

The Pivot from Schooling to Education

Key messages

- One of the greatest achievements in education worldwide has been reaching near universal primary school enrolment and attainment. This feat has been driven largely by closing inequality gaps between genders, incomes, and location (urban versus rural).
- Learning profiles represent gains in learning per year of schooling. Despite massive improvements in enrolment and attainment, learning profiles remain appallingly flat—children leave school lacking basic competencies.
- There is a learning crisis in school. For example, in South Africa, 40 percent of children were found to be innumerate and 27 percent illiterate—but only one percent had never attended school and another one percent had dropped out.
- In addition to lacking fundamental subject-specific skills, children who aren't learning in school aren't gaining other important benefits of schooling, such as labour productivity, higher wages, and female empowerment.

With consistent effort some dreams do come true: the achievement of universal schooling

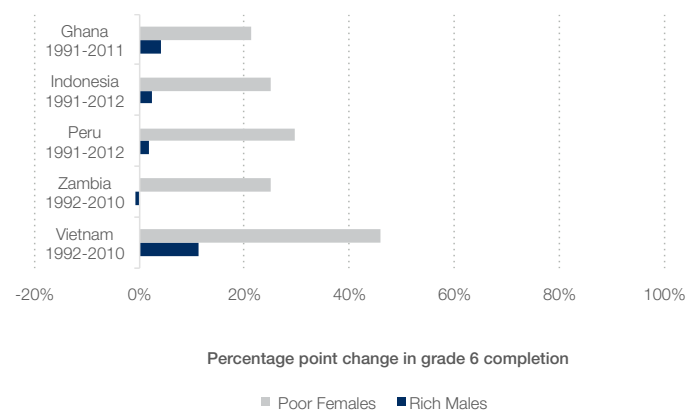
On 10 December 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which declared in Article 26(1) that “everyone has the right to education.” At the time this declaration must have seemed quixotic, even impossible. In 1950 the average adult in the developing world had only two years of schooling (Barro and Lee 2013). Schooling was spreading slowly but mostly in the domain of triply privileged children—urban, male, and with well-off parents.

In 2015, this once quixotic goal of universal primary schooling is solidly on the path to fulfilment. Around the globe today, practically every child enrolls in formal schooling, and most persist at least through primary school. The average years of schooling completed in the developing world have more than tripled to above seven years.

This expansion has happened even in countries in difficult economic and political circumstances. In Haiti, GDP per capita today is not significantly higher than it was in 1950, and the country has suffered from political dictatorships, unrest, and natural disasters. Yet schooling grew more each decade since 1950 than in Haiti’s entire previous history as a nation from 1806 to 1950. Similarly, in Bangladesh, a country riddled with a troubled political past and consistently rated near the bottom on rankings of government effectiveness, adults today have more schooling than people in France did in 1975 (Barro and Lee 2013).

As the elites were always first to acquire education, the expansion to universal schooling was driven by closing the inequality gaps in primary completion rates between rich and poor, urban and rural, boys and girls. In Peru, the proportion of rich (top 20 percent) males completing grade 6 increased only from 98 percent to 99 percent between 1991 and 2012, while grade 6 completion of poor (lowest 40 percent) girls increased from 61 to 90 percent (Figure 1).

Figure 1: In many countries the expansion towards universal primary completion has come from rapid progress among disadvantaged groups that narrowed attainment gaps.



Source: Data from World Bank, 2011

Even with success there remain significant challenges in reaching universal primary completion. The Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2013-14 states that although the number of out-of-school children fell by

half between 1999 and 2011, 57 million children were still left out of school in 2011. Some countries in Africa still had primary school completion rates below 50 percent in 2010 (e.g. Chad, South Sudan, and Niger). While gaps are narrowing for the countries in Figure 1, in other countries like Niger the gaps are widening, with faster progress for richer males than poor females. In many countries children from some ethnic groups lag behind and there are still gaps between girls and boys, and between urban and rural areas. Reaching true universality will require overcoming the remaining inequities across country, gender, ethnicity, remoteness, and income.

One major factor in the progress towards universal primary schooling is the success of a global advocacy movement. Between the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, there were 15 distinct international declarations aimed towards achieving universal primary schooling (Clemens 2004). This global movement helped create schooling as a powerful norm for all nation states—even ones in which the domestic politics appeared unfavourable to schooling (Meyer et al. 1977).

The global movement was successful in expanding schooling in part because it set concrete goals with repeated and reliable measurement and tracked progress across countries. The international education community has pressed for, and helped countries to build, the capability to measure progress in schooling. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics (UIS) reports recent data on school enrolment for all but three of the world's 216 countries.

