

Increasing student enrollment and attendance: impacts by gender

Last updated: February 2019

Reducing the costs and increasing the perceived benefits of education increase student participation for both boys and girls, and successful programs tend to help the gender with the lowest initial attendance most.



A girl in primary school in India. Photo: Francisca de Iruarrizaga | J-PAL

Summary

Despite substantial progress in increasing school participation overall, girls of primary school age remain less likely to be in school than boys [1]. . When evaluating strategies to increase school participation, it is therefore important to analyze results by gender. A recent J-PAL review including randomized evaluations of 25 programs to increase school participation disaggregated results by gender. Most programs that improved school participation were as effective—if not more effective—for girls as they were for boys. Programs aimed at increasing participation tended to help the gender with the lowest initial attendance most.

Supporting evidence

Reducing costs and increasing perceived benefits increase participation for both boys and girls, and often girls benefit more than boys. Gender-disaggregated results of the studies included in the J-PAL review show that most programs that improved school participation overall were as effective—if not more effective—for girls as they were for boys. Of the evaluations of 25 programs with results split by gender, 14 showed no difference between boys and girls [2], [3], [4], [5], [6], [7], [8], [9], [10], [11], [12], , and 5 improved girls' attendance more [13], [14], [15], [16], [17]. However, these are short-term results; further

research is needed to determine how impacts for each gender will differ in the long run.

Programs aimed at increasing participation tend to help the disadvantaged gender most. Girls' enrollment and attendance are typically lower than boys', but in two evaluations, boys started with lower attendance rates. In these cases, the programs, offered to all students, led to greater improvements for boys than for girls. In Nicaragua [18], and Colombia [19], boys had considerably lower attendance rates at baseline than girls. In these cases, impacts of CCT programs for boys were larger than for girls. Successful programs aimed at increasing participation in general tend to help the disadvantaged gender most, likely because the most marginalized students are particularly sensitive to the costs and perceived benefits of education.

There is less evidence on programs that focus on gender-specific barriers such as menstruation. Policymakers have cited gender-specific cultural barriers, such as restriction on girls' mobility during menstruation, as a limitation on girls' educational attainment. However, there have been few randomized evaluations that focus on alleviating gender-specific barriers. One example of a randomized evaluation in this area studied the impact of a program to reduce mobility restrictions related to menstruation for girls. The program in Nepal sought to improve girls' attendance by providing seventh and eighth grade girls with sanitary products [20]. The evaluation found that, on average, menstruation was not a key barrier: girls only missed 0.4 days of school out of a 180-day school year due to their period. Although girls reported liking the product, it had no impact on closing this small attendance gap. More research is needed to understand the effect of gender-specific barriers on girls' enrollment and attendance.

Sector chair(s) or Academic lead(s)

Karthik Muralidharan Philip Oreopoulos

Insight author(s)

Meagan Neal

Robert Rogers

Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL). 2018. "Increasing student enrollment and attendance: impacts by gender." J-PAL Policy Insights. Last modified February 2019. <https://doi.org/10.31485/pi.2262.2018>

-
1. UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report. "Reducing global poverty through universal primary and secondary education." Policy Paper 32/Factsheet 44, June 2017. Report
 2. Barrera-Osorio, Felipe, David S. Blakeslee, Matthew Hoover, Leigh L. Linden, Dhushyanth Raju, and Stephen P. Ryan. "Delivering Education to the Underserved Through a Public-Private Partnership Program in Pakistan." NBER Working Paper #23870, September 2017. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
 3. Duflo, Esther, , Pascaline Dupas, , Michael Kremer, . "The Impact of Free Secondary Education: Experimental Evidence from Ghana." Working Paper, February 2017. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
 4. Benhassine, Najy, Florencia Devoto, , Esther Duflo, , Pascaline Dupas, , and Victor Pouliquen, . 2015. "Turning a Shove into a Nudge? A "Labeled Cash Transfer" for Education." *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 7 (3): 86–125. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
 5. Duflo, Esther, , Pascaline Dupas, , and Michael Kremer, . 2015. "Education, HIV and Early Fertility: Experimental Evidence from Kenya." *American Economic Review* 105 (9): 2757-2797. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
 6. Hidalgo, Diana, Mercedes Onofa, Hessel Oosterbeek, and Juan Ponce. 2013. "Can Provision of Free School Uniforms Harm Attendance? Evidence from Ecuador." *Journal of Development Economics* 103: 43-51. Research Paper

