# STUDY ON TEACHER TIME ALLOCATION AND WORK PERCEPTIONS

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200 teachers from 39 government and municipal schools in Delhi, were surveyed between December 2017 and April 2018 to unpack their work and role related perceptions and to map the time spent by them on various school activities. Teachers were found to be juggling multiple activities in settings with low capacity and resources. The situation is exacerbated due to planning and management issues. This in turn is affecting the quality and time spent on academic tasks, as well as teacher morale.

## I. INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

From December 2017 to April 2018, Accountability Initiative (AI) at Centre for Policy Research, conducted a study with 200 teachers from 39 government schools across Delhi, to systematically probe how teachers allocate time to essential school tasks. The study also aimed to understand how teachers perceive their roles and responsibilities, and its effects on their professional identity, perceptions of workload, morale and overall experience working in Delhi's education system.

The study sought to address the following four key questions:

1. How much time were teachers allocating to school related activities during and after school hours, and what were these activities?

2. How were teachers perceiving their official roles and responsibilities?

3. Which activities did teachers identify as "non-academic" and non-core to their role as teachers?

4. Were there variations in time allocation and role perception amongst teachers belonging to two different education managements i.e. the Department of Education (DoE) (state managed schools) and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) (schools managed by the local government)?

Section II of this policy brief explains the research design and method. In Section III, we discuss the main findings while Section IV summarises the key recommendations emerging from this study.

## II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

**Study Components:** The first component included a questionnaire with 41 closed and open-ended questions, designed to capture data on the following themes: perceptions around the teaching profession; school related issues; take on teaching-learning; "non-academic" tasks; and teacher performance. The second component included a self-reported Time Allocation tool. The time-allocation information was collected for all activities conducted by teachers on the day preceding the survey. A detailed protocol was developed for the study, which included definitions and categories of activities reported by teachers.

**Administering the Survey:** All responses, including any explanations offered by the 200 respondents, were noted verbatim in the survey tool itself. Barring two questions, teachers were not provided with options or prompts. For the time-allocation element, surveyors were trained to walk teachers through the preceding working day and help them recall all their activities, including breaks and work done while multi-tasking. This data was recorded period-wise for DoE schools, and in half hour slots for MCD schools. Brief discussions with the HoS were carried out after the surveys, to broadly verify the activities of the day for which data was reported.

**Sampling:** Schools were sampled from the two largest education managements in Delhi – the DoE and MCD.[1] Since MCD and DoE zones are not coterminous, schools managed by MCD were mapped on to the 13 education districts, as categorised by the DoE, for district and school sampling. The final "map" consisted of 8 unique districts for sampling MCD schools and 5 unique districts for sampling DoE schools. For school sampling, school information was organised by districts in ascending order of student enrolment, with the three schools in the middle of each list shortlisted for the three rounds of data collection. The final school sample consisted of 39 schools with 24 MCD schools and 15 DoE schools, including 3 DoE Aided schools.

Since one of the main objectives of this study is to understand how teachers spend their time in school and outside, handing various education related responsibilities, respondents were purposively sampled. The survey focussed on the "busiest" teachers in schools, who were identified by the number of additional charges assigned to them. Some common and demanding charges include managing the time-table and assigning teachers to classes in a daily activity called "teacher arrangement", mid-day meal, examination, and scholarship charges. These activities require maintaining multiple records and demands for these records are not always pre-planned. The Heads of Schools (HoS) were consulted to both identify these teachers and to broadly verify interviewees' activities from the previous day, since all collected data was self-reported.

**Data Collection:** Data collection took place in three rounds – in December 2017 (a "regular" teaching month for schools), February 2018 (when we expected teaching to peak, right before the final exams), and April 2018 (when we expected time spent on administrative paperwork to peak due to new admissions taking place). A phase-wise breakup of the 200 teachers surveyed is given in Table 1. Time allocation data was collected from 192 teachers for a total of 1191 hours. A phase-wise breakup of this is give in Table 2.

