

Reforming Education and Challenging Inequalities in Southern Contexts

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Evidence from India and Pakistan

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In Southern country contexts, such as India and Pakistan, schools, teachers and the quality of teaching have been found to matter more than family background in positively influencing learning (Chudgar & Luschei 2009; Andrabi et al. 2007). The strong implication of this is that there is potential for teachers in these contexts to be able to compensate for disadvantages in student backgrounds and so to level the playing field. Having an accurate and complete understanding of the factors that can improve teaching and learning, particularly in contexts of social disadvantage, is crucial for making decisions about the types of policies to put in place to promote equality in education.

Historically, the education production function approach has provided policy guidance on inputs considered necessary for ensuring learning (Hanushek 2008; Glewwe et al. 2011). The approach predicted that easily observable inputs such as qualifications and the experience of teachers could be used as a proxy for effective teaching. In this framework, the most effective teacher would be someone with the most years of experience and the highest qualifications. Yet, repeated applications of this framework to data from different contexts, including India and Pakistan, have established that these observable characteristics are not good predictors of teacher effectiveness (Andrabi et al., 2007; Aslam et al. 2019; Hanushek & Rivkin 2012). Another framework, the value-added approach, predicates the notion of effective teaching on learning gains achieved by the teacher in a year and sets out to find characteristics of teachers and schools to which these gains can be attributed. Research that applies this framework has identified that latent variables such as contractual arrangements, subject content knowledge, motivation and pedagogical practices can have a stronger influence on children's learning than observable characteristics (Aslam et al. 2019; Singh & Sarkar 2012).

Teachers' beliefs are considered important for shaping the learning environment and influencing student motivation and by doing so improving the education process (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2009). One aspect that potentially shapes teachers' beliefs relates to their closeness to, and engagement with, students from different backgrounds and communities. A key question, therefore, is whether such social distance plays a role in shaping

both pedagogic practice and learning outcomes or indeed contributes to inequalities in such outcomes.

Some studies in India and Pakistan show that children taught by teachers of similar gender and/or caste perform better (Rawal & Kingdon 2010; Tamim & Haq 2015; Chudgar & Sankar 2008), however, others have produced conflicting evidence (Karachiwalla 2019). Furthermore, these studies reveal associations but do not elaborate on the mechanisms underpinning those associations (Rawal & Kingdon 2010; Sarangapani 2003).² The proportion of children from marginalised backgrounds in mainstream classrooms is very high in India (Social Research Institute – IMRB 2014), as well as in Pakistan to a lesser extent. Therefore, understanding ways in which social distance may impact learning becomes especially important. If teachers (who are from more privileged backgrounds and enjoy a higher social status than many of the children they are teaching) exhibit or express negative biases, are unaware of the challenges faced by children from disadvantaged backgrounds or are unable to support them, then classrooms in government schools can become sites for exclusion.

In this chapter, our starting point is that such *social distance* is highly significant and that teachers' beliefs are at the centre of the link between social distance and students' successful or unsuccessful learning. This then raises the two key questions which we address in the chapter:

- (1) How, and to what extent, does social distance shape teachers' beliefs and practices?
- (2) What is the likely effect of social distance on the education or learning of children from disadvantaged backgrounds?

We begin by drawing on existing research to theorise a connection between social distance, teachers' beliefs, their teaching practice and student learning. We then present empirical data from interviews with teachers and classroom observations in India and Pakistan to: (i) describe teachers' beliefs, highlighting those particularly relating to children's home backgrounds; (ii) note how teachers' beliefs vary for different children and, (iii) describe observed teaching practice and teacher-student interaction. Our classroom observation tool allows us to differentiate between teaching practices in relation to high- and low-performing children.

We find that while teachers are not actively biased against children from poor or low-caste households, they do believe family background to be the most significant determinant of learning. Furthermore, teachers' conceptualisation of a *good* student in both countries comprises a set of characteristics that are much more likely to be present in children from middle- or upper middle-income families (those where parents are educated and in stable economic circumstances) or naturally gifted children. Teachers, through their classroom practice, end up favouring these *good* students. The likely outcome is that low-performing students or those from marginalised backgrounds may end up being excluded in the classroom.

