An analysis of social accountability and transparency interventions's influence of educational services

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Abstract: Accountability and transparency have a very important impact on the delivery and quality of education services, because the release of data can put pressure on schools' results and citizens can make reference based on the data. The purpose of this essay is to analyse whether various interventions have a positive impact on education. This essay adopted the method of case studies, selected different intervention actions were used in different countries to analyse. The results show that all of these interventions have positive effects on educational services, but each intervention has its own disadvantages. The effectiveness of accountability and transparency is likely to be maximized when multiple interventions are carried out simultaneously.

1. Introduction

Citizens have a general right to information in democracies, one of which is the right to educational information about school performance, infrastructure, teaching resources and the quality of teachers. Openness and transparency of information can enable the public to have references when choosing schools, understanding the level of schools and making educational plans. Also, the accountability measures according to the data can improve the quality of teaching. Various interventions have been carried out by different institutions to make information transparent, and many researchers have studied those interventions to determine whether they have a positive impact on the delivery of educational services. While the effectiveness of a single intervention is limited, the introduction of multiple accountability and transparency measures raises the question of their individual effectiveness as well as their effect when combined. I argue that if these interventions can be implemented simultaneously, accountability will have the greatest impact on educational services.

This essay will analyse the influence of the following interventions on education in order to explore the role of accountability and transparency in education delivery: access to information, information campaigns, report cards and score cards. There are many kinds of interventions, but for the scale of this essay, I have chosen four that are common.

2. Access to Information

The first kind of intervention the essay will analyse is access to information, which is provided to the public on newspapers or websites through national legislation. A transparent and open information does have a positive impact on the delivery of educational services to some extent, but the impact may not be as strong as policy makers expected. Of course, some people may argue that transparency and openness of information are essential for the delivery of education and equitable allocation of educational resources, but the platform, method, and clarity of the information need to be accepted by the public to ensure that the public does not get lost in the process of accessing the information.

Access to information is a right of citizens in order to understand educational policies and government plans for the future. At the same time, it is difficult to select useful information when presented with a lot of data. Moreover, the medium through which the state disseminates information needs to be accessible to the general public. If using the chosen medium is too difficult for the public, then access to data will become a challenge. Also, the information needs to be as widely disseminated

as possible among citizens, not just by those who use the medium frequently, such as a particular profession or a particular age group. Therefore, when choosing this kind of medium, it is necessary to choose the simplest operation and the widest transmission as much as possible.

There's an example from Tanzania about access to information. According to McMurren et al. [1], Tanzania established the "Education Open Data Dashboard" and "Shule" projects, in an attempt to change the public's lack of understanding of information in the education sector. The low pass rate of Tanzania's national examinations in 2012 had exposed the shortage of educational resources and teachers, along with regional development imbalances, so that citizens needed to know the reality of education in the country and hold the relevant institutions accountable. The original intention of the Shule project was to make information available to everyone. However, the online traffic figures show that the project did not achieve the goal. Internet use is not widespread in Tanzania, and people prefer to share information by word of mouth and posting notices on bulletin boards, especially in rural areas. Therefore, while these programs are subtly changing the way information is delivered, the interventions alone are not enough to solve the problem at least in the short term.

Consequently, in some countries or regions, access to information alone is insufficient to achieve transparency and accountability of educational services. Other interventions should therefore also be used in tandem.

3. Information Campaigns

Information campaigns refer to the disclosure of schools' data to inform the public about their performance, results, academic achievements and services. This intervention can give citizens an understanding of the performance of their school or a point of reference when choosing a school, which can have a positive impact on the quality of education. First of all, when faced with the school data, citizens generally tend to choose schools with high academic achievements, which may have more chance to provide students with better educational resources and teachers of higher quality. Secondly, making the school data transparent and open will stimulate the teaching quality of the school to some extent. Schools with good academic achievements may compete with others, while schools with low academic achievements may have pressure so as to reflect and improve.

One study supports this. Hastings and Weinstein et al. [2] found that, other things being the same, middle and low-income parents were more likely to send their children to schools with better academic achievements, and children would get higher grades in these schools. Since most parents tend to choose schools with higher scores, schools with lower scores will face pressure from reduced enrollment, thus they will make some changes. Figlio and Lucas [3] also drew a similar conclusion that parents were indeed more inclined to choose schools with higher scores and they were even willing to increase their spending on housing for this reason. It can be seen that information transparency does positively affect the delivery of education and subsequent learning outcomes.

