

Myth between educational resources and attainment

Re: "Education Ministry to scrap one laptop per child project", News, November 28.

The Education Ministry's decision to scrap the "one laptop per child" project may seem to some people like the right thing to do. Yet I would bet my very own laptop that there are more people - especially those on the receiving end - who are less than pleased with the ministry's change of heart. Surely every child deserves an equal distribution of educational resources regardless of their social background?

I would have no quarrel whatsoever if the main purpose of the "one laptop" policy is to increase the level of equity in child welfare for all. However, given that the budget is under the Education Ministry's supervision, my best guess is that such a populist policy was originally and primarily designed to give each child a better chance to achieve higher educational attainments at school.

At first glance, this does not seem like a crazy idea. There is substantial evidence, in US and European data, of a positive and strong correlation between educational attainment and the number of books (as well as the presence of a laptop) a child has access to. So, surely, by giving each child a laptop, we can definitely raise their IQ and subsequently their test scores?

Probably. But more probably not. After all, there is no clear evidence to date that the presence of a laptop in the house brings higher educational achievement; it says only that the two are correlated.

A more probable theory is that children who have a laptop at home are those whose parents are smart and well educated to begin with (and they pass on their genes and work ethic to their kids). Or perhaps they care more about education and about their children in general, which means they create an environment that encourages and rewards learning for their children. For these reasons, it is more likely that a laptop is less of a cause of intelligence than an indicator, and thus it may be more fruitful for the government to direct resources elsewhere that can guarantee a cause and effect outcome.

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