

Abstract:

That teachers are increasingly being drawn from the lower part of the ability distribution has been documented for several countries. If this is a cause for concern crucially depends on how these abilities affect student performance; a relation yet to be fully appreciated. In this paper, we directly relate detailed information on cognitive abilities and non-cognitive leadership ability from military draft records in Sweden to teacher performance. Using a unique database matching individual teachers to individual students, we find that teachers' leadership abilities have a positive effect on student performance, while no such average effect can be found for teachers' cognitive abilities. Leadership ability is particularly important for lower achieving students, while the reverse holds for cognitive abilities. In fact, while high-performing students benefit from high-cognitive teachers, being matched to such a teacher can even be detrimental lower performing ones.