

CELEBRATING
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programme

THE IMPACT INITIATIVE

For International Development Research



Photo: A girl walks to school in West Darfur, Sudan. Credit: © Jenny Matthews/Panos Pictures

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FOREWORD

Raising educational outcomes globally is key if we are to accomplish the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and ensure inclusive, equitable educational opportunities for all.

Since 2014, the ESRC-FCDO (formerly DFID) Strategic Partnership has commissioned world-class, cutting-edge social science research through the Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems (RLO) Research Programme to address complex questions concerning learning outcomes within education systems in Southern contexts.

This booklet celebrates the work by bringing together examples of how research within the RLO programme has promoted change in education policy and practice in diverse settings. While this selection only shows a snapshot of the portfolio, the examples demonstrate how social science research in this area can help us to translate evidence into

impact. The contributions draw on research by grantholders on the RLO programme that has been put together for policy audiences in collaboration with the Impact Initiative.

It is hoped that sharing this research evidence will provide policymakers and practitioners with concrete ideas on how to improve learning for all and that, in creating an exchange of relevant, accessible and diverse information, we can extend the reach of research to bring about transformation in attitudes and inspire change in development policy and practice.

- Professor Pauline Rose and Elizabeth Tofaris
Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre, University of Cambridge

The **ESRC-FCDO Strategic Partnership** is at the forefront of commissioning research with the specific aim of tying research with pathways to achieving impact. Through the Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research and Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme, the partnership aims to provide a robust conceptual and empirical basis for development, delivering economic and societal impact in developing countries.

ESRC define impact as “the demonstrable contribution that excellent social and economic research makes to society and the economy, of benefit to individuals, organisations and nations.”

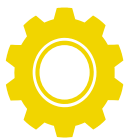
The Impact Initiative for international development research aims to increase the uptake and impact of research from these two research programmes.



Research jointly supported by the ESRC and FCDO

A GUIDE TO THE RESOURCES

This education pack profiles ESRC-FCDO research evidence presented for practitioners and policymakers. While this pack solely focuses on education, the Impact Initiative produces resources across many themes:



IMPACT STORIES provide 'easy access' to impact within the projects funded by the ESRC-FCDO Strategic Partnership, along with insights into how the research contributes to wider development issues.



RESEARCH FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE PAPERS provide a mechanism for presenting findings to development policymakers and practitioners from several projects with a shared theme. These papers inform discussion and influence debate on issues high on the development policy agenda.



POLICY BRIEFS & WORKING PAPERS provide expert analysis from the Impact Initiative. These papers aim to make research widely available and accessible to a range of non-academic audiences, and ensure its relevance is recognised by policy actors and practitioners.



OPINION PIECES (AKA PRESS CUTTINGS) are editorials written by researchers, often in partnership with NGOs and/or policymakers and published in media outlets to reach a policy and public audience. These pieces are opportunities to contribute and engage in broader and topical debate that is connected to the research projects.





CONTENTS

IMPACT STORIES

- P6. Improving Early Childhood Education In Rural Bangladesh
- P8. Improving Literacy Through Indigenous Languages In South Africa
- P10. Mother Tongue Education Improves Literacy in Uganda
- P12. Outsourcing Primary Education In Liberia Leads To Mixed Results
- P14. Reforming Higher Education Teaching Practices In Africa
- P16. Research on Children with Disabilities Influences Education Policy in Pakistan

RESEARCH FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE PAPERS

- P18. Disability and Education
- P23. Education Accountability Relationships Between Schools, Communities, and Government in India
- P27. Gender and Education
- P31. Quality Teaching

POLICY BRIEFS & WORKING PAPERS

- P36. Raising Learning Outcomes in Diverse Indian Contexts
- P40. Covid-19: Thinking Differently about Education Research Impact

OPINION PIECES (AKA PRESS CUTTINGS)

- P46. Project Syndicate Demystifying menstruation
- P46. New Statesman: Why tackling period poverty is an issue for everyone
- P47. Devex: We must commit to inclusive education for children with disabilities

IMPROVING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN RURAL BANGLADESH

Only 40 per cent of children in Bangladesh are enrolled in pre-primary education, with this figure estimated to be much lower in rural areas. Research led by Monash University, Australia, and supported by local partner the Global Development and Research Initiative (GDRI) Foundation, has evaluated whether introducing pre-schooling in remote rural communities in Bangladesh can help prepare children for primary school. By developing a set of policy interventions designed to improve children's educational outcomes, the research demonstrates how early childhood programmes could be effectively adapted for implementation at scale, using locally available resources and infrastructure.

THE CHALLENGE

Over the last decade, Bangladesh has made significant progress in expanding access to education, achieving near-universal primary school enrolment. However, more than half the children who complete primary education are unable to read, write or count to the expected level.

Although evidence has shown that early childhood education can improve school readiness by supporting children's language, literacy and numeracy skills, there is a notable lack of research on the impacts of investing in

low-cost early childhood and parenting programmes in low-income and lower-middle-income countries.

In Bangladesh, many parents, particularly those from rural areas, are unable either to send their child to pre-school or to support his/her development adequately at home. Innovative research from the ESRC-DFID study '[Investing in our future: the early childhood intervention and parental involvement in Bangladesh](#)' is making a valuable contribution to our understanding of low-cost pre-schooling in remote rural areas.



Photo: A young girl reads with her Early Primary Education (EPE) teacher in Bangladesh. Credit: GMB Akash/Panos Pictures.

THE RESEARCH



By combining elements from existing early childhood programmes, the researchers designed two low-cost interventions aimed at improving the school readiness of children in remote rural communities in Bangladesh.

The first intervention was a formal pre-school programme that provided early education to children for five days a week. Children were taught in groups of 15 by specially trained, locally recruited staff. The curriculum focused on developing cognitive, social and emotional abilities by developing language, basic numeracy, creativity, and problem-solving skills. The second intervention comprised a weekly home visit by teachers to caregivers to help enhance the learning environment within the home. These visits reflected the curriculum provided in the formal pre-school setting. Through the home visits, it was hoped that parents' attitudes and behaviour towards the development of their children, and their knowledge about it, would be optimised.

With the support of the GDRI Foundation, the interventions were carried out in 223 randomly selected rural villages in two districts (Khulna and Satkhira). Over two years, 7,000 children were assessed at the beginning of the programme, after one year, and at the end. As well as analysing the two separate interventions, the team also assessed the effectiveness of combining the pre-school programme with the home visits.

The results shed light on how effective traditional, formal pre-school settings were compared with a programme which nurtured at-home development. The evidence showed that although the home visits yielded positive results in the short-term, particularly regarding children's reading and verbal communication, traditional pre-school settings were associated with higher cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes, including literacy, numeracy, gross and fine motor skills, communication and problem-solving skills. Pre-schools were also more cost-effective.

According to survey results, parents felt more satisfied when their children were in nursery, and the findings indicated that children benefited from interaction with other children. One parent remarked:

 [In the nursery], my child learns new things every day – how to talk, queue up and respect others. At home, we can't teach these things. 

The research has made an important contribution to the understanding of low-cost pre-school education in remote rural areas, by demonstrating that interventions that involve helping parents support their children's

CREDITS



This impact story was written by Elizabeth Tofaris, REAL Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge in collaboration with Asadul Islam, Monash University, Australia.

learning cannot replace the traditional nursery-like set-up of a formal programme.

THE IMPACT

In Bangladesh, the research team established a national advisory committee consisting of early childhood experts, NGOs, government representatives and local researchers, to discuss how early childhood programmes can be effectively adapted for implementation at-scale in poor, rural areas.

One mother reported on the impact of the early years' provision:

 Parent-teacher meetings in the early years nursery school were very helpful. We got to know a lot about our child. We have never seen this kind of early years' initiative. 

Drawing on the tools they used to assess the cognitive and non-cognitive abilities of children, the research team are collaborating with BRAC to help traumatised Rohingya child refugees, to evaluate a play-based early childhood development programme. The team has provided support for curriculum development and helped build capacity by training Bangladeshi planners and researchers in the area of early childhood development, and enhancing their skills in the research methodology and analytical techniques of Random Control Trials used in the original research. As a result of this collaboration, the team are also working with BRAC international in Uganda and Tanzania on pre-school interventions using play-based curriculum.

Looking ahead, the team plan to conduct a follow-up study on the medium to longer-term effects of such interventions by assessing the children to understand what happens to them in primary school and whether the benefits (such as reading and writing ability) last longer than similar skills acquired by children who didn't access any form of pre-schooling.

FURTHER READING

[Bangladeshi Sangbad Sangstha \(2019\) 'Workshop on early childhood intervention held'. \(3 December\) \(accessed July 2020\)](#)



Investing in our future: the early childhood intervention and parental involvement in Bangladesh

The research team was funded by the ESRC-DFID Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme led by Asadul Islam, Monash University, Australia. The research was carried out in partnership with John List (University of Chicago), Anya Samek (University of Southern California), Steven Stillman (Free University of Bozen-Bolzano), Ummul Ruthbah (University of Dhaka), the Global Development and Research Initiative (GDRI) and BRAC.

IMPROVING LITERACY THROUGH INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN SOUTH AFRICA

To better understand early grade reading in African languages, a multi-disciplinary team of researchers from Stellenbosch University, the University of Cape Town, the University of South Africa and Funda Wandé, together with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa, are working towards a deeper understanding of higher reading gains in English and three African languages.

THE CHALLENGE

In South African primary schools, more than three quarters of nine to ten year-olds fail to reach the expected benchmarks in reading. Despite the high proportion of children learning to read in their mother tongue, there is little research on African language reading. This research is contributing to the development of national reading benchmarks in indigenous languages, leading to deeper understanding of how proficiency in African languages can contribute to improved literacy.

THE RESEARCH

The 'Leadership for Literacy' project was a two-year (2016–18) mixed-method study that used a combination of case study research and longitudinal data from 60 schools. It aimed to understand the development of early reading skills and how these

enable comprehension, what factors underpin success, and how it is similar or different across languages.

Specifically, the team looked at the factors associated with higher reading gains in English and three common African languages (isiZulu, Northern Sotho and Xitsonga) of 756 grade 3 students and 656 grade 6 students in outstanding and low-performing township and rural schools in the provinces of Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo.

The team found that many of the children were not reaching basic levels of reading proficiency. Despite poor reading outcomes, the study showed that instruction in the teaching of reading generally received little attention from leadership and managers; was under-prioritised in professional development; and teachers were unaware of how



Photo: South Africa. Children reading in class. Credit: Chris Sattlberger/Panos Pictures.

poorly children could read. Using these results, the team was able to establish tentative benchmarks in the three South African languages.

It was clear that grade 3 children were not reaching well-established norms regarding English: by the end of the academic year, half of the study sample were reading less than 34 words correct per minute (WCPM). By comparison, children in the USA are expected to read 110 WCPM by the end of grade 3. However, these English benchmarks could not be used for African languages because the language structures are very different. Instead, learner scores on the comprehension questions associated with African language texts were used to develop benchmarks for each of the languages. According to the relevant benchmarks, it was found that less than 9 per cent of the Northern Sotho sample and less than 39 per cent of the isiZulu sample were reading at the basic reading level. More work is needed to validate the accuracy of the benchmarks, and to expand to other grades and languages.

THE IMPACT

Together with earlier work undertaken by the team, the research has contributed to an increased focus at a national level on working towards benchmarks and incremental early learning targets for improvement.

On 20 June 2019, President Cyril Ramaphosa included reading for meaning in the early grades as one of the five strategic areas for South Africa to focus on in his State of the Nation Address:



Let us agree, as a nation and as a people united in our aspirations, that within the next ten years we will have made progress in tackling poverty, inequality and unemployment, where... our schools will have better educational outcomes and every ten-year-old will be able to read for meaning.

This goal was adopted partly in response to priority policy recommendations submitted by the project team, which profiled the importance of addressing reading in schools. In an earlier study, the team synthesised a large body of evidence on the binding constraints to education improvement, and the findings were presented to President Ramaphosa, highlighting that reading for meaning should become a clear priority goal for South Africa. Furthermore, the team consulted on 'The Early Grade Reading Study', led by the DBE in South Africa and funded by USAID, which further strengthened the call to scale up teacher coaching in African language reading instruction to improve reading outcomes.

Further building on the body of work, the DBE has initiated collaborations across academia, funders, and

CREDITS

This impact story was written by Elizabeth Tofaris, REAL Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge in collaboration with Gabrielle Wills, Stellenbosch University.

organisations (such as UNICEF, Zenex Foundation, and USAID) to develop norms and benchmarks in different African languages using existing data sets while planning for larger data collection processes to further aid this process. This comes at a time when 'reading for meaning' (a strategy to help children understand – and care – about what they read) is being profiled as a national priority for the first time in post-apartheid South Africa.

Nompumelelo Mohohlwane, Deputy Director for Research, Monitoring and Evaluation at the DBE said:



In the absence of established reading benchmarks in the African languages, it is very difficult for the education system to identify learners at risk for reading failure during the foundation phase. It is also very difficult to set clearly articulated, realistic expectations for teachers to know the reading levels learners should attain by the end of each grade. This research is helping the Department of Basic Education initiate efforts to develop reading benchmarks in collaboration with a broad range of partners and funders.

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Taylor, N.; Wills, G. and Hoadley, U. (2019) *Addressing the "Leadership Conundrum" through a Mixed Methods Study of School Leadership for Literacy*. *Research in Comparative and International Education* 14.1



Succeeding Against the Odds: Understanding Resilience and Exceptionalism in High-Functioning Township and Rural Primary Schools in South Africa

The research team was funded by ESRC-DFID's Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme, led by Principal Investigator Professor Servaas Van Der Berg, Stellenbosch University (SU), together with Gabrielle Wills (SU), Nic Spaull (SU, Funda Wande), Nick Taylor (JET Education Services), Ursula Hoadley and Jaamia Galant (both University of Cape Town), Nompumelelo Mohohlwane (Department of Basic Education), David Carel (SU), Elizabeth Pretorius (University of South Africa), and Francine De Clerq (University of Witwatersrand).

MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION IMPROVES LITERACY IN UGANDA

Children whose first language is not the language of instruction in school are more likely to drop out or fail in early grades. Research from the Universities of Illinois and their Ugandan partners Mango Tree Educational Enterprises and the Ichuli Institute, Kampala, demonstrates that the provision of teacher support and educational resources produced in local languages can lead to large learning gains in rural, under-resourced and overcrowded classrooms.

THE CHALLENGE

In Uganda, as in many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, access to primary school has expanded rapidly over recent decades. However, these gains have not been matched by improvements in learning, especially in literacy. In the Lango region of northern Uganda, 80 per cent of children aged 7–8 years are unable to read.

Previous research has shown that a child's first language is preferable for literacy and learning throughout primary school. Children who receive mother tongue-based multilingual education also perform better in their second language. However, in

the Lango region, reading is usually taught in English, and not in the local language, Leblango.

National efforts to promote mother tongue education policies have been largely unsuccessful due to underdeveloped rules for the writing and spelling of local words, a lack of education materials produced in local languages, and the absence of quality training to support teachers to deliver local-language curriculums.

THE RESEARCH

Funded through the ESRC-DFID Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme, the aim of the research was to evaluate and measure



Photo: Uganda Kampangi, Rakai. A pupil holds up their hand to ask a question at St. Henry's school where about 410 students between the ages of 6 and 16 are enrolled. **Credit:** Mikkel Ostergaard / Panos.



Cover photo: Tororo, Uganda: A boy giggles during a presentation on menstrual hygiene management at Agwait Primary School.
Credit: Nyani Quarmyne/Panos.

the effectiveness of the innovative Mango Tree Literacy Programme in Uganda which seeks to emphasise mother tongue literacy education.

The programme engages indigenous writers, artists, designers and technical experts, as well as teachers, to co-develop education materials in local languages. Teacher training has an explicit focus on improving written and spoken language skills, and parents are taught how to interpret their child's literacy report card and use the results to support learning at home.

A randomised control trial of the programme took place in 128 schools in the Lango region over four years (2013–17). The researchers found that Mango Tree's approach succeeded in substantially improving literacy levels in early primary school grades, raising literacy levels equivalent to a whole additional year of schooling – amongst the largest improvements ever achieved for randomised education interventions of this kind.

THE IMPACT

Results from the research have reinforced the benefits of Mango Tree's approach to literacy instruction. Thanks to Mango Tree's role in the research process, a project team member is part of a national literacy technical working group advising the government on successful approaches to improving literacy instruction and teacher training and support.

The research findings have also influenced a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) White Paper on approaches to improving literacy instruction in Uganda. Heidi Soule, USAID Uganda Education, Youth and Child Development

CREDITS

This impact story was written by Elizabeth Tofaris, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, in collaboration with Rebecca Thornton, University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, USA

Advisor reported that 'Without this research, the local language development component would not have been included in the White Paper.' The paper will be incorporated into a national reflection and dialogue about the future of literacy programming at an upcoming USAID-sponsored National Reading Symposium where participants, including prominent Ministry of Education officials, parliamentarians, practitioners, and non-governmental organisation leaders will vote on priorities for future national education programming in Uganda.

Not only has the project stimulated a passion for local language literacy and a love for reading in local language in homes, communities, and schools, but the impact of the research has contributed to knowledge about successful approaches to teacher training and effective instructional materials in Uganda, which have the potential to transform learning in all low-income contexts.

FURTHER READING

Kerwin, Jason and Thornton, Rebecca L., Making the Grade: The Sensitivity of Education Program Effectiveness to Input Choices and Outcome Measures (January 30, 2018). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3002723> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3002723>



The Literacy Laboratory Project (LLP) under the Northern Uganda Literacy Program

The research team was funded by ESRC-DFID's Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme, led by Rebecca Thornton, Department of Economics, University of Illinois. The research was carried out in partnership with the University of Minnesota, the University of Wisconsin, the Copenhagen Business School, Mango Tree Educational Enterprises, and the Ichuli Institute.

