

World Policy Analysis

Compulsory Education in South Asia

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Abstract: *Compulsory education has become an essential component of robust state education systems. The purpose of this study was to analyze the compulsory education policies in South Asia and the relationship between compulsory education and national income inequality. Literature reviews on the relationship between compulsory education and income mobility, and compulsory education in South Asia. A study of each country's compulsory education policy from primary education to secondary education, a qualitative analysis of the Gini coefficient, poverty rate, GDP, and compulsory education. Results revealed that there is no clear correlation between compulsory education and income inequality. Authors speculate that compulsory education may have different impacts on different countries. The limitations of this study and the implications of these findings are discussed within.*

Introduction

With the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adoption, compulsory education became a necessary component of robust state education systems (Besche-Truthe, 2022). Since the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) members agreed to guarantee access to "free and compulsory primary education" in the Education for All Dakar Framework for Action (2000, 8), it has been difficult to envision a nation-state without compulsory education (Besche-Truthe, 2022).

However, in South Asia, 12.5 million primary-aged children and 16.5 million lower secondary-aged children are not enrolled in school, and more than 50% of children live in learning poverty—being unable to read and comprehend a basic text by the age of 10 (UNICEF South Asia, n.d.). Also, South Asia has the highest rate of youths worldwide who were not

enrolled in any type of education, employment, or training (NEET) (30 per cent) (UNICEF South Asia, n.d.).

Research Question

We are interested in exploring the value of mandatory education and how it impacts a country's development based on the facts provided above. Our research questions are as follows:

1. *What types of guarantees do South Asian countries provide for compulsory primary and secondary education?*
2. *Does compulsory education policies in South Asia nations contribute to decreasing national income inequality?*

Hypothesis

The impact of South Asia's policy of compulsory schooling on the reduction of income disparity is examined in this article. As a framework for our analysis, we discuss our findings in relation to the following hypothesis:

Compulsory education policies in South Asia have contribution to decreasing national income inequality.

Importance

In general, the overall expected effect of compulsory education reform is to raise the educational level of those children who are most likely to leave school early (Allison Academy, 2022, August 3). If looking at the national level, compulsory education will also increase the average educational level of the population and, to a certain extent, the equity of education

(Allison Academy, 2022, August 3). In case, the benefits of compulsory education are not only for the children but also for society and the whole country.

For one thing, compulsory education can provide minimum conditions for children to live independently in the future (Harmon, C. P., 2017, March 28). Besides, children will also have the experience of interacting with their peers through compulsory education and form basic social views and values (Harmon, C. P., 2017, March 28). There is evidence for considerable protective benefits of educational attainment on mental health using data from the China Family Panel Studies (Tianheng Wang, 2022). On the other hand, compulsory education can promote the country's development and help it modernize its way of life (Harmon, C. P., 2017, March 28). There is evidence that compulsory education policies can have intergenerational impacts and are effective in helping to address persistent poverty across generations (Allison Academy, 2022, August 3). In addition, compulsory education has indirect social benefits, including lower crime rates and improved mental health outcomes (Allison Academy, 2022, August 3).

Literature Review

Income Inequality and Education

The health and well-being of individuals and families can be influenced by income, which varies depending on social characteristics, including sex, age, and race or ethnicity (Carter & Howard, 2020). The extreme degree of income inequality on a global scale is demonstrated by the fact that the wealthiest 10% of people currently earn 52% of all income. In comparison, the bottom 50% only receive 8.5 percent, the same as in the early 20th century. (Stanley, 2022). Low levels of education, sanitation, nutrition, and medical care are brought on by poverty, high rates

of child labor and exploitation, and infant and child mortality (Carter & Howard, 2020). At the same time, low levels of education and these conditions contribute to fresh cycles of poverty.

Whether expanding education or increasing public spending on education can reduce economic inequality and, by extension, promote intergenerational mobility by raising incomes is still controversial.

By building a four-period overlapping-generation model, an article published in the journal "China Economic Review" examines the effects of innate ability, compulsory education (grades 1-9), and non-compulsory education (grades 10–12 and higher education) on inequality and intergenerational mobility of income. They discovered that the causes of economic inequality and intergenerational income mobility are explained mainly by natural talent and parental support for early education (Yang & Qiu, 2016). Additionally, the analysis demonstrates that schooling enhances people's cognitive abilities and benefits their self-reported income and social position (Tianheng Wang, 2022).

