

TEACHING AND LEARNING:

Achieving quality for all

Monitoring the Education for All goals

Progress towards the six Education for All goals in Latin America and the Caribbean

Indicator	Latin America and the Caribbean		World	
	1999	2011	2010	
Goal 1	Pre-primary gross enrolment ratio (%)	54	73	50
Goal 2	Primary net enrolment ratio (%)	94	95	89
	Out-of-school children (million)	3.6	2.7	57.2
Goal 3	Lower secondary gross enrolment ratio (%)	95	102	82
	Out-of-school adolescents (million)	3.3	1.5	69.4
Goal 4	Adult literacy rate* (%)	86	92	84
	Youth literacy rate* (%)	93	97	89
Goal 5	Primary gender parity index	0.97	0.97	0.97
	Secondary gender parity index	1.07	1.07	0.97
Goal 6	Primary pupil/teacher ratio	26	21	24
Finance	Public education spending (% GNP)	5.0	5.5	5.1
	(% total government expenditure)	14.4	16.2	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 32 deaths for every 1000 live births in 2000 to 19 in 2012. The pre-primary education gross enrolment ratio increased from 54% in 1999 to 73% in 2011. This is good news given the strong evidence coming from long-term studies in the region on the importance

of strong foundations. For example, in Brazil children who had grown faster than expected by the age of 2 attained 0.6 more years of school and were more likely to complete secondary school. However, access to early childhood education services remains unequal. For example, in Belize and Suriname only 16% of 3- to 4-year olds from the poorest fifth of families attended some form of organized early childhood education programme, compared to about 60% of their richest peers.

Universal primary education

Latin America and the Caribbean are close to achieving universal primary enrolment with a net enrolment ratio of 95%. Yet, there are still over 2.5 million children out of school in the region. Moreover, assessing whether universal primary education has been achieved should be based on measures of completion rather than enrolment, which often gives a misleadingly optimistic picture. For example, Guatemala had a net enrolment ratio of 98% in 2010, but only 79% of children of primary school starting age were expected to complete primary school.

Youth and adult skills

Latin America continued making progress in secondary education enrolment over the past decade, although at half the speed of expansion compared to the previous decade. By 2011, the net enrolment ratio had reached 77%.

In general, countries that lagged behind expanded secondary education faster. However, wide inequalities remain. For example, increased access was combined with decreasing inequality in Ecuador, while in Guatemala inequality remained very high with only 28% of rural females attending secondary school compared to 62% of urban females in 2011. Differences in performance are partly explained by differences in the priority governments place on financing education: public education expenditure as a share of GNP almost tripled in Ecuador from 2% in 1999 to 5.3% in 2011. But it is also related to the effectiveness of other social policies. In Guatemala, a major conditional cash transfer programme, Mi Familia Progresá, expanded rapidly within two years to cover 23% of the population in 2010 but it provided only 9% of beneficiaries' income, much lower than the average in the region.

The pace of progress is too slow for many countries in the region, particularly for the disadvantaged. For example, in Honduras where 84% of the richest but only 10% of the poorest young people completed lower secondary school in 2011/12, it is projected that universal lower secondary school

completion will be achieved in the 2030s for the richest but almost 100 years later among the poorest young people.

Adult literacy

Among countries that will still be far from achieving universal adult literacy by 2015, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Mexico reduced the illiteracy rate by at least half, reaching the target set in 2000.

Gender parity and equality

Of the 15 countries globally with fewer than 90 boys for every 100 girls in secondary schools, half were in Latin America and the Caribbean. In Honduras, while parity in primary education has been achieved, only 88 boys are enrolled for every 100 girls in lower secondary education and only 73 boys for every 100 girls in upper secondary education.

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. Latin America and the Caribbean spent on average 5.5% of GNP on education and 16.2% of total government expenditure on education. While some countries in the region, such as the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Jamaica, put more emphasis on education financing, for example, meeting the benchmark on spending as a percentage of GNP, other countries, such as Paraguay and Peru, moved away. If Paraguay increased its tax-to-GDP ratio by 0.75% per year from 2011 onwards and if the government ensured that 20% of the budget is allocated to education, then an additional US\$ 1 billion would be available for education.

