

# IMPROVING EDUCATION PERFORMANCE AND STANDARDS IN PAKISTAN

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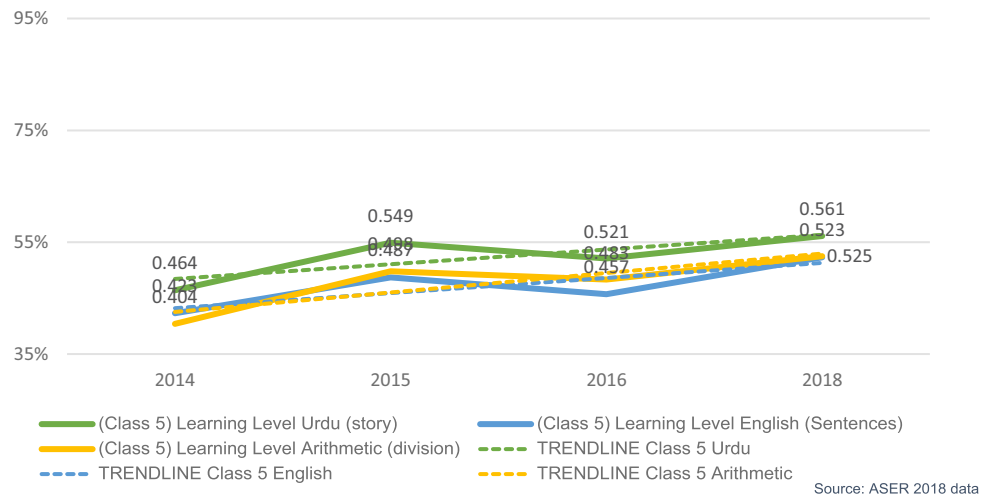
DFID Pakistan

Once again ITA has completed a remarkable feat in conducting the ASER survey, compiling the data and analysing it in the report. The data set represents the only time series national data that captures learning and other trends in Pakistan. As valuable and essential as ASER is, more data on the performance of the education system and how much learning it is actually producing is essential to drive progress.

There are four areas critical to improving education performance and standards in Pakistan.

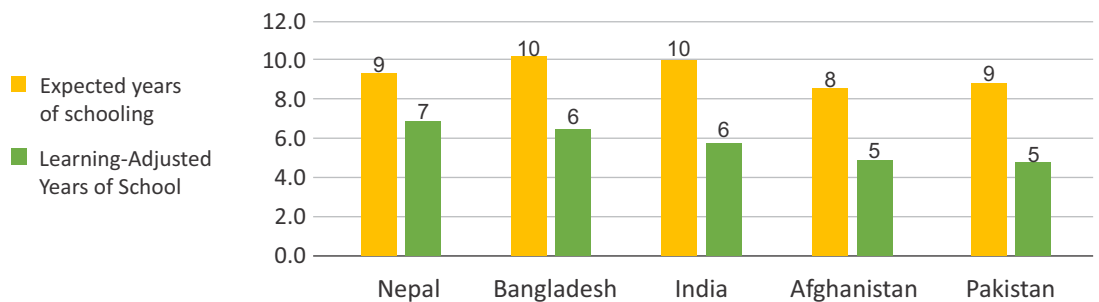
**Learning is improving but not fast enough.** Trends in the ASER data from 2014 to 2018 for Grade 5 are showing upward trends at the national level in Urdu, mathematics and English.

**Figure 1: Gradual Upward Trend in Learning Levels Still Low**



However, each year children in Pakistan are learning too little and too slowly. ASER tests all children of age 5-16 on what they should have learnt in Grade 2. In 2018, ASER reports that around half of the children of Grade 5 age have not reached Grade 2 levels of learning. Other data support this picture of upward progress but a big gap remains between what students have learned and what they should have learned. As the graph below shows, although children in Pakistan are expected to achieve nearly 9 years of schooling, this equates to only 4.8 years of actual learning: behind Pakistan's regional neighbours.

**Figure 2: Expected Years of Schooling Vs Expected Years of Learning**



What can be done? **Teaching is what drives learning.** A year of good teaching will have the most significant impact on how much a child learns. There are good teachers in Pakistan

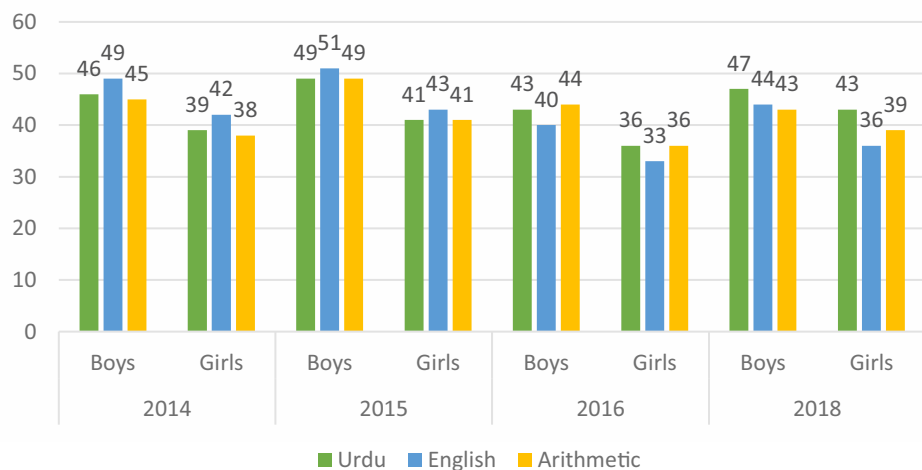
who teach well; transferring their good practice to every classroom is what is needed. Counter-intuitively, this does not necessarily mean more traditional teacher training outside the classroom. It means supporting teachers to teach more effectively in their own classroom. For example, detailed scripted lessons have worked in Punjab to significantly improve literacy and numeracy for Grade 3 children. One intervention alone will not raise standards in teaching across Pakistan; a range of tools and approaches that support better teaching are required. Good teaching is intrinsically linked with good school leadership, which applies and monitors standards and targets. Defining what good teaching is, setting targets for learning, supporting teachers to improve what they do in the classroom, and monitoring progress at the student and school level set the foundation to increase the pace of improvement.

