A REVIEW OF
EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN IRELAND,
1960–1980

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One hundred and fifteen empirical studies of education which were carried out in Ireland between 1960 and 1980 were identified and characterized in terms of the problem investigated the purpose of the investigation the methodology employed and disciplinary influences on the study Information was also obtained on the identity of investigators the subjects of the study and the intended clients of the research activity The main trends in research over the period are identified Relationships between research in Ireland and research in other countries are examined

The term educational research does not have a universally accepted meaning, indeed, multiple and diverse activities are often grouped under its general heading This may be due to the diversity of tools and methods employed in these activities, or it may be due to different assumptions about the nature of the social sciences To be regarded as 'scientific', the activities must meet certain requirements and conventional standards related to the process of the acquisition of knowledge To be regarded as 'educational', they must be related to social aspirations and practices, or to an educational context, which in turn supposes certain social purposes and objectives

The relationship between the process of acquisition of knowledge and social aspirations has traditionally served as a basis for the development of educational theories Socrates and Plato, for example, began by systematizing the properties of human cognition and methods of inquiry and social utopias as a basis for the future formulation of educational

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principles   More recently, others have underlined another aspect of the
relationship   the role which social events and processes can play in
structuring cognitive systems, such as knowledge of sociology and
psychology (14, 15)   Using this perspective, Coleman (4) has shown how
many of the developments which occurred in the field of sociological
research in the United States are related to identifiable societal changes
Schools of thought in sociology grow and decline and terminology and
research methodology seem to alter with the emergence of new consumers
of research and changes in society as a whole

Although studies of the relationship between educational research and
society are rare, it seems reasonable to conclude that knowledge of educa
tion has some special features that link its development to social evolution
Besides the cultural and social factors with which the structuring of any
cognitive system can be associated (14), knowledge of education has three
specific properties   it is intentionally related to action (at least as its final
purpose), it is the representation of the convergence of a series of different
constructs and methods originating within a great variety of disciplines,
and its conclusions have explicit political and cultural implications   Given
this position, one would expect the topics chosen for research to be
selective rather than random and a function of the internal dynamics of
the development of the body of knowledge of education, together with
factors of a social and cultural nature   However, the way in which those
factors interact is not clear

The cumulative nature of knowledge means that research of any kind
is strongly associated with the written tradition (16)   Research reports are
the main sources of information on topics, problems, and over all trends
in scientific work   Research reports on educational problems have grown
at a great rate during the last 25 years all over the world, in fact education
al research is one of the most dynamic areas in social investigation   As
government, private foundations, local school systems, and commercial
enterprises invest more funds in such activities, public interest and concern
in the results and processes of research also have increased   ⟍

Ireland is one of a number of small countries that shows a rapid and
coherent development of educational research during the last two decades
simultaneously with many social and educational changes   These character
istics, in conjunction with those emerging from its past and cultural
traditions, its geographical location, and its political commitment to
education makes research in Ireland a fascinating field of inquiry as well as

an interesting case for some other countries to consider when approaching decisions related to education

In Ireland, the development of educational research has come about at a time of great change in its educational system The expansion of the Irish school system since the 1960s has been very great in comparison with other countries, indeed, it has been one of the highest in the world This has been particularly so in second-level education The number of students enrolled in secondary schools as a proportion of an age group grew from 35 in 1960 to 92 in 1977 (17) In industrialized countries, the growth over the same period of time was from 68 to 87 The expansion of the system can also be seen in the growth of the number of teachers In 1931, there were nine and a quarter thousand primary school teachers (11), thirty years later there were fourteen and a half thousand (12), by 1981, that figure had increased by a further five thousand (13) Significant changes have also occurred in educational policy and financing, in school adminis tration, curriculum development, and participation of religious institutions in education These changes have been accompanied by economic and political changes, such as the accession of Ireland to the European Economic Community, as well as by an increased opening towards other European and American influences

In many respects, the Irish educational system reflects a traditional doctrinal, scholastic, and humanistic tradition On the other hand, it has the political commitment to cultural restoration In addition, it has tried to encourage a positive rational and empirical development in accordance with British tradition and this constitutes one of the main roots of the contemporary empirical educational research approach In the late 1960s, while in some European countries (e g , Italy, Spain) there were no organizations which devoted themselves exclusively to research in the field of education (6), Ireland had developed a modest but basic research infrastructure in terms of organizations, people, communication channels, and projects

At present, at least four research organizations carry out educational research activities The Educational Research Centre at St Patrick's College, the Economic and Social Research Institute, the Linguistic Institute of Ireland, and the curriculum unit of the Department of Education The university colleges and colleges of education also conduct research activities on educational problems National agencies (educational and non educational), associations (e g , Reading Association of Ireland, Educational

