Teachers and Teaching for Marginalised Girls

This independent evaluation found that teacher and teaching related interventions in selected projects included in the Girls' Education Challenge Phase II (GEC II) led to improvements in pedagogy, gender responsiveness and safeguarding of learners.

During the pandemic, educators' roles expanded beyond conventional education delivery to supporting adapted learning, providing pastoral care, and providing health and safety information for girls and their communities. Female community-based educators were particularly important in keeping girls engaged.

Study methodology

This study examined how selected GEC II projects engaged teachers and emphasised teaching quality to improve girls' education. It addressed two research questions: (1) how did projects implement interventions on teachers and teaching prior to Covid-19; and (2) how did they adapt during the pandemic? Ten projects that had a particular focus on teachers and teaching were included in the study, four of which were selected for a more detailed examination of adaptations during Covid-19.

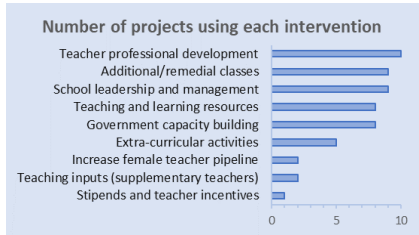| Countries	Number of projects studied for question 1	Number of projects studied for question 2
Afghanistan[1]	2	2
Ghana	2	1
Sierra Leone	2	1
Somalia	1	-
Nigeria	1	-
Uganda	1	-

The study team analysed project documentation for all 10 projects, project-level external quantitative evaluation data for the nine GEC-T projects, and primary qualitative data (including 187 interviews, 31 focus group discussions, and 60 narrative classroom observations) for the four projects in the Covid-19 adaptation section.

[1] This study was completed in 2020-2021, prior to the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021.

Interventions related to teachers and teaching

The most common intervention implemented by the 10 projects was teacher professional development, with most projects delivering classroom training, and other formats including mentoring, coaching, or peer learning. Most projects included a focus on gender-responsive, learner-centred, and inclusive pedagogic approaches.

Number of projects using each intervention

Teacher professional development
Additional/remedial classes
School leadership and management
Teaching and learning resources
Government capacity building
Extra-curricular activities
Increase female teacher pipeline
Teaching inputs (supplementary teachers)
Stipends and teacher incentives

0   5   10

Projects engaged with a diverse range of educators including government school teachers, community-based educators, volunteers, mentors, and learning assistants. Some projects aimed to transition community-based educators into mainstream teaching to improve the sustainability of interventions.

A shortage of female teachers was the most frequently identified barrier to girls' education. Two projects sought to bring in more female teachers through apprenticeships, grants to attend teacher training college, and distance learning with teacher training colleges. Systemic barriers to the recruitment and retention of female teachers (such as traditional gender norms affecting women's access to work outside the home) may have limited this support.

Adapting to Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated existing constraints to girls' education. Across the three countries in which the four selected projects operate, schools closed for several months in 2020 and 2021, and girls took on increased domestic and income-generating duties which reduced time spent in education. Challenges also included limited access to technology, textbooks, and assignments, and limited opportunities for feedback.

GEC II projects adapted to support remote education, girls' wellbeing, and delivery of health information and resources. Projects delivered teacher-guided and self-directed learning activities and materials, helped girls access national distance learning initiatives, and helped educators provide telephone-based support.

Educators took on additional roles providing adapted learning, monitoring girls' wellbeing and providing pastoral care. Community-based female educators were trusted sources of information for girls and communities, and in some cases visited girls personally or organised informal classes. GEC II projects adapted their training to support educators in additional responsibilities.

Once schools reopened, projects adapted their interventions and provided training to educators to implement catch-up strategies. Covid-19 safety protocols were introduced. Educators used formal and informal assessments to gauge learning levels, repeated material before moving on to new content, offered additional classes and formative assessments, used positive gestures and behaviours to build rapport, and applied learner-centred pedagogies for engaging marginalised girls.

Outcomes for girls' education

Teacher training seems to have improved pedagogies, self-confidence in teaching, gender responsiveness, and awareness about child protection and safeguarding. Classroom observations found most teachers using learner-centred pedagogies, gender-equal practices and gender-related content in their classes. However, the extent to which teachers' professional development supported girls' learning needs is uncertain because some projects did not routinely assess teachers' knowledge, skills, or competencies or link this information to girls' learning outcomes.

