

The RISE Education Systems Diagnostic Toolkit

PART 1(b):

Applications of the the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic

This document contains one section of the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic Toolkit.

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| Introduction

| **Applications of the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic**

Part 2 | IMPLEMENTATION

Part 3 | RESOURCES

Download the full toolkit at: https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-Misc_2023/09.

The RISE Education Systems Diagnostic Toolkit

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RISE

RESEARCH ON IMPROVING
SYSTEMS OF EDUCATION

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Applications of the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic

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Each section of the toolkit should be consulted during the indicated phases of the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic:

- 1 Inception
- 2 Desk review
- 3 Stakeholder workshops & interviews
- 4 Analysis
- 5 Prioritisation workshop
- 6 Final report

More details on each phase are available in the Application Guide (Part 2).

Introduction

The RISE Education Systems Diagnostic aims to facilitate and support governments and organisations in selecting high-level strategic reform priorities to improve learning, based on the latest education systems research.

The RISE Programme has developed a framework for conceptualising an education system. This RISE accountability framework (Pritchett, 2015), also known as the RISE systems framework or the 5x4 framework, can be used to identify the key actors in the education system, specify the relationships between them, identify the primary alignment(s) of the relationships, and pinpoint any misalignments between different parts of the system.

This framework has been adapted to create a diagnostic tool meant to identify constraints to education progress and priorities for system reform (Silberstein and Spivack, 2023). Between 2019 and 2022, the RISE Programme worked with partners on seven field-based pilots of the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic. Each

pilot took place in a different country with a different partner organisation. The pilots were conducted with a focus on various levels of the system. Some pilots were conducted in close collaboration with and on behalf of the national government, others with state or provincial governments, and others focused on district level government with results applied to NGO programmes. The RISE Programme internally conducted three additional desk-based exercises that used the approach for retrospective analysis of education policies or programmes.

The primary intended audience for this document is teams considering whether to use the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic. It attempts to answer some of the important questions that attend the invention of any new tool, especially “Where has this been done before?” and “What was the outcome?” This document serves as an entry point for those exploring the tool, while the other resources in the [RISE Education Systems Diagnostic Toolkit](#) paint a fuller picture of the diagnostic process.

This document has three subsections. The first provides a high-level overview of the ten existing applications of the Diagnostic. The second focuses on the seven existing field-based pilots, and describes the context, notable departures from the guide to applying the Diagnostic, and main findings from each. The third summarises the three desk-based case studies produced using the Diagnostic.

Overview of the ten applications of the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic

Table 1 below provides an overview of the ten completed projects that have used the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic. They illustrate the diversity of use cases for the Diagnostic. It has been used successfully by academics, think tanks, consultants, and non-profit organisations. It is also flexible enough to speak to different primary audiences, which have included national governments, sub-national governments, and education organisations.

The Diagnostic can serve at least three broad objectives:

- **Policy prioritisation:** Diagnosis of key misalignments between different parts of the education system, in order to identify and prioritise the policies that might resolve these misalignments and improve student learning. This objective would lend itself to strategic exercises and reviews of sector priorities and education sector plans.
- **Programme design:** Diagnosis of the alignments and misalignments between an ongoing or planned educational programme and different parts of the wider education system. This objective would be useful to organisations trying to ensure that a soon-to-be-launched programme “lands” within the wider system and achieves its intended impact.
- **Retrospective policy analysis:** Backward-looking diagnosis of the education system and a policy in question to explain the success or failure of a reform and its impact on student learning. This objective would be useful to organisations seeking to understand success or learn from failure.

The earliest pilot, launched in late 2019, was in Ghana. The RISE Education Systems Diagnostic was still being developed at the time of this launch, and some RISE Directorate members travelled to Ghana to co-develop the tool and participate in fieldwork and analysis. The pilots in Balochistan (Pakistan), Ecuador, Gauteng (South Africa), a state in northern India, and Uganda, together with a set of pilots in Global School Leaders partner countries were all launched around the same time in 2022.⁵ These teams participated in training

⁵ The details of some pilots have been anonymised. There was a long break between the initial pilot in Ghana and subsequent pilots due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

sessions with the RISE team on the fully drafted diagnostic tool. RISE team members conducted regular check-ins (approximately every six weeks) with pilot leads, and three all-group meetings were held with the teams to allow for opportunities for peer feedback across the pilots. The desk-based exercises were conducted in 2021 and 2022 by RISE Directorate team members and were published in working papers (Kaffenberger and Spivack, 2022; Kaffenberger, Silberstein, and Spivack, 2022).