Social distance, teacher beliefs and teaching

The notion of social distance, simply put, expresses the gap between social positioning of two individuals or groups. This gap may be due to class differences (rich and poor), ethnic or racial differences or gender differences. It is a sociological concept which takes multiple dimensions of identity into account in its expression of remoteness between individuals and groups. The concept of social distance can be traced back to Robert Park (1924) who defined it as ‘an attempt to reduce to something like measurable terms the grades and degrees of understanding and intimacy which characterise personal and social relations generally’ (cited in Wark & Galliher 2007, p. 383). The related concept of prejudice was defined in this work as ‘the instinctive disposition to maintain social distances’. These notions were applied to studies of race and ethnic relations in the United States by sociologist Emory Bogardus (1933). At the centre of his concept are differences in identities, where social distance is observed in the interactions (or lack thereof) between individuals belonging to different social groups. Social distance becomes particularly important when it results in exclusion from public services.³

This link between markers of identity such as social class and race and social exclusion is also to be found in the sociological discourses on social reproduction. Within these discourses, schools are thought to reproduce existing disadvantages through prioritising and valuing certain types of knowledge or in failing to ensure adequate resources and support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Bourdieu 1986). The Coleman Report in the 1960s is considered seminal for the empirical documentation of differential access to public resources in education by race, post segregation and the associations of these input inequalities with differential outcomes for African American students (Coleman et al. 1966). In another classic study, Bowles and Gintis (2002) document the ways in which schooling processes and trajectories determine unequal labour market outcomes.⁴

A framework on social identity and learning outcomes that elaborates on mechanisms has been developed by economists Akerlof and Kranton (2002). They draw on sociological concepts of identity, social categories and perceptions to develop a *social category* model that is also relevant to the way we are thinking about social distance. In this model, developed in the United States, schools impart an image of ideal students, in terms of characteristics and behaviour through activities like assemblies and day-to-day interactions in classrooms. Teachers praise and reward some students based on these perceived characteristics, while they disapprove of and punish others. Each of these identities (that of an ideal student or a poorly performing student) has expectations associated in terms of who is likely to succeed academically. Students determine the amount of effort they expend in school in response to how they think they are perceived by teachers and match their identity to these social categories. These choices are seen to be particularly poignant for

students whose backgrounds (such as African Americans, Hispanics and other minorities) conflict with the school's ideal. In choosing the level of effort they exert, the students match their identity to these constructed categories of good and poorly performing students.

The expectations that teachers set for students through their pedagogic practice, interactions and even through what they say, form students' expectations of their own success. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) tested through an experiment, in schools in the United States, the degree to which changes in teacher expectations produce changes in student achievement and found that for children in primary schools teachers' expectations were a self-fulfilling prophecy.⁵ Students may perform less well if they expect to be discriminated against or if they have had low expectations set for them. McKown and Weinstein (2008) found that students in the United States whose teachers have high expectations for them performed better on achievement tests than students for whom teachers had low expectations. While the studies mentioned here are set in the United States, they offer us an insight into links between identity, practice and outcomes that is largely missing in the studies emerging from Southern countries. We use these insights to develop a framework for social distance, beliefs and outcomes in the next section.

The salient features of identity in South Asia which relate to the notion of social distance include caste, gender, ethnicity and social class. Many of these are interrelated. In Pakistan, caste, occupational status and poverty are connected with each other and have been linked to the lack of educational mobility (Cheema & Naseer 2013). In India, caste is a far more formal and visible marker of disadvantage,⁶ which also intersects with poverty and occupational status. Majumdar and Mooij (2012) highlight the increasing social mobility of teachers alongside the widening gap between their and students' social status. The empirical work on teacher and student identity in South Asia therefore leads us to expect that teachers will have higher expectations from students from stable, high-income backgrounds (similar to their own) and low expectations from children from unstable, poor homes. However, there are very few studies that explicitly capture teacher expectations regarding students from disadvantaged backgrounds in this context.

Teachers' beliefs and teaching practice

Turning now to beliefs and practices, Figure 12.1 presents a stylised and simplified representation of factors that determine teacher practice and effort in classrooms. Knowledge of curricular content, pedagogy and incentives (career progression, rewards but also sanctions determined by the system) impact on teacher practice and their level of effort directly. However, whilst much has been written about these two factors, teacher beliefs are a relatively less explored component of the framework.

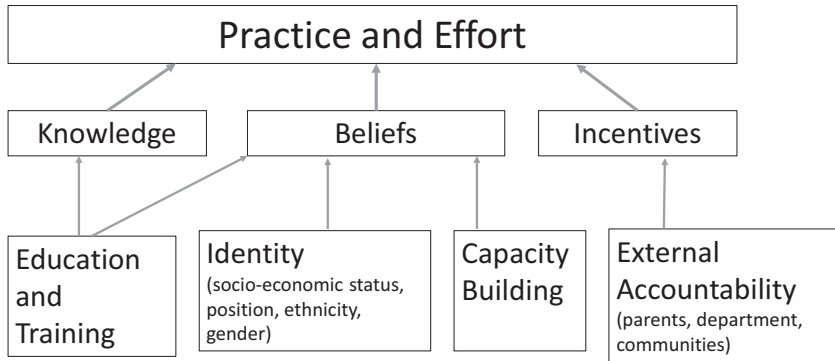


Figure 12.1 Stylised framework linking teacher practice and effort with identity, attitudes and beliefs, alongside other factors

