# The relationship between social accountability and transparency interventions and the delivery of educational services

## Zixin Xia*

Kang Chiao International School East China Campus, China

*Corresponding author: litax508599751@gmail.com

**Keywords:** Intervention, education, accountability

**Abstract:** This essay studies the impact of intervention on educational services. The results show that interventions can improve the efficiency of the provision of educational services under certain circumstances—especially the premise of setting good audience (beneficiaries) goals, implementing (geographical) areas and having strict control (on the variables). This paper divides intervention into two types: one is intervention that achieves high impact and has practical utility, and the other is intervention that does not cause significant effect.

## 1. Introduction

In developing countries, some governments have spent about 1 trillion dollars on education annually, which has allowed for rapid development and quality changes in education in the past 25 years (Glewwe and Muralidharan 3). However, there are still related education deficiencies in the world. Data in 2018 from the World Bank showed that only less than 50% of students in developing countries could master the four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing; compared with 86% of students in developed countries who were very proficient in applying these same skills ("Accountability in Education"). In this case, the World Bank proposed that one of the main reasons for poor educational performance is inefficiency in the delivery of education services ("The Three Dimensions of the Learning Crisis."). In order to better improve delivery of education services and accelerate the government's response to education issues, the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) proposed that the participation of the beneficiaries of education (children, their parents, and the general public) is very effective in changing education ("Accountability in Education"). The prerequisite for public participation is beneficiaries' understanding of relevant education. As a result, the term information transparency has been introduced to allow the public to assess relevant information in education. Given the interest in increasing accountability as regards to education delivery, how effective are these measures? As the hypothetical answer to this question, by evaluating the impact of accountability and transparent interventions on improving poor education service delivery, this essay will argue that the more efficient—having a specific target, good management of participators, and a suitable to publish the information—the intervention is, the higher the impact would be.

## 2. The interventions made high impact on the delivery of educational services

In 2008, Hastings and Weinstein performed natural and field experiments targeting lower-income families: they evaluated schools in the targeted area while sending the information on schools' testing results to the students' parents to see whether the information would influence parents 'decision on choosing schools (Hastings and Weinstein 1,2). The results proved that the more information parents received about schools, the easier it would be for them to choose schools with better performance. Such an information campaign-style intervention made an influential impact on public decisions, and improved accountability efficiency.

Similarly, another survey on report card research has also achieved great success. The investigator Andrabi and his teammates sent the children's school performance and recent achievements of the

school to the parents of the students, and observed the parents' responses to the report card during this period. A survey conducted after the change showed that after parents had a more comprehensive understanding of their children's schoolwork and school's performance, they paid more attention to their children's academic problems, and gave more frequent feedbacks to the school (Andrabi, et al.). It can be seen from the two investigations that the transparency of information is one of the main conditions for the public to make decisions by participating in solving education problems. This also helped the school to improve its performance.

According to the first research, to obtain a higher rate of enrollment, the school will improve its test scores on their education level, infrastructures, etc., so it can be chosen by the parents when they are comparing the different school's performance. For the second study, as report cards to parents will get more parents 'participation in students' performance and school policies, if parents are dissatisfied with the school's education level then they will likely cause the loss of the school's students and even damage its reputation. As a result, the school will respond to the parents by improving its educational performance. In this case, the delivery of educational services has been improved by the client power acting on the schools. However, the expansion of popular power means that there are more people who can influence decision-making. In this way, it is difficult for school administrators to face all opinions and give an answer that satisfies everyone, which increases the workload of school management. Consequently, it may slow down the provision of education-related services in some way as well. Considering both the positive and negative side of high impact made by the transparency of information intervention, the interventions use client power to make the managers of schools or related learning institutions be aware of the deficiencies in their systems, so ideally they can make relevant adjustments to their deficiencies and provide better education services. The public has many different suggestions that would affect the efficiency of the education department to make decisions and changes, since difficult for them to take relevant actions without the help of the public to correct their mistakes. Therefore, in general, information intervention is beneficial to the delivery of education services.

## 3. The interventions made low impact on the delivery of educational services

On the other hand, there are interventions that show a low impact on the individuals or the organizations. The researchers Migala and Urquiola conducted a Sistema Nacional de Evaluación del Desempeño de los Establecimientos Educativos Subvencionados (SNED) Program, which used "homogeneous groups" (that constructed by using geographical units) in comparable institutions as the survey subjects to determine effective schools (Mizala and Urquiola 3). This study started from schools with high-efficiency education work and determined that for these schools, the first choice for parents to choose a school (see related details in the second paragraph) does not have a particularly large impact or change on high performed schools. In other words, when the recipients of the information see a school with a higher level of education, they will choose this school as their priority selection since they believe that the students in this school are of high quality; but in reality, this does not mean that they will definitely send their children to the school. This means that due to the high performed schools originally had more effective education service delivery while they would receive fewer negative opinions, such information transparency interventions have no practical effect on them and are a redundant practice.

