

2ND ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL EDUCATION MINISTER'S CONFERENCE (APREMC-II)



POLICY BRIEF

Training and supporting teachers in adapting to the post-pandemic era in the Asia Pacific

Introduction

Teachers are the most important actors in improving students' learning outcomes and thus in addressing a learning crisis in the region. Moreover, the unprecedented and extensive school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have affected about 43 million teachers in school education in the Asia-Pacific region. These teachers were at risk of losing their jobs due to budget cuts, they had to address the new challenge of teaching remotely, as well as worrying about their own and their families' health and well-being (UNESCO-International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2020; UIS, 2021).

Throughout the school closures, teachers continued to teach under extremely fluid and trying conditions: increased workloads, having to use new and unfamiliar technologies without adequate training, experiencing a lack of materials for online instruction, high levels of physical and mental stress, and insufficient support.

This policy brief focuses on teachers in formal education and their preparedness and readiness for the learning recovery and to support deeper and more qualitative learning in medium and long term. It also shades light on structural changes needed for teachers' selection, recruitment and training. We recognize the importance of improving training and professional development of non-formal educators and facilitators, in particular in addressing the learning needs of those that dropped out or never engaged in the formal school system.

Key issues and challenges in Asia-Pacific

Decrease in teachers' value and status in society

Effective learning in and outside the classrooms calls for qualified and motivated teachers. A high value given to the teaching profession can help attract top candidates to join and remain in the teacher workforce. There is also evidence of a strong correlation between the value teachers enjoy in society and positive student outcomes (OECD, 2020; Dolton et al., 2018), and this value remains relatively high in some Asia and Pacific countries compared to the rest of the world.

The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS – OECD, 2020) reported that the perception of the value of the teaching profession in 2018 was higher in Viet Nam (92% of surveyed lower teachers agreed with the statement that the teaching profession is valued in society), Singapore (72%), Republic of Korea (67%), Kazakhstan (63%) and Shanghai-China (60%) than in other OECD member and partner countries. Similarly, the Global Teacher Status Index (Dolton et al., 2018) found that teachers in China had the highest status among surveyed countries, and teachers in Malaysia, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, India, New Zealand and Singapore were also highly respected (ibid.).

However, even in countries where historically teaching is highly valued, there has been a general decline in the status of, and respect for, teachers owing to many inter-related factors such as low salaries, decrease in quality of working conditions, increased workloads and lack of support for teachers' well-being (OECD, 2020).

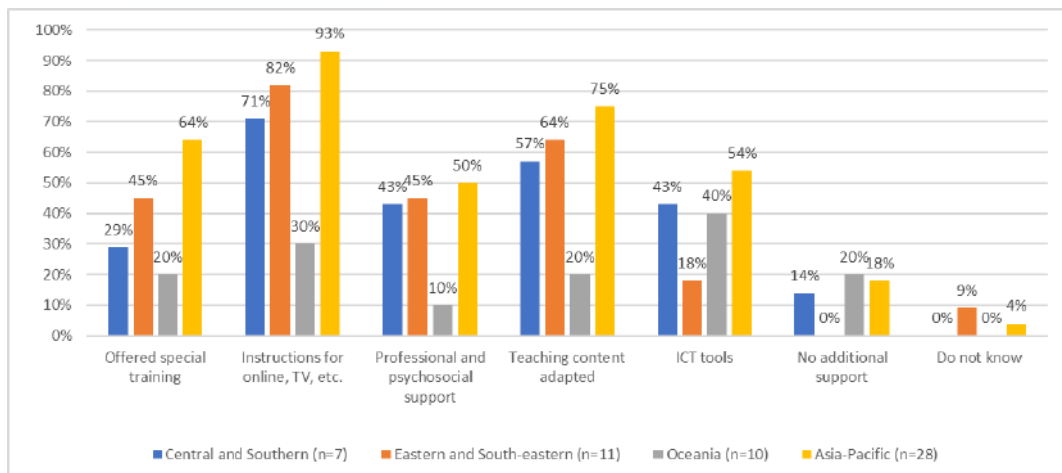
Gaps in teacher education and continuous professional development

Teachers require quality initial preparation and continuous professional development to facilitate effective student learning. While more than 90% of teachers received pedagogical training according to national standards in most countries in Asia-Pacific, this share falls to 70% or less in some countries in South Asia and Oceania (UNESCO and UNICEF, 2021). Even in countries that provide pedagogical training, teachers report a need for further training in key areas of teaching and learning (OECD, 2020), in particular, how to assess students' learning, provide relevant feedback and implement differentiated learning strategies (OECD, 2020). All these are key competencies needed to identify and mitigate learning loss in the short term.