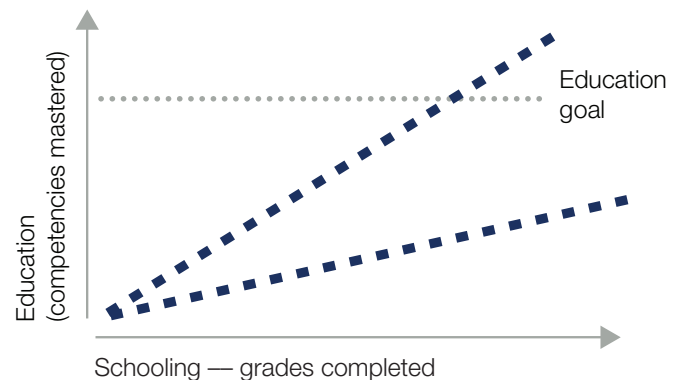
Schooling and education: linked by a learning profile

However, while there was a relentless focus on the expansion of schooling, no country or global movement has ever really meant to set a goal that was just schooling. Schooling goals were set, but were always understood as instrumental to education goals. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was about a right to education, an education goal. Education is the process of equipping children with the competencies they will need to succeed as adults in family, local, national, and global roles. These competencies can vary across societies and include mastery of fundamental skills like reading for understanding and numerical operations for practical application; mastering bodies of knowledge and an ability to apply that knowledge; transmitting a society and culture's core values and beliefs; and developing one's creativity, curiosity, sense of worth, and ability to work with others in groups.

The relationship between progress in acquiring competencies and schooling can be represented by a learning profile, which shows the pace at which children gain the education they

need as they persist through schooling, or the relationship for any child between competencies mastered and grade completion. This learning profile is what links an education goal and a schooling goal. If the learning profile is flat, schooling only measures "time served," not skills gained. As shown in Figure 2, a flat learning profile can mean children won't reach education goals even with many years of schooling, whereas with a steeper learning profile schooling goals are able to achieve education goals.

Figure 2: The link between education and schooling is a learning profile that links a child's progress in desired competencies mastered and persistence in school.



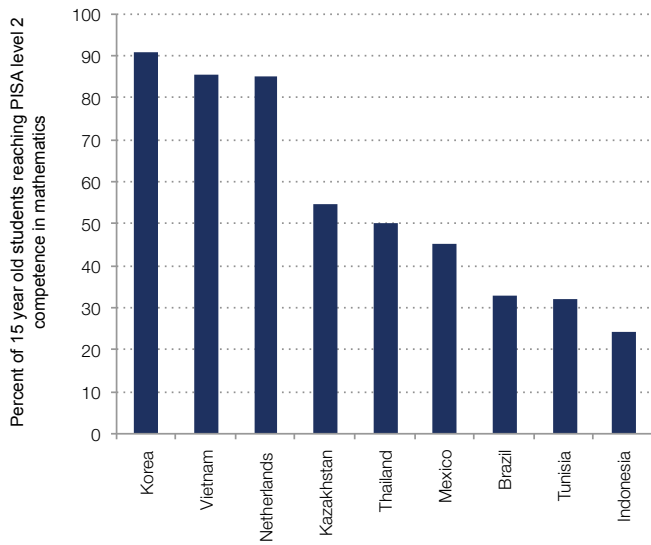
Source: Adapted from Pritchett 2013

A learning crisis in schools

Today, the problem that many countries face is that the learning profile is just too shallow—children acquire skills and competencies too slowly while in school, so that they finish many years of school and yet still lack basic competencies.

In the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), level 2 performance in mathematics for the assessed 15 year-old students requires them only to "interpret and recognize situations in contexts that require no more than direct inference; extract relevant information from a single source and make use of a single representational mode; employ basic algorithms, formulae, procedures, or conventions; and reason and make literal interpretations of the results"(OECD, 2014). Over 80 percent of students reached this modest achievement in Korea, Vietnam, and the Netherlands. But Figure 3 shows that in Tamil Nadu, India, only 15 percent, in Indonesia only a quarter, and in Brazil only a third of students achieve that goal. Even in upper-middle-income countries like Kazakhstan, Thailand, and Mexico, only about half of students reach even that minimal level of competence. Children arrive at such low cumulative levels of learning because the learning profile is too shallow: they learn and retain too little from year to year.

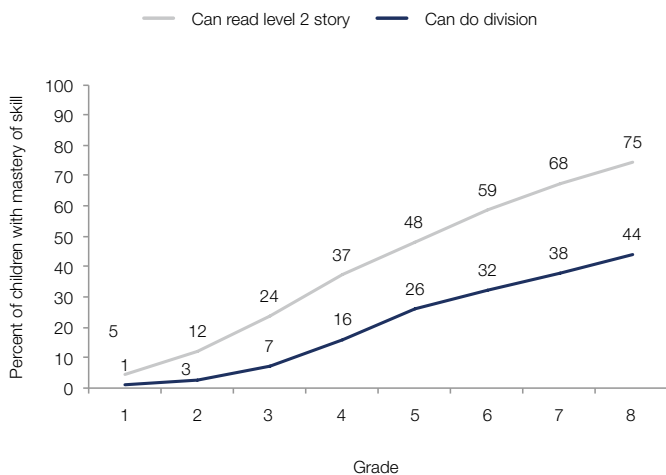
Figure 3: While in high-performing education systems minimal competence in mathematics is nearly universal, in many developing countries most students reach age 15 with many years of schooling but without minimal competence.