However, some studies take the opposite referenceable comments. For example, "free compulsory education significantly reduces the incidence of child labor for boys but has no significant effect on the likelihood of child labor for girls" (Tang, C., Zhao, L. & Zhao, Z. ,2022). Thus, free compulsory education reform may lead parents to reallocate resources toward boys within a household, potentially widening the gender gap in human capital investment (Tang, C., Zhao, L. & Zhao, Z. ,2022). Moreover, there is also an opinion that no proof shows that students who acquire more education due to changes in regulations requiring compulsory attendance will benefit, particularly in terms of pay (Stephens, Melvin Jr., and Dou-Yan Yang, 2014). Since the research by Yang and Qiu is based in China, and the one by Stephens is based in the United

States, whether compulsory education has a different impact on different countries is worth exploring.

Compulsory Education in South Asia

South Asia has grown economically quickly and enormously since the early 1990s. Declining poverty rates and significant advancements in human development are examples of this expansion (Dreze and Sen, 2013). This has made the political climate favorable for implementing EFA goals and policies (Bajaj, M. and Kidwai, H., 2016).

Even though it only applied to basic education, Bangladesh's Compulsory Primary Education Act of 1990 established the Right to Education (Bajaj, M. and Kidwai, H., 2016). Since then, the nation has significantly improved its efforts to increase school enrollment, and the gross enrolment percentage in primary schools rose from 71% in 1980 to almost 100% in 2004 (Bajaj, M. and Kidwai, H., 2016).

Free and compulsory education was guaranteed by Article 25A of Pakistan's 18th Constitutional Amendment, which was passed in 2010, although no legal structures or redress procedures have yet been created (Idara-e-Taaleem-o-Aagahi 2011). A local initiative to change government policy has made strategies and organized a petition with more than a million signatures under the leadership of Idara-e-Taaleem-o-Aagahi (ITA), one of Pakistan's top educational organizations.

Afghans are situated as a beneficiary of substantial global funding for education. In order to achieve EFA goals by 2020, the Education Ministry of Afghan is collaborating with some international organizations closely (Bajaj, M., and Kidwai, H., 2016). “Thanks in part to USAID,

student enrollment grew from 900,000 male students in 2001 to more than 9.5 million students, 39 percent of whom are girls, in 2020.” (U.S. Agency for International Development, 2022). However, education in Afghanistan will take a hit in 2021. Along with unthinkable human sacrifices, since the Taliban took power in August 2021, the crisis has the potential to undo a lot of the development advancements gained during those 20 years (UNESCO, 2022). The right of Afghan children and young people to education has been severely impacted. 1.1 million secondary girls have been barred from attending secondary school until further notice since 23 March 2022 (UNESCO, 2022). Additionally, the current crisis hurts young women enrolled in higher education (UNESCO, 2022).

Due to its nearly universal literacy rate (92%), high gross primary enrollments (99%), and regional record for the highest mean years of schooling. "Sri Lanka is the only country in South Asia to be on par with countries with high human development in education (9.3 years), as shown in the Table 11.1 (see Appendix table 1)." (Bajaj, M. and Kidwai, H., 2016).

While political shifts and unrest have affected the availability of education and made the mass education history of Nepal much shorter, it has still made significant progress in increasing access (Bajaj, M. and Kidwai, H., 2016). Nevertheless, the unaddressed diversity of Nepal's caste, language, gender, class, and, more recently, political affiliation remains a significant factor preventing large-scale schooling expansion (Bajaj, M. and Kidwai, H., 2016).

Bhutan has advanced the goal of ensuring universal access to basic education. A report showed that the net primary enrollment ratio in 2012 was raised from 62% to 96% from 2000 to 2012 (Royal Government of Bhutan 2012, 2013).

Another small country example in South Asia that has had recent successes in expanding primary education is the Maldives. "The Maldives, with near-universal rates of access, has sought to address the challenge of improving the quality of education."(Bajaj, M. and Kidwai, H., 2016).

Analysis Methods

Compulsory education is examined on the policy level in South Asia nations to find out what types of guarantees do South Asian countries provide for compulsory primary and secondary education. This data is accessed from the World Policy Analysis Center. We focused on the following inquiries:

- 1) Is compulsory schooling guaranteed for primary and secondary education?
- 2) Is tuition-free schooling guaranteed for primary and secondary education?

