

Achievement gaps between public and private schools in developing educational systems

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Abstract

Achievement gaps between public and private schools have been widely studied in economics of education, mainly due to concerns for inequalities. The literature tends to show that self-selection of more affluent students in private schools is an important driver of these gaps, rather than quality of education itself. However, findings from developing educational systems remain limited. This research provides evidence from Arab and Latin American countries which took part in the 2018 and 2022 editions of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), using Oaxaca-Blinder decompositions that aim at investigating how achievement gaps between public and private schools changed between the pre- and the post-pandemic period. The results show that significant achievement gaps between public and private schools persist in both regions, and these are largely explained by differences in socioeconomic background. Moreover, public schools may be less effective in translating student background into academic success. The decomposition results also reveal that public school systems in these regions were inadequately prepared for pandemic-related disruptions. The findings provide policy recommendations aimed at improving the resilience of developing educational systems in facing unexpected disruptions, especially for public schools.