From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, children around the world attend schools, but their access, goals, and experiences vary greatly. For some, the goal is a university education and professional degrees. For others, basic literacy is all children can hope to achieve, regardless of their ability. Not long ago in human history, education of children was carried out informally; during the socialization process, parents, relatives, and elders taught children the skills they would need to survive. Early scholars were primarily religious figures who studied to read and interpret religious texts. However, with industrialization, globalization, and advances in technology, new forces are driving education and educational reform. The growth of industry, trade, business, and demand for an educated workforce is now heard around the world (Stewart, 2005).

The term *globalization* means many things to many people. Attempts at a concise definition are difficult because some scholars define its historical beginnings; others look at the political, economic, or sociocultural aspects of the process; and still others use interdisciplinary analysis including business and economics. Some studying globalization focus on “globalization from above” and “globalization from below.” Globalization from above looks at the big picture—major world patterns and trends related to globalization such as Westernization, internationalization, marketization, and educational needs (Singh, Kenway, & Apple, 2005). This top-down globalization generally starts from two points. The first is scholars who consider historical shifts and cultural patterns resulting in globalization. The second considers the role of multinational corporations and global political and economic organizations in globalization. Globalization from below, on the other hand, focuses on fragmentation and inequalities caused by globalization, and what is happening in traditional and local communities, some of which are being hard hit by effects of globalization and the rich-poor divide. This is where the educational divide is very apparent.

Theories of educational change today assume that global political, economic, and social change affects educational systems around the world in numerous ways. New theories are emerging to view this ongoing process of change (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002). *Institutional theory*, for example, is concerned with influence from the global social environment and broader cultural norms on educational systems. Several questions guide the studies of researchers who take this approach: Why do educational organizations located in different communities and even countries have similar practices and
structures? How do these organizations adapt to changing conditions in their environments? How do broader forces in individual countries and internationally result in change across organizations? (Ballantine & Hammack, 2012; Meyer, 2009).

Understanding the impact of globalization on educational systems is critical to understanding education in today’s world. Major theoretical perspectives proposed to help us understand globalization and education include world systems theory and postcolonialism, among others (Spring, 2008). For example, just as countries are divided by economic systems and wealth into center core areas and poorer peripheral areas (world systems theory), so too do educational systems reflect the economic and political institutions of a given society and its place in the world system. Within and between countries, educational levels reflect the economic status of families, communities, and societies. Distinctions between countries lie at the base of many comparative studies and sometimes reflect the former colonial status of countries (postcolonial theory).

Sociologists of education are particularly interested in the differences in world educational systems because those differences help to put their own national systems into perspective. The following paragraphs summarize several areas of study in comparative education that are discussed in the readings in Chapter 10.

**Influences on curricula:** Sociologists of education have traced the origins of modern educational systems and curricula to former colonial systems. For instance, former British colonies often include classical British literature in their curriculum and require the British O-level and A-level (vocational and university entrance) examinations at the completion of high school and for entrance to university. However, critics argue that this type of system is not preparing all citizens for the realities of their world because O-level students do not always receive the same amount or quality of education (Ramirez & Boli-Bennett, 1987). Some former colonized countries have developed educational systems that meet the needs of the majority of their populations, often including information on agricultural practices, health care, and other essential subjects for their societies.

Although there are commonalities in educational systems around the world, many researchers question whether that convergence is good for all members of all societies, especially students from peripheral third world countries. These scholars suggest that learning to read materials relevant to the needs of rural farmers, for example, would be more appropriate for some members of society than learning Latin. This is a key point made by educational reformers Ivan Illich (see Chapter 11) and Paulo Freire (1973; also Freire & Macedo, 1995) with regard to Latin America and other developing regions.

**Comparison of educational systems:** Most countries provide free education for basic literacy skills, and many require schooling to the age of 16. Some countries even provide free education through the university level for those who qualify. However, the world’s children do not have equal opportunity to attend schools, as discussed in the first two articles in this chapter. Although variations in educational systems around the world are great, there are also areas of similarity (Boli, Ramirez, & Meyer, 1985; Zhao, 2005). Comparisons of systems take many approaches including reviewing curricula, test results, structures of educational systems, access to education, and other variables. There are attempts to copy strategies of successful countries, or sometimes to impose educational systems on others. However, cultures and, therefore, educational systems cannot be transported easily from one nation to another. Each country must meet its own needs based in its unique situation. Still, similarities in curricular content around the world have evolved because of global educational demands, even as these systems provide education to meet their national needs.
**Educating all children:** In the first reading in this chapter, Joel E. Cohen, David E. Bloom, Martin B. Malin, and Helen Anne Curry discuss the necessity of educating all children for today’s world. They point out the status of educational systems today—the good, the bad, and the ugly; what changes need to take place; and the challenges that lie ahead. Countries of the world are becoming more interdependent and sharing ideas about effective curricula and structures of educational systems in today’s interdependent world. This means that there will be a need for continued study of the processes of globalization, urbanization, development, and change around the world as they impact educational systems.

**Race, class, gender, and different school experiences:** Continuing the discussion of educating all, children have very different experiences in schools. Race, class, and gender all affect what chances a child has to achieve in school. Most poignant are the cases of girls in some Middle Eastern, Asian, and African countries who have limited opportunities in life, face female genital mutilation, and receive much less education than their brothers (King, 1999; Lewis & Lockheed, 2006). Although many children from poor families in poor villages are at an educational disadvantage, girls are most severely affected (Sperling, 2005)—yet girls are the ones who raise and feed the children and often need to support the family. A measure of the development of a country is often seen in the statistics on education of girls.

The Reading by Maureen A. Lewis and Marlaine E. Lockheed provides a picture of the situation for girls in many poorer countries, especially in rural areas. Due to poverty, political or religious beliefs, lack of infrastructure to accommodate all children, and a host of other problems, girls and some minority children may not have the opportunity to attend school, even primary school, to reach basic literacy. Lewis and Lockheed lament the status of girls in some countries and regions. They point out the benefits of educating girls and the costs to society and girls when there is a lack of educational opportunity.

**International comparative testing:** In this chapter, David H. Kamens and Connie L. McNeely review national assessments of educational systems and comparative educational testing. They also discuss the global trends in curriculum and testing that have brought similarities in educational expectations across the globe. Findings generally support a convergence of curricular themes across nations, reflecting the social, political, economic, and educational interdependence of nations (Chabbott & Ramirez, 2000; McEneaney & Meyer, 2000). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) are two international tests that compare scores of children around the world in literacy, mathematics, science, civic education, and foreign language. These rankings provide information on the similarities, differences, and effects of development on educational systems. The comparatively low scores of U.S. students are of concern to U.S. educators and government officials. However, it is necessary to exercise caution when interpreting international data, because, despite United Nations guidelines, data gathered in countries are not always standardized. Therefore, when reporting results, comparative studies must take this into account (Baker & LeTendre, 2005).

**Transition from school to work:** A major purpose of schools is to train students for their future occupations and contributions to society. Every society expects schools to help prepare young people for the transition from school to work. This school-to-work transition has stimulated research in recent years as societies transition from industrial to postindustrial information nations, and as globalization changes the economic systems. Much of this research is coming from Europe and South America. by
Rachel Brooks explores the education-to-work transition and its effect on students, stratification systems, and societies. Brooks compares education-to-work plans of several European countries, the United States, and other countries, and discusses different patterns that have emerged due to global social, political, and economic changes.

With the ubiquity of globalization and the impact on educational needs and patterns around the globe, no nation seems able to ignore education for the contemporary needs of society. This chapter addresses some of the issues in this growing field of international education.

References


The first reading in this chapter discusses the current state of universal mass education in the world, including a discussion of the obstacles to global education and how we might move beyond them. The good news is that formal education has been spreading around the globe, encompassing more and more eligible and eager learners. Literacy rose from 25% to more than 75% in the 20th century, and access to education continues to increase rapidly. However, there are still millions of uneducated children without the opportunity to move ahead. Those who can attend school may not receive quality education. The largest problem for would-be school attendees is that in some regions of the world, lower-income groups, girls, and minorities do not have equal opportunity. Spending on education varies widely as well. Why provide all children with quality educations? Here, the authors point to the advantages that accrue to those individuals and societies with strong educational systems: economic benefits, strong societies, better health for students and their families, and fulfillment of what many believe is a basic human right. Yet to reach the goal of universal education, societies must deal with obstacles such as corruption and lack of infrastructure supporting schools. Pressure on countries to increase educational opportunities in order to participate in the 21st-century world is great, thus generating growing demand and educational enrollments.

Questions to consider for this reading:

1. What is the current status of world educational opportunities?
2. Describe some challenges that poor countries face in trying to improve their educational systems. What does the future for educating all children look like?
3. What are the benefits of universal education for recipients and for countries?