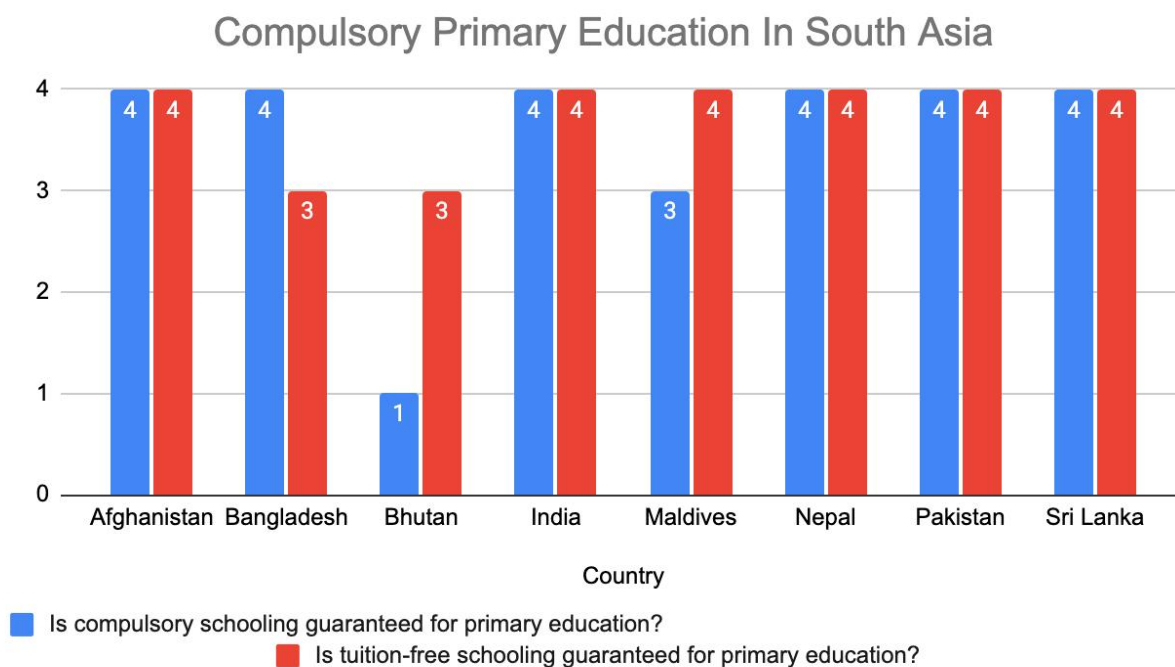
This highlights the status of policies and underdeveloped nations in the region in terms of primary and secondary education, and services on a policy level.

Income disparity is examined through the most recent data sets on the Gini coefficient and poverty rate from World Bank. In order to discover within-region patterns and determine if longer compulsory schooling is associated with better overall national outcomes in these indicators, the authors created scatterplots using Stata to study the relationships between compulsory education policy and these interrelated outcomes in South Asia.

