

ROOM DOCUMENT FOR THE MODERATION SESSION OF THE 11TH MEETING OF THE COMCEC POVERTY ALLEVIATION WORKING GROUP

There will be a moderation session under the agenda item 4 titled “Policy Debate Session on Improving Education Quality in the OIC Member Countries”. This room document has been prepared for enriching the discussions during the aforementioned session to come up with policy advices for approximating policies among the Member Countries in this field. The document has been prepared in accordance with the main findings of the research report conducted specifically for this meeting and the answers of the Member Countries to the policy questions which have already been sent to the COMCEC Poverty Alleviation Working Group focal points by the COMCEC Coordination Office. The Working Group highlighted the following policy recommendations:

Policy Advice 1: Increasing both the quantity and quality of teachers, particularly who teach in schools serving to disadvantaged and poorest through improving wage rates, pedagogical interventions, performance incentives, training and curricula reforms.

Rationale:

Teachers are the most significant influencer of educational outcomes. However, they are in short supply in many OIC member countries. Efforts should be intensified to make teaching an employment of choice. Income levels are critical for attracting best candidates into the teaching profession. This partly explains why in high performing countries such as Singapore and South Korea, many top graduate students aspire to enter the teaching profession. However, teacher wage rates are very low in many OIC member countries. As indicated in SDG target-4, increasing the supply of qualified teachers must be a priority for the OIC countries.

On the other hand, evidence indicates that the level of competencies and knowledge among teachers remain low in the OIC member countries, particularly in schools serving the most excluded and poorest. Teachers lack the ability to transfer their own knowledge effectively to the students. Available options to improve teacher quality include contract-based appointment or the introduction of performance incentives. Pedagogical interventions that align teaching to student learning levels are also effective at improving student performance. Moreover, curricula reforms and teacher training should focus on the student’s understanding of the subjects and promote analysis instead of rewarding memorization.

Policy Advice 2: Increasing teaching and learning effectiveness through adoption and widespread use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based new models.

Rationale:

In all assessments, the OIC as a group showed a declining trend in education quality, measured in terms of student achievement in math, science and reading. The use of ICT based teaching and learning models remain a popular choice to aid teachers and students to overcome such shortcomings. Jordan and Malaysia are two examples to OIC member countries which have launched new projects to improve the quality of education by investing in ICT infrastructure in education sector.

While the use of ICT-based teaching and learning models are popular and have some promising features, their success is not always guaranteed. Content design of ICT-based learning platforms is one of the important dimensions of this type of initiatives. Moreover, new ICT-based models should be tried in small-scales and only be scaled up following an evaluation of their impact on learning outcomes. Experiences of the OIC members who have made investments in this area can offer some guide to other members. Examples include distribution of low-cost tablet-PCs, establishing central online school monitoring and reporting systems.

Policy Advice 3: Promoting better early-childhood learning opportunities through accessible and affordable pre-primary schooling

Rationale:

Income poverty and poor health are system-wide problems that also limit early-life learning opportunities. The level of malnutrition is very high in some of the OIC member states; physical illness is a major cause of student absenteeism from school. Therefore, investments in child health and enhancing access to quality pre-primary schooling can go a long way for removing inequalities in learning opportunities at later stages of school education. The importance of early development is already recognized in the SDGs target 4.2 i.e. “ensuring that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education by 2030”.

Country-specific analysis of learning outcomes of Jordan, Malaysia and Nigeria confirm the importance of pre-primary schooling for later success in primary and secondary grades. According to one estimate, providing children with 3 years of Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) would increase the average secondary and tertiary educational attainment by 0.7 years. However, coverage of ECED differs throughout the OIC members. In many countries, participation rate in pre-primary education is low. In many instances, reliance on private providers limits access of the children from economically poor families or creates inequality in access to quality pre-primary education.

Policy Advice 4: Ensuring progressive universalism for closing the rich-poor gap in learning outcomes

Rationale:

Despite the reductions in poverty and increases in schooling rates in some OIC member countries, the gap between educational outcomes of students from rich and poor families persists. This socio-economic gap in learning is observed across the OIC region. The wealth gap is larger for the students studying at mainstream government schools in rural areas where the school quality is especially poor.

Findings in the context of all four case study countries of the research report indicate that income level of the family is strongly associated with student performance. Ensuring progressive universalism – allocating more resources to those who need it most – will require identifying children with learning deficits and effective mechanism to target them in the classroom and community. Only a few examples such as Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) in South Asia and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) schools in Jordan are observed to achieve success in providing quality education to students from economically disadvantaged families. More examples shall be identified across the OIC Region so that effective pro-poor education models can be made wide-spread. Madrassahs¹ may play an important role in pro-poor education, however, some set of reforms and regulations might be needed to improve the prospects of religious seminaries across the OIC Region.

¹ While in Arabic, the word Madrasa refers to any type of educational institution (religious as well as non-religious), this refers to a specific model of education in some countries where the focus is on Islamic or Qur’anic education.

Policy Advice 5: Enhancing and reinforcing accountability through parental engagement and involving parents in the monitoring of their children's education and intensifying the parent-teacher interaction to improve education delivery

Rationale:

The delivery of equitable quality education is a shared responsibility whereby different stakeholders work together and depend on each other. The lack of accountability is a system-wide challenge and key reason for the poor returns to public spending in education in the OIC member countries. Teacher truancy is a significant challenge in OIC countries. According to one survey including OIC countries, on average nearly 20 percent of teaching time is lost every year due to factors resulting in teachers being away from school.

Evidence indicates a positive association between student performance in PISA and parental engagement. Student achievement is low where school authorities report only a minority of parents applying pressure on academic standards or the pressure being "largely absent". Parents need to be kept up-to-date with what their children are studying and how they are progressing. This can enable parents to follow-up the progress by regularly consulting the teachers. Moreover, increasing the frequency of parent-teacher interaction can enable the school to provide parents with clear information on how to effectively contribute to their children's learning. In addition, schools can provide useful information to parents through a variety of communication methods such as home visits, publishing newsletters, and parent's handbooks.

Instruments to Realize the Policy Advices:

COMCEC Poverty Alleviation Working Group: In its subsequent meetings, the Working Group may elaborate on the above-mentioned policy areas in a more detailed manner.

COMCEC Project Funding: Under the COMCEC Project Funding, the COMCEC Coordination Office issues calls for project proposals each year. With the COMCEC Project Funding, the member countries participating in the Working Groups can submit multilateral cooperation projects to be financed through grants by the COMCEC Coordination Office. For realizing above-mentioned policy recommendations, the member countries can utilize the COMCEC Project Funding facility. These projects may include organization of seminars, training programs, study visits, exchange of experts, workshops and preparation of analytical studies, needs assessments and training materials/documents, etc.