OUTSOURCING PRIMARY EDUCATION IN LIBERIA LEADS TO MIXED RESULTS

The long-lasting effects of a 14-year civil war, compounded by school closures caused by the 2014 Ebola outbreak, have had a huge impact on Liberia's education system. In early 2016, the Liberian Ministry of Education announced that it would contract the operation of some government primary schools out to private companies. Researchers working with Innovations for Poverty Action examined the effects of these new partnerships and looked at how the schools deliver (or fail to deliver) better outcomes.

THE CHALLENGE

Liberia has one of the world's highest amounts of out-of-school children, with an estimated 15 to 20 per cent of 6–14-year-olds not attending school. Only 54 per cent of children complete primary education.

Faced with these statistics, in 2016, the Liberian government outsourced the management of 93 randomly selected state schools, covering 8.6 per cent of all state school students. These schools remain under public ownership, charge no fees, and are staffed by state school teachers, but each school is managed by one of eight private contractors (three for-profit companies and five charities). While originally prompted by the government's desire to improve test scores, the initiative has been dogged by the expulsion of students, an alleged cover-up of sexual abuse, and cost overruns.

THE RESEARCH

Over three years, the project, [Partnership schools for Liberia: impact on accountability mechanisms and education outcomes](#) examined the effect of the new

Liberian Education Advancement Program (originally known as Partnership Schools for Liberia) by comparing the 93 schools whose management has been delegated to private operators to 92 control schools under government management. The randomised field experiment collected data at three points between 2016 and 2019, via student tests and in-depth surveys with teachers.

The research found that after three years, outsourcing the management of state schools to private providers raised test scores by 0.21 standard deviations in maths (equivalent to about 0.7 extra years of schooling) and 0.16 standard deviations in English (equivalent to four words per minute additional reading fluency for the cohort that started in first grade). Beyond learning gains, the programme reduced corporal punishment by 4.6 per cent, but it increased school drop-out rates by 3.3 per cent and failed to reduce self-reported sexual abuse at schools.

Crucially, the results varied by provider: some generated uniformly positive results, while in other cases, there were stark trade-offs between learning



Photo: Pupils in class in Liberia. Credit: Giacomo Pirozzi/Panos Pictures.

gains and extra-curricular outcomes, suggesting that the identity of private contractors matters for the performance of these public-private partnerships.

The research found that when government capacity to monitor performance and enforce contracts is weak – as in the case of Liberia – selecting private providers who are aligned with the public interest, and disinclined to exploit contractual incompleteness, may be important for the success of outsourcing.

THE IMPACT

After one year, the preliminary results of the impact evaluation were presented to the then Liberian President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and her cabinet. As a result, provider contracts were amended to prevent some of the failures that had been identified early on during the 2016/17 academic year. Changes included setting standard contracts for all providers. However, even providers who had presided over serious failings were rewarded with contracts to manage more schools when the programme expanded in 2017 (e.g., Stella Maris, Bridge International Academies, and More than Me, respectively).

The results were discussed in March 2018 as part of the report on DFID’s programme ‘Leaving No One Behind in Education’ produced by the UK’s International Development Committee. The aim of this report was to inform DFID’s work on education and, in particular, its work in Liberia and its investment in one of the contracted organisations: Bridge International Academies (a for-profit chain of low-cost private schools which rely on technology and scripted lessons). Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP told the Committee:

Bridge Academies added hundreds of dollars extra to educate each child from external money, meaning that no Government in the developing world would be able to sustain that level of investment if the schools returned to the Government... That study means that the Department for International Development needs to relook at its involvement with Bridge Academies and other providers and consider value for money.

Following the hearing, the Committee suggested DFID re-consider its working relationship with Bridge Academies, stating that the results of the pilot and the sustainability of Bridge’s work in Liberia should be taken into consideration by the Department when assessing its support for Bridge elsewhere.

The results have been widely discussed in mainstream media such as Devex, The Economist and Quartz, with findings being used both by proponents of these types of partnerships, and by detractors. For example, Bridge International Academies has proclaimed the

CREDITS

This impact story was written by Elizabeth Tofaris, REAL Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge with support from Mauricio Romero, Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México.

Liberia experience to be a complete success, citing the results on learning gains. On the other hand, Action Aid and Education International contend that the results indicate failure, citing increased drop-out rates and the high cost of some providers.

Despite impressive results demonstrated by non-profit providers like Street Child (that produced positive learning gains similar to the other, better-known chains, but did so at much lower cost, and with no negative effects), for-profits seem to have generated the most interest from philanthropies and impact investors. Andrew G. Tehmeh, Country Director of Street Child of Liberia explained:

It sends a different message that as a local NGO striving to provide quality learning at very low-cost to the most vulnerable children in Liberia, for-profit organisations are being favoured by large philanthropic organisations. One would think the organisation that performs better would triumph in terms of funding support. Philanthropies need to give their unwavering support to institutions like us that are going to highs and lows to strengthen an education system that is already facing grave challenges.

In other countries where similar public-private partnership approaches are being considered (e.g., Sierra Leone), the results are being used to inform policy discussions.

Looking ahead, the research team hope the Ministry of Education will use the results to improve the programme so that providers which perform well in various dimensions – not just test scores, but also access to education, sustainability, and child safety – are rewarded with more contracts, while providers who underperform have their contracts terminated.

FURTHER READING

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Romero, Mauricio, Sandefur, Justin and Sandholtz, Wayne (2018) ‘Partnership Schools for Liberia’, <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/5OPIYU>, Harvard Dataverse V4



Partnership schools for Liberia: impact on accountability mechanisms and education outcomes.

The research team was funded by the ESRC-DFID Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme led by Justin Sandefur (Center for Global Development). The research was carried out in partnership with Mauricio Romero (ITAM), Wayne Sandholtz (Nova SBE), and Innovations for Poverty Action.

REFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING PRACTICES IN AFRICA

Critical thinking – the process of questioning and learning with an open mind – is considered one of the most important outcomes of a contemporary university education, a crucial skill for graduate participation in the global ‘knowledge economy’. Thanks to innovative research from University College London, UK together with researchers from the University of Botswana, the University of Cape Coast in Ghana, and Strathmore University in Kenya, universities across sub-Saharan Africa are now making changes to their teaching practices to support the development of their students’ critical thinking skills.

THE CHALLENGE

The new development challenges facing countries in sub-Saharan Africa – and elsewhere – call for individuals with demonstrable critical thinking skills. However, despite a large body of literature looking at ways in which academic experiences at university can positively influence the development of student critical thinking skills, current evidence rests largely on research conducted in the USA, UK, and Australia. There is a noticeable lack of research and evidence to inform these debates in the African context.

THE RESEARCH

The ‘Pedagogies for Critical Thinking: Innovation and Outcomes in African Higher Education’ project examined the impact of teaching reforms in 14 universities across Botswana, Ghana, and Kenya. Using a mixed methods approach (a longitudinal study of student ‘gains’ in critical thinking over a two-year period and a qualitative investigation of the teaching and learning environment), researchers wanted to understand how different teaching styles affected the development of critical thinking skills,



Photo: A group of students sit together outside a University in Botswana. Credit: Marc Shoul/Panos Pictures.

and how universities in Africa respond to processes of pedagogical change.

Measuring critical thinking skills using an adapted version of the ‘Collegiate Learning Assessment’ (a test undertaken by students at the start of their undergraduate course and then another two years later), the study found that three universities in particular supported significant improvements in the critical thinking skills of their students. They were found to have:

- Enabled a shared teaching culture in which faculty members privileged independent student learning;
- Created a learning environment in which students were exposed to a variety of viewpoints and perspectives;
- Ensured critical thinking was a required skill across the curriculum;
- Created a culture of pedagogical improvement, providing regular ongoing development for teaching staff;
- Restructured assessment formats so as to better align with teaching approaches; and
- Provided teaching staff with sufficient time to discuss and improve their practices, in order to foster pedagogical change.

THE IMPACT

Following the dissemination of research in all three countries, many of the participating universities are considering ways to reform their teaching practices and processes to better prepare lecturers in the skill of fostering critical thinking.

In Kenya, the Commission for University Education has now incorporated critical thinking into its national work and is supporting universities in adapting their curricula. Mwenda Ntarangwi, CEO, explained:

This research has supported one of the bold moves taken [by the Government of Kenya] to introduce a competence-based curriculum that aims at producing students with requisite skills and competencies that meet the needs of a changing society propelled by a knowledge economy. [It is] particularly useful for supporting this change where learning is herewith active and interactive as the learner takes on a larger role in the process of learning as the teacher’s role increasingly becomes facilitative. These critical thinking skills are a must for all Kenyan students, not just a preserve of a few who may have access to select institutions.

CREDITS

This impact story was written by Elizabeth Tofaris, REAL Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge in collaboration with Tristan McCowan, University College London, UK and Rebecca Schendel, University College London, UK and Boston College, USA.

Some Kenyan universities have also explicitly prioritised critical thinking within institutional structures. For example, one private university in Nairobi has recently adopted critical thinking as a key dimension in its curricular review at an institutional level, while another is incorporating aspects of critical thinking into its staff development programme.

In Botswana, the project inspired one participating university to organise a seminar for faculty and staff that focused on the importance of critical thinking skills for employment. Another institution is preparing to overhaul its process for evaluating teaching quality (a critical component of the academic promotions policy), to better support the kinds of institutional characteristics highlighted by the study.

In Ghana, there is evidence that lecturers at the public universities involved in the study have embedded critical thinking into their teaching approaches since the research took place. However, in some cases the success of these innovations is restricted by large class sizes, indicating that systemic change across the university system is needed.

The ‘Pedagogies for Critical Thinking’ research has shown the success of infusing critical thinking across the curriculum. It is providing an important evidence-based contribution to a critically overlooked aspect of university quality in the region.

FURTHER READING

Rolleston, C.; Schendel, R. and Grijalva Espinosa, A.M. (2019) ‘Assessing “Approaches to Learning” in Botswana, Ghana and Kenya’, *Research in Comparative and International Education* 14.1: 118–140

Schendel, R.; McCowan, T.; Rolleston, C.; Tabulawa, R.; Adu-Yeboah, C. and Omingo, M. (2019) *Pedagogies for Critical Thinking: Implications of Project Findings for Higher Education Policies and Practices in Ghana, Kenya and Botswana*. London: University College London (UCL) Institutional Research Information Service (IRIS)



Pedagogies for Critical Thinking: Innovation and Outcomes in African Higher Education

The research team was funded by the ESRC-DFID Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme led by Tristan McCowan (University College London, UK) and Rebecca Schendel (University College London, UK and Boston College, USA). The research was carried out in partnership with Caine Rolleston (University College London, UK); Richard Tabulawa (University of Botswana); Christine Adu-Yeboah (University of Cape Coast, Ghana) and Mary Omingo (Strathmore University, Kenya).

RESEARCH ON CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES INFLUENCES EDUCATION POLICY IN PAKISTAN

Children who face multiple disadvantages including those related to disability are among those least likely to be learning. Using large-scale household data together with qualitative data from classrooms in rural Pakistan, researchers from the University of Cambridge, UK and the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS), Pakistan have gained a picture of how many children with disabilities attend school, and what factors affect their learning. This research is shaping key policy debates on education, inclusion and disability.

THE CHALLENGE

In 2010, the Parliament of Pakistan added Article 25A to the Constitution, which promises 'free and compulsory education' to all 5–16 year-olds. Since then, there has been steady progress in more children attending school. However, little was known about whether children with disabilities have benefited from this expansion, and if those making it into school are learning.

Furthermore, there is an uncoordinated approach to providing support to schools and teachers for children

with disabilities who are in mainstream schools. A separate Department of Special Education responsible for the education of children with disabilities has been insufficiently connected with the School Education Department that supports government schools.

THE RESEARCH

In 2014, the ESRC-DFID-funded Teaching Effectively All Children (TEACh) project assessed around 1,600 children aged 8–12 years in rural Central Punjab on literacy and numeracy skills. The researchers combined the Child Functioning Questions developed



Cover photo: Punjab, Pakistan. A pupil practices her English at a government primary school in the remote Panchkasi village.
© Zackary Canepari/Panos Pictures.

by the [Washington Group for Disability Statistics](#) with data on children's enrolment patterns and assessed their learning. In addition, information was collected from households on other characteristics, such as poverty and gender.

By gathering large-scale data, the researchers were able to gain a fuller picture of the prevalence of disability in Pakistan: around 10 per cent of children had some form of disability, much higher than previous estimates. A large proportion of children with disabilities were in mainstream (both government and private) schools, with around three quarters of those with moderate-to-severe disabilities in school in the sample. More boys than girls with disabilities were in school.

While some children with disabilities were benefiting from access to schooling, the data also showed that their learning outcomes in both literacy and numeracy were, on average, lower compared to children without disabilities. The findings highlight that the conditions of schooling are not enabling children with disabilities to achieve their potential.

THE IMPACT

The TEACH project has shown that it is feasible to use internationally recognised and standardised questions to understand the schooling experiences of children with disabilities. And, by demonstrating that children with disabilities *are* in mainstream schools, the research is providing valuable new evidence on the types of strategies governments must adopt to support them in the classroom.

Recognising that better data is needed to identify children with disabilities in national surveys for more effective planning, Edward Davis, former DFID Pakistan Education Policy Team Leader, said: 'The research has been influential in training Punjab Special Education Departments on how to use the Washington Group child functioning survey tools.'

The research highlighted the need for better data on children with disabilities as well as improved links between different educational departments.

Drawing on TEACH findings, team member Dr Faisal Bari of IDEAS Pakistan provided expertise in 2018 for the Lahore High Court on a case about the rights of children with disabilities. He was also invited to be a member of a Child Care Commission tasked with writing a report on the status of children with disabilities, which included the research evidence and has since been submitted to the High Court.

CREDITS

This impact story was written by Elizabeth Tofaris, REAL Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge in collaboration with Dr Faisal Bari and Dr Rabea Malik, Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS).

Furthermore, the research team has been asked by the School Education Department to provide input on a new inclusive education policy and, according to its Special Secretary, Imran Baloch, the research findings are set to influence future education policies: 'Many of those with special needs who are enrolled in government schools don't receive the support they need to participate in appropriate educational activities. These [TEACH] findings are vital in helping to shape and inform Pakistan's new inclusive education policy – including helping to ensure that we can equip teachers to support children with diverse needs.'

Beyond Pakistan, findings from the project informed preparations for the [Global Disability Summit](#) held in London in July 2018. In collaboration with stakeholders from bilateral and multilateral agencies and international non-governmental organisations, the research contributed to a [Statement of Action on Inclusive Education](#), which informed the Summit's messages on the importance of better evidence and data to inform policy and practice on inclusive education.

FURTHER READING

[Bari, F. \(2018\) 'Ensuring Inclusion', *Dawn*, 10 August](#)

[Bari, F.; Malik, R.; Rose, P. and Singal, N. \(2018\) *Identifying Disability in Household Surveys: Evidence on Education Access and Learning for Children with Disabilities in Pakistan*, Policy Paper 18/1, REAL Centre, University of Cambridge](#)

[Malik, R. \(2016\) 'Education's Missing Priorities', *Dawn*, 17 September](#)

[Singal, N. \(2018\) *Disability and Data: Need for Numbers and Narratives*, Washington Group on Disability Statistics blog, 1 August](#)

The Impact Initiative (ed.) (2017). [Disability and Education, ESRC-DFID Research for Policy and Practice](#). 2017. Brighton, IDS.



Project title: Teaching Effectively All Children (TEACH) in India and Pakistan

The research team was funded by ESRC-DFID's Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme, led by Principal Investigator Professor Pauline Rose, together with Dr Nidhi Singal and Professor Anna Vignoles, Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre, University of Cambridge. In Pakistan, the research was carried out in partnership with the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS), led by Dr Faisal Bari and Dr Rabea Malik.

Disability and education

Foreword

Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to ensure that no one should be left behind in education. Having been completely left out of the Millennium Development Goals, disability rights activists advocated for a disability inclusive framework for sustainable development – drawing on increasingly available research to inform this advocacy.

Despite efforts by governments, policymakers and practitioners to ensure inclusive quality education for all learners, disability continues to be one of the primary causes of educational exclusion. We still lack the full picture of why girls and boys with disabilities are more likely to drop out of education and what methods may support their learning processes.

Disability rights activists depend on research-based evidence to shape advocacy and influence education policymakers to develop effective responses. We need research on how children with disabilities learn and thrive from early childhood and how to ensure a foundation for higher learning and employment. We need a nuanced and contextualised picture of challenges and good practices to fill the knowledge gaps.

This collection of ESRC-DFID funded research provides valuable new evidence on what governments must consider in order to ensure that children with disabilities benefit from quality education without discrimination or exclusion. This research contains excellent, globally relevant and contextually grounded evidence of how the education sector can plan and design policies with a lasting impact for children with disabilities. It highlights the value of a study led by deaf researchers in India; explores school-readiness in Malawi; offers greater understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by children with disabilities within the classroom across six countries; and advances strategies on how to support the learning and teaching of children facing multiple disadvantages, including disabilities, in India and Pakistan.

Collectively, the research also highlights how to use available tools to identify children with disabilities in national surveys in ways that can inform planning while avoiding stigmatising families and children with disabilities. The research should be promoted by all disability rights advocates and read by all planners aiming to implement Sustainable Development Goal.

However, we still need to know and understand more. The World Bank's 2018 World Development Report highlights how girls with disabilities are more likely to drop out of school than their male peers; how the issue of intersectionality between disability and other forms of disadvantage is still poorly documented; and how too many girls with disabilities leave school without basic literacy and numeracy skills. As the clock ticks towards 2030, evidence is urgently needed on how to tackle these challenges.