Findings

Policy Findings

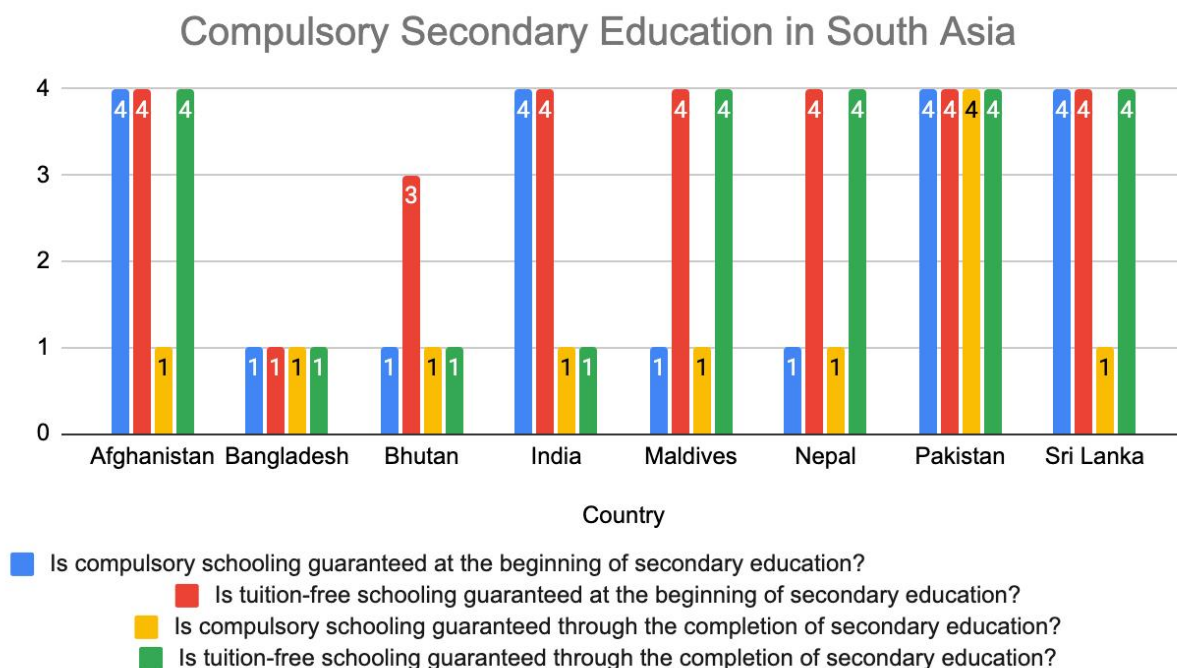
According to the World Policy Analysis Center, the majority of South Asian nations have legal or constitutional provisions requiring all children to attend elementary school. Due to the fact that this guarantee is enshrined in the nation's laws or constitution, it carries a higher degree of assurance. Maldives has policy guarantees for elementary school compulsory education, which is a non-legislative guarantee and can be more precarious and reversible than legislative or constitutional ones. Bhutan has no warrant for elementary mandatory school education. In terms of tuition-free schooling at the elementary school level, South Asian countries have all achieved tuition-free coverage for primary education. Most of them use legislative and or constitutional guarantees. It is worth noting that two countries, Bangladesh and Bhutan, use policy guarantees.



Variable Values: 1: No guarantee 2: Subject to progressive realization 3: Policy guaranteed 4: Legislative or constitutional guarantee.

Secondly, about half countries in South Asia, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, have compulsory schooling guaranteed at the beginning of secondary education. These four countries all have legislative or constitutional guarantees. However, the other three countries, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal have no proof of secondary education beginning. In addition, Bhutan has a policy guarantee for tuition-free schooling at the beginning of secondary education, and Bangladesh has no policy guarantee for tuition-free. Other than that, all other countries have legislative or constitutional guarantees.

Furthermore, only Pakistan has legislative or constitutional guarantees for completing secondary education, while other countries have no compulsory warranty. Afghanistan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka all have legislative or constitutional guarantees for tuition-free schooling through the completion of secondary education. Bangladesh, Bhutan, and India have no tuition-free warranty for completing secondary education.



Variable Values: 1: No guarantee 2: Subject to progressive realization 3: Policy guaranteed 4: Legislative or constitutional guarantee.

Relationship Finding

The most recent year's Gini coefficient and poverty rate data were used to produce scatterplots that examined the relationship between income inequality and compulsory education policies. There is no clear pattern on the scatterplots (see Appendix table 2a-c). However, it is worth noting that Pakistan, as the only country with guaranteed compulsory education through primary education and the completion of secondary education, has the lowest percentage of the Gini coefficient. Bhutan, on the other hand, does not have a guarantee for compulsory education from primary education to secondary education and has the highest percentage of the Gini coefficient. Bangladesh and Nepal have very similar Gini coefficient percentages, which are in the middle of the South Asia countries. Primary education is guaranteed by legislation or the constitution in both countries, while secondary education is not. Thus, it seems that compulsory education may have an impact on some countries.

Surprisingly, the poverty rate and Gini coefficient in the Maldives are very low. According to World Policy Analysis data, the Maldives only has a policy guarantee for primary education and no policy guarantee for secondary education. To understand whether the relationships are related to other aspects, such as a country's GDP in general, the authors created another set of scatterplots where GDP is on the X-axis (see Appendix table 3a-c). Once more, no discernible pattern can be seen in these charts. One observation is that Maldives has the highest GDP out of South Asia countries, which may explain the low Gini coefficient and poverty rate. Future research could be done to determine the relationship between income inequality and GDP

or other factors that contributes to Maldives' income inequality. Therefore, the authors think compulsory education may have a different extent of impact on different countries.

Limitations

We recognize that there are several limitations to this research. Our analysis relies on the Gini Coefficient and Poverty Rate data from World Bank. However, the data for Afghanistan was missing in Gini Coefficient and Poverty Rate. As a result, we dropped Afghanistan to analyze relationship findings, which makes our analysis of the second research question not comprehensive enough.

