Evaluating the Impact of Text and Audio Messages for Parents and Teachers in Côte d'Ivoire

Abstract

Engaging parents in their children's education via text messages has been shown to be effective at increasing children's attendance in school and improving grades in Brazil, but it's unclear whether this model could be adapted to poorer countries where teacher absenteeism is high and many parents are illiterate. This randomized evaluation tests two versions of this model, using text and audio messages for parents either with or without messages to teachers in Côte d'Ivoire. Researchers are measuring impacts on student learning outcomes, parental engagement, and teacher professional outcomes.

Policy Issue

Many developing countries have seen dramatic increases in school attendance rates over the last two decades, yet these gains have not translated into much improvement in learning outcomes for children. In recent assessments in Ghana and Malawi, more than four-fifths of students at the end of grade 2 were unable to read a single familiar word such as *the* or *cat.*[1] This phenomenon has been called the 'global learning crisis.' One approach to promoting education and learning is to increase parental awareness and engagement in their child's education, known to be key predictors of children's academic achievement.[2] A rigorous evaluation of a program that sent text message nudges to parents in Brazil to engage in their children's education showed increased attendance and better grades for

children. However, it is unclear whether the program could be adapted to poorer countries where teacher absenteeism is high and many parents are illiterate.

Context of the Evaluation

Both youth and adult literacy rates in Côte d'Ivoire are low, estimated at 53 percent and 44 percent, respectively, with large disparities for marginalized groups such as women and poor children.[3] Ivorian authorities are employing various strategies as part of reforms to improve literacy and learning. As part of this effort, Ivorian authorities tested Eduq+, a platform powered by Movva, a Brazilian social impact startup, which allows schools to send messages to parents with information about children's attendance and grades, and which nudges them with motivating facts and suggested activities to engage them in their children's school life. The text-based version of Eduq+ has been shown to be effective in Brazil, where communication with parents had large impacts on attendance, test scores and grade promotion rates.[4] Nevertheless, in contexts with low adult literacy rates, audio-based interventions for caregivers may be more effective. What is more, in contexts where teachers might be the binding constraint, the impacts of engaging parents might strongly depend on whether teachers' inputs are also simultaneously enhanced.

Details of the Intervention

Researchers are evaluating the program's impact on measures of student attendance, dropout, and learning outcomes, as well as parental engagement and teacher attendance and professional well-being. In 2018, 100 schools in two regions of Côte d'Ivoire were randomly assigned to one of five groups:

1. *Text messages to parents:* Parents in this group received two *nudges* per week via text messages sent by Movva, with suggestions of simple activities that aid in social-emotional development and which do not require any curricular knowledge in math or French, the language of instruction.
2. *Audio messages to parents:* Parents in this group received the same as above, except in the form of audio messages in their local language, rather than a text message.
3. *Text messages to teachers:* Teachers in this group received two nudges per week via text messages containing motivational messages, tips on activities to do with students and ways to customize their classes to increase children's learning.
4. *Text messages to parents + Text messages to teachers:* Parents and teachers both received the text messages described above.
5. *Audio messages to parents + Text messages to teachers:* Parents received the audio messages and the teachers receive text messages.
6. *Comparison group:* Status quo; neither parents nor teachers received messages from program at the time of study.

In addition to measuring impacts of text vs. audio messages, and those sent to parents vs.

teachers, researchers are examining how the messages may impact different groups. Parent's characteristics – from literacy to language spoken at home to patterns of attention – may be critical for determining which type of intervention is most effective for each family. Moreover, children's characteristics may also influence the success of the intervention (e.g., parents may be more willing to engage and invest in children with higher academic skills). Through this investigation, researchers aim to understand more about how to foster successful home-school relationships, as well as how to tailor behavioral nudge interventions to different children and parents to be most effective, with implications for national educational interventions.

Results and Policy Lessons

Project on-going; results forthcoming.

Sources

[1] "World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise," Text/HTML, World Bank, accessed June 20, 2019, http://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2018.

[2] Castro, María, Eva Expósito-Casas, Esther López-Martín, Luis Lizasoain, Enrique Navarro-Asencio, and José Luis Gaviria. "Parental involvement on student academic achievement: A meta-analysis." *Educational research review* 14 (2015): 33-46.

[3] UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Côte d'Ivoire Country Profile," November 27, 2016, http://uis.unesco.org/country/CI.

[4] Bettinger, Eric, Nina Cunha, Guilherme Lichand, and Ricardo Madeira (2019) "Are the Effects of Informational Interventions Driven by Salience?"

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