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Foundational Learning & the Education Workforce: Global Evidence & Implications for Pakistan

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Foundational learning is key to the promise of quality education and lifelong learning for all, and the global community has come together to ensure it is at the top of education agendas worldwide. Pakistan also faces significant foundational learning challenges which have been exacerbated by the recent COVID pandemic.

Foundational learning challenges

- Pakistan has the world's second highest number of out-of-school children, with 22.8 million children aged 5-16 are out-of-school, representing 44% of the total population of that age group.¹
- At every level, more girls are out of school than boys. In Sindh, 52% of the most impoverished children - of which 58% are girls - are out of school; in Balochistan, 78% of girls are out of school.²
- In addition to those children out of school, many in school aren't learning the basics: only 55% of grade 5 students can read a story in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto and only 51% can solve arithmetic division;³ 75% of children in Pakistan at late primary age today are not proficient in reading, adjusted for the out-of-school children.⁴

Education workforce challenging

- Teachers have the biggest impact on learning outcomes, yet in Pakistan, there are not enough teachers: Punjab, the biggest province in Pakistan, faces a shortage of 90,000 teachers at all levels.⁵
- Teacher absenteeism remains another key challenge – while it has decreased in KP and Punjab through use of technology, it still remains an issue in other provinces.
- Merit-based recruitment has been challenging, but provinces have taken steps to recruit quality teachers to schools.
- Contract teachers, mostly untrained, play a key role in filling the gaps (Low-fee private schools and Foundation schools).

The Education Commission's three visions for the education workforce

These are critical issues that many countries face. In light of these challenges, the Education Commission's Education Workforce Report (funded by FCDO) puts forward three evidence-based interacting visions for the education workforce which can help address such challenges and improve foundational outcomes.^{5a}

¹ Rizwan, Maleeha, Kiyoshi Taniguchi, and Rie Hiraoka. 2022. Access Challenges to Education in Pakistan. ADB Brief 207. Asian Development Bank. Available at: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/771091/adb-brief-207-access-challenges-education-pakistan.pdf>

² UNICEF Pakistan Education. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/education>

³ Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Pakistan. 2021. Available at: http://aserpakistan.org/document/aser/2021/reports/national/ASER_report_National_2021.pdf

⁴ World Bank Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's promise

⁵ Adnan Lodhi. July 26, 2022. Punjab faces 90K teachers shortage. The Express Tribune. Available at: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2367771/punjab-faces-90k-teachers-shortage-1>

^{5a} The Education Commission. 2019. Transforming the Education Workforce: Learning Teams for a Learning Generation. The International Commission on Financing Education Opportunity.

Vision 1: Strengthening the education workforce

Vision 1 is about addressing immediate challenges through strengthening the existing education workforce. This vision is for a workforce with a greater focus on access, learning, equity and inclusion across all levels of an education system. It also emphasizes professionalizing and supporting teachers AND other key roles, such as school leaders and district officials, and ensuring fair working conditions and wages.

To strengthen the workforce in under-served areas and address teacher shortages, countries need to consider alternative routes into the profession. In the Girls' Access to Education (GATE) project in Sierra Leone, the community selects local women to become learning assistants and through school-based training and distance learning they become qualified teachers.⁶

Continuous professional development should be provided to teachers AND other key roles, and it should be based on evidence. This is important - a lot of funding has gone into ineffective teacher training. In the Tusome program in Kenya, which focused on foundational learning, evidence showed that it was the combination of professional development, coaching, textbooks, teacher guides, and regular monitoring and support from district officials that led to a significant improvement in reading outcomes.⁷

Technology can be harnessed to help address teacher shortages and professional development. For example, GIS techniques can help with more equitable deployment of teachers to where they are most needed, and messaging platforms and online systems can support more widespread teacher professional development and peer learning, even at a distance.⁸

Inclusion shouldn't be an add on. For the workforce to be focused on inclusion, it needs to be inclusive itself. Inequities can lead to a workforce that is not representative of the population it serves and this can have a negative impact on learning and other outcomes. For example, we know lack of female teachers and school leaders has immediate consequences for girls' enrollment, retention, and achievement as well as the school culture and longer-term impact on girls'

⁶ Crisp, Martin, Kimberly Safford, and Freda Wolfenden. 2017. "It takes a village to raise a teacher: The Learning Assistant programme in Sierra Leone." The Open University and Plan International.

⁷ USAID. 2017. "Tusome External Evaluation Midline Report of the Tusome Activity in Kenya." Washington, DC: USAID (United States Agency for International Development).

⁸ The Education Commission. 2019. Transforming the Education Workforce: Learning Teams for a Learning Generation The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity.

aspirations, safety in school, and job prospects. In several French-speaking African countries in 2019, boys' and girls' performance in reading and numeracy was better in schools headed by women.⁹

What does this mean for Pakistan?

- Introducing merit in recruitment and improving transparency in the system. This is already being done in some provinces (KP and Punjab) but needs to be adopted system wide.
- Hiring more teachers directly from underserved areas and providing alternative school-based and distance qualification and training routes that address their needs.
- Exploring the latest data techniques, such as the use of GIS, to improve teacher distribution, and matching algorithms to take into account teacher preferences in deployment.
- Providing quality, school-based continuous professional development opportunities to teachers and school leaders and ensuring it is focused on known approaches to improving foundational learning. This could include professional learning communities, mentoring and coaching.
- Connecting the workforce and giving them the tools they need to collaborate, technology is there to be harnessed. During COVID, the government in Pakistan quickly connected the education workforce to technology, with around 600K public sector teachers immediately put on Microsoft systems. COVID has shown us what is possible when we prioritize the education workforce.

