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Timeline

2016-2020

Study Status

Results

Study Type

Randomized Evaluation

Sample Size

900 schools

Research Implemented by IPA

Yes

NBER WORKING PAPER SERIES

WHEN INFORMATION IS NOT ENOUGH:
EVIDENCE FROM A CENTRALIZED SCHOOL CHOICE SYSTEM

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Academic Paper

The Role of Information in Secondary School Choice: Evidence from Ghana

Researchers conducted a randomized evaluation to measure the impact of providing information to students and parents on secondary school characteristics and selection strategies on enrollment outcomes. Results showed that the information influenced students' school preferences and the characteristics they valued. In turn students selected and were admitted into higher value-added schools, but enrollment did not change.

Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced accelerating increases in secondary school enrollment since 2000, decreasing the proportion of out-of-school lower secondary students by 23 percent and out-of-school upper secondary students by 16 percent.¹ However, enrollment remains significantly below enrollment rates in low- and middle-income countries in other parts of the world.² In Ghana, education is compulsory from 6 to 15 years of age. This translates to high enrollment rates in primary and junior secondary schools but not necessarily in senior secondary schools, where net enrollment is below 60 percent.³

Before entering senior secondary school, Ghanaian students submit a ranked list of up to four secondary schools that they would like to attend. The Computerized School Selection and Placement System (CSSPS) of the Ghana Education Service uses this ranking, together with their performance on the Basic Education Certification Exam (BECE), to place students in senior high schools. However, students must make their selection of schools with only very limited information on schools' admission standards, academic performance, and fees. This information deficit is especially pronounced for marginalized students, which could negatively impact enrollment decisions.

From 2016 to 2020, researchers partnered with IPA, the Ghana Education Service, and the West African Examinations Council to conduct a randomized evaluation to measure the impact of providing information to students and parents on secondary school characteristics and selection strategies on enrollment outcomes. They designed and distributed a booklet about school choices, produced and screened a video about the school choice system, and facilitated a school-based workshop to provide information on how to navigate the application process and the various school programs. A total of 900 schools (encompassing 18,000 students) were randomly assigned equally to have students receive the booklet, video, and school-based workshop; students and parents receive the booklet, video, and school-based workshop; or receive no intervention and serve as a comparison group.

Results showed that both interventions increased the likelihood that households used the booklet for information about the quality of the schools and the school characteristics they valued such as admissions chance and distance from home. As such, students changed their school choice behavior in their applications. They were more likely to indicate that they

considered admissions chances and thus applied to academically “safer” schools, they applied to a wider portfolio of schools, and they were more likely to list schools in order of difficulty. In turn, students were admitted to higher value-added schools. However, 40 percent of the students did not end up going to their selected schools, likely due to school fees causing unanticipated shocks and households changing their preferences between the intervention and the start of school.

Sources

¹ United Nations Children’s Fund and African Union Commission. TRANSFORMING EDUCATION IN AFRICA: An evidence-based overview and recommendations for long-term improvements. UNICEF and AUC. New York, NY: 2021

² World Bank Data, “School enrollment, secondary (% net) - Sub-Saharan Africa (excluding high income), Europe & Central Asia (excluding high income), East Asia & Pacific (excluding high income), Latin America & Caribbean (excluding high income), Middle East & North Africa (excluding high income),” World Bank Group, accessed January 19, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.SEC.NENR?locations=ZF-7E-4E-XJ-XQ>

³ World Bank Data, “School enrollment, secondary (% net) - Ghana,” World Bank Group, accessed January 19, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.SEC.NENR?locations=GH>

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Implementing Partners



Ghana Education Service



West African Examinations Council