



Evidence and lessons learned regarding the effect of equitable quality education on ‘open society’

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Question

What evidence exists and what lessons can be learned regarding the effect that equitable quality education¹ has on ‘open society’²?

The concept of ‘open society’ is broad. For the purposes of this review, the following areas will be of focus: (1) impact of education on democracy; (2) impact of education on civic engagement; (3) impact of education on social cohesion.

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¹ For the purposes of this report, ‘quality equitable education’ refers to schooling for school-age children.

² For the purposes of this report, FCDO has provided a definition of ‘Open Society’ which can be found in the summary section.

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1. Summary

The purpose of this review is to assist FCDO in understanding the evidence of impact and any valuable lessons regarding the effect equitable quality education can have on 'open society'.

FCDO provided a definition of 'open society'. It comprises:

- **Institutions:** Citizens benefit from stronger, more accountable, and inclusive institutions: democratic elections and transitions; parliamentary systems; public finance and administration; and security and justice.
- **Transparency and accountability:** The conduct of government is underpinned by freedom of expression, inclusive and open digital and media spaces; strong and engaged civil societies; resilience to corruption and illicit finance, and a robust legal and regulatory system.
- **Human rights:** Individuals, particularly from marginalised groups, have greater protection in relation to their human rights. Governments and non-governmental actors are held accountable for abuse and neglect of human rights.

As the definition was broad, the first step was to carry out literature search to establish the strength of evidence in the different areas. The search revealed that there is a considerable volume of evidence which focuses on education's ability to reduce poverty, increase economic growth, boost employability and achieve better health outcomes. There is less which focuses on the aspects of 'open society' as defined in this paper. The scope of this review was narrowed to focus upon areas of the 'open society' definition where the most evidence *does* exist, given the timeframe for the review. The scope was narrowed to focus on:

- Democracy – more accountable and inclusive institutions, democratic elections and transitions, parliamentary systems, public finance, and levels of corruption.
- Civic engagement – strong and engaged civil societies.
- Social cohesion – protection for marginalised groups, security, and justice.

The review of the literature found strong evidence that equitable quality education can have a range of positive impacts on democracy (specifically, its institutions and processes), civic engagement and social cohesion.

The report will look at the evidence in each area in turn (democracy, civic engagement, and social cohesion). The strength of the evidence is assessed, and lessons learned are identified. There is considerable conceptual overlap between each area (for example, civic engagement is a cornerstone of democracy) and as such, there is the potential for some crossover between sections. However, each section has been cross-referenced in an attempt to limit duplication.

There is a **considerable body of evidence which indicates that there is a correlation between equitable quality education and benefits to societies** (more peaceful, higher levels of trust, greater participation in politics, etc). However, there was **no clear evidence that investment in equitable quality education directly leads to positive societal outcomes**. This is because there are so many other factors to account for in attempting to prove causation.

The lack of rigorous studies which attempt to attribute causation demonstrates a clear evidence gap.

It is important to note that education systems themselves are politicised and cannot be divorced from the political process. The extent to which education can impact positively on open society depends a great deal on the value education has within the political system in which it is operating.

1. Impact of education on democracy

The hypothesis that access to education leads to greater levels of democracy within societies has **significant empirical support** (Barro, 1999; Glaeser, LaPorta, Lopez-de-Silanes, and Schleifer, 2004; Papaioannou and Siourounis, 2005). Glaeser et al compared the Polity IV Index of Democracy (Jagers and Marshall, 2003) and the years of schooling in country in 1960 (Barro and Lee, 2001). Across 91 countries, the correlation coefficient between the variables is 74% – a strong correlation. Though correlation does not prove causation, the data also **demonstrated that increased levels of schooling led to countries transitioning from other systems (such as authoritarian) to democracy** (Glaeser, 2007).

Evidence suggests that citizens with higher levels of education are more likely to believe that living in a democratic country is important and are therefore more likely to be interested in preserving and promoting democracy throughout their lifetimes. The World Bank (2018) survey of more than 30 developing countries supports this, as does data from the Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2014). Across 18 sub-Saharan African countries, those of voting age with primary education were 1.5 times more likely to express support for democracy than those with no education. However, it is important to note that this is not always the case. In Kenya, although greater levels of education had caused young women to have increased levels of political knowledge, it also 'led them to be more disenchanted and more accepting of political violence' (World Bank, 2018).

Evidence suggests that citizens with higher levels of education have higher levels of trust and tolerance. Findings from OECD research indicated that better educated individuals are more trusting and tolerant of people they know and even of strangers (OECD, 2015). Citizens with higher levels of trust in government are more likely to comply with paying their taxes (Scholz and Lubell, 1998) and be in greater support of the way the government spends those taxes (Chanley et. al, 2000; Heatherington, 2004). Additionally, trust in institutions like banks tended to be higher; an important factor in securing greater financial stability at a societal level (OECD, 2015).

