

Comments on Ricardo Estrada's
"Rules versus Discretion: Teacher
Hiring and Rent Extraction"

By Miguel Jaramillo

GRADE

General comments

- Nice paper on a very relevant topic: identifying quality teachers.
- Comparison of two procedures in teacher hiring:
 - Committees with participation of teacher union representatives
 - A standardized-test
- Suspicion of agency problems related to teacher union participation (large role for discretion) versus a more objective evaluation.

Methods

- Able use of diff-in diff techniques, given self-selection into the study sample.
- Different robustness tests.
- Different specifications: fixed effects, matching (Abadie, 2005).
- However, data are not the best to test the hypothesis: approach is quite indirect.

Results

- No effects of a newly hired test teacher versus a newly hired discretionary teacher on: enrollment and student test-scores, for the full sample.
- Effects on cheating: test teachers are associated with lower cheating rates.
- For a restricted sample, non-cheating schools, significant positive effects on test-scores.

Specific comments

- Given features of the data, estimates may be lower bound
 - Test results on the very same year that teachers were hired.
 - Tests are on 9th grade students: they have already been educated by discretionarily hired teachers for 8 years at least.
 - Allocation of test teachers to 9th grade? No info on sorting of teachers into classrooms.
- So, no surprise there are difficulties in identifying effects.
- Also, could not schools receive both test and non-test teachers.

Specific comments, 2

- Cheating an outcome variable: an indicator of teacher quality?
- No observable determinants of cheating schools. History only predictor.
 - Need to provide greater support for this idea (literature, conceptual discussion).
 - Even though teachers do not supervise their own classrooms, their colleagues do...
- Also, particular sample of schools: telesecundaria. External validity?

Other comments

- Control schools have more classrooms, so 1-2 teacher effects may be more limited.
- Treated schools are in poorer areas: ¿are there any other concurrent interventions that may interact with effects?
- Less poor schools have a greater share of indigenous students? Surprising for someone from Peru.
 - Different mix of indigenous popin different schools.

Finally, ...

- Restricting sample to non-cheater schools may have other selection implications.