RECRUITING AND DEVELOPING STRONG TEACHERS: A CASE STUDY OF SOUTH ASIA

Z. Naveed¹, S. Hollows¹, M. Rab¹, T. Kennedy², S. Fakhro², M. Gosling²

¹The British Council (PAKISTAN)
²The Research Base (UNITED KINGDOM)

Abstract

Globalisation has an ongoing impact on education and learning systems, and so the roles and responsibilities of teachers are constantly in flux. Teachers are not just responsible for students’ intellectual development but also for imparting a broad range of skills to allow students to fully participate in a competitive, information-based global society. In many developing and emerging economies, these changes have created a demand for foreign curriculum and assessment systems. South Asia, in particular, has seen an increase in the number of English medium private schools that offer the British curriculum. Mostly local teachers in these schools are in a unique situation: they have been trained for national education systems but are expected to deliver an international curriculum and prepare local students for foreign qualification exams using English as the medium of instruction, a second or third language for their students. The schools that form British Council’s Partner Schools Global Network (PSGN) are examples of this: the network connects international and English-medium schools globally to form ‘a community of schools’ that offer a British curriculum.

This paper will discuss the results of a study in South Asia which looks at the current situation of teacher training and capacity development in secondary schools within the PSGN in South Asia. The key areas of teacher training and capacity development under consideration will include, but not be limited to induction and preparation, learning and development, rewards and recognition, and occupational motivation. The findings of the research will identify the global best practices and progresses in areas of secondary teacher training and capacity development and also facilitate in understanding the motivations and decision-making practices of school leaders and principals behind opting for certain approaches. In case any significant gaps are identified, interventions and recommendations will be proposed to enhance the capacity of secondary teachers within the PSGN, which may also be replicable for teachers working in similar contexts.

Keywords: Secondary teachers, training, capacity development, South Asia, British Council, quantitative, qualitative.

1 INTRODUCTION

Globalization has had an ongoing impact on education and learning systems which is reflected in the rising number of international and private schools offering English as an official medium of instruction. The trend is evident; since 2000, the number of international schools around the world has doubled. The international schools in Asia, including the Middle East, were estimated to comprise more than half of the total number of international schools worldwide in 2010 [1]. The majority of these international schools are English-medium, many of which pursue a British curriculum [2]. Alongside international schools, there are also a considerable number of English-medium private schools that follow the same curriculum. Roughly over 1300 of these schools make up the British Council’s Partner Schools Global Network (PSGN): a programme offered by the British Council that connects international and English-medium schools globally to form ‘a community of schools’ that offer a British curriculum [3]. The curriculum is largely taught and assessed using English as a medium of instruction.

In South Asia, the prevalence of English-medium international and private schools is relatively high but varies across the countries. The PSGN schools, however, operate predominantly as English-medium private schools with the exception to Sri Lanka, where restrictions on private education have led privately owned English-medium schools to take up the status of international schools. Across the PSGN schools in South Asia, the vast majority of students and teachers are local residents rather than foreign nationals.
• In Pakistan, there is an extensive history of English-medium private schools [4], as well as a rapidly expanding number of international schools which are currently over 350 in number [5]. A fairly recent overview of English-medium schools in Pakistan also estimated that around 90% of the English-medium schools accommodate students from the middle-classes [4].

• It is estimated that there are 200 – 250 international schools in Sri Lanka [6]. Although this figure is likely to be inflated by private schools operating as international schools, in order to take advantage of a legal loophole in the current ban on establishing new private schools within the national education system [7].

• In Nepal, there is long-standing hostility towards the establishment of private schools from both conservative and communist factions [8]; however the situation is reported to be improving since the cessation of armed conflict in 2006 [9].

• In Bangladesh, government figures indicate that there are 162 English-medium schools [10]. Although analysts suggest that there may be considerably more English-medium schools operating outside of official channels; alternative estimates suggest that the number is over 500 [11]. The increase in English-medium schools is partly due to the increasing demand for international curriculums, assessment centres and qualifications. This is arguably especially true in South Asia where the roles and responsibilities of teachers are put in a constant flux. Teachers are not just responsible for students’ intellectual development but also for imparting a broad range of skills to allow students to fully participate in a competitive, information and knowledge based global society and economy. The success of an education and learning system is dependent on the ability of teachers to deliver effectively. A research project looking at teachers and students engaged in British curriculum suggested that the performance of students is subject to teachers’ ‘quality’ or role in classrooms. More specifically, “being taught over a 2-year course by a high quality (75th percentile) rather than low quality (25th percentile) teacher adds 0.565 of a General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) point per subject to a given student, or 33% of the standard deviation of GCSE points” [12].