The COVID-19 crisis has also underlined the importance of digital technologies for distance teaching and learning. However, many teachers are not sufficiently trained to teach online,

with unfamiliar tools. Countries in Asia-Pacific have responded to this challenge in various ways: teachers in 93% of the countries surveyed received instructions on how to use the radio, television and online learning platforms for distance teaching; in 75%, they were able to adapt existing contents for online teaching; and in almost 64%, they received special training to organize remote learning. No additional support was provided to teachers in almost 18% of countries due to either insufficient capacity or need for such support (UIS, 2021). Efforts to further develop teachers' capacity to use ICT tools must increase and be sustained, while being sensitive to the digital divides between urban and rural areas, and between better-off students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Figure 1: Support provided to teachers for remote teaching in Asia-Pacific
Percentage of countries in Asia-Pacific reporting providing support to teachers (by type of support)



Source: UIS (2021)

Limited performance-based career progression and gender inequality

Providing structured and diversified pathways for career progression linked to performance appraisal is key to develop a professional, motivated and competent teaching workforce in Asia-Pacific. While some countries in Asia-Pacific such as Singapore, New Zealand and Australia have a long history of structured professional career pathways for teachers and clear performance appraisal based on teacher standards, many developing countries, continue to have relatively flat career structures where promotion is based almost solely on years of experience rather than appraisal of performance (UNESCO, 2016).

Moreover, in some countries in Asia, the progression and promotion of teachers display profound gender disparities, with men favoured over women. Female school leaders in Asia fall far below the OECD average of 47% with less than 10% in Japan, less than 20% in the Republic of Korea, and less than 30% in Viet Nam (OECD, 2020).

Teachers' heavy workloads and well-being

Teachers' workloads increased during the COVID-19 pandemic because they had to adapt to new school arrangements, and different modes of teaching. To carry out their responsibilities

effectively, they have to be physically and mentally healthy, feel safe and secure. Research on teachers in crisis contexts has shown that those who have built up their own social-emotional skills, and have access to regular professional debriefing and counselling services, are better equipped to provide similar support to their students. Younger and inexperienced teachers lacking these skills are more likely to suffer from stress and burnout, which in turn can lead to absenteeism, attrition and poor teaching quality. After the stressful COVID-19 experiences and with warnings about more challenges ahead, it is obvious that teachers need support and training to improve their social emotional skills and build their own and their students' resilience for personal well-being.

Key priority areas in Asia-Pacific

Key priority areas for the learning recovery

Training on assessment and remediation methods to identify and address students' learning losses: A key immediate priority is that teachers become capable of identifying and addressing learning loss caused by the prolonged school closures. In particular, teachers' knowledge and capacity to use adequate diagnostic assessment tools are vital for identifying learners' needs, and for designing the most suitable remedial programmes. Training and continuous professional development on assessment and remediation are needed to enhance teachers' competencies and skills in this area. Various assessment methods and guides are available to identify students' strengths and weaknesses, but teachers must know how to select appropriate types of assessment and remedial programmes to match the diverse needs of their students. Models from the non-formal education sector, such as the Teaching at the Right Level approach, demonstrate the advantages of flexibility in adjusting the curriculum and adoption of innovative practices.

Safeguarding teachers' health and well-being: As teachers' workload increases during the learning recovery, policies and strategies need to be put in place to safeguard teachers' health and well-being. One conceptual framework designed to address teachers' psychological, social-emotional and safety needs is based on four constructs – teacher self-efficacy, job stress and burnout, job satisfaction, and social-emotional competence – which interact with factors that influence teachers' well-being at six levels – individual, school, community, national, regional and global (Falk et al., 2019) . The Online Reading Club for teachers in Zhejiang Province is an example of how networks and peer support can alleviate isolation, worries and stress during times of crisis.

