



Does teaching quality matter? Students learning outcome related to teaching quality in public and private primary schools in India



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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how teaching quality impacts students' outcomes in public and low fee charging private schools in India. Drawing on Young Lives longitudinal study, students in private schools have a significantly higher mathematics score than public schools. Across public and private schools, teachers' characteristics such as experience, gender, content knowledge and general education qualifications do not have significant influence on students' learning outcome. Proximity of teacher's residence to the school, teacher's professional qualification and teacher's attitude towards schools and students and teaching practices such as regular checking of books, emerge as important determinants of students' outcomes.

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1. Introduction

India launched its flagship programme Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in 2001, to meet MDG 2 Goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (Grade 1–VIII). As a result, the recent years have witnessed a huge increase in enrolments in both public as well as private schools across the country. There is indisputably a growing shift towards private schooling, not only in urban areas, but also across rural India, where low fee charging private schools have mushroomed, carrying the fashionable tag of 'English medium'. Studies such as the Seventh Annual Survey of Education, show an increase in national level private school elementary school enrolment (age group 6–14 years) from 18.7 per cent in 2006 to 25.6 in 2011, except in Bihar which has the unique distinction of actually decreasing the proportion enrolled in private schools because of opening of a large number of Public schools and recruitment of teachers (ASER, 2011). National statistics reveal that 187,872,996 students are enrolled in elementary classes in India out of which 69.5 percent of the students are enrolled in Public or government schools and close to 34 percent of elementary students (Grades I–VIII) attend 19.4 percent of schools that are either private aided or unaided (DISE 2009–2010). Indian schools are broadly categorised into three categories: (1) public schools run by various state education departments i.e.

government owned and controlled which do not charge fees. (2) Private aided schools i.e. schools managed by private bodies but receiving funds from the government to pay salaries of teachers, and in general charge fees which is much lower than private unaided schools and lastly (3) private unaided schools which are privately managed, do not get any aid from the government and survive by charging fees from the students. Private unaided schools frame their own admission rules and fee structure for students and tuition fee may vary from Rs. 30 to Rs. 4000 per month depending on the location and services provided by the school. It is critical to mention at the outset that private schools are not homogeneous in nature and that is why one can find, very low fee charging schools in rural and urban slums of India and internationally competitive high fee charging elite private schools in urban areas, catering to rich students. This paper is limited to investigating low fee charging unaided private schools, catering to children belonging to economically weaker families.

The enactment of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 ratified in April 2010 (RtE Act) has made it a constitutional obligation for all 35 states and Union Territories in India to provide students between the ages of 6–14 access to free and compulsory education in a neighbourhood school till completion of elementary education (Article 3). At the time the Act was notified, it was estimated that the total number of additional teachers required to meet the prescribed pupil teacher ratio under the Act in public schools, was approximately 1.2 million teachers, in addition to ensuring that 0.5 million currently employed unqualified teachers get the requisite qualifications within three years.

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Even after the enactment of RtE Act, percentage of single teacher primary schools remains at 12.26 percent with states like Arunachal Pradesh having 65.12 percent single teacher primary schools. This is further exacerbated by teacher absenteeism and lack of accountability (Ramachandran et al., 2005). A range of quantitative and qualitative studies done in the past two decades (PROBE, 1999; Ramachandran et al., 2004; De et al., 2001; Majumdar, 2001) reveal a distressing picture of the learning achievements of students. The Seventh Annual Survey of Education Report (ASER, 2011) has also shown an alarming decline in mathematics skills in rural schools, with the number of class III students able to solve subtraction problems falling from 36.6 per cent in 2010 to 29.9 per cent in 2011.

1.1. Teaching quality

EFA and MDG 2 cannot be realised unless needs of all learners are met and this is highly dependent on teaching quality. Teaching and teacher quality have innumerable definitions and are sometimes linked together or used in isolation. This paper considers teaching quality to be an amalgamation of both teacher characteristics such as inputs (professional qualifications, experience, place of residence, in service training etc.) as well as what the teachers 'does' and demonstrates in the classroom (practices, attitudes and content knowledge). This has been aptly elaborated by Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005):

Quality teaching can be understood as teaching that produces learning. In other words, there can indeed be a task sense of teaching, but any assertions that such teaching is quality teaching, depends on student learning ... we label this sense of teaching *successful teaching* (p.186).

