

ESRC-DFID Research for Policy and Practice: Quality teaching

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Foreword

Teachers are crucial to achieving the ambitions articulated in Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure that no one should be left behind in education. Their motivation, skills and knowledge will literally determine whether hundreds of millions of children are able to see a path out of the global learning crisis.

However, the process of teaching – and what truly makes it good quality – remains something of a ‘black box’ to both academics and practitioners. That should perhaps not be surprising: without the appropriate support, teaching in developing countries can be a solitary and often lonely profession for teachers who are struggling against so many odds. I am delighted therefore that this collection of ESRC-DFID funded research sheds light on that process.

From evidence across three continents, some of the key learnings that have emerged include: how more flexible, locally driven models of recruitment and support can be made available affordably and at scale in Honduras; and, drawing evidence from China, how Professional Learning Communities can be a strong factor for building peer collaboration and support among teachers, particularly if backed by the right school support structures and embodying some key principles. The research also highlights how enhanced classroom practice tools can significantly strengthen the granularity of feedback that teachers receive in Uganda; and how a combination of pre-service and in-service training in Ethiopia led to more learner-centred teaching, and with it learners’ own engagement in the education process.

As a practitioner I am excited about starting to apply these lessons in our work at STIR Education, and I hope to contribute our experience back to the ESRC-DFID learning community. I hope other readers will feel very much the same and will delve into the valuable insights contained in this digest

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Photo: Adam Dean/Panos Pictures

A teacher writes on a makeshift blackboard in China.

Key messages

- Provide new teachers with well-structured induction programmes to support them in the classroom.
- View teacher development as a continuum, providing teachers with opportunities, support and incentives to continue to improve.
- Use classroom observations to feed back to teachers to boost motivation and effort, leading to further improved teaching.
- Adopt pre-service and in-service training to achieve more learner-centred teaching, and to encourage learners’ own engagement.

How innovative teacher training and recruitment approaches are improving learning outcomes in rural Honduras

In Honduras, the average 11-year-old child leaves primary school with dramatically lower reading and mathematics levels than those of nine-year-old children in developed countries, and 30 per cent of students don't finish primary school without repeating grades. To combat poor performance in rural areas, the government has looked to the *Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial* or 'SAT' model for secondary schools – a partnership between government and local non-government organisations (NGOs). The model focuses on quality teacher training, flexible teacher contracts and unconventional recruitment methods.

Confronted with a growing number of under-prepared primary school graduates in rural areas, the Honduran government has prioritised the cost-effective expansion of SAT schools. These offer a formal, alternative secondary school education focused on the development of relevant knowledge and skills, and service-oriented values that rural youth need to become productive members and leaders of their communities.

Researchers from the University of California, Berkeley, and the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán, Honduras, have found that the SAT system is effective for improving teaching and learning outcomes in developing countries, particularly in rural contexts. Earlier research found that students in Honduran SAT schools had test scores that were 45 per cent higher than children who attended traditional schools in nearby villages. Building on that evidence, the researchers wanted to examine and understand the features of the SAT model to try to explain these learning gains.

During 2008, baseline data was collected from 1,426 graduating sixth graders from 94 rural SAT schools and traditional Centros de Educación Básicos (CEB) schools. Students completed background questionnaires and achievement tests in mathematics and language; household surveys were given to parents and/or guardians; and headteachers, teachers, parents and local education authority staff completed questionnaires. Teacher professional development sessions and classroom teaching practices were also observed.

The research identified a number of innovative features of the SAT system involving recruitment processes, professional development and the ongoing support of teachers, which address some of the major challenges in improving the quality of teaching in developing country contexts:

- **Teacher recruitment and retention**

To address the challenge of too few teachers, particularly in rural areas, the SAT model advertises positions in rural communities through radio announcements. Potential candidates are invited for screening by the local government, and those who meet the requirements can begin the training process. The recruitment of individuals who are from rural areas results in higher rates of teacher retention in the programme.

- **Teacher training**

New teachers participate in two-week in-service training courses that precede each trimester of the academic year – totalling 250 hours of professional development each year. Teachers receive ongoing monitoring and instructional support from a network of field supervisors. Teachers are trained with the same curriculum that they will impart to students, allowing them to master the content. They develop the attitude that they can learn alongside and from their students – allowing them to embrace student-centred learning.

- **Ongoing professional support and accountability**

SAT teachers are visited by an *asesor* (adviser, similar to a teaching 'coach') once every two weeks. The role of the coach is to 'accompany' teachers in their classroom – to observe their teaching and to offer support. The coach also administers student tests each trimester to keep track of student learning outcomes and step in if they find deficiencies. These features create a system of accountability that supports ongoing professional development.

This research identifies features of the SAT model that can inform the design and reform of education systems to improve teaching effectiveness. Furthermore, the case of the SAT school model demonstrates that high quality teaching and learning can happen, even at scale.

In Honduras, the project team closely engages with government officials, including the First Lady and Minister of Education, and with donors to examine how the SAT model can be expanded and used in other communities. Project team members have joined a number of high-level international policy discussions to share findings from the study of SAT schools to ensure that their evidence influences education reform in Latin America. For example, following the sharing of the project findings, UNICEF has included SAT principles in its global secondary education guidance note. According to UNICEF, SAT serves as a concrete example of a programme that has been scaled up successfully by national governments to expand access to secondary education.

Ingrid Sanchez-Tapia, an Education Specialist at UNICEF explained, 'A programme like SAT invites us to re-think how to achieve SDG4 – or 12 years of education for all – through pedagogical innovation to reach the most marginalised adolescents.'



Project title: *Examining effective teaching in rural Honduran secondary schools.*

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SEE ALSO:

McEwan, P.; Murphy-Graham, E.; Torres Irribarra, D.; Aguilar, C. and Rapalo Castellanos, R. (2015) 'Improving middle school quality in poor countries: Evidence from the Honduran

Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 37.1: 113–137.