

Collecting Better Evidence for Development: Education

Abby Riddell
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Basic Questions

- ◆ Evidence for whom?
- ◆ Evidence for what?
- ◆ In what time frame?
- ◆ With what trade-off?

Education for All to Learning for All

- ◆ From access to learning achievement
- ◆ From EMIS to learning assessments
- ◆ Access was never enough: 'first' EFA in Zimbabwe: primary school access trebled and secondary access 7.5x over 5 years of indep.
- ◆ Yet, parents of half of those afforded places in new schools had their children walk further to older, established schools

The Holy Grail

- ◆ How to get the most bang for your buck – or as in the current WDR “which factors are associated with better student achievement”
- ◆ Some of us have been pre-occupied with these questions for decades and methodologies have changes as have ‘the answers’

Today

- ◆ Asking the same questions but really delivering for those at the top of the hierarchy: development partners and national ministries
- ◆ Yet the 'evidence' of success needed to inculcate changed practices is really lower down: teachers, head teachers, district administration, communities

History

- ◆ World Bank research – schools vs family background different in developing countries – using research models that couldn't adequately account for separate influences
- ◆ Trying to answer where you get the most bang for your buck – both a research exercise, but an important policy research area especially for newly developing education systems
- ◆ More refined research methodologies – gone off the scales in fact
- ◆ We've still had a huge dependence on economic researchers using their models and we've 'taught' nationals such methodologies
- ◆ Dysfunction between education and economic language – persists in policy, persists in govts (between ministries of finance and ministries of education)
- ◆ Still doing 'what matters' research – like searching for the golden fleece, but really like looking for a needle in a haystack as it becomes more and more refined: on the one hand using huge meta-analyses and on the other hand using RCTs

Examples

- ◆ Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (EFA) in India '90s– huge WB investment in baseline, midline and end results, sophisticated methodology and 2-3 pp. of implications
- ◆ Zambia: EMIS and USAID – money trumped fit
- ◆ OECD PISA: “Lower-middle-income countries have generally participated when participation has been encouraged and financed by donors.”
- ◆ Recent evaluations – similarly sophisticated to show ‘impact’: should donors’ ‘evidence’ trump nationals’ need for evaluative research?

WDR

- ◆ “international actors can fund participation in regional learning assessments or global learning assessments to spotlight challenges and catalyze domestic efforts for reform.”
- ◆ “External actors can also develop tools for tracking the proximate determinants of learning to aid in feedback loops.”
- ◆ “a high-leverage entry point for international actors is to fund better information that will make domestic spending more effective.” The World Bank can provide results-based financing that gives countries more room to innovate and iterate their way to achieving better outcomes.

'Evidence' and Systemic Reform

- ◆ In the search for 'what works', decades of research are discarded in favour of RCTs of individual interventions that do little for a minister's portfolio of systemic educational reforms. Yet they satisfy a donor's need for the accountability of its aid monies.
- ◆ Whilst a slew of meta-analyses of 'what works' in developing countries' education interventions have been forthcoming over recent years, ironically, this is at a time when 'post-truth' politics in our own countries has not only reduced the role of 'experts' but has made evidence-based policymaking an aside at the same time as it continues to be a mantra of development work.

GEM

- ◆ First, there is little evidence that performance-based accountability, which focuses on outcomes over inputs and uses narrow incentives, improves education systems. Incentives have often been limited to punishments to force compliance or modify behaviour. (295)

International Requirements

- ◆ GPE, UIS – data requirements
 - ◆ “assess countries’ readiness to apply for financing based on their existing system for monitoring learning outcomes or requiring a time-bound plan to develop one”
 - ◆ “In a conservative scenario, better data would lead to a 10% gain in efficiency.”
- ◆ ‘Requirement’ of learning assessment like GPE-vetted education plans
- ◆ Private initiatives: Pearson, Bridge
 - ◆ Encouraging education systems to function more like markets is likely to benefit better resourced schools and families, leading to greater inequality. (GEM:61)

Value for Money

- ◆ *value-for-money analysis* has been elevated in importance in aid reviews to the extent that efficiency may trump effectiveness, certainly from a long-term perspective.
- ◆ DFID should ensure that principles of development effectiveness – such as ensuring partner country leadership, building national capacity and empowering beneficiaries – are more explicit in its value for money approach. (ICAI)

GEM

- ◆ Many often externally funded approaches to accountability have not been designed in a sustainable way. To be sustainable, approaches to accountability should support and work with structures already in place. (295)

Evaluations

- ◆ Can we meet stakeholders' different objectives in the evaluations we undertake?
- ◆ Should there be inclusive 'rider' clauses (for evaluation processes and evaluation integration) for this purpose especially now that few if any observe the Paris Declaration?

2017/8 GEM Report

- ◆ Transparent and relevant data on the strengths and weaknesses of education systems should be available. But countries need to be **judicious** in what data they collect and how they use them, keeping in mind the costs involved and the skills required to interpret, analyse and act on such data to improve teaching and learning (xv).

What should we be doing?

- ◆ Insist on appropriate integration with long term buy-in – not just funding for international comparisons
- ◆ Highlight use of different assessments at different levels by recipients and let them choose what they value and are willing to self-finance in long run
- ◆ Try (again!) to get evaluations integrated in-country and covering more than ‘projects’: enable locals to use ‘evidence’ and cultivate use

More...

- ◆ Can we not get back to basics? What evidence should be needed to show that our contributions are making a difference? (whose lens?) do we have the guts to say that the time scale is too short and that the measures are highly imperfect? Or are the bean counters so important that we have to continue to fudge the data?
- ◆ the importance of building constituencies for the use and application of evidence for policy and decision-making.