RISE Annual Conference 2016

Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford

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Conference Report

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BACKGROUND

RISE is a large scale, multi-country programme aimed at conducting high-quality research to build evidence to enhance children's learning levels throughout the world. In simplified terms, RISE aims to answer the question: "How can education systems be reformed to deliver better learning for all?"

Nations around the globe have been remarkably successful in making progress toward universal primary schooling, but in many places, learning levels are poor, or have declined. As a result, even when children finish many years of schooling, they still lack basic maths and literacy skills. The RISE agenda emphasises the need to make changes that can provide children with the education they need to be successful adults in their local, national, and global communities.

ABOUT THE EVENT

The RISE Annual Conference took place 16-17 June 2016 at the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford. The aim of the conference was to bring together high profile academics and policy makers to discuss the emerging RISE research agenda. Over 108 academics, researchers, government officials, NGO representatives and businesses came together to participate in eight sesssions during the two-day event.

The first day of the conference saw a series of research presentations during morning and afternoon sessions, including presentations by two of the recently appointed Country Research Teams (CRT) and an invited panel session. In the morning, recent research on how the knowledge and performance of teachers can be improved was presented. This was followed by CRT Vietnam and CRT Tanzania showcasing their upcoming research. The afternoon found the attendees gaining insight into the politics of change surrounding education reform and how education systems form around such changes, followed by the invited panel discussion revolving around the education SDGs. Following this, everyone was invited into the venue forum to browse posters relating to the RISE conference themes.

The second day of the conference switched the focus to governance and methods with the morning session looking at whether government initiatives were working to improve education systems. The second group of CRT presenters from Pakistan and India walked everyone through their proposed research and the conference ended with the methods session in which methods at the forefront of education research, in terms of measurement and estimation, were demonstrated.
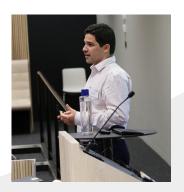
This report provides a summary of the conference proceedings. Papers and presentations can be accessed by clicking on the presentation title within the document.

During the conference, participants were encouraged to tweet with the hashtag #riseeduconf. By doing this, a complete record of the conference was on view in the venue forum so that all could see the comments and posts by colleagues during the conference. In all, 322 comments were posted by attendees with a unique reach of 359,538 and an absolute reach of 707,907.

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Chair: Geeta Kingdon, Institute of Education, University College London

Ronald Abraham, IDinsight and **Sharath Jeevan**, STiR Education
The Impact of Teacher Networks on Teacher Motivation: Midline Results from Two RCTs

Tessa Bold, IIES, Stockholm University
What Do Teachers Know and Do? A Report Card on Primary Teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa

Leandro Costa, World Bank
Through the Looking Glass: Can Classroom Observation and Coaching Improve Teacher Performance in Brazil?

David Evans, World Bank
Inside In-Service Teacher Training: What Works, What is Happening, and How Do We Measure It?

This session presented insights from the recent research on how the knowledge and performance of teachers can be improved.

Research highlights:

Ronald Abraham and Sharath Jeevan gave details of an Indian study evaluating the effect of motivation on teacher performance. The study is based on a three-year program that aims to enhance classroom education in the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Delhi through intrinsic and extrinsic motivation sessions for teachers, with a focus on building professional mind-sets, self-efficacy, and resilience. Specifically, the program involves inculcating a positive mind-set and identifying its impact on classroom learning using a survey tool to compute teacher motivation. This survey asks questions in 10 different domains and, for each domain, elicits both teachers' experiences as well as their values and beliefs. The research is on-going and the presenters acknowledged the difficulty in measuring motivation. Geeta Kingdon, the Session Chair, summed up the presentation by stating that the real weakness of social science is that it has not made progress in measuring motivation, and this paper represents a great effort in that direction.