Over the past century, three approaches have been advocated to escape the consequences of widespread poverty, rapid population growth, environmental problems, and social injustices. The bigger pie approach says: use technology to produce more and to alleviate shortages. The fewer forks approach says: make contraception and reproductive health care available to...
eliminate unwanted fertility and to slow population growth. The better manners approach says: eliminate violence and corruption; improve the operation of markets and government provision of public goods; reduce the unwanted after-effects of consumption; and achieve greater social and political equity between young and old, male and female, rich and poor (Cohen, 1995). Providing all the world’s children with the equivalent of a high-quality primary and secondary education, whether through formal schooling or by alternative means, could, in principle, support all three of these approaches. Universal education is the stated goal of several international initiatives. In 1990, the global community pledged at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, to achieve universal primary education (UPE) and greatly reduce illiteracy by 2000. In 2000, when these goals were not met, it again pledged to achieve UPE, this time at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, with a target date of 2015. The UN Millennium Development Conference in 2000 also adopted UPE by 2015 as one of its goals, along with the elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2015.

Educational access increased enormously in the past century. Illiteracy fell dramatically and a higher proportion of people are completing primary, secondary, or tertiary education than ever before. Despite this progress, huge problems remain for providing universal access and high-quality schooling through the secondary level of education. The UPE goal looks unlikely to be achieved by 2015 at the current rate of progress. An estimated 299 million school-age children will be missing primary or secondary school in 2015; of these, an estimated 114 million will be missing primary school. These statistics suggest that providing every child between the approximate ages of 6 and 17 with an education of high quality will require time, resources, and colossal effort. Should the international community commit the necessary economic, human, and political resources to the goal of universal education? If so, how should it deploy these resources, and how much will it cost?

## The Current Scene

Current educational data indicate that the world has made significant progress in education, though shortfalls and disparities remain.

## The Good

Over the past century, formal schooling spread remarkably, as measured by the primary gross enrollment ratio (GER)—the ratio of total primary enrollment, regardless of age, to the population of the age group that officially belongs in primary education. In 1900, estimated primary GERs were below 40 percent in all regions, except that in northwestern Europe, North America, and Anglophone regions of the Pacific, collectively, the ratio was 72 percent (Williams, 1997, p. 122). Within the past few years, the estimated global primary net enrollment ratio (NER)—the number of pupils in the official primary school-age group expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group—reached 86 percent (Bloom, chapter one [of Educating All Children], Appendix A). The NER is a stricter standard (i.e., it gives lower numbers) than the GER, so the achievement is all the more remarkable. Secondary-school enrollment shows similar progress. The number of students enrolled in secondary school increased eight-fold in the past 50 years, roughly from 50 million to 414 million (calculations by Bloom, based on UNESCO online data).

Measures distinct from enrollment round out this picture. Over the twentieth century, literacy tripled in developing countries, from 25 percent to 75 percent. The average years of schooling in these countries more than doubled between 1960 and 1990, increasing from 2.1 to 4.4 years (Bloom & Cohen, 2002). That figure has risen further since 1990. This growth in enrollment and literacy was supported by more global spending on primary and secondary education than at any previous time. According to Glewwe and Zhao [in chapter seven of Educating All Children], developing countries spent approximately $82 billion on primary schooling in 2000; Binder,
in chapter eight, estimates that spending for secondary education in developing countries in 2000 was $93 billion per year. Although the data and methods of estimation underlying these figures differ, they both indicate large expenditures.

As access to education and literacy increased, global monitoring of students, schools, and educational systems also increased. Developing countries are participating in international measurements of educational status in greater numbers. More statistical measures of schooling have been defined (for example, net and gross enrollment ratios, attendance rates, completion rates, average years of attainment, and school life expectancy). Though not all are well supported by reliable, internationally comparable, comprehensive data, several organizations are working toward this goal. The UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Montreal, maintains the highest-quality data (for example, UNESCO, 2000; [UNESCO-UIS,] 2004).

The Bad

This progress is considerable, but large deficits remain. Roughly 323 million children are not enrolled in school (23 percent of the age group 6–17); roughly 30 percent of these children are missing from primary school, the rest from secondary school (Bloom, chapter one) [of Educating All Children]. In developing countries, 15 percent of youth aged 15 to 24 are illiterate, as are about one in every four adults (UNESCO, 2005).

Moreover, enrollment does not necessarily mean attendance, attendance does not necessarily mean receiving an education, and receiving an education does not necessarily mean receiving a good education. High enrollment ratios may give the mistaken impression that a high proportion of school-age children are being well educated. Some 75–95 percent of the world’s children live in countries where the quality of education lags behind—most often far behind—the average of OECD countries, as measured by standardized test scores. That standard may not be universally appropriate. However, it is uncontested that educational quality is too often poor.

In addition, indicators of educational quality are scarce. Though participation in international and regional assessments of educational quality has increased, countries most in need of improvements are least likely to participate. As a result, important comparative data on quality continue to be lacking for the developing world. The problem of inadequate or missing data is pervasive.

The Ugly

Gross disparities in education separate regions, income groups, and genders. The populations farthest from achieving UPE are typically the world’s poorest. Net primary enrollment ratios have advanced in most of the developing world but remain low in Sub-Saharan Africa . . .

Girls’ education falls short of boys’ education in much of the world. Although enrollment rates sometimes do not differ greatly, many more boys than girls complete schooling, especially at the primary level. Although we know that gender, proximity to a city, and income level interact in influencing educational deficits, a systematic global analysis remains to be done of how much each contributes to differences in children’s educational opportunities and achievements. In India in 1992–93, the enrollment rate of boys aged 6–14 exceeded that of girls by 2.5 percentage points among children of the richest households; the difference in favor of boys was 24 percentage points among children from poor households (Filmer, 1999). The study also shows that wealth gaps in enrollment greatly exceeded sex gaps in enrollment. The boys from rich households had enrollment rates 34 percentage points higher than those of boys from poor households; the gap in favor of rich girls compared to poor girls was 55.4 percentage points.

Developing countries differ widely in spending on primary education, ranging from $46 per student per year in South Asia and $68 in Sub-Saharan Africa to $878 in Europe and Central Asia (see Table 45.1). Spending per student in secondary education shows a similar range, from $117 per student per year in South Asia and $257 in Sub-Saharan Africa to $577 in Latin America and the Caribbean.
Table 45.1  Recent Public Current Expenditures on Primary Schooling in Developing Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Public Spending per Student (U.S. $)</th>
<th>Total Public Spending (millions U.S. $)</th>
<th>Fraction of Population with Public Spending Data*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>6,910</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>6,100</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia and Pacific</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>21,200</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>28,200</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East and North Africa</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>14,200</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe and Central Asia</td>
<td>878</td>
<td>5,210</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All developing regions</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>81,800</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Glewwe and Zhao, chapter seven [Educating All Children].

Note. *Public spending figures are more reliable in regions where public spending data are available for a higher fraction of the population.

CHALLENGES

Closing the gap between the current state of global education and the goal of providing all children with high-quality primary and secondary education schooling requires meeting several distinct challenges.

- Educate the roughly 97 million children of primary-school age who are not currently enrolled in school. As a majority of these students are female and most live in absolute poverty, the underlying conditions that create disparities in educational access will likely need to be addressed.
- Educate the 226 million children of secondary-school age not in school. Improved access to primary education fuels the demand for secondary education. As more and more children attend school, more and more teachers—who should have at least a secondary education—will also be needed (UNESCO[UIS], 2006).
- Develop the capacity to educate the 90 million additional children 5–17 years old in developing countries in the next 20 years (United Nations, 2004).
- Improve the quality of primary and secondary education, assessed according to constructive goals and clear standards.
- Provide policymakers with clear, empirically supported rationales for why education matters.

Achieving these goals requires a realistic appraisal of the obstacles that have thus far prevented educational opportunity for all children. It requires fresh thinking about what the goals of education should be, and how best to pursue those goals. And it demands an assessment of the costs, which are likely to be significant, as well as an assessment of the consequences of educational expansion and the returns on this investment, which are essential to securing societal and political support . . .

WHY UNIVERSAL PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION?

Although education is not available to hundreds of millions of children, neither are health care,
adequate nutrition, employment opportunities, and other basic services available to these children or their families. Why should universal primary and secondary education be a development goal of high priority?

Several rationales support the pursuit of universal primary and secondary education. Education provides economic benefits. Education builds strong societies and polities. Education reduces fertility and improves health. Education is a widely accepted humanitarian obligation and an internationally mandated human right. These rationales are commonly offered for universal primary education, but many benefits of education do not accrue until students have had 10 or more years of education. Completion of primary education is more attractive if high-quality secondary education beckons.

**Economic Benefits**

... Extensive sociological and economic studies have found that education generally enables individuals to improve their economic circumstances. Although the benefits of education for the individual are clear, the aggregate effects on economic growth are more difficult to measure and remain a matter of dispute (Krueger & Lindahl, 2001; Pritchett, 1997; Bloom & Canning, 2004).

It is clear, however, that more education contributes to a demographic transition from high fertility and high mortality to low fertility and low mortality, and Bloom and colleagues (2003) find this change is associated with accelerated growth. When fertility rates fall, the resulting demographic transition offers countries a large working-age population with fewer children to support, although only for a transient interval before population aging begins. In this interval, the large fraction of the population that is of working age offers an exceptional opportunity for high economic growth (Bloom et al., 2003).

Women who attend school, particularly at the secondary or tertiary level, generally have fewer children than those who do not. An increase by 10 percent in primary GERs is associated with an average reduction in the total fertility rate of 0.1 children. A 10 percent increase in secondary GERs is associated with an average reduction of 0.2 children. In Brazil, women with a secondary education have an average of 2.5 children, compared to 6.5 children for illiterate women. In some African societies, total fertility is reduced only among girls who have had 10 or more years of schooling (Jejeebhoy, 1996).

Education contributes to reduced fertility through numerous pathways. Maternal education can lead to increased use of contraceptives. Education can enable women more easily to work outside the home and earn money. This improvement in status leads to empowerment and increased decision-making authority in limiting fertility. Educated women tend to delay marriage and childbearing, perhaps because of the increased opportunity costs of not participating in the paid labor force. Education and income may also become intertwined in a virtuous spiral: as incomes grow, more money is available to finance the spread of education, which leads to further increases in income.

**Strong Societies and Polities**

Although the evidence is not definitive, education has been shown to strengthen social and cultural capital. Absolute increases in educational attainment can shift disadvantaged groups, such as ethnic minorities or females, from absolute deprivation to relative deprivation compared to more advantaged groups. Educated citizens may be more likely to vote and to voice opposition. Among states, higher enrollment ratios at all levels of education correspond to increases in indicators of democracy. If the content of the education encourages it, education can promote social justice, human rights, and tolerance. As the percentage of the male population enrolled in secondary school goes up, the probability of civil conflict goes down (Collier & Hoeffler, 2001). These desirable effects depend on the content of education and do not flow from the fact of education per se (Cohen, [in press]).
Health

Controlling for income, educated individuals have longer, healthier lives than those without education. Children who are in school are healthier than those who are not, though causation could flow in either direction or both.

Many effects of education on health are indirect effects through increased income. Education increases economic status, and higher-income individuals have better access to health care services, better nutrition, and increased mobility. Education also has direct impacts on health, unrelated to income. It can provide vital health knowledge and encourage healthy lifestyles. For example, the offspring of educated mothers have lower child and infant mortality rates and higher immunization rates, even when socioeconomic conditions are controlled statistically.

Improved health may in turn enhance education. Randomized evaluations of school-based health programs in Kenya and India suggest that simple, inexpensive treatments for basic health problems such as anemia and intestinal worms can dramatically increase the quantity of schooling students attain.

A Basic Human Right

Universal education is justified on ethical and humanitarian grounds as right, good, and fair. Education enables people to develop their capacities to lead fulfilling, dignified lives. High-quality education helps people give meaning to their lives by placing them in the context of human and natural history and by creating in them an awareness of other cultures. Article 26 of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, asserts: “Everyone has the right to education.” It maintains that primary education should be free and compulsory. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which entered into force in 1990, obliges governments to make universal primary education compulsory and also to make different forms of secondary education accessible to every child.

Obstacles

The rationales for continued educational expansion are powerful, but the barriers too are numerous and formidable. The cost to governments of providing universal primary and secondary schooling, discussed later in this introduction and in chapters seven and eight of Educating All Children, are significant. The cost of education to individuals and families is sometimes a strong disincentive. Because governments face competing demands for the allocation of state resources, education is often pushed down the list of priorities. And even if financial resources for education were plentiful, then politics, corruption, culture, poor information, and history among other factors would conspire to block or slow the achievement of access to high-quality education for all children.

Economic Disincentives

Millions of children have access to schooling but do not attend. Some families may place greater value on the time children spend in other activities, such as performing work for income or handling chores so other household members are free to work in market activities. In developing countries, a troubled household economic situation may more often be a deterrent to enrollment than lack of access to a school. For example, in Ghana, almost half of parents, when asked why their children were not in school, answered, “school is too expensive” or “child needed to work at home”; another 22 percent believed that education was of too little value (World Bank, 2004).

Economic barriers disproportionately harm girls. Some parents perceive the costs—direct, indirect, and opportunity costs—of educating daughters to be higher than that of educating sons (Herz & Sperling, 2004).

Political Obstacles

Education competes for scarce national resources with many worthy projects such as
building roads, providing medical care, and strengthening a country’s energy system. Limited resources can hamper educational expansion in many ways. Organized interest groups may divert funding from education to their own causes. When social crises, such as crime, unemployment, or civil war, demand the time and resources of the government, citizens are perhaps unlikely to focus on education. Popular demand for education is frequently weakest in poor regions or countries where it is most needed.

Directing adequate funds to education requires a national commitment to education that many countries lack. Government decisions guided by the short-term interests of those in power are unlikely to reflect the importance of education, as educational returns accrue over much longer time horizons. When politicians devote funds to education, the funding sometimes flows to political supporters rather than to programs and regions where it is most needed. Moreover, a limited capacity to oversee the implementation of education programs and the limited political status of education ministries within many governments may blunt reforms as they are enacted.

Corruption

As with any large public sector, the education sector is rife with opportunities for corruption. When funds are diverted for private gain at any level, educational expansion and improvement may be harmed. At the highest levels of government, corruption can affect the allocation of funds to the education budget; at the ministry level, it can influence the distribution of funds to individual schools; and at the school level, it can involve the diversion of money from school supplies, and the payment of bribes by parents to ensure their children’s access to or success in school and by teachers to secure promotions or other benefits (Meier, 2004).

International donors may be deterred by a recipient’s history of poor spending accountability, and may curtail funding or impose accountability measures that are themselves costly. The loss of financial resources is always harmful. It is most detrimental at the local level, where the poorest children may be denied access to education because they are not able to afford bribes or where systems of merit—both for students and teachers—are distorted through the widespread use of bribes to secure advancement (Chapman, 2002). Heyneman (2003) argues that if pervasive corruption leads to the public perception of education as unfair or not meritocratic, then this distrust of the school system may lead to distrust of the leaders it produces. As a result, he says, a country’s “sense of social cohesion, the principal ingredient of all successful modern societies,” may be undermined.

Lack of Information

Reliable, internationally comparable, useful data on many aspects of primary and secondary education are lacking. For example, the mechanisms that keep children out of school are poorly understood in quantitative (as opposed to qualitative) detail. Most routine data focus on measures of “butts-in-seats” such as enrollment, attendance, and completion. Data on educational processes, such as pedagogical techniques and curricula, and on learning outcomes, are inadequate.

Failing to provide data on education feeds a vicious circle. Lack of accurate data impairs the formulation of effective education policy; citizens lack the information they need to hold their school administrators and elected officials...
accountable; unaccountable officials have few incentives to collect information that would help them to improve the system. Improving educational data could help to transform this vicious circle into a virtuous one by providing necessary information to citizens, administrators, and officials to monitor and improve the quality of schooling.

**Historical Legacies**

The history of efforts to expand education provides a rich source of models and lessons. These historical legacies can also present impediments to those who underestimate their importance. Benavot and Resnik examine in chapter two [of *Educating All Children*] the emergence of compulsory education laws, the transformation of diverse educational frameworks into formal school systems, the problems of inequality that have arisen, and the role played by international organizations in creating an increasingly interconnected global education system.

Despite the apparent uniformity in contemporary schooling, past educational models took many forms and motivations for educational expansion varied widely. Because national contexts differ, international organizations seeking to facilitate educational expansion need to be attuned to this varied history if their interventions are to succeed. Solutions that ignore the history of education in a particular country are likely to be less effective than solutions tuned to context. For example, when leaders advocated the decentralization of public schools in Latin American countries in the 1980s, they ignored the specific social and political purposes for which those schools had been founded, which included ending severe socio-economic segregation. Decentralization led to a growth of private schools and renewed fragmentation along socio-economic lines, which exacerbated the social divide that school centralization was initially intended to correct.

Though the past must not be ignored, it is not always a useful guide to present educational reform. Past state motivations to provide education—to consolidate national identity, win citizen loyalty, or neutralize rival political groups—were most prominent when nationalist, revolutionary, and totalitarian ideologies drove political development. Today, these rationales are less relevant.

**References**


In rich global north (developed) countries, girls generally have the same chance to obtain an education as boys. In fact, they attend university at higher rates than males, although the typical fields women pursue may not pay as well as fields males pursue. The picture is different in poor global south countries. Many girls, especially those from rural areas and minority groups, have no opportunities to pursue even primary-level education, leaving them illiterate. Maureen A. Lewis and Marlaine E. Lockheed discuss some of the reasons for this lack of opportunity for girls and what it means for the girls, their families, their communities, and their countries. Their discussion focuses on the sources of the problem for girls and the types of exclusions they experience. In addition, they look at the number of girls who do not receive education in different parts of the world and the cost to society and girls due to their lack of educational opportunity. Finally, the authors indicate some strategies for advancing educational opportunities for excluded girls.

Questions to consider for this reading:

1. Why are girls in some countries excluded from educational opportunity, what are patterns of girls’ exclusion, and how many girls are excluded?
2. What are the consequences of excluding girls from educational opportunity?
3. What can be done to increase the educational opportunities for girls?