Studies Association of Ireland) and foreign institutions constitute a third source of research in the field, however, they usually work in joint projects with local research organizations   A number of periodicals carry reports of research in education   *The Irish Journal of Education, Oideas, Irish Educational Studies, Studies in Education, The Economic and Social Review, The Irish Journal of Psychology,* and *The Irish Journal of Sociology*   Reports of research carried out in education in Ireland are also published abroad, particularly in the United States and Great Britain

PURPOSE AND PROCEDURE OF THE REVIEW

In this review a description and analysis of the development of educational research in the Republic of Ireland between 1960 and 1980 is presented   The review is based on research reports   Basic trends in research are characterized in terms of (i) the problem selected for study, the purpose of the study, the disciplines involved, and the methodologies employed, (ii) authors, subjects, and intended clients of research activities, and (iii) the relationship between the problem studied and national policy decisions, cultural traits, and international trends

Since the limits and nature of educational research are not clearly defined, for the purpose of the present study, a double approach was taken in the selection of the research reports   In the first place, it was decided not to include historical studies, general philosophical papers, different versions of the same study (though different analyses of the same data were eligible for inclusion), masters and doctoral theses (7)   Among the remaining studies, preference was given to those which were systematic in their approach to the problem, 'objective' in their collection and analysis of data, and clearly related to education, even if this was not the main subject of the report

The list of reports was compiled from the following sources (i) *The Irish Journal of Education, The Economic and Social Review, Oideas, The Irish Journal of Psychology, The Irish Journal of Sociology, Eudised R & D Bulletin,* (ii) references in the studies collected, (iii) previous bibliographies prepared in sociology of education, reading, etc , (iv) collections of Trinity College, St Patrick's College, and UCD libraries, and (v) personal inquiries to a selected group of researchers

An initial list of nearly 400 studies was compiled   When theses were excluded, the figure was reduced to 130   Excluding mere descriptions,

incomplete or unsystematic reports, the number was further reduced to 115 * All 'products' were equally weighted Thus, a book, an article, or a mimeo report were each represented as a unit

In accordance with the basic purpose of the study, a content analysis instrument was developed, judged and reviewed by a group of five independent researchers and applied by the author to the selected sample of reports The instrument contained seven parts, each one of which dealt with one of the following aspects (i) general information (e g , date and place of publication, source of funding), (ii) justification and purposes (based on international literature, based on previous research in Ireland, justified in terms of national social problems), (iii) disciplines (e g , philosophy, psychology), potential clients (e g , teachers, government), and authors (name, gender), (iv) main topics (e g , preschool, teaching learning, curriculum, evaluation, administration), (v) subjects (e g , national sample, regional sample) and methodologies (e g , descriptive, experimental), (vi) references (country of origin of references), (vii) main findings
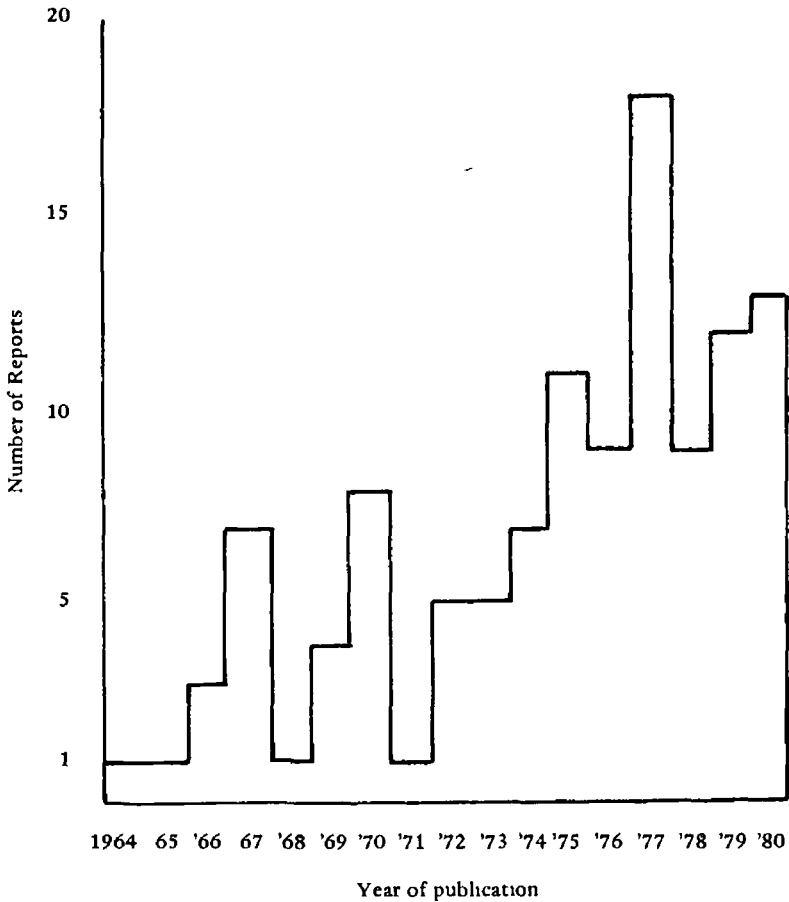
OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH REPORTS

