

**Lüdemann, E., Schütz, G., Woessmann, L.
and West, M. R.: School accountability, autonomy
and choice around the world**

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School Accountability, Autonomy and Choice around the World is a comprehensive study about the effectiveness of some of the most constitutive features of educational institutions that are discussed by politicians and scientists around the world. Accountability, Autonomy and School Choice are keywords for market-oriented or incentive-based reforms, that are aimed at introducing competitive forces into the schooling system to increase students' learning.

Using the extensive database of PISA 2003, the authors conduct an international comparative approach to empirically assess the effectiveness of incentive-based systems with respect to efficiency (total student learning) and equity (equality of student learning).

The book is well-arranged: First, a basic econometric multilevel model of educational production is presented, with student learning being explained by individual student characteristics, by school variables and most importantly by institutional characteristics of the education system. The first results of the basic model concerning accountability, autonomy and choice for total student learning are presented. In a second step, each of the institutional features are analyzed in more detail. Economic models are presented in a short and non-technical way, lifting the mechanisms and incentives that are created for the various parties (schools, teachers, students and parents) and short reviews of the empirical cross-country literature are given. Furthermore, the authors carefully analyze possible interaction effects of the various system indicators, such as the heterogenous effects of school autonomy in systems with and without accountability schemes. The last chapter of the book is dedicated to equity. The institutional characteristics are analyzed with respect to their effects on equality of educational opportunities.

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The results are interesting and the estimated coefficients of the various interaction models are presented in a nice way. The graphical presentation helps to catch the main results at a glance. The results of the study are the following: Students perform better in school systems that use accountability measures that keep schools, teachers and students responsible for their actions, such as external student exams. The results for school autonomy are mixed: autonomy in formulating budgets is detrimental to student achievement, while autonomy in staffing decisions seems to be beneficial. Here, an important interaction is worked out: accountability measures and school autonomy complement one another, i.e. school autonomy works best in systems that hold the schools accountable for their actions. Opportunistic behavior by schools, which is the fear coming along with school autonomy, can be overcome to a certain extent when accountability measures are in place. Moreover, countries that allow competition among schools resulting from extended school choice by a larger private school sector, by a higher degree of government funding and by equalized funding of private and public schools achieve higher test scores on average. Here, again, an important interaction is detected: school autonomy in combination with a larger private school sector seems to stimulate student learning. In competition with private schools, public schools should have the possibility to respond to student demands.

Concerning equity issues, the results of the study are less straightforward: a higher degree of school choice increases equity because it furthers students with lower socio-economic background to a greater extent. On the other hand, external exit exams and school autonomy increase the influence of parental background on student learning, thus reducing equity. However, in systems with accountability or autonomy, all students benefit from these measures and students from a more favorable home environment benefit to a greater extent.

The authors show that incentive-based systems operate differently from more traditional selective institutions. The early tracking of students into different schools slightly benefit students from high socio-economic backgrounds, but strongly hurt students from low socio-economic backgrounds. In contrast, accountability and autonomy benefit all students.

The book is based on the analysis of cross country data, which offers the possibility to look at all the institutional characteristics at the same time and detect important interactions between system indicators. But cross country analysis comes at the cost of potential biases due to unobserved heterogeneity. The authors sharply reduce the problem of unobserved heterogeneity at the student-level by focusing on aggregated system indicators at the country level. However, selection bias at the country-level can not be overcome. Countries do not randomly adopt a certain mix of educational institutions, but carefully choose their system. Certain education reforms may be part of a modern, open-minded society that might also further their children in the early years of their education. Thus, there is some room for endogeneity bias at the country level.

Furthermore, not all results are consistent with earlier studies or theory. The authors argue that the effects of certain institutions are sensitive to how the system is designed in detail. For example, the effects of external exit exams should be different, depending on how the results of those exams are used. There might be incentives for teachers to teach-to-the-test, to cheat or to focus on students with higher learning potential.

The results of the equity analysis of accountability point in this direction. Such specific questions of how incentive-based systems should be implemented in detail can not be answered within the international comparative approach.

The book shows that a careful cross country analysis of institutional effects can do a good job in achieving a comprehensive view on education systems, the effectiveness of various incentive-based institutions and their interactions. I recommend the book for all people from education science and policy because it gives a good overview on incentive-based reforms, helps to understand the mechanisms behind those reforms and detects important interdependencies of various single measures.

Woessmann L., E. Luedemann, G. Schuetz and M. West (2007), "School Accountability, Autonomy, Choice, and the Level of Student Achievement: International Evidence from PISA 2003", OECD Education Working Papers No. 13. Woessmann, L., E. Luedemann, G. Schuetz, and M.R. West. (2009) "School accountability, autonomy, and choice around the world". Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

31. favour of policies promoting school accountability, school autonomy, and school choice, the latter including school choice through public funding for private schools as means to improve learning outcomes.[18] However, while Woessmann emphasizes that school autonomy has positively affected student achievement in developed countries or countries with high-performing education systems, he also cautions that school autonomy may have the opposite effect in. Consequently, they conclude that measures of school enrollment and attainment tend to underestimate the very large gap between the skill levels of developing and developed countries' populations and that global economic convergence requires a closing of