

Policy Brief

LEARNING POVERTY IN PAKISTAN: HOW CAN THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PRIMARY TEACHERS IN PUBLIC SECTOR SCHOOLS BE IMPROVED?



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CHALLENGE

Pakistan faces severe learning poverty, with about

77% OF CHILDREN UNABLE TO READ
a simple text by the end of primary school i.e. age 10

(World Bank 2022)

An overwhelming number of children who are out-of-school or in schools but fail to attain foundational learning skills, are contributing to persistent learning poverty. **Key challenges include** ineffective teaching due to inadequate teacher training, overcrowded classrooms, lack of resources, and low teacher motivation. Additional factors include ambitious curricula, poor-quality textbooks, weak assessments, and non-supportive learning environments, particularly affecting rural areas. This policy brief focuses on the **role of ineffective teaching in contributing to learning poverty** in Pakistan and highlights the importance of **Foundational Learning and Numeracy (FLN) skills** for continued learning and academic success.

WHAT IS LEARNING POVERTY?

As defined by the World Bank (2019), learning poverty is the percentage of children unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10. World Bank (2018) states that children who cannot develop foundational literacy and numeracy by the end of grade 2 are unable to cover the gap between their learning and the learning benchmarks identified in the curriculum.

OBJECTIVES



Examine the key factors that hinder teacher effectiveness and lead to learning poverty.



Deliberate upon how weak school management practices hinder teacher effectiveness and exacerbate learning poverty.



Assess how limited parental and community engagement negatively affects teacher effectiveness and contributes to learning poverty.



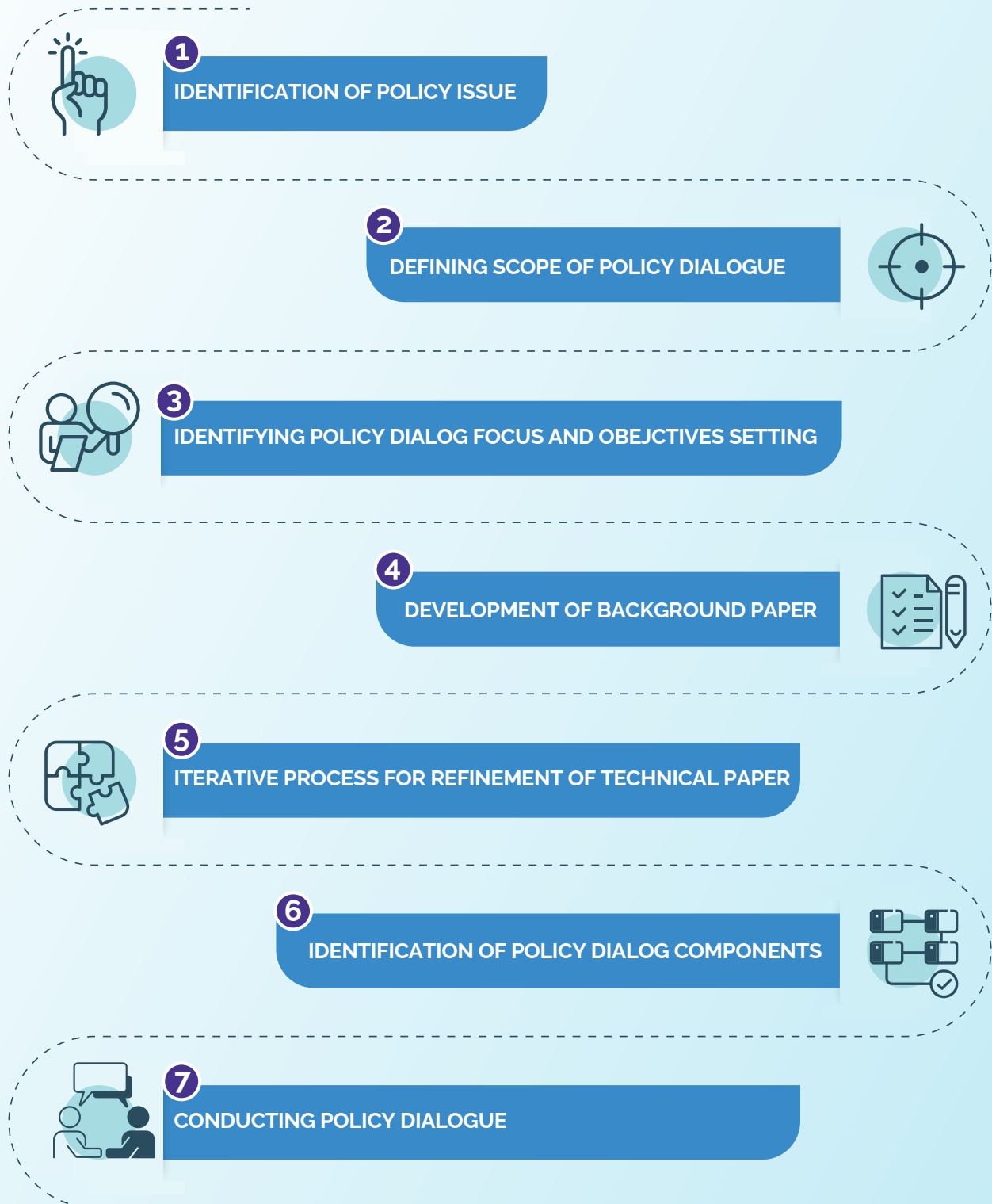
Critically examine how education policies affect teacher effectiveness and perpetuate learning poverty.



