Background:
Economists have drawn a link between a country’s future economic growth and the quality of its education systems. Research indicates economic growth is associated with adult literacy, with no country achieving continuous and rapid growth without at least a 40% literacy rate (CGD, 2005). Additionally, when students learn more in school, they stay working longer, gain more skills, and participate more effectively in the workforce, further contributing the economic growth (Hanushek, Ruhose, & Woessmann, 2016). Since teachers serve as the backbone of the education system, investing in teacher quality is a path to a stronger economy that starts with defining what makes an effective teacher. An Oxfam International study of teacher competencies and standards emphasized the importance of gaining stakeholder input when building a common understanding of quality educator characteristics (Bourgonje & Tromp, 2011). By giving stakeholders a voice, policymakers gain insights into how those most affected by policies think and feel about them and provide an opportunity to help frame important policy decisions that directly impact their lives.

Purpose:
To contribute to the global discussion about what makes an effective teacher, we surveyed students ages 15-19, teachers, principals, education researchers, education policymakers, and parents of school-aged children in 23 countries. The primary research objective was to provide an overall picture of what individuals invested in the teaching process in a variety of countries view as the most important qualities of a teacher. Additionally, we examine how context (i.e. a country’s human development) related to what qualities are valued in teachers.

Setting:
Surveys were conducted by third-party marketing research organizations in each of the 23 participating countries (Canada, United States, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Finland, Germany, Poland, England, Morocco, Egypt, South Africa, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Iran, India, Singapore, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Japan, and Australia).

Participants:
Respondents came from six primary stakeholder groups: students ages 15-19 (N = 3520), teachers (N = 3770), principals (N = 1206), education researchers (391), education policymakers (337), and parents of school-aged children (N = 3962). Sample sizes per country ranged from 351 to 1240, with most countries having around 530 participants. Around 64% of participants were affiliated with public or government-run schools, and participants were fairly evenly split by gender (51% female).

Research Design:
A crucial component of this project was developing the discrete, specific categories from the expansive range of qualitative responses provided by the respondents. These categories were derived in a variety of ways, and refined through an iterative process. One source of these categories was international research on effective teaching (i.e. Bransford et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Careful review of common themes within the responses was also used to
generate categories. At several points during the development of the coding scheme, we sought input from experts in the field (researchers and teachers and administrators). They reviewed our categories and made suggestions, both for adding additional categories and for either splitting or combining existing categories. In total, we developed twenty-nine categories. Trained coders then reviewed participant responses and applied numerical codes that matched the categories. We measured interrater agreement using Fleiss’ Kappa statistic, specifying 0.75 or higher as the goal. We trained raters until they could meet this requirement.

Data Collection and Analysis:
A variety of survey collection methods were used including online, in person, and computer-assisted personal interviewing. In countries that primarily spoke languages other than English, the survey was translated into the local language. Participants were asked to respond to the following item: List a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 15 of what you think are the most important qualities of an effective (good) teacher. We analyzed the data by generating frequency counts for each of categories. We also used a country level variable (Human Development Index score) as a point of comparison.

Findings:
Overall, teacher dispositions, as opposed to knowledge and skills, were emphasized most. The ability to build trusting relationships with students was mentioned most frequently (15.5% of responses) followed by having a patient, caring, and kind personality (11.4%) and demonstrating workplace professionalism (8.0%). Also, contrary to our expectations, there was considerable overlap among stakeholder groups on the most valued qualities. All stakeholder groups shared 9 of their Top 10 most valued qualities, in varying order. An exception was that all stakeholder groups mentioned the teacher’s ability to build trusting relationships with students most frequently.

Additionally, we grouped countries by their Human Development Index (HDI) scores and compared these groups on their Top 10 most valued qualities. The HDI, developed by the United Nations Development Program, is a combination of three key dimensions in human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living. We found that countries with lower HDI scores tended to value the teacher’s professionalism more (second or third of their Top 10 list) than countries with higher HDI scores (fifth of their Top 10). We also found that the high HDI group valued the teacher’s knowledge of learners (understanding child development; indentifying individual learning needs and adjusting instruction accordingly) more than the lower scoring countries (third in their Top 10 list vs. eighth and ninth). Across all levels of development, countries mentioned the teacher’s ability to develop trusting relationships with students most frequently.

Conclusions:
To meet the global goal of placing an effective teacher in front of every student, researchers and policymakers acknowledge that it is critical to formulate a clear definition of teacher effectiveness (Bourgonje & Tromp, 2011). “Effectiveness” in any field is defined as the ability to produce intended or expected outcomes. This study reflects what stakeholders value most regarding the qualities of an effective teacher, giving us insights into the types of educational
outcomes they desire. The results from this survey can therefore serve as a starting point for developing a shared definition of valued outcomes and effectiveness as it relates to teaching.

References:


