

# TEACHING AND LEARNING:

## Achieving quality for all

### Monitoring the Education for All goals

#### Progress towards the six Education for All goals in East Asia and the Pacific

Indicator	East Asia and the Pacific		World	
	1999	2011	2010	
Goal 1	Pre-primary gross enrolment ratio (%)	39	62	50
Goal 2	Primary net enrolment ratio (%)	94	96	89
	Out-of-school children (million)	10.2	5.1	57.2
Goal 3	Lower secondary gross enrolment ratio (%)	78	90	82
	Out-of-school adolescents (million)	25	8.9	69.4
Goal 4	Adult literacy rate* (%)	82	95	84
	Youth literacy rate* (%)	95	99	89
Goal 5	Primary gender parity index	0.99	1.02	0.97
	Secondary gender parity index	0.94	1.03	0.97
Goal 6	Primary pupil/teacher ratio	24	18	24
Finance	Public education spending (% GNP)	3.9	4.4	5.1
	(% total government expenditure)	15.0	16.6	15.5

\* Progress on literacy is reported for the periods 1985/94 (left column) and 2005/11 (right column).  
Source: UIS database

#### Despite progress, most EFA goals are likely to be missed by 2015

##### Early childhood care and education

Early childhood outcomes have improved. For example, the under-5 mortality rate fell from 39 deaths for every 1000 live births in 2000 to 20 in 2012. Timor-Leste reduced under-5 mortality by more than 50% from 109 in 2000 to 54 in 2011.

Malnutrition rates declined. In China the stunting rate fell by more than two thirds from 32% to 10% in two decades.

The pre-primary education gross enrolment ratio increased substantially from 39% in 1999 to 62% in 2011. China and Vietnam made fast progress, increasing access by 24 and 33 percentage points, respectively.

However, large inequalities remain. In Viet Nam, the attendance rate in early childhood learning programmes among 3-4 year olds in 2010-11 was 91% for the richest fifth and 59% for the poorest fifth. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 73% of the richest but just 5% of the poorest attended such programmes.

### **Universal primary education**

East Asia and the Pacific are close to reaching the goal, as 96% of children of primary school age were enrolled in 2011. The Lao People's Democratic Republic increased its primary adjusted net enrolment rate from 77% in 1999 to 97% in 2011. The number of out of school children fell by 66% in Cambodia and by 91% in Viet Nam between 2006 and 2011. However, 5.1 million children remain out of school in the region, of which 1.5 million are in the Philippines, where the percentage of poorest children failing to complete primary school barely changed (from 41% in 1998 to 39% in 2008). The survival rate to the last grade in the region increased by five percentage points between 1999 and 2010, but remains at 89%.

### **Youth and adult skills**

The gross lower secondary enrolment ratio in East Asia and the Pacific increased from 78% in 1999 to 90% in 2011. The number of out-of school adolescents more than halved, falling to 8.9 million in 2011. In Indonesia the gross lower secondary school enrolment rate increased from 67% in 1999 to 94% in 2011. But in Malaysia, it fell by two percentage points to 90% in 2011. And inequalities remained high: in Cambodia, the percentage of richest males completing lower secondary school increased by 19 percentage points, from 50% in 2000 to 69% in 2011. By contrast, the percentage of poorest females who achieved the same over the period increased by 8 percentage points, from 1% to 9%.

### **Adult literacy**

The adult literacy rate increased from 82% in 1990 to 95%, bringing the region close to universal literacy. Much of this increase has been driven by China, where the adult literacy rate grew from 78% to 95%.

### **Gender parity and equality**

While gender parity in primary education had already been reached in 1999, the secondary gender parity index increased substantially from 94 to 103 girls for every 100 boys enrolled. Countries such as Malaysia and Thailand now face the challenge of reducing gender disparities in secondary education at the expense of boys. Boys also face substantial disadvantages in Pacific countries, such as Fiji, Samoa and the Cook Islands. In the latter, there are 120 girls enrolled for every 100 boys.

### **Quality of education**

The pupil teacher ratio for primary education decreased from 24 to 18 over the period, putting the region well below the global average.