Impressive strides have been made in bringing girls into primary school over the past 25 years, with many countries achieving universal primary education and gender parity. But considerable disparity exists within and across countries, with intracountry differences stemming largely from the lagging involvement of excluded groups—rural tribes in Pakistan, lower castes in India, Roma in Europe, indigenous peoples in Latin America. Of the 60 million girls not in primary school, almost 70 percent are from excluded groups. If further
progress is to be realized, educating these girls must be a priority.

Who are the 60 million girls who remain out of school nearly two decades after the worldwide declaration on Education for All? These are their faces:

**Meera, 8,** lives with her family on a sidewalk in New Delhi, India. During the day she roams major intersections, her infant sister hanging from her hip, begging drivers for coins in the few words of English she knows. She does not go to school. In a few years she will be married off to a stranger. She will have six children, one of whom will go to school. Or she will die young, possibly immolated in a kitchen fire for having brought with her an insufficient dowry.

**Sonia, 10,** lives on the outskirts of a capital city in Eastern Europe. Like her siblings, all of whom speak only Romani, she does not attend school. Instead, Sonia spends her days committing petty theft to support her family. Adults in the town spit at her and warn visitors to watch their purses when they see her.

**Lia, 12,** went to school for a few years in her remote hill village in Thailand. Then her family sent her to the capital to earn a respectable living in a factory, but she was sold into the sex trade instead. She lives in a brothel and services dozens of clients a day. She will die young, most likely from HIV/AIDS.

**Wambui, 14,** goes to boarding school because no secondary school is available in her Kenyan village. But she will soon be expelled from school because she is pregnant, having been raped at school by boy students from another tribe, who considered it a mere prank.

Many developing countries have achieved gender equity in education, with near-universal girls’ participation converging with that of boys:

**Indrani, 10,** is the daughter of illiterate parents living in rural Bangladesh. She goes to school. Her older sister is finishing secondary school and plans to work in the garment factory in the market center. While her mother was betrothed at 12, her parents have decided that their daughters must finish school before marrying.

**Monique, 12,** is excelling in secondary school in Tunisia. She and her siblings have finished primary school with the exception of her eldest sister, whose arranged marriage interrupted her schooling. She expects to work before she marries and plans to have two children.

Are excluded girls simply the daughters of the poor, or are other, more subtle factors at work? Why do some countries make better progress? School participation figures from six low- and middle-income countries offer some clues:

- In Laos, a low-income country, Lao-Tai girls living in rural communities complete five years of school, whereas hill tribe girls living in comparable communities complete fewer than two years of school.
- In Bangladesh, a low-income country, 86 percent of primary school-age girls attend school and 69 percent complete primary school. There is no significant difference between girls living in urban and rural communities.
- In Guatemala, a lower middle-income country, 62 percent of Spanish-speaking girls but only 26 percent of indigenous, non-Spanish-speaking girls complete primary school.
- In Tunisia, a lower middle-income country, 95 percent of all girls complete primary school and 68 percent are enrolled in secondary school.
- In the Slovak Republic, an upper middle-income country, 54 percent of Slovak girls but only 9 percent of minority girls attend secondary school.
- In Botswana, an upper middle-income country, 95 percent of all girls complete primary school and 57 percent attend secondary school.

**Sources, Forms, and Levels of Exclusion**

What accounts for these differences? Most obvious is the presence or absence of significant subgroups. Bangladesh, Botswana, and Tunisia
are largely homogeneous, while Guatemala, Laos, and the Slovak Republic have excluded subgroups.1 In homogeneous countries higher shares of girls complete primary school, enroll in secondary school, and see higher achievement than those in heterogeneous countries.

Excluded subgroups are based on tribal, ethnic, linguistic, or traditional occupational classifications, such as the “untouchable” occupations of the lowest caste groups in India. But ethnic or linguistic diversity within a country does not necessarily lead to a failure to educate girls. The Basques in Spain, for example, are linguistically diverse but have high levels of female education. It is diversity accompanied by derogation and discrimination that leads to exclusion. The main driver of the remaining gender inequalities in education is the existence of subgroups within countries, accompanied by social stratification and cultural norms that seclude women. This driver operates both culturally and structurally to exclude girls from school. It is thus a particularly pernicious barrier.

Exclusion can take many forms—the more severe, the greater its effect on school opportunities . . . At one end are extreme forms of exclusion leading to genocide. Only somewhat less severe is the exclusion associated with ethnically based slavery (not slavery as an outcome of conflict), where education is denied to children of slaves, as was the case for African slaves in the southern United States or Brazil in the 1800s. The shunning of a group, such as the Dalits in India or the Roma in Europe, is less severe. It can result in lack of schools, inaccessible schools, segregated or “special” schools, corporal punishment of students, teacher absenteeism, and generally poor-quality schools. Moderate exclusion can result in schooling that is poorly matched with the needs of students. Consider the conditions faced by Berber children in Morocco before 2005; . . . teaching and school materials were not in their mother tongue, mild corporal punishment and ability tracking were used, and early qualifying exams excluded poorly performing children from further education.

A mild form of exclusion is that associated with individual social preferences, whereby teachers may overlook students from excluded groups or children from a minority group may not be included in social events. Exclusion can also result in decreased demand for education or for autonomy in the provision of education.

Severe exclusion has structural consequences: schools are not built, curricular materials are not supplied, roads to schools are not paved, and teachers are often absent. Milder exclusion is cultural. It can affect the behavior of teachers and schoolmates, making teachers insensitive to excluded students’ needs.

Language and ethnicity are only two of the sources of exclusion. Children living in remote rural communities face structural barriers to education due to distance, and these barriers are most pronounced for girls. Poor children face barriers to education due to the direct and indirect costs of education. Because the poor in developing countries often show a strong preference for sons, education investments are biased toward boys. Residential segregation often results in access to poorer quality schools.

The cultures of subgroups can differ with respect to the status and roles accorded to women. Where women are secluded, or expected to work long hours performing domestic chores or agricultural labors, cultural beliefs and norms limit girls’ educational opportunities. Girls face special cultural barriers associated with their roles in the home and as future wives. As a result, social exclusion from these multiple sources has severe consequences for girls’ education and will require different, more tailored policies to remedy them. The degree and nature of exclusion dictates the approach and scope of interventions; often multiple efforts are needed.

**How Many Girls Are Excluded?**

How many girls are affected by exclusion due to multiple causes? No formal estimates of the numbers of excluded out-of-school girls are available, because most developing countries do not systematically collect or report data on school participation disaggregated by all of the
subgroups subject to exclusion. Data from various sources can be used to estimate the figure, however. These data reveal a staggering finding: nearly three-quarters of girls who do not go to school come from excluded groups, while these groups represent only about 20 percent of the developing world’s population.

Most out-of-school girls live in Africa and South Asia, which together account for 78 percent of all girls not in school (UIS, 2005). [See Table 46.1.] In some large countries a small share of girls are out of school, but the size of the country means that large numbers of girls are affected. In some small countries the share of out-of-school girls is high, which represents a huge national challenge but adds little quantitatively to the global problem. For example, in Guinea-Bissau 55 percent of school-age girls never attend school, but because the total population of the country is little more than 1.2 million, only about 60,000 school-age girls are not in school. By contrast, in India 20 percent of school-age girls are not in school, but with a national population exceeding 1 billion, 27.7 million girls (ages 7–14) are not in school (Census of India, 2001 [Government of India, 2011]).

Data on excluded girls are limited. But recent Indian census data document how multiple exclusions can deter girls’ participation in school. Of the nearly 50 million children 7–14 years old not enrolled in school in India, 55 percent are girls. This figure is disproportionately high, with girls representing just 48 percent of all children 7–14 years old. Of the 27.7 million girls 7–14 years old not enrolled in school, 33 percent come from scheduled castes or scheduled tribes.2 This figure is also disproportionately high, because only 26 percent of girls this age come from scheduled tribes or scheduled castes.

The cost of excluding girls from school is high, and the benefits of inclusion significant. The social benefits of educating girls have been widely documented, and studies have also found economic benefits from educating girls.

Mild forms of exclusion often affect girls once they enter school, but the evidence suggests that when girls from excluded groups are given

the opportunity to go to school, they tend to go—and to succeed—at least through primary school. Their achievement is often comparable to that of girls from nonexcluded groups and equal to or better than that of excluded boys. Given that the quality of primary schools attended by excluded children is often poor, this is remarkable.

A concatenation of sources of exclusion—gender, ethnicity, area of residence—greatly reduces overall achievement by the time girls reach lower secondary school. Designing interventions and proposing solutions thus require assessing the demand for and supply of education and examining the school practices that affect girls and other excluded subgroups . . .

Lessons from developed countries can guide donors and policymakers in developing countries. But even developed countries grapple with exclusion. In some, failure to establish a level playing field early on has resulted in a backlash that exacerbates rather than mitigates differences. In developing countries, the diversity of subgroups and the specificities of the cultural contexts make building a new body of knowledge essential . . .

Ensuring that excluded girls go to school is a major challenge, requiring targeted interventions that address both the structural and cultural dimensions of discrimination in education. The costs of failing are tremendous in terms of lives lost and development opportunities missed.

