

# System Coherence for Learning: What We Have Learned from 8 Years of Research on Improving Systems of Education

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# Background

# A growing concern around 2012 that the relative emphasis in global education needed to shift from “schooling access” / “thin inputs” to learning

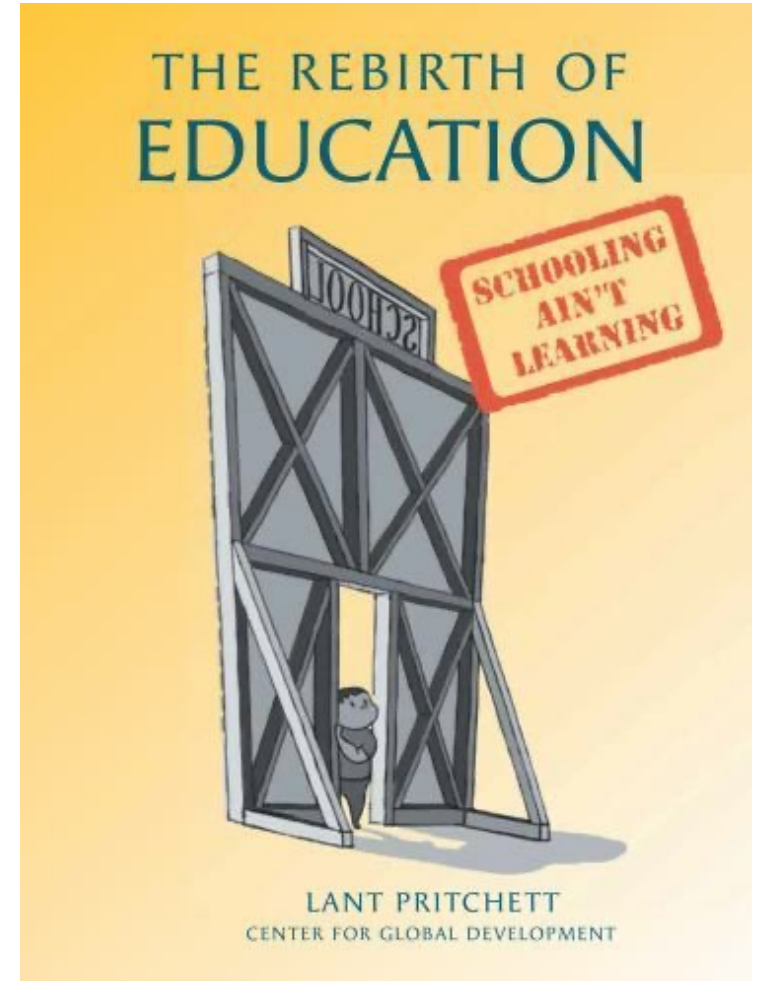
Since the **1948 Declaration of Human Rights** there has been tension between “education” and “schooling”

*Article 26.1: “Everyone has the right to education.” “Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.”*

The **1990 Jomtien declaration on Education for All** was explicit about learning goals:

“Every person - child, youth and adult - shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning.”

The **Millennium Development Goals** were expiring in 2015 and there needed to be a commitment to not just “time served” in school but a true learning goal.



# What is Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE)?

**A multi-year, multi-country, multi-discipline, research endeavour seeking to understand how education systems in developing countries can accelerate progress in improving learning**

## Funders

(UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation)

## Implementation

(Oxford Policy Management, Blavatnik School of Government, Center for Global Development)

## Delivery Board

## Intellectual

## Leadership Team

### 7 Country Research Teams

(India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Vietnam, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Nigeria)

### 2 Political Economy Teams

(Adoption, Implementation)

### Research Directorate & Theme Team

RISE Fellows  
RISE Community of Practice



# Over the past 8 years RISE has produced almost 500 written outputs

These include:

- 110 original research (non-synthesis) working papers (or books)
  - 87 synthesis products (reviews of the literature, etc.)
  - 301 other written works (including insight notes, issue briefs, essays, and blogs)
- There are already over 600 academic citations of RISE publications

