

Impact of Short-Term Tutoring on Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills in Chile

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Students take a test in Santiago, Chile

Location: Great Santiago and Bío-Bío Regions, Chile

Sample: 6,136 students in 85 schools

Timeline: 2010

Partners:

Chile Ministry of Education

Fundación para la Superación de la Pobreza (FSP)

A growing body of literature has shown that remedial education programs using non-teaching staff such as parents and volunteers can improve learning outcomes for students at low-performing schools. In Chile, researchers are evaluating the effect of having college students provide small-group tutoring at low-performing schools on students' language scores and attitudes towards reading.

Policy Issue: Improving education outcomes among students from low-performing, poor schools is an important and debated topic among policymakers and academics. Low levels of learning, if not addressed early in a child's school career, can worsen over time in terms of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills. Some research suggests that it is possible to improve academic performance with a few months of targeted, individual attention to bring low-performing students up to their expected level of proficiency. However, many poor schools lack the resources to hire

educational professionals to provide this additional instruction. A growing body of literature has shown that remedial education programs using non-teaching staff such as parents and volunteers can improve learning outcomes. However, there is little research into the effect that these short-term, volunteer-based programs have on cognitive skills, like reading ability, and non-cognitive skills, like self-control.

Context of the Evaluation: Although Chile has a well-developed public primary and secondary education system, most of the students who go on to tertiary institutions come from the highest income bracket in the country. In 2006, one eighth of college-aged youth from the poorest tenth of the population were enrolled in tertiary education, compared to more than half of the richest tenth. One substantial barrier to seeking tertiary education for those in lower income categories is the high tuition costs for post-secondary education: for households in the lowest income decile, one

year of public university tuition cost 141 percent of average annual income in 2003. Moreover, financial aid is merit-based, so for poor students, good grades and high scores on the college entrance exam are especially important for financing their education. Learning difficulties early in their educational career, if not addressed, could translate into significant disadvantages as they pursue higher education.

Details of the Intervention: In order to improve reading comprehension and attitudes toward reading in fourth grade students from vulnerable schools, the Chilean Ministry of Education partnered with the Fundación para la Superación de la Pobreza (FSP) in 2010 to implement Servicio País en Educación (SPE). In the poorest counties of the Santiago and Bío-Bío regions, the Chilean Ministry of Education selected 85 public and private schools that had scored below the average on the language portion of Chile's national standardized test. From these 85 schools, 45 schools were randomly selected to receive SPE and the remaining 40 served as comparison schools.

SPE brought college student volunteers into primary schools, where they conducted 90-minute reading sessions with groups of 5 or 6 fourth grade students. The sessions included a mix of traditional stories and instructional texts appropriate for the students' age. Volunteers were managed by a paid employee of FSP stationed permanently in each program school to ensure accurate implementation and provide assistance on effective teaching techniques. The program lasted for 15 weeks.

Surveys gathered information on reading comprehension and attitudes towards reading, as well as program implementation details, and individual school and student characteristics. The implementation of the program was monitored through random visits to observe tutoring sessions and administrative data on student, volunteer, and supervisor attendance.

Results and Policy Lessons: *Implementation:*

Implementation of SPE varied between the two regions and between individual schools. At some schools, students received as many as 15 sessions (the number intended) while others receiving as few as five. In the Great Santiago region, each volunteer was assigned to a group of 8 students. Since there was high volunteer turnover in this region, each student was tutored by an average of 3-4

different volunteers over the course of the program. In the Bío-Bío region, on the other hand, program managers assigned pairs of volunteers to groups of students. This, coupled with lower turnover among volunteers, meant that students in Bío-Bío had an average of only 2 different tutors over the course of the program.

Project ongoing, full results forthcoming.

Related Papers Citations: *Cabezas, Veronica, Jose Cuesta, and Francisco Galleg. "Effects of Short-Term Tutoring on Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills: Evidence from a Randomized Evaluation in Chile." Working Paper, May 2011.*

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