Around the world, governments are grappling with ways to reallocate their education budgets to those children most in need. Brazil has led the way with financing reforms that reduce regional inequality not only in terms of access to education but also learning outcomes.

Supporting teachers to end the learning crisis

An increase in public spending needs to take into account how the cost of education is currently shared so that the poorest can benefit. Adopting a national accounts approach to education, new analysis for this Report shows that of the total secondary education expenditure in Nicaragua in 2009, households covered 40%, donors 19% and the government 41%. This shows that, first, education is far from free and, second, external assistance continues to be very important for certain countries in the region.

Total aid to education in the region may have doubled from US\$ 560 million in 2002-03 to US\$ 1110 million in 2010 but fell by 15% to 948 million in 2011. Total aid to basic education fell by 13% to 381 million in 2011. Haiti, a low-income country which absorbed more than a third of total aid to basic education in the region, saw the level of aid to basic education decrease by 18% in 2011.

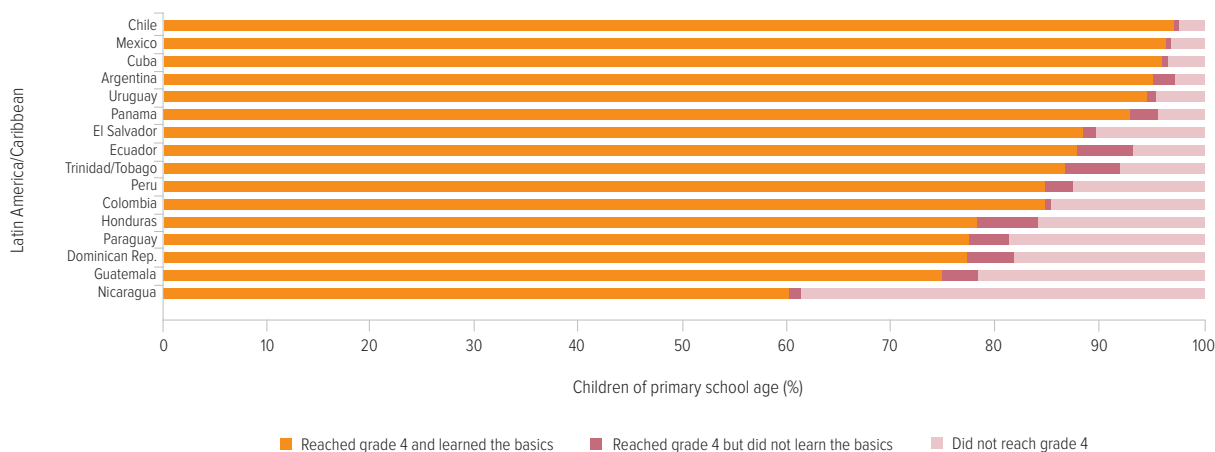
The learning crisis hits the disadvantaged hardest

Globally, 250 million children of primary school age are not learning the basics, whether they are in school or not. In Latin America and the Caribbean, 91% of children of primary school age reached grade 4 and learned the basics. 1.5% reached grade four but did not learn the basics, and 7.5% did not reach grade four.

There are wide disparities between countries: In Latin America and the Caribbean, where about 90 in 100 children of primary school age are learning the basics in reading, the share ranges from about 95% in Argentina, Chile, Cuba, Mexico and Uruguay to less than 80% in the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Paraguay. Performance in mathematics is worse: In Latin America and the Caribbean, only