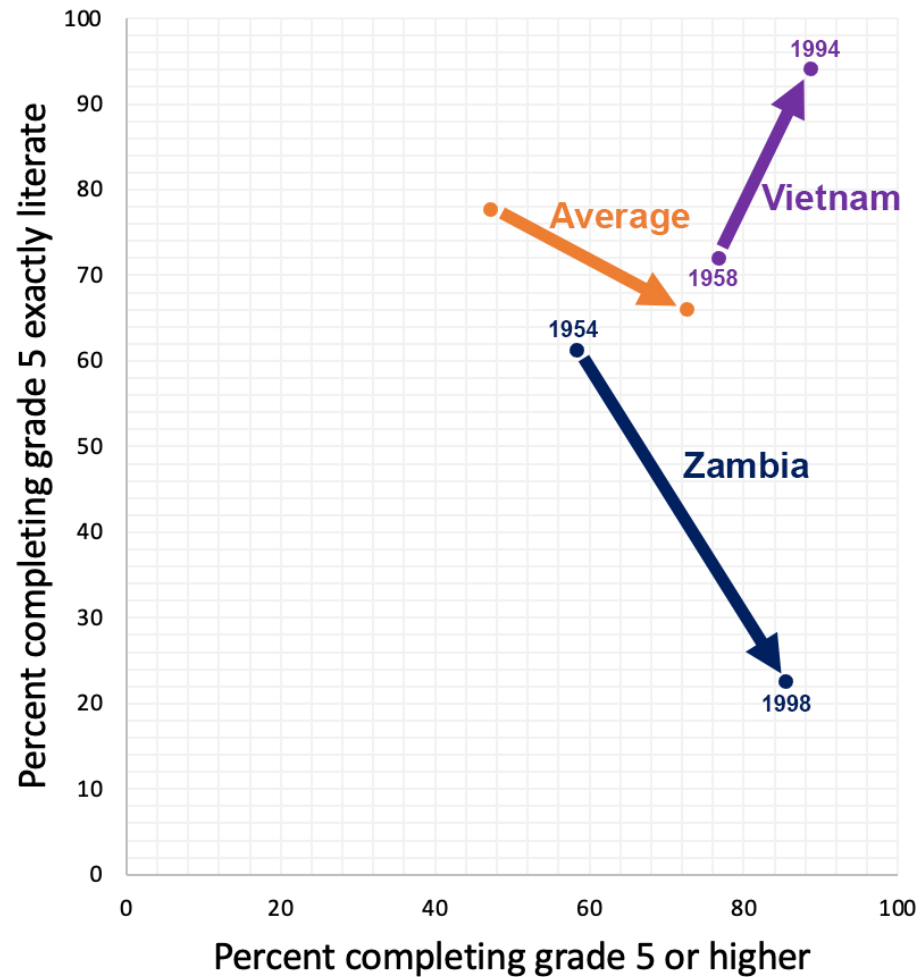
For more, see <https://riseprogramme.org/research>

# RISE outreach and engagement since 2015

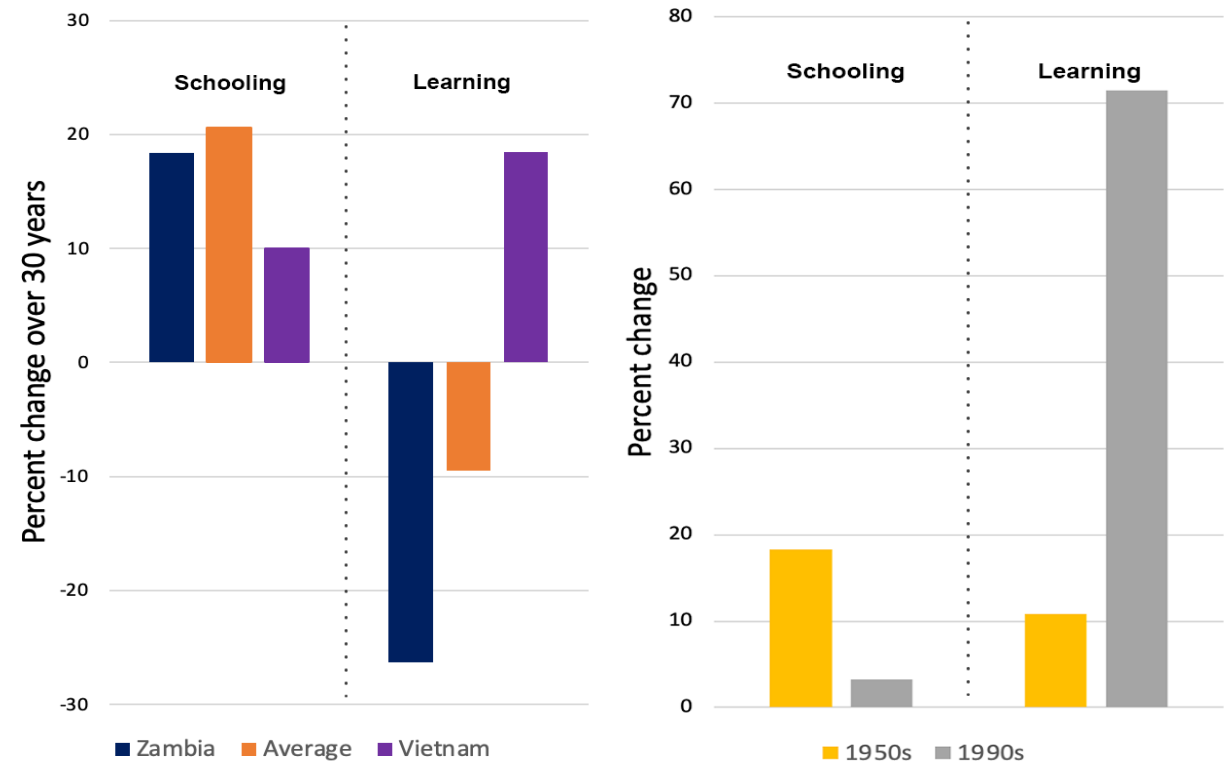
- As of February 2023, RISE's Country Research Teams and Directorate have had 776 total engagements with national and international stakeholders since 2015
- RISE has also organised 92 events, conference panels, and workshops, including:
  - 7 in-person RISE conferences, and 1 remote
  - 15 public webinars
- There are 100 organisations representing 30 countries and 6 continents in the RISE Community of Practice

# Ten new learnings

There was a significant long term downward trend in the fraction of women with five years of schooling who could read, with big differences in those trends across countries



The striking 70% gap in whether a woman with five years of schooling can read between Vietnam and Zambia is up from only 10% in the 1950s. Vietnam got better by 20% and Zambia got worse by almost 30%.