This paper will discuss the results of a study on PSGN secondary schools in South Asia, which was undertaken by The Research Base on behalf of The British Council. The research identifies the post-initial teacher training and capacity development approaches opted by school leaders and principals, as well as their motivations and decision-making practices behind it. This paper, in particular, will focus on the professional learning and development frameworks that exist for qualified secondary teachers and examine how these compare to globally recognized best practices. In case of any significant gaps, interventions and recommendations are proposed to enhance the capacity of secondary teachers within the PSGN schools. These may also be of interest for teachers and schools working in similar contexts around the world.

2 METHODOLOGY

This paper focuses on PSGN secondary schools in four countries in South Asia: Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. As noted previously, these schools are largely English medium private school with the exception to Sri Lanka. A mixed method approach is opted which includes a literature review to inform global best practices, a survey with school leaders and principals and a few Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-depth Interviews (IDIs) to validate and expand on the survey findings. By utilizing the quantitative and qualitative techniques simultaneously, mixed method research includes the benefits of both methodologies and ensures accountability [13].

The literature review accessed a variety of resources including academic reports, university publications and some grey literature to identify the evidence of best practice regarding professional learning and development of secondary teachers. Since PSGN schools form a unique context where the curriculum and qualifications are ‘international’ in nature but the majority of teachers are locally trained, the literature focuses on international and local private English-medium schools both.

An electronic survey was circulated to all school principals and selected school leaders of the PSGN schools across four countries to gather a quantitative perspective on the given topic. It included questions on policies and specific approaches towards learning and development of teachers. This information was useful in highlighting specific trends and significant relationships. A total of 562 out of 776 respondents participated in the survey; however only 318 individuals completed the full survey. The top three job titles of respondents included Principals (37%), Vice Principals (20%) and Head Teachers (10%) amongst others. 56% of the respondents were male, whereas 44% of the total...
sample were females. The responses from the survey have been weighted to ensure that responses from countries with lower participation have a greater relative weight. An advantage of doing this is to avoid findings relevant to one country’s local context to apply to others equally. Percentages have also been used with respect to all those who responded to a particular question, rather than to those who completed the survey.

Five Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and five In-depth Interviews (IDIs) were conducted country-wise at the Schools Now! Conference in Colombo, Sri Lanka 2017. The conference had participation from school leaders globally that are a part of the British Council’s PSGN schools [14]. The discussions facilitated in validating the survey findings as well as in providing a comprehensive insight to the approaches and practices opted for professional learning and development of secondary teachers.

3 RESULTS

3.1 International Best Practices in Professional Learning and Development

The themes presented in this section highlight the international best practices in terms of professional learning and development which appear to be well suited to the context of PSGN schools.

3.1.1 Embedded Learning

Embedding learning within school and classroom has proved to help in establishing long term and sustainable changes within schools. In terms of international best practice, the evidence shows an inclination towards establishing in-school collaborative professional development practices, structured lesson observations and clear feedback loops. It is also useful for the professional development training opportunities to be suited to individual needs of the teacher. A recent qualitative study within the United States, for example, found that the principals believe professional development for teachers is most useful when it is ‘embedded in real instructional and curricular practices that are sustained over time and opportunities for peer-to-peer collaboration are incorporated’ [15]. Similarly, a research in Bangladesh highlighted that practices such as peer-to-peer collaboration, classroom observation and school-based training tend to have a more positive impact in contrast to professional development opportunities that are pursued at an individual level [16].

3.1.2 Professional Development Practices in High-Performing School Systems

It is also worth reviewing the relevant best practices emerging in the area of teachers’ professional learning and development from high-performing school systems.

• Lesson Study Model: This model has originated from Japan, where this collaborative practice was first introduced in the 1870’s [17]. This practice consists of teachers forming a lesson study group and identifying a pedagogical issue which is then thoroughly researched by the members of the group. One member often teaches the group for further observation and feedback. An example of a similar model is the ‘Spiral of Inquiry’ which has been introduced by the British Columbia in Canada [18].

• Teaching Communities: A more formalized and sustainable process of peer-to-peer learning through the establishment of teaching communities can also have a positive impact on teachers’ development [19]. However, the success of this practice is dependent on a clear leadership and purpose within the teaching community, along with substantial financial support.

• Evidence-based Practice: Teachers are encouraged to participate in university-based training as well as to take an evidence-based approach to classroom practice; within an environment where teachers are given ‘high levels of professional trust and autonomy’. The interest in the Finnish model has increased since it was named top of Pearson’s international education rankings in 2012 [18].