Table 1. Overview of pilots of the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic.

	Geographic focus	Pilot lead(s)	Pilot lead organisation type	Government counterpart and/or level of analysis	Objective
Field-based	Balochistan, Pakistan	Verso Consulting and Juniper Policy Consulting	Consultancy	Provincial government	Retrospective policy analysis to support longstanding engagement with elected officials to prioritise quality education
	Ecuador	SUMMA and former Ecuadorian government officials	Think tank	National Ministry of Education	Policy prioritisation
	Gauteng, South Africa	University of the Witwatersrand	Academic researchers	Provincial Ministry of Education and National Planning Committee	Policy prioritisation
	Ghana	Education Partnerships Group	Consultancy	National Ministry of Education	Policy prioritisation as part of the World Bank Ghana Accountability for Learning Outcomes Project (GALOP)
	GSL partner countries	Global School Leaders (GSL) and affiliated researchers	NGO and academic researchers	Various	Programme design to guide GSL programmes and policy advocacy
	A state in northern India	Central Square Foundation	NGO	State Ministry of Education	Policy prioritisation
	Uganda	Economic Policy Research Centre	Think tank	Education Policy Review Committee	Policy prioritisation
Desk-based	Sobral, Brazil	RISE Directorate team	Academic researchers	No counterpart, analysis at city level	Retrospective policy analysis of successful municipal efforts to improve foundational learning
	Indonesia	RISE Directorate team	Academic researchers	No counterpart, analysis at national level	Retrospective policy analysis of Indonesian teacher pay reforms' failure to improve learning outcomes
	Eastern Cape, Limpopo, and Western Cape South Africa	RISE Directorate team	Academic researchers	No counterpart, analysis of an NGO called Funda Wandé	Retrospective policy analysis to understand an NGO's success

A note on the repeated references to the concept of “misalignment” in the pilot findings described below: The Diagnostic is designed to identify different types of misalignments in the education system. There are **two broad types of misalignments**:

- The first type of misalignment occurs when a part of the education system is designed to primarily achieve **a purpose other than learning**. Although education systems can and should fulfil multiple purposes, cultivating children’s learning is a fundamental purpose of any education system. The Diagnostic distinguishes between alignment for learning and alignment for selection, access, compliance, and patronage/special interests.
- The second type of misalignment is **between different parts of the system**. This can be between different education stakeholders—such as politicians and civil servants—or between different educational processes—such as the goals prescribed by education authorities (e.g., curriculum) and the information used to measure progress against those goals (e.g., assessments).

For a much more detailed discussion of (mis)alignment, see [Silberstein and Spivack \(2023\)](#).

Field-based cases

Balochistan, Pakistan

Pilot context

The Balochistan diagnostic was led by a team of policy consultants and government advisors collaborating across two organisations: Verso Consulting and Juniper Policy Consulting. This team has been working in Balochistan for many years and was involved in helping to craft education sector plans in 2013 and 2019.

In 2010, responsibility for education provision in Pakistan devolved to the state level. While this led to increased political attention, spending, and policy reforms for the education sector in Balochistan, both schooling access and learning outcomes have remained largely unchanged. The team used the pilot to retrospectively diagnose why. They focused on reforms between 2013 and 2018 related to the establishment of new public schools in Balochistan.

The team identified two counterparts in government: 1) a small number of senior bureaucrats, and 2) the Strategic Planning and Reforms Cell (SPRC) based in the Planning and Development Department of the Government of Balochistan. In addition to tailoring the Diagnostic to the needs of the SPRC, the team intends to use the results of their diagnostic to inform their own activities, in particular their plans to work with political parties to improve their education reform platforms.

Implementation approach and notable adaptations

The Verso and Juniper team followed the approach laid out in the guide to applying the Diagnostic. One notable adaptation was that, given the team’s extensive experience in the education sector in Balochistan, the team started by filling in the [Diagnostic analysis tools](#) through a series of internal discussion sessions. This

allowed the team to take advantage of their expertise and to use the desk review⁶ and subsequent fieldwork to target specific knowledge gaps or points of contention.

Uniquely among the other pilots, the team also made politics a focus of their study. RISE did not provide supporting materials to analyse the politics relationship,⁷ so the team created their own template. The team believed that politics was a key driver of the alignment of the other parts of the system to the extent that leaving it out would severely limit the study.