ADVANCING EXCLUDED GIRLS’ EDUCATION

Strategies for advancing excluded girls’ education do not apply in all contexts—what works in one country may prove disastrous in another, and “one size does not fit all.” Consider busing. In Bulgaria the largely urban and peri-urban Roma community benefited greatly from being bused to better schools. In rural Turkey, busing led parents to pull their daughters out of school over concern for their safety because the new school was in another village. Context is critical . . .
Table 46.1  Most Primary School-Age Girls Out of Schools Are From Excluded Groups, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Girls out of school (thousands)</th>
<th>Excluded girls out of school (^{a}) (thousands)</th>
<th>Excluded girls as percent of all girls out of school</th>
<th>Excluded subgroups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>23,827</td>
<td>17,870(^{b})</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Members of nondominant tribes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>23,552</td>
<td>15,780(^{c})</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Rural people in Afghanistan, scheduled castes and tribes in India, lower castes in Nepal, rural tribes in Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East and North Africa</td>
<td>5,092</td>
<td>1,680(^{d})</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Berbers, rural populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia and the Pacific</td>
<td>4,870</td>
<td>4,383(^{e})</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Hill tribes, Muslim minorities, other ethnic minorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Commonwealth of Independent States</td>
<td>1,583</td>
<td>1,425(^{f})</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Roma, rural populations in Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>1,497</td>
<td>1,482(^{g})</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>Indigenous and Afro-Latino populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>60,421</td>
<td>42,620</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note. Data are for girls 7–12 years old, unless otherwise noted.

a. Estimated. The percentages in column 3 provide the basis for estimating the total number of out-of-school girls by region reported in column 2.

b. Based on the density of heterogeneity and the assumption that most out-of-school children are from minority groups.

c. Based on 2001 census data from India for the number of girls 7–14 years old from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, on tribal breakdowns in the Pakistan Integrated Household Survey, a household survey of Nepal, and linguistic and ethnic data from non-urban girls in Afghanistan.

d. Percent of Berbers used to determine the number of out-of-school children.

e. Assumes all children out of school come from excluded groups.

f. Includes Roma and Turkish girls out of school.
Policies to spark progress with the remaining out-of-school populations will require actions on various fronts:

- Altering education policies and addressing discrimination by changing laws and administrative rules.
- Expanding options for educating out-of-school children, especially girls.
- Improving the quality and relevance of schools and classrooms by ensuring that excluded girls receive basic educational inputs and providing professional development to help teachers become agents of change.
- Supporting compensatory preschool and in-school programs that engage and retain excluded children, particularly girls.
- Providing incentives for households to help overcome both the reluctance to send girls to school and the costs of doing so. Donors could spearhead innovation by:
  - Establishing a trust fund for multilateral programs targeted at excluded girls that supports experimentation, innovative programs, alternative schooling options, and the basic inputs for effective schools.
  - Expanding the knowledge base about what works to improve the school participation and achievement of excluded girls through a girls’ education evaluation fund. The fund could finance a range of evaluations to build the knowledge base for policy. It could also assist more heterogeneous countries in participating in international assessments of learning achievement to monitor changes over time.
  - Creating demand by financing the compensatory costs associated with reaching excluded children; promoting outreach programs for parents; building partnerships for conditional, cash transfers; and providing school meals, scholarships for girls, and school stipend programs for books and supplies.

**ALTERNATING EDUCATION POLICIES**

**AND ADDRESSING DISCRIMINATION**

Changes in policies and rules can help determine the environment in which excluded groups function and increase the credibility of government efforts to reach out-of-school children. Policies alone ensure little, however. Establishing clear mandates against discrimination, a legal system that enforces both entitlements and rights of all citizens, administrative rules that foster the completion of basic education for all children, and an articulated education policy for excluded groups are needed to strengthen the credibility of government, establish a foundation for action, and bring together target populations. These actions also provide a context for engaging donors in advocating for marginalized groups, particularly marginalized girls, and in reaching under-served regions with education programs.

Antidiscrimination laws undergird both legal and policy efforts in fighting exclusion. Clear legal protection offers a beginning in reversing implicit and explicit discrimination against minorities. It has proved critical in Canada, New Zealand, and the United States, where official and public discrimination against minorities was once widespread. South African blacks suffered similarly during apartheid, as did Cuban blacks prior to the revolution of 1958. Unless discrimination is aggressively addressed in the labor market, returns to education will not materialize, reducing the demand for schooling, particularly by girls. Barring trained workers from jobs on the basis of ethnicity, language, or cultural differences has adverse consequences for education because it reduces demand for education by groups that believe the returns will not be positive.

Affirmative action—and the less controversial “preferential” action, which emphasizes bolstering the performance of disadvantaged students while maintaining common standards—has been effective in many countries. Summer math programs and after-school enrichment can strengthen the skills of disadvantaged children. Compensatory programs assume that the minority groups suffer from deficits that can be remedied through tutoring, behavioral guidance, or other compensatory interventions. Brazil, India, Malaysia, South Africa, and Sri Lanka use a
combination of affirmative action and compensatory investments to mitigate the effects of discrimination.

Administrative rules often prevent girls from attending schools. In some communities, separate schools for boys and girls are required, which often results in too few schools for girls. Rules preventing children from studying in their mother tongue keep some children who do not speak the language of instruction out of school or make it harder for them to learn. Early ability-based tracking allows schools to provide unequal education programs and produces dropouts. Expulsion of pregnant girls from school and lack of flexibility in school hours for young mothers attempting to continue their schooling after giving birth severely limit their educational opportunities. Changes in all of these rules could increase the number of excluded girls attending school.

Donors could expedite integration by fostering alternative forms of positive discrimination and expanding opportunities for girls who would otherwise have no options. The Open Society Institute assisted local nongovernmental organizations and governments in their efforts to initiate laws and regulations to protect the Roma and make schools safe havens for Roma children. Donor initiatives could also help countries analyze the educational regulations in place that act as barriers to girls.

**EXPANDING OPTIONS FOR SCHOOLING**

One way of increasing the number of locally available schools is to allow communities to establish their own schools. Community schools are formal schools that provide the basic elements of the school curriculum, adapted to local conditions, including variations in language of instruction and hours of operation. They are designed to shape schooling to meet the needs and ensure the involvement of community members. They are the ultimate means of giving parents voice in the running of schools. South Asia pioneered the approach in 1987 with its *Shiksha Karmi* Project in Rajasthan, India, which uses paraprofessional teachers, allows the community to select and supervise teachers, and hires part-time workers to escort girls to school.

Two alternatives to formal schooling are non-formal schools and distance education. Nonformal schools address gaps or compensate for limitations of existing schools, particularly for children who never started school or who dropped out early and are older than primary school students. In some cases nonformal schools provide basic literacy training. In others they serve as preparation for re-entry into mainstream schools. Nonformal schools can be highly important in preparing disadvantaged children academically and in developing appropriate social skills and self-discipline. Such schools have contributed to progress in primary education in Bangladesh, which has recently achieved gender parity in primary school.

When expansion of schooling requires the use of teachers with less education, radio or television can help provide better quality lessons. Primary education programs that combine radio delivery of a high-quality curriculum with local monitoring of children's progress have been rigorously evaluated and found to boost learning. The most widely used are interactive radio instruction programs, which use professionally developed curricula broadcast to children in remote regions. Thirteen countries have successfully applied such programs.

At the secondary level, distance education programs such as Mexico's *Telesecondary* offer a full range of courses, which would be difficult
to provide in schools serving small communities. For girls with limited access to information or learning outside the immediate community, such programs vastly increase educational opportunities.

What has not succeeded, though, is providing separate schools for children from ethnic, cultural, and linguistic minorities—often tried in earlier periods, as in the United States, Canada, and New Zealand. Separate schools, for example for the Roma throughout Eastern Europe or blacks in the United States pre-1954, are inherently unequal and suffer from poor quality. Similarly, creating separate schools for girls may fail to improve girls’ educational outcomes. Separate schools for girls can also limit their access and, because of poor quality, their performance. Indeed, the lagging performance of Pakistan in girls’ education can be attributed in part to the need for double investments in schooling, one for girls, the other for boys. Bangladesh, which has coeducational primary schools, has sped ahead while Pakistan continues to struggle with expanding separate access for both genders.

Lack of funding often prevents experimentation with innovative means of expanding schooling to difficult-to-reach groups or adapting effective programs to new contexts. A trust fund for multilateral programs targeting excluded girls could provide the financial basis for expanding successful efforts of donors and governments.

Donors could also play a catalytic role in devising and financing alternative schooling options, particularly for innovative programs for adolescent girls. Programs such as English language immersion classes or computer training provide an alternative to secondary school that equips girls with marketable skills. Creation of a girls’ education evaluation fund to finance bilateral, multilateral, and nongovernmental organization evaluations of new or ongoing programs aimed at reaching girls would help fill a major gap and offer guidance to both policymakers and donors eager to use their resources to promote girls’ education...
households. A concern, however, is whether school feeding provides additional nutrition or simply substitutes for home meals, particularly for girls; this issue deserves attention.