We must keep our promise to *all* girls and boys who are left behind and respond to the needs of all learners.

Trine Cecilie Riis-Hansen
Head of Advocacy and Policy
PLAN International Norway

Key messages

- Adopt collaborative approaches to working with beneficiaries, partners and stakeholders – including people with disabilities as research partners.
- Adopt a more holistic approach to addressing educational exclusion of children with disabilities, focusing on intersecting disadvantage associated with factors such as poverty and gender.
- Collect data that identifies children with disabilities in household- and school-based surveys to track their progress in learning and access.
- Recognising that children with disabilities are increasingly in mainstream schools, identify and adopt strategies that support them in the classroom and tackle discrimination they may face.

Improving literacy for sign language users in India

Deaf learners have piloted a systemic innovation that could transform learning and literacy for India's estimated 2.5 million sign language users. The country has one of the world's largest deaf communities, yet there is a critical shortage of teachers with sign language skills.

India has several hundred schools for the deaf, generally staffed by teachers without Indian Sign Language skills. A large majority of deaf children, particularly in rural areas, cannot access these schools.

'Peer to Peer Deaf Literacy' was a one-year pilot study looking at new ways of teaching literacy to deaf learners in India. Led by the University of Central Lancashire in collaboration with Lancaster University, deaf organisations and the National Institute of Speech and Hearing in India, the project drew on deaf people's own resources. Its curriculum tackled real-life needs while peer-guided teaching combined online and in-class learning.



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Piloted with 43 young deaf adult learners, the programme was implemented in the virtual learning environment 'Sign Language to English by the Deaf' (SLEND). It used texts such as bank forms to expose learners to key everyday words and expressions. The classes and lab sessions ran five times a week for six months.

SEE ALSO:

Ahereza, N.; Nyarko, M.; Fan, H.R.; Gillen, J. and Zeshan, U. (2016) 'SLEND Sign Language to English by the Deaf: literacy development with Deaf communities using sign language, peer tuition, and learner-generated online content', in U.I. Ogbonnaya and S. Simelane-Mnisi (eds), Proceedings of the South Africa International Conference on Educational Technologies

Gillen, J.; Panda, S.; Papen, U. and Zeshan, U. (2016) 'Peer to Peer Deaf Literacy: Working with young deaf people and peer tutors in India', *Language and Language Teaching* 5, 2.10: 1-7

Zeshan, U.; Fan, H.R.; Gillen, J.; Panda, S.; Papen, U.; Tusting, K.; Waller, D. and Webster, J. (2016) Summary Report on 'Literacy development with deaf communities using sign language, peer tuition, and learner-generated online content: sustainable educational innovation', Preston: University of Central Lancashire.

Bhattacharya, T.; Fan, H.R.; Gillen, J.; Mathew, S.; Panda, S.; Papen, U.; Randhawa, S.; Tusting, K.; Waller, D.; Webster, J. and Zeshan, U. (2017) Policy Report on 'Peer to Peer Deaf Literacy' (P2PDL), Preston: University of Central Lancashire.

At the end of the pilot, there was clear potential for improving English literacy learning for young deaf adults previously marginalised in their access to education. The learners, who were evaluated in pre and post-tests, made significant gains in their written English.

Success was largely attributed to the project's participatory nature. The entire Indian team consisted of deaf people. Deaf people's knowledge and skill base were recognised and validated. The project sparked huge interest, particularly online, with more than 12,000 online views of the research skills workshop with deaf learners.

In consultation with the Rehabilitation Council of India, a curriculum for a one-year training programme for 'language and literacy trainers' has been agreed, to include work with both young deaf adults and deaf children in formal education. The Council expressed willingness to accredit this new qualification – which would be the first time that deaf people specifically benefit from an accredited qualification in India's special education sector. The accreditation would pave the way for sign language-based literacy education to be rolled out more widely.

This peer-led project helps address the huge resource gap of trained teachers who are fluent in Indian Sign Language. By proposing that educational changes are best driven from within deaf communities, underpinned by digital and mobile learning and teaching, the project highlights the potential for a cost-effective, adaptable solution, leading to greatly enhanced class-based and individual learning. The next phase will see the project rolled out in Ghana and Uganda, with possible trials in Nepal and Rwanda.



Project title: Literacy development with deaf communities using sign language, peer tuition and learner-generated online content: sustainable educational innovation

Principal Investigator: Professor Ulrike Zeshan

Director, International Institute for sign languages and deaf studies
School of Language and Global Studies, University of Central Lancashire, UK

BLOG POSTS:

[Zeshan, U. \(2016\) 'Interest in deaf-led research soars', October, Islands Centre](#)

[Zeshan, U. \(2016\) 'Thanks to Chinese partners for special visit and discussions on deaf literacy', August, Islands Centre](#)

[Zeshan, U. \(2016\) 'Indian signers build skills at islands deaf-led research week', August, Islands Centre](#)

Prioritising early childhood development and disability in Malawi

By working collaboratively with local community groups and other key stakeholders, researchers from the University of Birmingham, Sightsavers and the University of Malawi are examining factors that could be preventing young children with disabilities from participating in early childhood development programmes in rural Malawi.

Despite its relatively small population (of approximately 16 million), Malawi has potentially up to 192,000 children living with disabilities. Malawi's government prioritised early childhood development (ECD) and education for all children as part of its Growth and Development Strategy II (2012–16). Currently, however, the government and service providers in Malawi are struggling to provide ECD volunteer caregivers with appropriate training on disability and inclusion.

High-quality ECD programmes benefit children's development, life experiences and life chances. Children with disabilities often need support and guidance on practical skills required for their daily environment, and yet education systems still expect them to comply with traditional rules, routines and syllabuses. Are systems failing to adequately support and prepare young children with disabilities for primary education?

Tikule Limodze (Let's Grow Together) is a three-year mixed method study examining the role of ECD pre-school caregivers in supporting children with disabilities in community-based early childhood centres in a rural district of southern Malawi. The study is conducted by the University of Birmingham, with UK-based partners (Sightsavers, Anthrologica, University of Liverpool); Arizona State University in the US; as well as Chancellor College, University of Malawi, the Association of Early Childhood Development in Malawi and the Government of Malawi.

To assess 'school-readiness' skills, the research team developed a curriculum-focused assessment scale based on the Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) developed by UNICEF and the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare in Malawi (2015). They collected data from 920 children in 48 community-based childcare centres, focusing on 'language, literacy and communication' (including emergent reading skills and the ability to communicate effectively) and 'mathematical and numerical knowledge', key areas of the ECD curriculum.

It quickly became apparent during baseline assessments that many of the children aged three to five were unable to perform even the most basic tasks such as holding a book correctly. The assessment also tested a child's ability to talk about pictures in books. As children are not evolutionarily primed to respond to reading, passing these tasks relies on having prior exposure to print, pictures and books. Very few community-based childcare centres (CBCCs) had access to any reading materials. Without these, the centres are unable to help children and families to become 'school ready'.

The quality of ECD programmes may also depend on:

- the opportunities for children to develop literacy skills in social and cultural contexts that are conducive to such learning;
- the intensity and duration of the teaching;
- developmental approaches to understanding and developing literacy skills that are inclusive of children with disabilities;
- the opportunities for children to develop literacy skills at home, in the community and at the centres;
- the skills/literacy levels of staff in the centres;
- parents' and carers' own literacy levels;
- the ECD standards around literacy being inclusive of diverse needs, and the validation process.

In response, the project's next step is to develop a 'bio-ecological systems theoretical framework' to help organise the environmental factors and understand their influences on inclusion by placing the child at the centre of the system. A key aim is to increase the chances of children with disabilities being 'ready for school' through a tripartite process involving the child, the parents and community, and the school. Survey and assessment tools have been made available for use to the Malawi government and have been used in a Sightsavers project 'Leave no child behind', funded by Comic Relief.



Project title: Improving curriculum and teaching methods to influence policy and increase the quality of ECD provision for children with disabilities in Malawi

Principal Investigator: Dr Paul Lynch

Senior Lecturer in Inclusive Education

School of Education, University of Birmingham, UK

SEE ALSO:

McLinden, M.; Douglas, G.; Hewett, R.; Cobb, R. and Lynch, P. (2017) 'Facilitating participation in education: The distinctive role of the specialist teacher in supporting learners with vision impairment in combination with severe and profound learning difficulties', in *Journal of Blindness Innovation and Research*, 7.2

BLOG POSTS:

Lynch, P. (2017) 'Disability and school readiness in Malawi', April, *The Impact Initiative*

Tackling barriers to learning for children with disabilities

Researchers from Washington University in St Louis argue that education is failing the most vulnerable children, particularly those with disabilities. Their global findings, based on evidence collected from the past decade, highlight an urgent need to improve the inclusion of these children in education.

According to data collected from six countries (Afghanistan, India, Sudan (Darfur State), Sierra Leone, Morocco and Tunisia), disadvantaged children are increasingly accessing schools and education in low- and middle-income countries, but they are not learning effectively due to social exclusion within the classroom and out-of-date teaching methods that perpetuate inequality. The research was conducted as part of the project 'Constructing a Global Framework for Analysis of Social Exclusion From and Within Learning Systems'.



Among the six countries are some affected by conflict and crisis, where children, particularly those with disabilities, are far less likely to attend school. Many of these countries have limited education budgets, resulting often in little or no pay for teachers, poor infrastructure and learning equipment and overcrowded classes – which in turn affects the nature and quality of education received. These factors affect the progress of children with vulnerabilities who do manage to attend school more than their peers. In Afghanistan, for example, children who became disabled below school age risked never attending school at all and once in school struggled with retention and completion.

Drawing from initial data, the researchers argue that current benchmarks to assess the quality of learning are too narrow and that a fundamental shift is needed in how the quality of education

is defined, implemented and assessed. There is an urgent need to design and build evaluation systems that look at participation rather than individual educational achievement.

They also recommend a clear policy need to focus on children still out of school, especially those with disabilities. They urge that work to tackle practices and beliefs that perpetuate stigma, prejudice and discrimination of vulnerable children is aimed at both local and national levels.

By enhancing understanding of the classroom experiences and challenges faced by children with disabilities, the study has had a number of impacts, both locally and more widely:

- By working closely with field local partners, the researchers are designing a teacher-training framework on inclusion of all children in the classroom.
- Researchers have engaged with international NGOs and ministries of education in Afghanistan, Morocco, Sierra Leone and Tunisia to raise awareness about barriers to learning faced by children with disabilities – especially stigma – and ways to tackle these.
- The research is contributing to global policy discourse on education and disability, providing insights on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The research provided guidance on defining and assessing inclusion in international education policies.
- With UNESCO, researchers provided input for the Guide to Inclusion and Equity in Education, to support governments in making the shift from access to equity and inclusion (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002482/248254E.pdf>). The researchers are currently part of an expert panel working on the UN Flagship Report on Monitoring and Evaluation for Disability-inclusive Development, to be released in 2018 (https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/resources/monitoring-and-evaluation-of-inclusive-development/egm_monitoring-and-evaluation_geneva_may2017.html).



Project title: *Constructing a Global Framework for Analysis of Social Exclusion From and Within Learning Systems*

Principal Investigator: Dr Parul Bakhshi

Assistant Professor

Washington University in St. Louis, USA

SEE ALSO:

Bakhshi, P.; Babulal, G.M. and Trani, J. (2017) 'Education of children with disabilities in New Delhi: When does exclusion occur?' PLOS One September

Trani, J.; Babulal, G.M. and Bakshi, P. (2015) 'Development and Validation of the 34-Item Disability Screening Questionnaire (DSQ-34) for Use in Low and Middle Income Countries Epidemiological and Development Surveys,' PLOS One December

Trani, J.; Bakhshi, P.; Lopez, D.; Gall, F. and Brown, D. (2017) 'Socioeconomic situation of persons with disabilities in Morocco and Tunisia: Inequalities, cost and stigma,' European Journal of Disability Research, 11.4: 215–233

Strengthening teaching for children with disabilities: India and Pakistan

Researchers from the University of Cambridge and partners in India and Pakistan are working to identify strategies to support the learning and teaching of children facing multiple disadvantages notably related to disability, poverty and gender. By engaging key local, national and international stakeholders, the research is shaping policy debates on education and disability.

Children who face multiple disadvantages related to disability, poverty, gender, caste, religion or where they live, are among those least likely to be learning. In many low- and middle-income countries, disadvantaged learners often receive poor quality teaching. Many teachers are recruited without basic subject knowledge and are inadequately trained to support these children.

Using a household survey, University of Cambridge researchers, together with partners CORD (India) and IDEAS (Pakistan), constructed a unique data set offering insights into prevalence of disability. By assessing children's literacy, numeracy, non-verbal reasoning and social and personal skills, researchers identified who is in school and who is learning. The data shows that in the areas covered by the survey (rural Haryana in India and rural Punjab in Pakistan), many children with disabilities are gaining access to government and private schools. The challenge is that they are less likely than peers to be learning.

Qualitative data from classrooms help researchers to understand the challenges teachers face in teaching diverse classes and the practices they adopt to teach all children effectively. The research identifies that these strategies, though limited, could be a catalyst for governments to help teachers to better respond to the learning needs of all children, including those with disabilities.

The emerging findings suggest that to meet the Sustainable Development Goal for education (SDG 4) there is a need to:

- adopt a more holistic approach to addressing intersecting disadvantage;
- collect data on children with disabilities in household and school based surveys to track their progress in access and learning, and identify policies for improving their educational opportunities;
- recognise that many children with disabilities are attending mainstream government schools, and ensure teachers are trained and supported to address diverse learning needs.

SEE ALSO:

Malik, R. (2016) 'Education's missing priorities', Dawn newspaper

Samson, M. and Rose, P. (2016) 'Teaching, learning and disadvantage: from policy to practice', August, The Impact Initiative.

De, A. and Singal, N. (2016) 'The paradox of disability and education in India', August, The Impact Initiative.

Rose, P. (2016) '1, 2, 3 testing: Assessing learning of what, for what, and for whom?' November, Global Partnership for Education

Raza, F. (2017) 'The missing voice of teachers: Evidence from Pakistan', October, UK Forum for International Education and Training (UKFIET)

Project team members have joined a number of high-level international policy discussions to ensure that their evidence influences global debates. Their evidence has informed approaches to tracking progress towards SDG4 to ensure no one is left behind. The UK's Select Committee on International Development has drawn on the evidence, which could influence DFID's work. It has also informed the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity's message on 'progressive universalism'.

In Pakistan, the team is closely engaged with government officials and DFID on framing a new strategy for inclusive education.

This research is providing an important evidence-based contribution to identifying different types and severities of disabilities in large scale surveys, how to develop more inclusive learning assessment tools, and how to support teachers to adopt effective teaching practices in diverse classrooms.



Project title: Teaching Effectively All Children (TEACH): Learning outcomes and teacher effectiveness for children facing multiple disadvantages, including those with disabilities in India and Pakistan

Principal Investigator: Professor Pauline Rose

Professor, International Education

Director, Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL)
Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, UK

Education accountability relationships between schools, communities, and government in India

September 2020

Foreword

India has made significant progress in pupil enrolment and schooling infrastructure since the implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act in 2010. This committed to free and compulsory education for children aged 6–14. Despite this, learning outcomes continue to remain low across the country. There are still wide variations in enrolment and retention between and within different states, with participation and learning outcomes particularly low for children who face multiple disadvantages, including those related to gender, caste, disability, poverty, religion or where they live.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 initiated by the Indian Government has laid out a comprehensive transformation of education in India for provision of access to high-quality public education to all. It envisions foundational learning as the key to building India's education system and recognises the urgent need to shift education policy away from input-based interventions towards identifying policy actions that promote quality and inclusiveness in education.

However, despite widespread recognition of the challenge to improve learning outcomes and the need to shift education systems away from traditional input orientation, there has been relatively little attention paid to how basic education is governed. The robustness of accountability relationships and processes between schools, communities, and government within India's education system largely determine whether learning outcomes are enabled or inhibited. Yet gaps remain in our understanding of how these processes intersect with inequality, and how they can help the most marginalised. Crucially, we have relatively little debate on the kind of governance structures needed within the education system in order to strengthen accountability relationships in education.

This ESRC-FCDO-funded research is an important effort to bridge this gap. The research seeks to enhance our understanding of accountability relationships, how they function, and with what effect on learning outcomes, in both the short and long term. The research offers not only relevant, contextual evidence, but also highlights key implications for policy and practice.

In Uttar Pradesh, a study looks at how children's learning in the classroom can be improved by community-based interventions and how changes occur when schools are encouraged to view their accountability as being primarily to their local community. Meanwhile, in Mumbai, researchers explore how the accountability processes of different types of schools (public, private aided, and unaided) lead to differences in learning outcomes. And in the northern states of Bihar



Female students walking to school in Bihar, India.

and Rajasthan, findings demonstrate how accountability relationships between teachers, community, and government affect school participation and achievement.

As a policy researcher and practitioner, I am delighted to see this collection of evidence: it will serve to substantively enhance our understanding of critical governance questions in education. I believe this work offers us the foundation for building new analytical frameworks and identifying new forms of practice that will serve to shift India's education system firmly in the direction of improving quality and inclusiveness.

Yamini Aiyar

CEO, Centre for Policy Research, India

Key messages

- Mechanisms for school–community engagement should be strengthened to promote collective responsibility for raising learning outcomes. To achieve this, schools could make greater use of their School Management Committees to ensure parents have a voice in the running of their children's school.
- Policies aimed at tackling disadvantage (such as India's Right to Education) need to be better communicated to parents who face structural disadvantages such as those related to caste, unemployment, and poverty.
- State governments could invest more in administrative posts in schools to avoid teachers spending time on non-academic administrative duties which detract from in-class teaching time.

