
The impact of impact evaluations: Lessons from the education sector

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Education breakout session: Overview

- Questions for presenters of IE studies in education:
 - What attempts were made to present results/influence policy?
 - How much influence did the impact evaluation have, and why? And how do you know (*given that correlation need not mean causality*)?
 - How much influence *should* the IE have had?
 - What would increase its policy relevance?

 - Goal of education session
 - Identify 2-3 lessons on what worked in getting evidence used
 - Identify 2-3 lessons on what the major obstacles were
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Chance to test hypotheses from morning sessions

Impact Evaluation works best when:

- *Evaluation design:*
 - ❑ Policy evaluated is important (and not just interesting)?
 - ❑ Design focuses on producing timely findings?
 - ❑ Or should evaluation be built in ex ante (which takes longer)?
 - ❑ Design deals convincingly with selection bias (or other biases)?
 - ❑ IE takes heterogeneity of impacts seriously?
 - ❑ IE is designed with a view to scaling up?
 - ❑ IE is designed to understand process generating impact?
 - ❑ IE includes evaluation of viable alternatives?
 - ❑ Design uses mixed methods?
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Chance to test hypotheses from morning sessions

Impact Evaluation works best when:

■ *Country context*

- ❑ Country has (or builds) capacity to participate in IE and take ownership?
- ❑ IE can build on good baseline data & statistical capacity?
- ❑ Policymakers are open to learning from negative results?

■ *Delivery and use of IE:*

- ❑ IE results are presented in a direct, clear, non-PC way?
 - ❑ IE is part of a package of interactions and policy dialogue?
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Cases examined

- **Case #1:** Primary education programs in Uganda
 - IE found that:
 - Access expanded dramatically, but quality remains poor
 - Investments in teachers, classrooms, & books can improve education quality, but poor school and district management is also a binding constraint
 - IE impacts:
 - Enhanced accountability to Parliament
 - Greater use of evidence-based policy-making
 - Move from output monitoring to monitoring of results
 - Building demand for further, more rigorous evaluation
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Cases examined (*continued*)

- **Case #2:** Scholarships for lower-secondary attendance in Cambodia
 - Filmer and Schady (2008) show that:
 - Scholarships increased enrollment & attendance by 15-20 percentage points, but did not increase test scores
 - Scholarships were progressive, but not well targeted at poorest
 - IE impacts:
 - *Catalyst for more IEs?:* Yes -- previous IE by the authors influenced program design and paved the way for this cleaner RDD design, and this IE's findings were well received by authorities
 - *Catalyst for policy change?:* Yes – increased openness to better targeting of scholarships, via new focus on primary level instead of secondary
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Cases examined (*continued*)

- **Case #3:** Generalized school choice (vouchers) in Chile
 - Hsieh & Urquiola (2003, 2006) found that choice had led to:
 - Massive sorting & middle-class exit from public schools
 - No gains in average achievement
 - IE impacts
 - *Catalyst for research?* Yes -- follow-up studies on sorting and achievement gains
 - *Catalyst for policy change?* Not clear – greater electoral focus on education quality and equity, but attributable more to student protests and Chile’s dissemination of school performance data
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What worked and didn't work in education IEs

How to get evidence used

- Choose an important topic that policymakers need an answer to, such as effects of school choice in Chile or massive ramp-up in primary education in Uganda – *all three countries*
 - Find allies and a policymaker champion inside the government, try to minimize their costs, and be transparent with them about process – *Uganda*
 - Provide clear, easy-to-understand indicators of both outcomes and impacts:
 - Provide better indicators of outcomes (e.g., in access to education, or student achievement) and problems with management (e.g., dropout, teacher absenteeism) – *Uganda, Chile*
 - Use visually attractive methods like RDD or incidence bar charts, so that non-specialists can see the impact clearly -- *Cambodia*
 - Use initial IE and results monitoring to build demand for further, more rigorous IE – *Cambodia, Uganda*
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What worked and didn't work in education IEs

What barriers have to be overcome

- High costs of IE, high-risk nature of *ex ante* IE, and time requirements – *Uganda, general experience*
 - Communication, given complexity of IE ideas -- *Uganda*
 - Lack of baseline data and statistics – *Cambodia*
 - Unwillingness to randomize – *Cambodia*
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