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IMPORTANCE OF THE EXPERIENCE OF FOREIGN COUNTRIES IN IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EDUCATION QUALITY

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Abstract. This article reviews what has been learned over many decades of foreign aid to education and discusses what works and what does not work. It shows the positive contribution that aid has made to education in aid-recipient countries, the most tangible outcome of which is the contribution that aid makes to expanding enrolments especially of basic education. But the article also indicates that there is a considerable gap between what aid does and what it could potentially achieve, especially in relation to its contribution to improvements in educational quality. It shows the distortions caused by focusing on enrolments and insufficiently on quality. Sustainable education outcomes will not be achieved merely by reproducing yet more successful, but individual projects. Perversely, development agencies which focus only on demonstrable short-term impact may well be contributing, unwittingly, to an undermining of long-term impact on the education systems and their deepening development, to whose progress they are trying to contribute.

Key words: experience, effectiveness, opportunities, intercultural communication, receive adequate, reinforcing comprehensive.

Introduction. The simplicity of the question, 'What do we know about what works in foreign aid to education?' unfortunately, is not matched by the simplicity of a list of effective interventions or the simplicity in the way aid to education is provided. In recent years there have also been many new and different approaches in the provision of aid to education. If that doesn't make an assessment of the effectiveness of aid to education difficult enough, the challenges are compounded by the fact not only that education serves many purposes, but educational outcomes are influenced more by what goes on outside schools than within them—widening further the complexities involved in assessing the effectiveness of foreign aid to education. It is at least as challenging as assessing attempts to reform and improve our own national education systems, without crossing international boundaries. Nonetheless, decades of work and accrued knowledge and experience have yielded lessons of what works best, even if such lessons reflect detailed approaches involving capacity development, mentoring, new accountabilities as well as specific 'inputs'.

The purpose of this article is to review what has been learned over many decades of foreign aid to education. It discusses what works and what doesn't and in this discussion will draw attention to the fact that even a simple assessment requires more than providing a uniform check-list of 'inputs'. It goes on to provide some guidance as to how aid effectiveness could be improved to reach more sustainable, education outcomes. This article does not, however, seek to provide prescriptive answers to specific problems, but instead to define a broad set of unresolved issues in the aid architecture for education. Thus, the reader should approach this article as a problem-posing piece, in which questions are raised (not answered), for future research in the field.

Educationists have continually pointed out that it is far easier to show the impact of aid-supported health interventions than education ones: improvements in mortality rates are more visible in the short term than increased learning. However, when attempting to assess the contribution of aid to service-delivery, aid to the health sector faces quite similar challenges as does aid to education. This is because attribution is typically multifaceted: providing textbooks

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and speeding up textbook distribution, like the provision of anti-malarial bed nets, will no doubt contribute to overall impact, but determining and especially trying to quantify its specific contribution to broader outcomes is far from easy when set alongside many other contributory factors, only some of which are aid-related. And to identify sustainable improvements is even more difficult as it requires attention to the social, political and economic contexts of the reform as well as the inter-linkages with inputs from other sectors.

Aid has been channeled into a variety of interventions such as school feeding programs, classroom construction, teacher education, girls' scholarships, programs to reduce student drop-out, curriculum development, targeting different educational levels and utilizing different aid modalities. Project impact evaluations by development agencies have tended to produce more positive results than the studies of aid impact utilizing panel data from international aid and education statistics. When focused on the impact of aid to education on outcomes such as access to education or years of completed education, studies have found very small impact.

School effectiveness research was first undertaken within the industrialized world, and hence by donor countries themselves, and subsequently used within developing countries, primarily by industrialized country researchers, focused on production functions that were termed 'determinants of achievement', isolating individual inputs and trying to assess which would give the most 'bang' for each aid 'buck' contributed to an education system. Though the research in aid-recipient countries mirrored that carried out in industrialized countries, surprisingly, the early conventional wisdom from this work made out that developing countries were different from industrialized countries because the school rather than family background factors mattered more in influencing learning achievement differences—reinforcing the view that providing aid to schools was an effective way of using aid resources. However, the veracity (and simplicity) of these early conclusions have been challenged by other work. School effectiveness research continues especially with the increasing attention being paid to the production of more direct measures of educational quality through learning assessments.

