

What impact? Professional learning in Timor Leste

ACER's work in Timor Leste is seeking to identify the impact of professional learning and mentoring on student learning outcomes over time, as **Adeola Capel** explains.



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The Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has engaged ACER to conduct a longitudinal evaluation from 2017 to 2021 of the Timor Leste Professional Learning and Mentoring Program (PLMP) which runs from 2016 to 2021, in order to provide policymakers with an understanding of the extent to which the PLMP and the introduction of a new curriculum in Timor Leste supports school leaders and teachers to improve teaching practice, and student learning outcomes.

The PLMP is one program under the \$120 million Australia Timor-Leste Partnership for Human Development, a five-year, multi-sector partnership addressing health, education, water, sanitation, nutrition, gender, disability and social protection.

The PLMP aims to build leadership and teacher capacity to enable sustained improvement in teaching practice over time in order to improve student outcomes.

Launched in April 2016 and being rolled out nationally over five years, the program involves tailored training for school leaders backed up by regular classroom observation and in-classroom mentoring of teachers by international and national mentors.

Designed with the Timor Leste Ministry of Education, the PLMP aims to support teachers to effectively implement the National Basic Education Curriculum, which includes understanding new curriculum content and new pedagogies. Key foci of the program include:

- continuous teacher professional development
- strong school leadership
- systems to assess student learning outcomes
- systems to support and evaluate teacher performance.

The longitudinal evaluation of the PLMP will use both quantitative and qualitative approaches to understand the extent to

which the PLMP supports leaders and teachers to develop teaching knowledge and to change teaching practices over time. ACER will also investigate the extent to which teacher participation in PLMP leads to improvements in learning outcomes for students.

The PLMP longitudinal evaluation is one result of recommendations in DFAT's *Investing in Teachers* evaluation, which examined Australia's recent and current investments in teacher development, including desk reviews of 27 bilateral Australian aid investment programs. The *Investing in Teachers* report found almost no data on outcomes that could be attributed to DFAT's teacher development investments, and determined that it was impossible to judge whether teacher development has led to improved teaching practices or improved student learning outcomes.

The *Investing in Teachers* report recommended that DFAT should work systematically to improve its monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes of investments in teacher development. In its management response, DFAT committed to support a series of multi-year studies on teacher development investments to evaluate the effects of teacher development on teacher knowledge and practice, and student learning.

The PLMP longitudinal evaluation commenced in 2017. ACER is due to report its findings in 2020. ■

LINKS

For more information about ACER's education and development research program, visit www.acer.org/research/areas-of-research/education-and-development

To read DFAT's *Investing in Teachers* evaluation, visit <http://dfat.gov.au/aid/how-we-measure-performance/ode/other-work/pages/teacher-quality.aspx>