• International Collaboration: There is also a rise in the number of teachers within British schools, who are developing informal networks with colleagues from other international schools. This practice offers an opportunity to utilize the online and digital media in order to learn from other teachers, for example through online shadowing [18].

• Individualized Professional Development Plans: This practice currently exists at a top performing school system in Shanghai. The school administrators take responsibility to develop personalized professional development plans for teachers that not only meet their requirements but are also aligned with the broader school goals [19].
• Feedback Loops: Through feedback loops, teachers are requested to rate the effectiveness of professional courses before, immediately after and at a later pre-defined interval. An evident benefit of this is that school administrators are able to gauge the long-term effectiveness of such trainings through the experience of teachers themselves. Hong Kong and Singapore are known to use this approach frequently [19].

• Scheduled Collaborative Learning: A top performing school, British Colombia, ensures to schedule a slot for teachers within their weekly calendar to pursue collaborative professional learning [19]. A relevant example of this is when senior teachers are made entitled to lead collaborative working groups as a part of in-school professional development practices [19].

A more generalized recommendation includes involvement of teachers in decision-making regarding areas and activities related to their professional development training; while simultaneously ensuring that the opted practices are sustainable and supported by school leadership [20].

3.1.3 English as a Medium of Instruction

It has been noted that most teachers working within English-medium schools do not receive professional development trainings aimed at delivering lessons in English language to students for whom English is often a second or third language. This is also largely true for teachers as well. Recent research has highlighted reluctance by teachers in acknowledging the pedagogical implications of teaching while using English as a medium of instruction. This translates into lack of willingness by teachers to adopt techniques that will facilitate students’ English language comprehension; for example through teaching subject-specific vocabulary and adapting to teaching resources relevant to the local context [21].

The emerging evidence increasingly points towards the value of providing training on content delivery in the English language for teachers working in English medium and international schools worldwide. Furthermore, it is also important to provide support to teachers with lower levels of English proficiency to improve their English language skills and knowledge.

3.1.4 Teaching Assistants

The employment of teaching assistants or teaching support staff is on the rise in English-medium and international schools. One research highlights that majority of the teaching assistants employed within international schools are local residents. Even though the professional development opportunities largely vary across different international schools, the school principals identified the following key training areas to be relevant for teaching assistants: effective classroom management, English as an Additional Language (EAL), general training on learning disabilities, behaviour management, and planning and preparation [22]. In addition, University of Northampton has developed a specialized training for teaching assistants working in international schools settings. The Certificate for Teaching Assistant focuses on ‘intercultural teaching and learning strategies’, whereby acknowledging the role that teaching assistants can play in facilitating students with diverse cultural backgrounds and learning styles [23].

3.1.5 Motivation

There is increasing evidence drawn from global best practices which highlights a direct relationship between teachers’ motivation, effective professional development and students’ learning outcomes. An independent review of the literature shows a positive impact of teacher motivation on professional development programmes across the teaching profession. Some of the factors that influence teachers’ motivation in this regard include maintaining ‘input and control over the Professional Development (PD) processes’, taking collaborative approach to combat teachers’ sense of isolation and encouraging them to develop their own sense of self-efficacy [24]. According to another recent study, high levels of motivation are especially important while adopting innovative approaches whereby teachers’ recognize the significance of the content being imparted and… how this content is connected to them personally and professionally’ [25]. The value of participating in a learning and development programme should be conveyed to the participating teachers, rather than assuming a certain level of commitment and interest from them.

Research highlights that having a rewards and recognition system for teachers can amplify the return on teachers’ professional learning and development programmes. A study on teachers in Pakistan found that teachers tend to highly value rewards and recognition, which in turn feeds back into high motivation. The findings of the research suggest performance-released pay to be an effective way of
producing extrinsic motivation [26]. A Kenyan study identified recognition by senior leaders, either verbal or written; to have the greatest impact on teachers’ motivation and performance levels [27]. This is further supported by another research which identifies effective recognition practices to include more than verbal or written praise. An example of this can be regular in-school teaching awards [28].

3.2 Trends in PSGN: Quantitative & Qualitative Findings

3.2.1 Quantitative Findings

More than half of all principals and school leaders surveyed confirmed that secondary teachers at their schools participate in professional development activities either once (24%) or twice (27%) per year, while another 23% said that teachers participate once per term. Even though majority of the teachers do participate in professional development activities, the survey findings indicate that more frequent participation in professional development is relatively rare. For example, only 13% of the respondents said that teachers at their school participate in training twice per term, while another 3% said they participate once per week. Similarly, 4% of the respondents said that teachers at their school participate once every couple of years. The content offered to teachers through professional development training was largely similar across the region. The three widespread content areas include curriculum & subject content (52%), lesson planning and preparation (49%) and pedagogy (47%).

