



**BLAVATNIK**  
SCHOOL of GOVERNMENT

# IMPROVING GOVERNANCE, DELIVERING BETTER EDUCATION

*10 – 11 April, Blavatnik School of Government, Oxford*

## CONFERENCE REPORT

Author: Clare Leaver, Blavatnik School of Government



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## BACKGROUND

Education is key to economic development and wellbeing. But education outcomes remain below expectations in many settings, particularly in low and middle-income countries. Studies over the last decade indicate that poor and inefficient governance plays a major role. While problems such as low teacher effort,

teacher absenteeism and leakage of public funds are increasingly recognised, addressing these issues remains a challenge. On 10–11 April 2014, the Blavatnik School convened an international conference to discuss how governance could be improved to deliver better educational outcomes.

## ABOUT THE EVENT

The conference brought together academics, policymakers, and donors working in the field of education, as well as experts from other sectors. Over 40 participants attended the five sessions held over the course of the two days.

The first day of the conference saw a series of research presentations from academics, followed by comments from invited discussants. The morning session presented insights from recent research on school-level governance in low-income countries. A variety of initiatives were discussed, including monitoring and performance pay for teachers, teacher hiring practices, and the use of contract teachers. The first set of papers in the afternoon session brought in perspectives from other sectors. The initiatives discussed here included a poster campaign to improve citizen voice in the transport sector, and performance-based financing and peer scrutiny in the health sector. The second afternoon session returned to the education theme and asked if there were lessons that could be learnt from high-income countries. The specific policies discussed were classroom instruction time and school inspections. The day closed with a presentation from the Department for International Development (DFID) setting out new long-term funding opportunities for education research.

The second day of the conference switched the focus from evaluation of pilot initiatives to the challenges of large-scale policy implementation. In the first of the morning sessions, researchers from the World Bank summarized what is known about what makes schools work and, the quality of service delivery, across a range of low and middle-income countries. In the second session, experts on political economy presented results from observational studies documenting how extensively politicians can influence the delivery of public services. The formal conference proceedings were brought to a close with a keynote panel session on the next 'big ideas' in education systems research. Over the course of a lively two-hours, leading academics and policymakers debated the merits of system-wide changes in the use of performance standards, supplementary teaching assistants, and teacher evaluation and career progression. Many conference participants stayed on for an optional afternoon session focused on building research partnerships. The roundtable discussion highlighted a number of areas for future collaboration.

This report, combined with the slides and papers that it links to, provides a summary of the conference proceedings.





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## THURSDAY 10 APRIL

### Session 1: Evidence from recent governance reforms in schools

Chair: **Philip Davies**, International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3IE)

**Clare Leaver**, Blavatnik School of Government  
*Pay for locally monitored teacher attendance? A welfare analysis for Ugandan primary schools*

**Ricardo Estrada**, Paris School of Economics  
*Rules rather than discretion: Teacher hiring and rent extraction in Mexico*

**Justin Sandefur**, Center for Global Development  
*Scaling up what works: Experimental evidence on external validity in Kenyan education*

**Karthik Muralidharan**, University of California, San Diego  
*The fiscal cost of weak governance: Evidence from primary education in India*

*Contract teachers: Experimental evidence from India*

Discussants: **Sonia Bhalotra**, University of Essex;  
**Abhijeet Singh**, University of Oxford

This session presented insights from recent research on school-level governance in low-income countries.

#### Research highlights:

- The Ugandan study evaluated two monitoring schemes via randomised trial. In both schemes, head-teachers were asked to submit SMS text reports on teacher attendance to Makerere University. These reports were collated and fed back to the local community. In one scheme, teachers were also paid a cash bonus when reported present by their head-teacher. Paying for locally monitored

attendance reduced teacher absenteeism by 9 percentage points relative to the control, and 8 percentage points relative to community feedback alone. This financial incentive scheme also generated the highest quality information. Netting out the cost of the bonuses, pay for locally monitored teacher attendance was estimated to improve social welfare.

- The Mexican study exploited a natural experiment to compare the effectiveness of two teacher-hiring policies. Under a discretionary scheme, teachers' unions directly proposed candidates, while under a rule-based scheme teachers were hired on the basis of national standardised exam scores. Schools that were allocated test-hired teachers experienced significantly less cheating in end-of-year exams and higher student achievement. These findings were interpreted as evidence that rule-based hiring can curb the tendency of officials to extract rent from lower-quality candidates.
- The Kenyan study investigated the external validity of recent NGO-led randomised trials of contract teacher programs in Western Kenya and parts of India. An NGO, World Vision, and the Ministry of Education replicated the intervention across all Kenyan provinces. NGO implementation of the program produced a positive test score effect that was comparable in magnitude to earlier studies. However, government implementation produced zero effect. These findings suggest that institutions matter and, in particular, that government failure can arise at scale.
- The first of the two Indian studies used panel data to calculate the returns to improving education governance. Between 2003 and 2011, teacher



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absence showed no correlation with infrastructure spending and was negatively correlated with both school inspections and pupil-teacher-ratios. These findings suggest that there could be substantial returns to reallocating public investment towards school inspections, and away from additional capital and labour inputs. The second study used a randomised trial to evaluate the impact of an expansion of a contract teacher program in Andhra Pradesh, India. The provision of an extra contract teacher significantly improved test scores, and lowered teacher absenteeism, in program schools relative to control schools. Contract teachers are paid substantially less than regular teachers, suggesting that they may offer a cost-effective means to reduce pupil-teacher-ratios.



