

Assessment of Learning Outcomes and Social Effects of Community-Based Education, Afghanistan (ALSE)

Research Brief #3: Evaluating Trade-Offs in Teacher Recruitment

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Background

Over the last 15 years the Government of Afghanistan has recruited large numbers of primary school teachers and expanded their access to training opportunities. Despite these accomplishments, there remains a dearth of qualified teachers in remote rural communities and concerns about the quality of education provided by community-based education (CBE) classes.

The deficit of qualified rural teachers is a particular issue for CBE. It is extremely effective at expanding access to education, and providers claim that CBE is of equal or better quality than that offered in formal schools (existing research supports these claims, Burde & Linden, 2013¹). Yet questions remain about the quality of education provided. As one staff member of a Provincial Education Department told us:

"If I am appointed as the education minister, I will consider a balance in improving education's quality throughout Afghanistan. In the past, there was good quality but not quantity in the education sector. Today, the process of improving quality, however, is not implemented in a balanced manner...if I were the education minister, I would have paid more serious attention to education's quality and quantity."

Education stakeholders in Afghanistan tend to assume a trade-off between teacher qualifications and village-familiarity with the teacher. The NGOs who provide CBE argue that the remote location of many CBE villages can make it difficult to recruit qualified teachers and that parents are likely to be more comfortable sending their children to learn with teachers they know. In such cases, they argue that hiring a teacher from the community, even if that teacher has lower qualifications, will produce better education outcomes while learning and attendance may suffer under teachers from outside of the community. In contrast, the Ministry of Education (MoE) argues that it is better to hire a teacher who meets a minimum level of qualifications, because the quality of their teaching will be better. Moreover, teachers without the minimum

qualifications cannot be hired as civil service employees but must be contracted on a temporary basis, possibly compromising their motivation and the longer term sustainability of CBE classes.

This assumed tradeoff raises important policy questions. Specifically it is unclear whether parents are reluctant to send their children to learn with teachers they do not know and it is not apparent that hiring teachers without the MoE requirements actually leads to lower levels of learning. As part of its efforts to understand **the best models for high quality effective and sustainable community-based education**, ALSE has therefore collected and analyzed data comparing different teacher recruitment strategies.

Specifically, we examined whether teacher qualifications or teacher familiarity with the community affect student attendance and student learning outcomes. We also examined whether teacher recruitment strategies change sets of factors that themselves affect student attendance and student learning outcomes. These include parent demand for education, satisfaction with available schooling options, teacher capacity, and teacher motivation.

Capacity building has been done for teachers who we hire... In some villages we cannot even find a graduate of grade 12. We try to find high school graduates and we need to have the agreement of the [MoE] and the community and we sometimes hire someone who has [informal qualifications]. After that person receives workshops, that changes him a lot. But overall, there are so many challenges. The quality of teaching isn't as high as it should be. (NGO official)

The intervention

ALSE examined teacher hiring practices as one key programmatic variation. Where possible ALSE partner NGOs, CARE and CRS, recruited CBE teachers from within each target village who meet the current MoE qualifications of grade 12 graduation. In the case of CARE villages, it was possible to find qualified teachers from within the village in all cases. However in CRS villages where there were no accredited teachers, one of two processes was used to recruit teachers:

¹ Burde, D., & Linden, L. (2013). Bringing education to Afghan girls: A randomized controlled trial of village-based schools. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 5(3), 27–40.

- (1) **Qualifications prioritized:** Teachers who possess at least a grade 12 education were recruited from outside the community (either from a nearby village, the district center, or the provincial center). These teachers were provided with financial incentives (40% increase over the civil servant salary scale) to encourage them to live and work in the remote community;
- (2) **Familiarity prioritized:** Teachers were recruited from within the village based on the level of their skills and personal capabilities.

Our research then examined whether there were different education outcomes associated with these two random assignments.

