



Editorial

Introduction to Volume 87



ARTICLE SUMMARY

Volume 87 is full of both breadth and depth. Its twenty-three manuscripts fall into five groups – (i) the effects of COVID-19 on education, (ii) the pernicious education effects of authoritarian governments; (iii) the equality of opportunity; (iv) methodological innovations, and (v) topics which cannot be easily classified.

1. The effects of COVID-19 on education

In the summary article titled “Education Response to COVID-19 Pandemic: A Special Issue Proposed by UNICEF”, Nicolas Reuge and seven co-authors from UNICEF remind us that the pandemic disrupted primary and secondary schools for 90% of the world’s children. Many were placed at risk to becoming permanent drop-outs; all children fell behind in both learning and social development. Articles focus on the impact of school closures, learning loss, remote learning solutions, and notions of how to re-open differently and better. These manuscripts are accompanied by an article on COVID’s affect on higher education. In the article titled “Educating Students During a Pandemic in the Light of Research” authors S. Silwa, V Saiendo and M. Kowalski provide evidence from a single university showing that the COVID-19 delayed the completion of studies, lowered examination scores and raised the percentage of students who never completed studies.

2. Pernicious education effects of authoritarian governments

It is assumed that the provision of schooling is an attempt to provide access to new occupational opportunities and broaden the democratic participation of a nation’s citizens. But that is not always the case. Several articles in volume 87 remind us that schooling is like a tool; it can be used for good or for ill; and it can be provided not to raise occupational opportunity and democratic participation but to control them. In the article titled: “The Educational Intentions of the Islamic State Through its Textbooks,” authors O. Arvais, M. Buyere, C. Chamsine and M. Mahhou analyze textbooks produced by the Islamic State between 2014 and 2017 in Arabic, mathematics, science, geography, history and English. They find that each subject was used by the Islamic State to further its objectives through militarization, the ‘banalization’ of violence and the establishment of a single religious truth. The article includes recommendations for an effective strategy when approaching the education of children who have migrated from regions previously controlled by the Islamic State and children in detention who have experienced education under the Islamic State.

In their article titled: “‘Just Keep Silent’: Teaching Under the Control

of Authoritarian Governments (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia),” A. Weigele and C. Brandt describe the government’s use of mechanisms of surveillance and sanctioning to create a climate of fear and produce conformity to its political objectives.

Last in this group is the article by A. Sabic-El-Rayess titled: “How Do People Radicalize?” in which she describes how ordinary students, if they feel displaced by mainstream institutions, may be radicalized by a teacher using a ten-step process. This process can turn ordinary youth into a radicalized actor with a potential to engage in violent extremism.

3. The equality of opportunity

Three manuscripts approach this subject through the analysis of school infrastructure. In the article titled: “School Built Environment, Gender, and Student Achievement in Pakistan,” N. Khudadad and R. Michelson analyze the effects on academic achievement of electricity, fresh water and toilets. They find that access to all three have significant effects on achievement. The academic achievement of male students is more likely to be affected by access to electricity; female achievement to toilets and fresh water. In the article titled: “Understanding School Attendance: The Missing Link in ‘Schooling for all’”, authors M. Banerji and K. Mathur point out the fact that school enrollment (which is commonly monitored) and school attendance (which is not) are not at all the same and that enrollment figures may be misleading. They point to the many factors which influence attendance — family obligations, work, health status and the like. They conclude, however, by noting that the provision of infrastructure can be particularly effective means toward increasing attendance. Last in this group is an article by C. Omoeva, N. Cunha, and W. Moussa who discuss the macro issue of school infrastructure. They analyze the allocation of educational resources within and between educational systems to ascertain the implications for equity. They divide resources into categories of: (i) teacher quality; (ii) physical infrastructure and (iii) instructional environment and use Brazil to demonstrate the adaptability of their approach to contrast the availability of each category between low and high-needs schools.

Authors B. Arapa, E. Sanchez, A. Hurtado-Mazeyra, and A. Sanchez

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approach the topic of equality of opportunity by analyzing access to pre-school. In their article titled: "The Relationship Between Access to Pre-School Education and the Development of Social-Emotional Competencies: Longitudinal Evidence from Peru," they find that attendance at pre-school is associated with higher socio-emotional ability, high 'agency' scores and pride. For those who are able to begin pre-school at three or four years old, the relationship with 'agency' persists up to the age of 15.