Box 1: Online Reading Club for teachers in Zhejiang Province, China

The Zhejiang Department of Education set up online reading clubs to connect teachers who were isolated at home. Teachers supported each other through exchange of information and advice on how to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and related health issues, and explored ways to include lessons learned from the pandemic into their curriculum, lesson plans and teaching practices. Source: Miao et al., 2020.

Key priorities for transforming teaching and the teaching profession

UNESCO's Futures of Education report calls for teachers to have a central role in creating a new social contract – an implicit agreement among members of a society to cooperate – for education for our shared futures. Enabling teachers to contribute to this social contract calls for new policies that govern the selection, preparation and career trajectories of teachers, and in the organization of the profession itself (UNESCO, 2021a). Heeding the Futures of Education's call in Asia-Pacific, three priority areas for this systemic transformation of education emerge:

Reforming teacher recruitment, preparation and management: Attracting top, motivated candidates to join and remain in the teaching profession requires significant effort and a comprehensive approach to teacher policies starting from competitive and quality-based teacher selection and recruitment and including attractive teachers' remuneration and working conditions throughout their career as a key mean for attracting and retaining talented teachers. The Teacher Policy Development Guide was designed to help national policy-makers and education officials formulate comprehensive teacher policies and align them with their national development plans for maximum impact on learning (UNESCO-International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2019). It was instrumental for the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) in Lao PDR in developing its national teacher policy. The Capacity Development for Education (CapED) programme in UNESCO is working with MoES to include a dimension on crises and emergencies in the forthcoming National Teacher Policy based on a module on crisis-sensitive teacher policy (UNESCO-International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2022).

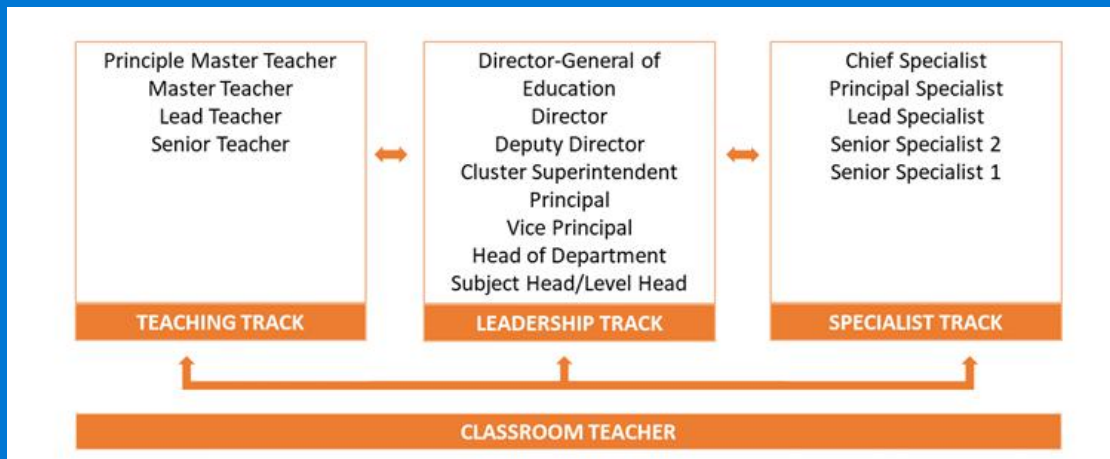
Box 2: Development of a comprehensive National Teacher Policy in Lao PDR

A study to examine teacher-related legislative documents in Lao PDR found three laws, one draft law, 34 decrees and other legal documents. They are aligned with most of the nine dimensions in the Teacher Policy Development Guide. The Ministry of Education and Sports is developing a comprehensive National Teacher Policy based on the recommendations from the study. Source: UNESCO, 2020.