### **Monitoring global education targets after 2015**

Although East Asia and the Pacific have almost achieved universal primary education, countries still face a challenge in providing for the most disadvantaged. For example, Indonesia and Viet Nam, two countries which have made considerable progress in recent decades, are not projected to reach universal primary completion for the poorest girls and boys until after 2030. Vanuatu and Cambodia are not projected to achieve universal completion for the poorest girls until approximately 2075.

The poorest girls and boys in Vietnam and Indonesia are not all expected to complete lower secondary school until around 2060, while for the Lao People's Democratic Republic this is only projected to happen in 2115. Post-2015 goals need to make sure the most disadvantaged groups achieve benchmarks for goals. Not doing so may mean that apparent progress continues to mask the fact that the advantaged benefit the most.

# Supporting teachers to end the learning crisis

## Trends in financing Education for All

New EFA goals after 2015 should set a target for all countries to allocate at least 6% of GNP to education and at least 20% of total government expenditure on education. Education spending as a proportion of GNP increased from 3.9% in 1999 to 4.4% in 2011 but remains below the global average. However, the proportion of total government expenditure allocated to education exceeds the global average.

A number of countries in the region do not sufficiently tap their tax base or devote an inadequate share of their budget to education. At the extreme, in Myanmar education expenditure is less than 1% of GNP. In the Philippines, the share of education in GNP fell from 3.3% of GNP in 2000 to 2.7% in 2009. Papua New Guinea only spent 11% of its budget on education. If it increased this share to 20% like Viet Nam it would almost triple its education spending per child by 2015.

Around the world, governments are grappling with ways to reallocate their education budgets to those children most in need. In Indonesia, the central government in 2009 fulfilled a constitutional commitment to allocate 20% of its budget to education.

The increase in resources has resulted, among others, in an overhaul of the scholarship system for poor students, which was insufficient, poorly targeted and not timed well enough to prevent dropout in the last grade of primary school.

Adopting a national accounts approach, new analysis for this Report shows that in Indonesia in 2009 the government contributed 85% of the total primary and lower secondary education expenditure, households 14% and donors 1%.

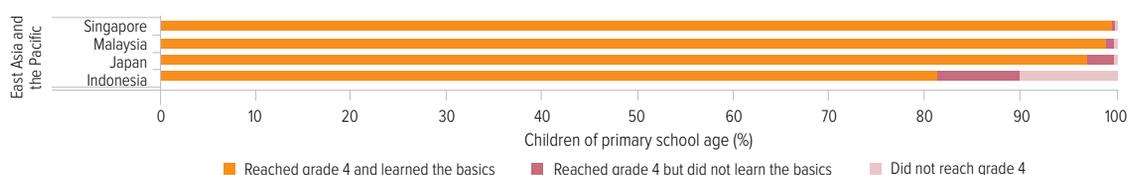
Overall, total aid to education in the region doubled from US\$ 1155 million in 2002-03 to US\$ 2309 million in 2010, although it decreased to US\$ 2060 million in 2011. Total aid to basic education fell by 20% between 2010 and 2011 to US\$ 552 million.

## The global learning crisis: action is urgent

Globally, 250 million children of primary school age are not learning the basics in reading, whether they are in school or not. In East Asia and the Pacific, 84% of children of primary school age reached grade 4 and learned the basics, 5% reached grade four but did not learn the basics, and 11% did not reach grade four.

### Learning outcomes vary widely between countries

Percentage of children of primary school age who reached grade 4 and achieved minimum learning standard in reading, selected countries



Sources: EFA Global Monitoring Report team calculations (2013) based on (1) expected cohort survival rate to grade 4: UIS database; (2) learning achievement: Altinok (2013b), using data from the 2011 PIRLS, 2007 SACMEQ, 2004-2008 PASEC, 2006 SERCE; and analysis by the 2012 ASER India and 2012 ASER Pakistan survey teams.