Examine how inadequate opportunities and poor-quality training affect teachers' effectiveness and lead to learning poverty.

THE PROCESS

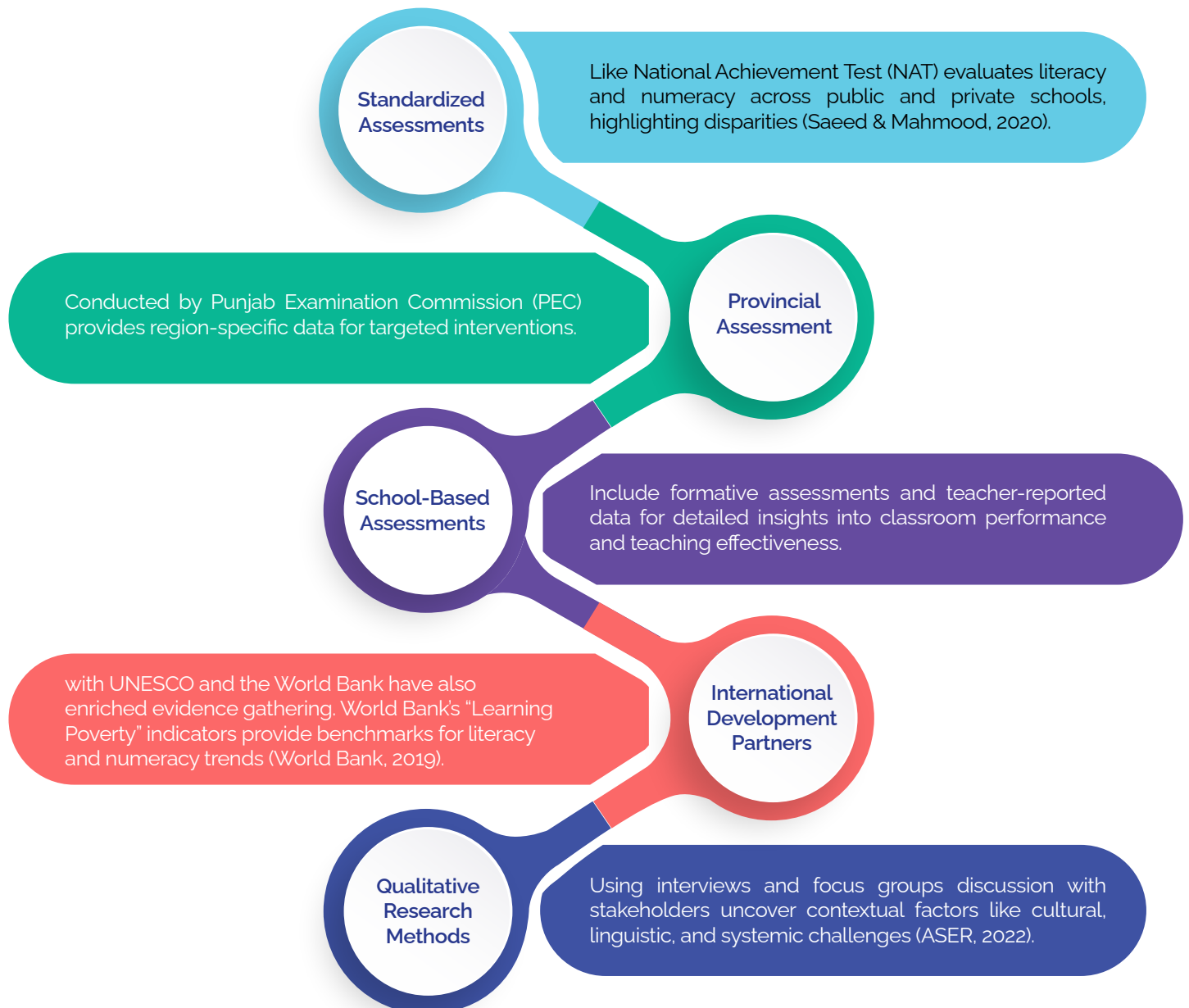
The process map outlines the **key stages involved in developing a policy brief**. It details the systematic approach taken, starting with the **identification of the policy issue** and moving through the **development of a background paper**. Following this, the process includes **conducting a policy dialogue** and **synthesis of recommendations**. The final step in this diagram is the **development of the policy brief** itself.