Well-integrated teacher career pathways and continuous professional development: Teacher competency frameworks that articulate standards and expectations of teachers, and comprehensive teacher career pathways can guide their professional learning and practice as they move up their career ladders. This progression should be closely linked to competency frameworks (e.g., the Southeast Asia Teacher Competency Framework) and professional standards (e.g., the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers) along clear pathways for promotion and diversification (e.g., Singapore's career tracks for teachers presented in the box). When properly developed and implemented, these frameworks and standards, together with comprehensive teacher policies, give teachers the opportunity to improve their professional practice and advance their careers.

Box 3: Multi-track career pathways in Singapore

In Singapore, teachers have diverse routes for advancement in their career. The pathways include a teaching track, leadership track and senior specialist track. Advancement along each of the tracks will allow teachers to assume leadership roles in their schools and among the teaching fraternity. For example, the leadership track can take fully trained teachers beyond the schools to the Ministry of Education, thus giving increased opportunities to use their experience and expertise on education policies and leadership issues.



Source: Darling-Hammond et al. 2017.

Training on the integration of ICT into teaching and learning: ICTs are flexible tools that a teacher can integrate into learning in the classroom and at a distance. Increasingly, hybrid and blended learning approaches will serve the best interest of students, backed by well thought-out policies and clear guidelines. Integrating in-person pedagogy with the use of appropriate technology to cater to the needs of students in their context will be a critical factor. To build the capacity of teachers, UNESCO's ICT Competency Framework for Teachers prescribes different levels of ICT competencies and skills teachers should have to keep pace with the rapid technological development (UNESCO, 2018), as well as pointing to 'low tech' applications, such as radios, to deliver lessons to suit the local conditions.

Box 3: Regional open-source platform in the Pacific

The UNESCO-World Bank-UNICEF Consortium is supporting an open-source platform, based on Moodle, for home-based distance learning and a regional repository of curriculum aligned resources for learners and teachers in Kiribati, Marshall Islands (Republic of), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu. It will include training resources for teachers, as well as IT support for staff, teachers and educators. Additionally, the development of audio resources for podcasts and radio is also underway as offline alternatives.

Source: UNESCO, 2021b.

Policy pointers

Immediate actions for the learning recovery	Medium-term and long-term transformations
System-level at centralized/national or sub-national levels	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare guidelines for assessment and recovery of learning loss, and organize sessions to build teachers' capacity in applying them. • Conduct Training of Trainers workshops and build partnerships with education technology, private sector and content experts that can build capacity of the teacher educators/trainers. • Formulate and implement comprehensive policies and strategies to safeguard teachers' health, well-being and safety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen teacher standards, differentiated by career levels (e.g. novice teacher, teacher, expert teacher etc) and by tracks, reflecting the competencies for a learner-centred approach to teaching and learning • Transform initial teacher education to be focused on the applied knowledge and skills needed for effective teaching in the classroom, particularly strengthening capacity in blended and distance teaching, special education needs, assessment methods, and teaching transferable skills; • Organise relevant continuous professional development, integrated into teachers' career structure and adapted to their training needs; • Include ICT competency standards for teachers and subsequent integration of the standards into curricula and training modules. • In teacher education and professional development, foster digital literacy, so that teachers can integrate the use of ICT into more learner-centred pedagogical practices. • Incorporate a crisis-sensitive component into existing national teacher policies • Ensure that social-emotional and psychological competences are included in pre-service teacher education and continuous professional development. • Promote open and broad social dialogues, and facilitate opportunities for teachers to participate in discussions so that their voices are heard and included in the decision-making processes.
School level	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train teachers to use appropriate types of assessment for immediate diagnosis of the extent of students' learning loss and differences among them. • Train teachers to prepare materials for online learning, and improve their preparedness in delivering blended and hybrid learning, and education in emergencies/conflict. • Enable teachers' access to counselling and psycho-social support and other services. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up teacher peer-support groups to reduce mental stress and provide professional support during emergencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empower teachers to establish a learning community in the school - peer-learning networks to support continuous professional development. Appraise teachers' work based on competency standards and provide feedback for professional development and career advancement

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The Global Education 2030 Agenda

UNESCO, as the United Nations' specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.



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