



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
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**EVALUATION INSIGHTS** provides a snap-shot of UNESCO's work in evaluation. Its purpose is to share insights and ideas with all interested stakeholders and to feed into ongoing discussions about the contribution of evaluation to the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Its fourth edition is dedicated to: **A Review of Evaluative Evidence on Teacher Policy.**

## A Review of Evaluative Evidence on Teacher Policy

Teachers are fundamental for achieving inclusive and quality education in the context of the SDG4 -Education 2030.

There have been some real achievements in global education following the endorsement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All in 2000.<sup>1</sup> Given these gains in access to education, and while Universal Primary Education remains a global priority, the international community's attention is becoming more concerned with improving education quality. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which aims to 'ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning', clearly echoes this shift. With teachers as one of its main means of implementation, SDG 4 reinforces the widespread recognition that education quality has to do, first and foremost, with the availability of qualified teachers in classrooms.

*Addressing the twin challenges of teacher supply and quality is an ambitious agenda* for even the most well-intentioned of governments. Not only are national budgets a constraining factor, but many developing countries also lack the capacity to design and implement complementary policies to sustainably address teacher reform. UNESCO, along with partner agencies, has an important role to play by providing technical assistance, monitoring normative instruments, supporting innovative evidence-based responses and promoting platforms for knowledge exchange.

### Why this review?

This review was initiated by UNESCO to inform the ongoing discourse and future strategies for teacher policy within UNESCO and potentially other UN agencies and development partners working on teacher policies.

<sup>1</sup> In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, the proportion of children enrolled in primary school has risen from 52% in 1990 to 80% in 2015. Globally, the number of out-of-school children of primary school age fell from 106 million in 1999 to 68 million in 2008, (EFA, Global Monitoring Report, 2015).

It revealed that partner agencies including World Bank, UNICEF, Education International and UNESCO are promoting a range of strategies and policies to help countries address the multiple challenges of teacher supply and quality, and much can be learned from their application in various contexts.



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## Emerging Insights

*Issue 1: Insufficient teacher supply poses a serious challenge for achieving SDGs. However, it is not only shortages, increasing workforce diversity is equally urgent.*

*Children who feel that their teachers have little in common with them are less likely to engage fully in learning.* As enrolment rises, children are more likely to come from marginalised groups, have disabilities or parents who are not literate. Reflecting on the diversity of the teaching workforce (gender, ethnicity, mastery of local languages, special needs) is therefore critical when considering strategies to increase the supply of teachers.

*Among the most critical challenges when addressing teacher supply is understanding attrition, i.e. who leaves the profession permanently, how many leave and why they leave.* Studies show that by 2030, attrition will drive almost 90% of the need for new teachers. Causes include demographics (e.g. retirement); personal factors (e.g. marriage, family); pull factors (e.g. labour market conditions, teacher pay); and push factors (e.g. school and living conditions at post; professional autonomy; workload).

*Furthermore, the number of teachers who do not show up regularly to work is equally significant.* Studies have found national averages of teacher absenteeism in developing countries that range from 3 percent to 27 percent. Within countries, absenteeism is larger in poorer, more isolated schools, contributing to unequal educational opportunities due to

a variety of issues (including external factors such as travel to city centres from remote locations to collect salaries) and often appears to be a response to working conditions and poor supervision rather than an endemic problem.

## *Issue 2: Ensuring teacher quality is central to improving education quality and learning*

*Teacher quality is high on policy agendas globally because of the evidence of its impact on student learning and of concerns expressed by teachers themselves about the future of their profession – its attractiveness to talented new entrants and its reward structure and the support that teachers are provided. However, there is limited consensus on how teachers can best be developed and motivated to perform, by getting the mix of recruitment, training and teacher management right. Teacher motivation and morale are also important influences. Among the most significant determinants<sup>2</sup> of teacher quality this review assessed the following:*

### *Who enters the profession (standards and certification)?*

Despite often low entry requirements many countries are still unable to attract sufficient numbers of candidates, in part due to the low image and status, as well as low salary standards the profession is offering.

### *What do they know (teacher education and training)?*

Low academic skills and knowledge at entering the profession, often regardless of the official qualification, coupled with the lack of pedagogical skills (i.e. encouraging active student participation, teaching in multi-grade classrooms, accounting for special learning needs, or gender sensitive teaching) often leads to lack of confidence and eventually retention among many new teachers. With increased need for contract teachers, community teachers or volunteer teachers the teaching workforce also includes untrained or undertrained teachers. While access to ongoing (in service) teacher training and professional development can compensate for low quality or no initial training, many countries even struggle to maintain the quality of their initial teacher education programmes.



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<sup>2</sup> Literature identifies 5 interrelated factors that determine teacher quality: Teacher standards and certification, teacher education and training before and during their careers, teacher management, teacher salaries and teacher deployment.

### *How they are motivated to perform (teacher management)?*

For students to learn teachers need to perform and be motivated. While evaluative evidence shows that monetary incentives such as bonus pay for performance suggest positive effects on student learning, many financially constrained governments seek to identify low cost or non-monetary incentives that can positively influence teacher behaviour, such as public recognition, respect from peers and supervisors, enhanced autonomy in the workplace and improved working conditions.

## **What did we learn?**

**Policy Message 1:** *With the link between teacher quality and student performance becoming increasingly apparent, education leaders are focusing attention on upgrading teacher quality. Unfortunately, chronic teacher shortages remain a serious issue and many governments continue to struggle with the first order problem of sufficient staffing. Given the amount of time it takes to train new teachers; it is essential to think creatively about policy combinations that address the shortage issue in the short-term while keeping an eye on maintaining quality over the long-term. Importantly, while ensuring representation from all groups is critical when discussing teacher supply, institutionalising gender sensitive recruitment and retention policies requires urgent consideration not least because evidence shows that the presence of female teachers can significantly improve girls' enrolment and attendance.*

**Policy Message 2:** *It is clear that effective teacher development is an ongoing process which requires considerable investment. It also demands a holistic view which balances content knowledge with pedagogical skills, practical experience and in-situ support with particular attention to creating child-friendly and gender sensitive teaching and learning environments. While what works to improve teaching quality varies by context, innovative approaches do exist and can be mainstreamed into national teacher development policies. However, despite the plethora of teacher training programmes, evaluative evidence of which innovations work at scale in developing countries and research into what context specific adjustments are required is thin. This is an area that requires substantial ongoing investment.*

**Policy Message 3:** *Many partner agencies have invested substantially in capacity building of national governments for teacher reform (both upstream at the policy level and downstream at the implementation level) with some very positive results. To maximise their impact, agencies can continue promoting existing policy development resources and building the capacity of teacher training institutes/resource centres, build own staff capacity to implement policy development resources locally, encourage the involvement of teachers in policy reform, and identify and attempt to narrow the evidence gap on teachers by encouraging more evaluation and systematic reviews of existing data.*