Education creates the building blocks for inclusive institutions which are a key tenet of democratic societies. Chong and Goldstein (2015) contend that greater levels of civic agency (discussed in more detail in the following section) leads to more inclusive institutions and stronger social contracts between citizens and their governments. The World Development Report (2018) highlights the virtuous circle that can be created as a result of this: more engaged and active citizens are more likely to be supportive of further investment in and reform of education. The World Development Report also found that education improves institutions and public services. 'Educated parents are better able to leverage decision-making at the school level' and 'a more educated population generally demands more transparent use of public

resources, better service delivery, and government accountability'. In fact, countries that had achieved 'mass education by 1870 had less corruption in 2010' (World Bank, 2018).

Education is likely to strengthen democracy because it emphasises the benefits of political activity. This is tightly related to political participation and so is therefore discussed in detail in the following section.

2. Impact of education on civic engagement

The hypothesis is that increased levels of education promotes and strengthens democracy because it **promotes civic behaviours** such as voting which underpin the democratic process.

Scholars have devoted considerable resources in trying to understand what drives civic participation (Mayer, 2011). It has become accepted wisdom that **education and levels of education are a key determinant of levels of civic participation** because education 'encourages citizens to participate in democratic processes and prepares them to do so in an informed and intelligent manner' (Dee, 2004). Furthermore, pedagogical approaches in schools teach people to interact with each other (Glaeser, 2007), which supports the behaviours needed to participate in civic matters. The volume of evidence in this area demonstrates **a strong correlation between educational attainment and various civic behaviours**, in particular, that higher levels of schooling are associated with substantive increases in voter turnout (Dee, 2004). This view has not been significantly challenged (Nie and Hillygus, 2001), however, recent research suggest that not enough has been done to account for other factors which might influence participation (Dee, 2004; Mayer, 2011). In fact, **much of the research on the impact of education on strong and engaged civil societies fails to assign causality.**

Nonetheless, **levels of education and civic engagement are correlated:**

- In 14 Latin American countries, voter turnout was five percentage points higher for those with primary education and nine points higher for individuals with secondary education than for those with no education (UNESCO, 2014).
- Across 29 mostly high-income countries, 25% of people with less than secondary education expressed concern for the environment compared with 37% of people with secondary education and 46% of people with tertiary education (UNESCO, 2014).
- In Latin America, people with secondary education were 47% less likely than those with primary education to express intolerance for people of a different race (UNESCO, 2014).
- In the Arab States, people with secondary education were 14% less likely than those with only primary education to express intolerance towards people of a different religion (UNESCO, 2014).
- In Ethiopia, six years of education increased by 20% the chance that a farmer would adapt to climate change through techniques such as practising soil conservation, varying planting dates and changing crop varieties (UNESCO, 2014).
- Levine et al (2008) observed that women with higher levels of education tend to participate more in civic and political life, citing a number of examples of women using political movements to secure benefits for themselves.

- In the United States, getting more education – for example, as a result of pre-school programs, high school scholarships or smaller class sizes – leads people to vote more often (World Bank, 2018).
- In Benin, receiving more education made people more politically active over their lifetimes (World Bank, 2018).
- In Nigeria, educational expansion substantially increased the civic and political engagement of its beneficiaries decades later (World Bank, 2018).

There is a considerable amount of literature which focuses on how **investment in specific activities related to civic engagement can have long-lasting effects on individuals'** attitudes towards participation throughout their lifetime. Providing *specific opportunities* for young people to engage in decision-making has been shown to improve their problem-solving, negotiation and communication skills, enables them to build better relationships (Generation Unlimited 2020; Martin, 2015), and leads to policies and decisions that are more likely to address their needs. In turn, young people are then able to utilise these skills to 'strengthen civil society, increase accountability of governments and corporations and work towards greater social cohesion' (Generation Unlimited; Gaventa, O'Kane).

Glaeser (2007) notes that 'the most dramatic place to see the effect of education on political participation is student activism', noting students rioting against authority in 'Oxford, Bologna and Paris even in the Middle Ages' and that students played key roles in 'liberal movements and revolutions in Europe in the middle of the 19th Century' (Glaeser, 2007). Students were also often at the centre of social movements and protests during the 20th Century and early 21st Century: for example, student demonstrations played an important role in the overthrow of Peron in Argentina in 1955, in the Tiananmen Uprising of 1989, and in peaceful demonstrations in Ukraine (Glaeser, 2007). It is important to note that **student activism does not always show a preference for democracy**. Both Mussolini and Hitler relied on student movements for support. As noted in the summary, education systems are part of the political economy. As such, students who experience that political economy will be reacting to it. Collinson (2003) describes "the interaction of political and economic processes in society: the distribution of power and wealth between different groups and individuals and the processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time".