Findings

The overall finding of the study is that **the education system is well aligned—but around patronage, not learning**. In analysing the school construction reforms, the study is careful to distinguish between de jure (on paper) and de facto (actual) reform goals. The reforms were de jure about improving access, and this is backed by adequate financing and functional information systems that reported on inputs. However, the de facto priority, whether in the relationship between the highest state executive and education authorities or in the relationship between education authorities and schools, is centred around patronage. New schools were built according to political criteria rather than community need. Budgets have therefore been spent inefficiently, and available data was ignored. There is a misalignment between patronage-driven goals and access-oriented finance and information.

The study also describes how patronage has perverted teacher human resource (HR) systems. On one hand, reforms introduced an examination-based teacher recruitment policy. By ensuring that **the teacher recruitment is conducted a rules-based manner**, this policy has helped insulate this aspect of teacher HR from the patronage in the surrounding system. However, **teacher assignment is still driven by patronage and connections**, allowing teachers to transfer out of undesirable rural posts and leaving many schools severely understaffed. Thus, access-aligned reforms in one part of the system (i.e., school construction) are undermined by patronage-aligned norms in another (i.e., patronage-based teacher assignment).

The study also highlights the **misalignment that exists between teacher pay (finance) and incentives to teach (motivation)**. Government teachers are highly paid, with the stated goal of attracting talent, but there are few intrinsic or extrinsic motivators to teach well. The study concludes that high salaries have done little to motivate teachers in the absence of concomitant changes to school culture and teacher career ladders.

For more on this diagnostic pilot study, see this [blog by the JPC-VERSO team](#), as well as their inception report (pp. 5–22), analysis tools (pp. 191–199), and final report (pp. 309–331) in the [example materials from the Diagnostic pilot studies](#).⁸

⁶ For more on the desk review and other phases of the diagnostic, see the [Toolkit](#) section titled *Guide to Applying the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic*.

⁷ RISE provided detailed supporting material to analyse the other three relationships that comprise the education system: compact, management, and voice and choice. However, an analysis of the politics relationship would require a more in-depth political economy approach, so it has not been included in the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic thus far. For a discussion of alignments of the politics relationship in the RISE Systems Framework, see Belafi (2022). For a discussion of the political economy of education and entry points to align politics around children's learning, see Levy (2022).

⁸ Note: If this hyperlink to the example materials from the Diagnostic pilot studies no longer works, please check https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-Misc_2023/09 and <https://riseprogramme.org/tools/rise-education-systems-diagnostic> for the most recent versions of the Diagnostic toolkit.

Ecuador

Pilot context

The Ecuador pilot was conducted by a team from at SUMMA Laboratorio de Investigación e Innovación en Educación para América Latina y el Caribe, including two former senior government officials (including a former minister) who had served in the Ecuador education system. The team took advantage of its strong networks in government to convene a high-level steering committee, which was the main audience of the diagnostic exercise.

Following a 2008 constitutional reform, Ecuador greatly increased spending on education. While learning outcomes improved between 2006 and 2013, they have stagnated since. The team sought to diagnose why progress on improving learning has stalled based on the current alignment of the system.

Implementation approach and notable adaptations

The team followed the approach laid out in the guide to applying the Diagnostic. One addition they made was to conduct an impact/influence mapping exercise with their steering committee to identify the highest-priority misalignments and potential approaches for addressing them.

The team also translated some of the supporting material to implement the Diagnostic (along with the final report) into Spanish to allow for sharing and discussing key concepts with the steering committee and respondents. *Note:* later in 2023, SUMMA will be launching a Spanish and Portuguese version of the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic Toolkit.

Findings

The pilot's central finding is that the Ecuadorean **education system is predominantly aligned around compliance with centralised administrative requirements**. Many people in the system see their primary job as filling in reports. The emphasis on reporting and tight supervision is a logical or even necessary development aimed at making the system more transparent and less vulnerable to corruption.

However, the report offers multiple illustrations of how **the system's alignment around compliance is also limiting in that it conflicts with the goal of improving learning**. One clear example is that while budgetary decision making has been deconcentrated to the district level, schools still do not have sufficient autonomy over their budget to achieve learning goals. Schools create mandatory improvement plans that include requests for support, but these plans and requests are often unconnected to budgeting decisions and go unfunded. The lack of decentralised autonomy to adapt the curriculum in order to meet learning goals is another good example. Legal and administrative provisions both ask schools to contextualise the curriculum to the local context (including the language of instruction). However, this is misaligned with the standardised guidelines, standardised teacher evaluations, and constant centralised initiatives to change the curriculum, all of which result in the delivery of a one-size-fits-all national curriculum.