Additionally, we chose the most recent data for each country as different years of data are available. Since we matched the GDP years to the results, our findings do not accurately reflect the current state of affairs. Moreover, due to the fact that there are not enough data points to answer using regression, we looked at descriptive trends instead.

Furthermore, we idealistically link the soundness of compulsory education policies to the actual educational attainment of students. Nonetheless, a variety of additional circumstances, including child labor and child marriage, affect how many kids complete their compulsory schooling. These could have an impact on the analysis result about income disparity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there has not been a convincing link between compulsory education policy and income inequality. We recognize that other factors affect income disparity, such as the quality of education and the teacher resources available. Compulsory education may have a distinct influence on each country. In order to perform regression and take other factors into account, as we previously stated, we intend to acquire more data on the other components in

future research. On the other hand, we believe compulsory schooling has some effect on reducing economic inequality based on data from Pakistan and Bhutan.

We have several recommendations for nations like Bhutan and Sri Lanka, which have a high Gini coefficient. First, raise the standard of instruction. According to UNICEF's assessment of the Maldives' educational system, the quality of education is a massive issue throughout the Maldives, and many teenagers lack access to higher secondary education (UNICEF, n.d.). That is something we think many South Asian nations have in common. Second, fill in the gaps and offer national-level solutions. UNICEF should assist these nations in conducting extensive evaluations of their educational curricula, showcasing their strong points and offering answers to their problems. Third, for countries too poor to guarantee compulsory education, we recommend that international organizations and developed countries reach out to help their economies develop to a basic level that can afford compulsory education to at least the primary extent.

Appendix

Table 1

Table 11.1 Education in South Asia

| | <i>Afghanistan</i> | <i>Bangladesh</i> | <i>Bhutan</i> | <i>India</i> | <i>Maldives</i> | <i>Nepal</i> | <i>Pakistan</i> | <i>Sri Lanka</i> |
|--|---------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Population (millions) 2014 | 31.3 | 158.5 | 0.77 | 1267.4 | 0.35 | 28.1 | 185.1 | 20.70 |
| Urbanized population (%), 2014 | 26 | 34 | 38 | 32 | 44 | 18 | 38 | 18 |
| Pop. below poverty line of US\$1.25/day (%), 2006–2012 | – | 43.3 | 2.4 | 23.6 | – | 23.7 | 12.7 | 7 |
| Human Development Index category, 2014 | Low | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Low | Low | High |
| Total adult literacy rate (%) 2007–2011, male/female | 39.5/12.5 | 61/52 | 65/38.7 (2005) | 66/60 | 98.4/98.4 | 73/48 | 69/40 | 93/90 |
| Mean years of schooling, 2014 | 3.21 | 5.07 | 2.3 | 4.43 | 5.84 | 3.24 | 4.73 | 10.8 |
| Primary gross enrolment ratio (%) 2008–2012, male/female | 114/81 | 98/106 (2004) | 110/112 | 116/116 | 111/107 | – | 104/85 | 99/99 |
| Primary completion ratio (%), 2009/2013, male/female | 48/19 | 70/80 | 96/101 | 96/97 | 111/103 | 97/107 | 79/67 | 98/97 |
| Secondary gross enrolment ratio (%) 2008–2011, male/female | 60/30 | 48/55 | 69/71 | 66/60 | 71/75 (2005) | 46/41 | 40/30 | 90/100 |
| Government spending on education as a % of GDP, 2011–2013 | 4.6 | 2.2 | 4.7 | 3.3 | 7.2 | 4.1 | 2.2 | 2.0 |
| Constitutional guarantees for the right to free and compulsory education | Partial guarantee | Partial guarantee | Partial guarantee | Full guarantee | Partial guarantee | Partial guarantee | Partial guarantee | Full guarantee |
| Constitutional status of the right to free and compulsory education ⁴ | Article ⁵ since 2003 | Act since 1990 ⁶ (primary only) | Article ⁷ since 2007 | Act since 2009 ⁸ | Article ⁹ since 2008 | Article ¹⁰ since 2007 | Article ¹¹ amended in 2010 | Act since 1945 ¹² |

Source: Right to Education Project 2013; UNDP 2015a; 2015b; UNICEF 2013; World Bank 2015.