Source: Authors

Teachers' beliefs about a wide range of aspects can impact on their teaching practice and their level of effort in teaching. These beliefs include those about the nature of learning and knowledge acquisition (*epistemological beliefs*), their own ability to convey knowledge (*self-efficacy*) and also – crucially – their beliefs about the ability of children to learn and the factors that influence this ability. The beliefs that teachers hold reflect their identity as individuals who are participants in society. As such, teachers may be influenced by cultural biases rooted deeply in the social fabric of which they are a part. Some beliefs may be formed, shaped and reshaped through teacher education whilst training and capacity-building support can be a source of knowledge about new alternative approaches that challenge beliefs and offer new tools that may mitigate these biases and institute positive values.

Beliefs and practices are closely linked. In order to understand how beliefs impact practice, Pajares (1992) asks us to consider how a teacher responding to disciplinary problems and deciding on the appropriate management technique to use will make a series of judgements about the child when doing so. Her point is that such – and other – interactions in class involve continuous judgements and 'evaluations of people, contexts and situation' (p. 313). These evaluations are informed not just by professional but also by personal beliefs. Pedagogical practices that are deeply rooted in cultural beliefs about gender and caste may intersect with teachers' beliefs about how children learn and which children can learn. Cultural biases and social inequities can then permeate student–teacher interactions (Brinkmann 2015).

There is considerable evidence of the differential practices used by teachers in relation to students from disadvantaged backgrounds in South Asia which

may be interpreted as bias. For example, Jha and Jhingran's (2005) multi-state study in India of schooling of the most deprived children attributed the discrimination faced by children from families living in poverty partly to teachers' cultural attitudes and their implications in the classroom. Similarly, in her 2015 survey of government elementary schools in India, Vasavi found that, for many teachers, their social and cultural background formed the basis of their beliefs which in turn impacted on their practices of classroom management in a way that reproduced biases and prejudices. Teachers' subjective judgements have been demonstrated to impact on assessments as well (Rawal & Kingdon 2010). Jacoby and Mansuri (2015) report parents' accounts of caste-based discriminatory practices, covering a range of strategies from the poor treatment in school of children from low-caste households to total exclusion from instruction altogether.⁷ Tamim and Haq (2015) also argue that exclusion is embedded in the political economy of social relationships and that it may occur deliberately and explicitly or silently. When these authors explored how caste results in such exclusion in Pakistani schools, they found that discriminatory practices included segregating children into different classrooms where there was lower teacher effort and poor treatment of students. They also found reports showing disregard for the learning of children from lower castes. The negative effects of social distance are apparent in acts of discrimination or prejudice or prejudicial beliefs. Discrimination manifests as negative stereotyping of a particular group of students and involves an association of low expectations from them. These are often expressed through teachers' classroom behaviour (praise or criticism) and impact on student confidence.

Two channels that link beliefs and learning

We combine insights from these studies to depict two pathways which could potentially link teachers' beliefs and learning: (i) teachers' expectations from students regarding how much they can achieve and (ii) teaching practice and the level of effort invested in, and attention paid to, students of different ability and home backgrounds (Figure 12.2).

In the first pathway, teachers' beliefs are linked to their expectations of how students learn. According to Akerlof and Kranton (2002), once stereotypes are created and expectations set, they will be apparent to students. Students will either work hard to meet those expectations, or in the case of low expectations fail to put in any effort. Expectations are likely to be high for good students and low for poorly performing students. These expectations are often expressed as the notion of who an ideal or good student is or the kinds of characteristics an ideal or good student possesses. High levels of student effort predict higher student learning.

The second pathway predicts that teachers' effort may vary for different students. Effort translates into support received by students. Teachers' effort in relation to inclusive practices includes the attention paid to students who are