By the end of the decade of the 1960s, research work was clearly intensified in national agencies and research centres This movement can be associated, at least in the initial phase, with a number of factors First, there were a number of political decisions, such as the so called free secondary education scheme in the mid 1960s, which suggested the need for research and evaluation Second, organizational arrangements resulted in the establishment of an Educational Research Centre at St Patrick's College And third, the *Investment in education* report formulated the need 'to promote activities of both basic and applied research, particularly research concerned with the evaluation of the pedagogical consequences of innovation' (10)

Thus, the quantitative educational expansion at the end of the 1960s seems to have been reflected somewhat later in the growth of educational research and, to a certain extent, in the administrative pre occupations resulting from that expansion Certification and public examinations, employment, curriculum, and economics had also some implications for

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* After the present study was completed some additional reports were found and a bibliography of 148 studies was published (1)

research content   The number of published works reached a peak in 1977 and decreased during the following years (Figure 1)

FIGURE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF RESEARCH REPORTS
FROM 1960 to 1980
(N 115)

Year of publication

Despite the obvious increase in the number of research studies, the growth cannot be regarded as particularly marked in comparison with other developed and even some less developed countries Neither has high quality been a characteristic of all studies Indeed, the growth has been slowly progressive, quite constant in its theme, and with a wide spectrum of quality in terms of the classical norms

Organizations and research production

Most researchers carry out their investigation activities as part of their professional duties in an organizational setting The existence of organiza tions dedicated to educational research is a relatively new phenomenon In Europe, they have become apparent during the last two decades In the first All European Conference for Directors of Educational Research Institutions held in 1976, it was reported that more than half of such organizations had been established after 1960 (3)

Specialized research centres in educational and social sciences were responsible for 45% of the research projects examined in this investigation (Table 1) Most of the joint projects (i e , ones involving more than one organization) were also carried out with the participation of such centres

TABLE 1

THE RESEARCH ORIENTATION OF
DIFFERENT TYPES OF ORGANIZATION

Orientation	Type of organization			
	Research centres	Universities and national agencies	International foreign institution and joint projects	Total
Practical oriented research (curriculum evaluation, planning)	21	27	6	54
Theoretical research	18	5	15	38
Critical comparative research (questioning of policy structure practice)	13	8	2	23
Total	52	40	23	115

The Educational Research Centre at St Patrick's College produced over
40% of the reports   Staff in colleges and universities seem to dedicate
more of their efforts to teaching activities rather than to research work
When they do become involved in research, they tend to concentrate not
on theoretical but on projects of a practical or critical nature   Despite
the fact that the general organizational structure of the universities is
usually geared towards the development of theoretical disciplines rather
than towards the solution of social problems (as might be expected in the
case of other national educational agencies), much of the output of both
types of organization was directed towards practical issues   Predictably,
perhaps, foreign institutions and international agencies are more interested
in theoretical than in practical issues   Overall, however, there does not
seem to be a very strong association between type of organization and the
orientation of research products (Table 1)

CONTENT OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Selection of research problems
    The selection of the key questions to be answered in an empirical
research project can be influenced by a variety of factors — the availability
of funds, political priorities, and personal motivation   The formal justifi
cation which a researcher might give for the selection of certain questions
for investigation might, on the other hand, relate to the immediate social
relevance of a project or existing literature on the topic   The attempt to
be universal in science together with the need to solve particular social
problems create a sort of tension which is always present in decision
making in educational research   The paradox is that the universal value
and meaning of research in education are based on the existence and
understanding of particular circumstances   In the Irish studies examined,
about half of the selected research problems tended to be justified mainly
in terms of their relationships with the international literature, few of the
studies were explicitly presented as originating from previous research
carried out in the country   In other cases, the research questions seemed
to emerge from a variety of social issues, ranging from health standards
to resource allocation problems

    Juftifications of the type of research problem selected seem to be
moderately related to the type of bibliographical sources used   When
the studies are classified according to the origin of references employed
(as mainly North American, mainly British, or mainly Irish), one finds
that studies predominantly justified on the basis of foreign literature tend

