

# RISE

RESEARCH ON IMPROVING  
SYSTEMS OF EDUCATION

## Purpose driven education systems: How systems shift

Michelle Kaffenberger and Lant Pritchett

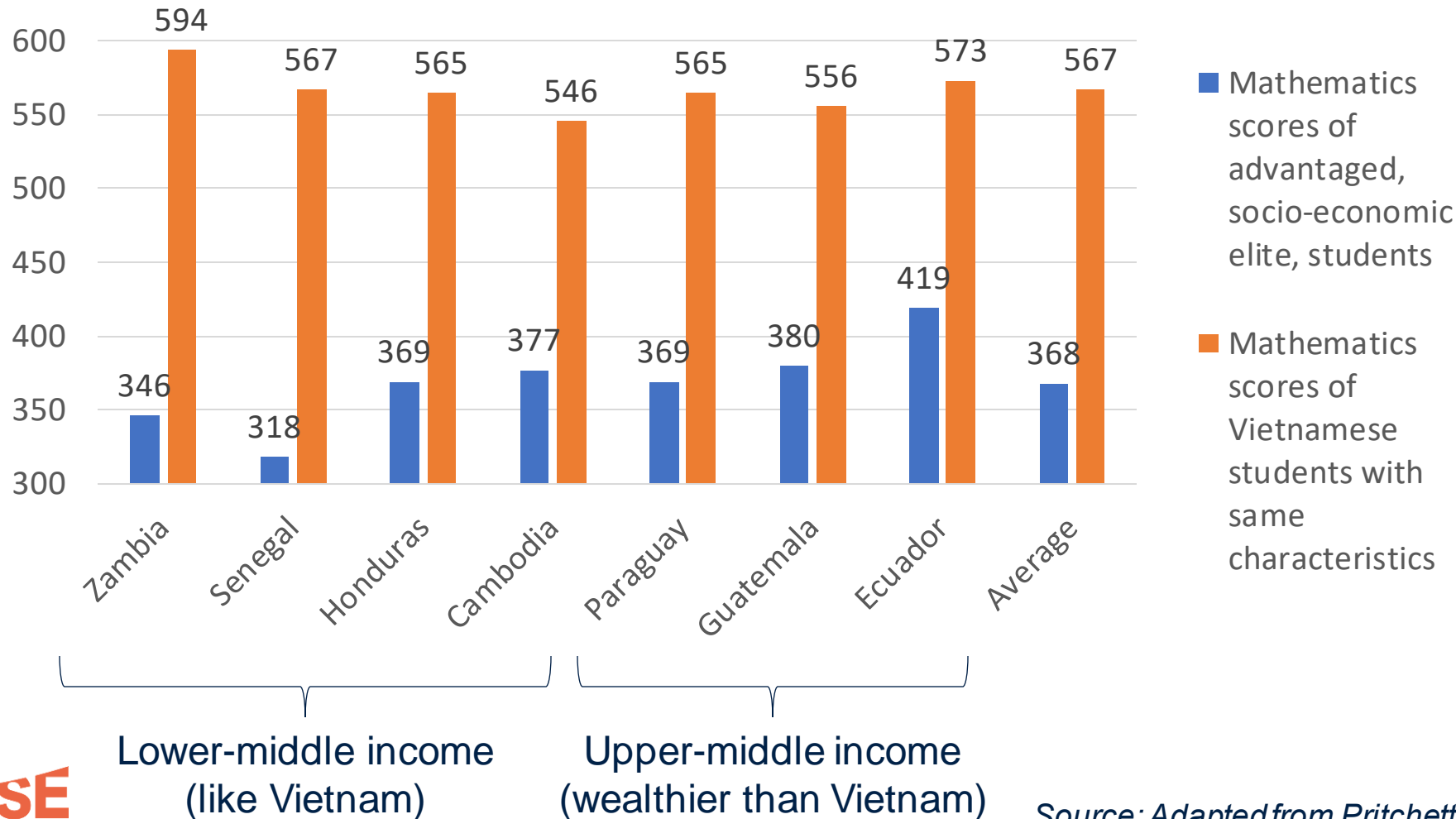
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# Start with a puzzle: Vietnam