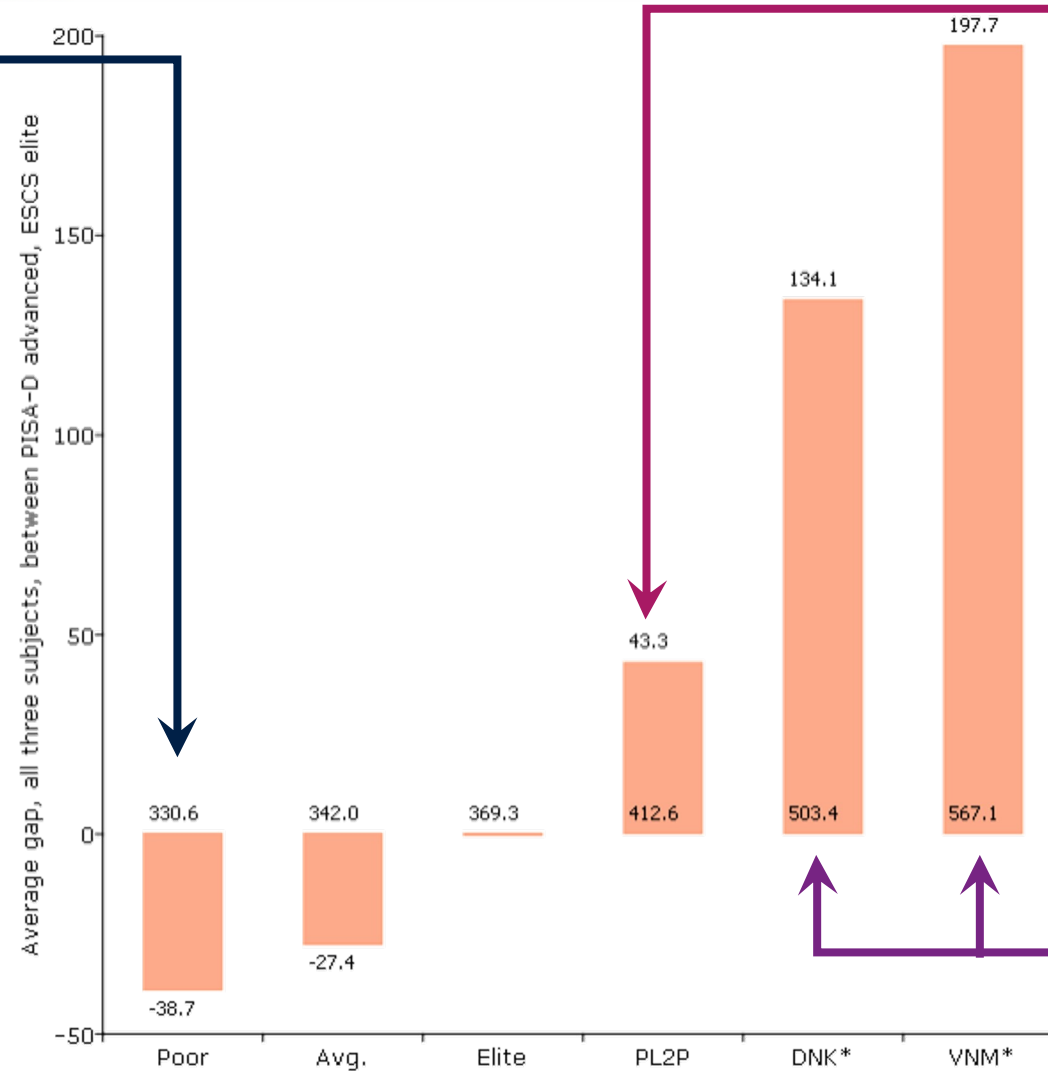




# Closing the learning gap between rich and poor children would be far from enough to help all children cultivate foundational literacy and numeracy

