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## **A century ago. The first and only large scale education survey in the German colonial empire (1911)**

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A century ago:  
The first and only large scale education survey  
in the German colonial empire (1911)

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*Abstract*

The following essay wants to remind international researchers of the 1<sup>st</sup> of June, 1911 – the date at which questionnaires for each and every educational institution in all the German colonies around the world had to be completed by the relevant governmental or missionary authorities responsible for them. The numerous questions touched upon quantitative and qualitative data such as enrolment data, numbers and status of teachers, school compound and classrooms, school attendance, curricula and syllabus, learning achievements, teachers' attitudes towards the abilities and motivation of the 'native' children and youths and other variables. This large data collection was conducted under the auspices of the *Hamburgisches Kolonialinstitut*, the founding stock of today's University of Hamburg. It aimed at covering all institutions of elementary, further and practical learning in the German colonial empire. More than 2,200 questionnaires were returned to Hamburg, where they were analysed by Martin Schlunk, Inspector of the *Norddeutsche Mission in Bremen*, who also published the findings in 1914. Even though this kind of educational research did not 'measure' attainments in the form of validated tests, its scope and aims come near to recent large scale data collections and surveys like e.g. the Global Monitoring Reports of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in that it tried to achieve a total coverage and include a broad scope of educational variables in order to 'measure' the status and achievements of education in the German colonies. It is therefore called a 'large scale education survey' in this essay. Although follow-up studies to the 1911 research had actually been envisaged, they never took place, because the German colonial era ended in the First World War. Hundred years later, scholars of Comparative Education may nevertheless benefit from the detailed information and numerical data which were collected in the 1911 research as well as critically examining their interpretations in the published reports.

Large scale education surveys have become increasingly popular around the world in recent decades. PISA (Programme of International Students Assessment), Education at a Glance – the regular publication of the OECD (Organisation of Economical Cooperation and Development) – and the yearly Global Monitoring Reports of the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) accompanying the Education for All (EFA) process have all become familiar to researchers and educational planners and policy-makers. Against this background it is interesting to note that one hundred years ago a very similar large scale education survey took place within all the territories which then constituted the German colonial empire. These were – using their German names and borders at that time: Togo, Kamerun, Südwestafrika, Ostafrika, Neuguinea, Samoa and Kiautschou. The date to remember is the 1<sup>st</sup> of June, 1911. This was the point at which all the relevant authorities in all the German colonies who conducted schools were instructed to complete questionnaires concerning enrolments and other relevant data. This endeavour yielded a huge amount of quantitative and qualitative data on education in the German colonies. Unfortunately, it seems that the original questionnaires have been lost, so that there is no opportunity for a reanalysis today with the help of modern information technology, which was not yet available at the time they were completed.

This essay will serve to remind those working in Comparative Education of this empirical research, which is little known for two main reasons. First, German colonialism ended much earlier than Belgian, British or French colonialism and has thus received far less attention from researchers. Second, research findings were disseminated only in German in 1911 and were therefore largely invisible in the Anglophone world – the reason, of course, why this essay is written in English and not in German. It should also be noted that this 1911 survey falls into the category of educational research for colonial purposes, i.e. it reflects the intention to use and possibly misuse education data for hegemonic aims. None the less, I would argue that this research and its findings remain a valuable starting point for discussions of education and colonialism today, providing they are approached critically. Because the main focus is not, however, on education and colonialism more broadly, only limited reference is made to this literature.<sup>1</sup>

### The scope and objective of the 1911 research

The survey was conducted by the *Hamburgisches Kolonialinstitut*, officially been founded in 1908 for the training of future colonial administrative staff and other commercial and research personnel destined for the German colonies. As such it was the first governmental institution of higher education in Hamburg at that time. Completed in 1911, it was incorporated into the University of Hamburg in 1919. The *Asien-Afrika-Institut* of the Hamburg University, its present day successor, commemorated the centenary of the *Kolonialinstitut* in 2008 with a *Festschrift* (Paul, 2008). The intro-

duction to this publication starts by asking, if it is feasible for a contemporary university institute to commemorate its colonial origins:

Kann ein Universitätsinstitut heute sich so unbefangen in die Tradition eines Deutschen Kolonialinstituts, einer Institution des Kaiserreichs, stellen, dass es dessen Gründung vor hundert Jahren feiernd gedenkt? (Stumpfeld & Paul, 2008, p. 3).