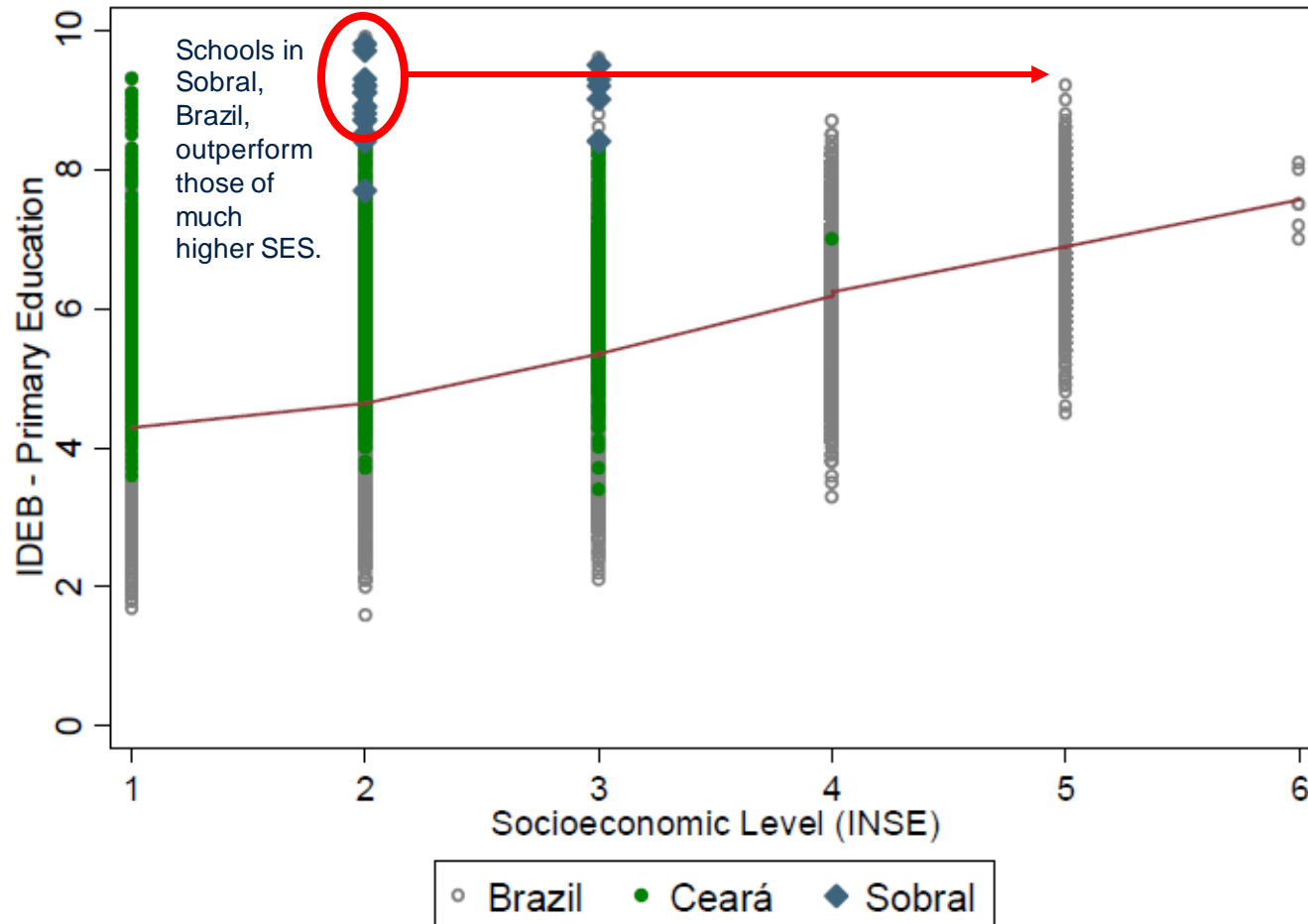
The gaps in learning outcomes for 15-year-old students between PISA-D countries and the equivalent child in Vietnam are around 200 PISA points



Vietnamese students far outperform children with similar demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, even in wealthier countries.

