**Teacher training and support?**

BY FA I S A L B A R I 2021-02-19

TEACHERS matter: a good teacher can impact the learning of children significantly. A good teacher/human being can also be a very effective role model for children. Both of these impacts are acknowledged in the literature on teacher effectiveness.  
  
Teaching has a lot of elements that link with teacher personality, but teaching can be learnt as well. There is again evidence that teachers learn new content, new ways of teaching, learning and interacting with students over their careers. This makes teacher training, development and teacher support important areas to think about. It is not just a matter of selecting good teachers; once a teacher has been selected, they need to be supported in their role throughout their careers.  
  
Many countries have significant entry requirements for teachers. These include an undergraduate degree, a degree in education, teacher certification and a requirement to attend courses, throughout their career, to keep their teacher certification valid. There can be some variation in the above requirements, but as a whole, this is what is usually needed.  
  
Public-sector teachers in Pakistan have to now be graduates at the minimum. They acquire an education degree after coming into service. They do get some induction training and some professional support throughout their careers, but there are no licensing and/or mandatory requirements.  
  
There are, effectively, no requirements for teacher qualifications for the private sector.  
  
Schools select teachers. There are no requirements for training either; it is up to the school and/or the teacher, if any training is provided or secured.  
  
We, effectively speaking, do not `select` for good teachers (as selection is not based on teaching demonstrations and/or personality traits) and we do not provide adequate support to teachers either, barring, possibly, a minority who teach in high-fee schools.  
  
Most of the private schools in Pakistan are lowto middle-fee schools. They do not and cannot pay teachers high salaries. In fact, most private-sector teacher salaries are below the minimum wage.Teachers, mostly educated females, find it easier and more socially acceptable to enter the teaching profession than any other. So, there is a large supply of untrained though educated females available to become teachers. But there is significant turnover in teachers as well. When women get married, have a child, or get a better job, they drop out of teaching.  
  
Training teachers for schools, even if they had the resources, makes little sense as there is a danger that investment in training will move with the teacher and be lost. The teachers, given their low salaries, have no resources to invest in training, and there are no returns on training either for the teachers or those providing the training.  
  
So we are stuck in a state of low-level equilibrium. A large supply of teachers, low salaries, low fees, and high teacher turnover combine to ensure there is no incentive to look for training, no incentives for providing it, and no rewards for giving or receiving training.  
  
On the public side, though teacher salaries have improved a lot, the training wings of the respective education departments remain severely underfunded. These departments do offer some level of training and continuous support to teachers but lack of funds implies that most of the time training or support is very basic and these departments have to wait for donor funds, project to project, to provide any innovative or advanced training. Take the example of Punjab, the largest province with some 400,000 public-sector teachers: a lot of teacher training, over the last couple of decades, has been supported by DFID (now FCDO) or World Bank funds. And trainings have been, to that extent, ad hoc or piecemeal.  
  
How do we change the equilibria? For the public sector, the solution seems to be more straightforward. We need more funds for the training and support wings of the education departments. There will be and should be valid concerns about effective utilisation of any more funds, but that is a general concern. The main issue is that teacher training and support needs to become a core function for education departments and it has to be fully or mainly funded through recurrent funds. Individualprojects can add training on specific topics but this cannot be the way to fund core programming and support.  
  
The need for funds makes the solution less likely to be implemented though. Education funding has been more or less stagnant over the last two to three years. Given the economic situation, it is unlikely it will be increased in the next year or two.  
  
Even if there are any increases, there is pressure to put additional funds in raising salaries or recruiting more teachers. It is unlikely teacher training and support will get high priority.  
  
On the private-sector side, it is harder to see the right intervention. There are plenty of schools and universities who could provide training. But who is going to pay for it? Schools do not have resources or incentives to pay, teachers cannot do it themselves.  
  
Andqualitytraining,likeeducation,isexpensiveto provide. How can this be resolved? Over 40 per cent of our children now attend private schools and leaving aside the 3pc to 4pc who go to high-fee schools, the rest are in lowto middle-fee schools. Could the government, in the interest of providing decent quality education to all children, come to the aid of private schools in the form of subsidised teacher training and support programmes? A large enough intervention could change the equilibrium. Even if it does not, there might be a large enough impact on the quality of education to justify the costs.  
  
Teacher training and support is an area that is not functioning well in Pakistan. The issues are different for the private and public sector though. For the public sector, it is an issue of injecting more resources to ensure quality of training and sustainability. For the private sector, the issue is figuring out who pays for the training and support. There do not seem to be enough resources in the system, and there is a lack of or poor incentives for the provision of training or support. Will the system continue to limp along, or can the government try and change this dynamic?  The writer is a senior research fellow at the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives, and an associate professor of economics at Lums.