

The Challenge

Haiti now has over 90 per cent of its children of primary school-going age enrolled in school. However, the quality of education remains a serious problem. Among other things, teacher absenteeism is perceived as one of the key reasons for unsatisfactory learning outcomes. Officials, principals and inspectors should be able to manage schools effectively, including to ensure that teachers attend school and deliver their lessons well. Even though all schools are assigned a school inspector, it is often difficult for the inspector to visit schools due to bad road networks, unavailable transport options, and limited gasoline.

To address this challenge, the World Bank worked with the Ministry of Education in Haiti to employ digital technology. School directors were handed smartphones with cameras and a data subscription. They were required to click pictures of teachers and upload them to a central server, from where the inspectors would be able to access them and conduct random checks.

The Impact

In spite of its simple format and huge potential, the programme did not have many successes to report. The World Bank study concluded that neither was it able to improve teacher absenteeism, nor was it able to boost student learning outcomes. Several reasons have been cited for this dismal result. The technology was not deployed on time due to administrative and procurement delays. Therefore, the programme could only run for four months of the academic year. The school directors and inspectors were not able to operate the devices successfully. When they asked for help, the planned maintenance service was not in place. Inspectors may have been using this technology as a substitute, instead of a complement.

Research

Evaluation of this initiative has been conducted by the World Bank using a randomised control trial. One hundred schools were chosen as the treatment group (school directors received smartphones), while another hundred schools served as control group. Baseline data was collected in November 2012, pertaining to the school and the director. A reading assessment test was also administered to 15 students at random in each school. The programme was rolled out in January 2014, and the endline assessment was conducted in May/June 2014. A

Education technology case study HAITI MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & WORLD BANK

qualitative study was also conducted by interviewing 37 teachers, 14 school directors, and four inspectors.



The robustness of the evaluation is subject to question. While the random assignment minimises biases, a larger number of students tested per school could have added power. The study also does not report which grade level(s) the students were from, and whether their test results had comparable means at the baseline. There could also be confounding observable characteristics such as income levels of families or student attendance that the study does not control for, and possible spill-over effects from treatment to control schools, if situated in close proximity. There was also no cost-benefit analysis done for such an intervention.

Stakeholders

All major players of the Haiti education system are important stakeholders in this programme. The school directors and inspectors are direct actors, and the success of the programme was largely dependent on the levels of compliance by these two groups. Another important stakeholder is the teachers themselves, whose performance is under scrutiny.

A key learning from this study is that technology interventions are no panacea, and should be integrated into the larger socio-cultural contexts of target communities. It suggests that such a programme may have caused dissatisfaction among teachers, as in Haiti, teacher salaries are not paid on time and there is no financial incentive to perform. This may also have adversely affected compliance by directors. Teachers may also have been disenchanted because their absentee rates in Haiti are only 5-10 per cent, much lower than other developing countries.

About

This is a series of case studies produced by HEART for the UK Department for International Development. Programme experts were consulted in the process. Any views and opinions do not necessarily reflect those of DFID or HEART.