# Start with a puzzle: Sobral, Brazil

## Schools in Sobral, Brazil outperform their much higher SES peers



Sobral, Brazil, rose from 1,366<sup>th</sup> municipality to #1 on Brazil's national assessment in 12 years.

While most of Sobral's schools are in the second lowest SES category, they now outperform nearly all schools of higher SES

## What explains such learning achievements?

- In these examples, higher income/resources and/or greater knowledge of what to do to achieve learning cannot explain differences in outcomes
- These examples (and others) leave us with much more complex questions of “How?” and “Why?” success was achieved


## In this presentation I will:

- Propose a conceptual framework for understanding drivers of education system performance, and use it to argue that commitment to the **purpose** of learning is a critical missing link to addressing the learning crisis
- Apply the conceptual framework to examples of successful system improvements
- Describe efforts that have fostered commitment to the purpose of learning.

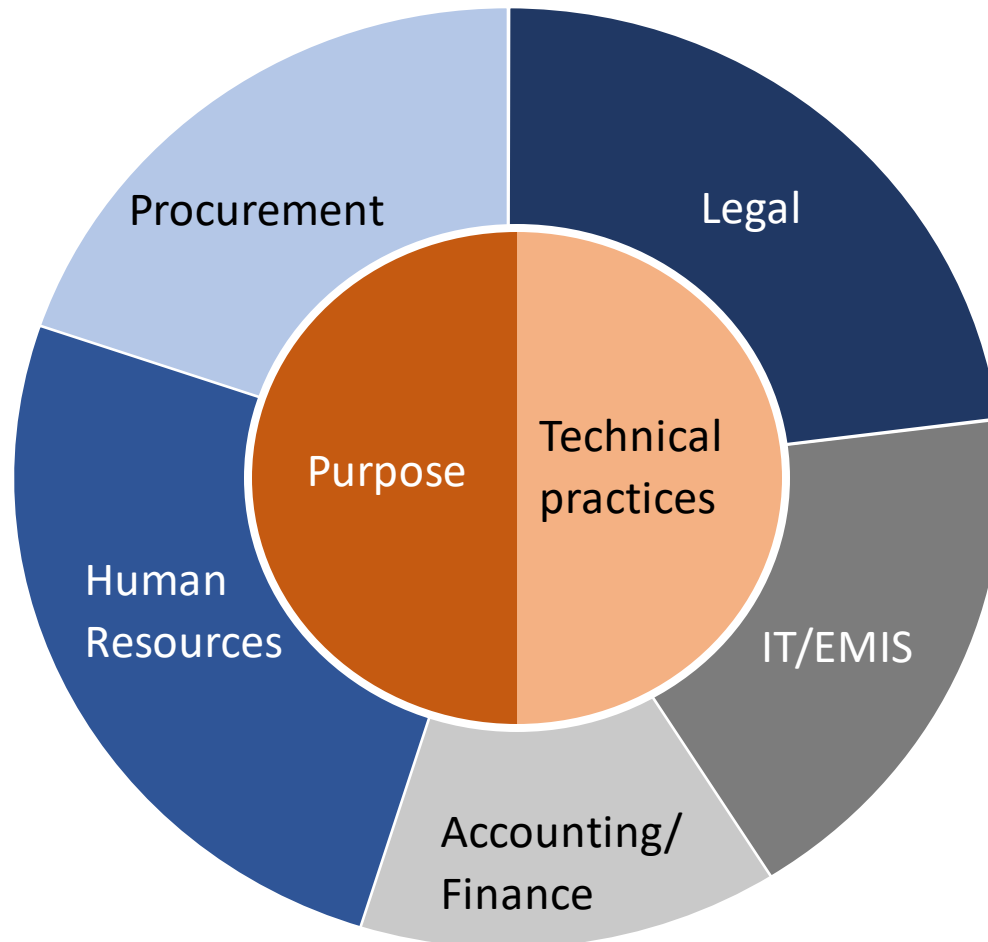
# The role of Purpose in education system outcomes

**Like organizations, education systems have a technical core made up of purpose and technical practices and surrounded by support functions**

**Purpose:** Set of strongly held beliefs about why organization / system exists



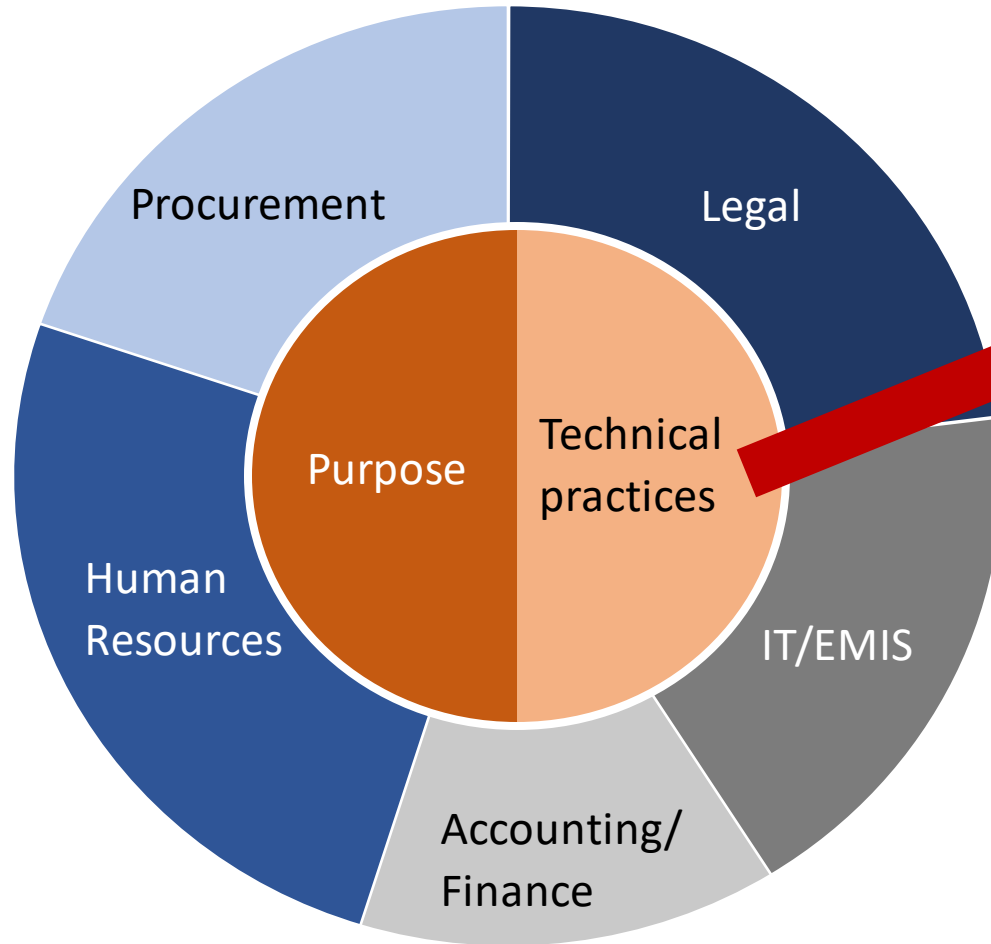