Table 2a

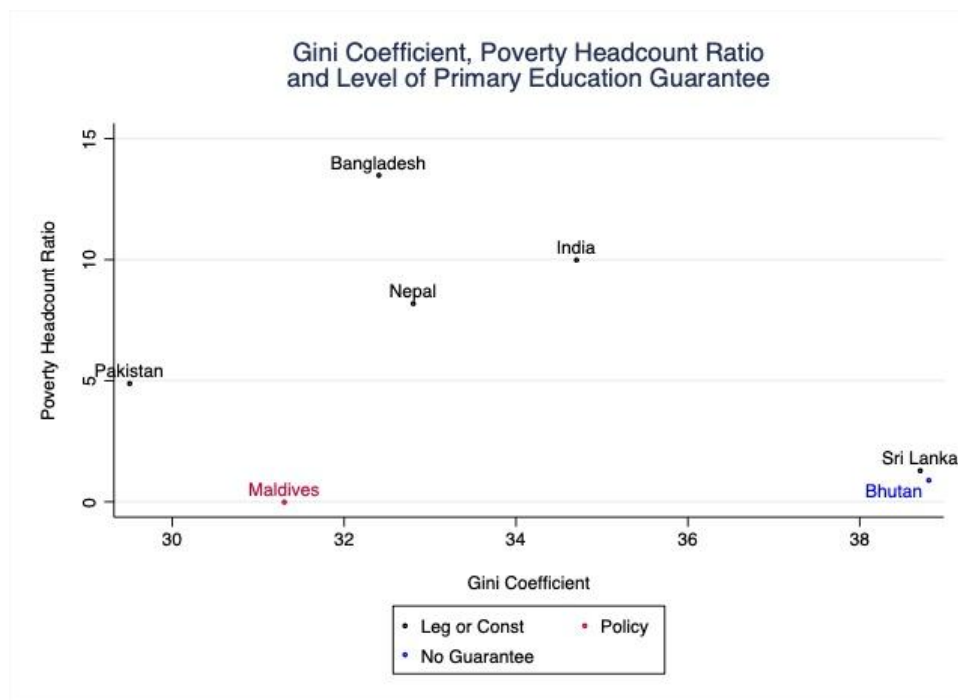


Table 2b

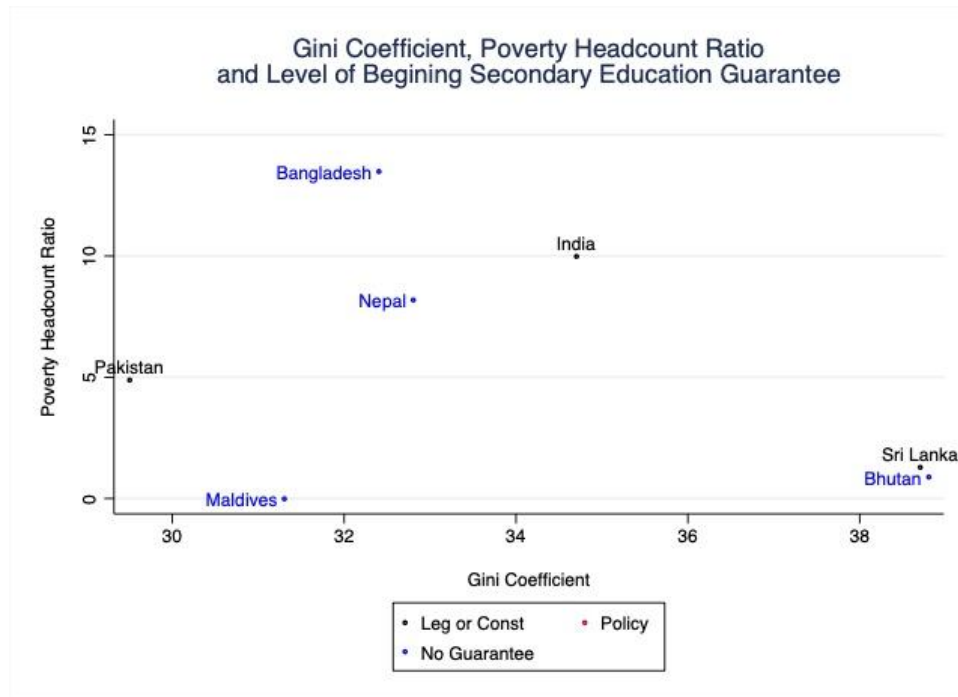


Table 2c