Tessa Bold discussed a study using data from nationally representative surveys covering close to 40 percent of the population from seven Sub-Saharan African countries to answer three questions: (1) How much instruction time in class do government school students actually get? (2) Do teachers know the material that should be covered to teach these students? (3) Do teachers have the skills to effectively transfer what they know to students? It was observed that, on average, students receive less than half the amount of scheduled time for teaching in a day. Further, a large majority of teachers have not mastered the students' curriculum and have low pedagogical knowledge and skills. A substantial share of the teachers had less than 10 percent of the minimum required knowledge and this accounted for a significant part of the variation in test scores across countries. These findings provide a lens through which the growing experimental and quasi-experimental literature on education in low-income countries can be interpreted and understood, and points to important gaps in our knowledge highlighting directions for future research.

Leandro Costa presented a study evaluating a Brazilian program that aimed to improve teacher effectiveness by giving teachers benchmarked feedback (or an information "shock") and expert coaching to promote increased professional interaction among teachers in the same school. The study showed that the program significantly increased teachers' use of class time for instruction, by reducing the time spent on classroom management and time off-task. The presenter admitted, however, that these preliminary results could be confounded if the teachers' behaviour changed simply because the teachers were aware of being observed (the Hawthorne effect). The program also increased teachers' use of questions during their lessons, consistent

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with the coaching program's goal of encouraging more interactive teaching practice and led to an increase in student engagement in treatment schools.

David Evans highlighted the dearth of detail on the nature of teacher training interventions and proposed a standard set of indicators for reporting on such programs as a pre-requisite for ascertaining which interventions lead to improved student learning. Across a set of 26 programmes with impact evaluations and student learning results, the programmes that provide complementary materials, focus on a specific subject, and include follow-up visits tend to show higher gains. Programmes that use non-education professionals as trainers tend to have worse outcomes. The presenter stated that the statistical power to identify these effects is limited, and use of these standard indicators in future impact evaluations will facilitate more precise inference and hence more impactful research.

Country Research Team Session I

Chair: **Kara Hanson**, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

Kitila Mkumbo, Twaweza and **Jacobus Cilliers**, Georgetown University
Tanzania Country Research Team

Paul Glewwe, University of Minnesota
Vietnam Country Research Team

This session had presentations from two of the RISE Country Research Teams, followed by Q and A.

Research highlights:

The Tanzania Country Research Team started its presentation by describing the education reform adopted by the Government of Tanzania called 'Big Results Now in Education' (BRNED). This project was adopted in the backdrop of a rapid decline in student achievement in the country. The CRT stated that they aimed to explore the system effects and relationships caused by the specific government initiatives aimed at fast-tracking the improvement of the quality of education service delivery introduced via BRNED. The Team views the systems-level theory of change underlying the BRNED initiatives under five mechanisms: (a) changing accountability environment, (b) building a

coalition to enact and sustain the reform, (c) motivating teachers, (d) re-orienting the education system to focus on learning outcomes and (e) improving school financing and management practices.

The CRT team members discussed their plan to collect detailed demographic and socio-economic data via household surveys, and information on school facilities and access to resources via school surveys. The team also plans to use the rich existing datasets from Tanzania, including household surveys (Living Standards Measurement Study and the National Panel Survey) for 2008-2015, and school surveys (Service Delivery Indicator survey) for 2011 and 2014. Student outcomes data will come from nationally representative datasets tracking literacy and numeracy, as well as two modules from the World Bank's SABER instruments (Early Child Development and Engaging the Private Sector). They will also engage in primary data collection to track key outputs and deliverables from the BRNED initiatives, notably the impact on learning, and intermediate outcomes such as accountability relationships. This data will be used to answer the following two questions at the heart of systems reform:

1. Does BRNED's pivot to learning-outcome-based incentives yield improvements in learning?
2. How did incentives for political actors create opportunities for the launch of such a system-wide reform as the BRNED initiative, and how do elements of the reform itself contribute to sustained momentum?