My own aim to commemorate a centenary – in this case, the first and only large scale educational survey of the German colonies – invites a similar question. As with the *Kolonialinstitut*, I would argue that a (self-)critical and reflective commemoration of historical events can be seen as a legitimate and even necessary intellectual endeavour, provided that it avoids the pitfalls associated with glorifying the achievements of colonial times. The aim is rather to make contemporary researchers in areas of education and colonialism aware of historical data which can be critically examined today.

Returning to the focus for this essay, it should be mentioned that the 1911 educational survey was based on three different kinds of questionnaires which had been drafted by D. Carl Paul (1857–1927), then a pastor in Lorenzkirch. Paul, however, could not analyse the research findings himself, because he had left to take up the post of director of the *Leipziger Mission* even before the questionnaires had been returned from the colonies. Paul earned a doctorate h.c. in Theology from the University of Leipzig and also became an honorary professor in Missionary Studies at the Faculty of Theology in Leipzig in 1912. Before drafting the questionnaires he had already demonstrated a special interest in colonial educational matters in a paper presented at the *Brandenburgische Missionskonferenz* in 1907, which was published later that year (Paul, 1907).

The questionnaires were sent out from Hamburg to all the German colonies in spring 1911, with instructions that they should be completed on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1911 – hence my own interest in commemorating this unique research a hundred years later.

The *Hamburgisches Kolonialinstitut* entrusted Martin Schlunk (1874–1958) with the analysis and interpretation of the questionnaires. Schlunk had been appointed the Inspector of the *Norddeutsche Mission in Bremen* in 1910 and became the Director of this missionary society in 1914. It took him some time to compile all the statistics and extract the information given to the open-ended questions, especially because this needed to be done in addition to his regular work (“... Bearbeitung, die ich nur nebenbei in mühsam ersparten Arbeitspausen vornehmen konnte”; cf. Schlunk, 1914a, p. V). In 1914 he published the results in two volumes: One of these can be considered as the ‘official’ volume, because it was published under the auspices of the *Hamburgisches Kolonialinstitut* as Vol. XVIII of the Series *Abhandlungen des Hamburgischen Kolonialinstituts* (ibid.). In this voluminous edition (365 large format pages) he describes the research as a whole and presents the findings for each colony in great detail, including large numbers of tables set out according to colony, type of school, government vs. missionary schools of various denominations, sex and ethnic and religious

denomination of teachers and pupils; summary tables and graphs are to be found at the end (the latter are reprinted in Adick & Mehnert, 2001, pp. 124–131). In addition, he published a smaller volume (150 smaller format pages) which contains more of his personal views and interpretations and also refers to other literature and sources on missionary and colonial education (Schlunk, 1914b).

The three sets of questionnaires mentioned above (drafted by Carl Paul) were addressed respectively to *Elementarschulen* (elementary schools), *Gehobene Schulen* (schools of advanced learning – today we would call them secondary schools) and *Lehranstalten für praktische Arbeit* (vocational education, e.g. agriculture, special institutions to prepare girls for ‘female’ work). The questionnaires were to be completed by the headmaster or director of each educational institution in the German colonies. The survey thus aimed at total coverage of education in the German colonial empire. The aim was to offer insights into all details of enrolments, staff, organisation and finance of the schools deemed important at that time, including achievements in teaching and learning (Schlunk, 1914a, p. V). The questionnaires comprised quantitative (e.g. number of school buildings, teachers and scholars, finance) and qualitative data (open questions concerning the curriculum, examinations, the perceived abilities of the pupils, differences between those children who attended and did not attend school, between boys and girls, etc.). They can be accessed in detail in the ‘official’ volume (*ibid.*, pp. VI–IX). The questions reveal a keen interest in all aspects of schooling in the German colonies, and they do not appear to be particularly ‘colonial’ or ‘racial’ in kind. Rather, while reading them, one is reminded of the quite similar sets of questions for various sectors of schooling elaborated by Jullien de Paris, the forefather of Comparative Education, in his 1817 research manifesto for education in Europe at that time (Jullien, 1817/1962) which was, however, never implemented.