However, schools' achievements may not be the only criteria parents consider. Many other factors also influence their choice, such as proximity, tuition and quality of peers. Most parents prefer to send their children to higher-performing schools, which can lead to increased demand for admission and thus higher tuition fees. For some low-income families, high tuition fees, transportation and housing costs can be unbearable burdens. Chili's "Sistema Nacional de Evaluación del Desempeño" (SNED) programme listed and advertised academically good schools, yet the enrolment of those schools had not increased [4]. The result contradicts the finding of Hastings and Weinstein. According to Mizala and Urquiola [4], there are three reasons why citizens did not choose those schools. The first one is that the choice of schools is also affected by many other school characteristics, such as the distance from the school and the quality of peers. Second, because the SNED programme had not been widely distributed to the public, its recognition and impact was relatively low. Finally, some savvy parents may rely more on their own judgment. Therefore, parents' choice of school is a result of the combined effects of multiple factors.

Overall, information campaigns as an intervention to make information transparent and open does have a positive impact on the delivery of education, but it is not the only contributing factor, its effectiveness is also affected by other factors as well.

4. Report Cards

Report cards refer to information campaigns that rank schools and publish them to the public, which sometimes may be accompanied by discussions with the public to promote the effectiveness of educational services. The way schools are ranked makes information transparent and accountability effective in improving the delivery of educational services. Some people may suspect that only focusing on ranking performance will have a negative impact on the quality of education, such as a disproportionate ecphasis on results while neglecting children's balanced development of competence. However, the intervention does have a positive impact on educational services that cannot be ignored.

As parents tend to choose schools at the top of the rankings, the consequences of underperforming schools' declining enrollments are severe. As a result the underperforming schools may focus on improving the quality of teaching, and then the students' performance will improve accordingly. Improving the quality of low-performing schools could create some competitive pressure on high-performing ones, so the high-performing ones may reduce tuition fees. In this way, lower tuition fees may lead to a series of positive ripple effects, such as increased enrollment. To some extent, it promotes the balanced distribution of educational resources and reduces the educational inequality between regions. In addition, parental involvement is also an important factor in children's performance, as discussions with parents can increase their participation and thus increase their knowledge. Therefore, the impact of this intervention on educational services is significant.

There are two studies that looked at the impact of report cards on educational services. Andrabi, Das and Khwaja et al. [5] provided parents with children and school test scores and found that not only the children's scores improve greatly, but the parents' knowledge also improved. Parents tend to go to higher-performing schools, and lower-performing schools have to choose between improving performance or closing down, so overall quality is improved. Furthermore, if private school tuition fees have also fallen, it could increase enrolment of schools. Burgess, Wilson and Worth et al. [6] obtained similar results. They found strong evidence that the abolition of school rankings in Wales led to a significant decline in student achievement, a significant decline in the effectiveness of teaching quality and a rise in educational inequality. They claimed that the abolition of the ranking system had reduced the pressure on schools to be named and exposed by the media, thus reducing the efficiency of education services. It can be seen that the report cards had a great impact on educational services, which can improve the quality of education and reduce inequality.

In summary, the evidence suggests that report cards increase information transparency, while accountability greatly improves the quality and delivery of education. Therefore, the intervention has played a positive role in educational services.

5. Score Cards

The final form of intervention is the score card. The score cards are kinds of quantitative surveys of public satisfaction, which may be accompanied by discussions with the public, such as discussing schools' achievements and following actions. The intervention is low-cost and is receptive to the feelings and educational need of the public, so as to allow them to put forward some effective suggestions to schools. As a result, there may be some pressure on schools to improve the quality of teaching. However, the form and content of score cards play a critical role in its effectiveness. If the form and content do not hold the school accountable, its effectiveness will be greatly reduced. Therefore, the role of score cards in educational service is still at a controversial stage.

Barr, Mugisha, Serneels and Zeitlin et al. [7] conducted an intervention in primary schools in Uganda. They tested two different score cards. The first one used the School Management Committee (SMC) score cards, which are promoted by specialized educational associations. They found that the

intervention resulted in a significant reduction in student and teacher absences and a significant improvement in student achievement. The second one used school's own score cards, which have no obvious impact on the quality and delivery of education. They concluded that accountability interventions do have a significant impact on education, but score cards need to be tailored to different contexts to make them responsive to school management and needs. Therefore, score cards have a positive impact on educational services, but must be set up properly and carefully discussed.

Overall, score cards have a positive impact on the quality and delivery of education. they are a low cost option and can reflect the satisfaction of parents, but their content is flexible and needs targeted formulation to be effective.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this essay discussed four interventions to explore if accountability and transparency interventions improve the delivery of educational services. Accountability and transparency play a vital role in the quality and delivery of education. Making data available to the public not only gives citizens access to more information, but also improves their performance and knowledge. At the same time, the pressure on schools and the competition among schools improve the quality of education and make a balanced distribution of educational resources. Therefore, access to information, information campaigns, report cards and score cards do have a positive impact on educational services. However, in order to maximize the effectiveness of the accountability system, the role played by a single intervention is limited. These interventions can be implemented simultaneously, and then the monitoring of education services by the accountability system can be fully played from multiple perspectives.

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