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

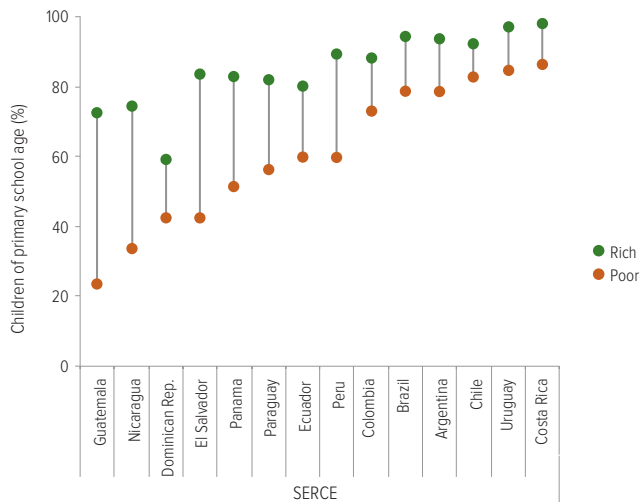


Note: See notes to Figure 4.1.

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.

Wealth affects whether primary school age children learn the basics

Percentage of children who completed primary school and achieved minimum learning standard in mathematics, by wealth, Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa



Notes: The definition of primary school completers refers to children aged 14-18 years and is calculated using available household survey data from the year closest to the learning achievement survey. Rich/poor refers to children in the top/bottom quartile in terms of the socio-economic status index in the SERCE surveys. The definition of achievement of a minimum learning standard depends on the benchmark specified in a given survey: level 1 (SERCE).

Sources: (1) Primary completion data: for SERCE countries: (2011): EFA Global Monitoring Report team calculations (2013), based on data from Demographic and Health Surveys and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys. (2) Learning achievement: Altinok (2013b), based on data from the 2006 SERCE surveys.

about 70 in 100 children are learning the basics in mathematics. In Nicaragua, where 60% of children reach the minimum learning standard in reading, only 37% do so in mathematics. In Chile, where almost all primary school age children reach the minimum learning standard in reading, 20% are unable to do so in mathematics.

Poverty can affect children's ability to learn: Children from disadvantaged backgrounds lag far behind their wealthier peers. In Costa Rica and Uruguay, at least 80% of children both complete primary education and achieve the minimum learning standard in mathematics, whether they are rich or poor. However, wealth gaps are remarkable in some countries in the region. In El Salvador, 42% of children from the poorest households complete primary education and master the basics, compared with 84% of those from richest households. In Guatemala, almost three-quarters of the rich achieve the basics compared with just one-quarter of the poorest, mainly because the latter do not make it to the end of the primary cycle.

Living in rural areas, which often lack teachers and teaching resources, can be a barrier to learning: In Panama, the achievement gaps in mathematics and reading between rural and urban primary school students exceeded 15 percentage points.

Speaking a minority language can be a disadvantage: The discrimination some indigenous or ethnic groups face is reinforced by the fact that the language used in the classroom may not be one that they speak. In Peru in 2011, Spanish speakers were more than seven times as likely as indigenous language speakers to reach a satisfactory standard in reading. Well-designed bilingual programmes taught by qualified teachers can help children overcome this challenge. In Guatemala, only 47% of poor rural minority language-speaking students reach the minimum learning standard in mathematics compared to 88% of rich urban Spanish-speaking students.

Children who learn less are more likely to leave school early: In Peru, children who scored in the bottom quarter in mathematics at age 12 were almost 50% more likely than those who were in the top quarter to drop out by age 15.

Inequalities remain in secondary education: In Colombia, only around 10% of poor 15-year old students reached the minimum learning standard in mathematics in 2009, compared with 55% of their rich peers. In some countries, the gap between rich and poor only becomes apparent in later grades. In Chile, for example, while the gap is narrow at grade 4, 77% of rich students achieve the minimum standards by grade 8, compared with 44% of poor students.

Access can be increased while the quality of education improves: In Mexico, as access to secondary school increased, the share of students performing above minimum benchmarks also increased, from one-third in 2003 to one-half in 2009. Targeted programmes to improve learning among children who were being left behind contributed to this broad-based progress.