The respondents were asked not to use aggregated data, e.g. school statistics previously compiled by a missionary society, but instead the questionnaires were to be completed using data available on the same date – the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1911 – throughout the territory. It has to be borne in mind, of course, that at the time nobody knew that German colonialism would end just a few years later, in the course of the First World War. So for the *Hamburgisches Kolonialinstitut* the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1911 represented a point in time when the German colonial empire had been consolidated and the political authorities were keen to review the accomplishments of missionary and colonial education in ‘their’ overseas territories, as a platform for future endeavour. But when the results of the research were published some years later, in 1914, the end of German colonialism was already near. The two Schlunk volumes can thus be considered as an audit of German colonial and missionary education, and are best read as such today.

Although it does not include any standardised forms of achievement-testing of the kind found in contemporary surveys such as PISA, the overall aims and scope of this project justifies its description as a ‘large scale survey’.

## Results of the year 1911 research

According to Schlunk (1914a, p. V), the total number of questionnaires for analysis was 2,258. Schlunk was, however, unable to provide information on the return rate. In his view, all the questionnaires which one could expect had been returned to Hamburg (“... soweit man übersehen konnte, alle zu erwartenden Bogen in Hamburg wieder eingegangen”; *ibid.*). The fact that 2,710 schools were reported in the survey, a number which is higher than the number of questionnaires returned, would suggest, that some of the questionnaires contained data for more than one school, even though the original idea had been to have one questionnaire for each educational institution.

It is impossible to give detailed information on the results in a short summary like this. For this, researchers will need to consult the primary sources. However, it is possible to indicate the nature of the quantitative and qualitative data contained therein and their potential usefulness for research today.

First, it should be mentioned that the titles of the two publications are very similar, and this, together with the fact that they were both published in the same year and by the same author, might easily lead to confusion. The official report (Schlunk, 1914a) is entitled ‘*Die Schulen für Eingeborene in den deutschen Schutzgebieten*’, whereas Schlunk’s more personal monograph (1914b) is called ‘*Das Schulwesen in den deutschen Schutzgebieten*’.

The ‘official report’ (1914a) presents the findings of the quantitative and qualitative data using the same pattern for each colony: Section A addresses *Elementar- und Gehobene Schulen* (elementary and schools of advanced learning), B contains information on *Lehranstalten für praktische Arbeit* (institutions for practical training), C treats *Allgemeine Fragen* (general questions), and D, *Statistik*, presents the statistical tables according to missionary societies and governmental schools plus summary information for each colony.

The other publication (1914b) contains eight chapters together with an introduction and a list of references. The chapters treat the history of schooling in the colonies, summarise findings on the status quo in education (from the 1911 research), and contain extended discussions of the accomplishments or outcomes of schooling, the problem of the language of instruction (German or indigenous), vocational education, the position of missionary schools in the colonies and discussion of the principles underlying a sound educational policy in the colonial era.

It is neither possible nor is it the intention of this essay to summarise the overall findings in a few sentences. However, the summary table showing the overall data on the number of schools, teachers and students by colony, in the appendix (previously published in Adick, 1995, p. 39) will give a flavour of how the data may be used for contemporary research. The table also highlights the issue of ‘missing data’ or ‘false calculations’, where the numbers do not always add up correctly, which raises issues about the quality of the data (to be discussed later).

