



# ASSESSMENT OF TEACHER COMPETENCIES IN SELECTED PROVINCES IN AFGHANISTAN (2023)

## INTRODUCTION

Quality teachers play a pivotal role in shaping students' learning experiences and fostering their intellectual and personal development. The impact of competent and dedicated teachers extends beyond the classroom; in addition to imparting knowledge and transmitting information, they serve as mentors, motivators, and guides in the intricate process of learning and shape students' attitudes, values, and lifelong learning skills. In essence, quality teachers contribute significantly to creating a positive and enriching learning environment, empowering students with the knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm necessary for success in both academia and life.

The inadequacy of comprehensive data on the competencies of school teachers in Afghanistan presents a major challenge in formulating appropriate teacher training programmes, including both pre-service and in-service training. Thus, UNESCO Kabul Office commissioned a study aimed at designing and implementing an assessment toolkit on the competencies of grade 3 school teachers. This initiative is designed to support the development of targeted teacher training interventions that are better aligned with the specific needs and characteristics of school teachers in Afghanistan. The study also aims to provide valuable insights to enhance teacher capacity and improve the provision of education in the country.

This brief presents key findings drawn from the study on teacher competencies in selected provinces in Afghanistan.

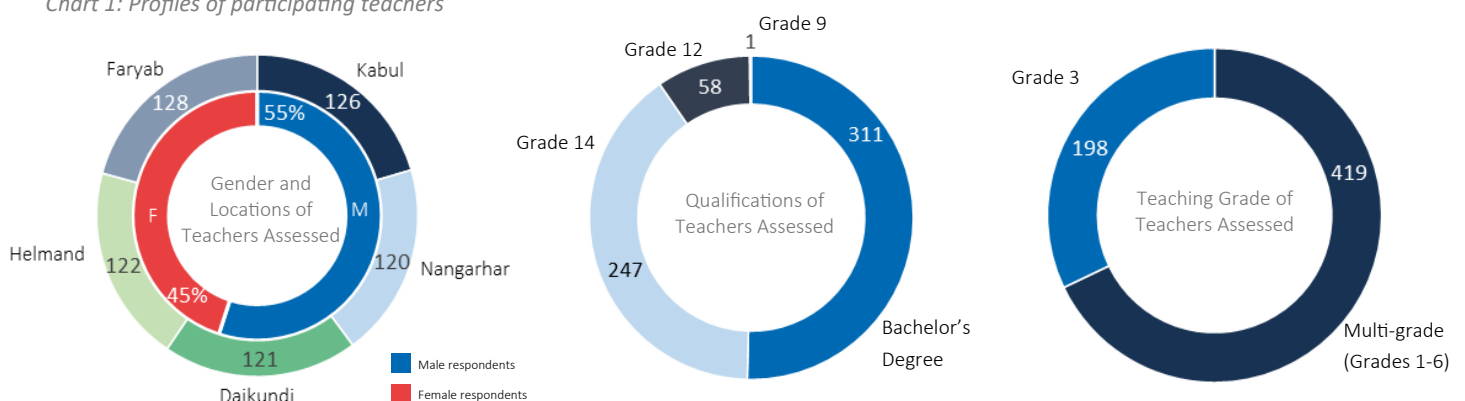
## METHODOLOGY

A Teacher Competencies Assessment (TCA) toolkit was developed based on existing technical resources, e.g., subject-specific question banks, under the overall technical guidance from UNESCO. The TCA toolkit comprises three components:

- (1) teacher content knowledge assessment;
- (2) teacher self-assessment; and
- (3) classroom observation.

A total of 617 teachers from 223 randomly selected schools across five provinces in Afghanistan participated in the study in October 2023. The selected provinces are Kabul, Nangarhar, Daikundi, Helmand, and Faryab, providing a geographically varied representation.