**The gap between the socioeconomic elite and the poor in 6 PISA-D countries is large (39 points) ...**

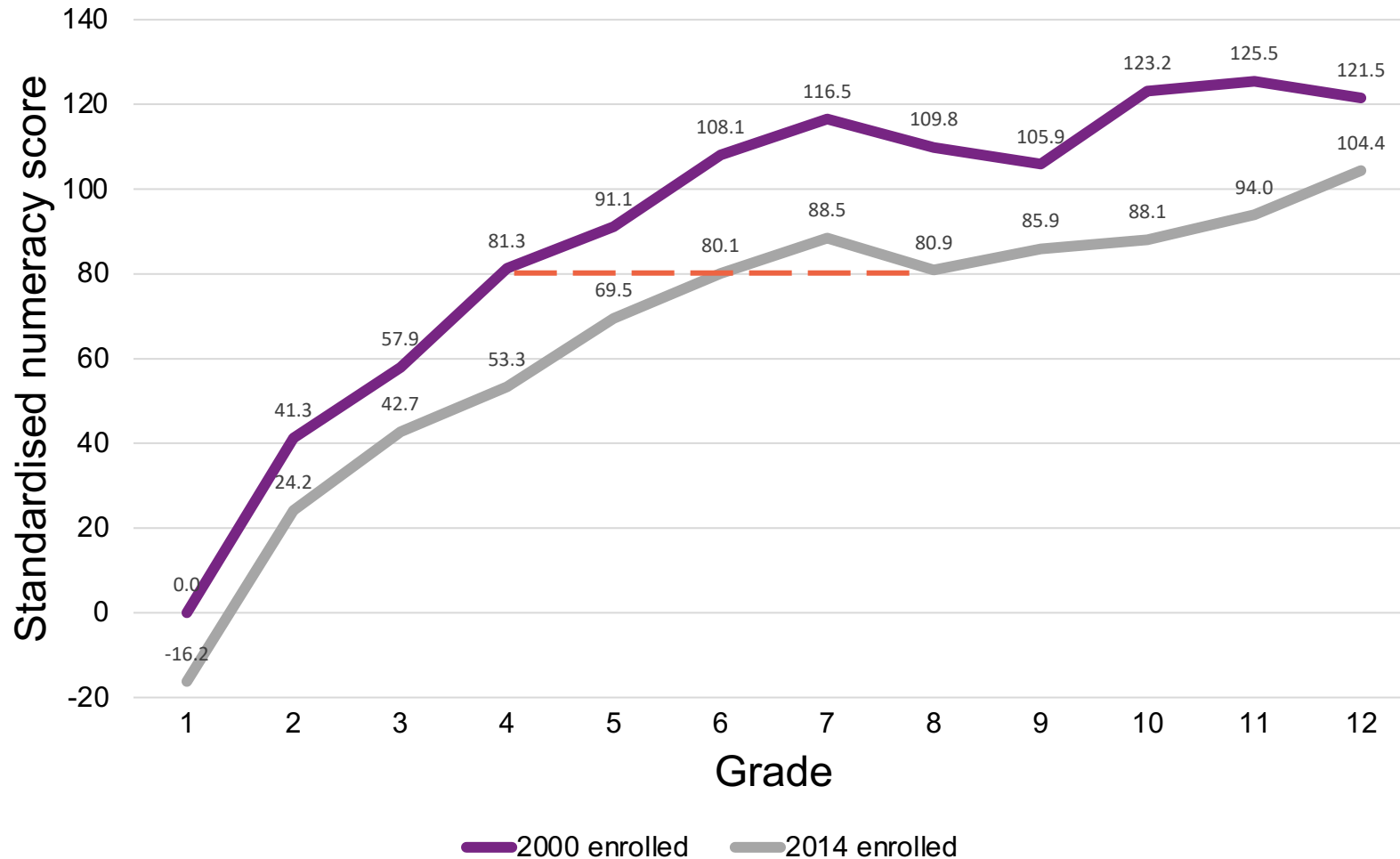
*Notes:* The socioeconomic elite are defined as those who are 2 standard deviations above the mean of the Economic, Social, and Cultural Status index in their country; while the poor are those who are 2 standard deviations below the mean. The 6 countries are Senegal, Cambodia, Zambia, Guatemala, Honduras, and Paraguay.



**... but smaller than the gap between the elite and the SDG4 benchmark for minimum proficiency (43 points) ...**

**... and much smaller than the gaps between the elite in these 6 countries and equivalent students in average developed countries (e.g. Denmark) or high-performing countries (e.g. Vietnam).**  
*E.g. Zambian 15 year olds are 233 points behind their equivalent Vietnamese counterparts.*

In Indonesia (a) learning trajectories flatten off at a relatively low level and (b) were falling over time