![Figure 1. Professional Development Training Content: All Respondents (Weighted)](image)

Almost half of all school leaders and principals who participated in the survey said they provide an in-school development programme (46%) and external training courses (45%) for qualified secondary teachers at their school. Coaching or mentoring is the least popular professional development opportunity for qualified secondary teachers (24%). However, there is significant variation in country specific results. External training courses are most common in Pakistan and Nepal in comparison to in-school development programmes, which are more popular in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

![Figure 2. Professional Development Training for Qualified Secondary Teachers: All Respondents (Weighted)](image)

In case of teaching assistants and support staff, the professional development opportunities are lower as compared to those for qualified secondary teachers. Only less than one third of the school leaders and principals said that they provide an in-school development programme (31%) or coaching and mentoring by other staff (27%) to the teaching assistant staff. These practices were mostly similar across the region.
School leaders opt for similar approaches to assess the effectiveness of professional development programmes across the region, where the top three include classroom observations (45%), pupil attainment and exam performance (40%) and pupil feedback (40%).

The survey findings also considered the influence of teachers’ employment status, such as being employed on a temporary or permanent basis, on school leader or principals’ approach towards teachers’ professional learning and development. Such an influence was confirmed by roughly half (45%) of the total respondents. The figures in case of Pakistan (46%) and Nepal (53%) were relatively high as compared to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (39% and 40% respectively). Of the respondents who confirmed teachers’ professional development variation due to their employment status, a significant majority also said that the approach differs largely in terms of the school's financial (80% of respondents) and time investment (77% of respondents).

More than one third of the total respondents (36%) confirmed having shared or peripatetic secondary teachers who worked in more than one school simultaneously. However the majority (55%) of respondents said that their school does not employ any peripatetic teachers, whereas the remaining respondents were unsure. The practice of employing shared or peripatetic secondary teachers was the most common in Nepal (60%) and the least common in Sri Lanka (9%). Almost half of all respondents (45%) in Pakistan and around one quarter in Bangladesh (26%) said they currently employ peripatetic teachers. Similar to the case of temporary or permanent secondary teachers, almost three quarter of respondents confirmed that their learning and development approach for shared and peripatetic teachers varies in terms of financial and time investment as compared to other secondary teachers.

School leaders and principals were requested to rate the perceived motivation levels of their teachers and to identify the factors affecting these motivation levels. The region depicted an average score of 2.9 out of a maximum score of 4. Considering country specific scores, Pakistan and Bangladesh gave an average score of 3.0, whereas Nepal and Sri Lanka scored 2.8 and 2.7 respectively. According to the respondents, the top three important factors affecting secondary teachers’ motivation include financial compensation (32% of respondents), opportunities for career progression (29% of respondents), and work environment and culture (25% of respondents).

### 3.2.2 Qualitative Findings

The qualitative phase of the research further informed regarding the existing approaches towards professional learning and development for secondary teachers at the PSGN schools in South Asia.

- **Mode:** It was noted that majority of the PSGN schools participate in a combination of in-house and external Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes. The primary reason for all schools to engage in some form of in-house CPD programmes was due to lack of resources available to invest externally. In-house CPD programmes are usually being delivered by senior teachers and leaders and cover activities from informal class-room observations to structured training sessions. However, there are exceptions, such as in the case of a school in Sri Lanka which sends its teaching staff for apprenticeships and internships to ‘expose them to the working world’.

- **Content:** Many PSGN schools formally engage in a teacher needs’ analysis or a similar process through which the development requirements are either directly reported by teachers or
independently assessed by school leaders. This information is then used as basis to opt for a certain type of training.

- Engagement: An interesting finding is the reluctance among some experienced teachers to participate in CPD programmes. According to one group of interviewed school leaders and principals, teachers ‘feel like they know all that they are taught [on CPD]’. An alternative explanation provided was with respect to A level teachers, ‘who are reportedly less easy to recruit, and therefore able to inflict their reluctance to engage in CPD [programmes] upon schools, given that they are a scarce resource’.

- Effectiveness: With reference to the discussion on effectiveness of different types of trainings, many mentioned the benefits of external trainings. These included networking and collaborative opportunities, accreditation and exposure to new perspectives. However, these trainings are costly, time consuming and may involve scheduling issues. There was some mixed feedback on usage of online learning which is considered to be cost effective, accessible and ensures effective usage of technology. Yet, it was described as having relatively less usefulness due to lack of existing monitoring mechanisms and follow-ups.