TABLE 2

STUDIES CATEGORIZED BY MOTIVATION AND
PREDOMINANT BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

References	Motivation			
	Social problems	Previous research in the country	Previous research outside	Total
Predominant U S	14	3	38	55
Predominant British	7	2	9	18
Predominant Irish	21	3	6	30
Total	42	8	53	103

to have mostly North American references   Problem selections justified
on the basis of their social relevance, on the other hand, tend to be
associated with Irish literature (Table 2)   The relationship between the
motivation for the studies and the origin of the majority of their references
is more obvious in the extreme cells of Table 2   In research which was
locally motivated, Irish sources play an important role, while research
with a more cosmopolitan motivation is more closely related to US sources
Educational research based on social needs is more characteristic of more
recent than of early research work in Ireland, over 60% of such projects
have been carried out since 1975

Questions of major interest to Irish researchers
    Educational research in Ireland, as distinct from what seems to be the
case in some other countries in which research has been strongly influenced
by the United States (8, 2), has developed in a quite coherent way around
some rather constant themes during the last two decades   When I
considered the main content of research reports, I found that most
attention (30% of reports) was paid to people involved in the educational
process (students, teachers, parents)   Next in terms of quantity (21%)
were studies of curricula and of specific curriculum subjects (languages,
bilingualism, reading, science, art, and physical education)   About the
same volume of studies (20%) dealt with variables associated with
educational contexts or the educational environment, that is, schooling

itself and types of school (e g , secondary, comprehensive) Somewhat less attention (16% of studies) was paid to processes and resources for teaching and learning and associated processes of education and testing, classroom interaction, textbooks, and audio visual materials Reports dealing with policy, development, economics, and planning made up about 10% of the sample, while only 3% of reports dealt with relationships between society and education, covering such topics as the social environment, culture, ideology, and community

The organizational bias in the selection of research topics is shown in Table 3 Universities and other national agencies, compared to research centres, have tended to emphasize the themes of education and society On the other hand, research centres have contributed more to the study of curricula and people in education What is of particular interest, perhaps, is that the work of all types of institutions has been distributed over all

TABLE 3

THE CONTENT PREFERENCES OF
DIFFERENT TYPES OF ORGANIZATION

Content	Type of organization				
	Research centres	Universities	Other national agencies	International foreign institution and joint projects	Total
Education and society policy planning	8	8	7	7	30 (13%)
Teaching and learning	17	4	4	11	36 (16%)
Educational contexts	20	8	7	12	_ 47 (20%)
Curricula	26	5	10	6	47 (21%)
People in education	36	14	9	11	70 (30%)
Total	107	39	37	47	230(100%)

the content areas

At a more specific level, we find that the dominant topics in the Irish educational research literature appear to be reading and bilingualism (with 14% of the total), evaluation and testing (12% of the total), and pupils' characteristics (10% of the total) The choice of these topics may reflect certain historical and psychological considerations   In particular, they reflect a deep and constant preoccupation about the general standards of the Irish educational system   Symptomatic of this preoccupation is the fact that about half of the studies dealing with reading also establish some sort of comparison with foreign standards, especially British ones It may also be that the search for a cultural identity, politically fostered and expressed in different aspects of Irish life, has had implications for the context of the research undertaken Many of the questions raised in the early research reports, such as bilingualism, still remain unsolved

Trends over time
The topics most frequently studied by educational researchers in Ireland, instead of forming clusters around certain years, are rather spread out along a time line   Evaluation and testing, for instance, as a research topic, appears in the early 1960s and, from 1969 on, has been constant in the literature with an average of two studies each year Reading, primary education, family, and languages, follow a similar pattern   Higher education, social development, and social environment, show a sort of cyclical pattern, this is also the case of economics which, because of its political appeal when it emerges, attracts the attention of the general public for a while and is likely to be mentioned in planning and policy papers as well as in public debates

Social aspects of education have been given relatively little attention, cultural aspects even less   No studies were found which approached educational phenomena from an anthropological perspective   Only one study dealt with ideology and education There were no studies of change processes or of innovations as such   In spite of the strong effort made by the government to expand the post-primary educational services through comprehensive and community schools, researchers have demon strated relatively minor interest in studying such new types of schools This is perhaps all the more surprising, given the fact that the vast majority of studies dealt with formal education Printed material and textbooks, adult education, physical education, sex education, art, sciences are also topics of minor interest in research in Ireland Surprisingly, studies on

religion and education are very rare despite the traditional influence that
the Catholic Church has exercised in Irish education

Among the very few new topics to emerge recently in educational
research in Ireland are women in 1980 and physical education in 1978
Among the abandoned topics seem to be community (since 1967), social
studies curriculum (since 1976), and administration (since 1976)

Leading disciplines and interdisciplinarity

Research in education is generally based on theoretical frameworks and
concepts developed in the social sciences, particularly in psychology,
sociology, anthropology, and economics, and many educational researchers
often come from such fields   Often the result is a mixture of frameworks
and concepts from a variety of backgrounds   By its very nature, education
tends to be a propitious area for the encounter of different disciplines
Recently, there has been an increasing interest in this phenomenon, which
has been termed 'interdisciplinarity' by some observers