Explicit    Implicit



**Technical practices:** Technical skills and know-how necessary for achieving the purpose

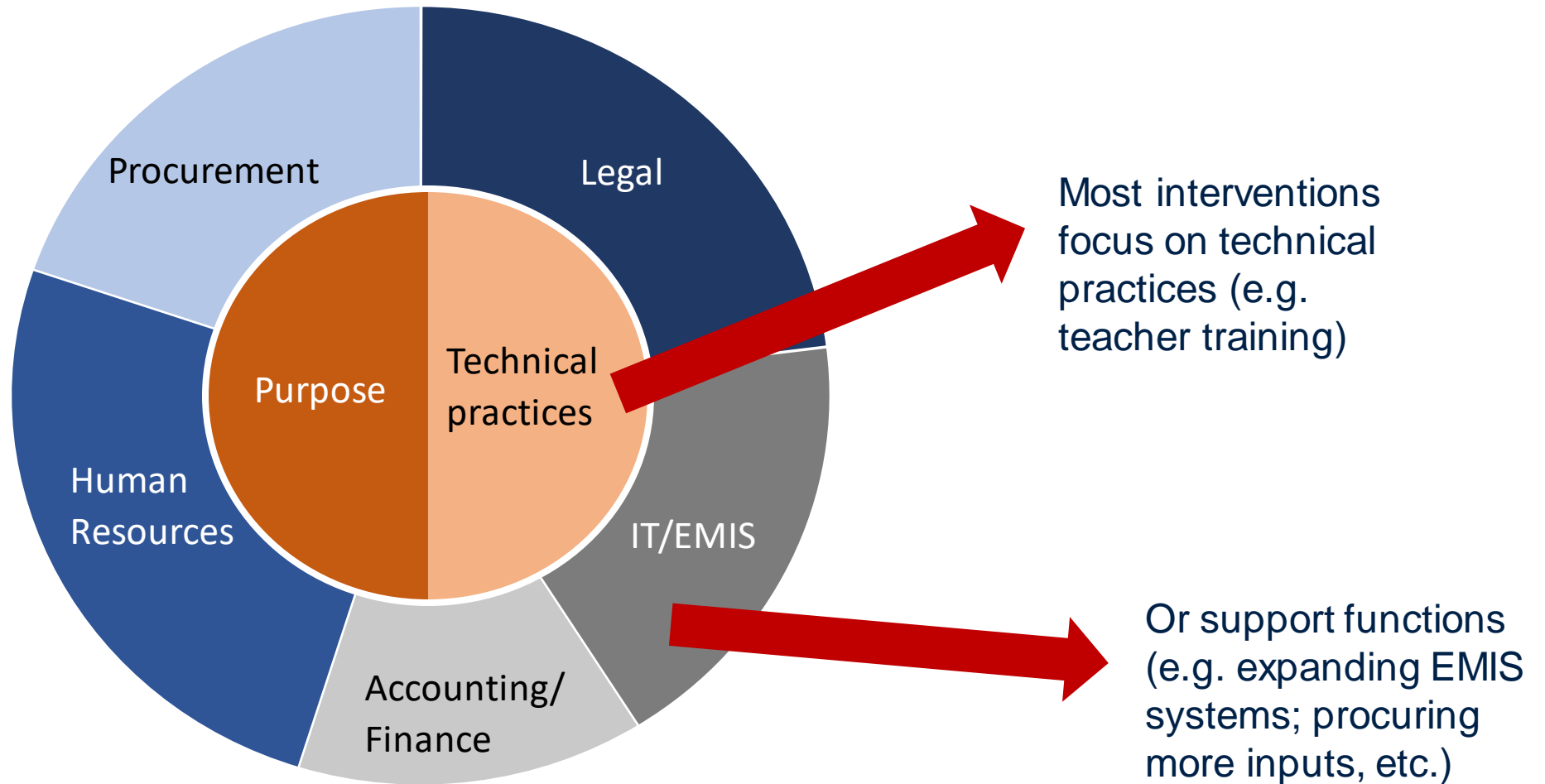
**Support functions:** Create operating conditions for technical core