It is evident that much has been uncovered with respect to the specific effects of individual inputs or approaches in providing aid to education. However, 'the' lesson of what works in aid to education has become clearer and it is this: that providing effective aid to education which seeks not merely to increase 'numbers' – of children in school, textbooks, schools and teachers – but to make a lasting improvement to learning and thus has quality at its core, is both complex and difficult. There is no 'set' and established blue-print of what to do that can be applied generally to all countries. What is needed will be informed not only by the educational system as a whole but by the political economy and sociology of education systems, and by the goals and purpose of formal and non-formal education systems. It will include the obvious basic inputs of teachers, classrooms and instructional materials, but will also need to include or take stock of the status, salary scales and deployment of teachers who, themselves have been educated, the curricula and design and use of examinations, the mentoring, supervision and support of teachers, the policy analysis and targeting of resource allocation to embrace systemic and specific needs, including meeting ethnic, locational and gender requirements, and advancing increased access for those with disabilities with sufficient attention paid to quality improvement so as not to create a second-class system provided for those without alternative choices.

Good planning can shed light on some of the inter-linkages between aid's specific contribution and its overall impact, foreseeing the consequences of particular aid interventions. This is often in spite of even aid to the education sector as a whole typically being ring-fenced by ministries or NGOs as well as by the sectoral departments of development agencies themselves.

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Indeed, planning and the surrounding education management information systems (EMIS) feeding such plans have constituted a major area of aid to education: helping countries to create reliable and robust data on issues such as enrolments, transition rates and to plan the expansion of school systems and assess teacher training needs. Nonetheless, without some national data collection yielding the gaps in educational provision – for example, of classrooms, textbooks, teachers or latrines – or the black spots of poor outcomes – whether of access, completion or learning achievement – it remains hard to determine where to target aid-supported interventions no less independent, national reforms. Such mapping of needs has extended into research typically funded by aid to determine the effectiveness of different inputs to educational reform. For example, girls' scholarships have been an intervention used in many countries to address gender disparities in school access and completion, based on the accumulated data of EMIS as well as household surveys.

The success of aid to educational planning, however, needs to be judged not only by the products or outputs produced, such as an educational plan or an annual educational data census, but, also (and far more importantly) by the successful use of such outputs, that is by the contribution they make to furthering better educational outcomes9. Providing more textbooks and raising primary school completion, for instance, have often been taken as 'proxies of learning' and other, qualitative, sustainable outcomes, but there is, of course, no guarantee that they do contribute to better learning. In the case of educational planning, it is the use of such plans and EMIS data for identifying resource needs, targeting allocations and determining appropriate policies which comprise the qualitative outcomes and which illustrate that processes of systemic change are taking place. 'Successful' planning is linked to ownership, leadership, capacity development, public sector reform and the institutional and organizational capacity development that underwrites individual skill acquisition.

The new aid modalities provide a more holistic perspective on the role of aid to education, prioritizing the aid recipient's objectives in their education plans. Having to balance policy options for a whole education system takes one along a different path from determinants of achievement research, and also from the more narrowed focus of RCTs. They comprise a more complicated interface of aid impacting educational systems rather than merely individual, identifiable outcomes. This raises the issue of institutional reform, together with all the interlinkages between different institutions rather than any individual education policy per se. Thus, for instance, public sector reform might have a greater impact on classroom teaching than any particular teaching intervention.

Conclusion. Aid to the education sector has certainly helped to expand the technical skill base of ministry staff, by increasing, especially, the planning and functions, but, as the analysis has shown, donors have repeatedly given priority to skills training to deliver more immediate products such as the plans or the annual school census data over progress in institutional and organizational capacity development, so that insufficient attention has been paid to their use within the ministry: one cannot 'make' staff use data unless it serves a purpose. If, or when, the purpose is to 'supply' data to donors for 'their' accountability rather than for the ministry's own targeting and resource allocation, then the plans and policy analysis will quickly become more like alien instruments than tools that, embedded in the core workings of the ministry, enhance the government's ability to respond better to its own demands for information and its use. Data use must be driven by need, not directed from on high, or from outsiders, or it will remain someone else's agenda.

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