Interdisciplinary studies in education (18) supposedly permit a fuller
recognition of the problems of individual and social development   The
nature, methods, and outputs of these studies are not yet very clear
According to Piaget, interdisciplinary research could result from two
sorts of inquiry, one relating to common structures or mechanisms and the
other one to common methods (15)   The former would occur when, for
example, relationships between theoretical structures of two disciplines
are established   The latter would occur when a method developed within
a discipline is applied to another   Both sorts are seen to be involved in
educational research   Often a particular discipline (e g , psychology,
sociology, or economics) will dominate a research project in education
When this happens there is a danger that educational research will lose
its social and practical relevance

This issue is of particular interest when we examine research on educa
tional problems in Ireland   One in every four research reports was clearly
identified with a particular discipline, psychology, being the most common,
followed by economics and sociology   The remainder constitute a body of
studies which deal mainly with schooling problems and which demonstrate
a certain independence from the classical borders of the social sciences
These are not mere descriptions of the educational system, some of them
are rather inferential, explicative, and theoretically oriented, even when
their conclusions and findings do not form a *concise theoretical* structure

The assimilation of concepts and methodology from a variety of disciplines, though predominantly from psychology and sociology, is to be found in studies of classroom interaction, teachers' role and behaviour, and reading processes   This assimilative approach appears to becoming more common but could be enriched by including other disciplines such as anthropology, economics, history, and philosophy

Subjects of educational research
    Due to the size of the country and the accessibility of schools and educational institutions, there is a tendency to select national samples for educational research purposes in Ireland   Half of the studies examined tried to obtain findings that could be generalized to a national level When the studies concentrated on local communities, they tended to focus on the Dublin area   Few studies (7% in the sample) were carried out outside the Irish capital city

    When the topic concerns people rather than processes, research has tended to focus on primary school children, disadvantaged children, teachers, and post primary school students   Very few studies exist on university students, learners in non-formal settings, college lecturers, educational administrators, or the adult population

AIMS AND PURPOSES OF RESEARCH

    Science does not orientate itself exclusively towards the aims of know ledge and understanding   Social action is also frequently an aim of scientific activity   Educational practice is also a directional process and, as such, must respond to the interests of groups and individuals   As with other kinds of scientific enquiry, educational research can have different purposes and can focus either on the search for knowledge or the search for social impact   Research, when oriented toward knowledge, can go about its task in different ways   Some projects, for example, can be devoted mainly to the application of knowledge already established according to conventional levels of evidence   Some others can have as a major objective the development of new propositions or the testing of a theory   Many projects concentrate solely on elaborating tools for further inquiry, others attempt to structure curricula for practical use   Social research can also strive to serve the needs of government planning and policy, it can highlight the need for social change and even deliberately intervene in the life of a particular community   The border lines between research and development projects are often blurred to the extent that

some people use the label 'action research' for some social programmes
with research components   Finally, some investigations are designed
specifically to take decisions on educational programmes, while others
assume a critical role on social practices or policies

Trends in the purposes of Irish educational research

For the present review, a decision regarding the main orientation of the
reports examined was made on the basis of formal statements of purpose
in the reports themselves   Where this could not be done, a classification
was made on the basis of an interpretation of the introductory sections,
justifications, and conclusions of a report

I found that a majority of educational research projects stated their
purpose to be either a diagnosis of the Irish eductional system at primary
or post primary level (20%) or a theoretical understanding of the behaviour
of the different elements which make up that system (30%) (Table 4)   A

TABLE 4

THE PURPOSE OF RESEARCH PROJECTS OVER TIME

Purpose	Time		
	1964 1975	1976 1980	Total
Knowledge Aims			
Apply knowledge or techniques	4	3	7
Replicate other studies	3	3	6
Develop a tool	1	2	3
Description or diagnosis	11	12	23
Development of theory or			
theoretical explanations	14	22	36
Developing a curriculum		1	1
Compare systems	2	4	6
Action or Power Aims			
Judge specific programmes	5	4	9
Planning or policy purposes	4	3	7
Questioning social practices	8	4	12
Questioning national policies	2	3	5
Act upon social reality			
Total	54	61	115

trend to this effect, noticable before 1976, has become more pronounced since that date Thus, quantitatively speaking, the critical role of research has been less important than its analytical role

Studies designed to judge or evaluate a particular educational programme are not as recent as might be expected   Some such studies have used classical or experimental designs, few have used evaluative models

