Academics, researchers and policy-makers alike recognise the importance of teachers in meeting the demands of universal education for all children, and acknowledge that improving teacher effectiveness is one of the most crucial elements in ensuring that this education is of a sufficiently high quality. Research evidence to date also confirms that teachers are the most important institutional factor in determining student outcomes. Teachers are also the best link towards achieving an inclusive education system. Given that improving teacher effectiveness is a policy amenable strategy, improving weak teaching may be the most effective means of raising school quality across the developing world (Glewwe and Kremer, 2006, p. 995).

On a positive note, Pakistan has made significant progress in achieving the goal of universal primary education and it is clear that great strides have been made in increasing educational access to the masses. 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 completed. There is evidence that cognitive skills have economically large effects on individual earnings and on national growth. This literature is summarised in Hanushek (2005).

Many people maintain that the rapid expansion of schooling in South Asia has been achieved at an enormous cost as it has resulted in the deterioration of educational quality in the region's education systems. New evidence from the region paints a shocking picture of the lack of learning among children. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER 2012) from Pakistan for instance shows that a vast majority of children aged 5-16 are nowhere close to the expected grade 2 curricular level in language and mathematics achievement.

Teaching quality has historically been of poor quality in the SAR region and Pakistan is no exception. The region is marred by difficulties not only in terms of hiring competent teachers but also in redeploying them effectively, ensuring they are adequately trained and exert sufficient effort when in school and display relevant competencies to impart meaningful learning. In addition to this, the emergence and mushrooming of the private schooling sector in Pakistan has altered the educational landscape of the country. A number of studies in recent years both within Pakistan and in other parts of the world have highlighted the superior academic outcomes of students in private schools as compared to their government school counterparts. This has partly been explained by the greater accountability of private school teachers within private schooling systems. The magnitude of the private...
schooling sector in the country today means that discussions surrounding teacher effectiveness and teaching quality cannot ignore private-public comparisons. The discussion that follows in this report simply aims to paint a descriptive picture of three main elements of teacher quality: teacher qualifications, teacher effort and the extent of multi-grade teaching in the country. All simple comparisons are made across the country and across the government and private sector.

Evidence from ASER 2012 Data

How qualified are our teachers?

Teacher quality encompasses a range of competencies and skills. Measuring quality is difficult therefore not only because it depends on a large number of observed and non-observed factors but also on the interaction of these with the nature of the relationship teachers maintain with their students during their classroom interactions (World Education Report, 2005, p. 108). Policy makers have tended to focus on improving the most measurable indicators of what is believed to encompass teacher quality. These include academic qualifications, years of training and experience. This is despite the fact that formal qualifications and measureable resume characteristics of teachers (experience, degrees held, certification etc.) seldom predict effectiveness in raising student achievement. Nevertheless, researchers continue to highlight the usefulness of a minimum level of general and professional qualifications that make an effective teacher.

ASER 2012 data allows us to compare the general and professional qualifications of current teachers across the country in both government and private schools. Figure 1 depicts the proportion of teachers in government and private schools who have the following general qualifications: Matriculation, FA, BA, MA or more and other. On average, government school teachers across the country are more qualified as compared to private school teachers. For instance, in Punjab, Sindh and KP, the proportion of teachers with an MA or more is higher (and bound to be significantly so) in government schools as compared to private schools.

![Figure 1](source: ASER 2012)

General teacher qualifications by school type (% teachers)

![Figure 2](source: ASER 2012)

Professional teacher qualifications by school type (% teachers)
Figure 2 depicts the proportion of teachers with professional qualifications (PTC training, CT training, B.Ed., M.Ed., or other qualifications) by school type. The picture here is not as clear-cut; in some parts of the country, teachers in private schools appear to have more professional qualifications compared to their government school counterparts (for instance B.Ed. in Punjab, Sindh, KP and Balochistan) while a larger proportion of government school teachers appear to have acquired M.Ed. training in certain parts of the country.

**Ensuring teachers exert sufficient 'effort'**

Teacher effort exerted while in school is also often believed to be at very low levels. This is reflected in high teacher absence rates. The problem therefore is not even one of low quality teaching but one of no teaching at all, for a significant part of the time (World Bank, 2004). Teacher absence has been linked with low student outcomes in a diverse group of countries (Miller et al. 2007, Clotfelter, Ladd and Vigdor, 2006). Very often it would seem that absence rates are higher in the areas or schools frequented by more disadvantaged and marginalised children, further lowering the quality of education they receive.

