The Importance of Management Support for Teacher-Led Targeted Instruction in Ghana

This brief presents findings from the baseline survey conducted between May and June 2018 for the Strengthening Teacher Accountability to Reach All Students (STARS) project, a randomized evaluation measuring 1) whether teacher led targeted instruction increases student achievement in upper primary grades and 2) how additional managerial support from head teachers and circuit supervisors can increase the likelihood that teachers implement targeted instruction in their classrooms. The data are drawn from 210 schools, 140 circuit supervisors, 209 head teachers, 671 P4 through P6 teachers, and 5,894 P4 and P5 pupils from 20 districts and seven regions in Ghana. Preliminary results from the evaluation are expected in October 2019.

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Country: Ghana
Timeline: 2018-2019
Sample: 210 government primary schools

Key Insights

1. School-level statistics across the sampled schools showed an average pupil-teacher ratio of 30:1, that is, 30 pupils for every teacher. The largest pupil-teacher ratio was 102 pupils per teacher while the smallest pupil-teacher ratio was five students per teacher. Large class sizes in some schools could have negative implications for classroom management, quality of instruction, and the overall performance of pupils.

2. Pupils in primary 4 and 5 generally scored poorly in the baseline language and mathematics assessment, especially in oral reading fluency and comprehension as well as performing simple division operations.

   - A sizeable proportion of the pupils in primary 4 and primary 5 struggled with recognizing four-letter words compared to three-letter words. Sixty-nine percent of pupils correctly identified all five three-letter words, while only 16 percent could correctly identify all seven four-letter words. On average pupils could recognize 82 percent of the three-letter words and only 55 percent on the four-letter words.

   - Pupils had difficulty with oral reading fluency, which also influenced their reading comprehension ability. Eighty-four percent of pupils could not read a five-sentence passage or story fluently aloud within 45 seconds and without making more than two mistakes.

Almost 80 percent of pupils could not correctly answer any of the post-reading comprehension questions because they were either unable to read the passage or did not understand it. Reading fluency is closely related to reading comprehension. Of those who could not read the passage aloud, 94 percent could also not answer either question about the passage. These results demonstrate that pupils’ have low reading fluency skills that limits their ability to comprehend written passages.
The data from the baseline assessment of pupils’ language and mathematics competency skills highlight that pupils are struggling to grasp core concepts, especially in oral reading fluency and comprehension as well as performing simple division operations. These challenges have implications for pupils’ success at higher levels of language and mathematics education, and could later affect their performance at higher levels of their education.

These findings lend credence to the importance of the STARS study. Notably, implementing the targeted instruction curriculum could potentially address these low baseline test scores: teaching pupils lessons that match their learning level may result in more effective teaching.

The forthcoming results from the evaluation will help Ghana’s Ministry of Education assess whether teacher-led targeted instruction can be replicated at scale within the existing education system. The evaluation will also shed light on how supervision can be strengthened to provide coaching and monitoring support for teachers to implement new pedagogical approaches.

Conclusion

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