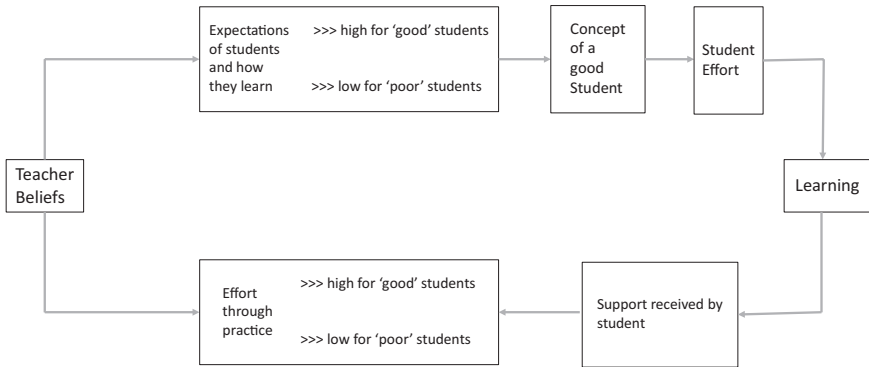


Figure 12.2 Two channels linking teachers' beliefs with student learning

Source: Authors

struggling, the amount of time, feedback and support provided, how the classroom is organised and whether instruction is provided in ways that benefit the pupils who require more attention (Westbrook & Croft 2015). Such inclusive practices matter because students from disadvantaged background are likely to receive lower home support and are more dependent on their teachers for learning. Also, if these students receive lower levels of support from teachers, their learning levels are likely to be even lower.

Empirical data collected from teachers and classrooms in government schools in India and Pakistan provided us with an opportunity to interrogate these theorised pathways. We document, using survey and interview data, teachers' expectations of students by asking who they believe to be good students and those that are easy to teach. We explored which teachers found it more difficult to teach and the factors they believed contributed to these difficulties. Using observational data, we then considered whether such teachers' practice differed for students from different backgrounds.

Our research study

This chapter uses data collected from the Teaching Effectively All Children (TEACH) Project⁸ which studied determinants of effective teaching through two rounds of surveys at 86 government primary schools (36 schools in India and 50 schools in Pakistan), including interviews with teachers and assessment of students, in rural Haryana in India and rural Punjab in Pakistan. These two sites were part of the same state under the colonial rule and have a similar school development history. They are also from similar agro-economic zone. Thirty

villages were randomly selected from three districts in each site. The government primary schools in which the village children were primarily enrolled were chosen for the study (see Aslam et al. 2019 for further details).⁹ Schools were visited at the start and end of the school year in order to conduct teacher and student quantitative surveys and learning assessments based on Young Lives and ASER tests.¹⁰ In total, 95 teachers in India and 129 teachers in Pakistan were surveyed regarding their beliefs about children's capacity to learn, the challenges they faced during teaching and about their teaching practices. In addition, 12 of these 86 schools were selected for more detailed exploration. This qualitative aspect of the research involved classrooms observations in grades 4 and 5 in each of the schools, along with in-depth semi-structured interviews with teachers (17 in India, out of which 5 were female and 18 in Pakistan, of which 10 were female). The findings included in this chapter are from the surveys, the teacher interviews and classroom observations.

The teacher interviews included specific questions about teachers' perceptions about children's abilities to learn (what factors support children's learning or not learning, with probes and follow-up questions about identity markers such as social class, caste and gender), children they considered good students and specific children who struggled the most. Responses to these questions underpin the analysis we present in the next section.

We conducted three sessions of observations in two classes in each of the 12 schools. There were two observers in the classroom, each with their own observation sheet – with one observer focused on the teacher and teaching practices and the other focused on four pre-selected children in the class. Scores on tests administered during the baseline school survey were used for selecting children: two high-performing students and two low-performing students. If a child with a disability had been identified in the class, they were included in the observation of students. The classroom observation tools recorded chronological developments throughout the class session, the seating positions of children, specific details about the classroom culture and negative and positive interactions. The observation tool recorded the activities of all the children and of the four pre-selected children. Data from these observations are the basis for the patterns described in the section on teacher practice.

The socio-economic distance between teachers and parents in the sample schools was apparent in the gap between them in terms of levels of education and types of occupation. In Pakistan, 40% of the fathers and 64% of the mothers were illiterate. In India, 20% of fathers and 35% mothers were illiterate. In contrast, around 80% of teachers interviewed were graduates or postgraduates. The teachers worked in the government sector, and their salaries are regular and much higher compared to average income levels in rural areas. Very few parents had jobs comparable in nature and status to that of the teachers. The majority of mothers had no paid employment: 76% of the mothers in the Indian sample and 89% mothers in the Pakistan sample did not have paid work. The majority of the fathers in India were engaged in a daily wage or blue-collar jobs (40%), while

others were engaged in agricultural work (25%) or ran shops (11%). In Pakistan, while similar proportions were engaged in agriculture or ran shops, fewer fathers were involved in daily waged work.

India has achieved near-universal primary education and consequently the number of children from the poorest households are in government schools (ASER 2018). By contrast, in Pakistan, the poorest children are still likely to be out of school (ASER 2019). With a high proportion of children from advantaged backgrounds in private schools, more so in India, the majority of the students in government schools are from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹¹ The differences in education and occupation status between teachers and parents are quite high and very likely wider in India than Pakistan. Next we explore some of the consequences of such differences.

Do teachers have higher expectations of some students?

