



EDUCATION ANALYTICS SERVICE: TEACHER DEVELOPMENT MULTI-YEAR STUDIES



REPORT HIGHLIGHTS - MULTI-COUNTRY REPORT

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THE TEACHER DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE

The global learning crisis is driving a focus on improving learning. Teacher development and improving teaching quality, is therefore at the heart of many education systems' policies and programs.

The Teacher Development Multi-Year Studies were initiated by the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to provide evidence on the impact of its investments in teacher development and how they can be more effective. Over 5 years, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) conducted research in 3 countries: Timor-Leste, Vanuatu and Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR).

The research investigated the extent to which Australian investments in the professional development of teachers have contributed to improved outcomes. It also sought to understand the conditions of success for teacher professional development investments, and how lessons learned can inform future programming.

This report highlights how teacher professional learning can work with system and contextual factors to lead to better outcomes. It provides a set of strategies for future thinking related to teacher development investments.

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT INSIGHTS

The Teacher Development Multi-Year Studies examine the following DFAT-funded programs:

- **Timor-Leste:** Apoio Lideransa liuhusi Mentoria no Aprendizajen (ALMA)
- **Vanuatu:** Vanuatu Education Support Program (VESP)
- **Lao PDR:** Basic Education Quality and Access in Laos Program (BEQUAL).

DFAT's investments support the rollout of new primary curricula. With a focus on improving literacy and numeracy outcomes, these curricula include a significant shift in content and pedagogies. The investments include inputs such as teacher in-service support, teacher guides, textbooks and classroom resources, scripted or structured lesson plans, and mentoring.

The teacher development initiatives are designed to support the implementation of the new curricula. However, while each teacher development investment has a similar intention, the approaches to support teachers – including application and effectiveness – are different.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

- Mixed methods
- 437 in-depth interviews with principals, teachers, sub-national and national government stakeholders, and donor partners
- 45 focus group discussions with parents and community in Vanuatu
- 190 classroom observations of teachers
- Questionnaire and student assessment data

IMPACT OF DFAT INVESTMENTS

Teaching quality



The 3 teacher development investments have supported improvements to teaching quality and the implementation of each country's new primary curriculum. There has been some shift from teacher-directed to student-centred approaches – the primary focus of each country's curriculum reform. With the support of these investments, teachers have strengthened their knowledge, attitudes and practices in line with curriculum intentions.

***'Biggest change...is in teaching approach and moving from rote learning towards more active learning, providing students chances to learn more and better.'* – National interviewee, Lao PDR**

However, evidence from the study suggests that the impact on teaching quality varied widely. Teacher development investments need to be part of a sustainable system of continuous professional learning. This is critical to improving the effectiveness and sustainability of the investments.

In Vanuatu and Lao PDR, a consistent message from teachers and principals was the need for more comprehensive and refresher training, and ongoing professional learning support.

***'We rush through to complete the training and by the end some are still unclear about the content of the teacher guides...not enough support to guide the teachers with the curriculum. We only attended the training and that's all.'* – Teacher, Vanuatu**

While DFAT's investment in Timor-Leste presented a model for an ongoing professional learning system, it relied heavily on donor resources. Addressing challenges to institutionalising the approach into Timor-Leste government systems is ongoing.



Student learning



Study data indicated that DFAT's investments in teacher development have supported changes in student participation, interest and engagement. However, it is not possible to report whether DFAT's investments have contributed to improved student literacy and numeracy outcomes. This is due to challenges related to data availability, and the impact of COVID-19 and natural disasters.

Teachers are one of the most important in-school factors influencing student learning outcomes. Valid and reliable learning data are critical to understanding associations between teaching and student learning. The experience of collecting existing and new data in the studies confirms the importance of having access to quality, timely and reliable student outcomes data.

