



The impact of school vouchers in developing countries: A systematic review



Claire Morgan^{a,*}, Anthony Petrosino^b, Trevor Fronius^b

^a WestEd, 400 Seaport Court, Suite 222, Redwood City, CA 94063-2767, USA

^b WestEd, 300 Unicorn Park Dr., 5th Floor, Woburn, MA 01801, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 6 August 2014

Received in revised form 28 April 2015

Accepted 30 April 2015

Available online 2 June 2015

Keywords:

Voucher

School

Evaluation

Systematic review

Developing countries

ABSTRACT

We report on a systematic review of evaluations of education voucher programs in developing countries. Extensive searching identified two studies that met inclusion criteria—one examining the Colombia PACES program and the other evaluating the Quetta, Pakistan Urban Fellowship program. Both programs increased private school enrollment among the countries' poorest income groups, thus probably improving equity. The Pakistan program resulted in girls being educated for less than it would have cost for the government to create public school spaces, while the Colombia program cost more, but will most likely prove cost-effective in terms of long-term economic gains. More rigorous research in developing country contexts is necessary to determine whether the gains from these two programs can be replicated and enhanced.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Two billion children, 85 percent of the world's total child population, live in developing countries (Kremer & Holla, 2008), where public education systems face enormous challenges. Low educational attainment in developing countries is attributable in part to the household costs associated with sending children to public and private schools (Bentaouet-Kattan & Burnett, 2004; Filmer & Pritchett, 1998, 2001). Children of the poorest income quintile in developing countries consistently represent the lowest percentage of eligible students attending school (Thapa & Mahendra, 2010).

Demand-side financing, based on the principle of governments either channelling education resources through students and their parents or basing school funding on enrollments or attendance, is a way of addressing inequities that prevent poor children from continuing their education, as well as a means of introducing school choice (Patrinós, 2007). Education vouchers¹ are a demand-side intervention involving the public subsidy of private schooling² based on the number of eligible voucher students per school (Arenas, 2004).

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +001 650 381 6466.

E-mail addresses: cmorgan@wested.org (C. Morgan), apetros@wested.org (A. Petrosino), tfroniu@wested.org (T. Fronius).

¹ Definition of 'voucher' for the purposes of this review: an education voucher system 'in the broadest sense is a payment made by the government to a school [or directly to the parent] chosen by the parent of the child being educated; the voucher finances all or most of the tuition being charged. The system introduces competition among public schools and between public and private schools; and it enables schools to offer diverse educational packages to meet the different preferences of parents' (p. 83).

² The term private school generally refers to for-profit or non-profit privately operated non-government-subsidized schools that charge tuition to all students. These may include NGO and faith-based schools, as well as low-cost private schools for the poor—a relatively new and rapidly-expanding education sector in many developing countries.

The impact of school vouchers in developing countries has not been systematically reviewed previously. Unlike a traditional literature review or policy overview, a systematic review transparently searches, evaluates, and synthesizes all of the relevant existing research through a systematic process that is explicitly defined in advance through a peer-reviewed protocol. A systematic review of rigorous impact evaluations in an area receiving attention by development agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academic institutions is essential for understanding the nature and quality of the evidence base available to inform policy and programming. In this paper, we report on a systematic review of evaluations of education voucher programs in developing countries. We employed extensive searching, including handsearches, examining gray literature, and contacting experts in the field. Through examination and coding of the eligible studies, we have assessed the breadth and quality of the literature base and synthesized the available evidence of the impact of education voucher programs on outcomes such as primary and secondary school enrollment and educational quality and equity.

1.2. Conceptual framework

School vouchers generally aim to expand parental school choice (Gauri & Vawda, 2003; Oosterbeek & Patrinos, 2008; Patrinos, 2007), which is often promoted to increase competition in the school system (Friedman, 1955). It is argued that the presence of more private schools leads to both public and private schools improving quality and learning outcomes, thereby increasing efficiency to attract students and their accompanying resources (Patrinos, 2005). In a developing country context, in which government schools often assess tuition and other fees, school vouchers aim to increase education access, as well as quality, and may be used for participating public, as well as private, schools.

Different voucher models have different objectives, and the form voucher programs take in each country may be radically different (Arenas, 2004). Generally, however, voucher programs involve payment made by the government to a parent or to a school chosen by the parent; the voucher finances all or most of the tuition being charged (West, 1997)³. A school voucher system introduces three simultaneous reforms: (1) allowing parents to choose schools; (2) creating incentives for schools to increase enrollment; and (3) granting schools management autonomy to respond to demand (Gauri & Vawda, 2003).

Levin's (2002) comprehensive school voucher framework focuses on four criteria of voucher programs: (1) freedom to choose, (2) productive efficiency, (3) equity, and (4) social cohesion. Voucher programs may place particular emphasis on one criterion over another by using three 'policy instruments': finance, regulation and support services; these are what define and distinguish individual voucher programs. For example, the size of the education voucher – whether or not it covers full school-of-choice tuition and fees – will affect its take-up by households and degree of incentive for schools to attract voucher students. In addition, when the size of the voucher is determined by the need of the household, equity issues are considered. Regulations associated with the eligibility of schools and households to participate in the voucher scheme will also impact implementation. Support services, such as access to information and transportation to school of choice, impact the efficiency of a voucher program.

There are various arguments in favor of voucher programs. For example, vouchers may improve quality in both public and private schools, which now have to compete to attract students (Arenas, 2004; Kremer & Holla, 2008). Vouchers may increase equity because they provide poor families with access to private education (Chubb & Moe, 1990) and all parents, regardless of income, are now able to choose their child's school (Patrinos, 2005). Theoretically, systems of accountability can be instituted to limit segregation by socio-economic status, ethnicity and academic ability (Arenas, 2004) that may arise as the result of voucher implementation. Advocates for voucher programs also stress that in low-income countries, private enrollment is generally more desirable than public, as evidenced by proportions of enrollment 2–3 times higher than private enrollment in industrialized nations (Angrist, Bettinger, Bloom, King, & Kremer, 2002). High teacher and administrator absenteeism exacerbate low quality in public schools, which leads to many families removing their children (Gauri & Vawda, 2003).

Opponents of vouchers argue that private schools do not necessarily provide a higher-quality education and that many are more interested in maximizing profit than in providing quality education; affluent families with more social capital and access to voucher program information are more likely to find the best schools; and it is very difficult to set up effective systems of accountability (Arenas, 2004). Increased school choice may thus lead to 'cream skimming' – in which private schools select the most academically able and advantaged students (particularly because parents often conflate student body composition with educational quality) – and sorting, in which the most disadvantaged students are isolated in the lowest-quality schools (Lara, Mizala, & Repetto, 2010).

³ The review focused on general education voucher programs, as defined above—government-sponsored programs that provide vouchers or similar subsidies for private education. These include voucher-like programs, such as the Quetta Girls Fellowship Program, that may not be 'pure' voucher programs, but that have the same aims of subsidising private education to introduce school choice. There are incentive-based models that do not necessarily offer public/private school choice, which is typically the emphasis of voucher programs, and are beyond the scope of this review. For example, many developing (and industrialised) nations have adopted various incentive-based programs to promote primary and secondary education among marginalised populations (e.g., conditional cash transfer [CCT], food for education, stipends). See Author (2012).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/356853>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/356853>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)