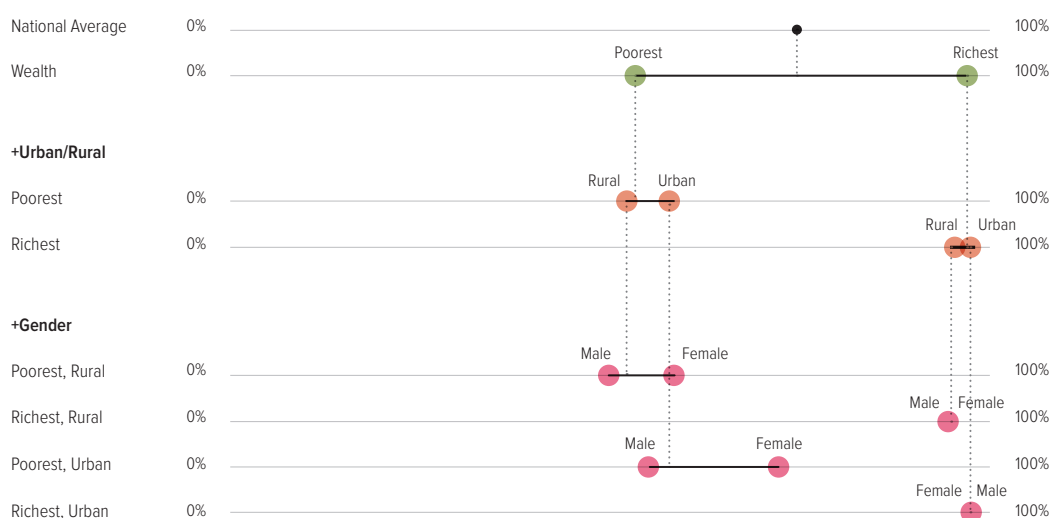


www.education-inequalities.org

Wide inequalities in learning

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 in access and learning across countries and within countries, with the aim of helping to inform policy design and public debate.

In Honduras, only one-half of the poorest boys living in rural areas have completed primary school and learned basics in reading. By contrast, almost all rich children have done so.



Source: PIRLS, 2011

Poor quality education leaves a legacy of illiteracy

The quality of education has a marked bearing on youth literacy. 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 always a guarantee for literacy. For example, among young people in Guyana, only 39% of those who had been no more than four years of school and only 60% of those who had five to six years of school had become literate.

Young people from poorer households are far less likely to be able to read. In Haiti, 42% of the poorest young people were literate compared to 92% of the richest. And among the poorest, there is a large 12 point gap at the expense of females compared to near gender parity among the richest. The combination of poverty and location may also have an adverse impact on the chances of young people being literate. In the Dominican Republic, while 78% of the poorest young people were literate, only 63% were literate among the poorest in Bahoruco province.

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 obtain the skills and knowledge they are meant to acquire. Poor quality of education holds back the learning of children from marginalized groups the most, so the global learning crisis cannot be overcome unless policies aim to improve learning among the disadvantaged. Latin American countries, such as Colombia, Paraguay and Peru, go further than some others in identifying reforms to improve the learning of disadvantaged groups, notably ethno-linguistic minorities and the poor. While such reforms mainly focus on extending access, they also include adapting curricula and pedagogical practices to the needs of particular groups. In Paraguay, for example, this involves creating educational materials in various languages.

Some plans include strategies that suggest making teachers accountable for delivering better results. In Jamaica, for example, performance-based pay is intended to foster a culture in which teachers apply the curriculum and so improve learning outcomes.

Few plans highlight the need for targeted support for students who are falling behind. Guyana has targeted programmes in mathematics and English for students in grades 6 and 7 who have not reached set standards of literacy and numeracy. Building teachers' capacity to deliver targeted programmes is a priority, along with developing relevant curriculum materials and distance learning using television and DVDs to support remedial programmes.

Policies can only be effective if those responsible for implementing them are involved in shaping them. In Jamaica, teachers expressed frustration over being left out of the policy formulation process. Many

felt that policy-makers were not genuinely interested in their opinions, and many said they were anxious about how new policies would affect their day-to-day work.