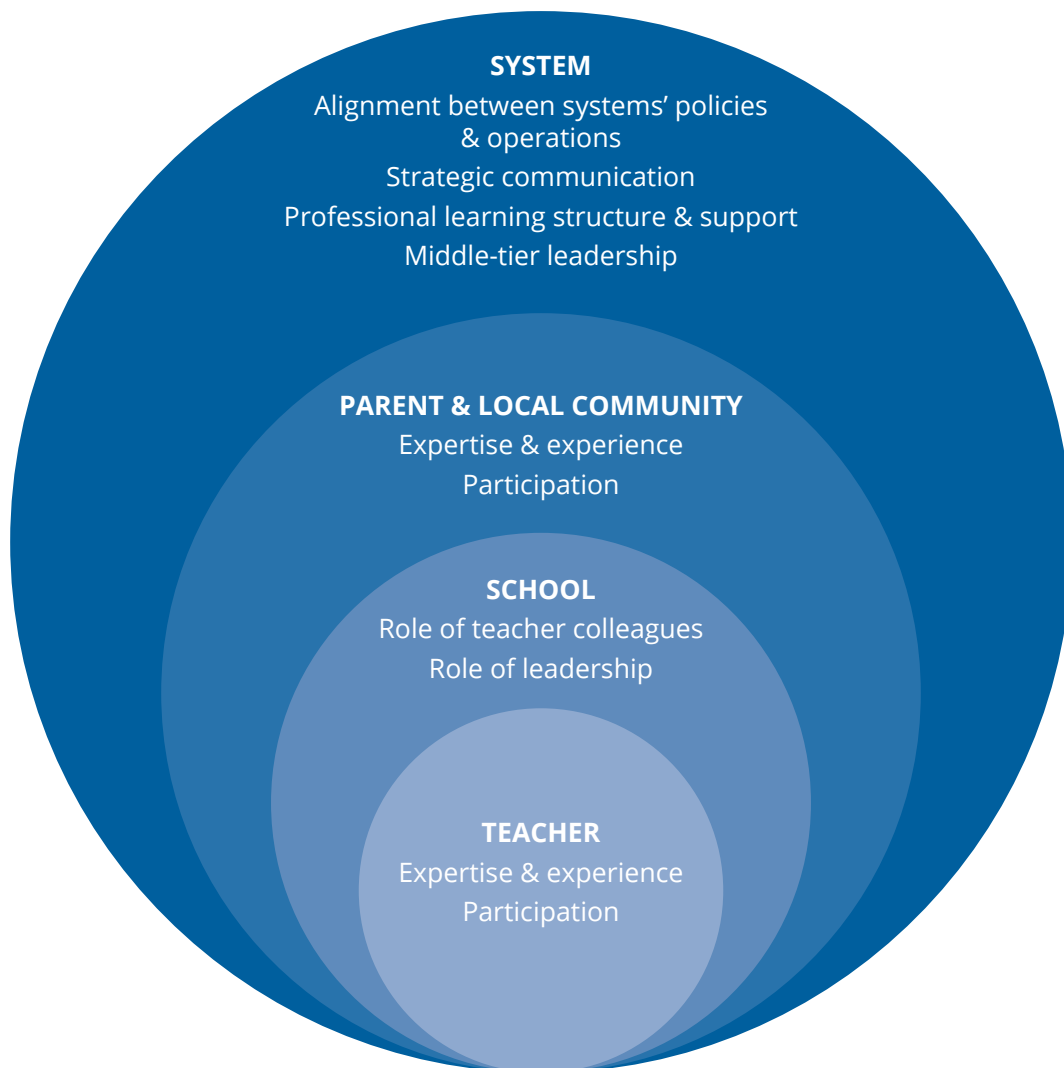
CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

Evidence from this study suggests the success of each teacher development investment is enabled and constrained by the program design, government systems and contextual factors. Research on successful and sustainable teacher professional development has produced a range of studies on effective program design for teachers. These 'best practice' design features focus on the quality of instruction, mode and frequency of approach, practical subject pedagogy, teaching and learning materials, and location of instruction. These are suggested as baseline features that provide a foundation to the development of contextually appropriate professional learning. The 3 DFAT investments had different designs and the teacher development approaches incorporated these features to varying extents, either intentionally or organically.

There is limited literature featuring system factors for teacher professional development. Findings from international literature and study observations highlight factors that can underpin the success of teacher development investments. These factors can be grouped according to the different levels within an education system – system, parent and community, school, and teacher.



