

Study reveals long-term detrimental education effects of Spanish and French colonial systems

February 1 2016, by Andy Dunne



School children in Huacaraico, Peru - one of the countries where Dr Feldmann's study finds the legacy of colonial education continues to impact outcomes for young people.

Even in the recent past, the colonial legacy has had a large negative impact on education in the former colonies of both Spain and France, according to a new study out this week from our Department of Economics.

The research, published in the prestigious journal *Kyklos*, reports that, in Spain's former colonies, the negative impact has been particularly large. By contrast, Britain's colonial education has not adversely affected schooling in its former colonies, the study found.

The study, which statistically controls for other determinants of

schooling, is the first to cover a large number of ex-colonies. Significantly it is also the first to cover former Spanish colonies.

It includes 17 former Spanish colonies, 23 former French colonies and 36 former British colonies.

Reduction in secondary school enrolment

"In the former Spanish colonies, during the 1972-2012 period the colonial legacy has reduced the secondary school enrolment rate by 17 percentage points", explains lead researcher, Dr Horst Feldmann, from the Department.

"In the former French colonies, the reduction has been 10 percentage points. Additionally, in both groups of countries, adults have attained 1.6 fewer years of schooling over the same period.

"The detrimental effects on females have been even larger, both in former Spanish and former French colonies", he said.

Understanding the differences

Dr Feldmann explained: "The results for the former Spanish colonies are especially remarkable, given that Spain's colonial rule ended almost two centuries ago.

"The reason for the negative effects is that many characteristics of Spanish colonial education have persisted long after independence. Specifically, Spanish remained the sole, or at least the dominant language of instruction, and educational provision in rural areas as well as for girls and the poor has remained very limited," he added.

"The large persistent effects in former French colonies are remarkable too, as most of these countries became independent more than 50 years ago. Here, most features limiting education have persisted after independence as well.

"These include a high degree of centralisation and government control, a very limited scope for non-governmental organisations to provide education, a neglect of local conditions and parents' preferences, and the selectivity and elitist nature of the system, which disadvantaged girls in particular. Also, most teaching continued to be in French."

Explaining colonial education under British rule

"In Britain's former [colonies](#), many features of its colonial education have persisted too, but these have been mostly benign. Thus it is unsurprising that we did not find negative effects here", said Dr Feldmann.

"In these countries, there has long been a high degree of autonomy of schools and teachers, educational provision has been relatively well adapted to parents' preferences and local practices, voluntary organisations have been subsidised and granted a wide scope to engage and compete, and the education of girls has been established early on. Furthermore, instruction has always been in the local vernacular in the first grades, enabling practically all native children to enter school."

More information: Horst Feldmann. The Long Shadows of Spanish and French Colonial Education, *Kyklos* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/kykl.12102](#)

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