EVIDENCE OF LEARNING POVERTY IN PAKISTAN

Data from Pakistan exposes high presence of the learning poverty: low foundational literacy and numeracy and continued low learning in subsequent classes. Resultantly, only 50% of Class 5 students in rural areas can read at grade level in Urdu/Sindhi, while proficiency in numeracy also remains low (ASER 2023, NAT 2023).

Several evidence from national studies and other levels of studies highlight the pervasive issue of learning poverty across Pakistan. Data consistently reveals a high presence of low foundational literacy and numeracy, alongside persistently poor learning outcomes throughout the school years.



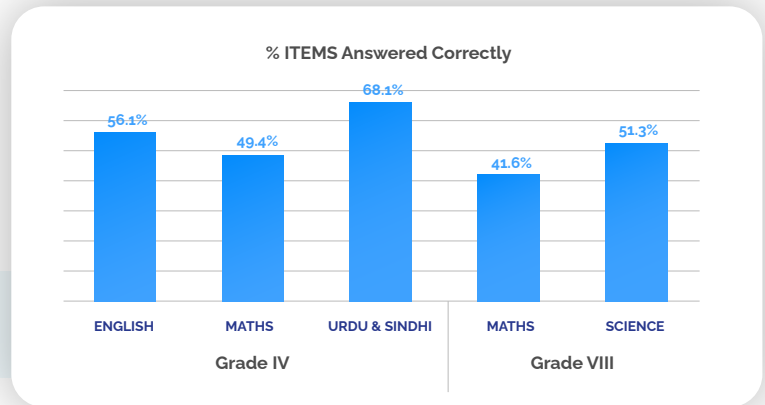
EVIDENCE OF LEARNING POVERTY IN PAKISTAN

The LaNA 2023 Linking Study results also highlight the urgency of addressing learning poverty in Pakistan, suggesting a need for outcome-driven policies instead of input-focused ones. Pakistan's average reading scores were between 318 and 343 below the LaNA 2023 average score (325 to 335). A significant percentage of students, 71% in Pakistan, scored only at the basic level in mathematics (score of 325).