DIFFERENT LEVELS WITHIN AN EDUCATION SYSTEM



Teacher professional development is more likely to be implemented effectively when the intervention design, systems supports and context work together. To be effective, teacher professional development needs to be bolstered by a coherent **system** of support. This includes alignment between policies and operations, a clear understanding of the changes by all education stakeholders and the roles they play, and putting in place the right structures and resources to effect the changes envisioned.

Parents and communities are important stakeholders in any education reform process and require engagement and support on key policy changes and how they can support their children's learning.

The **school** context plays a key role in how teacher professional development can be successfully implemented by teachers within their classrooms. Teacher peers and school leadership can create a supportive and reflective environment when teachers aim to implement new practices.

Teacher professional development is more likely to be effective when it meets the needs of **teachers** and their schools. The approach and design should consider teacher expertise, experience, and pre-existing ideas, values and attitudes.

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT INTO THE FUTURE

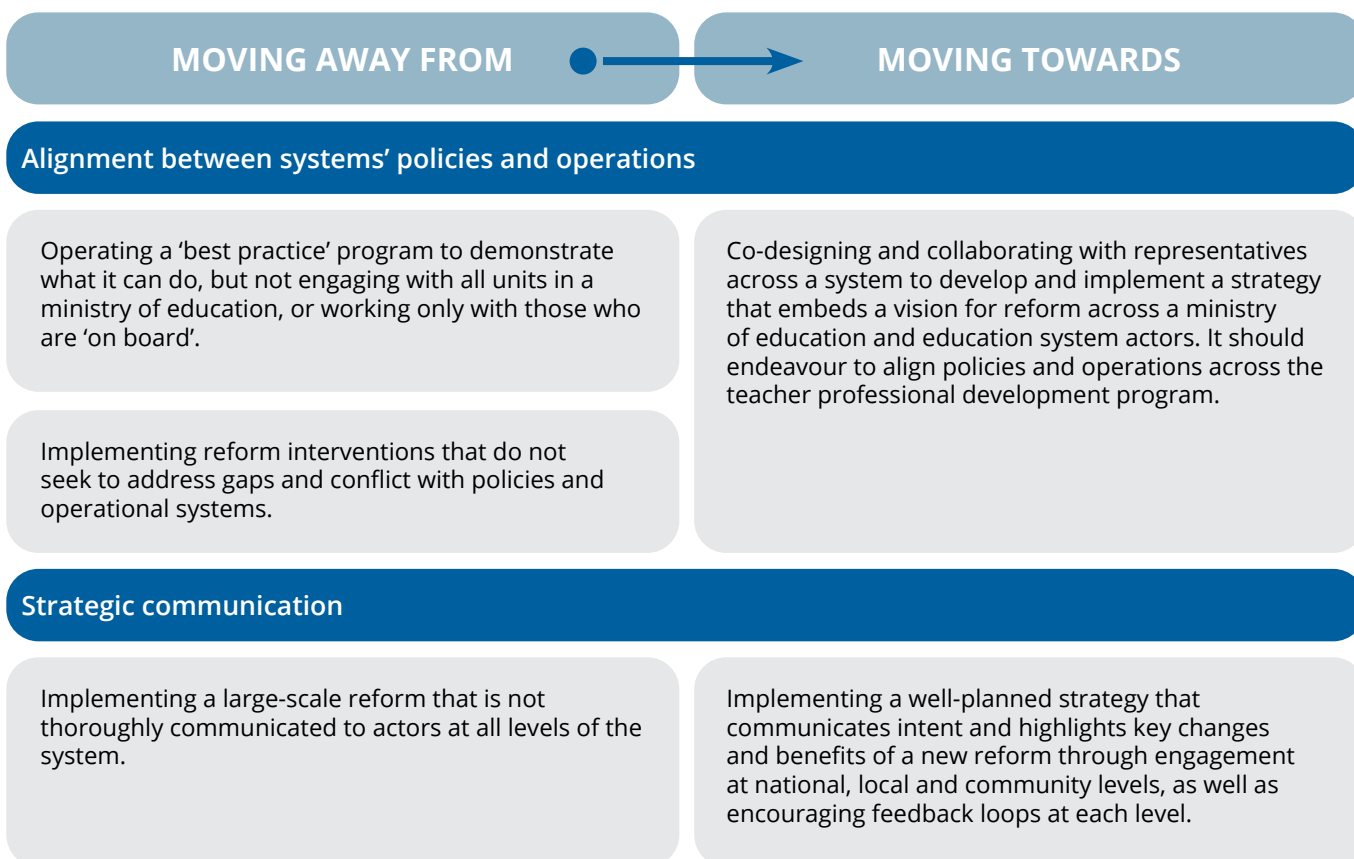
Approaching teacher professional development with systems thinking encourages consideration of how teacher professional development, system and contextual factors can work together, rather than constrain each other.