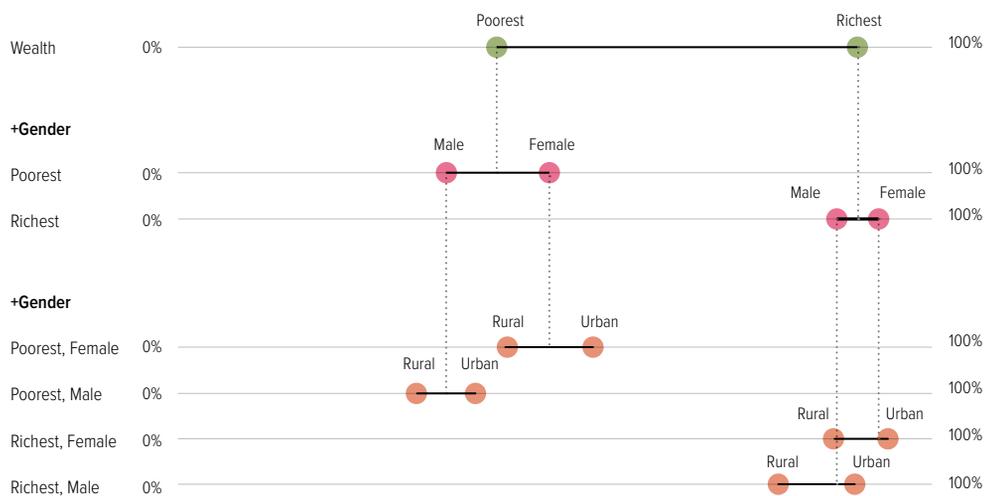


[www.education-inequalities.org](http://www.education-inequalities.org)

## Disadvantages interact to create even larger barriers for some

The World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE) highlights the powerful influence of circumstances, such as wealth, gender, ethnicity and location, over which people have little control but which play an important role in shaping their opportunities for education. It draws attention to unacceptable levels of inequality across countries and within countries, with the aim of helping to inform policy design and public debate.

This year, WIDE has expanded to include indicators of learning outcomes. In Malaysia, 65% of grade 8 children who took part in the 2011 TIMSS international assessment achieved the minimum learning standard in mathematics. While 90% of the richest reached this standard only 42% of the poorest did so. But even within the poorest, there are considerable differences. Only 31% of the poorest rural boys achieved the minimum compared to 54% of the poorest urban females.



Gaps between the poor and rich are also marked in high income economies in the region. In Australia, 82% of the poorest reached the basics in mathematics in grade 8 in 2011, compared to 96% of the richest. And only around two thirds of the indigenous students achieved this minimum benchmark with no change since 1994/95 compared with 90% of their non-indigenous peers.

Many young people who have spent just a few years in school do not develop literacy skills – and in some cases even completing primary school is not a guarantee for literacy. In Timor-Leste, after completing up to four years of school, 84% of young people emerge illiterate. Of those leaving school after 5-6 years, over 30% still emerge illiterate.

Young people from poorer households are far less likely to be able to read. In the Philippines, almost all young men and women from rich households have basic literacy skills, compared with 86% of poor young women and 72% of poor young men. In Indonesia, rich young women in Bali province have near-universal literacy skills, while just 60% of poor women in Papua province are literate. In Cambodia, less than half of the poorest young people are literate, compared to over nine out of ten of the richest.

## Making teaching quality a national priority

Strong national policies that make teaching quality and learning a high priority are essential to ensure that all children in school actually acquire the expected knowledge and skills. Plans should include a range of approaches to improve teacher quality, devised in consultation with teachers and teacher unions.

However, policy makers rarely consult them. Even when laws require teachers' participation in formulating education policies, their voice is often ignored. The 2007 Education Law of Cambodia (Article 29) states that teachers have the right to contribute actively to the development of education standards, from school level to national level, but a study found that teachers felt there was no forum for them to express their views. Excluding teachers is demoralizing but can also lead to inappropriate policies. In a survey in Indonesia, policy makers favoured promotion opportunities as a motivation tool, which only 20% of teachers considered important, compared with 49% who viewed improving classroom teaching and learning resources as critical.

## A four-part strategy for providing the best teachers

### 1. Attract the best teachers

The quality of an education system is only as good as the quality of its teachers. It is not enough just to want to teach. People should enter the profession having received a good education themselves. They need to have completed at least secondary schooling of appropriate quality and relevance, so that they have a sound knowledge of the subjects they will be teaching and the ability to acquire the skills needed to teach. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, for example, few ethnic minority women have become qualified teachers, partly because the number of girls completing school is low.