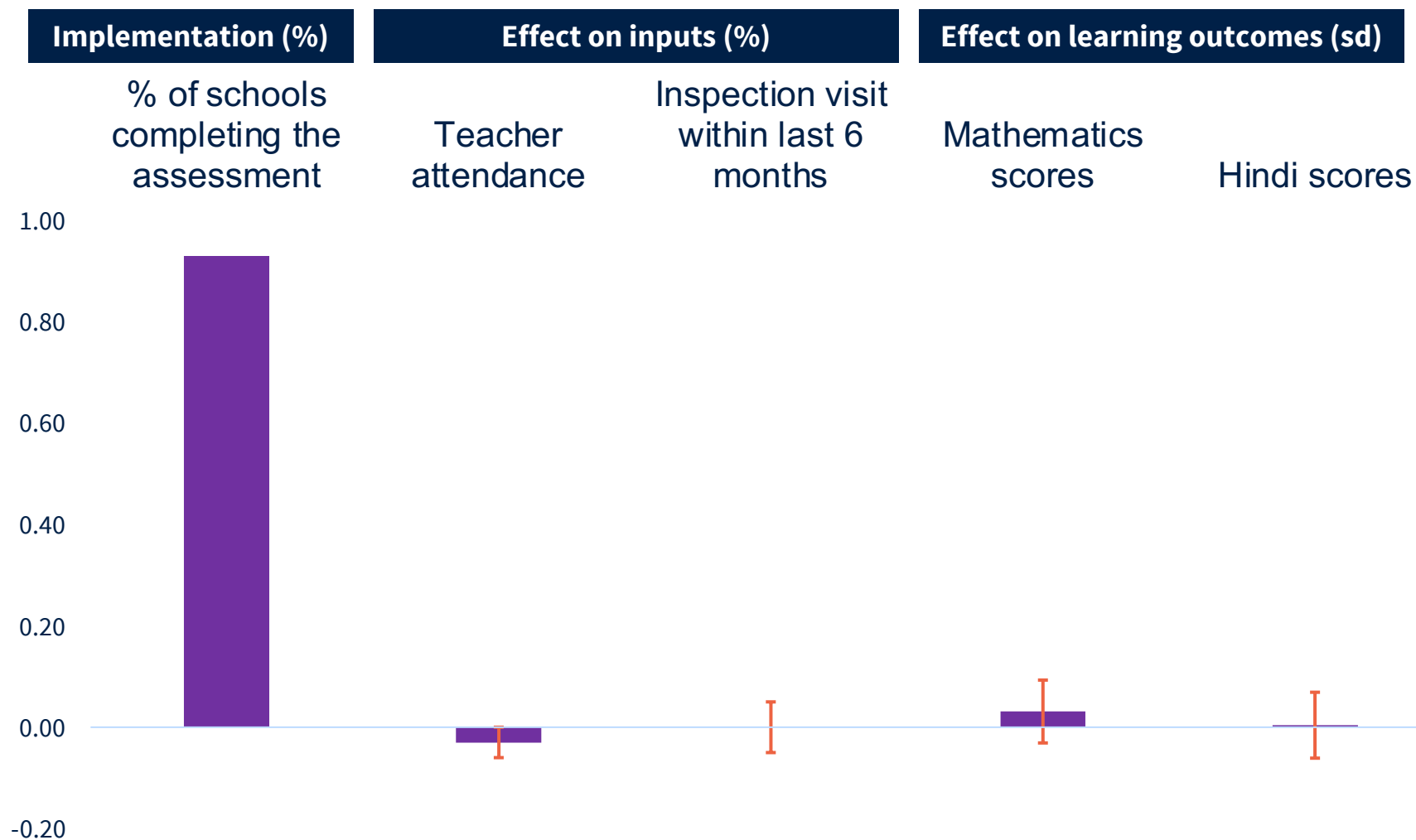
Using household data on simple arithmetic researchers found:

(a) what children knew in grade 4 in 2000 was more than what children knew in grade 8 in 2014

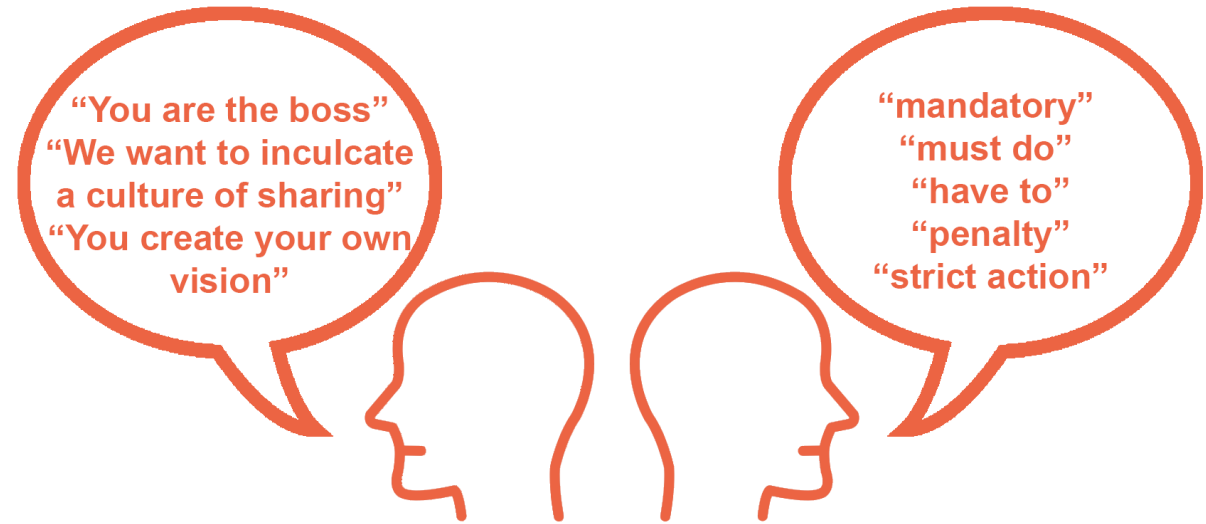
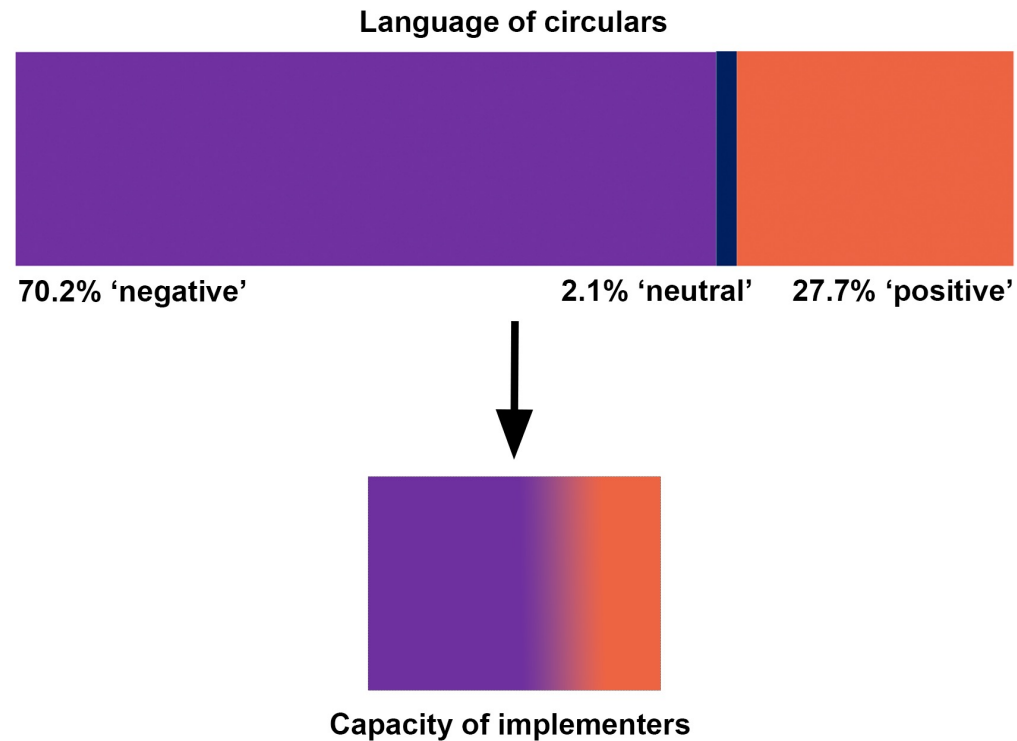
and

