

Accepted Manuscript

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PII: S0022-1996(17)30030-2
DOI: doi:[10.1016/j.jinteco.2017.03.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jinteco.2017.03.004)
Reference: INEC 3032

To appear in: *Journal of International Economics*

Received date: 4 April 2016
Revised date: 13 March 2017
Accepted date: 15 March 2017



Please cite this article as: Blanchard, Emily, Olney, William W., Globalization and Human Capital Investment: Export Composition Drives Educational Attainment, *Journal of International Economics* (2017), doi:[10.1016/j.jinteco.2017.03.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jinteco.2017.03.004)

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Globalization and Human Capital Investment: Export Composition Drives Educational Attainment*

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March 22, 2017

Abstract

Human capital is among the most important drivers of long-run economic growth, but its macroeconomic determinants are still not well understood. This paper demonstrates the importance of a key demand-side driver of education, using exogenously-driven changes in the composition of a country's exports as a lens to study how shifting patterns of production influence subsequent educational attainment. Using a panel of 102 countries and 45 years, we find that growth in less skill-intensive exports depresses average educational attainment while growth in skill-intensive exports increases schooling. These results provide insight into which types of sectoral growth are most beneficial for long-run human capital formation and suggest that trade liberalization could exacerbate initial differences in factor endowments across countries.

Keywords: Exports; Education; Human Capital; Skill-Intensity

JEL Codes: F14; F16; J24

*We are grateful to Q Ashraf, Andrew Bernard, Jim Feyrer, Nina Pavcnik and other colleagues as well as seminar participants at the NBER, Dartmouth, Williams, and a variety of other places for helpful comments and suggestions. This project was supported by the Class of 1945 World Fellowship grant at Williams College.

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