

RISE in Nigeria: Technical Research Overview

Principal Investigator:

Leonard Wantchekon (Princeton University)

Contracting Organisation:

African School of Economics

Other Key Institutions:

Study of the Economies of Africa (CSEA), Barnard College, Dalhousie University, Oklahoma State University, Princeton University, and the University of Oxford.

Introduction

The RISE Country Research Team in Nigeria will study the interplay between community engagement and aspiration, local politics, and educational outcomes in Nigeria. The goal is to examine whether and how engaged parents, communities and students can influence not only the quality of school governance, but also the politics of education policy at local and national levels. The focus of the £3 million, three-year project on demand-side determinants of education systems change contributes a new perspective on how to reform systems of education. The work will rely on a wide variety of research methods, including quantitative and qualitative investigations, the analysis of historical data, the collection of new data, interviews with local stakeholders, and randomised control trials looking at specific reforms.

Context

As a result of a rapidly growing population, Nigeria faces the task of providing quality education to over 10 million children of primary school age who are currently out of school (UNESCO, 2012). At the same time, it also needs to improve the quality of basic education. Using data collected by the World Bank, Wane (2014) estimates that less than 8 percent of public school teachers are able to meet the minimum qualification on a test (a score of 80 percent on a test of primary school level Math and English). The project also found that teachers are absent from the classroom roughly 25 percent of the time. A report by UNESCO in 2012 suggests that an estimated 26 percent of enrolled primary

school children do not complete the cycle as a result of deficiencies in the public school system.

In addition, the country also faces significant challenges in ensuring equitable education and learning outcomes across gender, ethnic, and regional lines. Estimates from the 2008 Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) illustrate these disparities in learning outcomes. For example, while only 35 percent of females between the ages of 14 and 25 are literate in the north, over 90 percent of females are able to read simple sentences in the south, on average, with the corresponding North-South literacy rate for males at 69 percent and 95 percent, respectively.

Improving learning outcomes has resonated as a key policy objective. Interventions to address learning deficiencies, in Nigeria and elsewhere, often focus on the supply side of educational inputs: getting textbooks into classrooms, training teachers, constructing more classroom blocks, and improving education financing (Gershberg et al., 2015). But this focus misses two critical, more systemic sets of questions:

1. How can the demand for education (i.e., student motivation, parental investment, community engagement) improve so that students take advantage of the inputs they access in order to ensure equitable improvements in learning outcomes?
2. How do local and national politics affect the quality of school governance, and investment in education? What makes political actors in Nigeria's public education sector act in the best interests of student achievement across various demographic groups?

The importance of these questions is apparent. The importance of these questions is apparent, both in the disappointing results of certain recent education reforms (Gershberg et al., 2015) and in the ethnic and gender differences that exist even among individuals living in the same school districts (Dev. et. al., 2016).

This project, therefore, studies the interplay between community engagement

and aspiration, local politics, and education outcomes in Nigeria. The hypothesis is that engaged parents can not only influence the quality of school governance (Dupas et al., 2014), but also the politics of education at the local and perhaps national level.

The research intends to build on insights from historical and current Nigerian education policy imperatives. The project will focus analysis on four events: the early introduction of missionary schools from 1845, the Free Primary Education policy initiated by western Nigeria in 1955, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) created in 1973, and the nationwide School-Based Management initiative launched in 2005. The study will also investigate how electoral politics, social movements, and activism at national or state levels shape these policies.

Theory of change, conceptual and historical background

The central thesis is that demand for education leads to educational systems change, school improvement, and improved school effectiveness. Educational systems change is defined as measurable indicators of school improvement (the mechanics of schooling) and school effectiveness (outcomes of education). Demand for education is shaped by political continuities and discontinuities that govern the changing trajectories of educational policy, and take on the following forms: aspiration, awareness, and action (although these constructs are in themselves permeable).

Indicators of school improvement include the extent to which there are significant changes to:

1. The policies governing educational provision and resource allocations
2. Process factors such as an organised curriculum, high teacher motivation, rewards and incentives, order and discipline, and positive school climate
3. Enabling factors, such as qualified teachers, effective leadership, and parental participation in school governance
4. Pedagogical arrangements, such as the teaching strategies, the use of formative and summative assessments, and home-school relationships to ensure that all students learn.

Indicators of school effectiveness include students' learning outcomes as measured by their mastery of the curriculum (often tested by learning assessments), transition to higher education and employability (as may be tested by national examinations), social and emotional skills (often assessed by classroom teachers in an ongoing manner or through standardised instruments), and attitudes and values

(assessed as part of the curriculum but mostly outside of schools in youth club and social clubs, and other community activities).