Another experiment which obtained similar results to that of Migala and Urquiola was done by Burgess et al. They published school performance tables in England and Wales to see if it could influence school's effectiveness; the relative data marked that "schools in the top quartile of the league tables show no effect" (Burgess, et al. 1) and the elimination of publication of students' grade tables would sharply reduce Welsh school's effectiveness (Burgess, et al. 4). Due to the target of this accountability was the students' parents as same as that of Hastings and Weinstein's experiment, it points out that parental involvement in choosing schools with better performance will affect some schools with poorer performance; different from information transparency, accountability explores the problem of managers if there is a poor performance, while information intervention is aimed at the

clients' power (Smith and Benavot, para 3). Therefore, the accountability intervention will make parents, who represent the power of clients in the society, pay more attention to education and try to find problems on themselves rather than consistently blame educational institutions, but this does not apply to all schools. As a result, even if the data in this experiment does not support that the transparency of educational information will have a great impact on the delivery of educational services, it shows the role and importance of accountability interventions.

In addition, another group of investigators, McMurren et al, provided online platforms for the public in Tanzania and the Philippines to open up teaching data in various schools, so that stakeholders have the opportunity to get the information they want (Read and Atinc 48). Unexpectedly, the results of this survey were not satisfactory. As the information was published on the Internet, it was difficult for them to locate and control the audience of this research, so in the end they did not obtain considerable data to prove that the access channels to provide information will allow stakeholders to participate more in educational activities. Another reason for failure is the choice of the release channel in the targeted country. The Internet penetration rate in these two countries is low, so fewer users will choose to go online to find school information, which is unfavorable to the results of the survey. It can be seen that the investigator did not conduct an in-depth investigation of the survey area, which is likely to lead to the failure of the study. Judging from the results of these two interventions, not all interventions are absolutely effective for all audiences. Although as mentioned above, the intervention has a great positive impact on education services at some times, but for some schools with high-quality performance, this impact has nothing to do with them. In addition, from the results of the second study, it can be seen that the lack of intervention pre-research and the lack of focus or concentration of the target audience of the intervention may eventually fail to achieve the goal.

## 4. Conclusion

Through the examples of information transparency interventions with different results showed above, the research question: "Do social accountability and transparency interventions improve the delivery of educational services?" does not have a certain yes or no answer. The information transparency interventions that have a greater impact on clients usually have abundant preliminary preparations, for instance, narrowing down the target audience of the investigation; through the participation of the clients in educational activities and their giving of opinions, relevant educational institutions can pay attention to problems and provide educational services more effectively. Similarly, not all interventions will have a positive and significant result or impact on the public. Different experimental subjects will have different results; for example, schools with high teaching quality and high efficiency of delivering educational services probably will not worry about the enrollment status of students, because they have already established a good reputation in the eyes of the masses, so information transparency and accountability interventions will not have a great impact on them.

As a result, intervention actions under well-prepared and efficient management and control will affect the efficiency of relevant institutions to provide educational services. On the contrary, they may only increase the collection of information for the beneficiary groups, and have no actual effect on certain educational institutions or the public.

## References

[1] "Accountability in Education: The Role of Citizens in Accelerating Learning." *Accountability in Education: The Role of Citizens in Accelerating Learning | Global Partnership for Social Accountability*, The Global Partnership for Social Accountability, 27 Feb. 2018, www.thegpsa.org/news/accountability-education-role-citizens-accelerating-learning.

[2] Andrabi, Tahir, et al. "Report Cards: The Impact of Providing School and Child Test Scores on Educational Markets." *SSRN*, 16 Dec. 2014, papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2538624.

[3] Burgess, Simon, et al. "A Natural Experiment in School Accountability: the Impact of School Performance Information on Pupil Progress and Sorting." *Bristol*, CMPO, 2010, www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/cmpo/migrated/documents/wp246.pdf.

[4] Glewwe, Paul, and Karthik Muralidharan. "Improving School Education Outcomes in Developing Countries: Evidence, Knowledge Gaps, and Policy Implications." *Punarjitroyc*, 25 Oct. 2015, punarjitroyc.weebly.com/uploads/4/6/3/3/46337267/glewwe_and_muralidharan_2015.pdf.

[5] Hastings, Justine S., and Jeffrey M. Weinstein. "Information, School Choice, and Academic Achievement: Evidence from Two Experiments*." Quarterly Journal of Economics, vol. 123, no. 4, 2008, pp. 1373–1414., doi:10.1162/qjec.2008.123.4.1373.

[6] Mizala, Alejandra, and Miguel Urquiola. "School Markets: The Impact of Information Approximating Schools' Effectiveness." *NBER*, 14 Nov. 2007, www.nber.org/papers/w13676.

[7] Read, Lindsay, and Tamar Manuelyan Atinc. "Information for Accountability: Transparency and Citizen Engagement for Improved Service Delivery in Education Systems." *Journal of International Cooperation in Education*, 2018, pp. 48–48., doi: https: //www. brookings. edu/research/information-for-accountability-transparency-and-citizen-engagement-for-improved-service-delivery-in-education-systems/.

[8] Smith, William C., and Aaron Benavot. "Improving Accountability in Education: the Importance of Structured Democratic Voice." *Asia Pacific Education Review*, Springer Netherlands, 27 May 2019, link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12564-019-09599-9.

[9] "The Three Dimensions of the Learning Crisis." *LEARNING to Realize Education's Promise*, World Band Group, 2018, pp. 4–4.