# The role of Purpose in education system outcomes



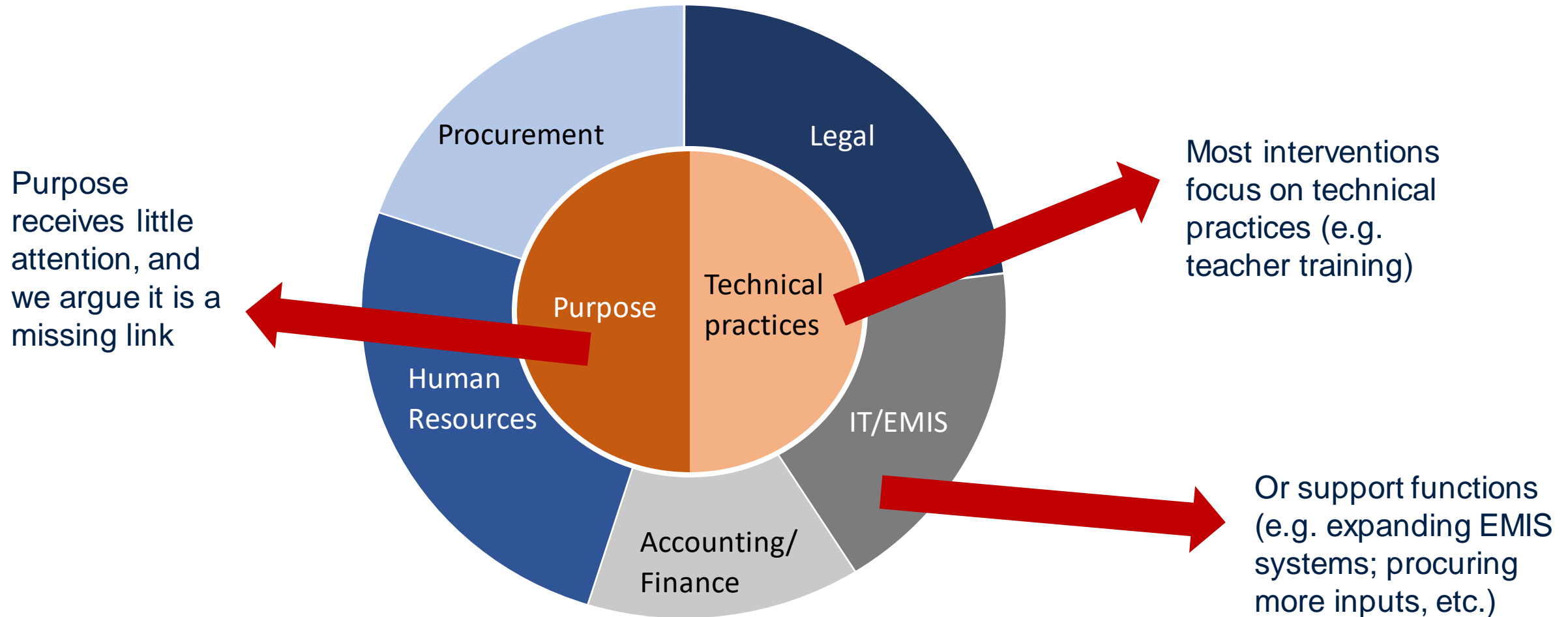
Most interventions focus on technical practices (e.g. teacher training)

# The role of Purpose in education system outcomes





# The role of Purpose in education system outcomes



See, for example, Evans and Popova (2016) analysis of 6 systematic reviews; of 15 classes of interventions analyzed, 4 relate to technical practices, 10 relate to support functions, and just 1 can be construed as relating to instilling purpose e.