When teachers are offered opportunities to contribute to policy-making, many are willing to do so. In Peru, a survey revealed that about 40% of teachers were uncertain about the implications of a new teacher evaluation policy and perceived it as too complex. When given a chance to ask questions about it on an online forum, many were highly critical of the policy, which sought to tie sanctions and rewards to teachers' performance as evaluated through written tests which the teachers judged to be inadequate for assessing pedagogical skills.

In some countries, the engagement of teacher unions has improved policies aimed at helping disadvantaged groups. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, for example, the Confederation of Rural Education Teachers was instrumental in improving education quality among indigenous groups by highlighting the need for bilingual, multicultural education. Teacher unions were also instrumental in improving education quality among the Aymara and Quechua indigenous groups which contributed to a decrease in illiteracy. The confederation is the chief advocate of education tailored for indigenous groups and peasants, historically excluded from the education system. Indigenous education rights are now enshrined in the constitution, providing a legal basis on which to advocate for improvements.

The quality of education is held back in many countries by a lack of teachers. Between 2011 and 2015, the Latin America and Caribbean region needs to recruit about 42,000 additional teachers per year to reach a ratio of 32 pupils per teacher in lower secondary education. Between 1999 and 2011, the number of lower secondary school teachers grew by 35,000 annually in the region.

A four-part strategy to provide the best teachers

1. Attract the best teachers

"I chose to be a teacher because I believe that education has the power to transform the society we live in. What motivates me to be a good teacher is to be an active agent in this change that is so necessary for my country, to fight against discrimination, injustice, racism, corruption and poverty. Our responsibility as teachers is enormous, and our commitment to provide quality education must be renewed every day."

– Ana, teacher, Lima, Peru

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.

Policy-makers also 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. Recruiting teachers from ethnic minorities to work in their own communities ensures that children are taught by teachers familiar with their culture and language.

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 Peru, as part of the 2004 national assessment of student learning, the teachers of 12,000 grade 6 students from 900 schools also took the mathematics and reading comprehension tests. Students who scored well in mathematics tended to have teachers who also scored well in the subject.

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 need to support teachers in being able to teach early reading skills in more than one language and to use local language materials effectively. 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, including Chile, found that none of the countries included preparation for student diversity as a key focus of teacher education. However, Chile was shown to have strong preparation for related professional challenges. Student teachers had more opportunities to learn how to teach students from diverse cultural or socio-economic backgrounds, as well as those with physical disabilities.

Pre-service education is vital to provide teachers with the skills to teach multiple grades, ages and abilities in one classroom. In the Peruvian Amazon, for example, multigrade teachers saw the monograde class as the desirable norm and felt unprepared to work in multigrade classrooms.

Regular supervision and ongoing training have the potential to address knowledge gaps and upgrade and reinforce acquired skills. In Mexico, the Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo system provides an intensive training and support package for untrained teachers in community-run pre-schools in disadvantaged areas. These teachers also receive a scholarship for tuition to continue their secondary or post-secondary education. Trainers are assigned to clusters of 10 schools and participating community teachers meet monthly for supervision and training.

Mentoring new teachers once they are in the classroom is vital, particularly in poorer countries where teachers have limited prior practical experience.

The key role that teacher educators play in shaping teachers' skills is often the most neglected aspect of teacher preparation systems. In Nicaragua, a professional development module was designed to address the instructional gaps identified in an Early Grade Reading Assessment in 2008. A first step was a four-day training workshop for 180 teacher trainers and ministry staff, focusing on using assessment tools to inform and improve instruction.

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. In Mexico and Peru, teachers with the best subject knowledge work in urban areas. In Mexico, teachers of children whose mother tongue is an indigenous language often have less education and training than other teachers.

Financial incentives and good housing can promote deployment to remote or rural areas.

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, local recruitment can bring challenges in deploying teachers effectively over the span of their careers. In Peru, most teachers are now recruited in the region where they were born and educated, and rarely change positions over their career.