Studies designed to diagnose or seek out theoretical explanations of educational phenomena are to be found in most content categories This is not the case with studies designed for comparative reasons, which deal mainly with reading, language, and bilingualism   Curriculum studies are not necessarily directed towards curriculum development   Their aim may be evaluative, critical, or diagnostic (Tables 5 and 6)

In the selected studies, the source of funding was determined when ever possible   It was identified as government, international, private foundation, or commercial enterprise   The source of funding of almost 30% of the studies could not be determined   Of the studies for which the source of funding was known, half were funded by the government alone, a further 12% were funded by the government in conjunction with a private foundation   Private foundations (American or European) funded a further 7% of the studies   Private enterprise rarely contributed to educational research

The direct influence of financial sponsors on the selection of problems and purposes of research projects is difficult to detect since financial sources are limited and the hierarchical structure in the organization of research activities is not sufficiently strong to exert a strong influence on the selection of research topics

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of research may be divided into four main types experimental and quasiexperimental, descriptive, case studies, and evaluative studies   In Ireland, the use of experimental methods has remained constant at nearly 15% of all research since 1964 (Table 7) This category includes a wide range of studies, from modest controlled small scale experiments to large scale societal experimental studies   The studies are confined largely to primary school pupils and preschool disadvantaged children

TABLE 5

STUDIES CATEGORIZED BY CONTENT AND PURPOSE (KNOWLEDGE)

Content	Purpose							
	Knowledge application	Replication	Instrument development	Description/ diagnosis	Theoretical explanation	Curriculum development	Comparative	Total
Higher Education				2	2			4
Schooling	2	2	1	9	9	1	1	25
Children/Youth/Adult/Women	3	1	1	1	2		1	9
Soc Dev and Soc Envir				5	2		1	8
Sp Ed/Disadvantage	3			2	5			10
Teaching/Learning	2	1		1	2		1	7
Teachers	1	1		2	7		1	12
Pupils		1		7	13			21
Curriculum (General)	1			1		1		3
Reading/Lang/Bilng	1	3	1	6	12		5	28
Math /Soc Stud/ P E /Health Ed		1		3	1			5
Eval and Testing		1	3	6	12		1	23
Admin/Econ/Ed Policy	1						1	2
Family/Community		1		1	5			7
TOTAL	14	12	6	46	72	2	12	164

TABLE 6

STUDIES CATEGORIZED BY CONTENT AND PURPOSE (ACTION AND POWER)

Content	Purpose				
	Judge a programme	Planning/ policy	Questioning social practices	Questioning national policies	Total
Higher Education		2	3		5
Schooling	3	1	3	4	11
Children/Youth/Adult/Women			2		2
Soc Dev and Soc Envir	1	1	3	2	7
Sp Ed/Disadvantage	2	2	1		5
Teaching/Learning	3				3
Teachers			2		2
Pupils			3		3
Curriculum (General)	2		1		3
Reading/Lang/Biling	4	1	1		6
Math /Soc Stud/ P E /Health Ed	1		1		2
Eval and Testing			2	1	3
Admin/Econ/Ed Policy	1	7	1	3	12
Family/Community	1		1		2
TOTAL	18	14	24	10	66

TABLE 7

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES OF STUDIES OVER TIME

Methodology	Time				
	1964	1965 1969	1970 1974	1975 1980	Total
Experimental and quasiexperimental		2	4	10	16
Descriptive studies	1	14	20	57	92
Case studies				1	1
Evaluative models			2	4	6
Total	1	16	26	72	115

In studies which used descriptive methodology, there is considerable variety in the content, tools, and techniques used for data collection and analysis Although several studies have been oriented to evaluation (Table 4), the use of evaluative models seems to be recent Case studies are not very common

An examination of the actual statistical techniques used in studies indicates that in the 1960s analyses tended to be limited to the use of qualitative descriptions and percentages An increasing use of a variety of multivariate approaches is found in the 1970s

The instruments most frequently used in the research examined were standardized tests, questionnaires, and interviews Direct observation and content analysis instruments were very rare The use of public data, such as government statistics, has also been limited Only 16% of the studies examined used existing statistics

INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE ON IRISH EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

The international communication network in the social sciences is becoming increasingly complex Ireland, geographically located between Britain and the United States, has historically been influenced by both neighbours Many researchers in education in Ireland have received at

least part of their academic training in either the United Kingdom or North America   Further, many Irish researchers have spend some time working outside their country

British and American researchers (sometimes with Irish backgrounds) have shown interest in the study of educational problems in Ireland   To explore tentatively how this situation might be reflected in educational research production, the references of each of the selected studies were classified in five categories according to their origin as follows   Irish references, British references, North American references, other, and unknown   The criteria for classification were firstly, the nationality of the author, and if this was not known, the nationality of the sponsoring institution, or the place of publication, or the government responsible for publication   If the reference origin could not be established using these criteria, the nationality of the reference was labelled as unknown