Chart 1: Profiles of participating teachers



## MAIN FINDINGS

### Teacher Content Knowledge Assessment

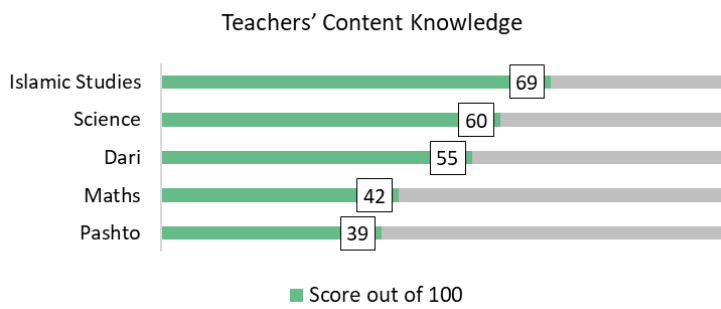


Chart 2: Teachers' knowledge by subject

The analysis of participating teachers' subject-specific content knowledge unveiled their generally low mastery levels of subjects assessed, especially mathematics and Pashto. On average, participating teachers across five provinces scored 69 out of 100 in Islamic studies, i.e., the highest level of content mastery among the five assessed subjects – followed by science and Dari with average scores of 60 and 55 out of 100 respectively. However, the data raises concerns over the low levels of content knowledge among participating teachers in mathematics and Pashto, with average scores of 42 and 39 out of 100 respectively (see Chart 2). The particularly low proficiency in core subjects taught in early grades is worrisome as it suggests potential deficiencies in foundational knowledge among participating teachers, which could pose challenges for their students as they progress to higher grades, where a strong foundational understanding becomes increasingly crucial.

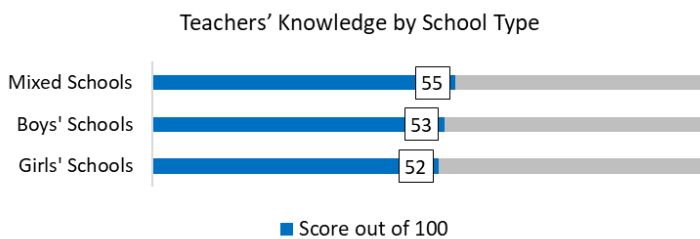


Chart 3: Teachers' knowledge by school type

In mixed schools, teachers collectively obtained an average score of 55 out of 100 across all subjects. This surpassed the average scores in boys' schools, which stood at 53 out of 100, and girls' schools, where the average was 52 out of 100 (see Chart 3). This suggests that, on average, teachers in mixed schools exhibit a slightly higher proficiency in delivering academic content compared to their counterparts in single-gender schools.

Further dissecting the data by gender, male teachers achieved an average score of 55 out of 100. On the other hand, female teachers recorded a slightly lower average score of 52 out of 100 (see chart 4). This nuanced difference may prompt considerations about factors influencing the performance of male and female teachers, potentially highlighting areas for targeted support or professional development.

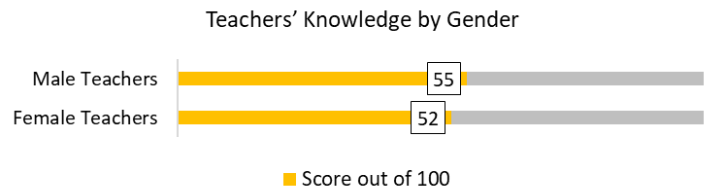


Chart 4: Teachers' knowledge by gender

### Teacher Self-assessment

Participating teachers demonstrated a high level of self-perception regarding teaching competencies, although there remained incongruence between their self-perception and actual classroom observation results. The teacher self-assessment tool was designed in alignment with the Interim Teacher Competency Framework developed by UNESCO in coordination with the Teacher Development and Support Forum after the power shift in 2021. It involved teachers evaluating themselves through 68 specified competency questions, categorized as "Unsatisfactory" "Basic" "Competent" and "Outstanding". The majority of the participating teachers (85 per cent), rated themselves as either "competent" or "outstanding" across five provinces. Notably, they tended to give high self-ratings in various competency areas, particularly in assisting students in learning, implementing effective teaching strategies, and having concrete personal and professional development plans.

This suggests an overall elevated level of self-perception of their abilities and effectiveness in fulfilling their teaching roles. However, it is essential to note that this self-perception does not align with the classroom observation results. The incongruence between self-perception and classroom observation could prompt a closer examination of the assessment criteria in the future or potentially indicate areas where teachers may benefit from additional support or professional development.



## Classroom Observation

Classroom observation was completed in two parts. The first session featured 25 questions where enumerators assessed the infrastructure and teaching materials. The second session featured 37 questions focusing on teachers' competencies.

Participating teachers demonstrated their strong ability in cultivating a positive learning environment. The classroom observation revealed commendable results in the aspect of fostering a positive learning environment across various parameters such as effective interactions, class management, and student engagement, with an average score of 87 out of 100. Notably, teachers in Nangarhar province outshone their counterparts with the highest score of 94 out of 100, followed by those in Kabul (86 out of 100). Further analysis indicated subtle variations in performance based on school location and gender. Teachers in urban settings and girls' schools acquired a slightly higher score compared to their counterparts in rural areas and boys' or mixed schools.

