

The scientific legacy of colonialism in Africa

March 19 2014

Colonial legacy has a significant impact on scientific productivity across the continent of Africa, according to a study by researchers at the University of Lomé, in Togo. Writing in the *International Journal of Education Economics and Development*, the team suggests that Africa performs relatively poorly compared with other regions of the world. Moreover, their analysis of data for the period 1994 to 2009 shows that African nations with a British colonial legacy are much more productive than countries with French or other history. This, the team adds, correlates with superior enrolment levels in higher education among nations once ruled by the British.

Mawussé Komlagan Nézan Okey explains that there are enormous disparities between African nations when one assesses scientific and technical output in terms of published research journal articles. His assessment of econometric data from 47 countries over 15 years shows that the different [scientific research](#) and educational policies, which are strongly influenced by each nation's former colonial powers, is a persistent legacy in science today.

"This has influenced differently the cost of scientific productivity as well as the ability of a given country's population to enroll people into [higher education](#), and allocate talented people into science and innovative activities rather than rent-seeking activities," Okey says. He points out that language has also had a long-lasting impact on a nation's scientific and educational achievements. "Former British colonies may enjoy comparative language advantages, relatively efficient, open and dynamic scientific research model, more increased demand for

collaboration with advanced universities and research centers, as well as better political and economic institutions that support higher education," he adds.

The natural conclusion, given the prevalence of written and spoken English across the globe in science is that teaching English must be at the heart of reforms for improvement of scientific research and innovation in African countries, Okey says. There is also a need to reinforce collaboration and cooperation between African and western universities regardless of the original colonial affiliation and official language of the particular nations.

More information: Okey, M.K.N. (2014) 'The scientific research wealth of African nations: do colonial origins matter?', *Int. J. Education Economics and Development*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp.113.

Provided by Inderscience Publishers

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