



Results Call for Proposals Spring 2015

Next Call for Proposals: 30 October – 17 December 2015

Nicholas Spaul

Nicholas Spaul is a Senior Researcher at Stellenbosch University (South Africa), where he is also Co-principal investigator for the “Building evidence for policy making” project funded by the Zenex Foundation 2015 and project manager for a large research project for the South African Presidency funded by the European Union under the Programme to Support Pro-Poor Policy Development II (PSPPD 2).



Fellowship project:

Spaul’s project aims to identify the binding constraints to quality education for the poor in South Africa. The proposal addresses the question: How does one combine access and quality in education to provide contextual profiles for countries. Internationally there is now widespread recognition that the expansion of access to education in the developing world needs to be accompanied by improvements in education quality (learning). Consequently, many countries now participate in international testing programmes such as PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS, as well as regional testing programmes such as SACMEQ, PASEC and SERCE/TERCE. However, the way children are selected to participate in these studies requires them to be in school, since only students in schools can be sampled. This excludes children who have dropped out of school before a particular grade or age. While this is not a serious problem for OECD countries (which have relatively low dropout rates), it is especially problematic for developing countries with high dropout rates.

The research proposal will focus on 8 developing countries that participate in PISA; Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Indonesia, Mexico, Peru, Thailand & Turkey – and aims to combine measures of access (enrolment) and quality (learning). Using PISA data in conjunction with household survey data for each country the project will create a composite statistic of access-to-learning which covers both the in-school and out-of-school population of 15 year olds. This is possible by using imputation methods and conducting sensitivity analysis using different assumptions.

In the proposed work, there is a distinct focus on equity and the double-disadvantage faced by girls who are also from poor families. Unlike most administrative data, household surveys do collect information on socioeconomic status, typically assets and parental education. This allows for an explicit analysis of the poor in relation to both access & quality for these 8 countries.



Álvaro Borja Choi de Mendizábal

Álvaro Choi is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Public Economics at the University of Barcelona, from which he holds a PhD in Economics. He has participated in the evaluation of a number of educational policies and is currently leading a project funded by the Ramón Areces Foundation which aims to identify effective policies for enhancing educational performance in Spain. He has recently assessed the situation of Spanish Special Need Education students. His main research interests are in Economics of Education and the evaluation of public policies.



Fellowship project:

Choi's research proposal aims at better understanding the evolution of the gender gap in proficiency along the lifecycle. Combining data from PIRLS/TIMMS, PISA and PIAAC, in fact, it is possible to follow representative samples of the same birth cohorts over time, thus partly overcoming one of the biggest limitations of International Assessment Surveys, i.e. their cross-sectional nature. Alvaro's research has the potential to shed light on an important policy issue. A better understanding of gender differences in the process of skills formation, as well as the identification of possible cross-country differences in how the gender gap evolves as people age, is crucial in helping the design of policies able to tackle in effective ways current gender disparities in educational and labour market outcomes.

The project focuses on gender inequalities in the process of skills acquisition. It aims to measure the size of the gender gap in the acquisition of key skills over time and to understand its evolution from a comparative perspective. While the existence of gender gaps in the acquisition of different skills (mathematics, reading, etc.) is a well-known fact, much less is known about the evolution of this gap over time. This is closely linked to the lack of internationally comparable longitudinal data. We will tackle this limitation through the creation of a pseudo-panel using TIMSS/PIRLS, PISA and PIAAC data.

Understanding the dynamics of the gender gap is a critical issue in order to design effective policies for enhancing equality of educational opportunities. For instance, one should know if this gap is generated during early stages of people's life or, for example, during the secondary school level. It is also important to unveil if there are common patterns across countries. This issue is even more complex at adult ages as, for instance, recent research based on PIAAC shows a higher level of skills may raise labour market participation while, at the same time, participation in the labour market may increase the skills of workers. Therefore, this project is not only interested in describing the evolution of the gender gap in the acquisition of skills over time, but will also try to uncover the channels through which differences emerge. As a consequence, this project is divided into two parts. In the first part, we will provide evidence on the evolution of the gender gap between ages 10 and 20/30 for countries participating in a set of assessments. This part will focus on the role of the educational systems for explaining cross-country differences and will try to use these differences for understanding within-country trends. In the second part we will study the evolution of this same issue at adult ages. This will allow us to describe the evolution of the gender gap from ages 16 to 65, and to identify some of the channels which may explain it.



Fabián Barrera Pedemonte



Fabián Barrera Pedemonte is an Associate Researcher in the London Centre for Leadership in Learning at the UCL Institute of Education. He is completing a Ph.D. in Education at the Quantitative Social Sciences Department sponsored by the Chile's National Commission for Scientific and Technological Research. He holds a Master's degree in Educational Psychology and has more than ten years' experience developing research about teachers' professional development. Fabián has co-authored the England national report of the "Teaching and Learning International Survey" (TALIS 2013), whereas in Chile has evaluated strategies for teacher learning. His Ph.D. project focuses on the contribution of the quality of the professional development of teachers to school outcomes in the UK, the US, Japan and Finland, as measured in a number of international large-scale assessments. His research interests include teacher policies, cross-national comparisons and quantitative analysis for evidence-informed school system reform.

Fellowship project:

A number of policy documents produced by international organisations have remarked that initial teacher education is not sufficient to prepare teachers for all the challenges of their careers in the context of a global changing society. Thereby, countries have been encouraged to offer permanent opportunities of learning for their teachers on the assumption that as greater this provision, more positive the influence on educational outcomes. Nevertheless, recent research has demonstrated that not all teacher professional development (TPD) is effective, but some measurable dimensions of the quality of such experiences can explain positive effects in some contexts.

Barrera's project will use PISA 2012 and TALIS 2013 data to examine whether high-quality TPD relates to teaching practices and student achievement in the participant countries of these two assessments. High-quality TPD refers to a number of attributes of in-service teacher training activities that the specialised literature has identified as empirically associated with positive school outcomes –namely: content focus, active learning, collective participation, extended duration and coherence. However, as the benefits of these features have been so far only studied in the US and England, the question remains in relation to their association with teaching practices and student achievement in diverse countries. This investigation will provide valuable insights to assess which and to what extent the features of high-quality TPD are associated to national educational outcomes for each of the participant countries.