Finally, the report highlights the **misalignment between delegated goals around improving teaching quality and the lack of support to achieve these goals**. There are far too few staff assigned to offer pedagogical support. Both these pedagogical support staff and school leaders have multiple roles. By default, they tend to focus on administrative roles such as oversight and reporting rather than offering support. Results on national assessments are not accompanied by targeted feedback to schools. Teachers are overburdened by reporting requirements, and the training they receive is mostly online, asynchronous, and

one-directional without face-to-face feedback that helps them apply their training to classroom practice. The system consistently pursues top-down compliance without offering substantial support.

For more on this diagnostic pilot study, see this [blog by the SUMMA team](#), as well as their desk review report (pp. 33–76), workshop slide deck (pp. 184–190), and final report (in Spanish on pp. 332–367 and in English on pp. 368398) in the [example materials from the Diagnostic pilot studies](#).

Gauteng, South Africa

Pilot context

The Gauteng pilot was led by a team of researchers at the University of the Witwatersrand. Some members of the team have been deeply engaged with the Gauteng Department of Education for many years, and this agency was the government counterpart for this project.

The main question the Diagnostic sought to address was why the province-level Gauteng education system, in alignment with the national Department of Basic Education, has been inconsistent in acting on the large body of existing research and evidence on how to improve early-grade learning in South Africa.

Implementation approach and notable adaptations

The team mainly followed the approach laid out in the guide to applying the Diagnostic, with some key exceptions. For example, the team conducted a significant portion of their analysis via their desk review, consulting an especially wide range of documents at the national, provincial, and district levels. These included planning documents, legislation, policy documents, press releases and newspaper articles.

The team mostly used their interviews and workshops to verify desk-based findings, rather than to gather new data.

Findings

The diagnostic exercise identified two key misalignments that were preventing the system from focusing on learning. First, there was a **gap between goals and measurement at multiple levels of the system** (or, in the vocabulary of the Diagnostic, a “misalignment between delegation and information”). The goal of improving the quality of education—including the quality of education in the early years of school—is clearly articulated by most levels of the system (national, provincial, district, families). However, the only reliable measure of “quality” in terms of learning outcomes is the Grade 12 exam. This gap leads to a disproportionate focus on the Grade 12 National Senior Certificate pass rates, and a damaging lack of attention to early-grade learning. The absence of systemwide information on early-grade reading and mathematics achievement also constrains actors within the system: districts have limited ability to hold schools accountable for learning; families have limited ability to exercise their considerable de jure power on school governing bodies in order to improve student learning; and families also have limited ability to exercise the considerable choice available to them to select between public schools on the basis of learning outcomes.

Second, across the national education system, the **relationship between districts and schools is strongly aligned for process compliance rather than for learning**. This problem is linked to a range of factors, including inadequate human resources, lack of trust, and the wide range of administrative tasks they need to perform. Consequently, districts’ main de facto purpose is to function as “pass through” or “post office” administrative units in a top-down relationship with the province. This is in tension with more learning-

oriented policies and rhetoric stating that the districts have a key role to play in supporting quality teaching and professional development according to bottom-up demand from school and teachers. The current dominance of the top-down compliance relationship is visible through many different symptoms: district staff are diverted from support functions to complete administrative tasks; districts are under-resourced in terms of the minimum standards for support (e.g., number of schools and teachers assigned to support staff); district staff are selected without regard to their ability to provide support; and the district's focus on monitoring, rather than supporting, promotes and reflects a lack of trust between district and school.

The team were asked to present their findings at a meeting of the National Planning Commission.

For more on this diagnostic pilot study, see this [blog by the University of the Witwatersrand team](#), and their final report (pp. 200–260) in the [example materials from the Diagnostic pilot studies](#).

Ghana

Pilot context

The Education Partnerships Group (EPG) was engaged by Ghana's Ministry of Education to create an accountability for learning framework for Ghana. The framework was a loan-linked government deliverable within a large World Bank project.

EPG approached RISE for technical input, and EPG and RISE entered into a partnership to adapt the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic as the basis for this accountability for learning framework. The main audience within government were the high-level officials in the Ghana Education Services (GES) who were responsible for drafting the framework.