Better student outcomes observed in private schools are often attributed to higher effort exerted by private school teachers because they are more accountable both to parents and to the school authorities for their actions. Figure 3 below illustrates teacher absence rates across government and private schools across the country. With the exception of Sindh, the absence rates among private school teachers are generally lower than those among their government school counterparts (especially in Balochistan). The highest absence rates among government and private school teachers are observed in Sindh and some of the lowest absences are among teachers in Punjab.

**Training our teachers to deal with multi-grade settings**

While a teacher's aptitude, skills and ability to teach and content and subject knowledge are believed to matter more to student learning and educational outcomes than observed resume characteristics such as qualifications and experience, there is insufficient data on these measures of teacher quality. Moreover, until recently, it has been believed that teachers' knowledge, skills and abilities were developed during general education and setting a minimum threshold on academic qualifications would suffice in providing a 'good' teacher. These views have dramatically changed in recent years with more importance being accorded to preparing teachers with useful training and supporting them to improve instruction in a bid to improve their teaching quality.

However, increasingly teachers are facing situations within classrooms that they have not been effectively trained to deal with. For instance, the extent to which multi-grade teaching is being used to meet the MDGs while well-known has not been adequately researched. However, the increasing use of multi-grade teaching that has arisen more due to necessity rather than choice raises concerns about the extent to which teachers are trained to turn this into an effective teaching methodology.
For the first time to our knowledge, data has become available that highlights the extent of multi-grade teaching across the country and allows a comparison across the government and private sector. Figure 4 depicts the worryingly high extent of multi-grade settings for students studying in rural areas in class 2 in the government sector especially in some parts of the country. For example, in Sindh, almost 70% of class 2 in sampled rural government schools were found to be sitting with another class in a multi-grade setting on the day of the survey. In Gilgit Baltistan, ICT/AJK and in Balochistan this proportion was 67 and 66% respectively. While lower in Punjab, 34 per cent of the sampled class 2's in Punjab were studying in a multi-grade setting rather than in a mono-grade environment. While multi-grade settings were found in private schools, they were significantly lower.

**Figure 4**

![Extent of multi-grade teaching, class 2, by school type](chart.png)

Going forward

- **Government school teachers are generally as qualified as their private school counterparts;** however, international evidence suggests that the resume' characteristics of teachers such as their qualifications do not matter to student achievement. This does not mean that we stop hiring 'qualified' teachers. It means that we look beyond qualifications to identify and then develop the key aspects of teacher quality that actually matter to student outcomes.

- **The effort exerted by teachers, as measured by teacher absence rates, often leaves much to be desired;** the evidence from ASER 2012 data also hints at somewhat lower absence rates among private school teachers and more rigorous studies have found links between better accountability in private schools and higher teacher effort and better student outcomes. It must be maintained that for some of the most marginalised and disadvantaged areas and children the problem is not one of poor quality teaching but of no teaching at all. There is an increased need for focusing on shaping policies that encourage teacher effort and improve accountability.

Perhaps the most effective tool in the delivery of quality teaching services is well trained teachers. While they may have the necessary qualifications and may even exert sufficient effort, if faced with settings for which they are ill-trained, teachers cannot be blamed entirely for the resultant poor quality teaching they impart to their students. The evidence from ASER 2012 depicts an alarming picture of children studying in multi-grade settings in the very early part of their learning experiences. This finding indicates that a large number of school environments (especially in government schools) encounter multi-grade teaching across the country. This does not necessarily need to be considered a liability as research has shown that in situations where multi-grade teaching has been implemented as a pedagogical choice as opposed to being a means of last resort, with teachers being supported with adequate training and resources, student learning is no less than in mono-grade environments (Little, 2008). In fact, multi-grade settings provide several advantages such as the potential for cooperative peer learning among children. The benefits of such teaching however depend on there being a stable multi-grade environment. Kingdon and Banerji (2009) in their SchoolTELLS survey in Bihar, visited 80 sample primary schools four times in the
same one school-year (2007-08). They found that 44% of classes were sometimes mono-grade and sometimes multi-grade. This suggests considerable instability in grade-grouping configurations within the same school year, making it difficult for the teacher to be trained and prepared for teaching for a given mix of classes. In light of this, it is critical for both pre and in-service training to equip teachers with the ability to effectively manage multi-age and multi-grade classrooms to ensure effective learning for all children and for school authorities to ensure a unified grade-mix and grade-grouping configuration rather than an unstable multi-grade environment for the teacher and for the students.

References


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