Darling-Hammond (2000), stresses that teacher quality is one of the most important factors contributing to student achievement, more significant than class size. Of all the variables associated with effective schools, the quality of teaching, has both the most consistently demonstrated impact on student learning and is within the power of schools to do something about (Wyatt, 1996). The McKinsey report (Barber and Mourshed, 2007) which studied 25 school systems, identified teacher quality as being crucial to high quality education. While many studies have undertaken a comparison of private and public schools in India and proclaimed the cost effectiveness of private schools (Kingdon, 1996a; Tooley et al., 2007) and also higher test scores (PROBE, 1999; Ramachandran and Saihjee, 2002; Muralidharan and Kremer, 2006), not many studies have focussed on quality of teaching within these schools and the effect on learning outcomes across private and public schools. Fuller and Clarke (1994) assert that there is a lack of evidence in developing countries that investigate teaching behaviours and classroom factors that promote favourable student outcomes.

The assumption that quality teaching leads to better student outcomes is an assumption that this paper adopts, since teaching is as seen as facilitating learning. This paper examines how teaching and teacher quality in public and low fee charging private schools measured by a variety of factors ranging from *teacher characteristics* such as maths content knowledge of teachers and teacher professional qualifications, *instructional dimensions* such as multi-grade teaching, regular feedback by checking books and teachers proximity to the school, as well as larger *organisational dimensions* such as teacher accountability, are related to student outcomes. Student outcome is measured by maths achievement level of students in the schools. The paper makes a critique of systemic issues related to the public education system, which is increasingly being abandoned by even the poorest of families who are taking on debts to pay for private education for their students, since they are

convinced that their sacrifices would result in a 'better future; for their children.' Section 2 provides details of Young Lives survey and sample for the school-based study, Section 3 focuses on methodology, Section 4 covers the analysis and results, while Sections 5 and 6 highlight the recommendations and conclusions respectively.

2. Young Lives

This paper draws on the India sample of the Young Lives longitudinal study, which is from the state of Andhra Pradesh.¹ Andhra Pradesh (AP) is the 5th largest state in India, with a population of over 80 million, 73 percent of who live in rural areas. Andhra Pradesh which ranks 14 out of 35 states in India on the Composite Educational Index (DISE, 2010), has also been impacted by the phenomenon of increasing private school enrolments, similar to National trends illustrated earlier. According to DISE (2010) (NUEPA, 2011), Andhra Pradesh had a total of 102,798 schools imparting elementary education of which 77.6 percent (79,813 schools) were Public schools (comprising local body, tribal welfare and department of education schools) and 22 percent (22,985 schools) were private schools. According to ASER, 2010, between 2009 and 2010, the percentage of students (age 6–14) enrolled in private school has increased from 29.7 percent to 36.1 percent in Andhra Pradesh. Policy planners are faced with a situation where even the poorest of families are opting for low-fee 'English-medium' private schools, which are often run by entrepreneurs such as young graduates or someone with rooms to spare within their own homes, both in rural areas as well as urban slums.

So far, data on the Young Lives students, households and communities have been collected in three rounds – 2002, 2006–07 and 2009–2010 respectively. The Round 3 Young Lives India Survey Report (Galab et al., 2011) highlighted that there was a significant increase in enrolment of Young Lives students in private schools at the age of 8 between 2002 and 2009. 44 per cent the Younger Cohort aged 8 in 2009, were enrolled in private schools, compared to only 23 per cent of the Older Cohort when they were 8 in 2002. The report shows that private school enrolment has gone up for every group – male, female, rural, urban and all the different official caste and tribal groupings,² and that private school enrolment has approximately doubled in 2009, compared to 2002. However, serious equity concerns exist, with increased enrolment far from evenly distributed and gender-based school choices more prevalent (Woodhead et al., 2013). In 2009 (Round 3 survey), the parents of eight-year old children were asked about the main reason for choosing a particular school for their child. It is interesting to notice that while 53 percent of parents who sent their children to public schools, cited close proximity to school as the main reason for choosing the school, only a miniscule 6 per cent said cited good-quality teaching. On the contrary, amongst the parents who sent their children to private schools, 63 per cent refer to the good-quality teaching and 22 per cent chose the private school due to proximity to their home (Singh and Sarkar, 2012).

A number of studies in India have focussed on studying private and public schools in various states of India. Kingdon (1996a) challenged the prevailing notion in Indian writings, based on official published data, that the size of the private sector in primary education was "infinitesimally small" or "negligibly small." A

¹ The state of Andhra Pradesh has been bifurcated into the two new states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh on June 2nd, 2014.

² Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes and Other Tribes are official designations made by the Public of India. Disadvantaged groups are given legal protection and other benefits designed to compensate for the discrimination they have suffered for centuries.

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