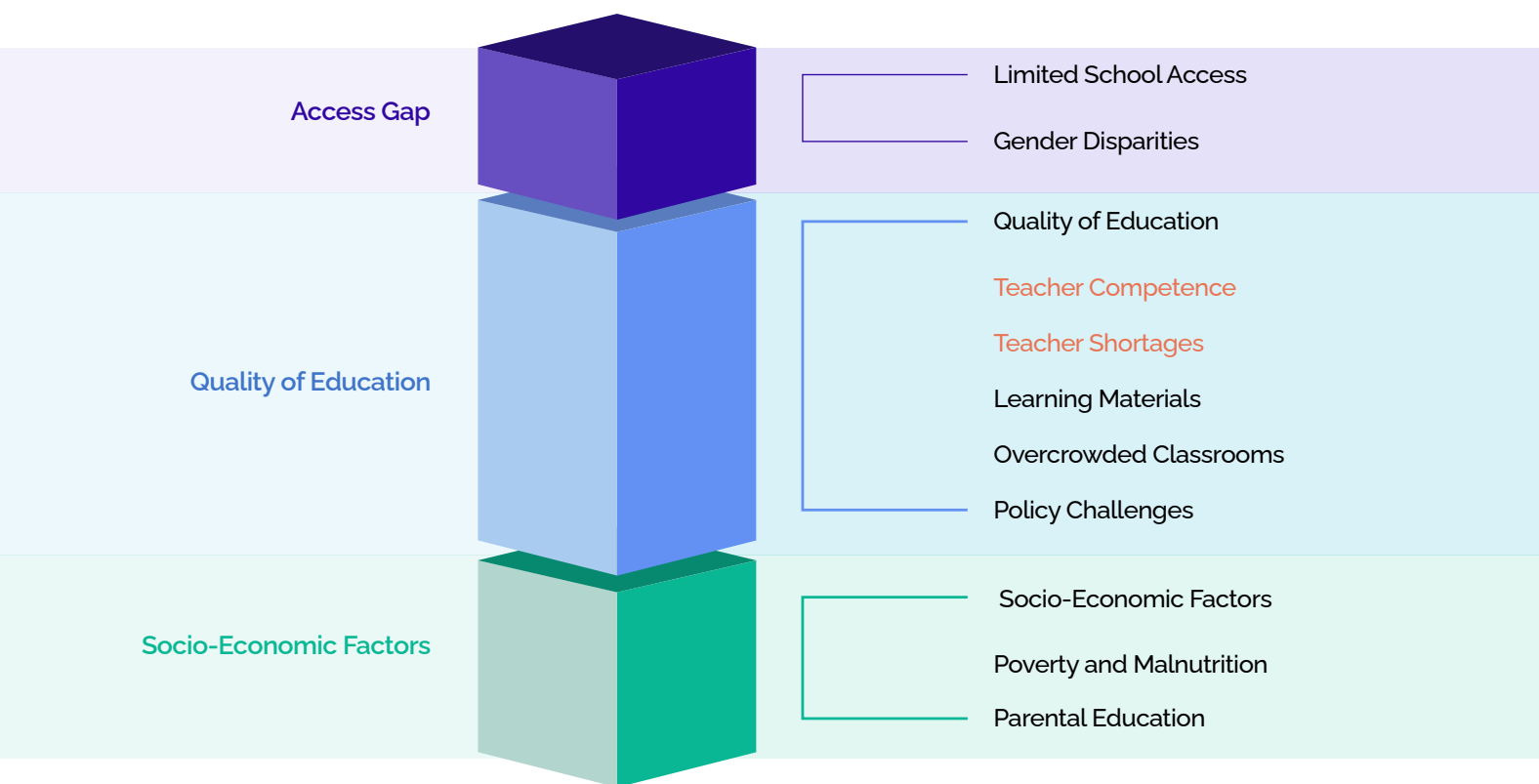
CAUSES OF LEARNING POVERTY IN PAKISTAN

Learning poverty in Pakistan stems from a complex array of interconnected factors. This includes significant contributions from broader systemic and socio-economic challenges such as access gaps, the overall quality of educational provision, policy issues, and factors including poverty and parental education levels.

NAT 2023 Results confirm the situation of continued poor Learning Outcomes throughout the School Years.



Learning Poverty Causes



TEACHING'S TIGHTROPE: WHY TEACHER SKILLS AND NUMBERS MATTER FOR LEARNING

Teacher Competence

Limited subject knowledge and pedagogical skills are key factors contributing to low teacher competence. Over 40% of government schoolteachers are under-trained, with only 60% meeting competency standards (ASER, 2023; NEMIS, 2021-22). Insufficient pre-service and in-service training further hampers their ability to implement effective teaching strategies tailored to diverse learning needs.