Over the last 30 years, activities aimed at changing educational systems have been piecemeal, targeted on discrete areas such as teacher education, curriculum and textbook reform, and reform to educational ministries. There is less evidence of a significant and concerted effort to stimulate demand for education.

The research hypothesis is that the nature and extent of demand are generally framed by student, parental, and community aspirations, awareness, and action, whatever the level of participation. Furthermore, even within communities, demand could also vary based on gender, and the socioeconomic and ethno-religious backgrounds of parents and children. Under the working hypothesis, attitudes toward educational, social and economic achievement are motivated by socio-political awareness, and can be traced historically. The basic assumption is of a strong interaction between political continuities and political discontinuities that, at different stages, either increases or suppresses the demand for education, with important implications for learning outcomes.

The study investigates the general link between demand and education systems change by first drawing on historical educational reforms, and then digging deeper into the reasons why changing demand can in turn influence systems change. The study will examine a number of current policies that provide an opportunity to explore these mechanisms at the level of the students, parents, communities, and local political stakeholders. Additionally, the team will run an education "social contract" experiment across different regions to understand the mechanism through which the demand for education interacts with politics and can be institutionalised in the political process.

Individual components of the study

Mission schools

A natural starting point for a comprehensive study of Nigeria's education system is the introduction of formal education with the arrival of missionary schools. The retrospective evaluation of the impact of colonial schools will use data from archival research and several rounds of surveys on a dozen of the colonial and missionary schools from western Nigeria.

Quantitative analyses will examine how missionary education by itself altered aspirations, and changed the demand

RISE Nigeria team members getting ready for research activities



for education across various religious groups and social classes. The study aims to understand how missionaries engaged with the traditional political structures to obtain the buy-in of traditional leaders and decisionmakers to raise parental aspirations and the demand for male and female education.

Researchers will conduct in-depth interviews with descendants of early mission and colonial school attendees, the oldest generation of adults linked to those who attended these schools. Researchers will use randomly selected case studies (of families involved with early mission schools and those that were not engaged, possibly within the same community) to understand some of the mechanisms that would be lost in a quantitative framework. Researchers will conduct interviews with local political actors to assess the extent of interactions with local communities in areas with and without mission schools.

The results are expected to directly inform stakeholders regarding the reasons why these early schools were successful. Moreover, the findings should provide understanding of how demand for education may be harnessed to replicate this success in multi-ethnic Nigeria.

Specific research questions will include:

- What are the effects of formal education, and how do these effects spread within and across generations through demand-side factors?
- Does increased aspiration act on educational outcomes through the mechanism of increased participation in local politics?
- How do these effects vary between mission and government schools, genders, and other community characteristics, such as religion and traditional hierarchies?

Free Primary Education

The Free Primary Education (FPE) scheme was initiated in 1952 by the government of Nigeria's western region and existed until 1966 (Ajayi, 1965). The primary school population increased from 429,542 students in 1953 to 1.15 million in 1960. Enrolment rates jumped from 35 percent to 63 percent over the same time period, with female enrolment increasing faster than that of males. Despite its high costs and implementation challenges, the free primary education scheme of 1952-1966 is viewed as one of the most successful programmes of its kind.

This study aims to provide a rigorous ex-post analysis of the effects of the FPE on learning, labour market, and other socioeconomic outcomes, including income, occupational choice, and political participation. The RISE research will examine the issues surrounding the provision of primary education in the local language, as compared to English—an aspect of the current reforms that the government has found quite challenging (Gershberg et al., 2015). While compulsory and free primary education was introduced in the western region in 1955 and in other regions in the subsequent years, a national programme to improve primary education was not launched until 1976.

Using a difference-in-difference evaluation strategy, the research will exploit regional variation in the FPE implementation to assess the programme's effectiveness in increasing school inputs due to increased aspiration and parental involvement. The analysis will rely on administrative data to document the relevant school inputs, availability of teachers, and student enrolment. It will also draw on secondary data from large-scale household and labour force surveys to assess student achievements, and labour market and

socioeconomic outcomes. The work will investigate the degree to which the success of the programme depended on local political conditions and pre-existing demand for education. The work will exploit variation across communities with initial exposure to mission schools, political engagement within the ruling party, and traditional hierarchical structures.

Research questions will include:

- What was the FPE programme's effectiveness in increasing school inputs due to increased aspiration and parental involvement?
- What strategies did the government adopt to increase local support for the programme, especially support for increased female enrolment?
- What is the importance of providing primary education in the local language as compared to English?
- What is the impact of having more educated leaders on the amount and quality of public goods provided?

