



Pearson

# Saudi Arabia: What makes an effective teacher?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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# Executive Summary



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The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.  
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BARBER & MOURSHED, 2007

Decades of research make it clear: teachers make a difference in student learning. In fact, Stanford University economist Eric Hanushek (1992) has noted that the difference between a good and a bad teacher can be a full level of achievement in a single school year. Given the strength of these findings, nations around the world recognize that in order to improve educational outcomes and equity they must focus on effectiveness of teachers. A critical step toward achieving that goal is for individual countries to identify the competencies required for effectiveness and use them to inform teaching standards, pre-service teacher preparation, professional development programs, and performance evaluations. To make an impact, those systems and processes will need to be based on a common understanding—within each country—of what it means to be an effective teacher.

**Oxfam’s international study of teacher competences and standards concludes that in order to build that common understanding, it is “absolutely necessary that the question as to what is considered a quality educator is investigated among stakeholders” ( Bourgonje & Tromp, 2011, p. 145).** Giving stakeholders a voice not only allows us to understand how they think and feel about a topic; it provides an opportunity to help frame important policy decisions that directly impact their lives. Pearson is therefore surveying students, teachers, principals, education researchers, policymakers, and parents in 23 countries regarding their perceptions of what it takes to be an effective teacher. Pearson is comparing the views expressed by these stakeholders with both current government teaching standards and research on effective teaching.

This report, the third in the series, summarizes the results of the survey conducted in Saudi Arabia, where the government has been working to provide a high quality education to all children, yet still faces significant struggles in developing and training teachers to deliver high quality instruction. In the global report, 23 participating countries are compared not only across stakeholder groups, but by country as well.

### The Survey

To learn the top qualities education stakeholders in Saudi Arabia seek in their teachers, we administered surveys across six regions (see **Table A2** and **Figure A1** in the Appendix). The stakeholder groups include::

- Students ages 15-19
- Parents of K-12 students
- K-12 teachers
- K-12 administrators
- Education researchers and policymakers

Respondents were asked to list, in their own words, between three and fifteen qualities that they feel are most important in making an “effective” teacher and to indicate what type of teacher, by subject(s) and grade level(s), they were thinking about while creating their list. The survey did not define “effective” for respondents, other than that it meant “good,” allowing respondents to define what an effective teacher meant for themselves. We developed a coding system to categorize responses, based on prior research about competencies of effective teachers. This coding scheme was reviewed by teachers, principals, education policymakers, and researchers and revised iteratively as additional responses were coded, resulting in a final list of 32 categories.

### The Most Important Qualities of Teachers in Saudi Arabia

We found some consistency in how the groups of surveyed stakeholders responded when they were asked to list between three and fifteen of what they believed to be the most important qualities or competencies of effective teachers. The most common response across the full sample was that effective teachers need to build trusting, compassionate *Relationships* with their students. It was the first or second most common response for each of the stakeholder groups, and also the most common response when comparing data representing government and private schools; teachers of primary and secondary grade levels; and males and females. Ultimately, the survey results reaffirm the notion that, at its foundation, teaching is about the trusting relationships between teachers and learners that foster learner success, as these communities define it.

### Most Important Qualities of Teachers in Saudi Arabia

1	Ability to Develop Trusting, Productive Relationships
2	Ability to Engage Students in Learning
3	Subject Matter Knowledge
4	Teaching Skills/Pedagogical Practices
5	Patient, Caring, Kind Personality
6	Professionalism
7	Ability to Make Ideas and Content Clear
8	Knowledge of Learners
9	Dedication to Teaching
10	Intelligence

The second and third most common responses across all stakeholder groups were ability to *Engage Learners* in learning and *Subject Knowledge*. Ability to engage learners addresses the content the teacher selects and the methods used to motivate students to learn. Subject knowledge was expressed as deep and thorough understanding of the content and the curriculum, in order to select what topics to teach and to address student misunderstandings.

When the responses of all stakeholder groups are combined, the other seven categories were, in descending order:

- Pedagogical skills and methods (*Teaching Skills*)
- A patient, caring and kind personality (*Patient, Caring*)
- *Professionalism*
- The ability to make content and ideas clear for learners (*Make Content Clear*)
- Knowledge and understanding of learners (*Know Learners*)
- *Dedication* to teaching
- *Intelligence*

Seven of the Top 10 most frequent responses for each group of stakeholders were shared by all groups. Additionally, the responses of stakeholders associated with public and private schools were remarkably similar: they shared 9 of the same Top 10 response categories. For the grade level of the teacher respondents were addressing, 8 of the Top 10 categories of responses were the same.

The categories of qualities mentioned most often across the entire sample reflect how strongly education stakeholders in Saudi Arabia value not only the knowledge and skills a teacher possesses, but also dispositions of care (relatedness, responsiveness) and character (responsibility, trustworthiness) in their teachers. There is research that supports the link between these dispositions, teaching effectiveness, and learner outcomes. What was notably missing from the most frequently reported survey responses from the educators (principals, teachers, researchers, and policymakers) was the importance of knowledge and use of *Assessment* to evaluate and track student progress, as well as *Planning* learning tasks and instruction. This is particularly troublesome for educators, education researchers, and policymakers, given the central role of these tasks in supporting student learning. In fact, Wiliam (2007) and others suggest that the ability to consistently assess student learning progress and adjust instruction accordingly is the single most important aspect of teaching practice to enhance student learning. Keeping *Families* updated on student progress was also surprisingly rarely mentioned, not only by parents but all stakeholder groups.

### Using These Results to Improve Teaching Practice in Saudi Arabia

We recommend that the results of this survey be used to inform and guide the definition of what it means to be an effective educator in the teaching and learning culture of Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of Education is currently collecting input from stakeholders to inform the teaching standards that will be shared publicly soon. The results of this survey could be used to supplement those efforts. Moreover, the results can inform discussions about teacher preparation, hiring, training, and evaluation in Saudi Arabia, particularly in areas of need, as documented by research.

Given the stakeholders' emphasis on the importance of teacher-student relationships, teacher training programs could place greater emphasis on dispositions that stakeholders believe are essential for effectiveness, e.g., patience, care, and relatedness. The programs could assess these qualities in candidates, counsel candidates on career fit, and provide training to improve teaching dispositions in future educators. Given the challenges in recruiting, developing and retaining teachers who are not only qualified but passionate and dedicated to their work in Saudi Arabia, adding quality programs for developing the key dispositions that support and enhance student learning seems to be an important step in improving the teaching workforce in this country. As other researchers have noted, **focusing on improving the social relationship that**

is at the heart of student learning should lead to improvements in a wide range of student outcomes in schools.

Likewise, training programs may want to emphasize the knowledge and skills that were mentioned less frequently but have been shown to be critical to effective teaching and student learning, such as:

- regular assessment of learner progress
- ability to plan effective lessons and learning tasks to enhance student learning
- delivery of a challenging, rigorous curriculum for all students
- regular communication with families about student progress
- collaboration with colleagues

While this research identifies many different qualities and competencies of effective teachers, we caution against using the results to generate a checklist approach under the misguided belief that there is a single winning pattern of competencies to be an effective teacher. Finally, it cannot be overstated that to be effective teachers, the work conditions and environment, first and foremost, must be well managed. School context and community culture have a profound influence on the way different teacher roles and competencies are understood, prioritized, and practiced.

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