References of United States origin were the most frequent   British references have over time become slightly less numerous while Irish references have increased during the 1970s (Table 8)

Irish studies, not only indirectly through the use of the literature, but also explicitly, tend to refer to United States and British standards Surprisingly, 30 studies in the present review established some kind of comparison with foreign systems, about half of them with British, and half with North American and other countries

The studies which establish comparisons with British standards tend to share some common characteristics   They tend to reflect relatively more British influences and to deal with topics such as reading, health, university entrance standards, and primary school children   They are usually carried out by Irish or English researchers and most of them were published before 1975   The studies which make comparisons with the United States educational system, on the other hand, tend to have a more recent date of publication and to deal with a greater variety of problems

There is another notable difference between the ways in which writers from the United States and from Britain appear in Irish educational research reports   American authors have tended to maintain a constant influence, mainly through a group of researchers who, as a whole, represent a main stream of contemporary thought in education   The eight most often cited authors in Irish educational research are in descending order,

TABLE 8

ORIGIN OF BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES OVER TIME

Origin	Year																
	1964	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	'73	74	75	'76	77	78	'79	80
Irish	1	1	32	14	4	13	76	2	13	9	48	95	39	61	58	29	93
British	10	13	73	37	1	18	75	10	18	28	62	80	48	44	25	51	29
North American	1	4	97	32	4	38	151	13	29	51	61	332	100	127	48	34	208
Other			50			2	17		1	3	6	33	13	4	8	3	37
Unknown	1	1	1				1		3	2	6	5		2	6	2	3
Total	13	19	253	83	9	71	320	25	64	93	183	545	200	238	145	119	370

Thomas Kellaghan, Benjamin Bloom, George Madaus, John Macnamara, James Coleman, the *Investment in education* team, Vincent Greaney, and Peter Airasian Four are Irish and four are American

QUESTIONS AND ISSUES

Many of the questions that arise relating to trends in scientific research, its costs and its social relevance, do not have simple answers This is particularly true in the case of research in education, which is expected to have some kind of nexus with future actions, with the mechanism of social reproduction, and, paradoxically, with innovations and changes in societies

A good many of the questions that arise concerning educational research deal with the nature of knowledge in education, its theoretical identity, its characteristics, and its growing dynamics Some questions, perhaps most commonly formulated in political circles, raise doubts about the use and applications of educational research In this context, questions are raised not only about the results of investigations, but also about the selection of topics investigated Closely related to questions relating to the nature of knowledge in education are questions relating to the factors influencing the development of research trends (e g , local and cultural circumstances, international trends, financing agencies)

A final set of questions about educational research emerges from a consideration of the function of different institutions in the process of research the role of universities, government, private institutions, and colleges of education

Reflections on some of those questions based on a case study of one nation might help to lead towards a greater understanding of the role and possibilities of research activities in educational development, as well as to an awareness of the multiple social, cultural, and transcultural factors which influence the direction of such activities Ireland, because of its cultural and historical background, its geographical location, and the recent changes effected in its traditional educational structure, on the one hand, and its relatively well developed research capabilities, on the other hand, affords a good opportunity for such reflection which may benefit other societies that are in the process of creating an educational research infrastructure With this in mind, a number of questions were selected and discussed on the basis of the information I obtained during my review of educational research in Ireland

1 *Is educational research in small countries a very unstable process that often changes its focus and interests according to passing fashions?*

Educational research in Ireland has tended to be a selective process Researchers have demonstrated certain biases in the selection of topics to be studied However, the process as a whole has been rather constant in its content, purposes, and investigators for nearly fifteen years In general, it has focused on the formal educational system and from this point has moved almost by necessity into more social considerations Within the context of the schooling process, some recurrent topics can be found The continuous anxiety to raise students' achievement standards, especially in English, to justify bilingualism, and to understand pupils' and teachers' characteristics in the interest of improving educational outputs have commanded a good deal of effort This internal coherence in an apparently disorganized activity gives educational research in Ireland a certain personality of its own and a certain continuity of work, but also points to some weaknesses and omissions In depth investigation of the same topics permits the accumulation of a body of knowledge on the educational system, but can also lead to a neglect of a consideration of development of alternative routes and innovations

2 *Is educational research just a summary of research carried out in specialized disciplines, such as psychology sociology and economics?*

Without entering into epistemological discussions on the nature of the social sciences, we can say that there is a growing number of works dealing with educational problems which are very difficult to allocate to a single traditional discipline This does not mean that education now occupies a distinctive position among classical disciplines, nor does it demonstrate that knowledge in education constitutes a theoretical body comparable to psychology or sociology However, knowledge about education does have a certain identity based on the range of problems studied