Korin (2020) found that **countries with well-educated women enjoy the greatest returns to civic engagement and social commitments**. There is consensus in the literature is that investment in education for women and girls has a multiplier effect on society as a whole. Evidence from Levine et al. (2008) points specifically to an increased likelihood of democratic governance in countries with well-educated women.

3. Impact of education on social cohesion

The hypothesis is that a more equal society in which fewer people find themselves on the 'outside' leads to greater civic engagement and citizens who are more willing to hold government and institutions to account. Therefore, educational initiatives and interventions which seek to increase social cohesion have the potential to yield significant benefits to society.

There is **very little rigorous research on the direct impact of education on social cohesion and practices of exclusion in society**. Social cohesion and exclusion in society are complex, multi-sector challenges that require coordinated cross-sector responses. Because of this, efforts to find causation are challenging as there are so many variables at play. Nonetheless, **education can play a significant role in fostering and encouraging social cohesion**.

Education improves tolerance and can reduce crime. Higher levels of formal, general education promote trust and tolerance (Korin, 2020). The World Values Survey in Latin America and the Arab states demonstrates that people with primary education only were more likely to demonstrate intolerance towards people of different religion, sexuality and ethnicity than people with secondary education or above. **Trust in others increased with additional years of schooling** (UNESCO 2014a).

Poor educational attainment is a cause and a consequence of child marriage. Countries with the greatest gender disparities in secondary enrolment include the countries with the highest rates of child marriage (Wodon et al. 2017). **Education reduces rates of child marriage**, which disproportionately affects girls (Wodon et al 2017).

Tippett and Wolke (2014) found that **low socioeconomic status is associated with a greater likelihood of being involved in bullying, either as a bully or a victim**. **Parents' educational attainment is one of the most important predictors of school performance and educational attainment** (OECD, 2020; OECD 2016; Dubow, Boxer and Huesmann, 2009). Data from PISA showed that the students with at least one parent who completed upper-secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education are less likely to report being victimised (OECD, 2020). The data also shows that low performers, especially boys and students whose parents are less educated, tend to report greater exposure to bullying (OECD, 2017).

As already mentioned in this report, education systems themselves are not capable of being politically neutral. **Curricula can play an important role in improving or worsening social cohesion** (Naylor, 2015). There are examples of curricula which have been used to oppress particular ethnic groups and to promote hatred, xenophobic and racist ideologies, militarism and religious warfare (Dupuy, 2008). There are also examples of curricula which have been designed to 'promote peace: through direct teaching of peace education, or other subjects promoting tolerance, cooperation and negotiation skills...through subjects that aim to promote civic values and governance, or through inclusive approaches to choice of language of instruction, history and social studies curricula' (Naylor, 2015)

4. Lessons learned

The following tables summarise the evidence alongside lessons learned for each of the three areas.

Democracy

Evidence	Lessons for consideration
Increased years of schooling is correlated with increased likelihood of democratic politics.	Expand equitable access to quality education, focusing on measures to support more years in school.
Education is likely to increase democracy because it creates the conditions for individuals to be engaged in society.	Expand equitable access to quality education.

Strong and engaged civil societies

Evidence	Lessons for consideration
Levels of education and civic engagement are correlated.	Expand equitable access to quality education for all.
Giving school-age children the opportunity to engage in decision-making and other civic engagement skills is likely to lead to higher levels and more sustained participation in later life.	Promote and even make compulsory civic education across stages and types of school to close the inequality gap in civic participation in later life.
Finding opportunities for young people to engage in civic processes within their existing environments (through school councils or debating in class, for example) can be low-cost and high impact.	Train, support and empower system leaders/policymakers to promote and enable schools to facilitate civic education and to foster debate and discussion in classrooms.
The history of student activism shows that students do not necessarily prioritise advocating for democracy.	Combine civic engagement skills with education on social issues and differing political systems.
There is an increased likelihood of democratic governance in countries with well-educated women.	Focus on girls' education.

Social cohesion

Evidence	Lessons for consideration
Education can play a significant role in fostering and encouraging social cohesion.	Expand equitable access to quality education for all.
Trust and tolerance can be increased with additional years of schooling.	Consider measures to support children and young people to stay in school for longer.
Countries with the biggest gender disparity in secondary enrolment have the highest rates of child marriage.	Reduce the disparity between girls and boys in secondary school enrolment.
Children whose parents have lower levels of education are more likely to be bullied.	Consider measures to support children and young people to stay in school for longer.
The content of curricula can have a positive or negative impact on society.	Train, support and empower policymakers, education advisers, teachers etc to design curricula that support positive social outcomes.

The evidence assembled in this report emphasises the importance that a good quality education must be made accessible to all. Education's unique potential to help society achieve other goals can only be fully realised if education is both equitable and of good quality.

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