCE, p. 14).

Such engagement can address the problem of political will that is so problematic in Nigeria (Uneke et al., 2010; Allsop et al., 2015). Perhaps the best supporting evidence addressing the importance of collaboration at all levels – rather than just between academics and policymakers – is to be found in the community-directed interventions for improving primary health care in the Global South (Akogun et al., 2001; Neilson and Smutylo, 2004; TDR/WHO, 2008; Okeibunor, 2010; Remme, 2010; Uneke et al., 2010; ESSENCE, 2014). These typically address both the demand and supply of research and illustrate how such collaboration can contribute to necessary political engagement, the relevance of the research and its saleability – all of which are highlighted as conditions of success by Court and Young (2003).

A review of the Tanzania Essential Health Interventions Project (TEHIP) indicated two further conditions: (i) that it was designed to work within existing structures rather than in parallel with them; and (ii) the provision of additional resourcing (Nielson and Smutylo, 2004). With reference to the authority of Nigeria’s States, it is also worth noting that the review suggested that the decentralisation of the health sector in Tanzania facilitated TEHIP’s success as decisions could be made at the local level.

Collaboration requires, if not a common understanding of research, then an appreciation of different understandings. This can be achieved through the use of research tools developed to improve policy implementation (TDR/WHO, 2008; World Bank, 2009; ESSENCE, 2014).

The need for appropriate training – not just technical training but training in the soft skills of communication – is repeatedly emphasised. In particular, academics need to be taught how to work with policymakers to identify relevant research and make it accessible and the training needs to be evaluated to ensure that it is appropriate (Nchinda, 2002; Court and Young, 2003; TDR/WHO, 2008; Ryan et al., 2012; ESSENCE, 2014; Ogundahunsi et al., 2015). Less attention is paid to the need to train policymakers but Court and Young (2003), the World Bank (2008), de Grauwe (2009) and Mugabo et al. (2015) note that this is critical to the success of collaborative programmes. The presence of formal networks can facilitate training but, as Court and Young (2003) observe, some work far better than others and the reasons for these differences seem to be poorly understood.

The risks and challenges associated with such training are better understood, though. With academics, there is the long-standing concern that it can contribute to the ongoing ‘brain drain’ from the Global South to the North (Nchinda, 2002; Ager and Zarowsky, 2015; Ogundahunsi et al. 2015). A report from the International Institute for Education Planning (de Grauwe, 2009) observed that training public officials can help but may be undermined by isolated, one-off training sessions, the high turnover of staff and poor managerial use of new learning – with the latter being identified in a World Bank report (2008) as the most significant factor in the lack of success of training programmes.
Gomo et al. (2011) and Ogundahunsi et al. (2015) emphasise the need for strong institutional support for research to address these concerns. Ager and Zarowsky (2015) and Ogundahunsi et al. (2015) highlight the significance of academic leadership in developing institutional strength. They also note the importance of researchers having ownership of their projects while others (Nchinda, 2002; Court and Young, 2003; Mugabo et al., 2015) make a similar case for policymakers. However, the focus on collaboration clearly implies joint ownership of the research (Akogun et al., 2001; Court and Young, 2003; Neilson and Smutylo, 2004; TDR/WHO, 2008; Okeibunor, 2010; Remme, 2010; Uneke et al., 2010; ESSENCE, 2014; Ogundahunsi et al., 2015).

The need to generate relevant and robust research is central to this matter of ownership both as a response to concerns about poor quality research and in regard to the development of centres of excellence (Gomo et al., 2011; Mugabo et al., 2015). There is a general acknowledgement that addressing both issues demands time and investment.

In their recent review of the TDR, Ogundahunsi et al. concluded that research capacity in low- and middle-income countries could be strengthened by collaborative teams of policymakers and researchers applying for competitive tenders (2015). The key arguments here are that the use of competitive tenders for grants enhances the quality of the research and helps integrate such work into the global academic community (Gomo et al., 2011; Ager and Zarowsky, 2015). Altbach sums up these concerns in his reflection on the development of research universities in the Global South when he states that a ‘system of competitive awards encourages innovative ideas and granting funds for the best projects’ (2009, p. 20).