Governments and multilateral donors have forged partnerships for conditional cash transfers in many countries in Latin America. Expanding those initiatives to other countries and to difficult-to-reach groups could increase the number of excluded girls who attend school. How successful such programs can be in attracting excluded girls, especially adolescent girls, to school remains an open question. Donors could finance and manage household stipend components of conditional cash transfers for low-income countries that lack the managerial capacity and resources to conduct a conditional cash transfer program.

Scholarships for girls have demonstrated enormous promise. Donor initiatives to expand such programs to lower secondary, higher secondary, and tertiary education would increase the number of educated women in low-income countries. Educated women from disadvantaged households could serve as both community leaders and role models for excluded girls.

Stipends could be used to finance uniforms, school supplies, and books for girls—items parents often cannot afford or refuse to pay for because they do not appreciate their value. Providing assistance through stipends avoids the bureaucratic management problems of subsidizing inputs.

Financing school meals can attract children to school. It can also provide employment for adults and help involve parents in school, reinforcing the school as a focus of community life. Such initiatives offer an entry point to help upgrade schools and provide the potential for additional help to children with faltering attendance or performance. School feeding programs have not been tested specifically among excluded groups. Donor funding could help determine whether these programs are effective among excluded children.

NOTES

1. The excluded subgroups are: indigenous peoples in Guatemala, hill tribes in Laos, and Roma in the Slovak Republic.

2. Scheduled castes are the lowest caste populations in India and include the “untouchables.” Scheduled tribes include indigenous people. They are both on a government schedule of disadvantaged groups, hence the name.

REFERENCES


Along with the spread of educational practices and curricula have come assessments of educational systems around the world. Key to comparative assessment is “international benchmarking,” identifying what is considered necessary educational knowledge for a nation’s needs, improvement, and global competitiveness. The measurement of student achievement with the use of national educational assessment and international testing indicates an agreement about the importance of testing and what is to be tested. The authors, David H. Kamens and Connie L. McNeely, point out that the significance of testing is the agreement that high levels of educational achievement, national assessment, and international testing are important in order for nations to compete in the global economy and the global “race to the top.” In addition, it means that there is an agreed-upon body of knowledge to test globally. The implications are that nations are moving toward similar educational systems and standards.

Questions to consider for this reading:

1. Why are national assessment and international testing important for educational systems, and why has international testing spread rapidly throughout the world?
2. What can be done to increase international assessment, and what are the results of increased global assessment and testing?
3. How do the global assessment and testing movements relate to this chapter’s first reading, “Educating All Children”?

Education has long been characterized as a central requirement for national economic development and political democratization in the contemporary world. Moreover, international benchmarking has been identified as the “basis for improvement. . . . It is only through such benchmarking that countries can understand relative strengths and weaknesses of their education systems and identify best practices and ways forward” (OECD 2006, 18). Statements such as this example signal an international consensus that has emerged—at least among “developed” countries—about the legitimacy and, even more so, the necessity of international testing and
national assessment. As David P. Baker and Gerald K. LeTendre (2005) observe, both international testing and national assessment are linked to efforts to reform educational systems and are often themselves stimuli for further cycles of reform. The results of international testing, they note, will fuel further interest in national assessment.

Here we develop an argument about the global forces that have led to the explosive growth of national educational assessment and international testing. In particular, we argue that the international acceptance of testing comes from key ideological forces in the world polity that are associated with the accelerating globalization of national and international cultural, economic, and political structures. As we develop and warrant this argument, we also qualify it by pointing out that national adaptations to this larger world culture may vary depending on the presence and capacities of international organizations and regional associations that act to mediate and adapt these changes to conditions in individual countries. In addition, we consider the effects of subnational movements in introducing pressures for change that may favor more national assessment.

The Spread of International Testing and National Assessment

During the past 40 years, the number of countries participating in international testing for learning in mathematics, science, and reading has increased dramatically, with participation growing among both developed and developing countries (Kamens and McNeely 2007). Indeed, by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, over a third of the world’s countries will be using standardized tests to assess their middle school and high school student achievement. Still, 65 percent of the countries in the world are not yet involved in international testing, so we must also address the possibilities of limits to this trend.

Two other facts about participation are especially telling. First, countries that score poorly in early rounds of international testing typically continue to participate in later rounds. Second, low-scoring countries that drop out often turn to international governmental organizations (IGOs) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to assist them in conducting national assessments (McNeely and Cha 1994; McNeely 1995; Martens 2005). Thus, the “need” to test or assess student populations is spreading as a taken-for-granted assumption. Moreover, an expanding number of donor agencies and multilateral organizations are mandating some form of learning assessment to accompany their loans and other aid support.1 Often involving cooperation with organizations that provide technical advice and support, testing is increasingly viewed as an obligation of nation-states. National ministries of education typically act as the agents imposing this activity on schools and education systems.

In addition to the growth of international testing, national learning assessment is growing rapidly, especially in mathematics and language and more so at the primary and lower secondary levels. This trend is occurring not only among the more affluent countries but also among the poorer ones. For example, the Dominican Republic has engaged in a long-term assessment project with the help of the Educational Evaluation Research Consortium and with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Similarly, both Latin American and African countries have regional assessment programs funded by UNESCO. The Latin American Association for the Assessment of the Quality of Education, founded in 1994, now has 19 members. The Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ), started in 1990, has 15 member countries; seven of them participated in its first assessment study in 1995–97, and 14 were involved in 2000–2003 studies. Similarly, Francophone Africa has the Conference des Ministres de l’Éducation des Pays Ayant le Français en Partage (CONFEMEN), which encourages and assists member states in
performing national assessments. Also, some of these associations sponsor regionwide assessments that are more highly standardized than national ones and that resemble international tests.

In 2006 and 2007, UNESCO gathered the most authoritative data to date on the spread of national learning assessments, which tend to focus on how well the intended curriculum is taught and learned. These data show that, across virtually all world regions, national assessments are a rapidly growing phenomenon (Benavot and Tanner 2007). From 1995 to 2005, the number of countries carrying out learning assessments more than doubled, from 28 to 67. And although developed countries continue to have the highest rates, developing countries have almost doubled their rates of learning assessments (from 28 to 51 percent). While “in transition” countries have the lowest levels of assessments, they too, increased in participation over the 10-year span, from 0 to 17 (43 percent). Even “fragile states” have begun to carry out national assessments, with 15 of 35 (43 percent)—half located in East Asia and the Pacific—having done so by 2005.

Nevertheless, there are regional differences in conducting national assessments. In the 1990s, the lowest rates were in sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia. During the same period, much of southeastern sub-Saharan Africa began conducting national assessments. As of 2005, North America and Western Europe had the highest rates of assessments, followed by Central and Eastern Europe, East Asia, and Latin America. Most of Latin America began national assessment testing in the 1990s. Between 1995 and 2006, the Middle East Arab states, together with South and West Asia, had particularly dramatic increases in their rates (from 15 to 55 percent and from 11 to 44 percent, respectively).

The rapid pattern of growth of national learning assessments looks similar to that of international testing. For instance, while developed countries are leading the use of learning assessments, developing countries—including the most fragile states—are catching up. Additionally, even in regions where almost no international testing has been done, large proportions of countries conduct national assessments. Countries in Francophone Africa and the Caribbean are particularly striking examples of this pattern—few participate in international testing, but all have conducted national assessments. Finally, the subjects covered in national assessments have been almost identical to those addressed in international testing: mathematics, language, and civics or social studies. This pattern is not surprising since these subjects and science constitute the bulk of the curriculum of grades 1–6, in which much international testing and most national assessments are done (Meyer et al. 1992; Benavot and Tanner 2007).

Despite critics and controversies, it appears that international testing and national assessment have become relatively commonplace across different countries. These initiatives are works in progress, however, and one can expect the related methodology, as well as the breadth of the testing subject matter, to evolve. While comparative interest in national examination systems actually dates back to the late nineteenth century (Meyer et al. 1992; Eckstein and Noah 1993; McNeely and Cha 1994), formal international testing is largely a post-World War II project based in part on technological advances and the availability of sophisticated testing methods and computing capabilities that have made large-scale data collection and analysis possible.

Technological capability is only part of the story. Consider the following scenario: in a world where national educational systems are viewed as unique in structure, history, and purpose, international testing would have little plausibility. In fact, this view was the dominant perspective when Torsten Husén and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) first conducted international math and science testing in the 1960s. Husén (1967) himself saw the purpose of these studies as investigating national differences in educational systems, which he argued were due to unique educational and cultural histories. Since that time, there has been a change in perspective; testing and assessment no longer seem like a case of comparing apples to oranges (UNESCO 1986).
For example, in the past, countries with centralized educational systems were most likely to implement national examination systems. These examination systems, however, were designed to select students for further education, not to assess the curriculum and its implementation (Eckstein and Noah 1993). Times have changed, and now the emphasis is more typically on the use of testing and assessment to judge the adequacy of educational systems to deliver desired outcomes (Travers and Westbury 1989). In this new environment, it is not clear that distinctions among nation-states and among their educational systems will have such strong impacts on the spread of national assessment and testing. Among the most developed countries, for instance, we have seen that almost all—ranging from those with highly centralized education systems, like France, to those with more decentralized systems, like the United States—do a lot of international testing and national assessment (Baker and LeTendre 2005; Benavot and Tanner 2007). In spite of differences in state structure and the organization of education, the pressure and tendency to test and assess seem equally prevalent. The trend cuts across different types of educational systems—for example, a class-based educational system in France (see discussions in Bowles and Gintis [1976]; Kamens, Meyer, and Benavot [1992]; Rubinson and Fuller [1992]; and Prasad [2005]) and a mass-credentialing system like that in the United States (Collins 1979).