There remained room for improvement in terms of pedagogical skills among participating teachers. It was observed that most of the participating teachers did not showcase effective pedagogical skills such as providing clear explanations, adopting different teaching strategies in line with students' varied learning needs and capacity, and posing thought-provoking questions, etc. Across all five provinces in the sample, participating teachers only scored an average level of pedagogical mastery, i.e., scoring approximately two out of four on the proficiency scale. In addition, it was observed that a large majority of participating teachers neither followed closely their

lesson plans nor communicated regularly with the community and school council about students' learning challenges. They also did not have a concrete professional development plan for themselves either.

## Teacher Training and Continuous Professional Development

There is a pressing need for a more systematic approach to teacher training and continuous professional development. A noteworthy finding from the assessment is that a substantial 48 per cent of the participating teachers did not partake in any training over the past three years. The remaining 52 per cent received training sessions supported by external partners, covering a broad spectrum of critical areas, including content knowledge, student assessment, pedagogy, gender-responsive lesson planning, class management, prevention of violence against children, etc. That said, half of these teachers expressed uncertainty regarding the training, and approximately 20 per cent could not recall the training specifics or mentioned irrelevant topics.

In light of these findings, a more systematic approach to teacher training and continuous professional development is essential. Regular, targeted training sessions should be integrated into teachers' professional development plans. These sessions should be meticulously designed to align with the assessed needs of the teachers, incorporating relevant contextual elements into the content. A special emphasis on enhancing content knowledge, classroom management, student assessment, and other pertinent aspects is crucial to ensure the continuous professional development and effectiveness of teachers in Afghanistan.



## BOTTOM LINE

Teachers in Afghanistan find themselves grappling with a multitude of challenges that significantly hinder their ability to deliver education in an efficient and effective manner. Many teachers are confronted with suboptimal teaching and learning environments, with a staggering majority of schools in the country lacking vital infrastructure elements such as electricity, safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, libraries, laboratories. There is also a shortage in teaching and learning materials, as 21 percent of students in 263 observed classrooms lacked textbooks, and 78 percent of teachers lacked teacher guidebooks. This deficiency in essential facilities contributes to a less conducive atmosphere for both teaching and learning. These challenges are also coupled with limited pay and economic hardships, creating a challenging professional landscape for the teaching workforce in Afghanistan.

Results from this assessment of teacher competencies in selected provinces in Afghanistan highlight the urgency of addressing existing deficiencies in teacher capacity, characterized by content knowledge and pedagogical skills, to ensure a solid foundation for students throughout their educational journey. Enhancing teacher capacity and effectiveness necessitates a holistic yet strategic approach to teacher training and continuous professional development that aligns with the current educational landscape in Afghanistan. The approach should involve offering systematic support in those specific areas where teachers may exhibit deficiencies or require further development. Rather than providing a one-size-fits-all comprehensive competency training package to all teachers, a nuanced strategy is crucial to ensure that teacher training programmes are tailored to offer support in specific areas where teachers may exhibit deficiencies or require further development, which will ultimately improve the overall quality of education in the country. UNESCO, together with UNICEF, is co-leading the Teacher Development and Support Forum in Afghanistan, a strategic platform designed to improve the quality of education provided to students by bringing together all relevant stakeholders to tackle the challenges faced by the teaching workforce in the country.

## INTERIM TEACHER COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK 2023

The TCA constitutes a comprehensive evaluation, focusing specifically on Grade 3 school teachers in Afghanistan, based on the interim Teacher Competency Framework (TCF) for Afghanistan developed by UNESCO. The interim TCF aligns global best practices with the local context after the power shift, incorporating stakeholder feedback. It aims to establish a shared understanding of quality teaching, guide professional learning, enhance accountability, and improve teacher competencies. The core competencies of the teachers in accordance with the interim TCF are:

### 1. Know and understand what they teach:

Teachers need to have a deep understanding of their subject and engage in continuous learning. It is crucial that they have familiarity with the curriculum .

### 2. Help students learn:

Teachers must prioritize students' learning needs by getting to know each of them individually. They should use effective teaching strategies, provide constructive assessments, and offer feedback tailored to their learning styles. Ensuring student well-being, with a focus on child protection, is a crucial aspect of this core competency.

### 3. Commit to self-improvement:

A commitment to ongoing self-improvement is integral to effective teaching. This core competency emphasizes self-awareness, command on teaching practices, and adherence to the teacher code of conduct. The goal is for teachers to strive for excellence and continual enhancement in their teaching skills.

### 4. Engage the community:

Teachers are encouraged to actively engage with the community in the educational process. This includes seeking community support to enhance students' learning experiences and fostering an environment of respect and diversity. By engaging with the community, teachers can create a more comprehensive and supportive educational ecosystem.