Author L. Santibanez, J. Saavedra, R. Kattan and H. Patrinos approach the topic of equality of opportunity by analyzing the use of private schooling by low-income children. In their article titled: "Comprehensive Private Schooling for Low-Income Children: Experimental Case-Study Evidence from Mexico," the authors analyze the results of low-income children (chosen by random lottery) in private schools. The lottery winners gain an additional 0.18 SD (Standard Deviation) in literacy and an additional 0.09 SD in numeracy over a period of the first three years of primary school. Parents of the lottery winners are more likely to report that their children's schooling is academically demanding, rate the school higher, and have greater expectations for their children to complete college.¹

Also approaching the equality of opportunity is the article titled: "Socioeconomic Segregation Between and Within Curriculum Tracking," by M. Buitron and E. Trevino. Curriculum tracking (placement of students into different ability groupings) can have three different mechanisms: through different schools, through different classrooms or through differing groups within the same classroom. Buitron and Trevino compare the magnitude of socio-economic segregation between and within mechanisms. They conclude that the unequal distributions of pupil socio-economic status narrow when tracking takes place within schools, and lessen further when schools have incentives to focus on specific student populations.

4. Surprising lessons from innovative methods

Occasionally the importance of a manuscript's content is a product of the means by which it is acquired. Two manuscripts in volume 87 fit this description.

One is authored by M. Oketch, C. Rolleston and J. Rossiter titled: "Diagnosing the Learning Crisis: What Can Value-Added Analysis Tell Us." Value-added methods have been utilized to assess the quality of teaching and teachers on the grounds that teachers should be rewarded for the change in student achievement rather than evidence of current student achievement. This method of judging teacher quality has been criticized because there are many intervening influences which help determine achievement changes. However, in this study a very large value-added sample is used for diagnostic rather than accountability purposes. They discover that some schools and teachers are more successful in 'raising the floor' and narrowing the socio-economic dispersion of achievement while other schools and teachers are more successful at 'rising the roof' of achievement. Less effective teachers seem to be particularly ineffective in raising the roof while the most effective teachers seem to be effective at all levels of prior student performance. This suggests that value added methods may be of significant use in assessing large groups of teachers rather than assessing individual accountability of teachers.

In a second manuscript, authors D. Hernandez-Torrano, L. Karabassova, Z. Izekeonova and M. Courtney used metadata from 6754 publications indexed on the Web of Science Core Collection database between 1992 and 2020 to assess the trends in post-Soviet education research across the 15 independent republics of the former Soviet Union. This is quite an interesting and important undertaking. At the time of the

¹ They are also quick to point out that the gains are associated with an increase unit expenditure due to of the additional services available and fewer economies of scale.

breakup of the Soviet Union, the local scientific community was at vastly unequal stages of development. The physical and chemical sciences were world class; the social sciences were not. Because survey research had been considered threatening, social science research in 1990 was in its infancy. And as a field, research on education policy was virtually unknown (Heyneman, 1997, 1998, 2000).

This article tracks the quantity and country-by-country distribution of education publications and citations since that time. The authors conclude that the quantity has risen exponentially, but that the contribution to the international literature 'remains marginal'. In terms of the distribution, the quantity of education research is highest in the Russian Federation and Ukraine; the source of the largest citations however is Estonia, and with the exception of Kazakhstan, the area of least quantity and citations are the countries in Central Asia.²

5. Other contributions

There are manuscripts in volume 78 which make individual contributions outside of the groups mentioned above. Much attention has been placed on the provision of 'free' public education in Eastern Africa. While many development assistance agencies have congratulated the countries, some observers have argued that the free education policies have been faulty. Allowing children into classrooms without sufficient physical infrastructure or investments in faculty have lowered expenditures per/pupil. Quality has sunk so low that schools have to inaugurate fees to operate at all. As a result, many poor families now choose to send their children to low fee non-government schools (Oketch et al., 2010; Oketch and Rolleston, 2007; Abuya et al., 2013). Authors Samonova, Devine, Surgue, Capistrano, Sloan and Symonds argue that the problem of free education not being free may not be confined to Eastern Africa. In their article titled: "An Empty Bag Cannot Stand Upright: The Nature of Schooling Costs in Sierra Leone" they provide a detail analysis of the 'institutional factors' which drive the charges levied by schools in spite of the policies of 'free primary education'.