Implementation approach and notable adaptations

The Ghana pilot took a different approach than the later pilots. This was both because the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic was still being developed at the time, and because the tool was being used instrumentally to inform a specific government policy document. As a result of government expectations, the Ghana diagnostic was far narrower in scope than the subsequent pilots. It zoomed in on the major data-collection processes of the education system—national assessments, school-level monitoring, inspections, and the national EMIS—and mapped responsibilities and reporting on these processes through 10 layers of the bureaucracy. (The framework was a precursor to a data dashboard to be developed later in the World Bank project cycle.)

This pilot was a learning experience for RISE and directly informed a number of refinements to the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic before further pilots took place. For example, the narrowed scope in Ghana meant that it was difficult to draw conclusions about major misalignments in the system; subsequent pilots emphasised this big-picture systems lens. The data gathered in Ghana was mostly collected through 1-to-1 interviews; subsequent pilots largely conducted workshops with groups of participants to build consensus between stakeholders within the system and formed steering committees to further guide and refine findings. After the project in Ghana, RISE developed additional supporting materials for implementing the Diagnostic, including the guide to applying the Diagnostic and the planning and analysis tools with detailed illustrative indicators to help structure the analysis.

Findings

The Diagnostic found that **data systems in Ghana are mostly aligned around measuring access rather than the quality of learning**. There is relatively little learning-oriented information in the system, and the information that does exist is generated by compliance-oriented processes that report data upward within the bureaucracy but are rarely used to make decisions. For example, the Diagnostic found that the information collected by headteachers and circuit supervisors (the civil servants that interface between the district and school levels) is focused on enrolment and attendance, rather than what has happened inside the classroom. The teaching practices that are included in these monitoring routines—such as the presence of lesson plans or the presence of marked student exercise books—relate to compliance rather than the quality of teaching. The information passed upward in the system focuses on “thin” metrics of whether monitoring was carried out (e.g., number of visits) rather than on the quality of monitoring or its outcomes (e.g., the kind of feedback delivered).

Another set of findings focused on school inspections conducted by the semi-independent National Schools Inspectorate Authority. The Diagnostic found that **the inspection process was mostly aligned to measure teaching and learning**, including observation of classroom practices and student assessment data. **However, there was no systematic process for using the inspection reports**, either to relay the reports back to the school level and help schools act on them, or to aggregate inspection results into a usable input to national policy.

Based on the diagnostic findings, EPG drafted recommendations as to how the government could articulate and strengthen an accountability for learning framework. EPG presented this draft accountability framework to the MOE and Ghana Education Services (GES), and the framework was subsequently adapted and adopted by the government.

For more on this diagnostic pilot study, see [Ghana: Accountability for Learning Framework](#).

Global School Leaders partner countries

Pilot context

Global Schools Leaders (GSL) is a non-profit organisation that aims to improve education systems in low- and middle-income countries by strengthening school leadership. They achieve this by collaborating with governments, schools, other NGOs, and funders to equip school leaders with high-quality, context-appropriate training and tools. In addition, they collaborate with partner NGOs in Brazil, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Kenya to generate practice-based evidence on school leadership and student outcomes.

GSL are using the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic as a tool for cross-country organisational learning, to better understand the systemic misalignments that hinder school leaders from improving teaching and learning. At the time of writing, GSL had piloted the Diagnostic in one partner country with a focus on school leaders, and in another partner country with a focus on the barriers that education officers face in attempting to support school leaders. They intend to implement the Diagnostic in other partner countries, to guide future GSL programmes and policy advocacy.

Implementation approach and notable adaptations

The team drew on the approach laid out in the guide to applying the Diagnostic, making adaptations to suit the contexts of their partner countries as well as their organisational goals. For example, because GSL aims not only to enhance their programme design but also to contribute to the academic research base on school

leadership, their desk review went beyond documents and research reports on the partner countries in question toward the wider research base on educational management, school leadership, and organisational learning.

Another notable adaptation is that, in partnership with a university-based academic, GSL developed a survey instrument for school leaders in order to complement stakeholder feedback from the diagnostic workshops with input from a much larger sample of school leaders across a range of locations. This survey instrument is centred on the RISE education systems framework and additionally draws on a range of existing survey instruments (e.g., PISA, TALIS, the Development-World Management Survey). Among other functions, the survey is intended to gather data on school leaders' actual, on-the-ground experiences, as distinct from what is de jure written in policy documents.