Researchers in colonial history will probably be surprised that there were so few European teachers: Overall in the whole German colonial empire only 781 out of 4,195 teachers were European. In Togo and Cameroon, the African teachers in elementary schools outnumbered the Germans more than tenfold. This actually means that the overall teaching load in the German colonies lay in the hands of the ‘colonial subjects’ – a finding which may be used as an argument to counterbalance the prevailing idea that education in colonial times was – for better or for worse – totally European-run. The history of ‘modern’ schooling, albeit colonial and missionary in outlook, is thus nevertheless a part of the educational history of the now independent countries and contains the work and aspirations of their students, teachers and parents. It is also interesting to compare the rate of European to local teachers between different types of schools: in the *Gehobene Schulen* (schools of advanced learning) the number of European teachers was much higher than in the *Elementarschule*, which would suggest that local staff were placed overwhelmingly into the elementary school sector. An obvious issue which springs to mind is whether local teachers received any kind of teacher training and, if so, what form did it take. It would also be worthwhile to consider the representation of female teaching staff. In order to answer these and other questions, e.g. the differences between colonies, governmental and missionary schools, protestant and catholic missions, one would, of course, have to go back to the detailed information in Schlunk (1914a).

The information on education in the different colonies would be of special interest to researchers working in the various now independent countries. By comparing the state of education in different places in 1911 it might be possible to detect some of the origins of regional disparities and imbalances in a country or differences between rural and urban areas, using enrolment and other data in the report (*ibid.*). These data are not only to be found in aggregated national data, but for all the villages or towns and regions which then offered schooling in the colonies.

Another possible avenue for research is the relative numbers of boys and girls enrolled in elementary school. At first glance it would appear that the differences between the various German colonies are quite striking. This could lead to further lines of inquiry: from where do these differences stem; and have they changed over time, as indicated in Akakpo-Numado’s (2007) research on the education of girls in the German colonies in Africa. In his analysis, he compares the 1911 data on the four German colonial territories with enrolment data from the contemporary postcolonial states which emerged from the former German territories: Namibia, most of Togo (part of German Togo is now Ghana), Cameroon, Tansania, Rwanda and Burundi (roughly ex-German East Africa). Particularly challenging is, e.g. his finding that in Namibia girls outnumber boys in school enrolment and this was the case under German rule as well as in recent times. Comparing the 1911 German survey and enrolment data for the school year 2000/01 from UNESCO, the situation in the other ex-German African ter-

ritories, seems not to have changed dramatically either, i.e. ex-colonies with lower or higher female enrolment still showed similar patterns at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, possibly because of the persistent nature of gender relations (ibid., pp. 213 f.). But of course, this situation might probably change in due course, in line with the gender equity goals of the Education For All policy of the UNESCO and the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations.

Further research might focus on enrolment rates in the German colonies – possibly as compared with other colonial powers. This line of inquiry, of course, requires population data for each of the colonies, including numbers or reasonable estimations of the school age population. But population data, let alone statistics relating to age groups, are scarce for colonial territories at those times. For any given case, considerable effort is required to locate and draw inferences concerning population data from the relevant literature in order to arrive at plausible answers. For instance, according to Schlunk (1914a, appendix) pupils made up 1.4 % of the population of Togo, but 29.4 % in Samoa. Caution needs to be exercised, however, because such enrolment rates are not synonymous with enrolment rates according to the school age population. But drawing on sources such as Kuczynski (1939) and Bouche (1975), which discuss colonial demographic surveys for the earlier period, it is possible to extrapolate plausible enrolment rates and use these to make comparisons, for instance, between the German Colony of Togo and the neighbouring British and French colonies. Using data from the 1911 research compiled in Schlunk (1914a) and other sources it would thus be possible to argue that in the southern part of German Togoland roughly every fifth or sixth child went to school, two thirds of them belonging to the Ewe, who predominate in Southern Togo; that this number compared fairly well to the neighbouring Gold Coast (present day Ghana); and that both were much higher than in the former French colonies, including the French colonial centre Senegal (Adick, 1995, pp. 33 ff.).