* * *

**CONCLUSIONS**

It seems clear that international testing is increasing, and the limited data on national assessment suggest that it has also expanded since the 1990s. It seems that fewer and fewer countries imagine that they will achieve the status of the “good society” without high levels of formal education and accompanying efforts at national assessment and/or international testing. Thirty-five percent of countries now do international testing, but many more are conducting some form of national assessment. According to Benavot and Tanner (2007), 81 percent of developed countries have conducted national assessments as of 2006, and 51 percent of developing countries have also done so. Most of the former also have participated in international achievement testing. About 43 percent of the poorest countries have not done international testing but have completed one or more national assessments. Thus, national assessments are the major growth sector of international testing and will probably continue to expand.

While there may be debates about the forms that education should take, evidence on rising national enrollment levels across the world indicate that no country’s elites can envision a successful future without high levels of popular education. Moreover, with notions of education for all come increased pressures for educational accountability. Accordingly, we expect that national assessment will spread and that international testing also will continue to expand in keeping with increasing globalization and world polity cultural dynamics and social relations.

In particular, we have posited the diffusion of international educational testing and national assessment on the basis of three principal cultural features of the world polity: (1) ideologies of education as a source of national and world progress, (2) the hegemony of science as a critical means to development, and (3) the idea that educational systems—and, indeed, society in general—can be managed to produce desirable outcomes. . . . [I]ncreased testing and assessment result from pressures to rationalize education and schooling, with IGOs, NGOs, regional associations, and subnational movements operating as agents of diffusion.

As societal rationalization proceeds and education expands, new domains of assessment are likely to become common. The difficulty will lie in deciding the limits on learning that students should be expected to master (World Bank 2005). Also, given the worldwide expansion of higher education (Schofer and Meyer 2005), it is very likely that the urge to assess will expand to cover
additional levels of education. For example, countries might seek information on how their systems of higher education compare with one another (cf. OECD 2008).

National assessment is also likely to expand. Both political elites and external organizations, such as IGOs and NGOs, will facilitate the process as well as demand accountability and evidence of educational effectiveness in exchange for resources. Moreover, since the biggest differences in test scores are linked to issues of democracy within countries, such as access and equality, assessments and comparisons could help in evaluating school policies, constructing models of schooling and teacher practices, and providing educators and the public with contextually sensitive accounts of exposure and learning levels (e.g., Downey et al. 2008).

As previously mentioned, constraints on testing and assessment also exist. While constraints may weaken in the world polity environment, they will not necessarily disappear. In the case of international testing, we have noted at least two practical impediments that must be considered. First, an important problem is the fundamental lack of resources and lack of organizational capacity to administer this complex activity. As more standardization of testing regimes is required, more administrative capability and expertise are also needed to carry out related activities. Sampling designs, test construction, translation, and so on all become complex and important issues. Poor countries simply may not have the necessary resources to coordinate and undertake these activities. Thus, to date, many developing countries have been absent from the populations of countries in which international testing has occurred. Second, engaging in testing opens a country to external scrutiny and may also intensify internal conflicts over perceived responsibilities for inadequate or unequal educational outcomes. Even the most amenable elites in such societies may feel that such comparisons are premature and dangerous at a time when they may be trying to devise school systems and curricula that bridge gaps among groups in their countries.

Nevertheless, the spread of international testing has produced its own dynamic in shaping educational systems, and the modern obsession with education produces intense interest in testing and assessment around the world (McKnight et al. 1987; Stevenson and Stigler 1992; Baker and LeTendre 2005). This is one of the institutionalizations of education and of its “transcendental” character. No matter how well students perform on international tests, educators and political elites are constantly looking for ways to improve their educational systems (Baker and LeTendre 2005). In the context of a globalizing economy, every country is looking for an edge that makes it more competitive. Accordingly, all countries have the urge to compare and compete.

In this global environment, it is difficult to imagine what forces would restrain the urge among national elites to assess and test. World polity culture will continue to spread, even in the face of global economic downturn. This perspective privileges education as integral to democracy and human rights, stimulating demands for both educational expansion and educational accountability. Thus, the drive to assess and test is built into modern education, and both assessment and testing are likely to increase as more countries become more fully integrated into the world polity.

Notes


2. “In transition” or “transitional” countries are those attempting to change their basic constitutional elements toward market-style fundamentals (IMF 2000). Countries and territories in transition include the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, and Ukraine, plus the more “advanced” developing countries, namely, the Bahamas, Bermuda, Brunei, the Cayman Islands, Cyprus, the Falkland Islands, Hong Kong, Israel, Kuwait, Qatar, Singapore, Taiwan, and the United Arab Emirates. Some World Bank studies also include Mongolia (IMF 2000; DFID 2009).
3. States are considered “fragile” when their governments cannot or will not deliver core functions to their people, with a focus on the “weak capacity and/or lack of political will to provide services and to sustain a development partnership with the international community” (Vallings and Moreno-Torres 2005, 4).

4. National assessment may be a widely respected substitute for participation in international “high-stakes” testing because the former (a) has higher utility for policy elites, providing useful national and subnational evidence on the functioning of teachers and regional school systems; (b) is more relevant in given countries’ curricula; and (c) may avoid problems associated with international testing and comparison (e.g., potential political humiliation and high costs).

REFERENCES


This reading by Rachel Brooks focuses on the end goal of education: graduating a productive working member of society. Graduation signifies a rite of passage from youth to adulthood. In today’s world, however, increased complexity has made this transition anything but straightforward. Changes in social, political, and economic institutions in societies result in a variety of often complex transition models; for instance, many youth begin work before finishing school or are in and out of school before settling into a career. Brooks discusses factors that influence transitions including education-to-work policies and complexities of the transitions in various regions of the world.

Questions to consider for this reading:
1. Why are nations’ governments concerned about the transition from education to work?
2. What are some complications discussed by Brooks in making this transition?
3. What are some ways to accomplish this transition?

Changing Patterns of Transition?

The concept of a “transition” from full-time education to full-time work is one with a long history in youth studies, sociology, psychology and education. However, along with other transitions typically associated with the period of “youth” (i.e. from the parental home into independent housing and from the “family of destination” to the “family of origin”), it has been subjected to considerable critical scrutiny over recent years. . . . [S]ome researchers have argued that it now offers little theoretical purchase on the experiences of young people in the twenty-first century and the increasing complexity of the choices they are required to make as they move towards adulthood. While acknowledging the changes to the social, political and economic context within which young people now live, other scholars have suggested that it is more helpful to discuss changes to the nature of transitions, rather than assume that the concept is now obsolete. Indeed, in mapping some of these changes over recent decades, youth researchers have highlighted
three significant trends in young people’s transition from education to work, which have been identified in many parts of the world. First, it is clear that young people are remaining in full-time education for longer periods of time and, as a consequence, entering the labour market (as full-time employees) at a correspondingly older age. This is evident not only in Western Europe, the United States and Australia, but also in Asian and post-communist countries (France, 2007). In the United Kingdom, 82 per cent of 16-year-olds and 69 per cent of 17-year-olds were in full-time post-compulsory education or government-supported training in 2005/2006 (DCSF, 2007), compared with around a third of this cohort in the early 1970s. Across all OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, the average educational enrollments amongst 15- to 19-year-olds reached a similar level (of 82 per cent) in 2005, with some countries such as Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece and Poland having reached 90 per cent or more (OECD, 2007).