The Vietnam Country Research Team started by charting the PISA scores of different countries against their GDP per capita. The graph showed that relative to its income level, Vietnam does very well even when compared to the PISA scores of higher per-capita income countries such as the UK and US. In addition to having great PISA scores, Vietnam also

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has 97 percent of students completing primary school and 92 percent of children enrolled in lower secondary schools. One of the aims of the Vietnam CRT research program is to verify that these statistics are indeed true, and if they are, to understand why the Vietnamese education system is performing so well. Further, the Team aims to use both quantitative and qualitative research to: evaluate how the Escuela Nueva program worked in Vietnam; understand the large curriculum reforms scheduled to take place in 2018; and estimate the expected and actual effects of this major reform. The Team noted that they would be able to take advantage of many high quality datasets already in existence for Vietnam, including the Living Standards Survey and the Household Living Standards survey, Young Lives data (qualitative and quantitative, Grade 5 reading and math assessments for 2001/02, 2005/06, 2011/12, including teacher assessments), the 2012 and 2015 PISA assessment data (age 15 only), Vietnam Escuela Nueva longitudinal data (2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016) and the primary school census database. In the presentation, different methods that might be used during the research program, including possible randomized control trials (RCTs) for the curriculum reform, were discussed with participants.

Session 2: Politics of Change

Chair: Patrícia Tavares, University of Oxford

Geeta Kingdon, Institute of Education, University College London
A Political Economy Analysis of Education in India

Anne McLennan, Wits School of Governance, University of Witwatersrand and **Barbara Dale-Jones**, BRIDGE
Working Together: Strengthening School Leadership-Teacher-Parent Relationships to Achieve Positive Education Outcomes for Learners

Barbara Bruns, World Bank
Managing the Politics of Quality Reforms in Education: Policy Lessons from Global Experience

This session presented insights on the politics of change surrounding education reform and how education systems form around such changes.

Research highlights:

Geeta Kingdon gave a synthesis of various pieces of work on the political economy of education in India. Her presentation focused on why teacher effort continues to be low despite high salaries and training. While most literature states that teacher effort depends on incentives, rewards, opportunities and accountability measures, she considered the role teachers played in the political arena in the State of Uttar Pradesh, where they occupy 17 percent of the seats in the Upper House and are also well represented in the Lower House. Her study indicated that teachers often use their political influence to avoid enforcement of accountability measures, adversely affecting the education system.

Anne McLennan and Barbara Dale-Jones jointly presented an on-going study that looks at the relationship between stakeholders (teachers, parents and principals) of schools in South Africa and how their interaction can be shaped to improve the standard of education. Their research is intended to identify system levers that will strengthen school leadership-teacher-parent relationships to achieve positive education outcomes for students in South Africa. Their research starts with mapping institutions that restrict or enable change, followed by scenario planning with multiple

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stakeholders to find out solutions for root problems; and finally analysing the most impactful change and accordingly making recommendations. Their study draws inspiration from BRIDGE's communities of practice program that yielded positive results through spreading and sharing of practices and resources. The findings of the study indicate that the State cannot provide necessary support to schools and while NGOs do play a role, this is too small in scale.

Barbara Bruns presented policy lessons learned from global experience of managing the politics of reforms relating to the quality of education. She began with a discussion of recent reforms that have since collapsed. Her study pointed out that: (1) quality reforms are inherently difficult to implement due to difficulty in monitoring them, their slow and diffused results and problems with teacher buy-in; (2) the political economy of education is stacked against quality reforms due to the effect on jobs, spending and being used as an instrument of nation building; and (3) quality reforms inherently cause conflict as costs are usually born by teachers, and teacher unions have immense political power. The study also looked at some of the successful education reforms and listed common elements of successful political strategies, including mobilising pro-reform stakeholders and shaping public opinion.