> *After training, I realised that maybe my way of teaching is not the best and I had to look for a better way of it… My attention was only on those who are willing to learn. From the training, I realised I had to change my method of teaching. If a child or a learner is sleeping it means that something is wrong. I need to reach out to that child.*
>
> Female facilitator, Ghana

Learner-centred, inclusive and gender-responsive pedagogies require support for implementation, given the resource-constrained environments in which many teachers work. A small number of classroom observations in the three countries studied in more depth noted teachers making gender-biased or gender-harmful statements. In addition, teachers' understanding and inclusive practice for learners with physical disabilities and special learning needs appeared to be limited. These observations primarily occurred in government schools (where the projects did not recruit their own educators).

It was not possible to determine how effective projects were in improving girls' learning outcomes. There are insufficient quantitative data linking changes in learning outcomes to teaching practices, so it was not possible to tell whether the support provided to teachers was the right support from the perspective of girls' learning needs.

School-related gender-based violence, including corporal punishment, which is legal in certain countries and contexts, remains a concern. GEC II projects prioritised child protection and safeguarding as part of teachers' professional development, and teachers reported that this was very useful in developing their own self-awareness and practices. Despite these efforts, instances of school-related gender-based violence, including violence perpetrated by teachers, were reported in a small number of focus group discussions and classroom observations. A continued focus on preventing and addressing violence, including improved reporting mechanisms, is important to support learners' safety and retention in school.

Lessons from the pandemic

During the pandemic, learners struggled with self-directed learning, even when projects provided paper-based resources and low-technology options. Learners faced difficulties without a means of contacting teachers to ask questions and get direct feedback and support.

Girls felt positive about continued engagement with learning, particularly when 'two-way learning' arrangements made it possible to maintain contact and interaction with teachers, rather than simply receiving materials.

> *For those [learners] whose families didn't let them to speak with male trainers, [community-based] teachers…called to them and ask about their problem…once in a week.*
>
> Female Community-Based Educator, Afghanistan

Educators not only provided adapted learning opportunities, but also critical health, safety, and wellbeing information and pastoral support. Educators played pivotal roles in the community but may not be adequately equipped for this pastoral role or compensated for the additional time and resources expected from them. Educators' own wellbeing appeared to be comparatively overlooked, with only one project specifically reporting support for educators' wellbeing needs.

Female community-based educators were instrumental in supporting girls' ongoing engagement with learning, sustaining their motivation, and reducing their risk of dropping out of school. In government education systems where teachers were not always able to contact learners outside of formal school settings, community-based models facilitated home-based and phone-based learning and wellbeing support. The role of female educators was particularly important as safeguarding concerns affected the extent to which male educators could provide support to girls outside the classroom in all three countries.

> *I felt really happy and [my mentor] encouraged us that we should continue studying what they taught us when the Safe Space was open. Every night, I try to read and think about everything they have taught us at the Safe Space.*
>
> Female learner, Sierra Leone

Recommendations

Future projects seeking to improve learning for marginalised girls need to consider interventions supporting teachers and teaching.

Recognising that educators' work goes beyond teaching in the classroom, interventions need to support them in these broader roles and in managing their own wellbeing.

Projects should critically engage with key stakeholders from the design phase in recognition of wider societal factors that are likely to influence the effectiveness of interventions.

A wide range of types of educators are needed, including community-based teachers, as well as health professionals and other specialists.

Interventions need to address systemic barriers to recruiting and retaining female teachers.

Teachers' professional development activities should be based on systematic assessments of teachers' and learners' needs.

Professional development should include training in gender-responsive pedagogies and include feedback mechanisms to ensure effective implementation.

Assessing the effectiveness of training requires information about both the quality and quantity of interactions between teachers and girl learners.

Teacher training should include remote or community-based modules and should be planned to overcome barriers to female teachers.

Resources and facilities for teachers and learners need to be assessed for potential future crises that could result in school closures.

Home-based teaching models need to enable interaction with teachers to ensure girls receive support and feedback.

School management, leadership, and teachers need to work together to address school-related gender-based violence.

Teachers may need more support to translate training into practice, considering resource constraints and challenges in the classroom environment.

For more information

This research was carried out by the Independent Evaluation Team of the Girls' Education Challenge Fund Programme. The Independent Evaluation Team is a consortium of partners led by Tetra Tech International Development together with the Research and Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre at the University of Cambridge and Fab Inc.

This policy brief is a summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations from the complete evaluation report which is available at: https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/wigmdnlg/gec-ii-evaluation-study-2-teachers-and-teaching-report_dec2021.pdf

For more information about the Girls' Education Challenge, please visit: https://girlseducationchallenge.org

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