Vision 2: Creating learning teams

Vision 2 involves a shift to a more fit-for-purpose and collaborative education workforce through developing learning teams.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted once and for all that teachers cannot work alone. Teachers, supported by school leaders, worked closely with parents and caregivers, community volunteers, and health workers to ensure learning continued and no child was left behind. We now have the opportunity to harness this collaboration to support the entire education system.

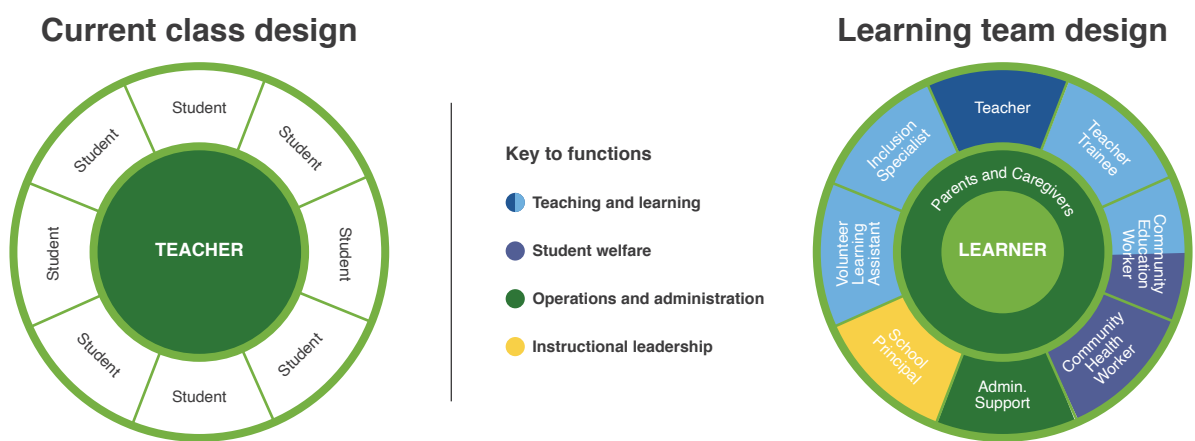
Learning teams collaborate inside the classroom, within schools, within districts, and beyond. These teams of education professionals and members of the community collectively focus on improving the learning and inclusion of all students and

⁹ Bergmann, Jessica; Alban Conto, Maria Carolina; Brossard, Mathieu (2022). Increasing Women's Representation in School Leadership: A promising path towards improving learning, Innocenti Research Briefs.

continually learn themselves.

This represents a big shift in how we design the workforce. In today’s design, the teacher tends to be at the center doing many different things besides teaching and is responsible for many students with many different needs. A learning team design flips this and puts learners at the center surrounded by teachers, school leaders, other professionals including healthcare workers, parents and community members.

This means the diverse needs of children can be met. It also means that teachers can focus on teaching and have greater support. Evidence shows that this team-based approach can result in better foundational learning outcomes.



What does this mean for Pakistan?

- Working with parents and the community to support teachers to reach learners furthest behind. For example, Pratham’s Balsakhis Program in India trained tutors from the community to take children in third and fourth grade who had not achieved basic competencies in reading and arithmetic out of the regular classroom and provide instruction that followed a special curriculum tailored to the students’ current level of learning. The program showed gains in learning for the most marginalized children.¹⁰
- Reorienting middle-tier support, such as school supervisors, to shift from a focus on compliance to supporting teachers and schools to focus on instructional leadership and using data to target support for learning and inclusion. ASER Pakistan has provided a valuable source of data to inform the design and

¹⁰ J-PAL. 2006. “Making Schools Work for Marginalized Children: Evidence from an inexpensive and effective program in India.” Policy Briefcase No. 2. Cambridge: Department of Economics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).
Reference for diagram: The Education Commission. 2019. Transforming the Education Workforce: Learning Teams for a Learning Generation. The International Commission on Financing Education Opportunity.

implementation of learning improvement programs and highlighted the need to find solutions for foundational learning. ASER Pakistan is also an example of citizen-led collaboration with an education system.

- Engaging the frontline workforce in policy design around foundational learning from the beginning, enabling a much more collaborative approach to decision making.

Vision 3: Transforming into a learning system

Vision 3 is a more future orientated paradigm-shifting vision to transform education systems into learning systems. This vision involves harnessing networks of learning teams, cross-sectoral partnerships, data and technology, and evidence to create a system that is able to continuously learn and adapt itself.

Learning systems harness collaboration between schools - as the capacity of professionals grows, school networks become the engine of professional development with high-performing teachers sharing their expertise. Evidence shows that when schools collaborate, they improve more rapidly. COVID-19 showed us how powerful tech-enabled networks and collaboration can be in supporting network resiliency.

Learning systems also embrace cross-sectoral partnerships. For example, closer coordination between health and social service sectors can help address systemic barriers to learning. In Kenya, the Let Girls Succeed program engages community health workers to work with girls and their communities to address factors that prevent them from going to school.¹¹

To be a true learning system, a research and development culture should be encouraged at all levels to help identify and scale high-impact innovations.

What does this mean for Pakistan?

- Partnering with local communities and government departments (such as health and child welfare) for the holistic development of the child.
- Forming communities of practice across schools and districts for collective problem-solving and catalyzing innovation.
- Partnering with organizations (such as Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi (ITA)) and academic institutions to conduct system wide research on challenges and interventions.

¹¹ The Education Commission. 2021. Transforming the Education Workforce and COVID-19: Learning Teams. EWI Brief. The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity.