

PROVIDING QUALITY TEACHERS FOR ALL CLASSROOMS IN SRI LANKA

Teachers are a critical factor in improving education outcomes of children. Teacher shortages for subjects such as English, science, and mathematics have been a policy concern in Sri Lanka in the recent past. With ongoing globalization and technological change, the skill demands of the market are continually changing. To implement necessary education reforms and match the demands of the market, an adequate supply of good quality teachers is essential.

This Policy Brief presents findings of a study that examines adequacy of teachers for teaching mathematics, English, and science at the secondary level in Sri Lanka, at the national level and across provinces and different school categories. Teacher cadres for each school in Sri Lanka are determined according to guidelines detailed by the education ministry (Box 1). These guidelines take into account the number of classes in the school, the number of subjects taught in the school, and the medium (i.e., Sinhala, Tamil or English) through which these subjects are taught. We determine teacher surpluses and shortages by comparing the available cadre with this recommended cadre. In addition to analyzing overall teacher numbers, we also focus on two determinants of teacher quality commonly used in the literature—subject-level qualifications and teaching experience (pedagogical skill).

Key Findings

- Sri Lanka's **total number of teachers** who usually teach science, mathematics and English are **more than the number recommended**

Box 1: Categorization of Teachers

Recommended teachers: number of required secondary-level teachers for each subject based on class sizes, determined by the MOE, as stated in circular no. 1 of 2016.

Subject-qualified teachers: teachers with a degree in the given subject or with special training to teach the subject - i.e. teachers with good subject knowledge in the subject they teach.

Experienced teachers: teachers with a Class 2-Grade II or above in Sri Lanka's Teacher Service. These teachers usually have at least three years of experience in addition to pedagogical training.

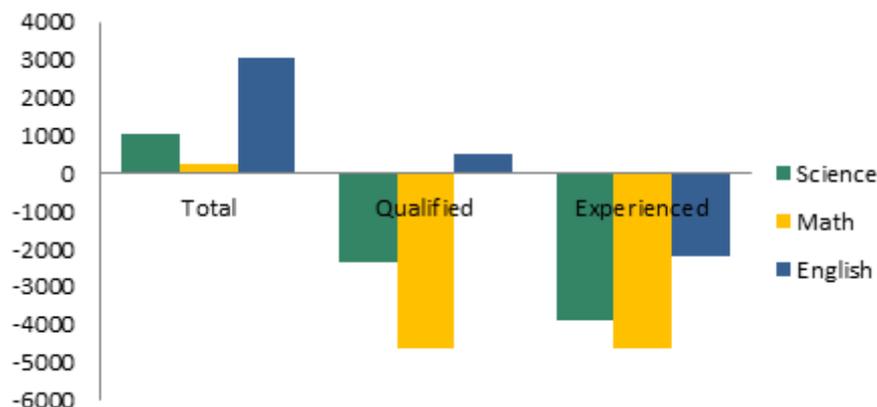
(Figure 1). This finding holds across national and provincial schools, with the exception of provincial schools in the Northern, Eastern, and North Western provinces.

- But **not all teachers who teach these subjects are specially trained to teach the subject**. The available numbers of subject-

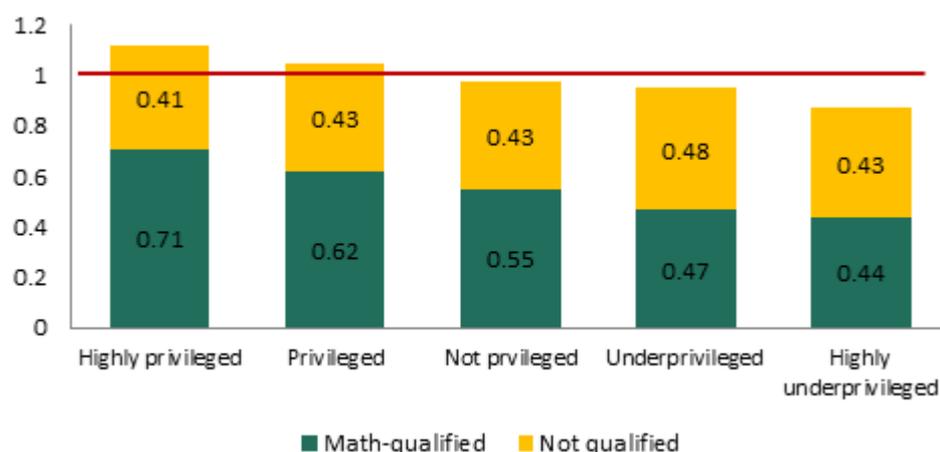
qualified teachers are below the recommended number for mathematics and science, at the national level as well as across different school categories.