In India, when teachers were asked to identify ‘good students’ in their class, they discussed three types of characteristics. The first way was in terms of those who were intelligent, had high IQs, could grasp concepts easily, were hard working and scored high marks in tests. The second was how students behaved in school, such as asking questions to clarify doubts, ensuring that their homework and classwork were checked regularly,¹² whether they displayed higher levels of confidence, were more focused, well mannered, obedient and disciplined, had leadership qualities and could teach other students, if required. The third set of characteristics included their appearance and attendance, such as whether they were neat and tidy in their appearance, attended school regularly, were punctual, brought the required textbooks and stationery and regularly studied at home. The following are some of teachers’ perspectives of how they differentiated good students from others:

[W]henever they are asked to any classwork, they [good students] continue to ask doubts till the concept is clear to them. Only when the concept is clear, they move ahead. Whatever is not clear, they don’t leave it and then move further. They don’t take any work given by the teacher lightly. They take it seriously, complete it and try to live up to the expectations of the teacher. Secondly, their habits are better than the others. Their habits and good manners differentiate them from the other students. That’s why they are good students.
(Class 5 teacher, India)

When something is being taught, if they don’t understand, then they ask again. They come properly bathed. They are disciplined. Students who remain discipline will always succeed. And the kids who are naughty or the one who is not disciplined their attention keeps diverting from one place to another and this is why they lag behind.
(Class 5 teacher, India)

They are good students not just because they are good at studies though they are *tez* [have high IQ levels], but also because they are responsible, they make the class form a queue and lead, they try to do their homework and class work, *kehna maante hain* [They do what I tell them], *naha dho kar aate hain* [They bathe before coming], they come on time, *saaf safayi rakhte hain* [They maintain cleanliness].

(Class 4 teacher, India)

They [parents] do not think [about studies]. And there is definitely some difference because of the IQ level. Those children who are *padhane mein hoshiyar* [good at studies] are ahead in sports too.

(Class 4 teacher, India)

Teachers in Pakistan believed that a good student is someone who is intelligent, attends school regularly, is attentive in class, participates by asking questions, takes initiative by showing up to have his/her copies checked (class work or homework). A good student is someone who is obedient, neat and clean, and someone who does not copy work from other students:

They are good students. They do their homework on time. They do their homework themselves. They don't copy from other students. They participate in class and ask questions if they do not understand. I think they are genuinely interested in studying and that is why I think that they are good students.

(Class 5 teacher, Pakistan)

They are intelligent and hardworking and pay attention during the class. They are not careless, they ask me questions and if they are having any difficulty, they share it with me. And I also feel very happy that the child is taking interest and it motivates me to give more attention to these kids.

(Class 4 teacher, Pakistan)

There are around 10 students in my class who learn very quickly. I just need to tell them once and they understand. The rest of the students, they ask again and again. They need some time and they also waste other's time too. Intelligence is also a factor and their home environment is also a factor. Their family members also take care of them.

(Class 5 teacher, Pakistan)

According to the teachers interviewed for the study in both India and Pakistan, good students are those who are viewed as being naturally intelligent, follow classroom teaching, are punctual and regular and study at home. According to the teachers, these good students are independent learners and quick to complete their work. On the flip side, those who take a long time to complete

class work or seek help from their peers are not good students. This has implications for the teaching and learning process in the classrooms: we found through our classroom observations that children who are struggling to keep up in class often rely on their peers, ask them questions, peek into their notebooks or copy from them because they are unable to receive the guidance needed in class from the teacher.

While a student's own ability is to a large extent intrinsic to them (though malnutrition and illness can have an adverse impact), it is more likely that children not doing their homework or receiving support from parents are ones whose parents are not literate themselves or do not have time because of their jobs. Regular attendance is closely linked with parental occupation. Children from families who do agricultural work and casual wage labour are more likely to get pulled out of classes and miss school days.

The significance of parental background

In our surveys and interviews, we asked teachers about those children who had more difficulty learning (Figure 12.3). The vast majority of teachers surveyed (88% in the Pakistan, 90% in India) believed that children with parents who cannot read and write have more difficulty learning. The second largest category of those who had difficulty learning included children with disabilities (84% in both countries). When asked about children from poor backgrounds, 75% of teachers