Table 1 – Total teachers surveyed

| Teachers surveyed | MCD | DoE & DoE Aided | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Phase 1 | 38 | 25 | 63 |
| Phase 2 | 37 | 31 | 68 |
| Phase 3 | 35 | 34 | 69 |
| Total | 200 | | |

Table 2 – Total time allocation data collected (in hours)

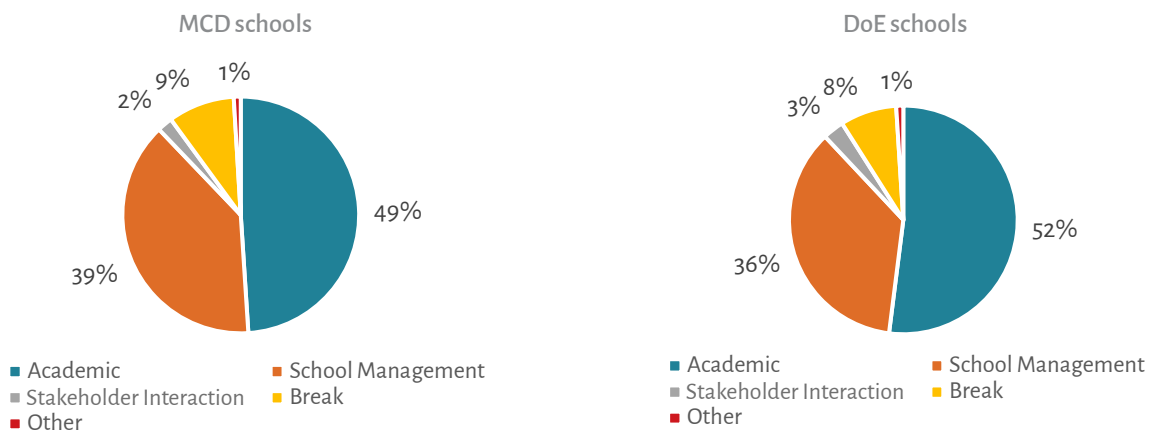| Time-allocation data | MCD | DoE & DoE Aided | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Phase 1 | 229 | 146 | 375 |
| Phase 2 | 203 | 205 | 408 |
| Phase 3 | 187 | 221 | 408 |
| Total | 1191 | | |

## III. KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

**1. School and teacher profiles:** The median student enrolment was 687 in the sampled DoE schools and 384 in the MCD schools. Of the 200 teachers surveyed, 195 were female and 5 were male. Table 3 summarises the key features of the respondents.

| Table 3 : School Type | MCD | DoE |
|---|---|---|
| Total Respondents | 110 | 90 |
| Educational Qualifications (teachers with Bachelor's degree and above) | 93 | 90 |
| Professional Qualifications (teachers with B.Ed. degree and above) | 56 | 80 |
| Average Teaching Experience in Govt Schools (in years) | 12 | 18 |

**2. Figure 1** depicts the overall time distribution on various activities during school hours, including time spent outside the school to carry out official duties, in DoE and MCD schools.



Figure 1: Overall time spent on activities during school hours (in %)

**3. The data shows that teachers were only able to teach for less than half their time in school.**

**3.1** Across all three phases, MCD and DoE teachers spent 49% and 52% of time in school, on academic activities, respectively. Excluding other academic work like sports, classroom management and teaching-learning supporting tasks, teaching alone made up only 41% and 39% of school time respectively.

**3.2** The time allocation data showed that teachers regularly faced disruptions while teaching, which were either spread out over several periods or were interspersed throughout the day, thereby breaking the flow of teaching and cutting into overall teaching time.

**3.3** While the overall time spent on non-teaching tasks may not seem significantly high, the time sheets of 35 DoE and 54 MCD teachers highlight how these tasks are intermittently distributed in a teaching day, resulting in teachers feeling overwhelmed and constantly disturbed by 'non-academic' work.

**3.4** MCD teachers are worse off as they do not have 'free periods' to complete essential non-teaching work. Furthermore, the data showed instances of classes being disrupted in MCD schools by guardians who came in with queries and issues around administrative matters related to bank accounts, admission or school-leaving certificates.

**4. Routine "School Management" tasks like daily attendance, adjusting the time-table and assigning teachers to various classes, managing the school assembly, mid-day meal and overseeing student dispersal at the end of the day, tend to be needlessly time-consuming due to resource constraints, limited capacities and procedural inefficiencies.**

**4.1** In MCD schools this resulted from a combination of staff shortage and technical difficulties like malfunctioning biometric machines or poor to no internet connectivity.

**4.2** In DoE schools start-of-day classroom management and tasks like taking and uploading attendance, checking circulars and teacher "arrangements" occupied more time, causing disruptions in the first half of the day.

