

When does community monitoring improve school performance?



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Summary

New research from Uganda shows that community monitoring improves test scores and pupil and teacher attendance at low cost, but only when communities can choose the criteria by which they judge school performance. Monitoring programmes that assigned criteria centrally did not lead to any improvements. This innovative new study emphasises the importance of participation and co-ordination between parents and teachers for improving schools.

Policy conclusion

- Governments should promote low cost community monitoring of schools, allowing priorities to be chosen locally by consensus.

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Policy context

Since the introduction of Universal Primary Education in 1997, the Ugandan government has invested heavily in elementary education. Even though the number of teachers was doubled and 88,000 classrooms were added between 1996 and 2003 alone, the quality of education in Ugandan primary schools has remained low.

Project findings in more detail

The Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC), Kampala, Uganda and the Centre for the Study of African Economies (CSAE), Oxford, UK implemented two different programmes, involving community monitoring, to improve schooling in Uganda.

In both programmes, School Management Committees (SMCs) - the organisations that allow parents, teachers and other community members to express their opinion about school performance - were trained how to use scorecards to help them monitor schools. In one programme these scorecards were designed by central organisations including NGOs and education authorities, whilst in the other they were designed by SMC participants themselves. A hundred schools across Uganda were assigned randomly either to one of these two community monitoring programmes, or to a control group where no additional monitoring programme was implemented.

Scorecard findings

The criteria emphasised by SMCs for inclusion in scorecards, were substantially different from those decided upon centrally. In particular, the SMC-designed scorecards paid little explicit attention to teacher absence, although underlying issues such as staff housing were frequently monitored. Also, the importance of parent contributions to learning appeared high on the list of criteria in the SMC-designed scorecards, further reflecting the need for parent-teacher participation and co-ordination, as shown in the graph below.

Figure 1: Scorecard outcomes

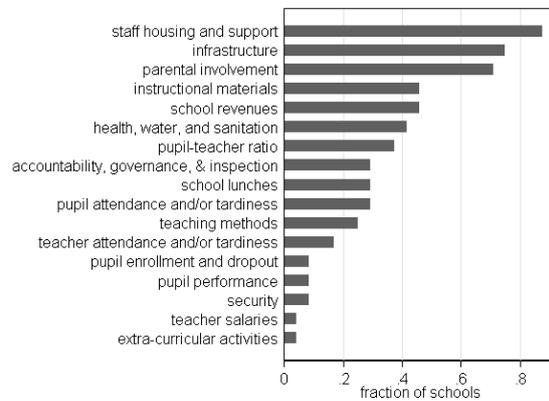


Fig. 1a: Content of SMC-designed scorecards

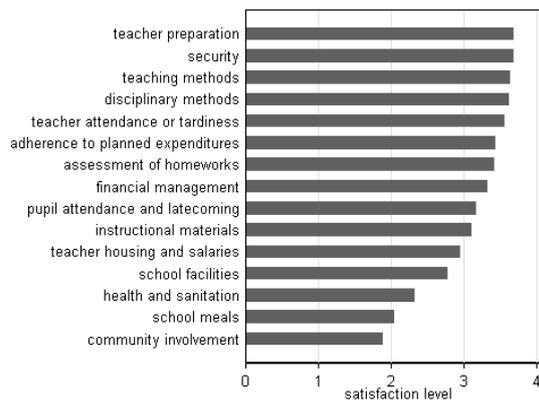


Fig 1b: SMC satisfaction levels on themes in centrally designed scorecards

Educational impacts

Monitoring using community-designed scorecards made students and teachers significantly less likely to be absent from the classroom – by 9 percent and 13 percent respectively – at the time of surprise visits by survey teams. There was also a significant increase in children’s literacy and numeracy test scores. Pupil scores on National Assessment of Progress in Education exams, administered by Uganda National Examinations Board officials, improved by 19 percent of a standard deviation – enough to move the median student from the 50th to the 57.5th percentile. These improvements were achieved at relatively low cost and were not detected in schools that used centrally-designed scorecards. These results highlight the central importance of participatory approaches when formulating community monitoring schemes.

Further research

This research fits within a broader research programme that seeks to understand how accountability measures interact with the motivations of teachers, parents, and managers (Barr and Zeitlin 2010; Barr and Zeitlin 2011). Together with Abigail Barr and Pieter Serneels, project researchers are exploring the use of laboratory games to better understand the mechanisms of accountability.

For more detailed information

Andrew Zeitlin, Lawrence Bategeka, Madina Guloba, Ibrahim Kasirye and Frederick Mugisha (2011). 'Management and motivation in Ugandan primary schools: Impact evaluation final report' <http://www.iig.ox.ac.uk/>

Abigail Barr and Andrew Zeitlin (2011). 'Conflict of interest as a barrier to local accountability'. CSAE Working Paper Series, No. 2011-13

Abigail Barr and Andrew Zeitlin (2010). 'Dictator games in the lab and in nature: External validity tested and investigated in Ugandan primary schools'. CSAE Working Paper Series, No. 2010-11



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