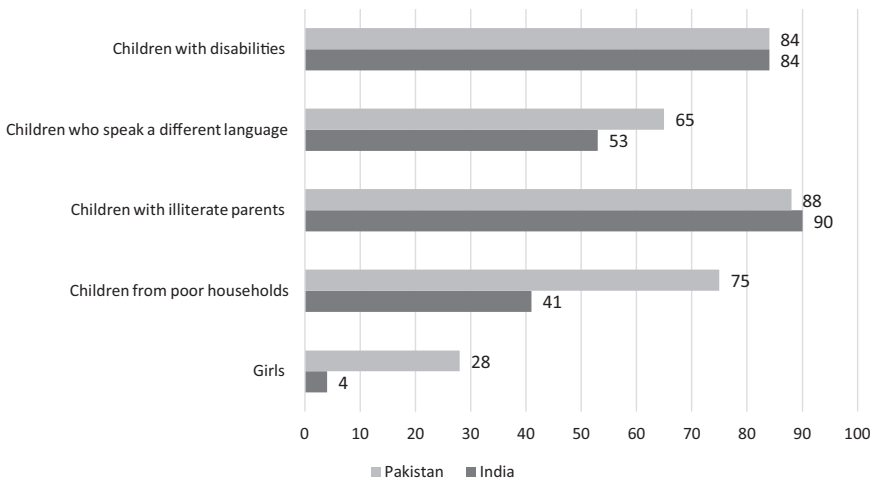


Figure 12.3 Percentage of teachers who agree or strongly agree that specific background factors affect children's ability to learn

Source: TEACH School Survey 2017

Note: the responses were on a 5-point Likert scale and the percentages are of those who agreed, or strongly agreed.

in Pakistan said they believed these children had greater difficulty, and a smaller but a substantial proportion (41%) in India said the same.

In other words, almost all teachers expect children whose parents are not literate themselves and are from poor families to have lower capabilities of learning. Their reasoning is that, if parents are not able to help children review their classwork and augment the teaching done in class through instruction at home, children will not be able to learn. Parents who are poor or not educated were pinpointed by teachers, with their parenting practices classified by teachers as 'neglectful' or 'disinterested'. The following quotes from teachers in Pakistan are examples of these views:

The children have problems at home. Their mothers go to work as daily labourers. Sometimes picking potatoes, or *arvi* [Taro]. How will these mothers pay attention to their children?

(Class 4 teacher, Pakistan)

Only a few students are from the 'stable' economic background. Most of the students are from financially weak households. They attend school in the morning and work in evening time. They work in fields.

(Class 4 teacher, Pakistan)

Also, sibling or parents of few children are educated and therefore are able to help them. Moreover, a few children come from problematic families and face issues while learning at school as well. Children from poor families also sometimes face difficulty in learning since they feel that they do not possess all those things which their classmates have.

(Class 4 teacher, Pakistan)

In some cases, teachers were more understanding in realising that it is not a lack of interest on the part of the parents but due to problems they face in providing support, whether it is a result of time constraints or lack of literacy. A teacher from India said the other main reason for looking at parents' financial background, especially in the context of the village where most people were poor, was that poorer parents leave for their work early in the morning, hence:

They are unable to keep a track on their children, whether they are going to school on time, whether they are studying, not studying and so on. It is also not their fault because they leave at 7 in the morning, come back at 5 in the evening, are very exhausted by then and are unable to look after their children's studies after that.

(Class 5 teacher, India)

If the home environment is good and there is importance given to studies then the child will also turn out to be good. And if some poor parents are

illiterate then they will obviously find it difficult to educate their children. Because they are not educated, they will not be able to tell their children what to do and what not to do. They can see that they are writing something, but who knows what they are doing and what that they tell their parents. This also happens.

(Class 5 teacher, India)

Family background and parental occupation also matter for teachers because in some instances students who attend school irregularly do so because their parents are taking them to work. These are most likely to be parents who were in casual labour or very poor and had not been to school themselves. A number of teachers mentioned irregular attendance during the harvest season. For example:

When these children get done from school . . . they help in their parents' jobs or around the house. In the harvesting season, the strength in the classes will reduce by nearly 50%. For example, if the class has 20 students, only 10 will come as the rest are out working in the fields with their parents. They have to do their own work. That's why they can't learn.

(Class 3 teacher, Pakistan)

They [children in families that work as contractual labour on brick kilns] are absent for three months [at a time]. [If they come back to school, we] need to start from the beginning. Yasira was fine for 3–4 months. When she leaves for contractual work at the kiln, I will have to start from the beginning again.

(Class 4 teacher, India)

While caste is an important indicator of social status, no teacher reported that the ability of children from disadvantaged castes was low:

No, no direct impact of caste (on learning). It is possible that there is a particular caste which is backward in education, do not have livelihood options, have to go out for earning to brick kilns or farms, then automatically their children would lag in studies, and that is not because of their caste but family reasons.

(Class 5 teacher, India)

These quotes show that teachers' expectations regarding the ability of students from poor backgrounds or from homes where parents do not have a stable economic situation, by and large, is low (with the exception of those from disadvantaged castes). In having low expectations of learning and achievement for students who are less likely to receive attention at home, teachers are reinforcing disadvantage, rather than countering it. Instead of delinking or muting the influence of family background, schools are potentially reinforcing their negative influence on those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Differentiated teacher practice

Inclusive practices require teachers to provide a disproportionate amount of effort and attention to the students who are struggling. Inclusive classrooms are where all children are included in interactions and encouraged to participate. In this section we share findings from the classroom observation data collected in the 12 sample schools in India and Pakistan. As noted earlier, the design of the classroom observation tool involved teachers and selected high- and low-performing students being observed separately.