- There is a shortage of experienced teachers** for all three subjects considered across all school categories.

Figure 1: Difference between existing and recommended teachers, 2016



Source: Own calculations using 2016 School Census data.

Figure 2: Available math teachers as a share of recommended, 2016

Source: Own calculations using 2016 School Census data.

Note: Public schools in Sri Lanka are categorized by the MOE into five distinct groupings based on a list of factors that reflect the availability of school resources, amenities, and ease of access to the school. The line at one indicates that available teachers exactly equal the recommended number.

- **Allocation of teachers is inequitable across schools.**

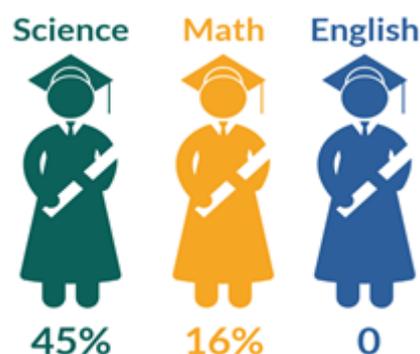
More privileged schools attended by children from affluent families have an excess of teachers while underprivileged schools face teacher shortages (Figure 2). Privileged schools also have a larger share of subject-qualified teachers compared to disadvantaged schools.

- **Limited pre-service teacher training opportunities** is one reason behind teacher shortages. Such training is available via two avenues—a Bachelor of Education (BEd), offered by university faculties and departments of education, and a three-year National Diploma in Teaching (NDT) offered by National Colleges of Education (NCOEs). Only two of the 17 state universities offer a BEd, producing a negligible 135 graduates annually. The NCOEs produce around 3,350 diploma-holders. These numbers are considerably lower than the annual number of teacher recruits needed in the country, which average at around 8,000 per year.



On average, less than half of annual teacher recruits are trained in education

- **Unsystematic teacher recruitments** in another concern. Large teacher numbers are recruited in some years and lower numbers in others. Moreover, **teachers are rarely well-matched to their education and training at recruitment.** Only a fraction of new teacher recruits are subject-qualified at recruitment (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Share of subject-qualified new teacher recruits, 2016

Source: Own calculations using 2016 School Census data.

Policy Implications

Upgrade and improve pre-service teacher training programs in the country to meet the demand for qualified teachers, both in terms of subject and pedagogical knowledge. For this to happen, either the number of faculties and departments of education in Sri Lankan universities need to be expanded, or the NCOEs need to be developed to the university level.

Conduct systematic teacher recruitment, where subject knowledge and training of teachers is taken into consideration when filling vacancies. As done in developed countries, teachers should be given a formal certification to teach a particular subject according to their qualifications and training, based on which recruitments can take place.

Improve teacher allocation by providing sufficient financial and other incentives to attract and retain good quality teachers in disadvantaged schools. Such incentives need to be large enough to be significant, and should be accompanied with proper support and development to ensure that teachers can succeed in disadvantaged schools. Formally recognizing teaching in difficult schools in the progression of the teaching career path is also important.

This policy brief is based on findings from a study on 'Are there Good Quality Teachers for All Classrooms in Sri Lanka?' carried out by IPS researchers Nisha Arunatilake and Ashani Abayasekara. Contact on nisha@ips.lk or ashani@ips.lk for more information.



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