



## Editorial



The 12 articles which appear in this issue reinforce several themes. Much interest continues to focus on China. In “A Study of the Rate of Return to Higher Education Engineering Education in China”, authors Jingobo Fan and Chenggang Zhang find that past rate of return figures may have declined; however rates of return for females, though lower than for males, have risen considerably. In “Predictors of Mathematics Achievement of Migrant Children in Chinese Urban Schools: A Comparative Study” authors Ting Lu, Kathryn Holmes and James Albright point to the well known discrimination against the children of migrants within China by comparing mathematics achievement in schools for migrant children in urban areas with normal public schools. Parental SES is the most prominent predictor of achievement in public schools whereas achievement in the schools for migrant children was predicted by many other factors such as length of urban residence, preschool experience, as well as family background. In “Exploring Dropout Rates and Causes of Dropouts in Upper Secondary Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Schools in China,” authors Hongmei Yi, Linxiu Zhang, Yezhou Yao, Aiqin Wang, Yue Ma, Yaojiang Shi, James Chu, Prashant Loyalka and Scott Rozelle report that dropouts are associated with being a migrant, low maternal educational attainment and low academic achievement.

Two articles question the quality of education statistics and analytic methods. In “Estimate of the Private Return of Education in Indonesia: Evidence from Sibling Data,” Magdalena Triasih Dumauli suggest that previous rates of return for higher education may have been overestimates. Controlling for unobserved family background influences using data on siblings, the rates of return drop from 10.8% to 5% which may help explain the stagnation of higher education enrollments. In “Enrolment Ratios and Related Puzzles in Developing Countries: Approaches for Interrogating the Data Drawing from the Case of South Africa,” Martin Gustafsson argues that enrollment rates in developing countries are inaccurate.<sup>1</sup> He draws on experience in rural South Africa to suggest how this might be remedied.

Three articles concern issues of cultures which span nations. In “Student Performance, School Differentiation and World Cultures: Evidence from PISA 2009,” Liang Zhang, Gulab Khan and Armend Tahirsylaj suggest that countries might fall into different cultural

clusters, one based on average school performance; the other based on the portion of variance in academic achievement explained by school quality. They find a striking similarity among countries within these two categories. This suggests that cultural clusters across countries might be a fruitful way of explaining global trends in school performance. In “The Relationship Among Cultural Dimensions, Education Expenditure and PISA Performance,” Joseph J. French, Atchapourn Nunjuntee and Wei-Xuan Li argue that culture influences the willingness of nations to invest more in education and that higher educational expenditures influence school performance. Moreover, they suggest that the culture of ‘power distance and masculinity’ affect education investment in negative terms and that ‘individualism and long term orientation’ affect education investment in positive terms. The authors conclude that PISA scores, across all test types, are influenced by the cultural dimensions which influence education expenditure. The third article has a personal connection. In “The Heyneman/Loxley Effect Revisited in the Middle East and North Africa: Analysis Using TIMSS 2007 Database,” Donia Smaali Bouhlila suggests that the influence of school quality is not greater than the influence of student socio-economic status.<sup>2</sup> The point which these three articles raise is important. National indicators of performance and economic growth may not be as important to watch as the ‘cultural clusters’ which cross national borders.

Two articles concern gender. Traditionally, work on gender has resulted in findings that females were under-represented and in multiple ways under-privileged. However, this is changing. In “How Gendered is Ambition? Educational and Occupational Plans of Indigenous Youth in Australia,” Joanna Sikora and Nicholas Biddle analyze the aspirations and expectations of majority and minority youth in Australia. They find that school quality influences both categories of youth, but that compared to boys females plan to enter occupations which require higher educational qualifications, and this seems to pertain to females in both minority and majority groups. In “Exploring Social and Psychological Factors that Might Help Explain the Afro-Caribbean Boy Under Achievement in England,” Anica G. Bowe reiterates previous findings that Afro-Caribbean boys underachieve by comparison to females. The question is why. The author explores multiple social

<sup>1</sup> The accuracy of UNESCO data has long been a subject of discussion in this journal, commencing with S.P. Heyneman (1999) “The Sad Story of UNESCO’s Education Statistics,” *International Journal of Education Development* 19 (January), pp. 65–74.

<sup>2</sup> A summary of the Heyneman/Loxley Effect discussions and re-analyses can be found here: S.P. Heyneman “The Heyneman/Loxley Effect: Three Decades of Debate,” (2015) in Simon McGrath and Quing Gu (Eds.), *Rutledge International Handbook on Education and Development*. Oxford: Rutledge (forthcoming).

and psychosocial factors but found only a few which could explain the differences in academic achievement. The point which these articles raise is also important. While discrimination against females remains common, also common is the tendency for boys to underperform and to leave education earlier. Is this trend temporary or is it the sign of a new and different long term problem?

Two articles cannot be placed in a category. In “Non-formal Education and New Partnerships in a (post) Conflict Situation: Three Cooking Stones Supporting One Saucepan,” Josje van der Linden discusses the impact of non-formal education in North West

Uganda, a region long known for conflict and social breakdown. He finds that the flexibility of non-formal education may help explain its success in such a volatile environment. In “Critical Thinking at Rwanda’s Public Universities: Emerging Evidence of a Crucial Development Priority,” Rebecca Schendel analyzes critical thinking in three of Rwanda’s universities and finds that not much improves as a result of the university experience.

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