Australian Government



Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Supplementary Teaching and Parental Involvement in Developing Countries Policy Brief

Despite increased primary school enrolments towards the universal primary education goal, educational outcomes remain poor due to high drop-out rates (particularly among females and the economically disadvantaged), teacher and student absenteeism, and poor facilities. The project with randomized field experiments, collaboratively conducted with education professionals, government officials, parents and teachers, evaluate several low-cost intervention programs to improve outcomes through greater parental involvement and supplementary teaching targeting girls and underperforming students in particular.

KEY MESSAGES

- The study provides strong evidence that parents' involvement in school activities can have a significant positive effect on students' learning even in low-income countries.
- The after-school teaching by local privately hired teachers led to significant increase in students' test score
- The intervention did not cause any substitution of efforts or expenditure on the treated children's education, but did increase household involvement in education for all the students.
- The interventions also helped to improve the performance of the other students (not targeted by this program) in the same schools, compared to those in control schools.
- We provide evidence on the effectiveness of placing students in small study groups in the context of Bangladeshi primary schools. The results reveal a positive impact of studying with friends on lowability females, a group that typically performs well below grade level.

Parental Involvement in Education

Greater parental involvement in their children's studies has been shown to be effective even in disadvantaged communities in developed countries. Based on a study of randomized field experiments involving regular, face-to-face meetings between teachers and parents in a rural Bangladesh setting, we show that this finding can be extended also to developing countries. Regular parent-teacher meetings induced parents to spend more time assisting their children and monitoring their school work. Not only did this help to improve students' test scores but it also resulted in improvements in student attitudes and behavior. The treatment effects were robust across parental, teacher or school-level characteristics. These findings have major policy implications for developing countries where higher school enrolment levels have often not translated into improved educational outcomes: programs to stimulate parent-teacher interactions are cost-effective, easy to implement and scale up.

Supplementary teaching to improve student learning in developing countries

The study uses a large scale randomized controlled trials in rural primary schools in Bangladesh to document the effectiveness of a supplementary teaching program in which we provide additional teaching outside normal school hours for underperforming students in schools. Using comprehensive data collected over three years from more than 30,000 children and their families in about 360 schools, we investigate the effectiveness of the program on students' academic achievement, and whether it causes any changes in teachers', households' or students' behaviors. At the end of intervention, we find no evidence of household substitution. We also observe improvement in test scores for students not targeted by the program, due perhaps to the increased competition among students in the same classes.

Friendship Networks Improve Female Education

Significant and persistent gender gaps in education are common across many developing countries. Improving the learning outcomes of female students, especially those with low abilities, is thus an important challenge not only for Bangladesh but also for much of the developing world. Actual progress in this respect, however, requires testing teaching practices that can be easily and inexpensively implemented in real settings. In our experiment, we focus on assessing the effectiveness of a simple teaching practice: the sorting of children into study groups of friends to work outside of class time. The results of our experiment show that, regardless of their initial ability level, the gain (or loss) in math scores for male students is not affected by whether they study by themselves, with random peers, or with friends. However, for female students, there is a significant and positive gain in math scores for the low-ability students who study in groups with friends.

Further readings

Islam, A. 2016. Parental Involvement in Education: Evidence from Field Experiments, Working Paper, Monash University

Islam, A. 2017. Supplementary Teaching Program: Key to improved student learning in developing countries? Evidence from a Randomized Controlled Trial in Rural Bangladesh, Mimeo

Hahn, Y., Islam, A., Pattacchini, E. and Zenou, Y. 2017. Do Friendship Networks Improve Female Education? IZA Discussion Paper No. 10674

Hahn, Y., Islam, A., Pattacchini, E. and Zenou, Y. 2015. Teams, Organization and Education Outcomes: Evidence from a field experiment in Bangladesh, Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR) Discussion Paper No. 10631

METHODOLOGY

- Use a two-stage randomized controlled trialstargeting different children in 360 schools in rural Bangladesh
- School were chosen randomly from several subdistricts and then students were selected based on different criteria, focusing on girls and underperforming children in these schools.
- Children were tested separately for their cognitive outcomes in each year, as well as before the intervention started.
- Two separate household surveys were conducted to understand the effects of parental inputs on children's educational outcomes, and impact based on the socioeconomic status of the parents.
- Students and their parental friendship information were collected to understand how they interact with their peers to produce educational outcomes.

Research team: Asadul Islam, Sisiriya Jayasuriya, Yves Zenou, and Eleonora Pattacchini This document is an output from research funded by DFAT. The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of DFAT or the Australian Government.