Findings

The team found that school leaders are expected to spend large amounts of time on administrative reporting upward, but there were no clear mechanisms for feeding this information back to the school level in order to improve teaching and learning. In the language of the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic, this suggests that, **in the management relationship between education authorities and schools, there may be a misalignment between the delegated goal of cultivating student learning and the way in which information is used.**

Another finding was that **there is a misalignment between the responsibilities that are delegated to mid-tier education officers and the finance and support that they receive to fulfil these responsibilities.** Specifically, education officers in this context are expected to partner with school leaders to improve school management, teaching, and learning—but they do not have either enough resources to deliver such support nor the autonomy to effectively solve school-level problems.

For more on this diagnostic pilot study, see [this blog from the GSL team](#). For the survey instrument that GSL developed, which can be adapted to other contexts, see pp. 163–183 in the [example materials from the Diagnostic pilot studies](#).

A state in northern India

Pilot context

The pilot in a northern Indian state was conducted by the Central Square Foundation (CSF). Their team was able to incorporate the pilot into a larger engagement with the state government, one of 12 such engagements CSF has with states in India to support their implementation of renewed efforts to improve foundational literacy and numeracy.

This diagnostic pilot was incorporated into CSF's ongoing partnership and work with the state. The pilot began at a time of political transition after state-level elections resulted in a change of government. This created an opportunity for the findings of the Diagnostic to influence the approach of the incoming state government, including through presentations and workshops with state administrative, academic, and political leaders.

Implementation approach and notable adaptations

The team mainly followed the approach laid out in the guide to applying the Diagnostic, with two key adaptations. First, due to a request from the state-level steering committee, the team designed the data-collection workshops and interviews to be as representative of state-wide education stakeholders as possible. They held discussions in several districts across the state and spoke not only with top bureaucrats, other government officials, headteachers, and teachers, but also with NGOs, parents, and children.

Second, while the team explained the diagnostic analytical framework to the steering committee, they did not do so during stakeholder workshops. Instead, they developed questionnaires using familiar local terminology that allowed them to facilitate the stakeholder meetings as group discussions framed in the vocabulary of the stakeholders present, rather than emphasising the less familiar conceptual framework and vocabulary of the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic.

Findings

Overall, the Diagnostic found that **the state education system is aligned toward access and selection, but is beginning to shift toward alignment to learning.**

The Diagnostic also uncovered some ongoing challenges in the process of shifting toward an alignment for learning. For example, **there is a need to further unpack the idea of “quality education”**. It is currently interpreted by different parts of the system according to criteria that relate more to access than learning (e.g., in terms of enrolment, inputs, teaching time, exam scores). Quality needs to be more closely linked to clear learning outcome goals. Similarly, the education system needs to reorder priorities for teachers, such that “good teachers” are defined in relation to “good teaching”. Teacher recruitment, teacher pay, teacher training, teacher appraisal, and teachers’ most important responsibilities are not currently related to a clearly defined set of teaching competencies and practices.

Another unresolved issue is that **the budgeting process is highly centralised, leaving little room for the district level or below to inform budget allocations or flexibly meet local needs.** Financing is mostly tied to administrative processes and budget headings related to access, and relatively little financing is tied to or monitored in terms of its impact on learning.

For more on this diagnostic pilot study, see this [blog by the CSF team](#), as well as their data collection instruments (p. 77–147) in the [example materials from the Diagnostic pilot studies](#).

Uganda

Pilot context

The diagnostic pilot in Uganda was initially suggested by counterparts at the UK government’s Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office. The RISE team sought out EPRC, a think tank, to conduct the pilot.

The EPRC team reviewed the stakeholder context and won approval from the Ministry of Education and Sports to conduct the pilot. The pilot focused on primary education. EPRC formed a steering committee comprising representatives from the Ministry of Education and Sports, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, the National Planning Authority, civil society organisations, faith-based foundation bodies (involved in establishing many primary schools), and the Education Policy Review Commission (a government-sanctioned committee working to review and rewrite the white paper that guides the high-level strategic vision for the education sector in Uganda).

Implementation approach and notable adaptations

The team largely followed the approach laid out in the guide to applying the Diagnostic.

