



Editorial

Volume 82: Summary highlights



Volume 82 contains many manuscripts with important findings. With respect to reaching universal literacy and numeracy, Maryam Akmal and Lant Pritchett have sobering news. In their article titled: "Learning Equity Requires More than Equality: Learning Goals and Achievement Gaps between the Rich and the Poor in Five Developing Countries" they find that 'except in Kenya equalizing grade attainment between children from rich and poor households would lead to only modest progress in achieving universal numeracy. Even with complete equality in grade attainment and learning achievement with children from the richest 20 percent children from poorer households still be far from the equity goal of universal numeracy and literacy, as even children from the richest 20 percent of households are far from universal mastery of basic reading and math by ages 12–13. In the currently low performing countries achieving universal literacy and numeracy to reach even a minimal proficiency of global equity goal will require more than just closing the rich-poor learning gap, it will take progress in learning for all'.

In her article titled: "A Structured Model of the Dynamics of Student Learning in Developing Countries, With Applications to policy" Michelle Keffenburger finds that learning in low and middle income countries varies widely, but is generally low. On the other hand, she discovers a new way to predict the results of implementing feasible policy changes. One policy change is to 'slow the pace of curriculum, so that more children can keep up. This would increase average learning in grade 10 by the equivalent of 1.6 years'.

Most education policy is assessed by asking participants what they think and experienced. This is done by using interviews, surveys and focus groups. But are these methods of data collection sufficiently neutral? Is there a less formalistic and more effective way to assess what people really think? Authors Munish Saini, Madanjit Singh, Manpreet Kaur and Manevpreet Kaur believe there is. In their article titled: "Analyzing the Tweets to Examine the Behavioral Response of Indian Citizens over the Approval of National Education Policy 2020," they rely on what respondents say about education policy when employing social media to communicate. Quite in contrast to the official view, they find that 'some of the Indian states show majorly negative emotions for the acceptance of policies in the new education system in the initial period of the National Education Policy. This opposition is demonstrated in the form of agitation and starting opposing hashtags on social networks'.

School children are often found to be victims of physical and oral insults from other school children. This tendency to bully may have an immediate negative impact on their psychological health. But does being the victim of bullying have long term effects? Authors Vanrong Liu and Feng Hu think that being a victim of bullying in childhood may have long term consequences on adult health. In their article titled: "Being

Bullied at School as a Child, Worse Health as an Adult? Evidence from China," they discover that 'victims are more likely to have low self-reported health, chronic diseases, physical functional limitations, and mental health problems even after several decades. The negative health consequences are more concentrated on the disadvantaged who come from low-income households or lack family support.'

Education systems struggle with the demands from teacher unions. Often there are multiple teacher unions, sometimes associated with political parties with divergent demands. These demands may lead to strikes in which schools are closed, sometimes for extended periods of time. The question is whether strikes have consequences for student learning. This question was explored by Luz Karime Abadia Alvarado, Silvia C. Gomez and Juanita Cifuentes Gonzalez. In their article titled: "The Effect of Teacher Strikes on Academic Achievement: Evidence from Colombia," they find that 'those students who have been exposed to more and longer strikes obtain on average, lower scores in math and reading and that students who were exposed to more strikes during secondary school score on average 41 % and 29 % of a standard deviation lower in math and reading.'

Two decades ago it was widely expected that the gap in educational outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa would increase dramatically as a result of the explosion of HIV-AIDS. Have these fears been realized? This question was investigated by Paul Bennell. In his article titled: "The Educational Attainment of Orphans in High HIV Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Update," he discovers that 'that while some orphans continue to be educationally disadvantaged in some countries, the overall size of already quite small orphan-non-orphan enrolment and educational attainment differentials have not significantly increased. The main reasons for this are the overall decline in the orphan population (due to the mass availability of life-prolonging anti-retroviral medication), free primary education, lower levels of absolute poverty, and targeted support of various kinds for orphans by governments and NGOs.'

Summary:

In some respects, international human capital targets have underestimated the requirements to achieve universal levels of literacy and social equality. On the other hand, there are new methods to anticipate what policy changes may be effective. There are also new methods to tap sources of data to make education policy evaluations more candid. It is true that teacher strikes may have detrimental effects on student achievement but some fears such as the gap between orphan and non-orphan achievement in Sub-Saharan Africa may not have been realized. However satisfying that may feel, it does not eliminate the fact that both orphan and non-orphan school performance in Sub-Saharan Africa is nowhere near what it should be.

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Stephen P. Heyneman
Vanderbilt University, International Education Policy, United States

E-mail address: s.heyne@vanderbilt.edu.