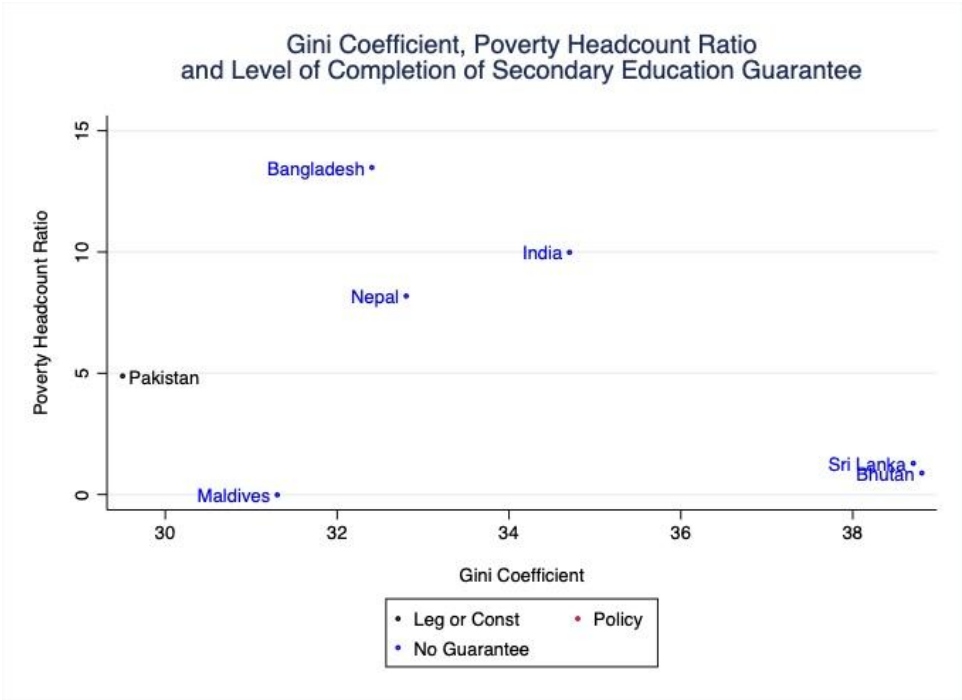


Table 3a

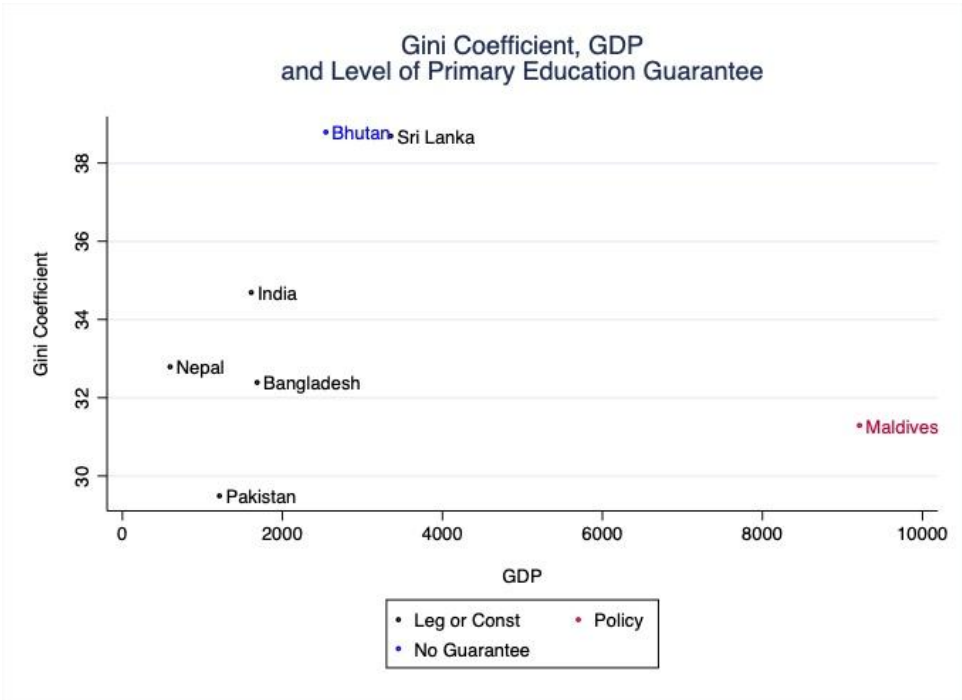


Table 3b

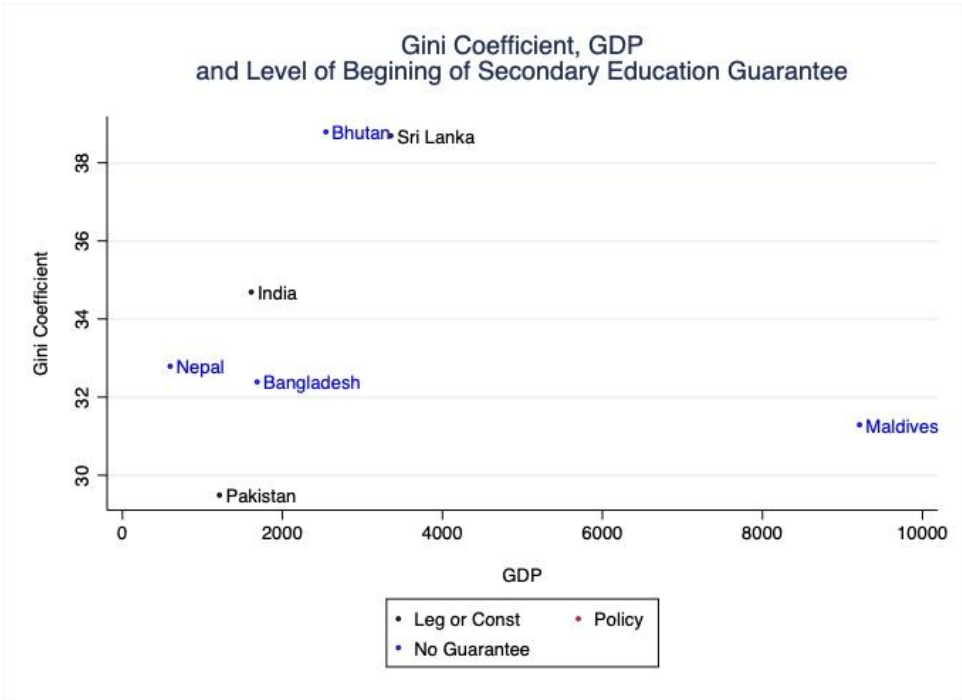
