
Teacher motivation and incentives

BRIEF 2

Teachers

Teacher improvement

Conditions of employment for teachers

Improving the motivation and incentives of teachers greatly improves the overall quality of the education system.

Improving the motivation and status of teachers generally improves teaching. Research suggests that students learn more in classrooms with highly dedicated and motivated teachers.(13) Raising the motivation and status of teachers as well as retaining high-quality teachers is therefore vital to improving education.

Issues and Discussion

In many education systems student learning suffers due to difficulties attracting high-quality teachers, limited motivation for teachers to perform their jobs well, and teacher attrition.(13) Though well intentioned, some educational policies and programmes actually undermine teacher motivation.(7) Education planners should therefore carefully consider the impact of their decisions on teachers and their motivations to teach.

Motivation and its effects: Exemplary teachers are highly motivated to teach all of their students as well as possible. However, a variety of intrinsic factors (such as loving the teaching process, enjoying children) and extrinsic factors (such as salary, further education) influence teachers' motivation levels. Low teacher motivation can affect the quality of candidates entering the profession. It can also contribute to a reduced focus on the teaching and learning process as evidenced by minimal time spent preparing lessons or supporting struggling learners.(1) Moreover, teachers with low motivation may repeatedly arrive late or not at all.(1) In fact, absenteeism can be as high as 25% in some countries and has a significant negative impact on student learning.(1)(2)(5) Attrition is also often a consequence of low motivation and is most severe in contexts where the living or teaching conditions are challenging, such as rural schools.(1) In fact, attrition rates vary between 5-30% in sub-Saharan Africa.(6) However, in some countries teachers may have low motivation but remain in the profession due to a lack of other jobs.(1)

A wide range of variables, including the five areas outlined below, influences both teacher motivation and problems of attrition.

Status of Teaching: In some countries teaching is considered a last option for graduates who need work or do not perform well on national exams.(1)(14) In contrast, teaching is a prestigious profession in several high-performing nations, such as South Korea, Taiwan due at least in part to the high standards for entrance into teaching.(7)(12) The initial desires of teachers to join the teaching profession influence their future job satisfaction and desires to remain in teaching.(7) It is therefore helpful to increase the status of the teaching profession and the perceived value of teachers by investing in improving the conditions and realities of the profession, as suggested below.

Professional Conditions of Teaching: The professional conditions of teaching also influence teacher motivation and attrition. Heavy workloads and large class sizes can significantly demoralize teachers.(1) Teaching is also becoming more challenging due to increased demands to teach complex skills, heightened control by administrators, and decreased time to plan and collaborate with colleagues.(7) However, a supportive professional work environment as well as positive relationships within the community can reduce these pressures and improve teachers' motivation and effectiveness.(1)(6)(7)

Personal Conditions of Teaching: Personal discomfort may make teachers want to leave their teaching post or even the profession. Inadequate housing options as well as the cost and travel time for transportation can contribute to low motivation and increased attrition.(1) Moreover, teachers who are posted to schools away from their families may desire to transfer or leave teaching completely.(10) Some teacher posts also involve more hardship than others, such as those in remote locations, in conflict zones, or in high-poverty communities. Teachers may need additional incentives to remain in posts where such personal conditions are less enticing. Attractive housing, running water, and consistent electricity are some of the most cost-effective approaches to motivate teachers in rural areas.(1)

Teaching Salary: The salary for teachers influences the overall prestige and attractiveness of the profession and teachers often say that increased pay would improve their morale.(1) In addition, there may be differences in salary between teachers of different levels—such as trained teachers and non-trained teachers—which can be a source of dissatisfaction, especially for the least trained and lowest paid teachers who may feel inferior. In many countries some teachers do not earn enough to live above the poverty line.(13) These low salaries influence the motivation of teachers, who often turn to private tutoring or other part-time work to supplement their income, which can negatively affect classroom instruction.(13) Moreover, late or inconsistent pay reduces teacher morale.(6) Reforms that link teacher salary with student performance are controversial and inconsistent across contexts, due largely to how teachers are evaluated and paid (e.g., by individual, grade, or school).(9) Yet, ideally teacher advancement and salaries would be connected to overall teacher quality.

Additional Incentives: Additional incentives for teachers may also be beneficial. For example, teachers may be motivated by opportunities for additional professional development or access to low-interest loans.(1)(6) Career advancement through attaining higher education qualifications can also make teaching more attractive.(1) However, providing study leave options for teachers can be challenging because some teachers may not return to teaching after their period of leave.(4)

Inclusiveness and Equity

Gender equity in teachers' conditions of employment: Female teachers serve as important role models for students in schools, especially in rural areas, but often face additional challenges and

have higher attrition.(6) Providing safe and adequate housing is extremely important for female teachers as well as considering marital/family obligations.(1)(10) Equal pay for male and female teachers is also important as well as the presence of female administrations and educational leaders.(6)

Paraprofessional teachers and professional equity: Many systems use paraprofessional teachers and pay them less. While this may be necessary to fill massive teacher shortages, it can be a cause of frustration for both trained and paraprofessional teachers.(1) Sometimes these are teachers recruited from rural areas or minority language groups to meet other important educational goals like rural access to schooling and mother tongue instruction. These teachers might initially have lower salaries because they have lower qualifications, but strong teachers should have opportunities to receive equitable pay and upgrade their qualifications.(11)

Policy Examples

- Zambia (pp. 120-122) [[PDF](#)]
- Vietnam (pp. 43, 49-50) [[PDF](#)]
- Bahamas (pp. 28-31) [[PDF](#)]

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