(b) very little is learned after grade 7 (from 53 to 89 from grade 4 to 7 and 89 to 94 from grade 7 to 11 in 2014) - even though performance is still very low.

When programmes are adopted and implemented without enough adaptation or iteration, even technically well-designed programme may have no impact



States/ governments don't just “see” a certain way (a la James Scott) but talk a certain way. The “grammar of the state” itself makes it hard to communicate new ways of doing education



Even when the state wants to empower and expand autonomy, the way that the state speaks —and has always spoken — can contradict what it says, creating confusion.

# Interventions that affect the local system ('market') can have effects not predicted from interventions with a single school

Unconditional cash grants given to one private school expands capacity in treatment school in ways that attract students, but cash grants given to all private schools improves test scores in all private schools in a market as schools cannot compete on just visible inputs.

Individual shock

USD 500 (PKR 50,000) given to one private school in a village



What the school(s) chose to do

Money spent on desks, chairs and computers in treatment private school



Enrolment: +21 students  
Test scores and fees: No change

*\*in treatment private school compared its baseline*

Enrolment, test scores and fees: No change

*\*in untreated private schools*

System shock

USD 500 (PKR 50,000) given to all private schools in a village



Money spent on teacher wages and on upgrading classrooms, libraries, and sporting facilities in all private schools