In India, there were variations in the extent to which teachers adopted inclusive practices in their classes. A few classes were observed where teachers used innovative methods to teach and attempted to involve all students. But there were other classes where teachers taught through reading and repeating and focused only on those students who were sitting nearby and following the class. On the whole, student-teacher interactions were pleasant and positive.¹³ Positive interactions were explicit and found with greater frequency with children who were better performing. Teachers were clearly stating their high expectations from such students. During one observation:

The teacher asked her [Poonam] to answer a question that was relatively tougher than the previous ones, and the teacher said, 'Stand up, Poonam! This question matches your level of intelligence'. The girl stood up and gave the correct answer too. The teacher praised her by saying, 'well done!' and confirmed her full faith in the girl's intelligence as she said to her, 'I had expected this from you'.

(Observer note)

There were few cases in Indian classrooms where teachers were observed actively trying to include all students, particularly the ones with lower learning levels. The low-attaining students being observed were often found to be disinterested and not following the class. But in certain cases when they made comments or wanted to respond, they were ignored by the teacher. Silent exclusion was observed in several classrooms. Teachers were seen to ignore or overlook raised hands of some students when they wanted to respond, while they acknowledged responses from others more readily.

One teacher, however, stood out with her practice, when she specifically asked questions to the ones who were not 'high-attaining' students and explained carefully why the responses were correct or not. But this was quite an exception. And she, too, could not disguise differences in expectations. When she had to ask a more difficult question, she asked the high-attaining girl who was being observed, saying that this was a question worthy of her to respond. This general pattern of calling on the same high-attaining students and those seated in front was observed during multiple observations. One observer noted that:

The teacher did not make any arrangement for other students to participate, for example, asking children who responded most to pause and ask others to

speak up. The teacher made himself available only to those who were sitting right in front of him.

(Observer notes)

It was also observed that the teachers were content with getting a quick answer to their question, even if it came from the same child, and others were not answering. Children seated at the back of the class were more disengaged, and the poorly performing students were seated in the far corners of the classrooms. These children were often seen talking amongst themselves. These children were often ignored by teachers, and even when the teachers did engage, it was not clear if effort had been made to ensure that all students had walked away from the interaction, having understood the concept being taught. Teachers were not questioning these students often or checking for understanding.

In the schools in Pakistan, similar general trends were observed. Children seated at the front of the class interacted more with the teacher and had their work checked more often. One observer noted that the children towards the back of the class were almost invisible. However, it was not always clear if children seated at the front were those who needed more attention. For example, in boys' schools, low-attaining boys were more likely to be seated at the back. In girls' schools, low-attaining girls were equally likely to be in front or at the back. Students seated at the back received less attention.

In their interactions, the Pakistani teachers tended to choose the same children for responding to the questions they asked. A higher frequency of positive interactions was similarly observed between the teachers and high-performing students and conversely, the frequency of negative interactions was higher with low-performing students. Teachers tended to get more easily frustrated with them, thus perhaps not surprisingly, low-attaining children were more likely to be overlooked in teacher interactions. These students seemed, in multiple observations, tense and confused. They did not receive support from the teacher. In one observation, a low-performing student approached the teacher multiple times with the intent to have his notebook checked, however he returned without doing so. The teacher did not pick up on this. The observer checked the child's notebook to find that none of the previous work of this child had been corrected.

It appears from classroom observations in both countries that the teachers do, through their actions, communicate their different expectations for the students. And they are more likely to provide greater effort for the students who actively participated in class and those they think of as 'good' students.

Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter we have drawn on existing understandings of exclusion to frame pathways through which teachers' beliefs about student ability may impact learning outcomes. The data collected from the two sites of the study indicate that social distance between teachers and students in government schools exists in both of the study sites. Demographic data from the schools and communities

sampled confirm a generally spoken truism about government schools in India and Pakistan: a majority of children in these schools are from homes where parental literacy levels are low, their incomes are low and their occupations either blue collar or irregular. All these aspects combine to make the social distance between teachers and the students they teach quite wide. If teachers believe that children from poor families and those with illiterate parents cannot be taught, their practices will reflect this belief resulting in exclusion of children who arguably need the most help. We bring empirical findings to bear on two questions in this chapter: (i) how and to what extent does social distance shape teachers' beliefs and practices? and (ii) what is the likely effect of this on children's education and learning?