Invited Panel Session: Strategies for Meeting the Education SDGs

Chair: **Luis Benveniste**, World Bank

Robin Horn, Children's Investment Fund Foundation

Justin Sandefur, RISE

Deon Filmer and Halsey Rogers, World Development Report

The invited panel session revolved around the strategies for meeting the education Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Research highlights:

Deon Filmer kicked off the panel by highlighting the key features of the World Development Report 2018, due in late 2017. It is the first such report published by the World Bank devoted to education. He discussed the first two of the four main themes in the Report, while Halsey Rogers discussed the last two. The first theme dives into the central role played by education in individual welfare and as a driver of national well-being. Mr. Filmer stressed how education improves pecuniary and non-pecuniary aspects of well-being, promotes civic engagement and reduces inequalities. The second part of the Report elaborates on how there has been a massive increase in enrolment in schools, in large part due to the Millennium Development Goals, while countries struggle to ensure students learn and acquire relevant skills required by the changing nature of jobs. The third theme considers the shift to evidence-based interventions in the last 15 years. Finally, while discussing the fourth theme of the Report, Mr. Rogers laid great emphasis on the need for education systems to be aligned towards learning, and to balance technocratic goals with the social and political functions of education within countries.

Justin Sandefur spoke next in the panel. He started by talking about the "Global learning crisis in one graph" and discussed how when the literacy levels of 1 million women in 1000 different regions in over 50 countries were measured after 5 years of education, it was found that over half the women across half of the countries could not read a simple sentence. Citing different reports evaluating this problem, Sandefur showed discrepancies in the findings of these different reports. The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, headed by Gordon Brown, has stated that funding to the order of an additional $20 billion per year was required for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals on education. Jeffrey Sachs's UNICEF report calculates the "financing gap" in the current global funding for education to be around $25 billion per year. Sandefur considered the assumptions on which these calculations are based and how

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they are disconnected to the learning crisis that exists; a gap which urgently needs to be filled.

Robin Horn concluded the panel discussion by focusing on parental demand for Early Childhood Education (ECE), or pre-schools, which is growing rapidly across the world. He discussed research suggesting that parents are expecting children in pre-schools to learn skills and abilities (recognize numbers, read, sing songs, recite poems) that they can observe, unlike in primary or secondary school, where the expectation is about participation in education and achieving diplomas. He then highlighted the major challenges and opportunities to understanding how systems are responding to parental expectations. He reinforced the idea that this is an important and topical research agenda, especially as the Sustainable Development Goal for ECE can be made measurable and achievable before other vested interests start to define how to interpret these goals.

Luis Crouch, the Panel Chair, summed up the discussion by talking about the interpretation of the evidence in research about education systems. He mentioned the good work being done by NGOs by not grouping children by levels of skill, but starting off "where kids are, rather than where they should be".

The panel discussion ended with Q and A.

Poster Presentations

Phalla Chea, University of Oxford MPP Student

Melanie Ehren, University College London

Hani Jesri, University of Oxford MPP Student

Diwakar Kishore, University of Oxford MPP Student

Difaf Sharba, University of Oxford MPP Student

Patrícia Tavares, University of Oxford

Jose Valdivieso, University of Oxford MPP Student

Samuel Weldeegzie, Australian National University

Poster presentations from selected participants and Masters in Public Policy students from the Blavatnik School of Government took place in the event forum following the invited panel session. The topics of posters presented ranged from the effect of private schools on social stratification in Mexico to the challenges of educating Syrian child refugees in Lebanon:

- *Systematic Review of School Accountability in LMIC; Wrangling with Realist Synthesis*
- *Implementing Systemic Change Needs Comprehensive Information*
- *Conflict Exposure and Childhood Human Capital Outcomes*
- *Education Reform in Cambodia*
- *Educating Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon: Challenges and Opportunities*
- *Governance in India and Columbia*
- *Do Bright, Ambitious People Want to Become Teachers? A Case Study of Education Policy in Syria*

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FRIDAY 17 JUNE
Session 3: Governance

Chair: **Ritva Reinikka,** World Bank

Salman Asim, Education GP
Community Engagement Mechanisms: Field Experiment in Pakistan

Kiran Bhatty, Centre for Policy Research
Does Government's Monitoring of Schools Work? A Study of the Frontline Education Bureaucracy in India

Roy Carr-Hill, Institute of Education, University College London
Decentralisation, Disadvantage and Incentives

Lee Crawfurd, Center for Global Development
School Management in Uganda

This session presented insights from papers exploring whether school performance can be improved through governance initiatives, including government and community accountability mechanisms, decentralization, and management.

