Faculty of Education
CUHK 中大教育

Department of Educational Psychology
教育心理學系

Departmental Seminar

Foundational Skills for Learning in the Majority World: Curiosity-driven Behaviors in Nepali Classrooms

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PhD Student, Harvard Graduate School of Education

SPEAKER

Kenji Kitamura is a PhD student at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, concentrating in Human Development, Learning, and Teaching. His research focuses on identifying early childhood skills and behaviors that drive positive learning and developmental outcomes, as well as designing interventions to foster these foundational capacities. Methodologically, he specializes in applying causal inference methods to rigorously study functions of early skills and behaviors. Kenji primarily works within low- and middle-income country contexts, with the majority of his current projects based in Nepal.

ABSTRACT

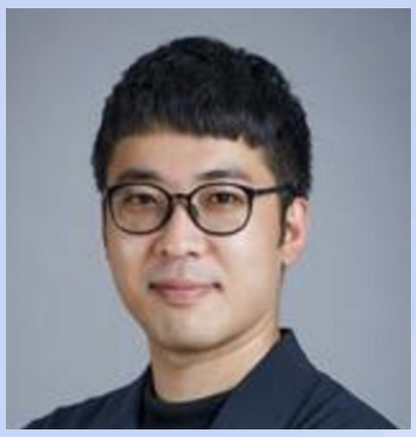
Although developmental sciences have theorized that competencies such as curiosity are foundational to children's academic success, evidence is mixed as to whether educational interventions targeting these competencies actually produce durable impacts on learning outcomes.

In this seminar, I will present two papers that investigate whether and how early curiosity-driven behaviors are foundational to children's learning outcomes in Nepal, using a mixed-methods approach.

The first study employs video-cued ethnography to identify classroom behaviors in preschool and Grade 1 students that parents and teachers associate with curiosity. The findings expand the traditional scope of curiosity-driven behaviors in Western literature, which has focused on independent exploration and proactive information-seeking (e.g., question-asking), to include attentive information-seeking (e.g., focused listening). This study also illuminates how parents and teachers perceive and react to these behaviors, alongside the sociocultural and institutional factors shaping them.

To test whether these behaviors causally affect learning outcomes, the second study applies an econometric quasi-experimental method (instrumental variable (IV) estimation) to data from a randomized classroom experiment. This innovative methodological approach bridges the gap between internal (causal) validity and real-world ecological validity.

Results indicate that curiosity-driven behaviors causally improve certain forms of knowledge but not others. Substantively, these findings provide empirical guidance for global educational reforms by revealing which learning outcomes these curiosity-driven behaviors support. Methodologically, this work offers a framework for generating disciplined causal estimates of how different skills affect learning when direct manipulation of these constructs is difficult.



Date:
16 June 2026 (Tue)

Time:
10:30 am - 11:30 am

Venue:
Room G6,
Ho Tim Building, CUHK

Language: English

Deadline:
15 June 2026

All are welcome

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Online Registration:
https://cloud.itsc.cuhk.edu.hk/webform/view.php?id=13734023