## The quality of the 1911 research

It has already been pointed out, that the number of schools for which data were gathered and the number of questionnaires differs, with about 500 more schools than questionnaires, presumably because some questionnaires contained information for more than one institution. Furthermore, Schlunk, who had been charged with the responsibility of analysing the questionnaires, writes at times about his personal frustrations while analysing and interpreting the findings. He notes that in some of the documents even small calculations were not accurate and bemoans how questions which seemed simple were obviously misunderstood by the respondents (Schlunk, 1914a, p. IX). Other difficulties stemmed from variations in the recording of names for ethnic communities, places, regions, etc. Also, sometimes aggregated data were given, without separately accounting for difference by sex or religious affiliation (ibid., p. IX f.). This weakness, for instance, might account for many of the question marks in the table in

the appendix concerning the numbers of male and female enrolments in elementary schools. In addition, there is the problem of missing data, which in some cases Martin Schlunk tried to solve by communicating with Carl Paul, who had drafted the questionnaires and collected some kind of control data, and had requested separate summary responses alongside to the official survey (ibid., p. V). The most important problem, however, was – according to Schlunk (1914b, p. 25) – the unit of analysis, which at times did not seem to be clear to those who had to answer the questionnaires. As mentioned above, the three types of schools, were evidently not always categorised correctly by the respondents, partly because they were called by different names in different locations. Schools which were offering the same (advanced) level of instruction were called *Elementarschulen* by some respondents and *Gehobene Schulen* by others. At this point, Schlunk writes, that he tried to rectify obvious mistakes, but that for future research it would be advisable to add a commentary sheet to the questionnaires, in which the categories of schools and other relevant issues would be clearly defined. He obviously envisaged that the survey would be repeated at some future point and that lessons learned in the earlier survey would be incorporated (ibid., p. 26) – although, of course, this never came to pass because the German colonial era came to an end.

While the problems outlined above still challenge researchers today, this does not suggest that the research findings are necessarily unreliable. Unfortunately, the absence of the original questionnaires makes reanalysis unrealistic. My own inquiries as to the whereabouts of the questionnaires, possibly at the buildings of the University of Hamburg, have been in vain. It is still possible, though, that the questionnaires exist, for instance, as part of Martin Schlunk's estate or somewhere else. Even so, it might be possible to cross-check some of the 1911 data sets with other surveys done in colonial times by other institutions than the *Hamburgisches Kolonialinstitut*. Examples include statistics of individual missionary societies or annual reports of the governments of the different colonies. But this would involve detailed comparisons of highly dispersed literature.

A different question concerns validity. Was the research really assessing the accomplishments of schooling? What does it mean, when a question such as the one on the regular attendance of the school is answered as 'good' or 'rather good'? What about the tendency of those in charge of a school to present their efforts in a positive way, reporting success rather than failure? One question, for example, asked about the competencies of average pupils at the end of elementary school. One respondent reported that in the better equipped missionary schools on mission stations they corresponded to the German *Volksschule*. Might this have been the response of a proud headmaster? In other cases concern was expressed about an 'educational proletariat' or the 'overproduction' of people being able to speak German (Schlunk, 1914a, p. 27, 30 f.). Overall, there is no particular evidence that Schlunk consciously distorted the

analysis, especially of the qualitative parts of the questionnaire, or that he belittled or exaggerated problems. There are some indications, however, of prejudice which might be due to colonial and racial bias. At times e.g. Schlunk declared that ‘race’ would become a major problem in the German colonies in the future (“... daß in einigen Jahrzehnten das Rassenproblem im Vordergrund unserer kolonialen Interessen stehen wird”; Schlunk, 1914b, p. 89). But on other occasions he also warned his contemporaries that schooling in the colonies might Europeanise the ‘natives’ instead of educating them in ways appropriate for their own cultural background, and recognising them as a genuine part of world culture (“... daß die Schule dazu beitragen kann, die Eingeborenen zu entnationalisieren, sie zu europäisieren, statt sie zu erziehen zu einer ihnen genuinen, ihrem Lande, ihrem Volkstum angepaßten und doch in den Rahmen der Weltkultur einbezogenen Eigenkultur”; *ibid.*, p. 75). He also feared that colonial subjects with a high level of education, including the command of German, might rebel against their colonial or missionary ‘masters’. Therefore he advocated the use of indigenous languages for instruction in the *Elementarschulen* and the addition of German as a foreign language only in the *Gehobene Schulen* (*ibid.*, p. 90). In short, it might be argued that he was biased against higher levels of European style education for the ‘natives’, and that he possibly underestimated and doubted the accomplishments of education rather than glorifying them –because of his fear of the consequences of an educated elite of colonial subjects.

