

Teachers and School Quality

Some Policy Pointers from Rural Punjab

October 2011

- **Monazza Aslam**
Institute of Education, University of London
- **Baela Raza Jamil**
Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi ITA/centre for education and consciousness
- **Shenila Rawal**
Institute of Education, University of London

Context

It is now universally recognised that variations in teacher effectiveness are important determinants of differences in school quality (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2011). Educational leaders and policy makers in developing countries acknowledge that material and social factors are not the only and perhaps not the most important deterrents to their countries' inability to meet educational targets. Research now confirms that improving weak teaching may be the most effective means of raising school quality across the developing world (Glewwe and Kremer, 2006, p. 995). The benefits of improved student learning through better teacher quality are expected to translate into economic gains for the country as a whole.

While Pakistan has made significant progress in moving towards the goal of universal primary education, there is much heterogeneity within the country despite the fact that great strides have been made in increasing educational access. However, while completed *years* of schooling are important in determining worker productivity and labour market and life outcomes, there is now almost universal

agreement that what is learnt in school matters as much as, if not more than, the years of schooling acquired.

This policy brief draws on a unique dataset that helps us understand the quality of schooling as measured by student achievement rather than the quantity of schooling attained. Even more importantly, this dataset allows us to link students' learning with the characteristics and the competencies of the teachers that teach them. The SchoolTELLS study is unique in its attempt to evaluate teachers' *ability* to teach in Punjab, Pakistan.

The mini SchoolTELLS Pakistan survey was undertaken in April- May 2011 with World Bank funding. It covered three districts of Faisalabad, Mianwali & Rahim Yar Khan, from the province of Punjab. The project covered twenty villages in each of the three districts and two schools were selected from each village, comprising a total sample of 120 schools (government 111 and private 09). The main purpose of this research study was to get reliable in-depth data to comprehensively understand the relationship between student learning levels and factors that can influence them, such as teachers' background, children's background & ability, classroom environment and school environments.

Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) or the centre for education and consciousness was the collaborating entity in Pakistan which also houses the secretariat for the South Asian Forum for Education Development (SAFED). ITA and SAFED have undertaken the pioneering initiative of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Pakistan in 2008/9, 2010 and 2011, and they work extensively in research initiatives across South Asia.

Learning levels of students from classes 3 and 5 were tested using student tests, while the student ability or IQ was tested using the Raven's Progressive Test (rpm). Student background information was collected using a student questionnaires. The students who took the tests and questionnaire included 10 students from class 3 and 10 students from class 5, from each school. In addition to this, learning levels of teachers were also measured using a teachers test. The test was designed in such a way that it tested three main competencies: teachers' understanding of the subject-matter from the primary curriculum, their ability to spot student mistakes and their ability to explain content in an effective manner. Unknown to the teachers and students, some of the questions in the mathematics and language tests were common for the two groups. Additional background information was also collected on issues such as teacher experience, education, affiliation etc. as well as information on political economy issues (such as union membership) and measures of teacher effort (time on task, absence etc.). Rich information has been gathered on more than 1500 students and more than 300 teachers across the 120 (111 government and 09 private) schools in Punjab.

Key Findings and Policy Pointers

Teacher absence is high and mainly unexplained: Poor motivation and a lack of accountability (through credible sanctions and punishment) are said to be the main reasons for the high rates of absenteeism observed among teachers in developing countries. Data from SchoolTELLS-Pakistan from rural Punjab reveals that on the day of the visit, **11 percent** of the teachers were reportedly absent. The majority of this absence was 'unexplained' rather than attributable to official non-teaching duties. Illness accounted for most of the explained absences. **A policy implication of this finding is the need to institute stronger accountability measures.**

High teacher competency is not reflected in higher student learning: Within the main competencies tested in the SchoolTELLS data, it is revealed that teachers in rural Punjab are substantially competent. This is unlike similar data that was collected in India showing worryingly low levels of teacher competence in these same three aspects of competence (see Kingdon and Banerjee, 2009). For example, the average score of all teachers in Pakistan in the language test was 69.5% while in mathematics the score was 73.9%. In India, on the other hand, while teachers average score in similar language tests was 64.9%, their score in maths was a mere 47.2%¹. In Pakistan, there were differences in total scores by school type only in mathematics with private school teachers performing significantly better than government school teachers. In language, the teachers across the public and private sectors performed similarly. **Critical to this finding is the fact that this high level of teacher knowledge is not translated into better student achievement (as reflected in Figure 1 below).** Whilst teachers themselves have a good understanding of the curriculum, are able to spot student mistakes and explain content effectively, their respective

¹ It must be noted, however, that School TELLs-India was conducted in 2 of the most educationally and economically disadvantaged states while School TELLs-Pakistan was conducted in Punjab, the relatively well-off and educationally advantaged province.

