



June 2017

Transforming lives through education



## Factors Affecting Student Examination Results Key Findings from a Qualitative Study

This issue highlights key findings from a qualitative investigation of factors affecting student examination results in government secondary schools that are part of the Kusuma Schools Partnership Initiative (KSPI) in Hardoi, Uttar Pradesh. 9 out of 25 schools were selected to represent a spectrum of below average, average and above average scores in Class 10 Board examinations in 2015-2016.

Kusuma delivers a package of interventions in KSPI schools (improved school facilities, deployment of contract teachers to fill teacher vacancies, teacher professional development, remedial education and support for better school leadership and governance) with the aim of improving student outcomes. Analysis of Board exam results in the past three academic years (2013-2016) shows considerable variation. Interviews were undertaken with key stakeholders (teachers, Head Teachers, students, parents, School Management and Development Committee (SMDC) members and District Resource Group (DRG) members!) to understand the reasons for variability in examination results. The key findings are outlined below.

### Student access and attendance

Students in most schools travel long distances to school. Poor road connectivity and lack of public transport exacerbate this problem, particularly during winter months. This affects student attendance, which drops sharply in winter to less than 50%. Many students experience similar difficulties in travelling to venues for Board examinations, thus potentially having an impact on examination results.

### Teacher vacancies and absenteeism

High teacher vacancy rates are a persistent problem across Uttar Pradesh. Three out of nine KSPI schools do not have any government teachers for the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades and a further three schools have only one appointed government teacher. Teacher vacancies result in high pupil-teacher ratios and overcrowded classrooms in some schools but examination data shows that high pupil-teacher ratios are not necessarily predictive of below average performance in Board examinations. All students interviewed receive private tuition and it is likely that this plays a significant role to play in explaining variation in student performance.

Students and some teachers also highlighted problems caused by teacher absenteeism or by a lack of willingness to teach even when present in schools. These problems reduce contact time with students and possibly scope for performing well in examinations.

### Kusuma Volunteer Teachers

Kusuma recruited Volunteer Teachers (VTs) to fill gaps in teacher vacancies in English, Maths and Science for Classes 9 and 10. Seven of the nine schools that participated in this study have at least two VTs who teach either two subjects or all three subjects. Some schools use VTs as a flexible resource to teach all subjects and all grades, making it difficult to link VT inputs to examination results.

Most Head Teachers and students expressed appreciation for VTs and some single teacher schools are at risk of closing down without them. However, students and teachers also thought that VTs were deployed too late in the academic year and were withdrawn too early, thus reducing the potential for positively impacting examination results.



Kusuma Volunteer Teacher Mr Amar Ashock teaching a Science lesson at the Government Higher Secondary School, Gopamu, Hardoi. Photo: Sam Strickland

1. DRG members provide mentoring and coaching support to teachers in the classroom.

**Our mission is to facilitate and increase access to education and other life opportunities for children and young people**

## Teacher professional development

Training on interactive teaching methods and subject content are offered to both government teachers and VTs but take-up by government teachers is low. Nevertheless, some government teachers have learned about interactive teaching methods from VTs working in their schools. All Head Teachers interviewed valued the contribution of VTs to the quality of teaching but most teachers felt that a balance needs to be struck between the use of interactive teaching methods and completion of the syllabus. There is a tension between helping students to understand what is taught and enabling students to answer examination questions on all topics in the syllabus.

## Mentoring for teacher professional development

DRG members are recruited and trained to provide mentoring support to teachers in the classroom. Most VTs value this practical support but government teachers perceive DRGs as a threat to their seniority and status. Reasons for resistance to DRG support needs to be addressed if mentoring is to have a positive impact on teaching practice.

## Remedial education

Kusuma's Secondary School Readiness Programme (SSRP) aims to bridge the learning gap among students in Classes 9 and 10. All stakeholders felt that weak students benefit from the SSRP but some government teachers felt that the SSRP may jeopardise the academic progress of brighter pupils and distract students from preparing for Board examinations, thereby having a potentially negative impact on student examination results.



Students studying in the library at Chandra Devi Shiksha Niketan Higher Secondary School, Hardoi. Photo: Sam Strickland

## Improvements to school facilities

Kusuma's infrastructure improvements (provision of tables, chairs, desks, blackboards, toilet facilities, safe drinking water, access to an adequate power supply, upgraded libraries and science laboratories) have been well received by all stakeholders.

Libraries are operational in most schools and are perceived by students and teachers as promoting a habit of self-learning. Students also said that access to libraries helped them to compensate for poor teaching or teacher absence. The active use of library facilities therefore has the potential to enhance student agency in their own learning and function as a protective factor in relation to teacher vacancies and/or absenteeism.

## School governance

Effective school governance plays a key role in ensuring the sustainability of Kusuma's interventions in KSPI schools and in enhancing the accountability of teachers. Most schools have an active SMDC that helps to raise funds for academic purposes and improves school management. SMDC members said that Kusuma's training on SMDC roles and responsibilities had helped them to function effectively but SMDCs in remote areas continue to require intensive support.

## Conclusion

Overall, this study shows that there are a variety of systemic and situational factors that constrain or facilitate students' experience of education. Teacher vacancies and absenteeism are a common problem in KSPI and other government schools in Uttar Pradesh. Kusuma's efforts to compensate for teacher vacancies by deploying contract teachers are highly valued by all stakeholders but their impact on student performance is variable and their sustainability is a key issue. Government teachers are far less likely than VTs to participate in Kusuma's teacher professional development programmes. This has implications for consistent improvement to the quality of education and student outcomes in the immediate and long term.

Remedial education has the potential to have a significant impact on student outcomes but implementation issues need to be addressed. In the face of multiple and complex problems in schools, interventions that support student agency in their own learning (e.g. libraries) have an important role to play. For families with sufficient resources, use of private tuition helps students to compensate for teacher vacancies or poor quality teaching but this disadvantages students from families who cannot afford the additional expense.

The executive summary of the qualitative study is available on the research page of our website: <http://www.kusumatrust.org/our-work/research/>