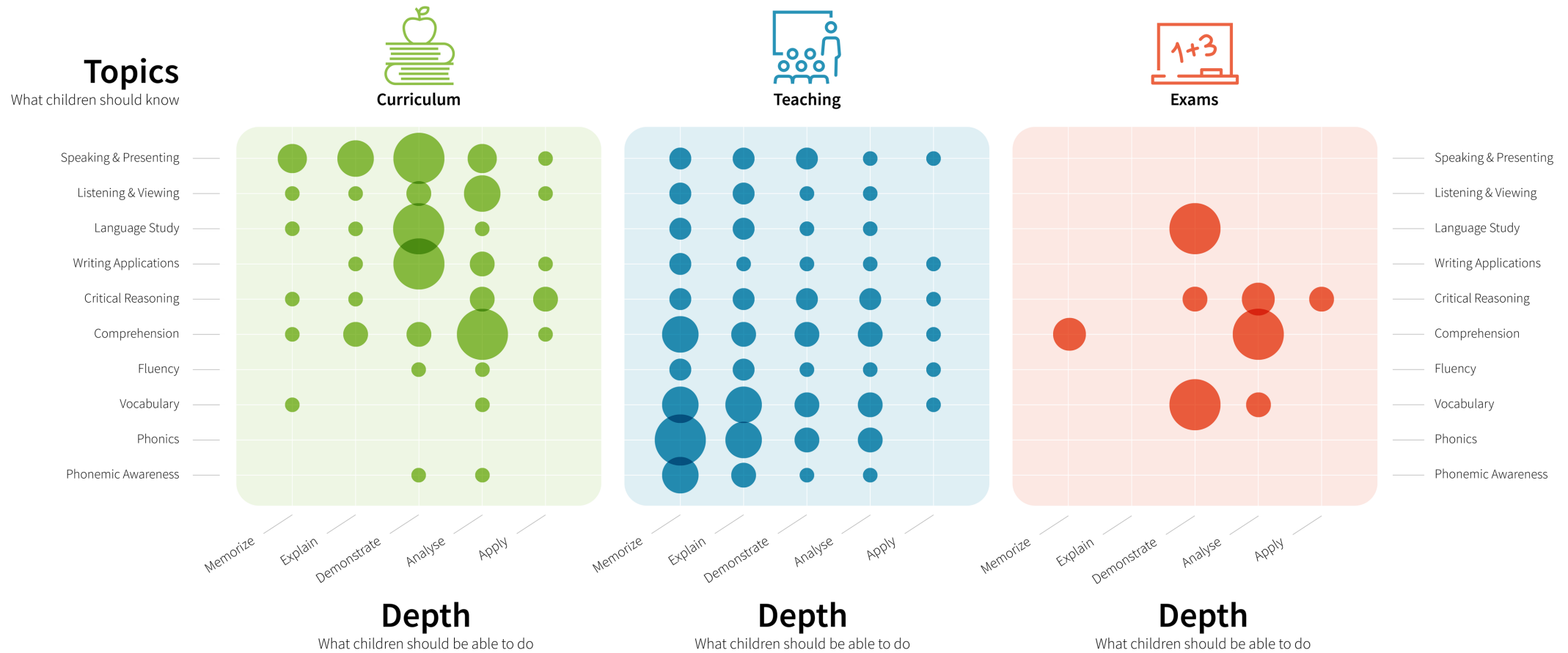


Enrolment: +9 students  
Test scores: +0.22sd  
Fees: +8%

*\*in all private schools*

# The incoherence between what the curriculum says, what teachers do, and what examinations measure can be huge

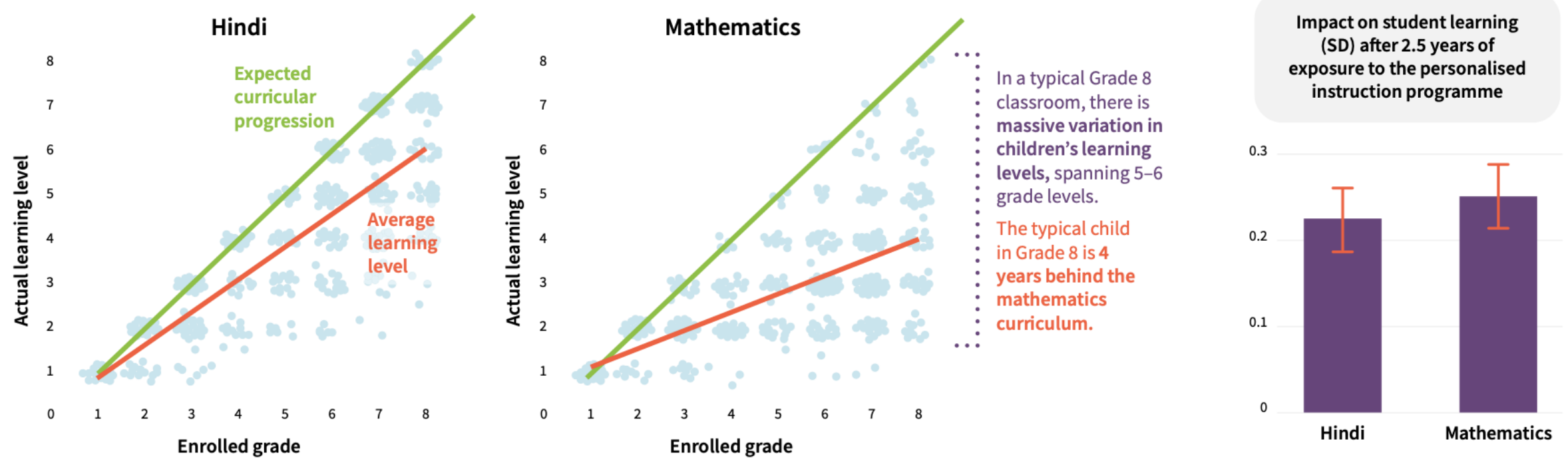
In a well-functioning system, curriculum, teaching and exams should cover similar topics at similar depths of mastery. This is not the case in reality as the curricular and examination “expectations” of coverage and depth are far from classroom realities



When the curriculum does not match children's learning levels, better aligning instruction with children's learning needs (in this case, with computer aided instruction) can substantially improve outcomes

In Rajasthan, India, an evaluation of a computer-aided personalised instruction programme found that the curriculum was misaligned with the learning levels of all except the most advanced children...

...but by aligning instruction with children's needs, the programme improved learning outcomes.