7. Kazianga, Harounan, Damien de Walque, and Harold Alderman. 2012. "Educational and Child Labour Impacts of Two Food-for-Education Schemes: Evidence from a Randomised Trial in Rural Burkina Faso." *Journal of African Economies*, 21 (5): 723–760. Research Paper
8. Alderman, Harold, Daniel O. Gilligan, and Kim Lehrer. 2012. "The Impact of Food for Education Programs on School Participation in Northern Uganda." *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 61 (1): 187-218. Research Paper
9. Miguel, Edward, , and Michael Kremer, . 2004. "Worms: Identifying Impacts on Education and Health in the Presence of Treatment Externalities." *Econometrica* 72 (1): 159-217. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
10. Loyalka, Prashant, Chengfang Liu, Yingquan Song, Hongmei Yi, Xiaoting Huang, Jianguo Wei, Linxiu Zhang, Yaojiang Shi, James Chu, Scott Rozelle. 2013. "Can information and counseling help students from poor rural areas go to high school? Evidence from China." *Journal of Comparative Economics* 41 (4): 1012–1025. Research Paper
11. Banerjee, Abhijit, , Rukmini Banerji, Esther Duflo, , Rachel Glennerster, , and Stuti Khemani. 2010. "Pitfalls of Participatory Programs: Evidence from a Randomized Evaluation in Education in India." *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 2 (1): 1–30. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
12. Sabarwal, Shwetlena, David K. Evans, and Anastasia Marshak. "The Permanent Input Hypothesis: The Case of Textbooks and (No) Student Learning in Sierra Leone." World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 7021, September 2014. Research Paper
13. Burde, Dana, and Leigh L. Linden, . 2013. "Bringing Education to Afghan Girls: A Randomized Controlled Trial of Village-Based Schools." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 5 (3): 27-40. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
14. Schultz, T. Paul. 2004. "School Subsidies for the Poor: Evaluating the Mexican Progresa Program." *Journal of Development Economics* 74 (1): 199-250. Research Paper
15. Jensen, Robert, . 2012. "Do Labor Market Opportunities Affect Young Women's Work and Family Decisions? Experimental Evidence from India." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 127 (2): 753-792. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
16. Beaman, Lori, , Esther Duflo, , Rohini Pande, , and Petia Topalova. 2012. "Female Leadership Raises Aspirations and Educational Attainment for Girls: A Policy Experiment in India." *Science* 355: 582-586. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
17. Kremer, Michael, , Edward Miguel, , and Rebecca Thornton, . 2009. "Incentives to Learn." *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 91 (3): 537-56. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
18. Maluccio, J.A. and R. Flores. 2005. Impact evaluation of a conditional cash transfer program: The Nicaraguan Red de Protección Social, Research Report No. 141, IFPRI, Washington, DC. Research Paper
19. Barrera-Orsorio, Felipe, Marianne Bertrand, , Leigh L. Linden, , and Francisco Perez-Calle. 2011. "Improving the Design of Conditional Transfer Programs: Evidence from a Randomized Education Experiment in Colombia." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*. 3: 167-95. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
20. Oster, Emily and Rebecca Thornton, . 2011. "Menstruation, Sanitary Products, and School Attendance: Evidence from a Randomized Evaluation." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 3: 91-100. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
21. Andrabi, Tahir, Jishnu Das, and Asim Ijaz Khwaja, . 2017. "Report Cards: The Impact of Providing School and Child Test Scores on Educational Markets." *American Economic Review* 107 (6): 1535-63. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
22. Baird, Sarah, Craig McIntosh, , and Berk Özler. 2011. "Cash or Condition? Evidence from a Randomized Cash Transfer Program." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 126 (4): 1709-1753. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
23. Banerji, Rukmini, James Berry, , and Marc Shotland. 2017. "The Impact of Maternal Literacy and Participation Programs: Evidence from a Randomized Evaluation in India." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 9 (4): 303-37. Research Paper, . | J-PAL Evaluation Summary