**5. Having more "additional charges" did not always lead to teachers struggling to find time to teach. Teachers with more responsibilities tend to be senior so they are familiar with rules and procedures of the school and Education Department. They themselves, or with the help of the HoS, rationalise and delegate work among other teachers, although only one teacher has the formal charge over a certain administrative task. This then affects the time allocation of other teachers and possibly leads to a collective feeling of being swamped with administrative work.**

**5.1** This was particularly seen in the case of "seasonal charges" i.e. those which require work to be conducted only at a certain point of the year, like admissions or exams. For example, in DoE schools teachers who did not have the examinations charge were seen handling exam-related logistics like seating arrangements. In MCD schools, it was not unusual to see almost all class teachers handling admissions, despite only one teacher having the formal charge.

**5.2** However, data from all three phases shows certain demanding charges, such as examinations, were recurring among teachers who taught for less than 50% of their time in school. Some of these were specific to DoE schools, like the time-table charge, and teachers who were 'second-in-charge' i.e. teachers in charge of school affairs in the absence of the HoS. Meanwhile, in MCD schools these included Head Teacher charge and IT charge among others.

**6. School management tasks often spilled over, causing teachers to work beyond school hours fairly regularly, though not as much as they appeared to portray in the perception survey.**

**6.1** Of the total 39 hours reported by DoE teachers working beyond school hours, 49% of time was spent on Academic tasks like checking answer scripts and notebooks, while 51% was spent on School Management tasks like marking their own attendance, overseeing student dispersal and recordkeeping work like exam result analysis, external exam invigilation duties or responding to official emails and circulars.

**6.2** MCD teachers reported a total of 49 hours working beyond school hours, of which a mere 6% was spent on Academic work and a whopping 94% of time went towards School Management and "Other" activities. MCD teachers spent significantly more time on tasks like recording facial attendance of students, addressing guardians' inquiries on admissions and withdrawal, collecting documents and signatures or filling our various forms for parents, as well as overseeing the safe dispersal of students from schools and routinely waiting after school hours with students whose guardians were late to collect them. "Other" activities included going to the bank, tax office or ward school on school-related work.

**7. Time spent on recordkeeping and data management was needlessly high due to teachers maintaining all records in both hardcopy and softcopy. The quantum of administrative work that teachers have to do naturally means that teachers who are tech savvy have an advantage over teachers who struggle to work with computers. But this also tends to negatively affect the teachers with higher computer skills as other teachers tend to rely on them to do a share of their work.**

**7.1** Across both MCD and DoE schools, recordkeeping constituted 9% and 11% of overall school time respectively, during school hours. Findings from the perception survey showed that over half the teachers cited having to maintain both hardcopy and softcopy formats, submitting the same information multiple times a year, the lack or poor quality of (clerical/IT) staff and human errors in data management, as the topmost reasons for this.

**7.2** In both DoE and MCD schools, teachers were found to be regularly engaged in preparing and uploading data and reports to the Education Departments. In DoE, this was due to a lack of or poor quality of clerical staff, with teachers often stating that the clerical staff either lacked the necessary skills to manage school data or were disinterested in doing their job. Meanwhile in MCD schools, clerical and IT posts have not been sanctioned.

**7.3** Complaints around recordkeeping arise from a lack of advance planning from the teachers, as well as unanticipated circumstances such as delayed information from the Education Department or lack of clarity on how to prepare and submit certain records. These problems are particularly seen with periodic or annual recordkeeping work like UDISE data, exams, distributions of scholarships and entitlements and admissions. For example, teachers were found to be engaged in UDISE data entry, as late as February, due to revisions in the UDISE data submission process. Teachers explained that this year they had been asked to submit detailed information on both teachers' and students' backgrounds, aside from school-related data that is generally required.

## 8. There appears to be a mismatch in teachers' work expectations and job preparedness vis-a-vis the state's demands on them as teachers and as government employees, which complicate matters further.

**8.1** Teachers reported largely positive reasons for joining the profession, with 63% respondents citing reasons like an innate interest in teaching, working with children and a desire to help society. Meanwhile, 27% also cited other reasons like job security, expectation of a better work-life balance, higher pay, and prestige of a government job.

**8.2** Teachers identified activities directly connected to teaching-learning (e.g. preparing lesson plans or evaluating homework) and recordkeeping tasks directly related to students (e.g. maintaining attendance or examination data) as constituting their core responsibilities. 37% and 32% of all respondents stated the latter, as their primary and secondary task respectively.

