Unit 8: Instruction

Teaching is at the heart of education systems and is of central importance to determining how much children learn. However, there are multiple system-level components that directly shape teaching (as distinct from the teacher-level factors covered in Unit 7) and determine how effective it is. Core instructional components include curriculum standards, assessments, and instructional resources (i.e., textbooks, lesson plans, and teacher training or coaching). These components are often poorly aligned with each other, and often poorly aligned with children’s learning levels.

Many education reform efforts seek to improve teaching by acting on a single instructional component. However, there is increasing evidence that this piecemeal approach is inadequate to improve learning outcomes. Instead, there is a need to examine and improve coherence across instructional components, and alignment between instructional components and children’s learning levels and needs.

For example, the literature on overambitious curricula highlights the mismatch between curricula and children’s learning levels in many contexts. This results in children who are left behind and unable to catchup, as the curriculum advances faster than their pace of learning. Conversely, many of the most promising examples of systems change that have increased learning at-scale have brought about greater coherence between instructional components.

This unit discusses tools to measure coherence between various instructional components (such as the Surveys of Enacted Curriculum). It also explores influential contemporary case studies that have successfully improved instructional coherence (i.e., ‘Teaching at the Right Level’ approaches and ‘structured pedagogy’ programmes), and compares and contrasts the distinct approaches these programmes take even as they pursue a similar goal.

After completing the unit, students should:

- Understand the concepts of instructional components and instructional coherence;
- Be able to provide diverse examples of instructional coherence, and interpret real-world case studies through the lens of instructional (in)coherence; and
- Be able to marshall theoretical and empirical evidence around the impact of overambitious curricula, and the importance of adapting instruction to childrens’ learning levels.

Lectures

1. Diagnosing (in)coherence: A focus on the system enablers for learning – Part 1 (Julius Atuhurra, RISE Programme, University of Oxford)
2. Diagnosing (in)coherence: A focus on the system enablers for learning – Part 2 (Julius Atuhurra, RISE Programme, University of Oxford)
3. Teaching at the Right Level: Helping tackle systems challenges and deliver results (Rukmini Banerji, Pratham Education Foundation)
Required Readings

  - Blog [optional]: [https://riseprogramme.org/blog/system_incoherence_curriculum](https://riseprogramme.org/blog/system_incoherence_curriculum)

  - Blog: [https://riseprogramme.org/blog/introducing-aligns](https://riseprogramme.org/blog/introducing-aligns)


Further Readings

- **Case Studies of Improved Instructional Coherence**

- **Overambitious curricula**

- **Pedagogical Production Function**
Instructional incoherence and Covid learning loss


Supplementary Resources


- Science of Teaching: Improving foundational literacy and numeracy. https://scienceofteaching.site/

- The RISE Podcast: Nangamso Mtsatse on Helping Kids to Read for Meaning and Calculate with Confidence in South Africa. https://riseprogramme.org/podcast/nangamso-mtsatse