- Rewards & Recognition: Many of the respondents acknowledged the role of rewards and recognition in boosting morale and motivation of secondary teachers. A school leader from a Sri Lanka mentioned the use of an incremental pay policy at their school, whereby teachers get salary increases relating to their years of teaching, their student results and qualifications. Similarly, a Bangladeshi school leader described their annual assessment process, through which each teacher is graded and receives a certificate accordingly. This helps teachers to stay motivated and to work harder. An exception to this was shared by another Bangladeshi participant who stated that teachers ‘should be self-motivated as teachers […] and should not depend on reward or recognition’.

- Motivation: School leaders and principals discussed the need for acknowledging the contribution made by teachers due to its effect on maintaining the motivation to teach. Almost all those who participated in the qualitative research quoted ‘salary’ as the key motivator for teachers. The reason for this is that teachers reportedly do not earn very much, so improving their remuneration would be an effective means to improve motivation. Few schools also had a bonus system to reward teacher performance (e.g. through students’ results), but most highlighted the need to do more in terms of financial rewards (e.g. offering performance related bonuses etc.) in comparison to existing practices.

4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After assessing the findings from survey and qualitative research, the relevant international best practices advocate for a strong role of supportive school leadership that will provide a dedicated resource to lead on the professional development of teachers. Professional learning and development programmes should have teachers’ engagement and consultation at the decision-making stage whilst ensuring that these programmes are tailored according to the identified needs and interests [19][20][24]. Focus on peer-to-peer collaboration, class room observation, school-based training, lesson study model and other forms of collaborative learning are also mandatory for beneficial outcomes [15][16] [17][19]. An effective evaluation and assessment of teachers’ professional development should include continuous feedback from teachers after the trainings [19]. Teachers should also be provided with support to develop English language competence in order to ensure effective pedagogical content delivery using English as a medium of instruction. Similarly, new teaching assistant and support staff should be provided with basic training in child protection, effective classroom management, English as an Additional Language (EAL), working with children who have additional educational needs, behaviour management, and planning and preparation [22][23]. The following highlights a set of key recommendations which are relevant to PSGN schools in South Asia, and should be replicable to similar contexts:

(i) Evidence suggests that in-house trainings are the most commonly used training mode across the region (46%). These are usually opted due to high costs relating to engagement from an external party. However, school leaders can make in-house trainings more effective by involving teachers through active consultation whilst ensuring that the organised trainings are well suited to their requirements. Alternatively, scheduled collaborative learning and teaching communities can be established to bridge the existing gaps in learning and professional development trainings. The success of these initiatives is subject to the school’s provision for an additional resource to formally
manage and coordinate. It is also worth noting that this approach may be more cost effective in the long-run as compared to hiring an external trainer.

(ii) Usage of E-learning (34%) is a relatively less popular mode for teachers’ learning and development. One of the stated reasons for this is the lack of follow-ups on classroom implementation in the post-training period. Developing an effective mechanism to counter this will not only be cost effective overall but it will also provide ample flexibility and accessibility for teachers. Moreover, this platform can be used to develop international collaborative linkages which can result into online coaching, mentoring and shadowing practices.

(iii) Clear feedback loops should be formally introduced as means to gauge the effectiveness of development trainings and programmes. For this to be useful, the provision of feedback and input by teachers should be a continuous process over a defined period of time. Currently, the top three assessment approaches include classroom observations (45%), pupil attainment and exam performance (40%) and pupil feedback (40%).

(iv) English as a medium of instruction has a strong impact on effective pedagogical content delivery by teachers. This is especially true in case of teachers for whom English is as a second or third language, such as in the case of South Asia. Currently, only 10% of the respondents confirmed to be offering trainings on English language which highlights a strong need for this gap to be eliminated as soon as possible.

(v) The surveyed respondents have depicted a short-term approach towards the training and development of their temporary, peripatetic and support staff. The variation is evident in terms of provision for time and money. There is a need for an attitude shift whereby the contribution of such teachers is not undermined. This will positively impact school’s performance and improve teacher retention levels, whilst developing a strong pool of qualified teachers in the system.

(vi) School leaders and principals do not perceive a significant influence of CPD programmes (13%) on teachers’ motivation level which is in contrast to the international best practices. It may suggest a lack of awareness of school leaders and principals regarding the benefits and utility of CPD programmes. Efforts should be made by schools to acknowledge and cascade the value of CPD programmes to teachers and the wider school network. If successfully implemented, it can compensate for the lack of financial remuneration to teachers due to the present budget constraints as highlighted in the interviews.

REFERENCES


