

Editorial

The first article in this issue, by Matthew Carroll and Filio Constantinou, is another contribution to the large amount of research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, as perceived by teachers. It is particularly noteworthy in its global coverage, including teachers from 38 countries. The findings about the perceived amount of “learning loss” are similar to those obtained from more quantitative studies based on assessment results, but teachers’ comments about what was “lost” provide an opportunity to explore which skills were most affected and highlight the importance of variability in the extent of loss.

Our second article, by Joanna Williamson and Tom Benton, is more technical but right at the heart of assessment: how to maintain or link standards from one version of a test or exam to another. Making use of pairs of assessments that differed only in the “cover sheet” but were otherwise identical, they evaluated different statistical methods of linking the mark scales in the unusual condition where we happen to know the “right answer”. The results were quite sobering but not unexpected – no single method was consistently better, and all methods could offer useful information but also could lead to incorrect conclusions about relative difficulty.

Our third article, by Chris Jellis, is an interesting exploration of a large data set from Cambridge CEM’s BASE assessment. It shows what we can learn from assessment of very young learners just starting primary school – both what they can do when they arrive at school and what progress they make in their first year in a variety of key areas such as word and number recognition, and vocabulary.

Our fourth article, by Martin Johnson, reflects on the concept of “recovery curricula” developed in response to educational disruption. This is an area that Cambridge had been involved with prior to the pandemic, but obviously has now become particularly salient. The article considers how recovery curricula have been defined in the research literature and notes the lack of evidence (so far) for the effectiveness of any particular examples of where a recovery curriculum has been implemented.

The final article, by Joanna Williamson and me, is a bit of a departure from our usual fare. We investigated whether there are any systematic differences in the exam results of groups of students with different categories of surname and found a small effect in line with our hypothesis: average grades of candidates with “occupational” surnames were slightly lower than those in other categories. The article notes some possible explanations that have been proposed in the research literature (for other surname-related differences) but concludes that these are highly complex matters where findings should be interpreted with caution.

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