

EVIDENCE-INSIGHTS-POLICY

STUDENTS OR TEACHERS? THE EFFECTS OF GIVING AND TAKING AWAY INCENTIVES IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN TANZANIA

CONTEXT

In 2013, the Tanzanian government embarked on an ambitious and wide-ranging set of reforms in the education system referred to as the Big Results Now in Education (BRNED) program. A key pillar of this program is improving student achievement through non-financial performance-based incentives for teachers. To facilitate an evidence-based scale-up of the program, Filmer, Habyarimana and Sabarwal (2017) experimented with various designs for performance-based teacher incentives.

INTERVENTIONS

A two-phase randomized controlled trial was adopted. Phase 1 tested the basic impact of performance-based teacher incentives. Phase 2

extended Phase 1 to test the impact of withdrawing teacher incentives after they were introduced for a short period of time and to examine the effectiveness of incentivizing students instead of teachers.

DATA

420 secondary schools (public and private) in three regions of Tanzania were included in the experimental sample. All interventions targeted 10th grade students and teachers. Student test scores in math, English, and Kswahili were used to measure teachers' performance.

KEY FINDINGS

- Non-financial performance incentives for teachers can lead to modest improvements in

student learning. In contrast, incentivizing only students did not produce observable learning gains.

- ⦿ Contrary to policy-makers' expressed fears, withdrawing performance incentives did not discourage effects among teachers and students (i.e., when incentives were withdrawn, student performance did not fall below pre-baseline levels).
- ⦿ Public school teachers took time to respond to these incentives. This is potentially linked to low trust among public school teachers. In contrast, private school teachers responded to the incentives faster and more strongly.
- ⦿ In public schools, teacher incentives only improved the performance of mid- to high-ability students. This is not the case in private schools, where these incentives also impacted low-ability students.

The results are relevant for Tanzania's education policies and for low-income countries seeking low-cost and sustainable solutions to improving the education.

POLICY IMPACTS

This evaluation tested the relative effectiveness—and cost-effectiveness—of a range of strategies to improve education through better teaching. The results are relevant for Tanzania's education policies and for low-income countries seeking low-cost and sustainable solutions to improving the education.