Teacher Shortages

A significant challenge in Pakistan, particularly in rural and underserved areas, is the shortage of teachers. This leads to multigrade classrooms and overburdened educators, directly impacting instructional quality and contributing significantly to learning poverty.

Through this policy brief, six areas have been identified that influences teacher learning processes namely:

Teacher Competence and Professional Development; Teaching Resources and Classroom Dynamics; School Leadership and Management; Parental and Community Influences; Policy and System-Level Reforms; Immediate actions to reduce Learning Poverty

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teacher Competence and Professional Development



01 Competency-Based Recruitment:

- Identify the gaps in recruitment and implement uniform selection process across the country aligned with the national educational goals.
- A structured hiring framework should ensure that only individuals who demonstrate a strong commitment to student learning and development are selected for teaching roles.
- Teacher licensing mechanism must be evolved to streamline the recruitment process.



03 Mentorship and Support Mechanisms:

- Establish a structured mentorship programme where experienced teachers or external education experts form the cluster of primary school guide for newer or struggling teachers.
- Mentorship should involve classroom observations, feedback sessions, and one-on-one coaching to help teachers improve their instructional strategies and address students' diverse learning needs.
- There is a need to establish a system of creating teachers' portfolios regarding their expertise and training requirements.



02 Continuous Professional Development (CPD):

- Restructure the available CPD models according to the requirements of foundational learning skills.
- CPD programmes should focus on pedagogy, classroom management, and student engagement techniques.



04 Use of Technology & Analytics:

- Technology-enabled learning platforms and AI-driven analytics can help improve instructional strategies by offering personalised recommendations based on student performance trends.
- To ensure effectiveness and contextual relevance, technology should first be piloted to learn, improve, and then scale based on evidence and outcomes.

Teaching Resources and Classroom Dynamics



01 Government Investment & Partnerships:

- Increase government funding to address deficiencies in teaching aids, classroom supplies, and school infrastructure.
- Invest in basic amenities such as clean water, functional toilets, electricity, and proper furniture to create a conducive learning environment.
- Partnerships with NGOs, private sector companies, and international organisations can help bridge resource gaps such as provision of books, digital learning tools, and sustainable infrastructure improvements.



02 Multigrade Teaching Support:

- Specialised training programmes should be introduced to help teachers to handle mixed-age classrooms.
- Specialised trainers are needed to equip multigrade teachers with practical, context-specific skills, supported by in-service training tailored to local realities and insights from successful multigrade educators.

School Leadership and Management



01 Leadership Training & Attitudinal Shift:

- School leaders must transition from traditional administrative roles to active mentors to support teachers in improving their pedagogy.
- Training programmes should focus on leadership development, effective communication, and problem-solving strategies to enable school heads to provide meaningful guidance to their teaching staff.



03 Accountability & Incentives:

- A well-designed performance monitoring system should be established to evaluate school leadership effectiveness. Leaders who demonstrate strong teacher support and innovative management should be rewarded with professional development opportunities and recognition programmes.



02 Data-Driven Decision-Making:

- The Department of Education should leverage student performance data to make informed decisions about curriculum adjustments, teacher training needs, and resource allocation.

Parental and Community Influences



01 School Management Committees (SMCs):

- Many formal SMCs in Pakistan are ineffective. They should be empowered and strengthened through better representation, decision-making power, and accountability in school governance.

Policy and System-Level Reforms



01 Align Policy with Practice and Outcomes:

- Translate education policies into actionable steps at the school level and make sure that policies are practical and effectively implemented.
- Policies should be adaptable to regional and contextual differences.
- Clearly defined and measurable learning outcomes should be the foundation of policy design.

Immediate Actions to Reduce Learning Poverty



- Introducing remedial learning programmes, learning camps and remedial sessions should be expanded nationwide to help struggling students catch up and build foundational skills.
- In addition, schools can be utilised for a second shift dedicated to left-behind students, ensuring they receive focused attention and learning support outside regular school hours. This dual approach can help bridge learning gaps and reduce learning poverty more effectively.