# Classroom realities can be drastically different

## High-performing classroom in Vietnam



## Low-performing classroom in Brazil

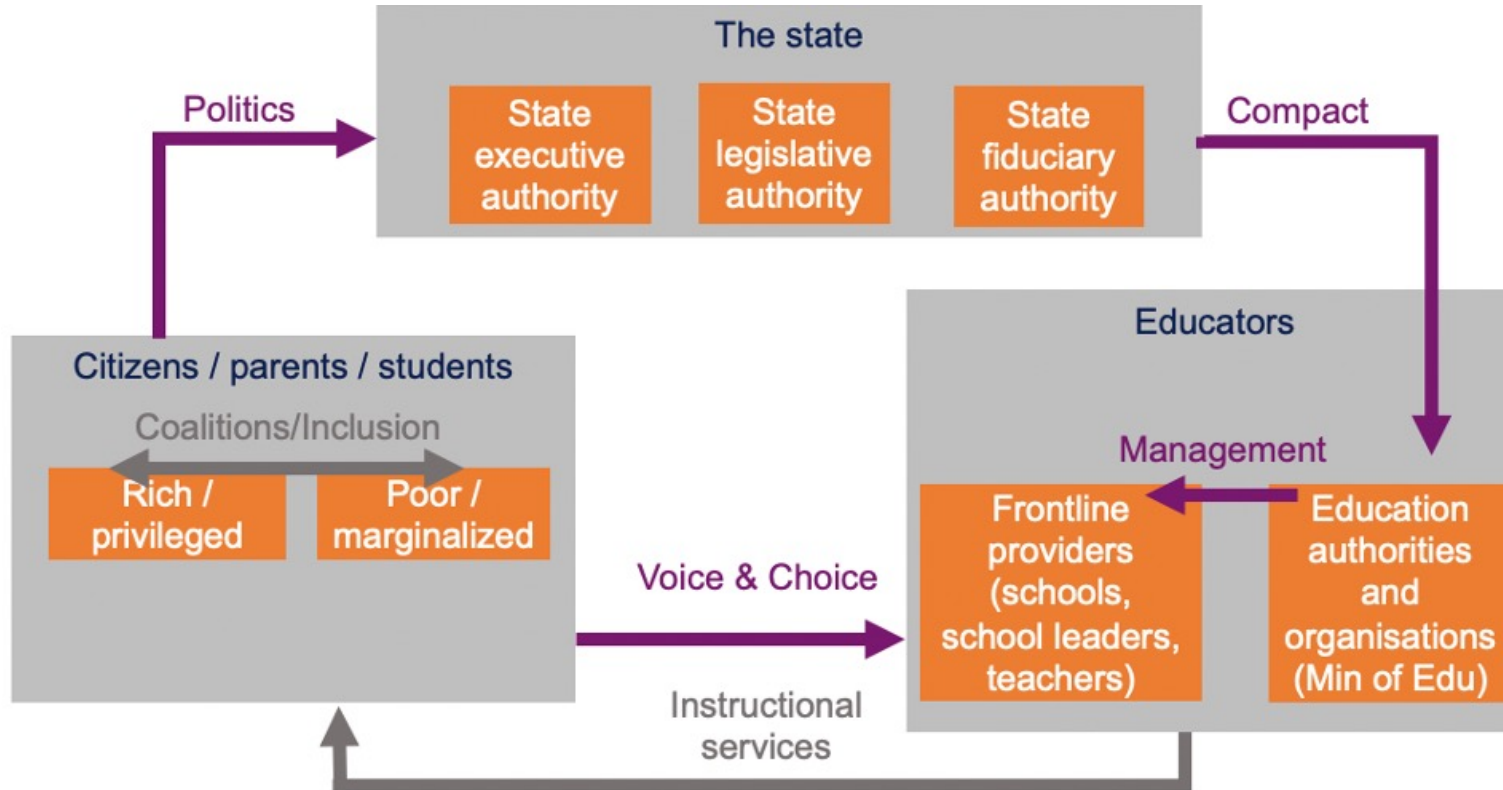


Duong, B.H., Dao, V. and DeJaeghere, J. 2022. Complexities in Teaching Competencies: A Longitudinal Analysis of Vietnamese Teachers' Sensemaking and Practices. RISE Working Paper Series. 22/119. [https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISEWP\\_2022/119](https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISEWP_2022/119)

Bruns, B. 2019.



# System incoherences in relationships of accountability exist and play out in different ways



## Four qualitative studies illustrating systems incoherence

School-based management committees in Nigeria (Bano 2022)

Teacher education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan (Siddiqi 2022)

Parents exiting the school system in Kano, Nigeria (Bano 2022)

Interactions among education actors in rural Malawi (Watkins & Ashforth 2019)

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Watkins, S. and Ashforth, A. 2019. An Analysis of the Political Economy of Schooling in Rural Malawi: Interactions among Parents, Teachers, Students, Chiefs and Primary Education Advisors. 19/031. [https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP\\_2019/031](https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2019/031)



Align  
Commit  
Measure  
Support  
Adapt

**Commit** to universal, early foundational learning  
**Measure** learning regularly, reliably, and relevantly  
**Align** systems around learning commitments  
**Support** teaching  
**Adapt** what you adopt as you implement

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SYSTEMS OF EDUCATION

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