## Session 2: New opportunities for education research in low and middle- income countries

Chair: **Pieter Serneels**, University of East Anglia

**Billy Jack**, Georgetown University

*State vs. consumer regulation: An evaluation of two road safety interventions in Kenya*

**Elise Huillery**, Sciences Po

*Pay-for-performance, motivation and final output in the health sector: Experimental evidence from the Democratic Republic of Congo*

**Ken Leonard**, University of Maryland

*Generosity norms and intrinsic motivation in health care provision: Evidence from the laboratory and the field*

**Simon Burgess**, University of Bristol

*How should we treat under-performing schools? A regression discontinuity analysis of school inspections in England*

**Victor Lavy**, University of Warwick and Hebrew University of Jerusalem

*Do differences in schools' instruction time explain international achievement gaps? Evidence from developed and developing countries?*

**Rachel Hinton**, Department for International Development

*DFID effective education systems research programme*

Discussants: **Erlend Berg**, University of Bristol; **Osea Giuntella**, Blavatnik School of Government; **Richard Murphy**, University College London

### Research highlights:

- The Kenyan study reported on two initiatives intended to improve the safety of matatus, private taxi minibuses with a notoriously poor accident record. The first initiative, state regulation, was shown to have had little impact on accident insurance claims by matatu drivers. The second initiative, in-matatu adverts encouraging consumers to speak out against dangerous driving had a substantial impact, reducing claims by around 60 per cent. Salient images of accidents encouraging individual action had the largest effect.

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- The Congolese study evaluated the effectiveness of two financing models in the health sector by randomised trial. In the performance-based-financing scheme, health facilities received resource increments based on the quantity of targeted services provided relative to other facilities. In the fixed payment scheme, health facilities received resource increments based on staffing numbers. Results were mixed. The performance-based-financing model increased health worker motivation to supply targeted services, with no corresponding decline in the supply of non-targeted services. However, there was also no evidence of an improvement in utilization on the demand-side. Moreover, there were signs that performance-based-financing may have crowded out intrinsic motivation.
- The third, Tanzanian, study evaluated the impact of intrinsic incentive schemes on the quality of care provided by clinicians in urban outpatient facilities by combining laboratory experiments with a randomised trial. In one scheme, peers scrutinised clinicians, while in another scheme peers offered encouragement. Both schemes were shown to improve the quality of care. Generous clinicians – as measured in the laboratory experiment – were shown to provide better care, but to respond to the incentive schemes in the same way as non-generous clinicians. The findings suggest that pro-social motivation in health care is important, and may be stronger in reaction to peers than to patients.
- The English study evaluated the impact of the OFSTED school inspections regime on under-performing schools between 2002 and 2011 using a quasi-experimental research design. The performance of schools that just failed their inspection (giving rise to a notice to improve) was compared with the performance of schools that just passed. Schools that just failed improved their subsequent performance relative to the pre-visit year by substantially more than schools that just passed their inspection. These findings suggest that top-down inspections do have potential to bring about improvements in the delivery of education, albeit at a fairly high resource cost.
- The final study looked at the impact of differences in instructional time across a large cross-section of developed and developing countries on the performance of pupils on PISA tests. The research design exploited within-student variation in instructional time across subjects. Hence the question was whether a pupil who received more instructional time in maths than in reading did better on his/her PISA maths test than his/her PISA reading test. Instructional time was shown to have a positive effect on test scores in OECD and Eastern European countries. However, the impact in developing countries was much lower, at only half the OECD estimate. The findings suggest that improvements in the work environment and governance of teachers could increase teacher productivity in developing countries.

The first day of the conference closed with a short presentation by Rachel Hinton on the new long-term research funding opportunities available under the DFID Effective Education Systems Research Programme launched earlier this spring.