Data analysis and findings

We evaluated these assumed trade-offs in teacher hiring practices using data collected from our household and teacher surveys, focusing on their relative impact on children's school attendance and test scores. Overall, we find **no evidence of a trade-off between qualifications and familiarity** and, to the contrary, **weak evidence that an emphasis on qualifications improves learning outcomes**. Specifically our data suggests:

- Hiring a teacher from outside the village does not harm attendance. In fact, attendance was about 1.8 percentage points higher in communities where qualifications were emphasized, though this is not a significant difference. Nor does a teacher being from outside of the village reduce the community's acceptance of that teacher.
- There is weak evidence that hiring a more qualified teacher from outside of the village boosts children's learning. We find that hiring teachers who have at least a twelfth grade education has a marginally positive impact on children's test scores (by about 0.137 standardized deviations), though this effect is not statistically significant. The lack of a significant difference may be because the two groups of teachers actually have relatively similar profiles in terms of teacher capacity (measured by four main dimensions; community satisfaction with a teacher's capacity, the amount of CBE oriented training teachers received, teachers' education levels, and teachers' experience) and teacher motivation (as measured by parent perceptions of teacher effort, reports of teacher absenteeism, turnover in teachers, teachers' job satisfaction level, and timeliness of pay).

But supposing we take the (nonsignificant) estimated effect of hiring teachers who have studied at least through grade 12 from outside at face value. Then another way to look at whether hiring qualified teachers from outside the village is worthwhile is to examine the *cost effectiveness*. More qualified teachers are more expensive to hire, so is the increase in test scores justified by the additional \$0.41 cost per child? We examined cost effectiveness with respect to both test scores

and attendance in Table 1. First consider test scores. Results suggest that for every \$100 expenditure on schools where local teachers are prioritized, there is an effect on test scores of 0.142 standardized deviations. Where credentials are emphasized, this estimate is 0.211 sd. This suggests that hiring qualified teachers is cost effective in spite of the increased cost per teacher. Per \$100 spent, there is a greater test score increase for schools that emphasize hiring qualified teachers from outside. Results for attendance similarly suggest that hiring qualified teachers from outside is cost effective.

Table 1: cost effectiveness analysis for teacher hiring practices

Effect	Cost per child	Test Scores		Attendance	
		Effect (se)	Per \$100 (se)	Effect (se)	Per \$100 (se)
School effect, standard recruitment	\$143.08	0.264 (0.075)	0.142 (0.041)	0.134 (0.053)	0.072 (0.029)
School effect, outside recruitment	\$143.49	0.401 (0.080)	0.211 (0.042)	0.152 (0.045)	0.08 (0.024)

In sum, the estimated effect of recruiting teachers from outside on test scores and attendance are positive but not statistically significant. When we take the estimated effects at face value and conduct a cost effectiveness analysis, we find that recruiting teachers from outside may be a good use of resources to increase test scores.

Future research

Future rounds of ALSE's research will investigate a third condition of teacher hiring. Namely, whether teacher qualifications influence the likelihood that CBE classes are sustained in the villages following the end of NGO involvement. Since teachers who do not meet the MoE's standards are ineligible to become civil servants and are instead hired on temporary contracts it is important to determine whether this policy influences the sustainability of CBE classes in cases where they are taught by less qualified teachers.

In regards to the contract teachers... because these teachers don't get prepared, they don't feel themselves always like teachers and they say that I have been a teacher for these 7 months, and the next year I am not sure at all whether I will be [hired as a teacher] or I won't. [I don't know] where I will be, what would God want me to be doing by then. There are these things and at the same time, well, people will take advantage of this situation. DED official

To examine this question we have randomly assigned 63 villages with CBE classes to be transitioned from NGO to MoE administration after three years of NGO programming, while the rest will continue to be serviced by NGOs. By comparing the schools administered by the MoE to those administered by the NGOs, we will then be able to identify mechanisms to boost the longer term outcomes of schools in remote rural areas.