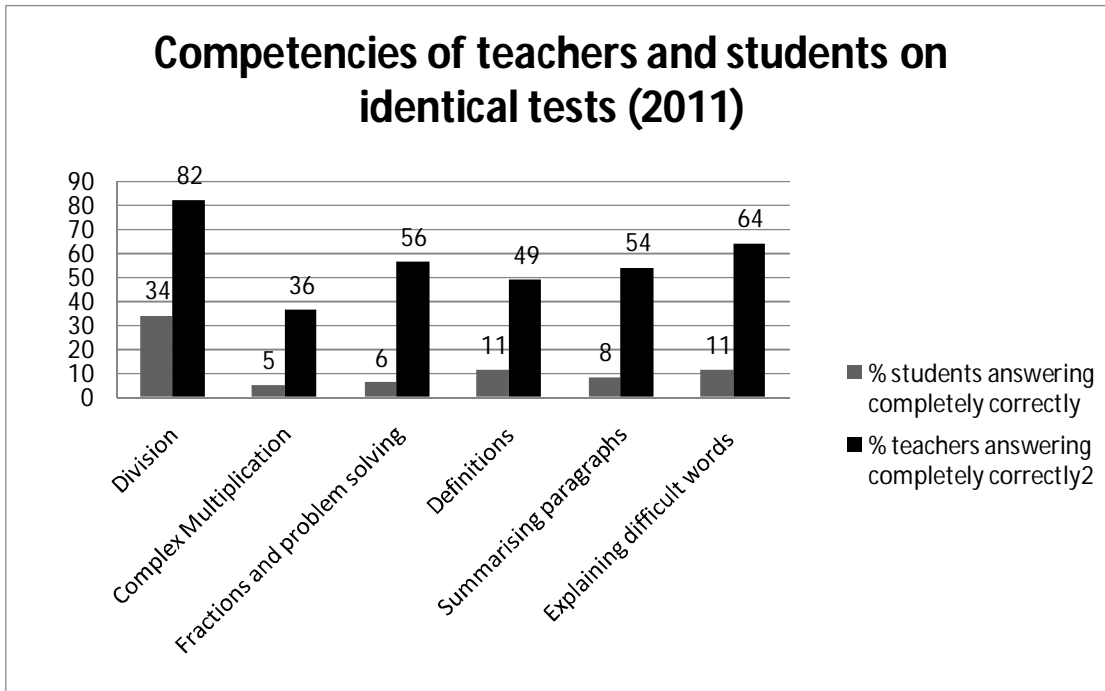
students' marks do not reflect this. This may have to do with the actual teaching techniques and pedagogy used. This highlights the need to reflect on current teacher training practices. One issue related to this could be that teachers in rural areas are increasingly having to teach in multigrade settings.

Source: Authors' calculations from SchoolTELLS-Pakistan (2011)

Inconsistencies in grade-grouping: In the one visit randomly made during the SchoolTELLS survey, data reveal that 43 percent of the children in primary school were sitting in a

detrimental to student learning. **Persistence of multigrade settings in developing countries needs to be reflected in teaching training courses in order to prepare teachers for this eventuality.**