International literature and the study findings suggest coherence between different parts of the education system are critical to effective and sustainable teacher professional development. Further, international literature points out the importance of teacher professional development being designed to be adaptable and flexible to context. Investments need to consider moving from 'best practice' to 'best fit', whereby programs are optimally adapted to different educational, political, social and economic contexts, with local actors who lead and sustain change.

STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE

The findings and lessons from this study present a strategy for future thinking in teacher development investment. It is important to move away from the accepted or current ways of doing things toward change that can impact system coherence, motivation and develop a mindset that considers the local and specific experiences of teachers, leaders and their schools. These strategies are grouped by levels within an education system and factors that can underpin success.

SYSTEM LEVEL



MOVING AWAY FROM

MOVING TOWARDS

Professional learning structures and support

Providing one-off training and resources (due to limited budgets) for teachers and school leaders that signify a change in pedagogies and curriculum.

Working with government to commit to long-term resourcing and budgeting for a system that supports continuous and ongoing professional learning, reflecting an understanding that teachers and school leaders need sustained follow up about new pedagogies and curriculum to fully adapt to new practices.

Providing resources as part of a program to support teacher professional development and curriculum reform.

Providing high-quality teaching and learning resources that are supported with aligned teacher professional development, to ensure teachers understand how to draw on and use them.

Rolling out technology supported professional learning initiatives.

Investing in technology as part of a broader strategy that provides access to technology, and complements curriculum, resources, training and peer learning initiatives. Appropriate and sustained support should be provided for teachers to develop confidence and skills in using technology.

Middle-tier leadership

Incentivising leaders/advisers to focus on monitoring and supervising schools and teachers.

Incentivising instructional leaders and advisers to mentor or coach teachers and school leaders, role-model good practices, and provide constructive feedback that builds the professional skills of teachers, equipping them with appropriate skills and supporting infrastructure to do this well.

Encouraging leaders and advisers to focus on collecting student learning data and enforcing schools' accountability.

Encouraging instructional leaders and advisers to collect and use evidence, such as student learning data, to target interventions and inform teachers' professional learning needs, especially content and pedagogies they are struggling with.

PARENT & COMMUNITY LEVEL

MOVING AWAY FROM



MOVING TOWARDS

Engaging communities and parents to support learning

Assuming that parents know how and are able to provide support for student learning.

Actively engaging parents and communities as key stakeholders in any education reform process, showing them how they can support their children's learning.

SCHOOL LEVEL

MOVING AWAY FROM



MOVING TOWARDS

Role of teacher colleagues within and across schools

Recognising that peer learning groups and communities of practice are important for teachers and leaders to learn from one another.

Bolstering peer learning groups as relatively low resource and high value interventions to support learning, by establishing them at regular time slots and ensuring teachers can access colleagues with expertise and experience.

Role of leadership

Recognising that school leaders manage activities, implement new curriculum and reforms, and distribute resources and materials to teachers.

Investing in the leadership skills of school leaders to facilitate a shift towards instructional leadership to support teaching quality and student learning through professional learning opportunities, strengthening collaboration within and between schools and ensuring teachers have time to learn new practices.

TEACHER LEVEL

MOVING AWAY FROM



MOVING TOWARDS

Expertise and experience of teachers

Distributing resources and one-off training to support teachers regardless of their experience, qualification levels or classroom context.

Designing teacher professional development that is adaptive, ongoing and considers the highly varied experience and qualifications of teachers, and contexts they work in.