Policy makers need to focus their attention also on achieving the right mix of teachers, including recruiting teachers from under-represented groups. Flexible policies for entry qualifications may be required to increase the number of female teachers and improve the diversity of the teaching force. Where access to quality education has been limited, flexible policies on academic requirements can help ensure that greater numbers are recruited. In Cambodia, where teacher trainees normally need to have completed grade 12, this entry requirement is waived for remote areas where upper secondary education is unavailable, increasing the pool of teachers from ethnic minorities. This policy has increased the number of teachers who understand local culture, are motivated to stay in remote areas, and can teach in the local language.

Recruiting teachers from ethnic minorities to work in their own communities ensures that children are taught by teachers familiar with their culture and language. Cambodia and Papua New Guinea provide scholarships for trainees from disadvantaged areas, who are often people with specific language skills.

### 2. Improve teacher education so all children can learn

Initial teacher education should make up for weak subject knowledge. Prospective teachers should ideally enter teacher education programmes knowing enough about the subjects they are going to teach. In some income countries, however, teachers often enter the profession lacking core subject knowledge because their own education has been poor. In such circumstances, initial teacher education programmes need to ensure that all trainees acquire a good understanding of the subjects they will be teaching. Teacher education programmes of the highest scoring countries on the Teacher Education and Development Study in Mathematics in 2007/08, including Singapore and Taiwan Province of China, offer balance between training in subject knowledge, methods of teaching subject knowledge and general teaching methods than some other countries.

Pre-service education is vital to provide teachers with the skills to teach multiple grades, ages and abilities in one classroom. Initial teacher education needs to provide classroom experience. Mentoring new teachers once they are in the classroom is vital, particularly in poorer countries where teachers have limited prior practical experience.

Teachers need to be trained to teach, particularly in early grades. Teacher education programmes need to support teachers in being able to teach early reading skills in more than one language and to use local language materials effectively. In remote areas, where student numbers are often small, teachers may have to teach more than one age group at the same time. Cambodia's Education Sector Strategic Plan aims to develop training in multi-grade teaching methodology for teachers in remote schools, with priority given to those who already teach multi-grade classes. It also aims to develop an annual action plan on multi-grade teaching in remote areas and those populated by ethnic minority groups.

Preparing teachers to support learners from diverse backgrounds is essential. As a result of inadequate training, many newly qualified teachers are not confident that they have the skills necessary to support children with more challenging learning needs. A study of pre-service teacher education for lower secondary mathematics teaching in 15 countries found that none of the countries included preparation for student diversity as a key focus of teacher education. In the five countries classified as having strong preparation for professional challenges, including Malaysia and the Philippines, student teachers have more opportunities to learn how to teach students from diverse cultural or socio-economic backgrounds, as well as those with physical disabilities.

Teachers' skills also need to be improved through ongoing education. Regular supervision and ongoing training have the potential to address knowledge gaps and upgrade and reinforce acquired skills. In Singapore, teachers are entitled to 100

hours of in-service training a year, and new teachers receive mentoring for the first few years of their career. Trainers visit schools to identify difficulties teachers face or to introduce new practices, such as approaches to critical thinking or the use of information and communication technology.

Trainers need training too. The key role that teacher educators play in shaping teachers' skills is often the most neglected aspect of teacher preparation systems. Reforms aimed at helping weak students need to ensure that teacher educators are trained to give teachers appropriate support. In Viet Nam, where a national core curriculum framework on inclusive education has been developed, many teacher educators had limited awareness of how to deal with diversity. To address this, training was provided for teacher educators from universities and colleges to act as experts on inclusive education in pre-service programmes.

Distance education can boost countries' capacity to train teachers. Distance teacher education programmes also have the potential to reach more future teachers at lower cost than programmes in teacher education institutions. In China, the Gansu Basic Education Project reached over 103,000 teachers through resource centres that provided satellite television, video, internet access and other resources. Around 1,600 teachers went on to gain professional diplomas. China has also built a multilevel network connecting national and provincial institutions with county and school-based training centres, using distance learning to increase the organization, implementation and effectiveness of professional development for rural teachers. A key strategy in this approach is the use of the internet to establish effective communication and learning support for distance learners through the National Teachers' Web Union and accompanying Continuing Education Website. Course costs at the China Television Teachers' College for unqualified primary and secondary teachers were at most two-thirds of those for conventional colleges.