Because of the effects of civil conflict, HIV-AIDS and migration, many children have had to be fostered by other families. Questions remain as to how they fare with respect to education. In their article titled: "Child Fostering and the Educational Outcomes of Jamaican Children," E. Strobl, T. Bose-Duker, and M. Henry find that the effect of child fostering depends on whether the family is a recipient of a conditional cash transfer program in which the benefits are received in exchange for evidence of school attendance.

Unwanted pregnancy is a status experienced by many school children. The question is what happens once pregnancy occurs. Do the children leave school or are there are results possible? In their article titled: "Learner Pregnancy in South Africa in the Eastern Cape: The Factors Affecting Adolescent Girls and School Withdrawal During Pregnancy," J. Jocim, L. Cluver, and F. Meinck find that 25% of the pregnant girls withdrew from school but that school-based services are able to provide the support necessary for girls to remain in school throughout their pregnancy and so avoid having their life careers interrupted.

It is common to associate schooling with better employment. It is unusual, however, to make the opposite association – that employment is an influence on schooling. Nevertheless, in their article titled: "Educational Mobility Across Generations of Formally and Informally Employed: Evidence from Pakistan," authors S. Kishwar and K. Alam find that at lower levels of school completion the poverty of informal (non-salaried) employment persists across generations. They suggest that educational attainment and hence lessening poverty may depend upon changes in the labor market.

It is common to argue that university education will help generate higher returns than vocational training. However, P. Vandenberg and J.

² A comment on these finding can be found in the final section of this note.

Laranjo discover that those with vocational and university training had lower wages than those with only secondary school. The article titled: "Vocational Training and Labor Market Outcomes in the Philippines," this counter-intuitive result stems from the dual-level trainees who have been exposed only to the 'lowest level' of training.

The role of education law is a growing specialization of education policy. To some extent it reflects the greater tendency to use court decisions in the North American context. However, in the article titled: "The Role Played by Courts in Promoting Equal Educational Opportunity Reforms: New York and Sao Paulo Cases," written by A. Silveira it becomes clear that in Brazil courts have been used to systematically advance educational equity policies. The author points out, however, that using courts is higher in cost because it takes a long time to produce the desired effects.

It is common to observe that the educational influence of wealthy families is significant. It is often assumed that the advantage of having a wealthy family background was passed to the children through material advantages. A. Silva, J. Vautero and C. Ussene dispute this. In their article titled: "Family Influence of Academic Performance in Mozambican College Students," they find that academic goals and performance was more influenced by family informational support than through material resources.

Sexual harassment is a common problem in universities. But do students in countries governed by conservative religious authorities have similar experiences? In their article titled: "An Analysis of Sexual Harassment on Iranian Campuses," F. Rostami describes the results of her interviews with female students who report that professors led them into sexual relationships negatively affecting their educational futures and psychological well being.

There is no part of the world which is not adversely affected by the availability of fake and misleading information. Schools and students are affected by this as well. In response volume 78 contains an editorial titled: "Fake News, Fake Truth: A New Purpose for Public Schooling," in which it is argued that schools should institute a certificate of media literacy as one criterion of completion. Examples of media literacy tests are provided and suggestions as to what the effects of this policy might have on the trustworthiness of information used by school children. It is also suggested that a certificate of media literacy might be employed outside of education, as a criterion for applications to the civil service for instance or to enter the military.

6. Summary

One advantage of working in Comparative Education for more than

half a century is that it allows one an occasional perspective not available to others. This does not mean that the perspective is correct. It does mean that it may be different. About the impact of the articles in volume 87 here are two thoughts. About the impact of the pandemic on education: children in every country have missed school, and even those with adequate electronic resources have missed school. The world is now faced with a common problem of catch-up. This opens the gates to innovation in both delivery and curriculum content. In many instances these innovations will be broadly applicable across national borders and levels of socio-economic development. It is an arena in which the experience of how to truncate curriculum and pedagogy, for instance, may be found to be useful well outside the site of origin.

About the development of education research in the former Soviet Union: some might suggest that the low rate of citation is a sign of low quality; others might argue that it is the result of bias on the part of western and/or English dominated systems of counting research quality. It is neither. If one had seen the status of research 30 years ago, one can only marvel at how far and how fast it has developed. If the development in the next decade is as quick as it has been in the previous decade, my sense is that education systems in many parts of the world will utilize the products of comparative education research from the former Soviet Union.

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