One notable adaptation was the careful sampling at the district level. While the team conducted key informant interviews with central government officials, the bulk of the qualitative fieldwork was conducted through focus group discussions at the district level. The team sampled districts in eight different regions and conducted nearly a full week of fieldwork per region. This allowed them to speak with different groups of stakeholders on different days (e.g., District Education Officers, school inspectors, school principals and school management committee representatives, teachers, and parents) since the team felt that even small hierarchical differences between respondents would preclude open and honest discussions.

Findings

Even at the primary school level, the study finds that **most parts of the Ugandan system are aligned around selection—identifying and furthering the education of top-performing students—rather than ensuring learning for all**. Government officials, the education bureaucracy, and parents all focus predominantly on pass rates on the primary school leaving exam (PLE) rather than curriculum mastery or learning gains. One symptom of this is how the multiple “contradictions” between the primary curriculum and PLE exams are resolved. In Uganda, the curriculum and exams are prescribed by different government bodies, and amidst the resulting misalignments the pressure to teach to the test often wins out. Teachers call this “delivery of the curriculum in an examination format,” where the curriculum is taught through test questions. Another telling symptom was that teachers have largely ignored a newly adopted “abridged curriculum” which emphasises continuous, formative assessment. Instead, teaching remains focused on training students to take the summative PLE since this is the ultimate arbiter of both student and teacher performance.

The study also emphasised **misalignments between the curriculum and the support offered to teachers to help them deliver the curriculum**. Changes to the curriculum—even changes launched as long ago as 2003–2004—are not well understood at the school level due to insufficient in-service training offered through broken cascade models. Pre-service training also often does not match on-the-job expectations. For example, curriculum reforms state that the early grades of primary school must be delivered in local languages, but pre-service preparation is still in English for all teachers.

Finally, the report notes that **some parts of the Ugandan system are aligned to promote access**. Most prominently, financing of public schools is tied to school enrolment levels, so this is a major preoccupation for the Ministry of Education. For example, school inspections emphasise enrolment-related information, paying relatively little attention to what is actually happening inside classrooms.

For more on this diagnostic pilot study, see the data collection instruments (pp. 148–162) and final report (pp. 261–308) from the EPRC team in the [example materials from the Diagnostic pilot studies](#).

Desk-based cases

Pilot contexts

All three of the desk-based pilots were conducted by members of the RISE Directorate as inputs to working papers.⁹

- One case study mapped a series of education reforms in the Brazilian city of Sobral beginning in 2001 to the RISE systems framework to understand their dramatic success in improving foundational learning outcomes. The results contributed to Section 3 of Kaffenberger and Spivack (2022). See Table 2.
- The second case study mapped a major 2005 reform which effectively doubled teacher pay in Indonesia to the 5x4 framework to understand why the reform failed to improve learning outcomes. The results contributed to Section 4 of Kaffenberger and Spivack (2022). See Table 3.
- The third case study mapped the programmes of a well-known South African NGO, Funda Wandé, to the 5x4 framework to understand the organisation's success since 2017 in improving foundational learning outcomes. The results contributed to Section 3.2 in Kaffenberger, Silberstein, and Spivack (2022). See Table 4.

Implementation approach and notable adaptations

The approach of the desk-based pilots differed from that of the field-based ones. Rather than considering the different possible orientations of each relationship in a system, the desk-based reviews each took an episode of reform or a programme and mapped it on to the RISE 5x4 framework. In all three instances, this mapping was based entirely on desk research. The outcome of the mapping exercise was to highlight the role that system alignment played in the success or failure of the reform efforts in being studied.

Findings

Each case study mapped out a narrative of how the reform or programme in question impacted—or failed to impact—different parts of the education system. The analyses of the Sobral reforms and the Funda Wandé programme show how each worked across multiple parts of the system, moving those parts of the system into greater alignment with learning and, ultimately, producing positive outcomes. In contrast, the analysis of the teacher policy reform in Indonesia shows how it narrowly impacted a single dimension of the system—financing—but neglected to move surrounding levers in the system into alignment with learning and therefore ultimately failed to have an impact. The key contention in all three case studies is that learning only improves when a critical mass of the system's constituent parts is pushed into greater alignment to learning.

The analyses from the three case studies are each summarised in the tables below. Conceptually, each cell in these tables represents a different “part” of the system in the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic.

⁹ Both of these papers are slated for publication as chapters of edited volumes.