Second, the youth labour market remains stagnant. For many countries in Europe, this stagnation has its roots in the early 1980s when youth employment collapsed as a reaction to a more general economic downturn. As Furlong and Cartmel (2007) note, youth unemployment is typically more sensitive to economic pressures than adult employment, and thus suffers disproportionately during periods of recession. Although a large number of countries experienced a collapse in the youth labour market in the last three decades of the twentieth century, there has been considerable variation in both the time at which this occurred and the magnitude of the decline. For example, whereas youth unemployment in European countries typically peaked in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, it was not experienced in Japan until the mid-1990s. Even within Europe disparities were seen, with higher levels of unemployment and sharper rises in the rate of unemployment occurring in southern European countries than in their northern counterparts (ibid.). This clearly had an impact on extending the period of education, discussed above: with fewer jobs available for school leavers, educational opportunities came to be perceived as increasingly attractive. Although some of the more pessimistic predictions about the future of youth employment did not come to fruition (namely that levels of youth unemployment would remain very high permanently), structural changes to the labour market over the last part of the twentieth century have had a significant impact on the type of work that is available to school leavers and other young people in search of employment. Young workers are now typically employed in small-sized firms in the service sector and, like many older adults, are increasingly employed on temporary contracts and on a part-time basis (du Bois Reymond and Chisholm, 2006). It is also the case that we are witnessing more variation in patterns of transition, as young people increasingly “blend” periods of education and work, moving backwards and forwards between the two and engaging in significant elements of paid work whilst being a fuller- or part-time student. Indeed, reflecting on changes witnessed in the last few decades of the twentieth century, Chisholm (2006) notes:

Transitions to the labour market were taking place not only later but also in more differentiated and gradual ways as young people mixed study and work in a combination between practical economic necessity, tactical career planning, and personal choices. (p. 15)

Third, alongside the extension of full-time education, we have witnessed the emergence of what some researchers have called the “training state” as a major pathway for school leavers since the 1980s (Mizen, 2004). Indeed, offering more extensive training packages to young people as they leave school has been one way in which national governments have tried to manage unemployment and skills shortages. This has been replicated at a regional level: for example, the European Union (EU) Summit on Employment held in Luxembourg in 1997 established a common set of principles to underpin provisions
for young people who had been unemployed for a period of six months or more—which included a guarantee of education, training or employment (Chisholm, 2006; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007).

Though the nature of young people’s transition from education to work has changed in the ways outlined above, there are also important elements of continuity, which should not be overlooked. For example, in their comparison of the transitions of British young people in the 1970s and the 1990s, Schoon et al. (2001) argue that, although the latter cohort demonstrates more fluidity in its transition patterns, gender continues to play a central role in shaping the pathways taken by young people, with more young women than young men outside the labour force—involved either in education or in family care. Similar gender differences are apparent in other parts of the world. On the basis of their analysis of data from the European Labour Force Survey, Iannelli and Smyth (2008) suggest that gender has a significant impact on transitions in most European countries, as a result of the different pathways taken by young men and young women through education and training (and, in particular, the different fields of study they choose) rather than because of differentials in the level of qualification attained. Schoon et al. also demonstrate persistent inequalities across time in the fortunes of those with the lowest level of qualification. Indeed, they contend that as a result of the more general trend towards staying on longer in education those who leave “early” with few or no qualifications are increasingly adversely affected by the disappearance of traditional entry-level jobs and the polarisation of the labour market (p. 19). Similar arguments are advanced by Dwyer and Wyn (2001) in their analysis of young people’s transitions to employment within the Australian labour market. Such differences also continue to be quite strongly associated with social class, with young people from working-class backgrounds over-represented amongst early labour market entrants, while the nature and type of work-based training taken up by young people also continue to be highly stratified by socio-economic status (as well as gender and “race”/ethnicity) (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007, p. 29).

These trends in young people’s transitions from education to work are inextricably related to wider economic changes in Europe and other parts of the world over recent decades. The changing structure of the labour market, periods of recession and the increasing dominance of the so-called “knowledge economy” have all had considerable impact on the experiences of young people as they come towards the end of their full-time education. However, within Europe in particular, youth researchers have argued that young people’s transitions from education to work have been altered, not only by the changing economic structures around them, but also by the considerable shifts in the political environment that occurred in the last couple of decades of the twentieth century—namely the demise of communist regimes in central and eastern Europe and the drive towards further European integration across the continent. Indeed, Chisholm (2006) goes as far as to suggest that, as a result of these changes, “Young Europeans could now think of their lifestyles and futures in different ways; new options for realization became practically available” (p. 15).

The Impact of Policy

Over recent years, many scholars have argued that state autonomy in relation to education policymaking has become increasingly limited by trends and initiatives at the European and international level. For example, Stephen Ball has contended that “the nation state is no longer adequate on its own as a space within which to think about policy” (2008, p. 25), maintaining that policies are now made largely in response to globalisation and tend to be driven by supranational agencies, practical policy “fads” and the flow of policies between countries. In relation to Europe, in particular, Martin Lawn has suggested that, as a result of both the Bologna Process and
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the Lisbon Strategy, a new “European learning space” has opened up, which “stands in sharp contrast to the older, central roles played by organisations, rigid borders and national sites” (2006, p. 272). The Lisbon Strategy (European Parliament, 2000) aims to make the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world...through measures such as encouraging the mobility (for both learning and working) of European citizens; creating an “information society” for all; promoting employability through investment in citizens’ knowledge and competences; and the adaptation of education and training to enable individuals to be offered tailored learning opportunities at all stages of life. The Bologna Process (Commission of the European Communities, 1999) is an inter-governmental initiative which aims to create a European “higher education area”...and to promote the European system of higher education worldwide.

Initiatives such as these, it is argued, have had considerable impact on young people’s transitions from education to work. Indeed, Walther and Plug (2006) outline a number of concepts which, they suggest, have gained widespread currency across Europe through processes of European integration and European policy-making. These include “employability,” which, they argue, is based on an individualised understanding of disadvantage—in which unemployed young people (and older adults) are viewed as insufficiently adapted to the demands of potential employers; “lifelong learning,” which “reflects the fact that education and employment are no longer linked directly within post-Fordist labour markets” (p. 85); and “activation” employment policies—which rely on motivating individuals to look for a job. More specifically, mechanisms have been put in place to drive forward the “Europeification” of education and training policies: the definition by the EU of a matrix of policies to be developed by member states in the field of education and training; the establishment of inter-governmental platforms to take decisions about measures to be implemented in individual countries; and the development of an EU community agenda and policy for education and training (Antunes, 2006). These have underpinned the Open Method of Co-ordination, which has attempted to promote convergence in vocational education and training across Europe.

Despite these trends, however, the nation state retains considerable autonomy in relation to education. It is notable that the Open Method of Co-ordination aims for convergence (i.e. moving closer together) rather than harmonisation in this area, and even this aim has been subject to criticism from European politicians, on the grounds that it may well compromise national diversity (Fredriksson, 2003). Moreover, various empirical studies have demonstrated the enduring differences in education policies, educational systems and education-to-work transitions across Europe. While acknowledging the various pressures from the EU to further the co-operation between universities and the world of work, Dahlgren et al. (2007), for example, point to considerable variation in the extent to which this was implemented in the four European countries in which they conducted research. Similarly, Furlong and Cartmel (2007) outline significant national differences in responses to the widespread unemployment of young people across Europe in the 1990s (and despite the establishment of a common set of principles for tackling youth unemployment, outlined during the EU summit on employment held in Luxembourg in 1997).

Recent scholarship has also emphasised the influence of the nature of national welfare regimes in determining education-to-work policies and, as a result, young people’s experiences as they reach the end of their full-time education (Iannelli and Smyth, 2008). Drawing on Esping-Anderson’s work (1990), Pohl and Walther (2007) identify five types of “transition regime” operating in Europe. These are broadly related to the more general welfare regimes operating in the individual countries (or clusters of countries), but are also underpinned by the differences in policies that impact young people’s transitions from education to work and, perhaps most fundamentally, different ways in
which “youth” is conceptualised. The “universalistic” transition regime of the Nordic countries is, Pohl and Walther argue, based on assumptions about the importance of collective welfare—and the citizenship rights of all young people, irrespective of their social background. Here, labour market activation measures focus on opening up access and developing individuals’ orientations towards mainstream jobs, rather than damping down aspirations and encouraging take-up of low-status careers. In contrast, the “liberal” transition regime typical of the United Kingdom and Ireland is characterised by Pohl and Walther as valuing individual rights and responsibilities above collective provisions, and understanding youth as a transition phase that should be replaced as quickly as possible by economic independence. Policy responses place more responsibility on the individual for maximising his/her own “employability.” The “employment-centred” transition regime is evident in continental countries such as Austria and Germany. Here, youth is understood as a process of socialisation into allocated social positions—through a selective schooling system and a limited range of labour market options for young people experiencing unemployment. The “sub-protective” transition regime is found, according to Pohl and Walther, in southern European countries including Spain, Greece and Italy. Young people in these countries have no distinct status, and youth transitions are characterised by a long “waiting phase” during which young people are dependent on their families. Labour market segmentation and a lack of training opportunities are argued to contribute to high levels of youth unemployment. Finally, countries included within the “post-communist” regime of eastern Europe have mixed understandings of “youth.” Transition policies vary accordingly, with some sharing significant elements with the liberal regime, whereas others have more in common with the employment-centred, universalistic or sub-protective regimes. These differences highlight the important variations between the experiences of young people across Europe and the close interaction between the way in which youth is understood in a particular society and its youth-related policies.

REFERENCES


Projects for Further Exploration

1. Various tests are used to compare academic achievement across countries. Using an academic database, search international, test results, and education to find a listing of test results across countries. How do students from the United States compare with those from other countries?

2. Using the web, look up at least two colleges or universities from three countries in different regions of the world. Compare the criteria for admission, curriculum offerings, methods for funding education, and format for instruction in these three different countries.

3. Interview a student or person from another country. Ask the interviewee about the structure of educational systems in his or her country and how the educational system there prepares students for entry into the workforce.