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 Chile and Peru. 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 Latin America, teachers are generally paid above the poverty threshold, but their salaries do not compare favourably with those working in professions requiring similar qualifications. In 2007, other professionals and technicians with similar characteristics earned 43% more than pre-school and primary school teachers in Brazil, and 50% more in Peru. A similar gap is discernible between secondary school teachers and other professionals, who earned 46% more in Paraguay and 50% more in Ecuador. In addition, the gap between teachers and other professionals is wider for those with longer experience, because teachers' salaries do not increase as much as other professionals' pay over time.

Teachers' salaries – and the rates at which they increase – are conventionally determined by formal qualifications, the amount of training and years of experience. But pay structures based on these criteria do not necessarily lead to better learning outcomes. Using multiple evaluators is one way of producing fair and successful teacher appraisals, but requires considerable time and resources on the part of the evaluators and those being evaluated. In Chile, principals share the responsibility with external accredited evaluators, a local assessment centre and peer evaluators.

Performance-related pay can have perverse outcomes if it rewards schools that were already performing well, as Chile's experience shows. All public and state-subsidized private primary and secondary schools, which together account for 90% of enrolment, have participated since 1996 in a National System of School Performance Assessment. Schools are divided into homogenous groups based on their region, whether they are in an urban or rural area, and their students' socio-economic status. Within each group, the schools accounting for the 25% of enrolment that has the highest index of student achievement in a national assessment receive a quarterly

'teaching excellence subsidy', 90% of which is shared among all teachers in the school, with 10% allocated by the principal to the best teachers. After the programme was introduced, average achievement increased. However, the formula used works to the benefit of schools that were already doing well, rather than those that improve the most.

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 teachers whose students are already performing well. In Mexico, many teachers are excluded from participating in such programmes, with those living in rural areas particularly affected. Experience in Brazil suggests that rewarding schools with collective bonuses may be a more effective way to improve learning outcomes.

However, 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.

Strengthen teacher governance

If days are lost because teachers are absent or devote more attention to private tuition than classroom teaching, the learning of the poorest children can be harmed. Understanding the reasons behind these problems is crucial for the design of effective strategies to solve them. Strong school leadership is required to ensure that teachers show up on time, work a full week and provide equal support to all.

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. In Peru, absenteeism was 9% in urban areas, 16% in rural areas and up to 20% in schools further than 15 km from a

paved road. Official duties explained 13% of teacher absences, sick leave or authorized leave 23% and unauthorized leave 10%, but no reason was given for 42%.

Even though teacher absenteeism is widespread in some countries, it is not inevitable, a fact that suggests it is a response to working conditions. In Ecuador and Peru, 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.

Combining monitoring with incentives could be more beneficial than penalties for tackling absenteeism. In a study of 178 primary schools in rural Peru, teacher attendance was monitored three times a day by parents trained for the task. In most schools, bonuses based on the achievement of individual and group attendance targets were distributed. Average attendance was higher by 17 days a year in these schools than in those with monitoring only: the combination of bonuses and monitoring proved effective. The impact on student achievement in mathematics and reading was limited, however: only grade 5 mathematics scores had increased by the end of the year.

Other interventions aimed at enhancing teacher accountability are often expected to reduce teacher absenteeism, but do not necessarily do so. Greater involvement of parents and the community in school management, for example, had limited impact on teacher attendance in El Salvador, and no impact on student achievement.

Governments should work more closely with teacher unions and teachers to formulate policies and adopt codes of conduct to tackle unprofessional behaviour such as persistent absenteeism and gender-based violence. Codes of practice should be consistent with legal frameworks for child rights and protection and a range of penalties, such as suspension and interdiction, clearly stipulated.

Private tutoring by teachers reinforces disparities between students whose parents can afford to pay the fees and those who cannot. Strategies should 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.

Private schools that charge low fees are seen by some as one way of expanding access to better quality education for disadvantaged children in areas where government schools are failing. Such schools are also seen as a less expensive way of achieving quality, because they can recruit teachers at lower cost than government schools. Advocates of low fee private schools argue that students in these schools achieve better learning outcomes than students in government schools, but such differences arise partly because teachers in government schools often face more difficult conditions, teaching larger classes and children with a wider diversity of learning needs.

