

**3ie-IFPRI Joint Seminar: Assessing the Impacts of Mais Educação on Educational Outcomes: Evidence between 2007 and 2011**  
**12/9/2015**

What happens when null impact evaluation findings come face to face with an intervention planned for continued expansion? [Rita Almeida](#), a Labor Market Economist at the World Bank, helped answer this question when presenting her paper “Assessing the Impacts of Mais Educação on Educational Outcomes: Evidence between 2007 and 2011” at the [3ie-IFPRI joint seminar series](#) in Washington, DC on December 9, 2015. This co-authored work, with Antônio Bresolin, Bruna Borges, Karen Mendes, and Naercio Menezes-Filho, evaluates the extension of Brazilian public school hours, for grades 1<sup>st</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup>, to at least 7 hours per day. Almeida and her co-authors evaluate the impact of *Mais Educação* on the educational outcomes of most interest to the Government of Brazil: Portuguese and Mathematics test scores, and dropout rates.

The Government of Brazil designed *Mais Educação*, a voluntary program for both schools and students, to expand the school day by adding up to 6 activities, including mandatory pedagogical support. The researchers analyzed panel data of municipal characteristics, an extensive existing administrative dataset, schools censuses and student assessments covering 2007- 2011. Using school level, propensity score matched, treatment and control groups, their difference-in-difference estimation strategy compares the control and treated groups before and after program implementation.

The researchers do not find program impacts on school dropout rates and Portuguese test scores, and they actually discover negative impacts on students’ mathematics test scores. To better understand the results, the researchers conducted subnational case studies to illustrate some program implementation challenges. Almeida presented anecdotal evidence for the null results, from unpaid volunteers “teaching” the additional school sessions to limited training guidelines provided by the program implementers.

Although Almeida and her colleagues do not find impacts on academic outcomes or dropout rates, the Ministry of Education is committed to expanding the program nationwide. The Government of Brazil believes the program improves students’ cognitive as well as non-cognitive development, especially as it targets children from vulnerable socioeconomic backgrounds. Almeida suggests future evaluations should focus on non-cognitive outcomes, to better understand alternative potential gains from program participation.

[Samuel Berlinski](#), Research Economist at the Inter-American Development Bank, served as the discussant for this seminar. Berlinski’s mainly argued that, given the design of the program and the challenges of educational quality in Latin America, it was not surprising that the program did not record positive effects. He suggested the intervention refocus on increasing quality rather than expanding school hours. Almeida concurred with Berlinski’s concerns about quality of education. Nevertheless, she suggested that due to the intervention expansion, researchers should work on ways to improve the program. The seminar participants had a number of questions, ranging from data phishing concerns to missing intermediate steps in the intervention’s theory of change. Almeida agreed that the impact evaluation should expand on the intervention’s causal chain.