Strengthening accountability of schools at the grassroots

In India, schools and teachers are primarily accountable to education authorities rather than to the children, parents, and communities with whom they work. Lack of engagement between schools, teachers, and parents have consequences for how these actors view each other as well as for children's learning levels, which are far below curriculum expectations. Researchers from the University of Cambridge and the ASER Centre, in partnership with the Pratham Education Foundation, are exploring whether school and community partnerships can help to foster action inside classrooms as well as in homes and communities to raise learning outcomes for all children, especially the most disadvantaged learners.

The project 'Can Schools' Accountability for Learning be Strengthened from the Grassroots?' explores how children's learning can be improved by school and community-based interventions designed to help head teachers, teachers, parents, and communities develop a shared understanding of children's learning levels and take action to improve these. The study hopes to shed light on whether, and how, changes occur when schools and their staff are encouraged to view their accountability as being primarily to their local community.

For over a decade, data from the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) have consistently shown that the gap between children's abilities and curriculum expectations emerges from the very first years of primary school, and widens over time. To stem this learning crisis, the Pratham Education Foundation, the largest education-focused non-governmental organisation (NGO) in India, has worked both within and outside the school system to help improve children's foundational literacy and numeracy skills. However, Pratham's previous community-based interventions have not formally incorporated teachers and other school actors. The project, therefore, aims to investigate whether Pratham's interventions (i) could be more effective if they work in both schools and communities; (ii) raise awareness of the importance of learning for children's futures; and (iii) promote avenues for better interactions between parents and teachers so the message is clear that a child's learning is everyone's responsibility.


The research is being conducted in 400 randomly selected villages in one district of rural Uttar Pradesh, and uses a longitudinal mixed methods design to evaluate two interventions. One intervention focuses on activities to build communities' awareness and capacities to support and improve children's foundational learning in grades 3–5. The other intervention includes similar community-based activities but adds an additional component focusing on school actors' awareness and engagement with these issues. Villages were randomly assigned: they were either where (i) Pratham's interventions work with both schools and communities; (ii) Pratham's interventions work only with the community; or (iii) no intervention was taking place.

The baseline survey included around 24,000 pupils from grades 2–4 from 853 government primary schools in 400 villages. The data reveal

that large proportions of children in rural Uttar Pradesh are behind curriculum expectations from their very first years in primary school, and also suggest that:

- **Interactions between teachers and parents are limited.** Although over half of the teachers interviewed said that they had monthly parental meetings, only a third of the parents surveyed had visited the school during the current academic session while 71 per cent of parents could not name even one teacher in their child's school.
- **Teachers and parents have poor opinions of each other.** Lack of interaction has consequences for how these actors view each other: each expected the other to be more proactive in educating children. For example, 92 per cent of parents considered it was a waste of time to meet with teachers, and 43 per cent thought that teachers did not do enough to support children's learning. In contrast, a third of all teachers said that parents were not doing enough to support their children's learning.
- **Both teachers and parents overestimate children's abilities.** Data revealed huge gaps in what teachers and parents think that children are capable of doing, versus what children can actually do. For example, 45 per cent of teachers interviewed incorrectly identified specific children as fluent readers, when in fact a large proportion of them could not read beyond individual letters and none of them could read at grade 2 level.

In order to raise learning outcomes for the most disadvantaged primary school learners, these initial findings suggest that there is a particular need to strengthen mechanisms for school–community engagement, recognising that home, school, and the broader community are all important sites for children's learning. Within schools, there is an urgent need to make teacher training more relevant to pupils' ground realities. Outside of the education system, parents and the community should be included as critical stakeholders in young children's lives. This could involve implementing mechanisms for regular communication, coordination, and collaboration between teachers, parents, and communities in support of children's learning and encouraging parental participation and home support. The research team hope these findings will encourage policies and practices that promote parent and teacher collaboration, recognising that both have an important role in helping children learn.

 **Project title: Can Schools' Accountability for Learning be Strengthened from the Grassroots? Investigating the Potential for Community–School Partnerships in India**

Principal Investigator: Ricardo Sabates

University of Cambridge, UK

This report was written by Suman Bhattacharjea and Purnima Ramanujan, ASER Centre, India.

BLOG POSTS:

Sabates, R. (2019) 'Make Some Noise So No One is Left Behind! Halla Bol!', *The Impact Initiative*, 21 October

Cashman, L.; Bhattacharjea, S. and Sabates, R. (2020) 'Parental Perceptions and Parental Involvement in Children's Education in Rural India: Lessons for the Current COVID-19 Crisis', *PAL Network Blog*, 15 April

SEE ALSO:

Sabates, R.; Bhattacharjea, S. and Wadhwa, W. (2020) *Accountability from the Grassroots: Children's Foundational Reading and Arithmetic in Sitapur District, Uttar Pradesh, Research and Policy Paper 20/6*, Cambridge: REAL Centre, University of Cambridge

Accountability and learning outcomes in different types of school settings

Researchers from the Universities of Bristol and Bath, together with in-country partners at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai, are working to understand how the accountability processes of different types of schools (public, private aided, and unaided) in India lead to differences in learning outcomes, and to what extent these changes can be explained by factors such as organisational culture, community participation, leadership, and wider social contexts.

Researchers on the project 'Organisational Perspectives on Accountability and Learning (OPAL): School Management Models and the Social Impact of Schooling in Mumbai and Kathmandu' are exploring whether accountability relationships between teachers, families, and governing bodies vary depending on school type. With a focus on Mumbai, researchers collected quantitative learning outcome data and questionnaire data from 2,621 pupils across 29 schools, as well as qualitative data from parents, head teachers, teachers, and school governors in ten schools.

The data were collected from three different types of primary school that account for the majority of provision in Mumbai:

- Public schools run and funded by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC schools);
- Private schools that receive funding from the government for teachers' salaries and usually charge relatively low fees (private aided schools); and
- Fully private schools that fund all expenses from non-state sources (private unaided schools).

These schools have different types of accountability processes and relationships. BMC schools are entirely funded and run by the municipal government; they are primarily accountable to it via the reporting of information (e.g. on attendance, lesson plans, and assessments) and through inspections by district education officers; and their teachers are public employees. Private aided schools are generally run by a trust, with trustees having broad oversight of school functioning and finance. Private unaided schools directly employ the teachers and are essentially accountable to market forces, with parents' consumer power requiring them to provide the best possible quality of education.

No matter what type of school, they are all required to provide information on pupil attendance and progress for government information systems. Additionally, both BMC and private aided schools are required by the Right to Education Act 2009 to establish School Management Committees (SMCs) to monitor the overall working of the school; to hold school staff accountable; and to prepare the school development plan each academic year.

Administrative burdens on teachers

The researchers found that in the three types of school, head teachers spent a substantial amount of their time reporting large amounts of information on attendance, progression, and classroom activities 'upwards' to government authorities, which detracted from their availability to undertake more substantive work such as communicating with parents. Furthermore, teachers attending to the paperwork and filling in of online forms (which were created to improve accountability by ensuring that they completed the required tasks) actually reduced the time teachers had available to focus on lesson planning.



Two schoolboys on their way home in Mumbai, India.

Policy recommendation: By funding administrative positions in all schools, head teachers and teachers would be relieved of their heavy administrative burdens. Public schools in particular often lack the resources for such positions, and funding for administrative support would yield benefits in terms of teachers' availability to focus on teaching. Additionally, processes could be streamlined through a single portal where all data regarding the school could be uploaded for government departments that need to access them, so that the time-consuming preparation of the same data in different formats upon request can be avoided.

School-to-parent relationships

Some schools were found to have strong relationships thanks to clearer and more regular communication with parents and the community. For example, in BMC schools, there is a dedicated team (led by the School Coordinator and a qualified social worker) that engages with the community and involves them in children's learning through a variety of activities including home visits. This interaction supports parents in facilitating home learning and thereby improves pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy. However, in some private aided schools, parents were largely unaware of either the membership or meeting of the SMC, and teachers who held low expectations of parents' abilities or interest in supporting learning devoted minimal effort to engaging them, ultimately leading to lower outcomes for pupils.

Policy recommendation: Schools could make greater use of the SMCs to fulfil their original purpose of accountability. An increase in home visits and development of community activities by school social workers would likely encourage parental involvement and thereby ensure better school-child-parent interaction.

The researchers plan to share this data with the Indian Administrative Services and through dissemination activities to educational practitioners. The research comes at an opportune time for education in India as the government reviews alternative models of school management for the BMC schools in order to ensure greater efficiency; for example, it is looking at NGO-managed public schools as a model that may be more efficient than government-run schools.



Project title: *Organisational Perspectives on Accountability and Learning (OPAL): School Management Models and the Social Impact of Schooling in Mumbai and Kathmandu*

Principal Investigator: Robin Shields
University of Bristol

Understanding how accountability relationships affect school participation and achievement

Researchers from the Universities of Leeds and Cambridge, in collaboration with partners from Azim Premji University and the Vidya Bhawan Society in India, argue that in order to improve learning outcomes for disadvantaged children, there must be a greater understanding of the role and influence of families, schools, communities, and government.

The 'Researching Accountability in the Indian System of Education (RAISE)' project is exploring these relationships using in-depth qualitative semi-structured interviews with parents, teachers, and head teachers from 62 government, private, NGO, and religious-run primary schools as well as with community leaders and government officials. The research focuses on the northern states of Bihar and Rajasthan, and examines the themes of access, participation, and monitoring in primary education.

Initial data from the study show that there are big differences in how families, teachers, community leaders, and government officials understand – and place value on – educational access and expectations. Often, these differences are shown to be the least favourable for children from marginalised and vulnerable communities. The research also highlights that beyond these differences, relationships between schools, families, and the community in particular are inhibiting a child's ability to participate in education, the quality and amount of teaching taking place, and the effectiveness of how a child's progress is monitored:

1. Teacher–parent relationships and expectations

The researchers found that irregular engagement and a misalignment in expectations between teachers and parents were undermining children's potential to learn. Teachers expected parents to oversee children's home studying to enhance their learning and participation in class, but parents tended to put the onus of their children's learning on the school. Data revealed that the capacity for a child's parents to adequately support them at home was shaped by structural disadvantages such as caste, unemployment, and poverty. In rural areas in particular, lower-caste families tended to prioritise a child's ability to contribute to the family income above sending them to school.

Policy recommendation: Regular and continuous interaction between teachers and parents to understand and support each other's roles could be developed, especially in cases where adequate family support to learners is absent. A possible strategy for this is for teachers to talk regularly to parents by phone to discuss their children's learning and each other's roles in the process, as well as to make home visits.

2. Lack of leadership at school management level

School Management Committees (SMCs) are mandated by state governments to monitor the overall working of schools and to hold staff accountable. SMCs in government and private schools across rural and urban areas were found to be ineffective and overly focused on managerial concerns such as fund utilisation, rather than on children's

SEE ALSO:

Dyer, C.; Sriprakash, A.; Thomas, N. and Jacob, S. (in progress) 'Accountability Relations and Collective Responsibilities in Education: The Social Contract in India's Right to Education', draft available from c.dyer@leeds.ac.uk

learning. Decisions were mostly taken by school staff rather than jointly with other SMC members (i.e. parents and elected community representatives), among whom there was lack of clarity about the committee's role and purpose. However, when school staff themselves make the decisions and do not involve other members, the SMC's role of ensuring accountability of the staff is compromised. These patterns in decision-making processes around school management reflect a hierarchy that places many parents at a disadvantage and as unequal players in relationships of accountability.

Policy recommendation: Linkages between schools and SMCs could be strengthened. For example, elected community representatives who are part of the SMC could actively encourage the participation of parents in deliberations and monitoring the working of a school. Additionally, schools could reach out to existing community groups such as local NGOs and self-help groups, and also to caste associations, which are involved in humanitarian and social work in many villages, to enhance school–community engagement.

3. Unequal bias of teacher accountability towards policy actors

The research showed that government teachers experienced the combined pressures of having to report upwards to local governing bodies as well as undertake non-academic administrative duties – all of which detracted from the time they had available to deliver lessons in the classroom. Circulars and orders sent by officials to teachers asking for data relating to school management (such as pupil attendance numbers) are sent regularly via WhatsApp and teachers said they felt pressured to respond immediately.

Policy recommendation: Teachers should be given the time and space to focus on pupils' needs, and be encouraged to prioritise teaching over administrative work. The state government could ensure that vacant administrative assistant posts in schools are filled to free up teacher time for teaching. A more efficient technology-based system of data collection should be in place and information requests, which are rarely urgent, should be made with a realistic deadline for response.

These emerging findings indicate that there is a need to pay much greater attention to the realities of local contexts and family livelihoods and to how schools can respond more flexibly to sustain access and participation. The findings highlight that policies should create opportunities for regular and continuous interaction of teachers with parents and the community, especially in cases of learners where appropriate family support is mostly absent. They also show that formal mechanisms of accountability tend to focus on managerial concerns and lack a consistent emphasis on promoting children's learning.



Project title: *Researching Accountability in the Indian System of Education (RAISE)*

Principal Investigator: Caroline Dyer

University of Leeds

BLOG POSTS:

Dyer, C. et al. (2019) 'Relational Systems of Inclusion and Exclusion: A Cross-Scalar Analysis of Educational Access and Participation in India', *The Education and Development Forum (UKFIET)*, 22 October

Foreword

Despite recognised efforts to improve access of girls and women to education, many still face numerous barriers to access learning opportunities, ranging from basic education to higher education level. Several factors hinder their participation and achievement in the formal education system and contribute to significant gender inequalities in education: namely, the quality of teaching and insensitive gender teaching and learning environments, plus cultural and social norms lead many girls and young women to leave education altogether.

Prioritising gender equality in and through education is crucial to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that the international community set itself to achieve by 2030. Yet, one third of the way to that deadline, new projections prepared by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Global Education Monitoring Report show that the world will fail its SDG education commitments without a major escalation of progress.

This collection of ESRC-DFID-funded research provides valuable evidence on strategies to ensure that we meet our pledge to eliminate gender inequalities in education. Beyond ensuring that every child – both girls and boys – is in school and learning, it highlights new approaches to how gender equality in and through education can be measured, which is crucial to achieving more than just gender parity in education.

The collection also demonstrates the need to work together to bring about change. In the case of Honduras, for example, community and teacher partnerships are working to promote gender equality and equip adolescents with the skills and information they need to take charge of their reproductive health and complete secondary school. The Honduras case also highlights the benefits of targeted social-emotional learning activities, which can be particularly effective for girls in conflict-affected contexts.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and agenda 2063 provide new opportunities in the long struggle towards achieving gender equality. We need robust evidence if we want accountability and the realisation of girls' and women's rights. This will help us to better understand how different groups of women are excluded because of their gender, age, dis-ability, class, ethnicity, religion, and many other factors. However, data alone is not enough; we need to engage with our partners to drive policy change aligned with the needs



Girls study in a classroom at a primary school in Malawi.

of the stakeholders.

This collection is looking at new approaches to contribute to gender equality in educational systems. Both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 – The Africa We Want provide new opportunities in the long struggle towards achieving gender transformative education.

Dr Rita Bissoonauth

Head of Diplomatic Mission, African Union/International Centre for Girls' and Women's Education in Africa.

Key messages

- New approaches to measuring gender equality in education are crucial to actions that go beyond just gender parity.
- Collaborative approaches to curriculum design can help promote gender equality.
- Non-formal learning strategies that include skills such as social-emotional learning opportunities should be considered to promote girls' learning in conflict-affected contexts.

Measuring gender equality in education

Despite more girls than boys enrolling in primary school in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, large numbers of girls, particularly from the poorest socioeconomic groups, drop out and do not progress to secondary school. However, current statistics fail to reveal the complexities of how inequalities hold girls back. Researchers from University College London (UCL), in collaboration with partners in South Africa and Malawi, are working to get more accurate and usable information to better understand how entrenched discriminatory gender relationships and social norms limit rights to education.

Achieving gender equality is at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) agenda. SDG 5 (gender equality) explicitly targets key areas of inequality, and SDG 4 (education) outlines a number of gender equality-related targets. These targets are brought together in General Recommendation 36 by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which sets out the ambition to achieve gender equality not only *in* but also *through* education.

Building on these targets and recommendation, 'Accountability for gender equality in education: Critical perspectives on an indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals' project (known as AGEE) is moving forward the debate around gender and girls' schooling by exploring what gender inequality and equality in education looks like, and how it can be measured.

The technique of measuring gender parity (the number of girls vs boys) does not sufficiently capture the range of relationships and values associated with the notion of gender equality in education, and what learning outcomes relating to gender equality might entail. Measuring gender parity tends to underplay a connection between education, women's rights, and social justice. Used alone, it is not a clear enough indicator of the relationships within and beyond education and therefore, what needs to be changed.

Through interviews and group discussions conducted in Malawi and South Africa and with representatives of key global organisations, and reviews of existing data sets, the research team is gathering data on laws and policies (whether or not these are put into practice); learning assessed through examinations, and other indications of attitudes; families' approach to organising work and managing budgets; teachers' attitudes; school-based gender violence, sexual harassment, and coercion; and lack of reproductive rights.

Drawing on conceptual work informed by the capability approach and reflections on the availability of data, the team is developing an alternative framework that captures a broader range of information on gender and education equality that looks beyond gender parity (i.e. girls as a proportion of boys). This includes information on:

- Gender and resources for education – including money, buildings, and staff;
- Constraints to converting resources into opportunities – for

SEE ALSO:

Unterhalter, E. (2019) 'The Many Meanings of Quality Education: Politics of Targets and Indicators in SDG4', *Global Policy* 10.1: 39–51.

