EI Policy brief

Every child has the right to quality education and this right begins at birth

1. Education is a fundamental human right for all, and a public good

Quality education is both a fundamental right for all, and an essential enabler for the achievement of other rights. States are obliged, collectively and individually, to make quality education available to all, at all levels, free of charge. Every child in whatever educational setting has the fundamental right to quality education provided by quality teachers. Local and national education laws must be in line with international human rights treaties.

2. Quality education needs an inclusive and holistic approach

The right to education entails an inclusive and holistic approach to education, as demonstrated in Article 26 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights: “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”.

In policy and practice quality education needs inputs (including adequate investment in public education, safe and healthy schools with adequate infrastructure, facilities and resources and qualified and well-supported teachers), a comprehensive and inclusive teaching and learning process (including broad curricula focusing on life skills as well as numeracy, literacy and specific subjects, learner centred pedagogies and continuing professional development for teachers) and broad outcomes (including critical thinking and problem-solving capabilities, civic-mindedness and other life skills). The narrow and reductionist view of education, mainly focused on numeracy and literacy and their measurement, is a mistake. This results in a narrow approach to learning, the degrading of other school subjects and essential life skills, values and relations, forcing teachers to ‘teach to the test’.
The quality of education is always contextually specific and, therefore, teachers and the broader community have to be involved in determining what quality is, through an inclusive and negotiated process.

### 3. Fairness and Equity are fundamental to quality education

The universal right to education for all includes equitable participation in quality education. Therefore all children and young people, including those from poor households, girls and boys, women and men, disabled children, children in rural and remote locations, conflict and post-conflict situations, indigenous children, including the Roma, and afro-descendants, migrants, lesbian, gay and transgender children must have equitable access to quality education. This includes early childhood, primary, lower and upper secondary, vocational, higher and adult education. An inclusive and diverse classroom with an appropriate curriculum allows us to learn how to interact with different people, helps us understand ourselves and the world, and forms the basis for a sense of shared values and a deepened intercultural awareness.

### 4. Quality education requires quality teachers

Research suggests that the major factors that influence student achievement are teachers and the students’ individual, family and neighbourhood characteristics. But among school-related factors, teachers matter most. Every child should be taught by a qualified, suitably trained, and motivated teacher, supported by adequate teaching materials and school infrastructure. Qualified teachers deserve professional recognition, decent pay, pension and other social benefits, and good working conditions. Quality education requires investment in initial and in-service teacher education and continuing professional development for all teachers.

### 5. Quality education for all must be publicly financed

Governments need to invest in quality education for their own countries’ social, democratic and economic development, as well as the individual development of their populations. Resource management with transparent funding practices and dedication are also important. Quality education must be publicly-financed and available to all, free of charge. States should also invest in public infrastructure and services to reduce all kinds of inequality. Services to reduce female household care work, as well as programmes to change attitudes on the division of labour between men and women and boys and girls, and ensuring that (gender or ethnic) stereotypes are not exacerbated and perpetuated through education must be given high priority.

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1. Teachers matter: Understanding Teachers’ Impact on Student Achievement, Rand Education

http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/corporate_pubs/2012/RAND_CP693z1-2012-09.pdf

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