The problems undertaken in research in Ireland have tended to involve complex human interactions Such research requires the investigation of a diverse range of factors Although there has been a strong psychological bias in Irish educational research, many of the studies which have been carried out cannot be classified simply as psychological since they include constructs, analytical perspectives, and tools from other fields of study Nevertheless, a conscious effort to combine social and psychological components in the understanding of school problems has not been made

3 *Has research had any influence on educational practice?*

A common critique, expressed not only by politicians and some teachers, but also by researchers whom they criticize, is that research findings do not affect educational practice Researchers, confesses a Swedish investigator, repeatedly have had the frustrating experience that their findings have very little, if any, impact upon what is happening in the classroom (9)

It should be borne in mind that the number of studies published on educational research in Ireland is very modest in absolute terms Given the complexity of educational services and the social investment involved in such services, expenditure on research in Ireland has been very small

The data I have examined do not allow me to make valid inferences on the way that the results of educational research are used in educational policy decisions or in classroom practice However, it should be noted that some of the reports indicate that the research on which they were based had a very practical orientation Specifically, seven percent of the studies were designed for planning and policy purposes Further, over 30% of the studies tended to justify their execution on the basis of social problems rather than on the basis of the research literature This does not mean, of course, that relevant questions for policy decisions or classroom practices were asked or that the findings of the studies, even if relevant, were implemented

4 *Are the universities ivory towers which only work on highly theoretical and pure research projects?*

The evidence I have examined suggests a negative answer to this question In fact, universities tend to engage in projects of a rather practical nature Their empirical research production, excluding these, is not very high, however Colleges of education, although apparently in search of a new identity and place in the world of higher education, have not, with one exception, developed basic research infrastructures

5 *To what extent are educational research trends in Ireland a result of British and American influences?*

Both Britain and the United States have played an influential role in Irish education However, the research reports examined for this study reflect these influences in different ways The British influence is more likely to occur in research dealing with reading, health, and university entrance standards and through occasional references to a wide range of

different authors   American influence is more dominant in projects of a
rather theoretical nature, in research dealing with a greater variety of
topics, and through extensive reference to a small group of authors

While Irish research shows evidence of the influence of work carried
out in other countries, it in turn has influenced work elsewhere   A
group of Irish researchers have come to constitute an important domestic
and international source of reference on topics such as bilingualism, educa
tion and testing, and disadvantaged   These researchers have lead the
educational research process with a very strong influence, as can be
observed in their published work and in the reference made to their work
by researchers in countries outside Ireland

*6 Do the research reports, as cultural products, reflect local character-
istics?*
Societies, for educational purposes, have to make a continual effort to
synthesize their beliefs and wisdom with their aspirations and their hopes
for the future   Research as a form of reflection upon these processes and
their environmental conditions has to attend to local circumstances   Its
capability to respond to such circumstances is also a social requirement
and a methodological condition   Even if international trends are always
matters of concern for professional researchers, many elements of a
cultural and political nature seem to be present in their work   '

Undoubtedly, themes in educational research in Ireland reflect some
circumstances of its political history   In the first steps away from colonial
domination, the Irish cannot avoid watching the image of Ireland in the
mirror of the old empire   The themes of bilingualism and educational
standards (in comparison with British standards) are expressions in educa
tional research of this preoccupation   Overall, educational research in
Ireland constitutes a sort of record of some of the most important issues in
education in the country   However, if the topics selected for research
appear to be locally influenced, the theoretical perspectives under which
they were analysed seem to reflect international trends

*7 What can other societies which are in the process of creating an educa
tional research infrastructure learn from the Irish experience?*
Research activities in the Irish educational system share the character
istics of the austerity of the system as a whole   Nonetheless, the efficiency
of these activities, relative to the financial outlay involved, might lead one
to agree with Collins (5) that in science as in other areas, it is likely that

smaller would be better   The continuity and coherence of the research could be the result of government provision of moderate but stable financing sources   Some other conditions seem also to have played a definitive role in the development of research capabilities such as the presence of personal leadership, a commitment to some topics of national importance, partnership arrangements with foreign research institutions, and the simultaneous development of a basic communication network between researchers in and outside the country

In this perspective, some other critical points should be considered In considering an overall strategy for research in education, the participa tion of universities and teacher training programmes should be assessed, since teachers are the main users of educational research   Even if some institutions specialize in certain areas of work, the understanding of education as a whole needs contributions from many different social sciences and not just from the traditional areas of psychology and pedagogy   The basic research infrastructure in Ireland is too small if one is interested in having an impact on educational practices   Paradoxically, a strong and stable theoretical foundation is also essential if the system is to be capable of innovations of a practical nature   Such a foundation requires a permanent questioning of the research activity in a society

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