### 3. Get teachers where they are most needed

Inequality in deployment leads not only to fewer teachers in deprived areas but also to disadvantaged students being taught by teachers with weaker subject knowledge, exacerbating inequality in learning outcomes. Unequal distribution of teachers is one reason why some children leave school before learning the basics.

Local recruitment of teachers to serve in their own communities can address teacher shortages in remote or disadvantaged areas and can result in lower teacher attrition. However, teachers also need to be deployed effectively. To achieve a balance of teachers across the country, some governments post teachers, usually newly qualified ones, to disadvantaged areas. One reason for the Republic of Korea's strong and more equitable learning outcomes is that disadvantaged groups have better access to more qualified and experienced teachers. About 77% of teachers in villages have at least a bachelor's degree, compared with 32% in large cities, and 45% have more than 20 years of experience, compared with 30% in large cities. Teacher hiring decisions are made at province or city level, with the highest priority given to disadvantaged areas. The practice of rotating teachers every five years to a different school within the city or province demonstrates commitment to distributing good teachers equitably. Teachers working in disadvantaged schools benefit from incentives such as an additional stipend, smaller class sizes, less teaching time, the chance to choose their next school after teaching in a difficult area and greater promotion opportunities. This helps ensure that disadvantaged groups have highly qualified teachers with strong subject knowledge.

Cambodia's national education plan is notable for including strategies to deploy teachers to the areas where they are most needed. The aim is for 1,500 new trainees (of around 5,000 recruited annually) from disadvantaged areas to be assigned to work in their indigenous areas after completing

their education. Overall, about 95% of new graduates from teacher training colleges are to be assigned to understaffed schools and to disadvantaged and remote areas every year.

Local recruitment can bring challenges in deploying teachers effectively over the span of their careers. In Indonesia, locally recruited teachers cannot be easily transferred. Decisions on hiring teachers have largely been decentralized: teachers hired directly by schools now make up 30% of the teaching force at primary level and 36% at lower secondary level. Five ministries issued a joint decree in 2011 providing guidelines to provinces and districts: primary schools with less than 168 students should have at least six teachers, and larger ones should have class sizes between 28 and 32; similar guidelines apply to lower secondary schools. These standards are compatible with the overall size of the teaching force, but to implement them, 340,000 teachers, 17% of the total, would need to be redeployed. Teachers hired by schools cannot be transferred, however, so the burden would fall on civil service teachers: up to 27% of those teaching in lower secondary school would have to be transferred. In the near future, a further challenge will be the need for a massive transfer of teachers to urban areas, as two-thirds of Indonesia's population is expected to live in urban areas by 2025, compared with half in 2005.

The unequal allocation of teachers is also affected by subjects taught. In secondary schools, in particular, there are often shortages of teachers in specific subjects, such as mathematics, sciences and foreign languages. Indonesia, for example, has a surplus of teachers at junior secondary level in Bahasa Indonesia and in religion, but shortages in computer science.

Financial incentives such as bonus payments and hardship allowances are another means of promoting deployment to rural areas, but they need to be large to outweigh the difficulties of living in remote areas. In Cambodia, teachers received US\$12.50 extra per month for postings in rural areas,

or US\$15 for designated districts. Teachers may also require incentives to return to their home areas. In China, the government established the Free Teacher Education programme in 2007 to give high performing students at the best universities incentives to teach in rural schools. In addition to having free tuition, graduates have 10 years of job security teaching in their home provinces. In 2007, 90% of participants came from central and western regions that are mostly less developed and economically stagnant. Even if a graduate finds work in an urban area, two years of rural teaching must be completed first.

Some countries are providing alternative pathways into teaching to attract highly qualified professionals with strong subject knowledge. One approach is exemplified by the Teach for All programmes in a range of countries, including Australia. Such programmes recruit high-performing graduates to teach in schools that predominantly serve disadvantaged students and often have trouble attracting trained teachers.

#### **4. Provide incentives to retain the best teachers**

Governments should ensure that teachers earn at least enough to lift their families above the poverty line and make their pay competitive with comparable professions. In addition, the gap between teachers and other professionals grows, as teachers' salaries do not increase as much as other professionals' pay over time.