Expanding private schooling on a large scale can widen inequality in access to quality education, leading to widespread dissatisfaction and social unrest, as Chile's experience shows. This is a particular risk if such expansion triggers a decline in the quality of government schools mostly serving the disadvantaged. In Chile, where private schools have expanded rapidly in recent years, 94% of enrolment in these schools is from the wealthiest quintile, while two-thirds of those in state schools are from the poorest half of the population.

Curriculum and assessment strategies that improve learning

Policy-makers should ensure the curriculum focuses on securing strong foundation skills for all, is delivered at an appropriate pace and in a language children understand. Governments should ensure that adequate and relevant resources are in place to support learning from the earliest years and build a culture of reading.

Curricula that do not acknowledge and address issues of inclusion can alienate

disadvantaged groups within the classroom, and so limit their chances to learn effectively. In some countries, curricula reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. The Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial, a secondary school programme working with the minority Garifuna group in Honduras, aims to address this, and to empower girls and women. An interdisciplinary curriculum questions dominant power structures and challenges gender stereotypes. Teaching is learner-centred and inquiry-based, and emphasizes dialogue. Graduates from this programme displayed greater ability to identify problems and conceive solutions, along with more gender awareness, self-confidence and knowledge and improved learning outcomes.

Getting out-of-school children back into school and learning is vital. Governments and donor agencies should support accelerated learning programmes to achieve this goal. Formal schools can also use accelerated learning in situations where large proportions of students are over-age for their grade. In Brazil, over-age students in grades 5 to 8 were taught a substantially modified curriculum, covering more than one grade in a year. Overall, schools' share of students with a two-year age grade gap was reduced from 46% in 1998 to 30% in 2003. Once the students were restored to the right grade for their age, they were able to maintain their performance and their promotion rates in secondary school were comparable with those of other students.

Technology can greatly extend the reach of educational provision and enrich curriculum delivery. Telesecundaria in Mexico was launched in 1968 to extend access to lower secondary education; by 2010, 1.26 million students were enrolled in the programme.

Teachers' ability to use ICT as an educational resource plays a critical role in improving learning. A study in Brazil found that the introduction of computer laboratories in schools had a negative impact on student performance, but that teachers' use of the Internet as a pedagogical resource supported innovative classroom teaching and learning, resulting in improved test scores.

Some countries, particularly in Latin America, have made great strides in using national assessments to identify children with inherited disadvantage who need extra attention. Uruguay followed up an initial assessment of grade 6 pupils' language and mathematics learning in 1996 with sample assessments every three years. The assessment material and training sessions were also offered to non-sampled schools so that these schools could conduct the tests themselves; about 80% of schools per year volunteered to do so, thus involving teachers directly in assessment activities. This has led to improvement in teachers' experience and use of assessment inside the school system. National assessments in 1996, 1999 and 2002 showed that, while all learners were scoring higher, the improvement was steepest for the most disadvantaged 20%.

Classroom-based learning assessments help teachers identify students who are struggling to learn, diagnose their learning difficulties and choose strategies to support them.

Students can also make considerable gains if they are offered more opportunities to monitor their own learning. The Escuela Nueva programme in rural Colombia, where pupils are guided to assessment tasks

through learning materials rather than having the tasks set by the teacher, found that pupils benefited from the ability to self-diagnose problem areas and learn at their own pace.

Targeted additional support via trained teaching assistants or community volunteers is another key way of improving learning for students at risk of falling behind. A tutoring programme in Costa Rica, which used secondary school volunteers to provide structured learning support for pre-school children from low income families, led to improved reading skills.

Policy-makers should manage teachers better by:

- making it harder for underperforming teachers to remain in the profession
- strengthening legislation to address misconduct and gender-based violence
- improving motivation and job satisfaction to reduce absenteeism and private tuition by teachers of their own students

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