Unterhalter, E. (ed.) (2018) *Measuring the Unmeasurable in Education*, Abingdon: Taylor and Francis.

example, difficulties in implementing policies, distributing finance or understanding gender and other inequalities;

- Attitudes of teachers, parents and students on gender inequality/equality that affect schooling – for example, whether or not girls are required to do large amounts of childcare and domestic work, and if teachers assume that girls cannot do mathematics or science; and
- Gender outcomes of education (progression, learning outcomes) and beyond education – for example, political and cultural participation and connections with health, employment, earning, and leisure.

This nuanced approach to understanding and measuring gender inequality and equality forms an important contribution to the discussions on metrics under consideration for two targets (SDG 4.7 and SDG 4a) on education that have a focus on practices around gender equality.

The team hopes that this framework will build and enhance accountability between governments, NGOs, and the public with regard to work on gender equality in education, particularly with organisations engaging with the SDGs. The *Global Education Monitoring Report – Gender Report: Building Bridges for Gender Equality* (2019) used elements of this framework for its monitoring on gender equality in education, identifying six domains to develop better substantive measures of gender equality in education.

National statistical offices in Malawi and South Africa, academics, and activist organisations are reviewing the framework and looking at how it can be used to draw out key gender issues to inform more gender-responsive education sector planning. At the international level, in partnership with a team at the Global Education Monitoring Report, a framework has been developed to monitor gender equality across countries. This uses the national level dashboard, but also draws on data that are already routinely collected across countries.

Having this richer source of information on gender inequality and equality in education will help policymakers truly understand the multiple barriers that girls face in realising their right to go to school and learn. It will contribute to the building of education systems that take account of broader gendered barriers holding children back – especially girls – and identify strategies to address them, and then measure progress towards closing these critical gender gaps.



Project title: *Accountability for gender equality in education: Critical perspectives on an indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals*

Professor Elaine Unterhalter

Professor of Education and International Development and Co-Director of the Centre for Education & International Development
University College London Institute of Education

BLOG POSTS:

Unterhalter, E.; Bella, N. and Davies, J. (2019) 'Making Gender Equality a Reality in Education: What Will it Take?', *Global Partnership for Education, Education for All Blog*, 6 March.

School, child marriage and early childbearing in rural Honduras

In Honduras, 34 per cent of girls are married before the age of 18, and 8 per cent are married before their fifteenth birthday (UNICEF). Child marriage can be devastating for girls' health and wellbeing. It denies them their childhood, their right to go to school and learn, to be independent, and exposes them to increased health problems and violence.

In some countries, research has shown that the longer a girl stays in school, the less likely she is to be married before the age of 18 and have children during her teenage years. However, in Central and Latin America, increased access to education has not resulted in a significant decrease in the rate of child marriage or early pregnancy, suggesting that expanding girls' access to schooling alone might not have a significant impact on the timing of early marriage and pregnancy.

Using data from a mixed-methods longitudinal study of adolescent girls, researchers from the University of California, Berkeley, and the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán, Honduras, have examined the relationship between schooling, child marriage, and early childbearing in rural Honduras.

In 2008, the research team began following 684 rural Honduran girls who were in their final year of primary school, and conducted indepth interviews with 24 of them at three time points over an eight-year period. The research collected from Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT) schools and Centros de Educación Básicos (CEB) schools found that only 8 per cent of girls returned to school after they had married.

The data identified a number of factors that influenced a girl's decision to leave school including:

- **A lack of interest in schooling** – along with economic pressures, researchers found that many students decided to leave school because they did not see the value of a secondary education. Despite being encouraged by parents and teachers, girls identified a lack of opportunities to further educational or economic opportunities due to structural limitations such as poverty and geographical isolation.
- **Exercising the right to marry** – girls did not always marry because they were forced, were pregnant or faced economic hardship; but rather, often as an expression of romantic desire. However, although girls reported entering unions willingly, researchers found that most girls reported regretting this decision.
- **The burden of motherhood** – many girls reported not feeling ready to become mothers, consistently describing a lack of knowledge of and/or successful use of contraception. In Honduras, discussion among family members about developmental changes involving biological changes, sexuality, and intimacy were described as taboo, and as a consequence, adolescents were often unprepared for these transitions.

Honduras has committed to eliminate child marriage by 2030 in line with SDG 5.3 and accordingly, the findings highlight several important policy considerations for:

- The continued need to provide financial assistance/cash transfers so that poverty does not prevent girls from completing secondary school;

SEE ALSO:

[The Impact Initiative \(ed.\) \(2018\) Quality Teaching, ESRC-DFID Research for Policy and Practice, Brighton: IDS.](#)



Honduras: A girl writes on a blackboard in San Pedro Sula.

- Undertaking more research to understand why many girls lose interest in school, since after poverty this is the second most common reason for dropout; and
- Expanding opportunities for learning about gender and sexuality in schools so that girls (and boys) develop attitudes and practices that foster equitable relationships and prevent unplanned pregnancies.

In Honduras, the project team has closely engaged with government officials, including the Minister of Education, and with donors, to explore how to provide comprehensive sex education programmes in schools.

The findings have led to a new partnership between the researchers, the Bayan Association (a Honduran educational organisation), and the Honduran Ministry of Education. Using design-based research methodology, these groups have worked in partnership to develop an intervention called 'Addressing Child Marriage through Holistic Education' (ACMHE). In collaboration with students, parents and teachers, ACMHE aims to support the prevention of child marriage in rural areas by designing a culturally relevant curriculum. It has been implemented via textbooks (which include gender equality, puberty, and decision making processes exercises) for both students and parents as part of the mainstream curriculum in 21 secondary schools. In 2020, the research team plan to start a nationwide expansion of ACMHE in schools administered by the Bayan Association, which has a presence in 12 of the 18 administrative regions of Honduras.

In order to eliminate child marriage by 2030, the research team hope these findings will encourage policies and practices that promote gender equality and equip adolescents with the skills and information they need to take charge of their reproductive health and complete secondary school.



Project title: *Examining effective teaching in rural Honduran secondary schools*

Erin Murphy-Graham

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Diana Pacheco

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Raising learning outcomes for girls in conflict-affected contexts

Quality education is of particular importance for children in Niger's south-eastern Diffa, a region affected by security threats and natural disasters: it can protect them against school dropout, child labour, and poverty. Schoolchildren in Diffa, particularly girls, often struggle with social-emotional and mental health problems that can hinder their learning and wellbeing. However, researchers from New York University have found that access to targeted social-emotional learning activities can be helpful and even more beneficial for girls than for boys in conflict-affected areas like Diffa.

During 2016–17, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) delivered its Learning in a Healing Classroom (Healing Classrooms) programme to bolster learning outcomes for and school retention of the students attending public schools in the Diffa region. Healing Classrooms provided remedial after-school tutoring sessions in addition to regular schooling, accompanied by teacher professional development and training in how to infuse social-emotional learning (SEL) principles into reading and mathematics teaching. In addition to Healing Classrooms tutoring, IRC provided low-cost targeted SEL programmes that could be incorporated into Healing Classroom programmes.

Researchers from Global TIES for Children at New York University conducted an experimental evaluation of the Healing Classrooms programme and the targeted SEL activities as part of the project, 'Promoting children's learning outcomes in conflict-affected countries: Evidence for action in Niger'. This project was designed to provide the first ever rigorous evidence of how non-formal, 'complementary' education programmes can support conflict-affected children's academic and social-emotional outcomes, and how it may impact girls' and boys' academic and social-emotional outcomes differently.

A total of 1,800 children from the 30 public schools in Diffa region were randomly selected to receive Healing Classrooms programming from the 4,994 second to fourth graders who are eligible for remedial education. The participating schools were then randomised to one of two conditions:

- 'Healing Classrooms Tutoring': students received six hours weekly of Healing Classrooms SEL-infused academic tutoring services for 22 weeks;
- 'Healing Classrooms Tutoring + Targeted SEL': students received six hours weekly of Healing Classrooms remedial services plus 11 weeks of mindfulness exercises, followed by 11 weeks of 'brain games' that used movement and playfulness to target core executive functioning skills.

The findings suggest that students who attended public schools and received the Healing Classroom remedial tutoring programmes demonstrated greater literacy and mathematics skills after 22 weeks of implementation compared to eligible students who attended the same public school but did not receive Healing Classrooms tutoring. In addition, they found the targeted SEL activities (mindfulness and brain games) improved students' school grades, but not reading and mathematics performance, over those involved only in Healing


Classrooms Tutoring. Healing Classrooms plus targeted SEL activities improved children's academic skills equally for both boys and girls.

The addition of targeted SEL programming, and mindfulness activities in particular, was found to be effective for children's social-emotional outcomes, particularly for girls. On average, students of both genders who had access to Healing Classrooms Tutoring plus mindfulness were less likely than students who only had access to Healing Classrooms Tutoring to report feelings of sadness or aggression in response to hypothetical social situations where such displays of emotion may not be appropriate. Importantly, girls benefited more from the mindfulness activities than boys; specifically, girls who had access to mindfulness activities were better able to regulate their sad emotions and aggressive impulses than boys in the same condition. In addition, accessing targeted SEL activities reduced girls' reports of school-related stress levels, while boys' stress levels remained the same regardless of whether they practised mindfulness activities or not. These findings suggest that the mindfulness activities, when accompanied by remedial tutoring programmes, potentially help children, and especially girls, to better adapt and adjust in social settings in schools and homes, leading to better academic and social-emotional development.

This study is not alone in finding gender differences for social-emotional intervention impacts, but there is currently little evidence as to why. Girls may be more aware of and reactive to their negative emotions and more susceptible than boys to internalising stress; a mindfulness approach, which emphasises non-judgmental awareness and regulation of feelings, may therefore allow girls to be more aware of and less reactive to their negative emotions. Alternatively, different developmental trajectories of boys and girls may affect the appeal and/or suitability of the intervention.

The findings demonstrate that targeted SEL results appear to be particularly robust for girls, who are at higher risk of poor schooling and mental health outcomes. The research provides evidence that quality non-formal learning opportunities, such as remedial tutoring programmes, can complement the formal education system in a conflict-affected country like Niger by supporting children's schooling and learning outcomes.

The project has significantly strengthened awareness that teacher training and curricular programmes should consider adding targeted and affordable SEL strategies to promote learning and wellbeing in conflict-affected countries.

 **Project title:** Promoting children's learning outcomes in conflict-affected countries: Evidence for action in Niger

Professor John Lawrence Aber

New York University, USA

Lindsay Brown

New York University, USA

Ha Yeon Kim

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SEE ALSO:

[Education in Emergencies: Evidence for Action \(3EA\) \(2017\) IRC Healing Classrooms Retention Support Programming Improves Syrian Refugee Children's Learning In Lebanon, Impact Report 1.1](#)

[Education in Emergencies: Evidence for Action \(3EA\) \(2019\) IRC Healing Classrooms Remedial Tutoring Programming Improves Nigerian and Nigerian Children's Learning, Impact Report 2.1](#)

Foreword

Teachers are crucial to achieving the ambitions articulated in Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure that no one should be left behind in education. Their motivation, skills and knowledge will literally determine whether hundreds of millions of children are able to see a path out of the global learning crisis.

However, the process of teaching – and what truly makes it good quality – remains something of a 'black box' to both academics and practitioners. That should perhaps not be surprising: without the appropriate support, teaching in developing countries can be a solitary and often lonely profession for teachers who are struggling against so many odds. I am delighted therefore that this collection of ESRC-DFID funded research sheds light on that process.

From evidence across three continents, some of the key learnings that have emerged include: how more flexible, locally driven models of recruitment and support can be made available affordably and at scale in Honduras; and, drawing evidence from China, how Professional Learning Communities can be a strong factor for building peer collaboration and support among teachers, particularly if backed by the right school support structures and embodying some key principles. The research also highlights how enhanced classroom practice tools can significantly strengthen the granularity of feedback that teachers receive in Uganda; and how a combination of pre-service and in-service training in Ethiopia led to more learner-centred teaching, and with it learners' own engagement in the education process.

As a practitioner I am excited about starting to apply these lessons in our work at STIR Education, and I hope to contribute our experience back to the ESRC-DFID learning community. I hope other readers will feel very much the same and will delve into the valuable insights contained in this digest

Sharath Jeevan

Founder and CEO, STIR Education

www.stireducation.org



Photo: Adam Dean/Panos Pictures

A teacher writes on a makeshift blackboard in China.

Key messages

- Provide new teachers with well-structured induction programmes to support them in the classroom.
- View teacher development as a continuum, providing teachers with opportunities, support and incentives to continue to improve.
- Use classroom observations to feed back to teachers to boost motivation and effort, leading to further improved teaching.
- Adopt pre-service and in-service training to achieve more learner-centred teaching, and to encourage learners' own engagement.

How innovative teacher training and recruitment approaches are improving learning outcomes in rural Honduras

In Honduras, the average 11-year-old child leaves primary school with dramatically lower reading and mathematics levels than those of nine-year-old children in developed countries, and 30 per cent of students don't finish primary school without repeating grades. To combat poor performance in rural areas, the government has looked to the *Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial* or 'SAT' model for secondary schools – a partnership between government and local non-government organisations (NGOs). The model focuses on quality teacher training, flexible teacher contracts and unconventional recruitment methods.

Confronted with a growing number of under-prepared primary school graduates in rural areas, the Honduran government has prioritised the cost-effective expansion of SAT schools. These offer a formal, alternative secondary school education focused on the development of relevant knowledge and skills, and service-oriented values that rural youth need to become productive members and leaders of their communities.

Researchers from the University of California, Berkeley, and the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán, Honduras, have found that the SAT system is effective for improving teaching and learning outcomes in developing countries, particularly in rural contexts. Earlier research found that students in Honduran SAT schools had test scores that were 45 per cent higher than children who attended traditional schools in nearby villages. Building on that evidence, the researchers wanted to examine and understand the features of the SAT model to try to explain these learning gains.

During 2008, baseline data was collected from 1,426 graduating sixth graders from 94 rural SAT schools and traditional Centros de Educación Básicos (CEB) schools. Students completed background questionnaires and achievement tests in mathematics and language; household surveys were given to parents and/or guardians; and headteachers, teachers, parents and local education authority staff completed questionnaires. Teacher professional development sessions and classroom teaching practices were also observed.

The research identified a number of innovative features of the SAT system involving recruitment processes, professional development and the ongoing support of teachers, which address some of the major challenges in improving the quality of teaching in developing country contexts:

- **Teacher recruitment and retention**

To address the challenge of too few teachers, particularly in rural areas, the SAT model advertises positions in rural communities through radio announcements. Potential candidates are invited for screening by the local government, and those who meet the requirements can begin the training process. The recruitment of individuals who are from rural areas results in higher rates of teacher retention in the programme.

SEE ALSO:

McEwan, P.; Murphy-Graham, E.; Torres Iribarra, D.; Aguilar, C. and Rapalo Castellanos, R. (2015) 'Improving middle school quality in poor countries: Evidence from the Honduran

- **Teacher training**

New teachers participate in two-week in-service training courses that precede each trimester of the academic year – totalling 250 hours of professional development each year. Teachers receive ongoing monitoring and instructional support from a network of field supervisors. Teachers are trained with the same curriculum that they will impart to students, allowing them to master the content. They develop the attitude that they can learn alongside and from their students – allowing them to embrace student-centred learning.

- **Ongoing professional support and accountability**

SAT teachers are visited by an *asesor* (adviser, similar to a teaching 'coach') once every two weeks. The role of the coach is to 'accompany' teachers in their classroom – to observe their teaching and to offer support. The coach also administers student tests each trimester to keep track of student learning outcomes and step in if they find deficiencies. These features create a system of accountability that supports ongoing professional development.

This research identifies features of the SAT model that can inform the design and reform of education systems to improve teaching effectiveness. Furthermore, the case of the SAT school model demonstrates that high quality teaching and learning can happen, even at scale.

In Honduras, the project team closely engages with government officials, including the First Lady and Minister of Education, and with donors to examine how the SAT model can be expanded and used in other communities. Project team members have joined a number of high-level international policy discussions to share findings from the study of SAT schools to ensure that their evidence influences education reform in Latin America. For example, following the sharing of the project findings, UNICEF has included SAT principles in its global secondary education guidance note. According to UNICEF, SAT serves as a concrete example of a programme that has been scaled up successfully by national governments to expand access to secondary education.

Ingrid Sanchez-Tapia, an Education Specialist at UNICEF explained, 'A programme like SAT invites us to re-think how to achieve SDG4 – or 12 years of education for all – through pedagogical innovation to reach the most marginalised adolescents.'



Project title: Examining effective teaching in rural Honduran secondary schools

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Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 37.1: 113–137.

Can a classroom observation tool improve teaching in Uganda?

How teaching practices and classroom processes affect student learning outcomes is of global interest. Researchers from New York University have developed a reliable, valid and cost-effective observation tool that could be used in low-resource contexts and provide teachers with feedback for improving practice.

Research shows that effective teachers are the most important contributory factor in student achievement. Although curricula, reduced class size, district funding, family and community involvement all contribute to school improvement and student achievement, the most influential factor is the teacher. Yet it has become clear that the professional development needed to support teachers is often lacking and how effectively they function within classrooms is ineffective. In many parts of the globe, teachers who need the most professional development (such as new or underqualified teachers) often receive the least. Though there has been a long history in measuring pedagogical practices and processes, there is a recognised need for improved instruments and methodologies to gauge elements of classroom quality and effective teaching.

The 'Teacher Instructional Practices and Processes System' (TIPPS) observational tool examined the quality of teaching practices and classroom processes through live observations in Uganda. It was hoped that the results would provide helpful feedback to teachers for improved teacher performance. Areas of observation included students' ability to solve complex problems, and the teacher's ability to manage and promote a positive classroom environment.