National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)

The NYSC scheme, created in 1973, randomly assigns Nigerian graduates of universities and polytechnic institutes to communities outside their states of origin. Most assignments are to teaching positions at primary and secondary schools. The "corpors" are required to engage in a community development project during their service year. The goal of the research is to study the importance of the corpors' participation in local and school governance, and how this affects the demand for education and school quality. The work also explores whether youth corpors acting as role models are able to increase pupils' effort and aspirations.

The research will take advantage of the random assignment of college graduates to schools, to provide a rigorous analysis of the effect of the NYSC on education demand and learning outcomes. Researchers will assess the relevance of learning outcomes, and investigate the mechanisms through which role models increase educational achievements. This analysis will also evaluate how the effect of role models is mediated by the local political economy. The research will examine differences between communities in which NYSC graduates do and do not play an active role in local school governance. The comparisons will examine community attitudes towards education, school inputs attracted, and educational outcomes.

Research questions will include:

- What is the impact of the NYSC scheme on student outcomes and community development?
- What are the mechanisms through which role models increase educational aspirations? Do these differ across genders and ethnoreligious groups?

- How are the effects of role models mediated by the local political economy?

Examination of School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs)

In 2005, the National Council of Education launched an initiative mandating that school-based management committees be established at all primary and junior secondary schools in the country. The objective was to encourage accountability and decision making at the local level by creating a bridge between government, communities, parents and children. The 12- to 19-member committees are drawn largely from civil society, faith-based groups, and parent-teacher organizations; at least 42 percent of the members must be women. There is good evidence to suggest that the initiative has had varying degrees of success. More than half of schools have yet to establish SBMCs; and where they exist, there is evidence to suggest that their role in school management and governance is poorly understood or employed to effect.

The goal of this project is how through the participation of SBMCs, demand can be raised for both access and better learning outcomes. The project has two specific objectives. The first is to test whether SBMC can be made more effective by making them more inclusive, by making the selection of the committee members more democratic and by changing how SBMCs decide on their activities. The second specific objective is to test whether providing school data (in the form of report cards) to SBMCs can alter their behaviour. The research will also investigate how increased community engagement (action) in politics mediates the link between increased demand for education and improved learning outcomes.

The research will begin with a qualitative study to establish the key dimensions along which successful and unsuccessful school-based management committees differ. Researchers will then use these differences to develop testable hypotheses that will be rigorously evaluated using randomised control trials. Prior qualitative research based on interviews and questionnaires regarding the constraints around SBMCs will be conducted.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How does increased community engagement (action) in politics mediate the link between increased demand for education and improved learning outcomes?
- Can providing SBMCs with more information on their schools in the form of report cards can induce them to take actions to

improve access to education and learning outcomes?

Political economy of education reforms

The team will take advantage of the 2019 general elections cycle to design an experiment to determine the impact of constructive dialogues and politicians' commitment to reform on education outcomes. Selecting five out of the 30 states, the treatment will involve conducting information sessions tagged 'education awareness workshops' that bring together gubernatorial candidates and education stakeholders in each selected state in a way that does not motivate the politicisation of issues.

The second stage of the experiment will involve the development and signing of an education social contract between the governor and education stakeholders at a townhall meeting. The stakeholders will include state and local government education officers, school administrators, SBMCs members, donor organisations, NGOs, PTA members, teachers, community leaders, and parents. This will embody the governor's political commitment to pursuing (specific) education reforms during their 4-year mandate. It will also serve as a tool for community members to use in seeking accountability to promised reforms. Under these

conditions, we will study how successful reforms will be, if pursued, and their impacts on education systems change, as described by school process and outcome improvements.

Research questions will include:

- What impact does "constructive" dialogue between politicians/aspirants and education stakeholders have on governance indicators at the state levels and the likelihood of success of education reforms?
- What is the effect of participatory governance in form of social contracts on education outcomes?
- Does the effect run through policy preference alignment and mutual commitment to reform by key stakeholders, for example the governor, teachers, parents, community leaders?
- Does the effect vary by regions or the level of electoral support for the winning candidate? Does it depend on co-ethnicity between the winning candidate and the dominant ethnic group in the state? On whether the winning candidate is an incumbent or opposition?
- Are there spillovers between treated local governments and the surrounding local governments? What are the mechanisms of this indirect effect?

Please contact information@riseprogramme.org for additional information, or visit www.riseprogramme.org.



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