In Cambodia, teachers' basic salaries are very low and few teachers can afford basic necessities without taking a second job. In 2007, initial base monthly salaries were around US\$44 for primary teachers and US\$47 for lower secondary teachers, increasing over a teacher's career by only around 30%. Many teachers expect to receive additional monthly allowances but these are often delayed because payment procedures are poor.

Low pay for contract teachers is not a long-term solution to poor quality education. Indonesia, where contract teachers made up 35% of the primary school teaching force in 2010, regular teachers earned up to 40 times their salary but the government guaranteed that contract teachers would eventually attain civil service status. The implications for the education budget are immense: giving all contract teachers permanent status would increase the salary bill for basic education by 35%, to about US\$9 billion. Recruiting contract teachers on a large scale cannot be seen, therefore, as a cost-saving solution to the learning crisis in the long term. Ultimately such teachers will need training and better pay, and expect the same conditions as their civil service counterparts, increasing the government's wage bill over time.

When teachers are paid less than people in comparable fields, the best students are less likely to become teachers, and teachers are more likely to lose motivation or leave the profession. In countries like New Zealand and the Republic of Korea, teachers are paid more than the average for full-time workers with tertiary education. In the Republic of Korea, for example, where the status of teaching and student performance are both high, lower secondary school teachers earn 20% more than other professionals with higher education.

Relating teachers' pay to the performance of their students is an alternative approach that has intuitive appeal. But it is difficult to find reliable ways to evaluate which teachers are the best and add the most value. Performance-related pay can also have unintended side effects on teaching and learning and may reward only those schools and teachers whose students are already performing well, rather than those that have helped children improve the most, to the detriment of disadvantaged learners. Some of the most successful education systems, such as that of the Republic of Korea, have not adopted performance-based pay. This suggests that there are other ways to attract and retain the best

teachers, such as improving the status of the teaching profession and offering a path to career progression.

A more appropriate way of motivating teachers to improve education quality is to offer an attractive career path, with promotion criteria that take into account initiatives by teachers in addressing diversity and supporting weak students. Many teachers have limited prospects of promotion, however. Those teaching in remote areas may be especially affected. Some countries use teacher evaluations to determine career advancement and reward or censure performance by granting or withholding promotion. In Singapore, the evaluation process is extensive. A planning meeting at the beginning of the school year sets goals for student achievement, professional development and contributions to the school and community. It is followed by a review meeting at mid-year and a final evaluation based on portfolios of work, as well as input from senior teachers and department or subject area heads who have worked with the teacher.

Most OECD countries use promotion and career progression as incentives rather than directly linking performance appraisals to pay. In the Republic of Korea, performance appraisals have a strong influence on promotion. Moreover, the Republic of Korea has a steep pay structure: an experienced teacher can earn more than twice that of a new teacher.

### **Strengthening teacher governance**

Better teacher governance is vital to reduce disadvantage in learning. If days are lost because teachers are absent or devoting more attention to private tuition than classroom teaching, the learning of the poorest children can be harmed. Strong school leadership is required to ensure that teachers are accountable: that they show up on time, work a full week and provide equal support to all.

Teacher absenteeism sometimes significantly reduces the amount of teaching children receive. In Indonesia, a 10 percentage point increase in teacher absenteeism was estimated to lead to a 7 percentage point decrease in mathematics scores, on average, and absenteeism was most likely to harm weaker students.

In some countries, high levels of absenteeism are due to many teachers missing more school days than can be explained by non-teaching duties or illness, rather than extreme absenteeism by a minority of teachers who might be easily identified. Even though teacher absenteeism is widespread in some countries, it is not inevitable. In Indonesia, teacher absenteeism was lower when teachers were born in the district where they worked, where the school had better infrastructure and where students' parents were literate.

One way of combating absenteeism is for head teachers and the school administration to take action against teachers who take unauthorized leave. In Cambodia, in the areas where head teachers had greater autonomy in taking staff disciplinary action, lower secondary teachers reported fewer absences.

The most appropriate way to address teacher absenteeism is to tackle its root causes, which vary according to context. In some countries, teachers are absent because their pay is extremely low, in others because working conditions are poor. A good working environment that values teachers' contribution can enhance job satisfaction and reduce absenteeism. Low pay and poor payment processes may also affect teacher absence, possibly by undermining teachers' motivation. In Cambodia, teachers who did not have to miss school to collect pay reported fewer absences.