Table 2. Diagnostic analysis of the Sobral, Brazil, case study

Five design elements	Principal-agent relationships of accountability			
	Politics	Compact	Management	Voice & Choice
Delegation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mayor delegates explicit learning goals, including universal literacy in first two years of primary, and remediation for children in older grades, with Slogan of "Alphabetization (literacy) at the Right Age" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secretariat of Education delegates goals to schools and teachers and brings other system elements in line with the delegated goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents expressed initial resistance to reform, but regular dialogue from the mayor and Secretariat increased support. Parents were encouraged to reinforce learning goals, ensure their children attend school, and more.
Finance		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal education funding increased for poor municipalities, including Sobral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial autonomy devolved to school level, giving more financial independence and responsibility for results 	
Support			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers provided with sequenced learning objectives, structured teaching and learning materials, training and professional development, and ongoing feedback and support through classroom observations, all aligned with learning goals. 	
Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information on low learning from new assessments were shared publicly by the mayor to increase citizen buy-in for improving learning 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of information on learning a top priority for education leadership, with 1/3 of time and effort dedicated to this. Twice-yearly assessments used by education leadership to measure progress and inform course-correction and strategy. Teachers supported to use continuous assessment in classroom for regular feedback on student progress and to inform adjustments to instruction. 	
Motivation			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial incentives for teachers, in-school pedagogical coordinators, and principals for achieving learning goals Public recognition events for high-performing teachers 	

Source: Kaffenberger and Spivack (2022)

Table 3. Diagnostic analysis of the Indonesia teacher reform case study.

Five design elements	Principal-agent relationships of accountability			
	Politics	Compact	Management	Voice & Choice
Delegation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers' groups argue that higher salaries and professional status will improve performance. Pressure from teachers' groups to dilute aspects of the law, in particular the teacher certification process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intended reform: delegation from legislative authorities to adopt pay raises for certified teachers to improve learning; Enacted reform: legal provisions on teacher certification significantly diluted producing a de facto universal salary increase. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intended reform: Delegation of quality improvement for teaching through merit-based certification process; Enacted reform: merit-based components replaced with superficial effectively universal certification process 	
Finance		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional financial resources needed for salary increases financed by a constitutional amendment passed around the same time mandating 20% of government spending go to education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intended reform: Finance provided to raise salaries for teachers who pass external evaluation for merit-based certification; Enacted reform: Finance provided to raise salaries for teachers who submit a portfolio and/or complete two-week course. 	
Support			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intended reform: comprehensive support and training to teachers who do not pass the certification process; Enacted reform: completion of a two-week course allows nearly automatic certification 	
Information			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intended reform: rigorous external evaluation to verify quality of teacher pedagogical knowledge; Enacted reform: Teacher quality superficially verified through portfolio review or two-week course. 	
Motivation			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intended reform: salary increase for teachers who pass rigorous certification process; Enacted reform: de facto nearly universal salary increase, not contingent on performance. 	

Source: Kaffenberger and Spivack (2022)

Table 4. Diagnostic analysis of the Funda Wande case study.

Five design elements	Principal-agent relationships of accountability			
	Politics	Compact	Management	Voice & Choice
Delegation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build government support for the foundational learning agenda with clear goals (100% of children reading for meaning and calculating with confidence by 2030) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align materials and training with government mandate to teach in local languages. Ensure that materials are aligned with mandated curriculum and officially sanctioned by authorities 	
Finance		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus attention on leveraging philanthropic money to improve public sector performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop reading materials for children in local language, print them in anthologies to reduce costs and make them affordable for low performing schools. 	
Support			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop teacher training and coach training programs aimed at preparing teachers to teach reading and basic math in local languages. 	
Information				
Motivation			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer teacher trainings in foundational skills instruction as part of a degree certificate at a university 	

Source: Kaffenberger, Silberstein, and Spivack (2022)

References

- Kaffenberger, M., Silberstein, J., and Spivack, M. (2022). Evaluating Systems: Three Approaches for Analyzing Education Systems and Informing Action. RISE Working Paper Series. 22/093. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2022/093
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- Spivack, M. and Silberstein, J. (2023). Applying Systems Thinking to Education: Using the RISE Systems Framework to Diagnose Education Systems. RISE Insight Series. 2023/051. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-RI_2023/051

Each section of the toolkit should be consulted during the indicated phases of the RISE Education Systems Diagnostic.

- 1 Inception
- 2 Desk review
- 3 Stakeholder workshops and interviews
- 4 Analysis
- 5 Prioritisation workshop
- 6 Final report

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