24. Barrera-Osorio, Felipe and Deon Filmer. 2015. "Incentivizing Schooling for Learning: Evidence on the Impact of Alternative Targeting Approaches." *The Journal of Human Resources* 51 (2): 461-499. Research Paper
25. Barrera-Osorio, Felipe, and Dhushyanth Raju. 2017. "Teacher Performance Pay: Experimental Evidence from Pakistan." *Journal of Public Economics* 148: 75-91. Research Paper.
26. Beasley, Elizabeth and Elise Huillery, . "Willing but Unable: Short-Term Experimental Evidence on Parent Empowerment and School Quality." World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 8125, June 2017. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
27. Behrman, Jere R., Susan W. Parker, and Petra E. Todd. 2011. "Do Conditional Cash Transfers for Schooling Generate Lasting Benefits? A Five-Year Follow Up of PROGRESA/Oportunidades." *Journal of Human Resources* 46 (1): 93-122. Research Paper
28. Blimpo, Moussa P., David K. Evans, and Nathalie Lahire. "Parental Human Capital and Effective School Management: Evidence from The Gambia." World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 7238, April 2013. Research Paper
29. Bobonis, Gustavo, Edward Miguel, , and Charu Puri-Sharma. 2006. "Anemia and School Participation." *The Journal of Human Resources* 41 (4): 692-721. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
30. Borkum, Evan, Fang He, and Leigh L. Linden, . "The Effects of School Libraries on Language Skills: Evidence from a Randomized Controlled Trial in India." NBER Working Paper 18183, June 2012. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
31. Duflo, Esther, , Pascaline Dupas, , and Michael Kremer, . 2015. "School Governance, Teacher Incentives, and Pupil-Teacher Ratios: Experimental Evidence from Kenyan Primary Schools." *Journal of Public Economics* 123: 92-110. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
32. Duflo, Esther, , Rema Hanna, , and Stephen P. Ryan. 2012. "Incentives Work: Getting Teachers to Come to School." *American Economic Review* 102 (4): 1241-78. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
33. Glewwe, Paul, , Michael Kremer, , and Sylvie Moulin. 2009. "Many Children Left Behind? Textbooks and Test Scores in Kenya." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 1 (1): 112-135. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
34. Huan, Wang, James Chu, Prashant Loyalka, Xin Tao, Yaojiang Shi, Qinghe Qu, Chu Yang, and Scott Rozelle. "Can School Counseling Reduce Dropout in Developing Countries?" REAP Working Paper 275, September 2014. Research Paper
35. Jensen, Robert, . 2010. "The (Perceived) Returns to Education and the Demand for Schooling." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 125 (2): 515-548. Research Paper, | J-PAL Evaluation Summary
36. Lassibille, Gérard, Jee-Pang Tan, Cornelia Jesse, and Trang Van Nguyen. 2010. "Managing for Results in Primary Education in Madagascar: Evaluating the Impact of Selected Workflow Interventions." *The World Bank Economic Review* 24 (2): 303-329. Research Paper.
37. Pradhan, Menno, Daniel Suryadarma, Amanda Beatty, Maisy Wong, Arya Gaduh, Armida Alisjahbana, and Rima Prama Artha. 2014. "Improving Educational Quality through Enhancing Community Participation: Results from a Randomized Field Experiment in Indonesia." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 6 (2): 105-126. Research Paper
38. Yi, Hongmei, Yingquan Song, Chengfang Liu, Xiaoting Huang, Linxiu Zhang, Yunli Bai, Baoping Ren, Yaojiang Shi, Prashant Loyalka, James Chu, and Scott Rozelle. 2015. "Giving Kids a Head Start: The impact and Mechanisms of Early Commitment of Financial Aid on Poor Students in Rural China." *Journal of Development Economics* 113: 1-15. Research Paper