# The many forms of education system purpose: a few examples

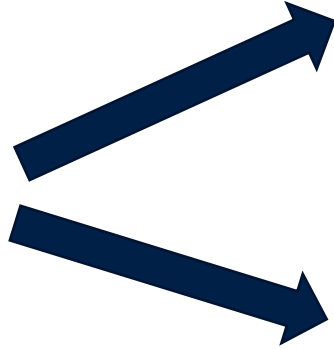
- Maintenance of elite-focused education
  - Often implicit
  - May include expansion of *schooling* for masses, but *quality education* only for elite
  - e.g. India as a “sorting and selection” system ([Muralidharan & Singh, 2021](#))
- Contested purpose
  - The system has “too many” purposes (even if all are good, legitimate purposes, the system is pulled in too many directions)
  - Contradictory purposes
  - Outright disagreement or infighting about purpose

# The many forms of education system purpose: a few examples

- Corrupted purpose
  - Purpose has been hijacked or supplanted by another (sometimes hidden) purpose
  - Purposes may include rents (for officials, contractors through procurement, etc.); maintaining bureaucratic compliance; etc.
- Repurposed to encompass learning for all
  - Includes establishment of learning as a fundamental purpose of the education system, followed by actions to support this purpose
  - Commitment to the purpose of learning for all may be necessary (even if not sufficient) for achieving large-scale learning improvements

## Establishment of purpose

- Assessment found 40% primary school students could not read
- Municipal leaders established learning as core purpose: goals for universal literacy in first 2 years of primary school, and remediation for older students
- Dedication and commitment to purpose filtered through all levels of system



## Improvements to technical practices to achieve purpose

Extensive support to teachers and other frontline workers in support of purpose (structured lesson plans, aligned teaching materials, professional development based on materials, classroom observation and coaching, etc.)

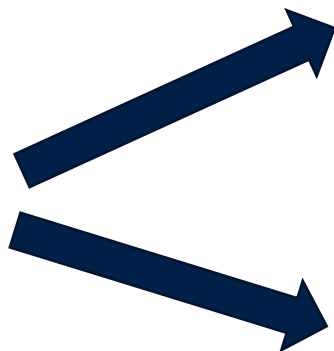
## Improvements to support functions to achieve purpose

Improvements to HR (e.g., meritocratic hiring of school principals); information systems (new learning-based monitoring systems), etc.

Large learning gains, rising from 1,366<sup>th</sup> ranked municipality to #1 in 12 years.

## Establishment of purpose

- Between 2006-2012 pass rates on PLE more than halved, to just 31%, and Uwezo, EGRA, and EGMA all showed poor results
- Spurred gvt to institute 3Rs curriculum reform with clearly established purpose to improve reading, writing, and arithmetic in grades 1 and 2
- 80% of instructional time allocated to these topics – showing commitment to goals



## Improvements to technical practices to achieve purpose

Support to teachers, including new curriculum, textbooks, instructional materials, in-service training, and continuous prof dev; training for head teachers; and support to school leadership.

## Improvements to support functions to achieve purpose

New information for monitoring learning (e.g. new grade 2 assessment); financing in support of learning goals.

Learning gains for both Kiswahili and mathematics, particularly for low performers; increased school retention

# Fostering commitment to the purpose of learning

1. Conducting / funding learning assessments to spur political and citizen-led attention and pressure to act
  - (Citizen-led assessments; EGRA and EGMA; national assessments or participation in regional or international assessments.)
2. Supporting domestic think- and do-tanks
  - (Organizations like Pratham; Central Square Foundation; Centre for the Study of the Economies of Africa (CSEA) in Nigeria; SMERU and INOVASI in Indonesia; CIASES in Nicaragua)
3. Funding programs and scholarships for tomorrow's leaders
  - (Programs like Teach for All; Vanderbilt's Graduate Program in Economic Development; Africa Fellowship Program; African Leadership Academy)

“The systems that change are the ones that **want** to change”

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[michelle.kaffenberger@bsg.ox.ac.uk](mailto:michelle.kaffenberger@bsg.ox.ac.uk)



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