Of course, a balanced evaluation of these limitations would only be possible with access to the original answers. The only alternative, then, is to be aware that the selected quotes from the answers to the questions are possibly biased ways, as, too, of course, are other contemporary education documents from the archives, which contain messages about the objectives of colonial and missionary education, curriculum material, records of (mis)behaviour of teachers and pupils, recommendations of missionary and governmental committees and others, a sample of which can be found in an annotated collection of archival documents (Adick & Mehnert, 2001). Given this proviso, a reevaluation of the 1911 research of the status of education in the German colonies would be feasible, as part of the broader exploration of education and colonialism. In addition, it would also be challenging to compare the German research reported here with other large scale educational surveys undertaken by other colonial powers – a challenge, which to my knowledge remains to be accepted. Although it would appear that the enrolment data contained in Schlunk’s report (1914a) have not been included in encyclopaedic reference works such as Mitchell (1982) on Africa and Asia, such an endeavour could help to supply much ‘missing data’.

At the beginning of this essay it was pointed out that the research by the *Ham-burgisches Kolonialinstitut* has not been widely recognised especially in the non-German speaking world. A notable exception is a contemporary official English observer, Hanns Vischer, who was then the Director of Education in Northern Nigeria. In

his article on 'Native Education in German Africa' he explicitly refers to the 1911 research and states:

In 1911 the German Colonial Institute made careful inquiries in all the German Colonies in order to ascertain the work done by Europeans, the Government, and the Missionary Societies in schools for the natives. ... The thoroughness of these inquiries is admirable (Vischer, 1915, p. 123).

This fact should remind researchers that colonial educational research was also seen and used as a means of international competition – in the same way as today's large scale evaluations and comparisons such as PISA, Education at a Glance, or the Global Monitoring Reports.

Appendix: Number of Schools (elementary schools, schools of advanced learning and schools of practical learning), teachers and students in the German colonies in the year 1911\*

Colony	Types of schools	No. of schools	No. of teachers			No. of students		
			European		Indigenous	total		total
			male	female	total	male	female	total
Togo	elementary	315	18	14	32	384	15	399
	advanced	5	3	—	3	4	—	4
	practical	4	12	2	14	4	1	5
Kamerun	elementary	499	30	12	42	606	5	611
	advanced	21	25	8	33	30	—	30
	practical	11	22	—	22	5	—	5
Südwestafrika	elementary	48	39?	8?	66	45?	2?	101
	advanced	1	1	—	1	1	—	1
	practical	5	9	13	22	—	—	—
Ostafrika	elementary	953	135	77	212	1.134	66	1.200
	advanced	31	41	8	49	47	4	51
	practical	17	18	8	26	5	—	5
Neu-Guinea	elementary	402	77?	33?	128	334?	68?	408
	advanced	19	20	11	31	7	—	7
	practical	11	15	6	24	1	—	1
Samoa	elementary	300	1	—	1	277	155?	468
	advanced	26	17	19	36	20	12	32
	practical	3	3	—	3	2	—	2
Kiautschou	elementary	31	—	2	2	52	4	56
	advanced	6	27	3	30	22	2	24
	practical	2	1	3	4	2	2	4
		2.710	514?	227?	781	2.982?	336?	3.414
								4.195
								97.408
								40.739
								149.528

\* Own elaboration from Schlunk, 1914a, pp. 54 f., 112 f., 134 f., 248 f., 304 f., 334 f., 356 f.

A '?' is put behind those figures which do not match the total sums in the rows or columns – most probably because of missing data, e.g. for male or female teachers or students, or for false additions in the original documents.

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## Note

1. Parts of this essay overlap with information given in a previously published more extensive article in German (Adick, 1995); the reasons to take up the issue again in this essay are to remind comparativists of the centenary and to address a wider international audience by writing in English.

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