Participation

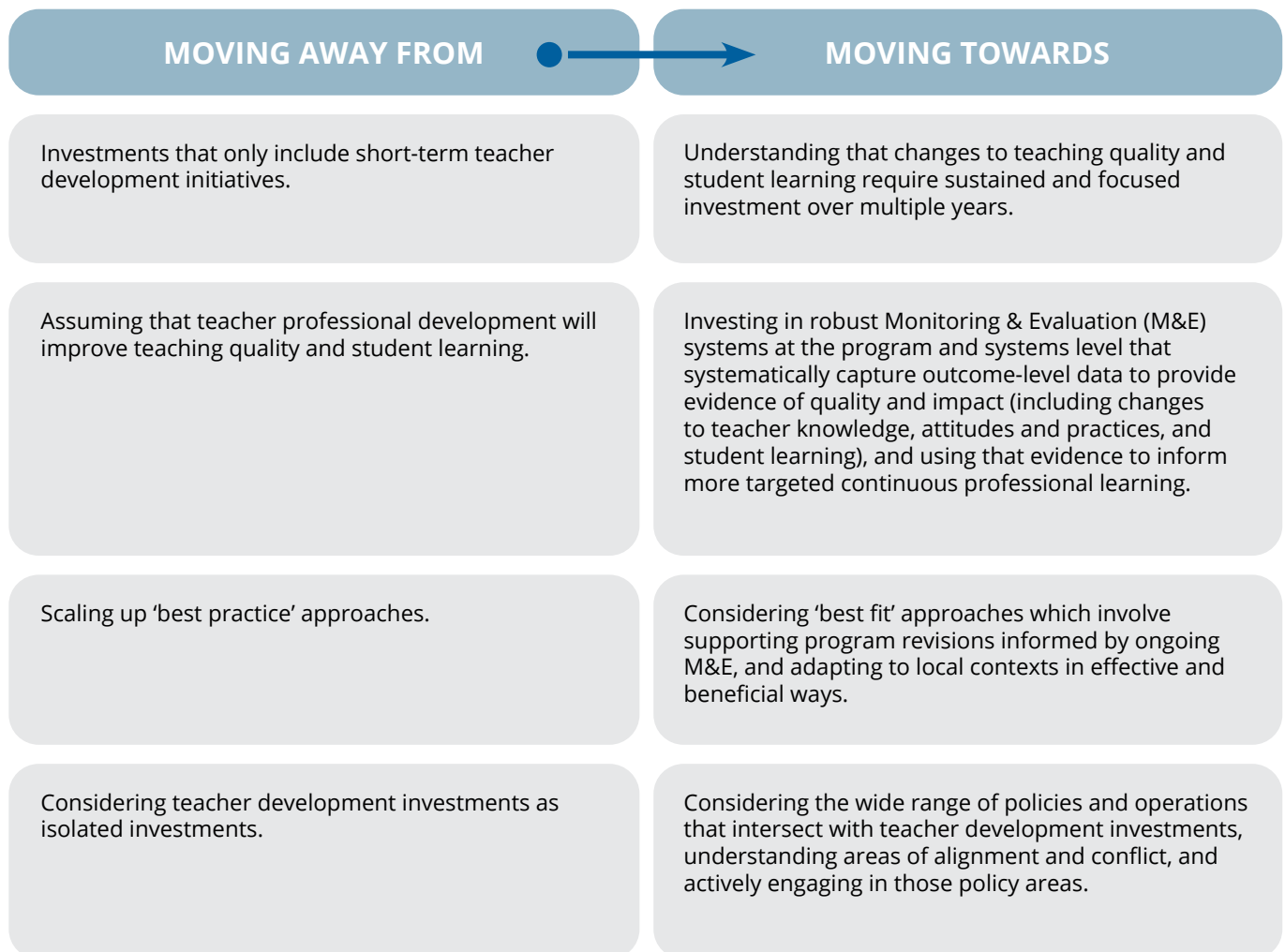
Assuming that a new teacher professional development program will provide a welcome opportunity for change in teaching and learning.

Acknowledging that teachers bring a range of experiences, values and attitudes to their work, and that clear messaging, opportunities for professional learning, reinforcement and incentives can help motivate teachers to continue learning.



STRATEGIES FOR DFAT INVESTMENTS

The study findings also point to important lessons for DFAT in shaping teacher professional development strategies.



Visit [DFAT's website](#) to read the full report, Teacher Development Multi-Year Study Series. Multi-country Report, and to view a list of references.

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