Research highlights:

Salman Asim presented a study in Pakistan that evaluated the possibility of government improving the functioning of school management committees by creating community engagement spaces to deliberate on education issues. In a large-scale field experiment in rural Sindh, the study found that providing information to parents and communities as well as supporting a dialogue through two distinct mechanisms improves (allocative and technical) efficiency. In the study, one mechanism had externally-administered community-level meetings organized to provide information to parents and the community on rights, roles and responsibilities in engagement with government schools via school management committees, as well as options for recourse. The other mechanism added an element of local community discussion on school performance through cell-phone based text-messaging (SMS) to identify, aggregate, and communicate the community's preferences to school committees. The study found that a significantly larger share of schools in treatment groups were open during unannounced visits compared to those in the control group. These schools were also about twice as likely to have an additional teacher deployed and infrastructure improvement compared to the control group.

Kiran Bhatty looked at the effectiveness of education governance in India, specifically the monitoring function, through the perspectives of front line officials. Her study located institutions within social and political structures marked by deep inequalities, and analysed the manner in which these institutional arrangements influenced the behaviour of front line officials. The study found that poor state capacities in terms of inadequate resources and systemic infirmities contribute significantly to ineffective monitoring. For example, the current numerous monitoring formats (over 400 different formats are used in India) rarely capture test scores given by monitoring officials and the process does not involve head teachers. In addition, the social distance of front line bureaucrats from their clients reinforces their low levels of motivation, preventing them from using discretion to achieve official objectives.

Roy Carr-Hill discussed the impact of school-based decision-making on educational outcomes in low- and middle-income countries and the barriers to (and enablers of) effective models of school-based decision-making. His study was a mixed methods review of 16 impact evaluations using quasi-experimental and 'before and after' methodologies. The results suggest weak effects on drop-out and repetition. The effects on test-scores were found to be more robust, particularly in middle-income countries. The study also observed some evidence that these effects were stronger in contexts of high decentralisation and of low income.

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Lee Crawfurd explored the relationship between measures of school management quality and student test scores in Uganda. The study used newly collected data on school management practices, gained from interviews with Ugandan secondary school head teachers, in combination with individual-level panel test score data from two high-stakes examinations. School management was evaluated on the basis of questions relating to school operations and monitoring. The study found that the overall average quality of management is similar to the other low and middle-income countries for which similar data exists (India and Brazil), though the surveys are not directly comparable. It was observed that a one standard deviation improvement in management as they measured it resulted in a 0.05-0.2 standard deviation improvement in test scores. Crawfurd attributed better management to detailed academic plans, support from teachers, specialization and division of labour; and noted that better management is not always limited to higher spending.

Country Research Team Session 2

Chair: **Luis Crouch**, RTI International

Abhijeet Singh, University College London and **Alejandro Ganimian**, The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab
India Country Research Team

Tahir Andrabi, Pomona College
Pakistan Country Research Team

This session had presentations followed by a Q and A session by two of the RISE Country Research Teams.

Research highlights:

The India Country Research Team presentation kicked off by outlining the Team's plan to look at three states within India with a focus on evaluating interventions at scale, and evaluating reforms that state governments are currently leading. A potential evaluation that the team aims to conduct relates to a school assessment and quality programme in Madhya Pradesh. The Indian state government has agreed to structure the intervention using randomized assignment and covering over 2000 schools. Another evaluation that the Indian CRT aims to conduct is in Rajasthan, where

the state government is planning a "school consolidation" project that would leave schools with better management and possibly the creation of PPP schools. The third program seeks to evaluate a Computer-adaptive learning project for personalized instruction in secondary schools in Gujarat. Finally, a forth program for evaluation is a reform including CCTV monitoring in Delhi. The Delhi programme would have randomised roll-out and random selection of lesson observations through a whole year of recordings. The merits of the CCTV program, discussed during the presentation included using information on teacher practice to inform teacher selection, training, and promotion.