When teachers offer private tuition, this can have a detrimental effect on the learning outcomes of the poorest students who are unable to afford it. Some countries where private tutoring is long established, such

as Hong Kong (China) and the Republic of Korea, have strong school systems, but elsewhere private tutoring by teachers is often a symptom of badly functioning school systems and low pay that forces teachers to supplement their income. In Cambodia, tutoring earnings increased teachers' base salary by two-thirds. Among secondary teachers, 87% reported tutoring after school hours.

Strategies should at least be in place to prevent tutoring of pupils by teachers who are responsible for teaching them in their daily classes. This would ensure that full curriculum coverage is available to all students, even those not able to afford supplementary tutoring. In Singapore, teachers need permission to give more than six hours of private tuition per week, and are forbidden to offer it to their own students. However, these regulations need to be rigorously enforced.

### Curriculum and assessment strategies that improve learning

*Nguyen Thi Thanh Hoan, a teacher in Muong Khuong county, Viet Nam: 'There are 13 ethnic students in my class. All Hmong girls. Sometimes when you teach in Vietnamese they seem not to understand.'*

The key to ensuring that children succeed at school is to enable them to attain critical foundation skills. Without them, many children will struggle to keep up with the prescribed curriculum, widening the gap in learning for disadvantaged children. It is often particularly difficult for children who are members of ethnic and linguistic minorities to get a quality early childhood education that prepares them for primary school. Culturally appropriate school readiness programmes can improve learning outcomes for these children.

Vietnamese, the language of the Kinh majority, is the medium of instruction in primary schools in Viet Nam but not the

mother tongue of the 53 other ethnic groups that make up at least 14% of the population. Children in remote, single ethnic minority communities who are taught by a Kinh teacher can have difficulty coping with the classroom environment, understanding the curriculum and retaining interest in school. The Teaching Assistants and School Readiness programme has reached over 100,000 children. Over 7,000 locally recruited bilingual teaching assistants in 32 provinces were deployed to support ethnic minority children from isolated communities as they made the transition into primary school. The assistants helped children prepare for school through early childhood education activities for two months prior to grade 1 entry and provided additional instruction once they were in school, including help with learning Vietnamese. In a two-year study completed in 2009, grade 1 pupils in schools that conducted school 30% higher in reading and writing, as well as shape and number identification, than children in schools not participating in the programme. In addition, parents were happier to send their children to school, knowing they would have someone who understood their language and culture. As a result, head teachers reported increased enrolment and attendance.

It is crucial that primary school pupils master the foundation skills of basic numeracy and literacy in the early grades so they can understand what is taught in later grades, but they sometimes fail to do so because curricula are too ambitious. Viet Nam's successful curriculum focuses on foundation skills, is closely matched to what children are able to learn, and pays particular attention to disadvantaged learners.

For early grade literacy and bilingual education to be successful, pupils need inclusive learning materials that are relevant to their situation and in a language they are familiar with. Providing appropriate reading materials alongside activities to encourage a culture of reading is a more effective way of improving children's learning.

Education strategies increasingly recognize the importance of accommodating children with disabilities in mainstream schools. However, more needs to be done to implement them effectively by adopting measures such as addressing attitudes of teachers and head teachers through training, and designing curricula that pay attention to the needs of disabled learners.

In Canberra, Australia, curriculum reform aims to raise students' awareness of people with disabilities through classroom activities aligned to the new Australian Curriculum. The reform is intended to help teachers improve student attitudes and understanding regarding students with disabilities, improve the quality of interactions and friendships between students with and without disabilities, and enhance the well-being and academic achievement of students with disabilities.

Curricula that aim to increase understanding of the science behind climate change and other environmental concerns can improve knowledge, raise awareness, and shape attitudes and behaviour that mitigate environmental damage. Strategies to empower children through communication and advocacy can also lead to practical actions that reduce their vulnerability to risk. In the Philippines, which is prone to environmental disasters, a strong commitment from government and non-state providers to integrate disaster risk reduction into the education sector has led children to take an active role in making their communities safer.

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