To set targets and monitor progress, **more and better-quality data on how well children are learning is needed** - and it needs to be used effectively at the right levels to drive learning. Learning data should be used summatively to track progress but also formatively to improve teaching. School leaders and teachers need to track children's progress using this data in the classroom and at school level. If the old adage that 'what gets measured gets managed' is true, then performance in teaching and learning needs to be tracked at critical points in a child's education and at critical points in the academic year. If the data shows some children have not mastered the required learning, then this needs to be addressed through adapting teaching before they move to the next step in their learning. The Citizens Foundation has demonstrated how this can be done effectively in Pakistan.

So, what to do to get this learning data? The ASER survey fills an important gap but more is needed. In 2019, Pakistan is scheduled to take part in its first international assessment of learning outcomes for Grade 4 and Grade 8 children. This will enable standards in Pakistan to be compared to those in similar countries. More frequent assessment of learning at school, provincial and national levels is needed to measure performance against targets and standards. This doesn't mean more school-based testing. It means standardised assessments against expected standards to replace the plethora of ad hoc school-based tests that take up too much teaching time.

**More and better data enables better decision-making**, from the classroom to national budgeting. This is vital for improvements in school effectiveness, efficiency of scarce resources and equality of educational equality.

**Figure 3: Persistent Gender Gap in Learning Levels**

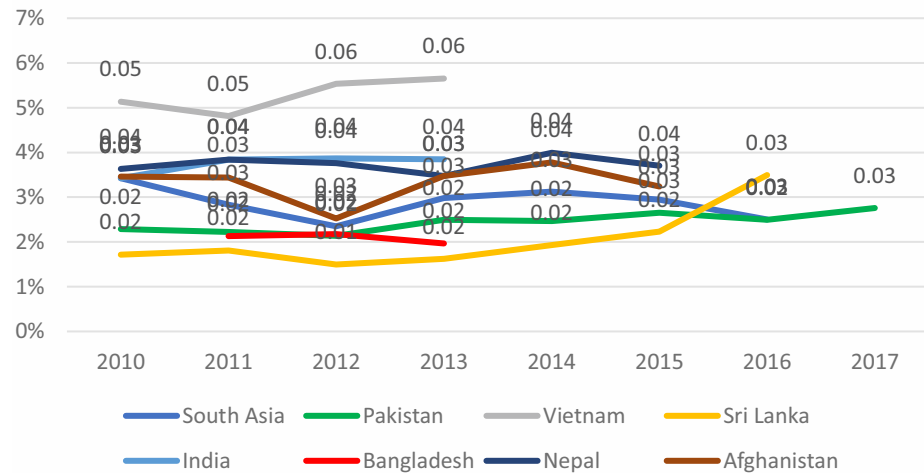


Source: ASER 2018 data

It matters for your education in Pakistan if you are born male or female, in an urban or rural area, in AJK or Balochistan, rich or poor, disabled or able bodied.

If the Pakistan education system is fair, none of these things should matter. However, we know this is not the case – and business as usual in the way financial, human and physical resources are allocated will not make the education system fairer. More financing is certainly needed: countries that are more successful educationally than Pakistan spend more of their national wealth on education, spend it on nursery, primary and secondary education and spend more per student.

**Figure 4: % GDP Spent on Education**



Source: World Bank (latest data available per country)

More finance alone will not result in improvement in education standards. The task is not just to spend more, but to use data to spend on what improves learning, in a more targeted and equitable way. The best teaching, more financial resources, and learning resources like reading books need to be targeted to where the need is the greatest. We need the data to identify need; a fair formula which is used to allocate resources based on need; and the data that tracks the progress in learning and school completion for disadvantaged groups, so closing the gaps to make the system fairer can be managed.

Lastly, we need to ensure that improvement applies to the whole system and all children within it, regardless of what type of school they are in, public or private. Pakistan has led the world in developing public private partnerships that enable free access to privately-provided education. Extending standardised assessments and data practices to the private sector, with fair and effective regulation of private schools that focuses on common standards of teaching and learning, will ensure learning standards also continue to improve for children in every school. Building on the success of PPPs in this way, while also expanding government provision, will be an essential tool if Pakistan is to get all children in school and learning to minimum standards.

In summary, to double the pace of learning in Pakistan, teachers must be supported to improve their teaching in the classroom. The data on performance in learning, teaching and school effectiveness must be collected and used. Good school leaders equipped with learning data and monitoring tools are needed. Data like that produced by ASER must be used to make spending decisions and target resources on improving learning and on the children and schools where the data show the need is greatest.