Politicisation of teachers: There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that there is significant political penetration by teachers in Pakistan as in the rest of South Asia. This is evident through newspaper reports of strike actions and political



monograde environment. However, **it was also found that in 8 percent of the cases, all five primary grades were sitting together.** These findings suggest considerable instability in grade-grouping configurations within the same school year, making it difficult for the teacher to prepare teaching for a given mix of classes. This provides one potential explanation for why despite having competent teachers; students in rural Pakistan have such low levels of learning. Much of this may stem from frequent teacher absence (as mentioned previously) which results in ad-hoc-ism about classroom organisation. This is in line with research relating to multigrade teaching that states that when adopted as a pedagogical choice, multigrade teaching can be effective but when a consequence of adverse circumstances, can be

lobbying by teachers in the SAR countries. More robust evidence on the extent of politicisation of teachers in education is very hard to come by. The Punjab Teachers Union in Pakistan lays claim to a strength of almost 350,000 government teachers across the province covering 63,000 schools in 38 districts². This is equivalent to almost 100% union membership of all government school teachers in Punjab alone. When asked what percentage of teachers at the school are members of a teachers union, **SchoolTELLS data shows that in rural Pakistan only 5% teachers reported all teachers to be trade union members while as many as 85% stated that no-one is a member of teacher**

² <http://punjabteachersunion.com/?p=4>, downloaded June 22, 2011.

unions. This illustrates reluctance to reveal union membership which may be linked to the motives behind joining unions. **When asked if unions can help teachers in transfer-related problems, 63% of teachers answered in the affirmative suggesting that teachers recognise and possibly utilise their unions in getting transfers. Sixty four percent teachers in the sample also believed that paying a bribe was an effective method of accomplishing a transfer.** Excessive politicisation of public education has had a profound impact on levels of teacher accountability in many education systems in the SAR region (Bennell, 2004) and Pakistan is no different. In addition to this, high levels of unionisation may lead to 'union wage premiums' of government school teachers. Teacher unions have immense political strength and have used this power to raise salaries to inefficient levels. The deleterious effect of teacher politicisation on school functioning and performance arises in part because by being engaged in political activities, teachers are kept away from actual teaching. This is then reflected in poor student learning and ill-functioning schools.

High teacher salaries unrelated to effort: SchoolTELLS Pakistan data reveals that the average monthly salary of a primary school teacher in rural Punjab is Rs. 17,000 as compared to Rs. 3800 earned by their private school counterparts. This salary is roughly more than 6 times as much as the average per capita monthly income of the average person in Punjab. This is likely to be an *underestimate* of this multiple as this latter figure includes the earnings of urban workers. This furnishes a measure of the *economic and social distance* between the teacher and the taught as it is believed that the greater the distance is, the more detrimental it can be to student learning (see Kingdon and Rawal, 2010). Salary increases are intended to improve the quality of public services delivered to citizens. The pay-rises are premised on higher salaries attracting better individuals into teaching and also on the idea that higher salaries motivate higher effort while in service, as per efficiency wage theory. However, Kingdon (2010) argues that salary increases unrelated to performance are not

necessarily efficiency enhancing. Aslam and Kingdon (2011) also show that teacher salaries in Lahore are not related to higher student learning. **The key policy implication is that teacher remuneration and tenure should be linked to teacher performance and effort to increase efficiency within the schooling system.**

References

- Aslam, M. and Kingdon, G. (2011), 'What can teachers do to raise student achievement?' *Economics of Education Review*, 30 (3): 559-574.
- Bennell, P., (2004), 'Teacher Motivation and Incentives in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia', Knowledge and Skills for Development, Brighton
- Glewwe, P. and Kremer, M. (2006), 'Schools, teachers, and Education Outcomes in Developing Countries', in *Handbook of the Economics of Education*, Hanushek, E. And Welch, F. (eds.), Vol. 2.
- Hanushek, E.A. and Woessmann, L. (2011), 'Overview of the symposium for performance pay for teachers', *Economics of Education Review*, 30: 391-393.
- Kingdon, G. (2010). 'The Impact of the Sixth Pay Commission on Teacher Salaries: Assessing Equity and Efficiency Effects', RECOUP Working Paper No. 29, May. Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.
- Kingdon, G and Banerji, R. (2009), 'Addressing School Quality: Some Policy Pointers from Rural North India', RECOUP Policy Brief No. 5, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.
- Kingdon, G. and Rawal, S. (2010), 'Akin to my teacher: some evidence from India', Department of Quantitative Social Sciences, Institute of Education, University of London, Working Paper No. 1018.



SAFED Secretariat

41-L, Model Town Extension, Lahore, Pakistan.
Tel: 042-5173005-6, Fax: 5173007
Email: safedsecretariat@gmail.com
Website: www.safedafed.org