In response to the first question, we find that teachers in the samples in both Pakistan and India strongly believe that parental background determines the pupil's capacity to learn and to do well in class. The teachers' conceptualisation of a 'good student' is someone who is intelligent, confident, interactive and attentive in classroom, attends regularly and is able to learn at home. These are all characteristics that are much more likely to be present in children from socially and economically stable and well-off homes, somewhat similar to the teachers' own background. Teachers expect that these children will learn more and that they will do better. A majority of teachers agree that children whose parents are not literate have the most difficulty in learning. They expect children of parents with low levels of education or low income to have lower capability of learning. The exceptions are students who are exceptionally intelligent but from poor backgrounds. We also find that the link between the child's background and his abilities is more strongly asserted by teachers in India. In Pakistan teachers are less likely to emphasise only family background. We interpret this to be an outcome of a larger number of poor children being present in government classrooms in India, intensifying the social distance between teachers and the students they teach.

In response to the second question, we find that through these expectations and their practices, teachers may be reproducing disadvantages that the student arrives with. Evidence from classroom observation shows that rather than focusing more on students who have lower learning levels and who are less likely to participate in classroom process, teachers engage more with students who are more motivated and engaged in classroom. The first group is not openly excluded but rather there is more of a silent process of non-inclusion. Interactions with students also communicate to the students what the teachers' expectations are about their performance. In other words, though the expectation is for teachers to contribute towards overcoming disadvantages that children face (and these can be multiple and intersecting in many ways), children who are perceived as not being intelligent or who do not have support from home may well be excluded from the learning process.

Our findings imply that teachers may not be aware how their beliefs about the children's ability may be biased and how that may impact on the students. Teachers appear to be prioritising children at the top of the learning distribution, and

those at the bottom of the learning distribution are being excluded. While not all, many of these children are those who will also not be receiving support at home. These findings have implications for contexts with very diverse classrooms, not just in terms of socio-economic background but also student ability. This has to do with teachers' ability to cater to the needs of children from poor and marginalised backgrounds, respond to their cues in class and adapt their teaching to their needs. Survey data in this study also recorded teachers in both countries stating that they did not feel adequately prepared to support children from poor backgrounds.

The emergent policy implication from this is that if social inequality and disadvantage are to be addressed, there is a need to introduce additional teacher-training components. This would include reflection on the social distance between teachers and the taught, the nature of teachers' own beliefs about social distance and difference so that they do not have biased expectations from students and to provide teachers with knowledge of teaching strategies that can differentiate instruction in an ameliorative way. We identify teacher beliefs, practice and interactions in the classroom as an area for further study.

Notes

- 1 We are grateful for funding from Economic and Social Research Council and the Department for International Development for this research under the *Raising Learning Outcomes* grant ES/M005445/1.
- 2 Rawal and Kingdon (2010) indicate that the role model theory may explain why teachers of similar identities (gender, caste, socio-economic category) may benefit students: seeing individuals similar to them may improve students' attitudes towards education. Sarangapani (2003) finds that belonging to the same community increases students' comfort level with their teachers.
- 3 The link between identity and exclusion from public services in general (outside education) has been documented by political economists in Pakistan and India. Cheema and Mohmand (2007) document the disparities by caste and class in access to sanitation and safe drinking water in rural areas in Pakistan in a report about social structures. Banerjee et al. (2005) link social divisions to public goods access in India.
- 4 Bowles and Gintis (2002) have been critiqued for ignoring the role of family in their analysis.
- 5 They call this the Pygmalion effect. For older children the link between expectations and outcomes is less strong.
- 6 In India caste remains an important identity of households marking social status. With affirmative government policies towards historically disadvantaged castes, its relevance may have decreased, but the caste-based occupational segregation and economic inequality still continues to a varying extent (Desai and Dubey 2012).
- 7 As caste is not officially recognised as a form of exclusion in Pakistan, there are no mitigation policies in place.
- 8 See www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/real/researchthemes/teachingandlearning/effectiveteaching/
- 9 One school was chosen if it was co-educational. If not, a boys' and a girls' school were chosen for these villages.
- 10 Students were tested in mathematics, English and Urdu or Hindi. A combination of ASER and Young Lives assessments was administered. These tests were used for selecting high- and low-performing students for classroom observations.

- 11 ASER data from India and Pakistan show that in 2015, 60% of children from the top income quartile in India were in private schools, while ASER 2018 in Pakistan shows only 30% of top quartile income children were in private schools.
- 12 During school visits in India, it was observed that in large classes teachers check homework and class work only of those students who bring them to the teacher for correction.
- 13 Teaching practices observed could be influenced by the presence of observers. This was anticipated and so the research team visited the school over a period of 7 to 12 days. Each teacher was observed in their class thrice so as to minimise the potential bias.

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