Globalization and Human Capital Investment: Export Composition Drives Educational Attainment

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Abstract

Human capital is among the most important drivers of long-run economic growth, but its macroeconomic determinants are still not well understood. This paper demonstrates the importance of a key demand-side driver of education, using exogenously-driven changes in the composition of a country’s exports as a lens to study how shifting patterns of production influence subsequent educational attainment. Using a panel of 102 countries and 45 years, we find that growth in less skill-intensive exports depresses average educational attainment while growth in skill-intensive exports increases schooling. These results provide insight into which types of sectoral growth are most beneficial for long-run human capital formation and suggest that trade liberalization could exacerbate initial differences in factor endowments across countries.

Keywords: Exports; Education; Human Capital; Skill-Intensity

JEL Codes: F14; F16; J24

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