**8.3** Most of the teachers identified certain activities they do, as clerical, which while essential to school functioning, were not directly related to teaching-learning. Actvities such as UDISE data entry or distributing and maintaining records related to scholarships and entitlements, among others, were either identified as secondary or activities they should not be doing. For example, 89% and 87% of all respondents felt they should not be involved in opening and closing student bank accounts, and seeding student Aadhaar cards, respectively. Teacher felt these tasks could be delegated to separate designated staff. They also felt that more time was being spent on these non-teaching activities, which cut into their time in class, and negatively affected their self-identity and morale. Due to this, many expressed negative emotions of guilt and disappointment in themselves for not being able to give students their undivided attention.

**8.4** While non-teaching work is a chronic source of discontentment among teachers, the survey highlighted a lack of consensus on what non-teaching roles entail. The confusion is likely due to the fact that the terms "non-academic" and "non-educational" have not been clearly defined in any government document. The RTE for instance, only vaguely addresses the "non-academic" roles that teachers must fulfil, by stating teachers must "perform such other duties as may be prescribed." Additionally, it is likely teachers feel they should not be engaged in non-teaching roles which are far removed from direct teaching-learning activities as these do not match their job expectations. This points to a mismatch between the state's vision of a government school teacher and how the surveyed teachers view their roles.

## 9. The use of pass percentages as the primary indicator to formally assess teachers' performance leads many teachers to prioritise what is minimally expected of them i.e. syllabus completion with the goal of ensuring students score high in the exams.

**9.1** Teachers largely understood feedback and professional evaluation only in terms of having their Annual Confidential Reports prepared by their respective HoS, which at the outset, is commonly viewed as a formality. Along with pass percentages, common indicators cited by teachers for their evaluation included interpersonal relations, punctuality and recordkeeping skills, but these tended to be arbitrarily assessed by the HoS. When asked if the current means of evaluating teacher performance were fair, 12% either did not know or were unable to answer the question, and 25% of teachers felt they were only fair to some extent.

**9.2** Meanwhile, 42% expressed dissatisfaction and felt the existing means of evaluating their performance, which are heavily focussed on exams result and pass percentages, are not fair. Teachers felt that these fail to consider the range of tasks they undertake and neither capture student progress in terms of learning levels, nor highlight teachers' teaching ability.

## IV. Recommendations

The RTE mandates a minimum of 45 working hours a week for teachers, including time spent on preparatory activities and evaluation. For the most efficient utilisation of this time, education planners could consider the following:

### 1. Preparing individuals for the role of a government school teacher and managing expectations

**1.1** Conduct time and work management related workshops, as well as orientations on best practices for common tasks teachers routinely do, like maintaining attendance and examination records. This would help increase teacher efficiency and enable teachers to better manage both their teaching and school management duties.

**1.2** Hold sensitisation workshops on the socio-economic backgrounds of students, so as to better equip teachers to handle student problems and counsel guardians.

**1.3** Arrange administration and management workshops for the HoS and specific workshops for teachers handling demanding charges like maintaining fund related records. This would boost efficiency and minimise errors.

**1.4** Clearly define the terms "non-teaching", "non-education" and "non-academic', and clarify the tasks that fall under these categories, to end confusion around the range of roles and responsibilities of a government teacher. This could also help in developing time related benchmarks for the wider range of work teachers do apart from handling academic responsibilities.

### 2. Improving planning, managing workflows and setting school priorities

**2.1** Redesign the DoE's Annual School Calendar so the activities and events of all branches are visible and arranged chronologically, in one place. This will allow for ease of planning, since at present the calendar is a poorly organised list of timelines issued by each branch.

**2.2** Ensure close coordination between different branches when setting deadlines and ensure they are cognisant of the time available to teachers to teach, manage the school and fulfil data demands. This will ensure that plans made at short notice by one branch do not clash with other demands placed on schools in the same time frame.

**2.3** Consider establishing a limit to the time teachers spend on routine school management tasks. This will send a clear message that Education Departments prioritise teaching-learning activities, above all other school activities. It will also enable both HoS and teachers to plan and regulate their time better.

### 3. Reducing time spent on recordkeeping and related tasks like recording, analysing and managing data

**3.1** Hire contractual data operators proportional to school strength and provide them with basic training on school data management and MS Office applications. This will free up teachers' precious time which could be devoted to classroom activities.

**3.2** Sanction posts for clerical and IT staff in MCD schools and fill vacant clerical and IT posts in DoE schools, at the earliest. This will enable both MCD and DoE teachers to spend more time on academic work.

**3.3** Define the role of clerical staff in DoE schools to include entering, retrieving and uploading all school data. Expanding the role of clerical staff will lessen teachers' burden. Presently clerks mostly handle salary records. Additionally, provide formal training to clerical and IT staff in DoE schools, on MS Office and school data management, to build their capacities and enable them to manage school data better.

