

DYNAMIC LINKAGES FROM SCHOOLING TO YOUNG ADULTS: THE LONG-TERM IMPACT OF A SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM IN CAMBODIA

CONTEXT

The “From Schooling to Young Adult: Tracing the Dynamic Linkages” research program was an ambitious program that tracked children who had participated in randomized controlled trials in the past in Cambodia and Pakistan to **understand how education in school affected their early labor market experience and their family formation**. These are among the first projects to measure the causal long-term effect of schooling in low-income countries. The findings have important implications for policies that seek to improve opportunities for children.

Barrera-Osorio, De Barros and Filmer (2018)

investigated how a primary-school scholarship program in rural Cambodia affected children’s transition to adulthood in their early 20s.

ORIGINAL STUDY

In 2008, 4th grade students in 207 schools received a scholarship for up to three years based on their academic performance (“merit”) or level of poverty (“poverty”). An earlier study, based on data collected three years after the program started, showed that both types of scholarship recipients had more schooling than non-recipients, yet only merit-based scholarships led to improvements in cognitive skills.

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LONG-TERM FOLLOW-UP

Barrera-Osorio, De Barros and Filmer (2018) revisited the students in 2017, nine years after the program's inception, when they were 21 years old. The results showed that both types of scholarship recipients in 2017 still had about one-quarter of a grade greater schooling. Merit- (but not poverty-) scholarship recipients had higher cognitive skills (0.11 standard deviations), greater self-reported well-being (0.18 standard deviations), and greater employment probability (3.4 percentage points). Neither type of scholarship had any impact on a wide variety of measures of socio-emotional skills, such as grit or the "Big 5" inventory.

However, (1) the results across the individual tests that make up the aggregated cognitive tests were not all consistent, and (2) the study was not sufficiently powered to detect a significant difference between the impacts of the merit and poverty scholarships. Therefore, although the study detected some suggestive impacts of the merit scholarship on socioeconomic status and well-being, it was insufficient to rule out differences between the two types of scholarships, suggesting that boosting learning through demand-side programs is not sufficient.