

Unit 1: Conceptualising Education Systems

Education systems are comprised of many actors and the relationships of accountability, feedback, and governance that bind them. Systems are effective if these relationships are aligned and if the various actors and components that make up a system work coherently to achieve the system's goals. A systems approach to education reform aims to diagnose areas of system incoherence, and identify approaches that could improve system coherence for achieving the system's goals. This unit contrasts a systems approach with other approaches to education reform.

After completing the unit, students should:

- Understand different system framework(s) in education (including education production function, SABER, RISE);
- Understand that systems are more than the sum of their parts;
- Have knowledge of the rationale for systems thinking in education, and be able to contrast it with other approaches to education reform;
- Have a high-level understanding of the different constituent parts of education systems (i.e., relationships between actors); and
- Have a high-level understanding of the multiple potential goals of education systems (i.e., learning, access, equity, selection), and the different potential interests these goals serve.

Lectures

1. [Why a “system” approach? What is a “system”?](#) (Lant Pritchett, RISE Programme, University of Oxford)
2. [The RISE 5 by 4 system of accountability](#) (Lant Pritchett, RISE Programme, University of Oxford)
3. [Coherence is a characteristic of systems as systems](#) (Lant Pritchett, RISE Programme, University of Oxford)
4. [Empirical examples of incoherence](#) (Lant Pritchett, RISE Programme, University of Oxford)

Required Readings

- Glewwe, P., Kremer, M. and Moulin, S. 2009. Many Children Left Behind? Textbooks and Test Scores in Kenya. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 1 (1) (January 2009), 112-35. <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/app.1.1.112>
- Glewwe, P., Lambert, S. and Chen, Q. 2020. Education Production Functions: Updated Evidence from Developing Countries. Ed(s): Steve Bradley, Colin Green, *The Economics of Education* (Second

Edition), Academic Press, Pages 183-215, ISBN 9780128153918,
<https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-815391-8.00015-X>

- Hanushek, E.A. 2018. Education Production Functions. Macmillan Publishers Ltd (eds) *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95189-5_1930
- Pritchett, L. 2015. Creating Education Systems Coherent for Learning Outcomes. RISE Working Paper Series.15/005. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2015/005
- World Bank. 2013. The What, Why, and How of the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER). The World Bank. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/867151468180272110/the-what-why-and-how-of-the-systems-approach-for-better-education-results-saber>

Further Readings

- Crouch, L. 2020. How to Rapidly Improve Learning Outcomes at System Level? Global Partnership for Education. <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/how-rapidly-improve-learning-outcomes-system-level>
- Crouch, L. 2020. Systems Implications for Core Instructional Support Lessons from Sobral (Brazil), Puebla (Mexico), and Kenya. RISE Insight Series. 2020/020. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-RI_2020/020
- Crouch, L. and DeStefano, J. 2017. Doing Reform Differently: Combining Rigor and Practicality in Implementation and Evaluation of System Reforms. RTI International. International Development Working Paper No. 2017-01. <https://www.rti.org/publication/doing-reform-differently>
- Faul, M. V., & Savage, L. (Eds.). 2023. Systems thinking in international education and development: Unlocking learning for all? Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://www.e-elgar.com/shop/gbp/systems-thinking-in-international-education-and-development-9781802205923.html>
- Kaffenberger, M. and Spivack, M. 2022. System Coherence for Learning: Applications of the RISE Education Systems Framework. RISE Working Paper Series. 22/086. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISEWP_2022/086
- Klees, S. J., Ginsburg, M., Anwar, H., Robbins, M. B., Bloom, H., Busacca, C., Corwith, A., Decoster, B., Fiore, A., Gasior, S., Le, H. M., Primo, L. H., and Reedy, T. D. 2020. The World Bank's SABER: A Critical Analysis. *Comparative Education Review*, 64(1), 46–65. <https://doi.org/10.1086/706757>
- Pritchett, L., Newman, K., and Silberstein, J. 2022. Focus to Flourish: Five Actions to Accelerate Progress in Learning. *Research on Improving Systems of Education*. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-Misc_2022/07

Supplementary Resources

- The RISE Podcast: Luis Crouch on Purpose and Complexity in Education Systems Change. <https://riseprogramme.org/podcast/luis-crouch>