

Introduction

Virtually every country in Asia has identified improving education quality as one of its highest national priorities. In spite of progress in responding to the demand for increased school access, developing more effective national planning and policy mechanisms, and implementing massive training programs for teachers and administrators, dissatisfaction persists with the capability of education systems to support national economic and social aspirations. To some extent, plans and policies calling for higher-quality schooling now supplement or even replace earlier attention to such priorities as education expansion and school access. It would seem that a consensus is forming that immediate attention of policymakers and involved international agencies should be focused on designing and implementing policies, programs, and actions to improve education quality. Translating the growing consensus into viable policies is a major challenge.

This booklet examines the concerns expressed among developing member countries (DMCs) of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) about education quality, reviews relevant research, focuses directly on teaching and learning, and suggests strategies that countries committed to quality improvement might use to raise school quality over the next decade. Attempts are made where possible to interpret education quality within the context being described. The most common meaning of education quality as inferred from its usage relates to level of student achievement on selected portions of the national curriculum. On this basis, populations of students have been compared across countries, across regions, within countries, and between schools in given localities.

The booklet commences by outlining broad concerns and problems among DMCs. This section comments on the meaning of education quality, and notes demographic and economic contextual influences. The booklet then turns to aspects of teaching and learning, noting the research literature on effective schooling, on teachers, on curricula, and on governance, management and school organization. The next section addresses policies and strategies for improving quality. It focuses on both systemic changes and subsector domains. Finally, the booklet concludes with a summary and comment on future prospects.