



Strategic Impact  
Evaluation Fund

# NEWSLETTER

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## How do parents adjust educational investments in response to remote instruction?

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many governments to shift their instruction to remote modalities, but in many low- and middle-income countries, children lacked regular access to devices or the internet that would allow them to participate in remote instruction. [A recent working paper](#) reports the results of a [SIEF-supported evaluation in Bangladesh](#), in which households were randomly assigned to receive a twice weekly reminder about an online learning platform offered by the government, an internet data subsidy in addition to the reminder, or a weekly 30-minute phone conversation with a teacher. The reminder did not increase usage of the online platform but rather reminded parents of the benefits of learning during lockdowns. Parents increased their investments in private tutoring, an effect driven by wealthier households in the sample. Children in wealthier households receiving the reminders also showed significantly higher math scores compared to a control group. Only the internet subsidy could increase usage of the online learning platform and again only for wealthier households. This increased usage triggered by the reminder and the subsidy, however, served to decrease children's math scores. Direct support from teachers did help to improve math scores among children in poorer households. These results suggest that even when services are offered to all, they might serve to exacerbate inequalities as wealthier parents can respond by adjusting their education investments differently from poorer parents. The results also suggest that remote instruction might not be effective in promoting learning even when households can access it.

## How well are we measuring skills among preschool-age children?

Measuring how well preschool-age children are acquiring cognitive, language, and social-emotional skills is a challenge. Parents may not be able to accurately report on their abilities, and most children lack the literacy skills to take a self-administered test. Equally challenging is designing a test that can measure a full range of ability-levels in multiple contexts around the world and that exhibits sufficient sensitivity to detect impacts of the interventions typically studied in randomized control trials. A SIEF publication, [A Toolkit for Measuring Early Childhood Development in Low and Middle-Income Countries](#), covers these issues, and earlier [SIEF-sponsored research](#) showed that the open-access International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) was suitable for program evaluation but, like most measurement tools, not suitable for cross-country comparisons. A more recent [paper](#) shows that children's scores measured with the IDELA tool also show good predictive validity – that is, they correlate significantly and

meaningfully with literacy and math scores measured when the children are older.

### Standardizing education

SIEF's [latest Evidence to Policy note](#) reports the results of a [SIEF-supported randomized control trial in Kenya](#) that evaluated the effects of providing scholarships to a private school that aimed to standardize all aspects of education. Teachers in these schools were equipped with a basic tablet computer containing detailed lesson plans; headmasters similarly had to monitor teachers using a very structured tablet-based assessment. Preprimary and primary students induced to enroll in a Bridge school by the scholarship learned much more compared to students who did not get scholarships, with learning gains equivalent to an additional 1.48 years of education among preschool age students and an additional 0.89 years of education among students in primary school. These are some of the highest gains recorded in the international education literature.