**3.4** Alternately, provide basic MS Office training to selected teachers to speed up the preparation, analysis, retrieval and management of information. At present, almost all school records are already digitised. Basic IT training will reduce the inefficiencies and errors teachers report when handling school data.

**3.5** Education offices at the zone, district and higher levels could also hire data analysts or upgrade the

skills of existing IT staff to analyse and retrieve data efficiently. This will reduce the need for schools to repeatedly send data throughout the year and will act as a check on officials' tendency to put sudden data demands on schools.

**3.6** Education Departments should digitise all information being collected from schools. This will reduce the double workload and duplication of data in hardcopy and softcopy at the school level.

**3.7** Expedite the provision of tablets to DoE teachers, and further expand the scheme to include all government school teachers in Delhi. This will ensure all government teachers in Delhi have the means to easily maintain and access school data digitally. It will also save the time teachers spend on waiting their turn to use the school computer.

**3.8** Departments should aim to collect data required for similar purposes like scholarships, in one go, annually or bi-annually. This will reduce instances of the same data being collected repeatedly, due to lack of coordination between different branches of the Education department.

**3.9** Outsource appropriate agents and hold camps near the school to handle essential administrative requirements like opening student bank accounts or creating Aadhaar cards. This will provide guardians with a point-person, who is available at all times, to assist them with tasks like filling out bank forms, thereby ending the need for teachers to be involved with these matters.

### 4. Improving staffing and infrastructure in MCD schools

**4.1** Urgently conduct an assessment of the state of access, hygiene, playground facilities and safety in MCD schools across Delhi to identify and combat glaring facilities and infrastructure related issues.

**4.2** Equip all MCD schools with high speed internet, computers and improve the corporation/state level servers. This will reduce time teachers spend on routine recordkeeping and management tasks like sending attendance and MDM data and prevent teachers from having to use personal means like home computers, for the same.

**4.3** Urgently fill vacant HoS posts across all MCD schools. DIET students could be temporarily assigned to schools with teacher vacancies. This will free up

the time of the Teachers In-charge, allowing them to focus on their academic duties, and to reduce the load on teachers currently managing multiple classes, often simultaneously.

**4.4** Assign cleaning and security staff in proportion to the size of MCD schools. The same could be hired via private companies, as in the case of DoE schools. This will further reduce teachers' involvement in basic issues like cleanliness, hygiene and security.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study focused on teachers identified as the busiest in their respective schools, to understand the range of activities they juggle, how this affects their day to day functioning, and ultimately shapes their work-related perceptions. Through this study we learnt that the sentiment harboured by teachers - of being overburdened - is layered and gets built over time. The feeling stems from a combination of factors including genuinely struggling to spend enough time on teaching; the quality of teaching that takes place in class as a result of frequent disruptions and the stress of juggling other tasks; lack of feedback on substantive teaching-learning matters from academic and administrative supervisors; and resource and capacity constraints.

Further, we found that teachers are routinely unable to *allocate* time to critical tasks like teaching, instead they *allot* time based on instructions received from the Education Departments. To plan effectively, teachers require clarity about the goals and priorities of the department, as well as advance knowledge of upcoming events and control over their own schedule, which is often lacking. While the Delhi School Education Rules 1973 and the RTE mention the number of days schools should remain open and the number of instructional hours teachers should teach, they do not mention how teachers should allocate time to accommodate other essential school management tasks.

Discussions on teachers' work perceptions and working conditions introduce another layer of complexity in dialogues pertaining to education reforms. It opens up discussions on not just teacher training and job preparation but also how the role of the government school teacher is positioned in society. It is hard to get actors to truly care if there is little buy in for a programme or, at the outset, the implementing actors'

job expectations, job preparedness, and work conditions are not in sync with the dual set of responsibilities put on them as teachers and as government employees. What seems to be the need of the hour is a specialised government school teacher preparation course which is tailored for the government school environment.

Finally, given the way schools and teachers function, the time put in to fulfil essential tasks, and issues surrounding the quality of teaching-learning taking place inside schools, must also be viewed as a symptom and a consequence of issues at higher levels of the education bureaucracy, precisely because schools rely so heavily on decisions of the Education Department.

NOTE

**1** All school related data was retrieved from UDISE (2016-17) for sampling purpose. As per UDISE (2016-17), the three municipal corporations collectively managed a total of 1693 schools, while the DoE managed 1228 schools, which included 211 DoE Aided schools.