The study, undertaken in collaboration with the Ugandan Ministry of Education and the World Bank, used TIPPS data collected in the classrooms of 197 Ugandan secondary schools and matched it with eighth grade achievement data from biology, English and mathematics. Pairs of locally recruited observers were trained to observe classrooms and were asked to match their observations to a manual that outlines 18 behavioural indicators known as 'TIPPS dimensions'. Dimensions could be added or deleted as appropriate to the context.

Findings

Out of the 18 dimensions created, 13 of them revealed sufficient variance and good to high levels of reliability across different assessors using the tool in the same context.

Based on the results in Uganda, TIPPS has shown itself to be a promising tool in terms of use and applicability in poorly resourced country contexts. Specifically:

- Three key dimensions of quality teaching emerged in Uganda: 'Instructional Strategies' which includes student-centred learning such as the encouragement of student questions and ideas; 'Sensitive and Connected Teaching' which refers to a teacher's

SEE ALSO:

Altet, M.; Paré-Kaboré, A. and Sall, H.N. (2016) OPERA, 'Observation des Pratiques Enseignantes dans leur rapport avec les apprentissages des élèves', <http://opera.ifadem.org/sites/default/files/pdf/OPERA-rapport-final.pdf>

López Bóo, F.; Araujo, M.C. and Tome, R. (2016) 'How is Child Care Quality Measured?', <https://publications.iadb.org/bitstream/handle/11319/7432/How-is-child-care-quality-measured.pdf>



Uganda: A teacher writes maths formulas on a blackboard at a school.

ability to connect lessons to everyday life and sensitiveness to respond to students' needs; and, 'Deeper Learning' which characterises a teacher's ability to break down concepts to help facilitate student learning.

- The dimensions appear to have subject-specific relationships in secondary schools to academic subjects. For example, a teacher's ability to connect what students are learning to everyday life resulted in a trend towards better performance in biology.
- Individual items of the tool also have meaningful associations with learning outcomes. For example, in English, feedback was related directly to improved student performance in that subject.

The researchers found that the TIPPS observational tool was successful in measuring high quality education, with the potential to serve as a feedback tool in Ugandan secondary schools.

The findings were significant in that they provided important insights into the critical mechanisms at work in the classroom, as well as demonstrating that TIPPS has a role to play in teacher quality improvement in low-income country contexts.

Further refinements have been made based on the data obtained, including the development of the instrument for different ages. Based on these findings, TIPPS is now also being used to mentor teachers in India, where the Kaivalya Education Foundation is using TIPPS to help improve teaching practices. Additionally, an early childhood education and primary version of TIPPS is being used in Ghana.



Project title: *Toward the Development of a Rigorous and Practical Classroom Observation Tool: The Uganda secondary school project*

Professor Edward Seidman

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Seidman, E.; Kim, S.; Raza, M.; Ishihara, M. and Halpin, P.F. (2018) 'Assessment of pedagogical practices and processes in low and middle income countries: Findings from secondary school classrooms in Uganda', *Teaching and Education*, 71: 283-296, doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2017.12.017

Wolf, S.; Raza, M.; Kim, S.; Aber, J.L.; Behrman, J. and Seidman, E. (forthcoming) 'Measuring and predicting classroom process quality in Ghanaian pre-primary classrooms using the Teacher Instructional Practices and Processes System (TIPPS)', *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*

Can Professional Learning Communities improve teaching quality in China?

As the world's most populous country, China regards the development of a high quality teacher workforce as essential to the future prosperity of its people. However, a lack of opportunities to participate in professional development – particularly in impoverished areas – is a key drawback to raising the quality of compulsory education provision.

In 2010, a ten-year national plan for education reform and development in China issued by the Chinese Ministry of Education included the requirement to '...overhaul quality evaluation, and examinations, revamp teaching methods and approaches, and put a modern school system in place.' As a result, schools have been given greater autonomy and are encouraged to contribute to their own curriculum to support students' all-round development.

These reforms provide an opportunity for schools to become more effective 'Professional Learning Communities' (PLCs) where teachers learn from and with each other, and where they come to see themselves as a community of teachers who focus on implementing new ideas and practices to support the academic performance of students. While the approach varies in different contexts, PLC activities might include teachers meeting regularly to share expertise, workshops, education conferences and seminars, mentoring programmes and peer observation.

Researchers from the University of Bristol, in collaboration with the National Institute for Educational Sciences in Beijing, examined the effectiveness of PLCs to promote learning outcomes and teacher development in Chinese secondary schools.

Improving Teacher Development and Educational Quality in China (2010–2014) looked at the nature of teachers' professional development, specifically the role of PLCs. A key purpose of the study was to explore the views and experiences of senior staff, teachers and students as well as national and local policymakers regarding the existence and relevance of the PLC concept to improve teacher quality and learning gains. The project's findings indicate that the practice of sharing and critically interrogating working practices has the potential to enhance teacher effectiveness and bring about improved quality and equity in the Chinese education system.

Qualitative data was collected from four Chinese secondary schools in a mixture of urban and rural locations in two regions of mainland China, central eastern and western. One-to-one and focus group interviews were used as the main method of data collection, as well as follow-up reports, telephone interviews and feedback from workshops. These led to 'case study' schools being identified to receive an introduction to PLC concepts and methods. Participants were specifically asked their views in relation to the PLC operation in their own school.

Key findings

● The concept of PLCs exists

More than 80 per cent of teachers surveyed were engaging in PLC activities such as courses and workshops, education conferences and seminars, mentoring programmes, peer observation and informal dialogue. Teachers recognised the relevance and value of PLCs for their work.

SEE ALSO:

Thomas, S.M. (2014) *Improving Teacher Development and Educational Quality in China: Examining Schools as Professional Learning Communities: ESRC End of Award Report, RES 167-25-0428*. Swindon: ESRC

Thomas, S.M.; Peng, W.-J. and Triggs, P. (2017) 'Professional Learning Communities in Chinese

● The quality and definition of PLCs in schools vary

The quality and type of PLC activities varied between schools and regions and were heavily dependent on available resources, local culture and values in efforts to promote collective responsibility for learning practices.

● PLCs can improve professional development practices

Teachers noted how PLCs helped to improve teaching and evaluation practices. Staff reported that engaging in such activities had enabled them to improve their reflective teaching practices.

● Key features of PLCs were identified

Commonalities identified included: shared values and vision; collective responsibility for students' learning; and collaboration focused on group as well as individual professional learning.

● Reflective enquiry identified as a key component to professional development

The process of individual professional reflective enquiry was perceived as important but many of those interviewed suggested that it was often confined to students' academic performance, mainly because this was a key indicator for evaluating teacher performance and student entry to higher education.

● Inclusion and trust were also seen as central to PLC development

Inclusion of non-teaching staff, parents and community as well as trust and respect were also seen as central to PLC development. However, because PLC development often takes place in a highly competitive environment, with fixed hierarchies and a lack of shared leadership, it is a challenge to generate enough trust, respect and inclusion to enable the PLC to flourish.

● Leadership is important for empowering teachers

It was noted that the leadership of the head teacher and support from the whole district were important for empowering teachers to take more responsibility themselves for their own learning and for school improvement.

The key findings suggest educational reform in China can be enhanced through PLCs if tailored to the Chinese context. Aspects that may need to be considered in refining the concept in China include recognising differences between east/west and rural/urban contexts, and the strength of existing pedagogies, hierarchies and competition.

The research findings have been used to create a freely available toolkit for Chinese and other East Asian teachers to enhance PLCs in their own school. The toolkit summarises key evidence and identifies best practice in how PLCs are cultivated, evaluated and sustained in Chinese schools. It is designed for teachers, school leaders and teacher trainers. The project team have ongoing links with Ministry of Education policymakers in China and Vietnam to support PLC development and teacher training events.



Project title: *Improving teacher development and educational quality in China: examining schools as professional learning communities*

Professor Sally Thomas

Professor of Education

School of Education, University of Bristol, UK

Senior Secondary Schools', in A. Harris, M. Jones and J. Huffman (eds) *Teachers Leading Educational Reform: The Power of Professional Learning Communities*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge

Research Impact website:

www.bristol.ac.uk/education/research/sites/ieeqc/research-impact/

Transforming teaching quality through active learning in Ethiopia

Despite a series of national education reform programmes designed to improve teaching quality, traditional teacher-centred 'lecturing' remains widely practised in Ethiopian schools. Researchers from Durham and Addis Ababa Universities together with partners in Ethiopia are looking to address some of the constraints of this method by devising strategies to improve the quality of science teaching.

The project Transforming the Pedagogy of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Subjects (TPSS) (2015–2018) trained primary school science teachers in ten Colleges of Teacher Education (CTE) across Ethiopia to use teacher-to-student and student-to-student dialogue to support the learning of physics.

The project sought to help teachers to provide more meaningful engagement with their students by supporting them to ask questions, provoke student responses and use these effectively in their teaching. Student-to-student dialogue was also encouraged via pre-prepared activities which prompted them to openly discuss physics concepts.

Phase 1 observed teachers' practices before and after they were introduced to dialogical teaching. In this phase, 11 lecturers from six CTEs were given intervention training at the beginning of the 2015/16 academic year and implemented dialogical teaching into physics courses during that year. A control group from four CTEs was established for comparison. A total of 449 student teachers from both groups took part.

Phase 2 worked with teachers and students (Grades 7 and 8) from 52 different schools across Ethiopia. The 11 lecturers from the treatment group in Phase 1 helped to deliver intervention training to the physics teachers. This phase tested strategies for bringing about lasting change to teacher practices and student learning by introducing both pre-service teacher training *and* professional development for experienced teachers.

By monitoring changes using video and interview data, researchers found that when teachers adopted more learner-centric methods of teaching – including using a wider repertoire in their speech and providing more opportunities for students to engage in group discussions – students' levels of engagement and learning increased and they were more able to understand abstract scientific concepts. Teachers demonstrated improved skills in handling dialogue with their students, realising the need to reflect on students' answers before proceeding.

The biggest change came from teachers who had been exposed to both pre-service and professional development training. For example, in the Phase 1 control group teachers who did not receive the intervention spent on average 73 per cent of the time on lecturing. This was reduced to 22 per cent in the treatment group (from 80 per cent before the intervention) in favour of other teaching strategies such as group work, whole class discussion and presentations. Students in the group receiving the intervention performed significantly better than those who did not when given a reasoning test after one academic year of experiencing



Photo: Petterik Wiggers/Panos Pictures

Ethiopia: A teacher shows one of her pupils how to do a maths sum on a blackboard.

dialogical teaching. Student responses improved in length and depth, with students supporting their responses with better reasoning.

The findings provide evidence to the Ethiopian Ministry of Education about how best to improve STEM teacher education and science learning. A national network of CTE lecturers, academic researchers and teachers is being established to ensure that the practice is applied to other subjects. A network is being set up through a series of meetings in Addis Ababa and attendees include a mix of national policymakers and 'TPSS ambassadors' who are staff who experienced the project and changed their teaching practices. It is hoped that the network will develop opportunities to transform the educational opportunities of many students.



Project title: *Transforming the Pedagogy of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Subjects (TPSS)*

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SEE ALSO:

TPSS research project website: www.aau.edu.et/tpss/

Kind, P.; Kind, V.; Alemu, M.; Tadesse, M.; Atnafu, M.; Michael, K. and Rajab, T. (2018) 'From Didactic to Dialogical Teaching – Intervention to Foster Scientific Argumentation and Dialogical Teaching in Ethiopian Teacher Education', presented at the 26th Conference of the Southern African Association for Research in Mathematics, Science and Technology Education (SAARMSTE), University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana, 16–19 January 2018.

Tadesse, M.; Kind, P.; Alemu, M.; Atnafu, M. and Michael, K. (2017) 'Improving Scientific Reasoning Through Dialogical Teaching – An Intervention in Ethiopian Teacher Education', presented at the ESERA Conference, Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland, 21–25 April 2017.

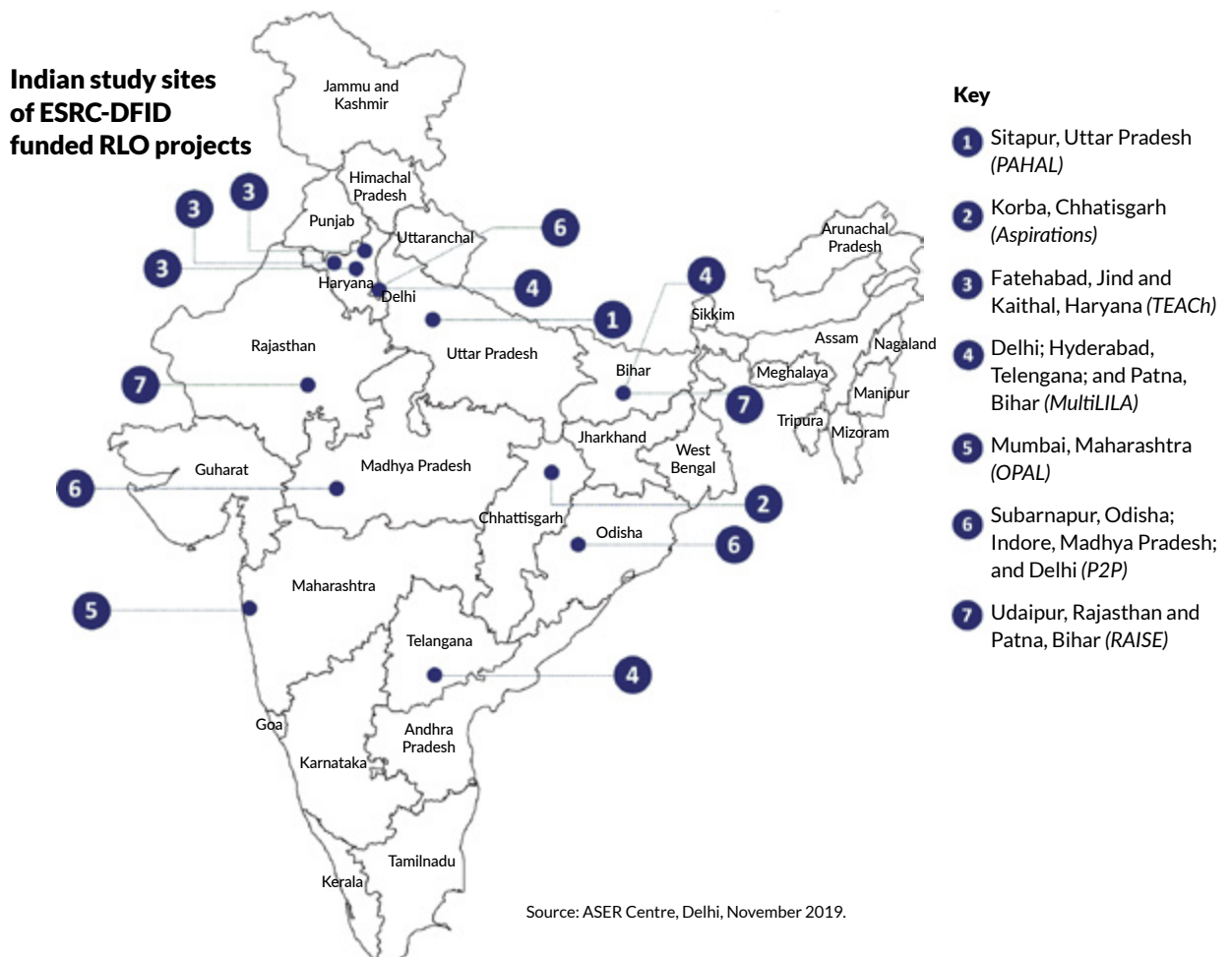
Raising Learning Outcomes in Diverse Indian Contexts

Over the past two decades, India has witnessed a rapid increase in primary school enrolment. Today, more students than ever before attend school, even those from very disadvantaged backgrounds. By 2014, only 3 per cent of children aged 6–14 were out of school (Social and Rural Research Institute 2014). However, not all complete primary school, and for those who do, many are not learning the basics in literacy and numeracy (ASER Centre 2019).

Since 2014, researchers supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) under the Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research programme (RLO) have examined issues of access and learning for those at risk of being left behind.

Research on schools in varied contexts across India – from small schools in remote rural areas to crowded ones in urban slums – found wide variation in students' backgrounds, needs and abilities. Pupils attending the same school often come from different caste, class or religious backgrounds. Their ability to participate and learn in classrooms also varied – sometimes due to different forms and degrees of disability. Studies also found that students who faced multiple disadvantages (due to poverty, gender, caste, religion, disability or where they live) were among those least likely to be learning. One study found that more than 10 per cent of students between the ages of eight and 12 could not read or recognise two-digit numbers (*Learning outcomes and teacher effectiveness for children facing multiple disadvantages, including those with disabilities*, [TEACH]).

This paper highlights the key messages and policy implications from seven ESRC-DFID-funded RLO projects (see the map below and Box 1). The studies provide valuable new evidence to inform the Indian government's efforts to ensure that all children benefit from quality education.



THREE KEY MESSAGES FOR POLICYMAKERS AND PRACTITIONERS

1: Widen policy perspectives on learning outcomes

Indian education policies typically measure learning outcomes in terms of (1) literacy and numeracy, (2) higher-level language and mathematical skills, and (3) subject-specific knowledge attainment. Policy approaches should be broadened to encompass multiple dimensions, to ensure that students acquire the skills needed to prepare them for school and for life. These include non-cognitive and social skills such as communication, critical thinking and empathy, which will build responsible citizenship in the face of challenges such as conflict, unemployment and climate change.