The Pakistan Country Research Team started by noting that Pakistan presents an interesting context for the RISE research agenda because education is an important political issue with a diverse system of providers and substantial share of aid money. The Team stated that it would take an innovative market-making approach to establish connections between low cost private schools and education support service providers, as well as study the impact on learning outcomes. The Team aims to use a randomized control trial (RCT) method to evaluate the effect of combining access to finance with access to education support services for low cost private schools in rural Punjab.

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Session 4: Methods

Chair: **Yuli Tamir**, Shenkar

Duncan Chaplin, Mathematica Policy Research
Using Value-Added Measures to Assess Teacher and School Performance: US Lessons for Developing Countries

Tim Kautz, Mathematica Policy Research
Fostering and Measuring Skills: Improving Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills to Promote Lifetime Success

Caine Rolleston, Institute of Education, University College London
Difficulties with Systematic Reviews of Educational Outcomes in International Development Research

Daniela Scur, University of Oxford
Developing Management: An Expanded Evaluation Tool for Developing Countries

This session featured a set of research methods at the forefront of education research in terms of measurement and estimation.

Research highlights:

Duncan Chaplin began this session with a paper on the contentious topic of value added models (VAMs). These are a set of models that attempt to measure the "extra value" that each teacher adds to their students' learning during their year of teaching. Among other features, these models adjust student test scores for factors outside of the control of teachers by controlling for past student performance and other observable characteristics of students to better evaluate school and teacher performance. Chaplin suggested that other models, including the average test scores model, classroom observations model and student surveys model, do not adjust for factors beyond the control of the schools and thus are not as effective in measuring the effect of the school and teachers. However, VAMs have their own set of issues, though they are better validated. Chaplin suggested that combining VAMs with other models can reduce the noise in VAMs, and that a combined model should be used for evaluation purposes.

Tim Kautz reviewed the literature on measuring and fostering cognitive and non-cognitive skills. He criticised IQ tests and achievement tests for not adequately capturing non-cognitive skills and skills such as personality traits, goals, character, motivations, and preferences that are valued in the labour market as well as in many other domains. He suggested that non-cognitive skills predict later-life outcomes with the same or greater strength as measures of cognition.

Caine Rolleston looked at the systematic reviews increasingly being carried out in international development research around educational issues. His study illustrated how many of these systematic reviews use techniques of meta-analysis to combine results from several different studies. The presentation laid out the strong assumptions used in meta-analysis, such as comparing the same treatment, same outcome, same outcome measurement and comparable population/sample. Rolleston pointed out that when studies do not use precisely the same outcome measure, then the different measures can be transformed to a common scale using the 'standardised mean difference' approach. However, he questioned whether this technique is appropriate when the raw outcome measures are incommensurable.

Daniela Scur presented on a new methodology to measure the quality of management practices in schools. She described the development of an expanded survey tool based on the successful World Management Survey (WMS) instrument, but tailored to research in the public sector of developing countries (called "Development WMS"). She presented preliminary results from detailed data that she and a co-author collected during pilots in India and Mexico. These pilots used face-to-face interviews and focused on settings where weak management practices prevail. The Development WMS reveals more variation in the left tail of the distribution than was possible with the original WMS instrument. Furthermore, the new instrument details three new processes used to systematically measure the strength of each management area in the WMS: (1) process implementation, (2) process usage, and (3) process monitoring. This detail can help to identify where exactly along the process of setting their management structures schools are failing. Scur discussed how this type of data collection project can be set up and pointed to a new website with training materials that is currently being developed to help researchers carry out such projects.

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