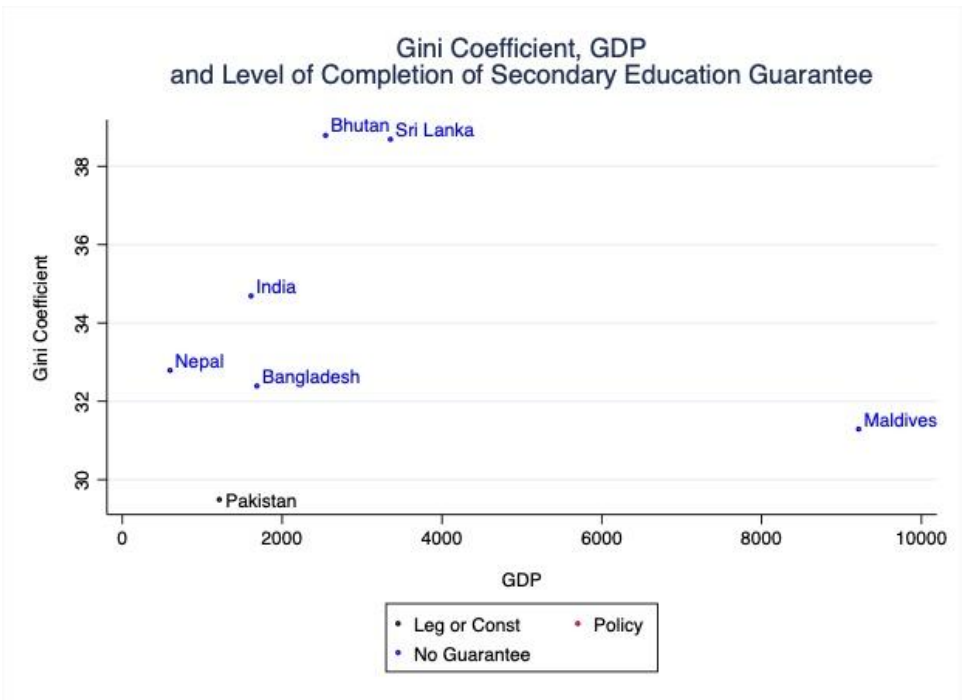


Table 3c



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