Most of the seven studies emphasised the need to explore the multiple dimensions of learning outcomes as well as the relevance of different dimensions to different cultures and population groups. For instance, the project *Peer to peer deaf multiliteracies: research into a sustainable approach to education of deaf children and young adults in the global South (P2P)*, which examined innovations in sign language and literacy and other communication skills for young deaf learners, identified the importance of building motivation, confidence and agency as the basis of learning. Similarly, the *Education systems, aspiration and learning in remote rural settings (Aspirations)* project highlights the value of aspirations in motivating students. While students dream about a future when they will ‘move forward’ and ‘become someone’, most had given up on their dreams by their teens, as they had not acquired sufficient knowledge and skills in school. The *Rights and accountability in the Indian system of education (RAISE)* project goes beyond test-based outcomes to look at outcomes in terms of active participation in classroom activities while *Organizational perspectives on accountability and learning: school management models and the social impact of schooling in Mumbai (OPAL)* looks at non-cognitive and social skills such as empathy.

Policy implications: Improving learning outcomes requires system-level changes:

- Learning outcomes should be broadened to include different dimensions of cognitive and non-cognitive skills, adapting priorities to specific contexts.
- School curricula and teacher training should be designed to build both cognitive and non-cognitive skills to prepare students for adult life.
- Both cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes should be assessed and monitored.

2: Teachers are crucial to ensure that no one is left behind in education. Without appropriate support, teacher motivation, skills and knowledge are severely compromised

Schools enrol children from diverse backgrounds, many of whom have limited or no home support. In such contexts, teachers require extensive training and support to help all children learn.

2a: Understanding student needs and abilities and providing the necessary support

Teachers usually see their job as ‘completing the syllabus’ and are unaware of the different learning needs of their students. For example, one study, *Can schools’ accountability for learning be strengthened from the grassroots? Investigating the potential for community-school partnerships in India (PAHAL)*, shows that almost half of all sampled teachers in early primary grades believed their students could read fluently when in fact they could not. The TEACH *study* found that although 4 per cent of students were identified as having moderate to severe disabilities and 17 per cent as having mild disabilities, teachers were unable to identify these students or provide additional support. Even when teachers were aware of individuals’ learning needs, they felt unable to meet those needs due to an unsupportive school environment and lack of training.

Two studies – *Multilingualism and multiliteracy: raising learning outcomes in challenging contexts in primary schools across India (MultiLiLa)* and OPAL – reported that teachers found it very difficult to address students’ linguistic needs and had a limited range of classroom practices. However, the MultiLiLa study also highlights cases where teachers were able to boost learning outcomes (for mathematics in particular) for slum children in Delhi by using strategies linked to a child’s home language.

These studies identify learning needs in multiple domains that the government education system does not adequately address:

- students who are first-generation school-goers, with limited home support;
- students facing difficulties in functioning, including disability;
- students whose home language is different from the medium of instruction in school;
- students from vulnerable home environments and with irregular attendance;
- students whose future livelihoods depend on agriculture and forests.

Policy implications: Teacher training should be designed based on the lived realities of multi-grade teaching, multilingualism and classroom diversity.

- Teacher training should emphasise inclusive and participatory pedagogies rather than rote learning.
- Teachers need to be trained to teach large classes with students from diverse backgrounds. Training should help teachers identify students who are not participating or facing difficulty learning. It should include contextual data collection and analysis of student outcomes, as well as understanding students’ living conditions and aspirations.
- For deaf students, more teachers should be recruited who are sign language users; and more training programmes should be organised for deaf sign language users to become recognised professionals in deaf education.

- Teachers should be trained in multilingual pedagogy for teaching disciplinary concepts and ideas.

2b: Improving administrative infrastructure

Teachers also need improvements to school administrative infrastructure so they have the time, space and opportunity to teach all children according to their needs. However, studies found several instances where teacher shortages and increased administrative burden reduced teaching time. Challenges include the following.

- Teacher shortages and sub-optimal deployment:
 - Large classes with diverse needs compromise teachers' ability to deliver even when they have appropriate knowledge and skills.
 - Teachers frequently teach mixed/multi-grade classrooms. Three studies – PAHAL, OPAL, and RAISE – found that multi-grade classrooms are very common, although teachers are not trained for these.
- Heavy administrative workload:
 - Teachers' engagement in administrative work intensifies teacher shortages and reduces time for teaching. Several studies found teachers on election duty (RAISE) or busy opening bank accounts (TEACH).
 - Government monitoring requires schools to provide data on students, locality, etc. While this is an important requirement, putting the onus on principals and teachers compromises their direct responsibilities for teaching and learning. For example, the OPAL study highlighted how a strict inspection process puts pressure to produce reports in different formats for different stakeholders.
- Centralised planning and ad-hoc assignment of new schemes and events:
 - The TEACH study found that the setting of syllabus and assessment tests were done at the state level, leaving no space for teachers to adapt their teaching to classroom requirements. The RAISE study also found that principals are under substantial pressure dealing with frequent changes in administrative requirements from government.
- Limited systemic attention to teacher aspirations and professional growth:
 - The Aspirations study demonstrated that teachers were demotivated as they found teaching dull and repetitive, with content not relevant to students' future livelihoods.

Policy implications: Education administration should provide a supportive teaching environment.

SUMMARY

This paper shows that improving learning outcomes in diverse Indian contexts requires a rethinking of educational strategies. While improvements in physical access to schools are

- The system needs to ensure the presence of more, and better trained, teachers to reduce class sizes and improve learning outcomes.
- Teachers should be given the time and space to focus on students' needs.
- Adding administrative support staff in schools will free up teacher time for teaching.
- Data collection and use should be rationalised, with a single common portal where all school-related data can be uploaded in the designated format for various stakeholders to access it.

3: Families and teachers both have an important role in helping children learn

When parents and teachers collaborate, it can have a positive impact on children's learning. However, although most schools have formal accountability mechanisms such as school management committees, interviews with parents and teachers in multiple studies (PAHAL, TEACH, RAISE and Aspirations) indicate a relationship of mutual distrust. Instead of working together, each expected the other to be more proactive in teaching their children.

- Teachers feel that parents are uninterested or unable to support children's learning and interested only in receiving material incentives.
- Uneducated parents feel they are not capable of providing home support to their children.
- Parents have little faith in schools and teachers. In the PAHAL study, most parents felt that it is a waste of time to meet teachers.
- As parents with children in government schools are typically more disadvantaged (in educational and socioeconomic status) compared to teachers, they are less able to hold teachers and schools to account.

Policy implications: Mechanisms for school–community engagement should be strengthened.

- School management committees need support and training to play an effective role, and could be linked with the *panchayat* (village council).
- Community members with livelihood skills and local knowledge should be involved in school activities, allowing communities to feel more engaged in schooling and enhancing students' skills for the future.
- Parent participation and home support needs to be encouraged. Regular community outreach from the school should be mandated by policy. Teachers should discuss with parents their child's progress and how to support their child's schooling.

welcome, improving learning outcomes requires different stakeholders to strengthen their role and adapt teaching content and methods to local contexts.

Box 1 ESRC-DFID RLO projects

1. [Can schools' accountability for learning be strengthened from the grassroots? Investigating the potential for community-school partnerships in India \(PAHAL\) \(January 2018–March 2021\)](#)

Project team in India: ASER Centre/ Pratham Education Foundation, Delhi
Principal Investigator (PI): Prof Ricardo Sabates, University of Cambridge
Study site: Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh
This project aims to understand whether and how school accountability for learning can be improved from the grass roots. It assesses the impact of a community-based intervention in rural India, which aims to engage with local school actors to improve children's foundational learning in school.

2. [Education systems, aspiration and learning in remote rural settings \(Aspirations\) \(September 2016–April 2019\)](#)

Project team in India: Sociation for Action on Health, Education and Environment (SAHEE), Latehar, Jharkhand
PI: Prof Nicola Ansell, University of Brunel
Study site: Korba, Chhattisgarh
This project investigates the processes through which schooling shapes young people's aspirations in remote areas, and how young people's aspirations shape their engagement with schooling and their learning outcomes.

3. [Learning outcomes and teacher effectiveness for children facing multiple disadvantages, including those with disabilities \(TEACH\) \(July 2015–December 2018\)](#)

Project team in India: Collaborative Research and Dissemination (CORD), Delhi
PI: Prof Pauline Rose, University of Cambridge
Study sites: Fatehabad, Jind; and Kaithal, Haryana
This project identified ways in which teaching affects children's learning, focusing on children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those with disabilities.

4. [Multilingualism and multiliteracy: raising learning outcomes in challenging contexts in primary schools across India \(MultiLiLa\) \(March 2017–April 2020\)](#)

Project team in India: National Multilingual Education Resource Consortium, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi; English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad; National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru

PI: Prof Ianthi Tsimpli, University of Cambridge

Study sites: Delhi; Hyderabad, Telengana; and Patna, Bihar

This study examines the causes of low educational outcomes, focusing on the medium of instruction and its relationship to the languages used in the child's home, as well as how gender differences and geographical disparities affect learning outcomes.

5. [Organizational perspectives on accountability and learning: school management models and the social impact of schooling in Mumbai \(OPAL\) \(October 2017–October 2020\)](#)

Project team in India: Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, Maharashtra
PI: Prof Robin Shields, University of Bristol

Study site: Mumbai, Maharashtra

This project investigates how school accountability differs according to the school management model and whether accountability is linked to differences in learning outcomes.

6. [Peer to peer deaf multiliteracies: research into a sustainable approach to education of deaf children and young adults in the global South \(P2P\) \(July 2017–June 2020\)](#)

Project team in India: AlterNEXT, Odisha, and Delhi Foundation of Deaf Women, Delhi

PI: Prof Ulrike Zeshan, University of Central Lancashire

Study sites: Subarnapur, Odisha; Indore, Madhya Pradesh; and Delhi

This peer-led project focuses on innovative methods of teaching literacy to deaf learners.

7. [Rights and accountability in the Indian system of education \(RAISE\) \(May 2017–March 2020\)](#)

Project team in India: Vidya Bhawan Society, Udaipur, Rajasthan; and Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion, Delhi

PI: Prof Caroline Dyer, University of Leeds
Study site: Udaipur, Rajasthan; and Patna, Bihar

This project investigates how learning outcomes for disadvantaged children are shaped by norms and interests, modes of participation, and regulatory roles among multiple actors from across the home, community, school and bureaucracies.

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- Learning Outcomes and Teacher Effectiveness for Children Facing Multiple Disadvantages, Including Those With Disabilities: India and Pakistan*, Teaching Effectively All Children (TEACH) in India and Pakistan, www.theimpactinitiative.net/project/learning-outcomes-and-teacher-effectiveness-children-facing-multiple-disadvantages-including (accessed 21 November 2019)

Credits

The paper was a collaborative effort of the seven research teams in India, led by Anuradha De of Collaborative Research and Dissemination (CORD). Additional editing was provided by The Impact Initiative for International Development Research, which supports the uptake and impact of research funded under the ESRC-DFID Raising Learning Outcomes programme.

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THE IMPACT INITIATIVE
For International Development Research

Covid-19: Thinking Differently about Education Research Impact

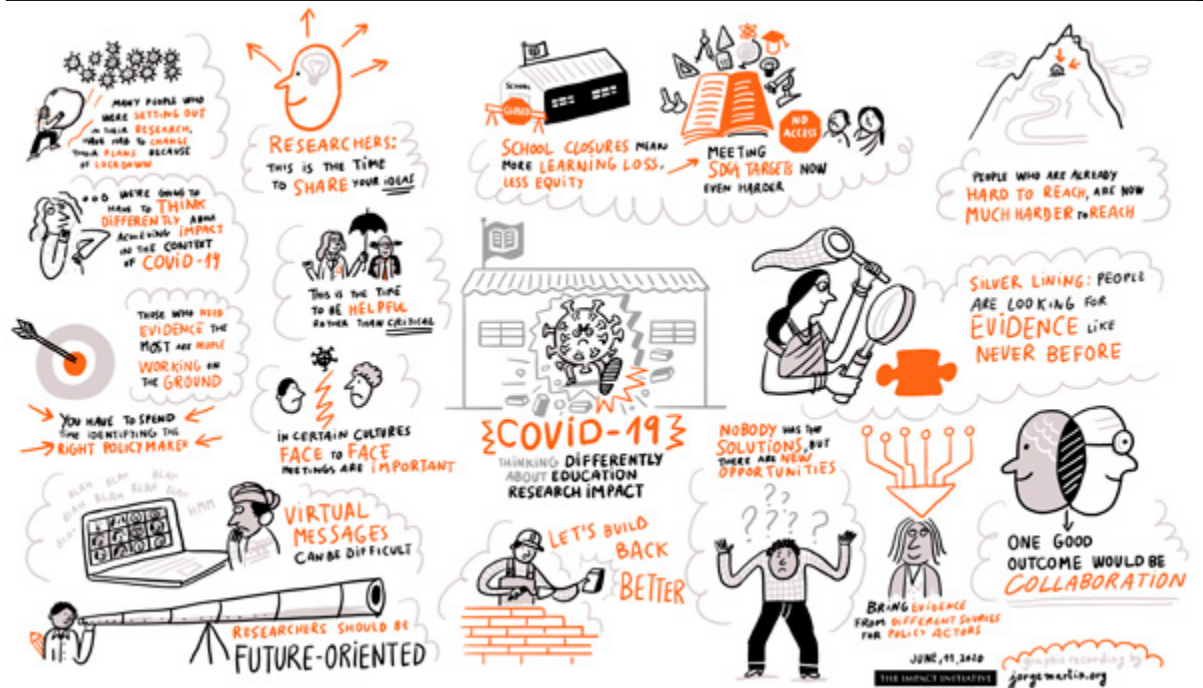


Figure 1: Visualisation of the online discussion focusing on Covid-19 and education research impact. Image: ©Jorge Martin 2020

THE IMPACT INITIATIVE PROGRAMME

The Impact Initiative programme, funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the former UK Department for International Development which merged with the Foreign & Commonwealth Office on 2 September 2020 to become the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), aims to increase the uptake and impact of research from two research programmes jointly funded by ESRC-FCDO: the Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research and the Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme. The Initiative achieves this through a process of identifying synergies between the programmes and grant holders, and supporting them collectively and individually to exploit influencing and engagement opportunities. As well as facilitating knowledge exchange and policy engagement on behalf of the two programmes, the Initiative develops programme-level research communication outputs in order to ensure each programme's research is effectively communicated and shared.

BACKGROUND

The effects of Covid-19 have been far reaching. Beyond being a recognised global health emergency, it has wide-ranging effects on children's schooling around the world. As a result of school closures, 1.2 billion¹ learners are estimated to be out of school,² with expectations that the most vulnerable children in poorer countries around the world may not return.

A further 258 million children and youth were already out of school.³ The reliance on education technology and parental support to home learning is often not a feasible alternative to many of these children, meaning that they will face

¹ *Education: From Disruption to Recovery*, UNESCO.

² Figure as at 21 July 2020, with the peak at 1.9 billion at the beginning of April 2020.

³ *Out-of-School Children and Youth*, UNESCO.

a significant loss in learning from an already extremely low base. UNESCO estimates that around 250 million children were not able to achieve the basics in literacy even before the pandemic.⁴

Since 2014, researchers funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) under the Raising Learning Outcomes (RLO) in Education Systems Research Programme have been undertaking research to understand the reasons behind the global learning crisis that existed before the pandemic, and to propose evidence-based solutions. Covid-19 makes such research even more imperative. However, along with its other disruptions, the pandemic also undermines conventional pathways adopted by researchers to achieve impact. Being able to achieve specific

changes in policy and practice through new evidence will undoubtedly be affected by the pandemic. Researchers, donors, policymakers, and practitioners all face challenges to their work as a result of the effects of the pandemic on the education sector including not being able to meet face to face due to travel restrictions to a reallocation of programme funds.

This paper draws on lessons from a webinar organised by the Impact Initiative that explored how researchers need to think differently about impact for education policy and practice in the context of Covid-19. It provides insights from education policy actors and researchers on how they are adapting their thinking on the types of impact that can be achieved in the context of Covid-19 and includes quotes from some of the speakers at the event.



CHALLENGES FOR EDUCATION

At the start of the global Covid-19 pandemic, there were obvious, immediate effects on health systems around the world. However, all aspects of daily life have been disrupted in some way – with short- and long-term effects on social interactions, finances, wellbeing, and education.

UNESCO⁵ quickly pulled together a database on education disruption and response, which was updated daily. Overall, an average of 91 per cent (1.6 billion) of students were affected by school closures across 191 countries from the middle of March to the end of May, in addition to the 258 million children who were already out of school.

‘People who are vulnerable are now even harder to reach.’

**Nompumelelo Mohohlwane, Deputy Director:
Research, Monitoring and Evaluation, Department
of Basic Education, South Africa**

Many organisations rushed to develop resources to inform the global debate on the immediate impacts of the pandemic on education, and how to keep learning going. As school closures have persisted, longer-term effects are apparent, such as how to catch up on learning losses, which inevitably affect students from more disadvantaged socioeconomic groups more gravely. Covid-19 is reversing decades of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): the effects have devastated the most vulnerable and left them further behind. As such, important questions arise about how to address widening inequality gaps, both by ensuring the most disadvantaged children can return to school and how adaptations can be made to enable them to compensate for their lost learning.

All of these challenges need to be supported by strong evidence. However, education researchers are now tasked with the need to adapt their plans for achieving specific changes in policy and practice and consider what needs to be done differently so that translating evidence into policy and practice can be managed and adapted within the context of the pandemic.

⁴ *Teaching and Learning: Achieving Quality for All*, Global Education Monitoring Report, UNESCO.

⁵ *Education: From Disruption to Recovery*, UNESCO.