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**FRIDAY 11 APRIL**

## Session 3: Implementing Reform

Chair: **Pauline Rose**, University of Cambridge

**Barbara Bruns**, World Bank

*Making schools work*

**Waly Wane**, World Bank

*Service delivery indicators across countries*

**Irma Clots Figueras**, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid

*Health, education and the political agency of women*

**Dan Rogger**, University College London

*The role of politicians in delivering government projects*

Discussants: **Julien Labonne**, Blavatnik School of Government; **Christine Valente**, University of Bristol

### Research highlights:

- The first presentation summarised and updated the World Bank's influential 2011 'What Makes School Work?' study. There were two key take-away messages. First, the accountability framework set out in the World Development Report 2004 is still useful—services fail when the voice and power of clients are weak—but it needs updating to reflect the rise of "peer" accountability. Second, there is a big knowledge gap concerning strategies that will best improve teacher practice in the classroom, which is the essential link in the causal chain for most education reforms.
- The second presentation summarised results from the World Bank's on-going initiative to provide comparable Service Delivery Indicators (SDIs) across sub-Saharan Africa. These SDIs are intended to shed light on behaviour in service delivery units, and to measure the availability of key inputs, as well as provider effort and ability. The key message was stark: the SDI results are a warning sign for Africa. Improving quality requires better management, a focus on providers' incentives, and enhanced accountability.
- The third presentation reported results from a study of the impact of politician gender on the delivery of health care and education across 16 Indian states. The quasi-experimental research design exploited close elections between male and female candidates. Specifically, service delivery outcomes in districts where the female candidate just won were compared with outcomes in districts where the female candidate just lost. In urban areas, female legislators improved the educational outcomes of citizens in their electoral district. However, the gender of politicians had no impact in rural areas. It was suggested that women politicians might invest more where both the educational and political returns were higher.
- The fourth presentation summarised what is known about the impact of politicians on bureaucratic performance. There were three take-away messages. First, there is evidence from a wide range of countries that bureaucratic performance improves (more projects are completed) when politicians face stronger political competition. Second, politicians exert influence in diverse ways, ranging from transfers of officials across posts, to discretionary fiscal transfers and strategic delegation of tasks. Third, researchers should try to anticipate (and measure) the political factors likely to affect interventions within the civil service.



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## Session 4: New architectures at system level

Chair: **Robin Horn**, Children's Investment Fund Foundation

**Derek Neal**, University of Chicago  
*Contests instead of "standards"*

**Karthik Muralidharan**, University of California, San Diego  
*An evidence-based proposal to achieve universal quality primary education in India*

**Barbara Bruns**, World Bank  
*Making existing systems work? Ideas from Latin America*

Panel discussion led by **Rachel Hinton**, Department for International Development

### Discussion highlights:

- Derek Neal kicked off the panel with a thought-provoking discussion of the role of "standards" in education governance. The central message here was that the prevailing paradigm, whereby educators are rewarded or punished as a function of how well they promote student learning relative to curriculum standards, is misplaced. An assessment system that measures how students perform against these standards is necessary to track progress over time. However, by construction, this system will be predictable and hence, given opportunities for gaming, poorly suited for holding teachers accountable. Derek argued that, to achieve the twin aims of student tracking and teacher accountability, there must be two systems. Student achievement relative to standards should be assessed under low stakes, while educator performance should be measured by relative performance in seeded contests.
- Karthik Muralidharan provided an energetic discussion of a proposal for large-scale reform of Indian primary education. He began by noting that "business as usual" is not working. Rigorous research in India over the past decade has found no evidence that investments in infrastructure, teacher training, or student inputs (meals, books/uniforms/materials) have improved learning

outcomes. On the other hand, experimental studies have shown that improvements in school-level governance (monitoring, contract teachers, pay-for-performance) and pedagogy can work. On the basis of this evidence, Karthik proposed a national program of primary school teaching assistants. Specifically, regular teachers would receive two teaching assistants hired from the same village as the school, with the TA role serving as the first step on a performance-based career ladder. He argued that this proposal would allow for a sharp increase in customised instruction (based on grouping by level of learning) in a fiscally-sustainable way, while also creating substantial employment and skill-building opportunities for educated rural youth.

- Barbara Bruns concluded the panel by bringing in perspectives from Latin America and the Caribbean. She began by noting that, globally, there is no single architecture associated with strong performance, pointing to the centralised system in Singapore and the decentralised systems in Brazil and Chile. Brazil has experienced dramatic progress without a change in system-level governance. Instead, the federal government has focused on increasing oversight of funding, results, and targeted support for at-risk students. Barbara highlighted that the current policy priorities in LAC are teacher evaluation and career path reform. Interestingly, bonus pay was widely used in Brazil but was thought to be less effective in raising teaching quality than career path reform.
- Discussant Rachel Hinton, recapped the main themes of the papers and argued that this research suggested that three issues were likely to be important going forwards: learning, institutions, and politics. Concretely, policymakers should focus on barriers to learning, be wary of "planting" institutions from other contexts, and contemplate independent assessment authorities.

Over 20 conference participants stayed on for an optional afternoon session focused on building research partnerships. The roundtable discussion highlighted a number of areas for future collaboration.



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