Source: PISA, 2012, 2009+

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) for India in 2014 assesses over a half a million children in rural India. As shown in Figure 4, very little learning happens from year to year. By the end of primary school (grade 5) 52 percent of children could read a simple grade 2 level story. Even among children that persisted to grade 8, a quarter still could not read a simple story—much less read and comprehend complex texts. Only about a quarter of grade 5 students could do a simple division problem, and less than half could do so even by grade 8.

Figure 4: The learning profile in rural India is shallow—there is too little progress in mastery of competencies from year to year to guarantee an adequate education.



Source: Data from ASER 2015

The sad fact is that in today’s world if one wants to find children who lack an education, the place to find them is in school. The 2014 UNESCO Global Monitoring Report stated that 250 million children are unable to read, write, or do basic mathematics, and 130 million of those children are in

school (UNESCO, 2014). Whelan (2014) calculated that of 100 primary school-aged children around the world, 96 will go to some schooling and 91 are in school now, but only 37 will reach a basic level of literacy and numeracy. Spaul and Taylor (2014) combined data on school attainment with the Southern and East Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) assessment of literacy and numeracy of children in grade 6 to estimate how many children who were uneducated (illiterate or innumerate) were out of school and how many were in grade 6. In South Africa, 40 percent of children of sixth grade age were innumerate and 27 percent were illiterate—but only one percent had never attended school and another one percent dropped out. This means 95 percent of the innumerate and 93 percent of the illiterate children had been in school for six years. *The learning profile was so shallow that children sat through six years of schooling and many did not even acquire minimal literacy and numeracy.*

Table 1: Schools with shallow learning profiles mean that in-school children are largely not getting an adequate education.

Country	Fraction of the uneducated (innumerate or illiterate) children enrolled in grade 6 (percent)	
	Innumerate	Illiterate
South Africa	95	93
Zambia	82	75
Zimbabwe	81	75
Malawi	75	64
Uganda	65	49
Kenya	59	30

Source: Spaul and Taylor 2014

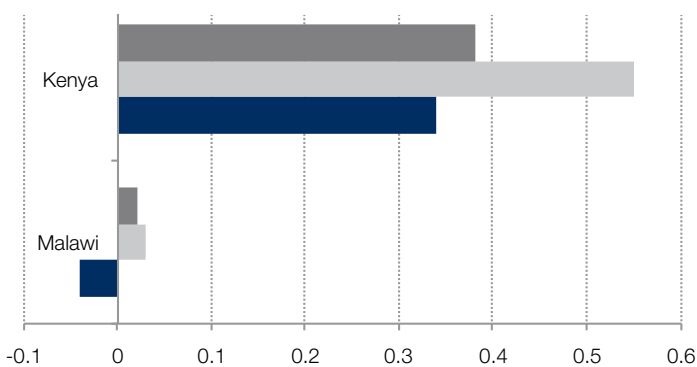
Without learning, schooling doesn’t produce the benefits of education

While schooling is an intrinsic right of each child that needn’t be justified by extrinsic benefits, it was and is intended by policymakers, parents, and children to be a means to achieving goals other than learning. At a basic level, nearly all countries expected that expanding schooling would facilitate higher levels of labour productivity and raise access to good jobs and higher wages. Yet in many countries, schooling has expanded massively and per capita incomes have stagnated. Hanushek and Woessmann (2012) have shown that expansion of schooling has been much less predictive of countries’ economic growth than the cognitive skills gained while in school have been.

Higher income is far from the only purpose of education. Education is key to priming

individuals for success in all dimensions of their private and public lives. For instance, many have emphasized the important role of female education in empowering women to resist domestic violence and to have greater control over decisions (Klugman et al., 2014). However, in Malawi, only 2 percent of children complete grade 6 with higher-order reading skills, so perhaps it is not surprising there is very little difference in measures of gender empowerment between those completing primary school and the unschooled. In Kenya, 38 percent of grade 6 completers have higher-order reading skills, and the difference in gender empowerment between unschooled and primary schooled is very large (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Schooling can be transformative in gender relations—but only if schooling brings education.



- Percent completing grade 6 with higher order reading skills
- Percent difference between unschooled and primary school completers who say they have final say in all household decisions
- Percent difference between unschooled and primary school completers who agree "Husband beating wife is ok if food is burned"

Source: Data from ICF International, 2012, originally seen in Klugman et al. 2014

Conclusion: a pivot back from schooling to education

The global education community has always recognized that the real goal was education—preparing children to be successful adults in their local, national, and global communities—and schooling was merely a means to that goal. When many or most children were out of school, it made sense to focus the global movement on expansion. But success demands change, and now the global education movement is pivoting from a narrow focus on measures and metrics of the expansion of time served in school to a focus on learning outcomes achieved and lives transformed.

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