THINKING DIFFERENTLY ABOUT EDUCATION RESEARCH IMPACT

There is great uncertainty about future research, and this includes practical challenges in undertaking research during a pandemic. For example, research may be affected by school closures meaning that data collection within schools is no longer feasible; in response, some researchers are adapting their work by using phone surveys or are basing analysis on pre-existing data that can be used to respond to relevant questions in the context of the pandemic.

Given the re-orientation of research, the ability to achieve different types of impact (see Figure 2) will also undoubtedly be affected. It might, for example, be more difficult for networks and connectivity to be achieved. In parallel, timely availability of evidence could result in conceptual and instrumental impact, particularly where research findings are collated across different studies in accessible ways.

Three key practical suggestions have emerged from the discussions involving a range of stakeholders which highlight ways in which researchers might try and achieve impact in this context.

1. New opportunities for building research-policy partnerships

Research-policy partnerships – long-term, mutually beneficial collaborations – are critical for achieving impact, and they will be even more valuable during the current pandemic.⁶ Researchers who are likely to be of most service in crises might be those who already have trusted relationships with decision makers and key stakeholders.



Despite policy work being greatly affected by the restriction of movement and potentially a reallocation of programme funds, policy actors still have an appetite for evidence to inform their response to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on education systems. Nompumelelo Mohohlwane, Deputy Director: Research, Monitoring and Evaluation, Department of Basic Education, South Africa said:

[T]his [the pandemic] creates a new opportunity to engage between policymakers and researchers. I think for a lot of researchers, you have been waiting for the moment where [sic.] government can listen to you [sic.]. This is your moment. We are waiting for ideas!

The landscape has created a new opportunity for researchers to engage with policy actors, providing a real opportunity for networks to build messages and to tell a powerful story across a number of different contexts, as highlighted by Laura Savage, Senior Advisor, Education Research Team, DFID:

One of the silver linings of the pandemic is that I have never heard the words 'what's the evidence for this?' said more often... people are looking for data, people are looking for evidence...

One way in which researchers can do this is to engage with busy policy actors, particularly if researchers work together instead of in silos, as they often do. Laura Savage said:

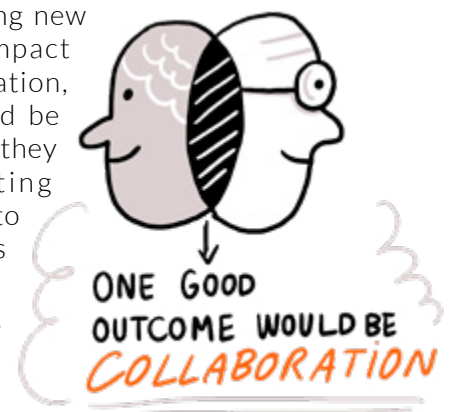
Voices will always be heard louder in a collective. For example, [members of] the 'BETER' [Building EdTech Evidence and Research] Network are coming together to think about how to work together to collect similar data in different countries that tell us a story across different contexts.

Researchers should collaborate, collate information, and work together to re-analyse existing data which might fill in specific data gaps (such as the risk of children being exposed to Covid-19 in formal school settings) or be relevant to specific policy areas – as seen already by the BETER Network which is collecting and inputting data on to a global database to help assess the impact of Covid on education.

As well as launching new studies on the impact of Covid on education, researchers should be synthesising what they know from existing research in order to inform tomorrow's decisions.

There is also now an opportunity to accelerate a more Southern-led approach (given barriers to international travel) as well as for existing networks and collaborations, including those from across the RLO programme, which encompasses 30 projects focused on 24 countries. Projects span research themes such as teachers and teaching, curriculum and pedagogy, inequality, and school finance and governance. Over the years, these projects have been encouraged to come together to explore new strategies for achieving research impact and to build new networks and links. Facilitated by the Impact Initiative, spaces have been created for researchers to identify synergies and collaborations and these have resulted in successful linking and increased engagement for grant holders with policy organisations. In the current context, the network of researchers provides an opportunity to consider how evidence from the projects could inform planning for 'building back better' as schools re-open, learning from challenges identified in the studies to date.

From a policy-oriented funding perspective, there are hard choices ahead in a post-Covid world in terms of shifting



⁶ See *IDS Bulletin 50.1 'Exploring Research-Policy Partnerships in International Development'*.

priorities with diminished budgets. Researchers need to reflect on how they can work cross-sectorally to answer the questions being asked right now by the global education and health communities. For example, it will be more important than ever for education and health researchers to actively gather evidence to support the safe opening of schools, to include ensuring that hygiene facilities are in place and social distancing measures are appropriate – both from the perspective of children’s age and stage of development as well as for their health and safety, and of other workers in schools.

‘New spaces for collaboration are opening up because nobody has the solutions to... the challenges that are facing us currently. So we’re seeing an openness on the part of many governments to engage with us to figure out solutions together.’

Suman Bhattacharjea, Director of Research, ASER Centre, India

Above all, this is the time to strengthen partnerships rather than weaken them because of the challenges of physical distance that have arisen.

2. Identifying creative approaches to engagement with policy actors

Real change often involves sustained forms of dialogue but researchers’ ability to reach policy actors has been greatly affected by the restriction of movement, as highlighted by Professor Tristan McCowan, University College London:

In certain contexts, face-to-face interactions are particularly important. Not being able to hold the stakeholder meetings as planned has made it difficult.

There is now pressure on researchers to keep relationships going with key in-country stakeholders even if physical meetings are not possible.



Researchers need to be clear and concise when communicating with policy actors, especially given that their roles are currently even busier and more demanding. This requires identifying the correct person to contact (which is not always the most senior person available) and to this end, Nompumelelo Mohohlwane makes a plea for researchers to:

be clear, be concise in your requests and know what you are asking for.... I would encourage you to spend some time in terms of thinking of your network and what information you actually need... [That way] you can identify the right person who is more in the middle of the road rather than right at the top so that your research isn’t waiting for a response from the Minister’s office.

Researchers should also try engaging via different formats – still keeping messages succinct and accessible. Pandemic challenges mean that researchers should harness the

potential of technology such as webinars to connect. Professor Tristan McCowan said:

In terms of the changing of ideas [conceptual impact], we have been forced to be more creative... [regarding] the types of outputs we are doing and different kinds of engagement such as through social media and policy briefs.

3. Repurposing research to be responsive to current realities

Researchers should not hesitate to use this unique moment to provide new ideas to feed into policy and action and contribute to the ‘building back better’ of education systems. Suman Bhattacharjea, Director of Research, ASER Centre, India emphasised that:

... because we don’t yet know the magnitude of these impacts [of the pandemic], we will need quick measurements that are able to quickly feed into policy and action on the ground when schools and communities do open up again.

For example, due to the massive expansion in distance learning provision following Covid-19, there is a critical need to understand the effects of this type of learning, particularly which children it is reaching and to what effect.

For example, Pratham in India – a research partner of the RLO project, ‘[Can Schools’ Accountability for Learning be Strengthened from the Grassroots? Investigating the Potential for Community-School Partnerships in India](#)’ – was very quick to offer virtual learning opportunities to 11,000 villages across India (providing educational content such as word games and simple sums for parents to do together with their children via messaging services like WhatsApp). According to Pratham’s experience, its distance learning programme is proving to be a positive framework for families and communities to engage in ways they had not done pre-Covid. The effects of initiatives of this kind will be valuable to assess in future research, in order to learn lessons for the likely ongoing effects of Covid-19, as well as for future pandemics.

‘When we think about “building back better”, it is really important to find ways to ensure that this engagement that we know is possible, can continue and thrive even when schools do open and we’re back to business as usual.’

Suman Bhattacharjea, Director of Research, ASER Centre, India

Funders can also play a role in allowing for flexible approaches for research to feed into policy at times of crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic. There are reports of some funders allowing a proportion of their budgets to be relatively undefined. This allows each research partner to be innovative and develop their own approaches to influencing policy in the current situation, depending on context. For example, Professor Tristan McCowan cited participatory action research approaches:

... because of course they know their local needs... it’s essential for people to actually participate in that transformative experience for the impact to be able to happen.

SUMMARY: FOCUSING ON WHAT CAN BE DONE

To meet the challenges ahead, the research community will need to restructure its work in relation to policy actors, practitioners, and communities. In particular, researchers will need to build and maintain relationships with decision makers and communities that are focused on collective goals. The ability of diverse communities of researchers and policy actors to find common ground, sustain their interactivity, and adapt to change will have real consequences for the impact of Covid-19 on young learners and their education, with millions of these children and youth already being out of school or years behind in terms of expected learning outcomes.

'For the foreseeable future, we are going to need to adapt to the way we do research – whether it's through phone surveys, social distancing, and learning from each other as we do so... We need to be more the sum of our parts... let's think constructively about what we can do collectively.'

Professor Pauline Rose, Co-Director of the Impact Initiative and Director of the REAL Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge

COVID-19: THINKING DIFFERENTLY ABOUT EDUCATION RESEARCH IMPACT WEBINAR

In June 2020, the Impact Initiative convened a discussion with researchers to explore how to think differently about impact for their work in education policy and practice in the context of Covid-19. The event was an opportunity for grant holders from the joint ESRC-FCDO-funded Raising Learning Outcomes (RLO) in Education Systems and Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) research programmes to hear from policy actors on how they are adapting their thinking on the types of impact that can be achieved in an education context in these times of Covid-19, and the processes through which researchers can best engage with policy actors in this context. It was an opportunity for grant holders to reflect on what the current context might mean for their plans for achieving impact, and what kind of support is needed.

Approximately 80 participants joined the virtual meeting. Professor Pauline Rose, Co-Director of the Impact Initiative



and Director of the REAL Centre, University of Cambridge, moderated a panel of four education experts (policymaker, researcher, practitioner, and donor) who shared their

thoughts on how translating evidence into policy and practice can be managed and adapted within the context of Covid-19. The panellists were:

- Nompumelelo Mohohlwane, Deputy Director: Research, Monitoring and Evaluation, Department of Basic Education, South Africa;
- Professor Tristan McCowan, University College London;
- Suman Bhattacharjea, Director of Research, ASER Centre, India; and
- Laura Savage, Senior Advisor, Education Research Team, DFID.

Issues that the panellists and grant holders were asked to reflect on included: What will Covid-19 mean for doing research using previously planned methodologies? What will it mean to try and achieve impact in this context, recognising that researchers will have to think very differently? What do we think is appropriate and feasible? What support will be needed going forward, in whatever practical ways that may be?

Grant holders were reminded of the framing of what 'impact' means in the context of their research projects. As defined by the *ESRC-DFID Guiding Principles on Uptake, Impact and Communication of Research*, projects must have demonstrated impact through at least two of the following four modes (also summarised in Figure 2):

- **Instrumental:** Seeing a change in policy and practice – for example, how teachers are recruited;
- **Conceptual:** Changing ways of thinking, raising awareness, and contributions to knowledge – for example, how to think about inclusive education;
- **Capacity building:** Building capacity of researchers and intermediaries to strengthen research uptake approaches; and
- **Networks and connectivity:** Building and strengthening networks, connecting up the supply of evidence with the demand for it.

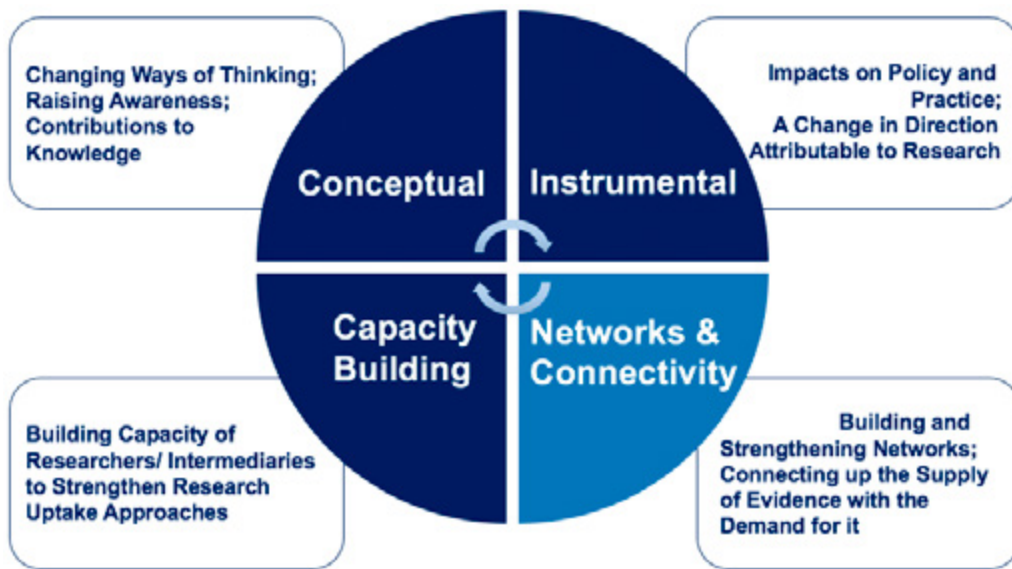


Figure 2: The Impact Initiative 'wheel of impact' based on the ESRC-DFID Guiding Principles on Uptake, Impact and Communication of Research.

Source: Georgalakis and Rose (2019: 2).

Panel presentations were followed by a rich discussion session with grant holders, collectively generating a lot of practical suggestions for how researchers can think differently about education research impact post Covid-19. The key challenges and opportunities from the discussion are summarised in Figure 1, a graphic illustration by Jorge Martin.

Credits

This Working Paper was written by Professor Pauline Rose, Director, Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre, University of Cambridge and Co-Director of the Impact Initiative; Elizabeth Tofaris, the Impact Initiative Communications Specialist; and Sandra Baxter, Research Uptake Lead, the REAL Centre, University of Cambridge. The direct quotes incorporated in this paper are sourced from the webinar recording and transcription notes and are included with kind permission from the individuals concerned.

Images: © Jorge Martin 2020

The Impact Initiative seeks to connect policymakers and practitioners with world-class social science research supported by the ESRC-FCDO Strategic Partnership, maximising the uptake and impact of research from: (i) the Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research, and (ii) the Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Programme. The Impact Initiative endeavours to identify synergies between these programmes and their grant holders, support them to exploit influencing and engagement opportunities, and facilitate mutual learning.

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THE IMPACT INITIATIVE
For International Development Research

Press Cuttings

The process of organising and communicating information can involve a wide range of intermediaries and outlets. In the Impact Initiative programme we have worked with the global media to produce several targeted articles. Often as part of an event, and in collaboration with NGOs and other researchers these pieces have been opportunities to engage in a larger conversation relevant to public audiences. Issues that have been addressed include: period poverty and inclusive education for children with disabilities.

Project Syndicate: Demystifying menstruation

17 April 2018

In collaboration with Gabby Edlin, founder of Bloody Good Period, Catherine Dolan (SOAS, University of London) Julie Hennegan (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health) shared the findings from their study with adolescent girls in Uganda, on menstruation.

“ We need solutions that are based on facts. Too often, biased assumptions guide policymaking. When programs are developed in conjunction with rigorous research, the effect can be dramatic. For example, a joint SOAS-Oxford study on menstruation in Uganda found that adolescent girls often missed school because they didn't have access to clean sanitary products. But when reusable sanitary pads and education about menstruation were provided to girls in eight schools, attendance rose by an average of 17%. ”

Read more:

www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/female-empowerment-managing-menstrual-sanitation-by-catherine-dolan-et-al-2018-04

New Statesman: Why tackling period poverty is an issue for everyone

7 February 2017

Following on from an engaged roundtable discussion as part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science in November 2018 on demystifying menstruation UK – Uganda, the panellists, Catherine Dolan, Mandu Reid (The Cup Effect and UK Women's Equality Party) and Emily Wilson-Smith (Irise International) wrote a piece building on their discussion on the universal nature of 'period poverty' and the need for multiple approaches and understandings in addressing it.

“ The failure to support women to manage their periods is a loss for society at large. Assumptions that women are less efficient while menstruating, the stigmatisation of a natural life process and the relative underdevelopment of the reusable menstrual product market must all be addressed. Politicians and policymakers need to be a driving force behind making a change. This is not just a feminist issue. This is a human issue. ”

Read more:

www.newstatesman.com/spotlight/healthcare/2019/02/why-tackling-period-poverty-issue-everyone

Devex: We must commit to inclusive education for children with disabilities

July 2018

Nidhi Singal (REAL Centre, University of Cambridge) and Nafisa Baboo (Light for the World), examined what governments must consider in order to ensure that children with disabilities benefit from quality education without discrimination. This opinion piece coincided with the first Global Disability Summit in July 2018 in London. Hosted by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the Government of Kenya and the International Disability Alliance, it aimed to promote the rights of people with disabilities by tackling the root causes of stigma, discrimination and abuse, and working towards inclusive education and employment for all. The summit brought together global leaders, government officials, donor agencies, civil society, disabled people's organisations and the private sector to ensure people with disabilities are included in both policymaking and society as a whole.

Read more:

<https://www.devex.com/news/opinion-we-must-commit-to-inclusive-education-for-children-with-disabilities-here-s-how-93153>



Photo: A school for returned refugees in the eastern province of Nangahar, Afghanistan Credit: © Ash Sweeting/Panos Pictures

THE IMPACT INITIATIVE

For International Development Research

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THIS BOOKLET PROFILES A SELECTION OF THE RESEARCH AND IMPACT FUNDED BY THE ESRC-FCDO (FORMERLY DFID) STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP THROUGH THE RAISING LEARNING OUTCOMES IN EDUCATION SYSTEMS RESEARCH PROGRAMME. THIS COLLECTION OF RESOURCES HIGHLIGHTS THE OPPORTUNITIES AND COLLABORATIONS THAT ARISE DURING THE COURSE OF RESEARCH AND THE MULTIPLE, UNIQUE AND SOMETIMES SURPRISING PATHS TO ACHIEVING IMPACT.

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