

The causal effect of financial education

Tim Kaiser, Annamaria Lusardi, Lukas Menkhoff, and Carly Urban

Abstract

We study the recent and growing literature on the causal effect of financial education programs in a meta-analysis of 65 randomized field experiments with a total sample size of over 100,000 individuals. The evidence shows that financial education programs have, on average, significant causal treatment effects on financial knowledge and downstream financial behavior. Treatment effects are economically meaningful in size and similar to those realized by educational interventions in other domains. These results are robust irrespective of the meta-analytic method used, and even when accounting for potential publication selection bias in the literature. The article concludes with a discussion of heterogeneity in observed treatment effects and the external validity of the findings.

JEL-Classification: D14 (personal finance), I21 (analysis of education)

Keywords: financial literacy, financial behavior, RCT, meta-analysis

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Tim Kaiser, University of Koblenz-Landau and German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin), 10108 Berlin, Germany; kaiser@uni-landau.de

Annamaria Lusardi (corresponding author), The George Washington University School of Business and NBER, Washington, DC 20052, USA; alusardi@gwu.edu

Lukas Menkhoff, Humboldt-University of Berlin and German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin), 10108 Berlin, Germany; lmenkhoff@diw.de

Carly Urban, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT 59717, USA; carly.urban@montana.edu