

EXPLORING TEACHER QUALITY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC:

A Case Study in Bangladesh, Cambodia, and the Philippines

Teachers play a critical role in nation-building. They enable the next generation to shape a better future for themselves and for others.

On the surface, teachers are seen as facilitators of the teaching-learning process. Beyond that, teachers respond to far more demands than just the facilitation of learning. They have to cater to their students' holistic needs. They are expected to model certain behaviors, mindsets, and values, and to provide socio-emotional support. They also have to fulfill their duties as members of the school community and the broader education system while looking after their own personal and professional needs. All these point to overlapping—and often overwhelming—





demands from their role within the education system.

Policy development work aimed at capacitating and supporting teachers requires recognition and a deep understanding of the interdependence between the teaching force and the broader education system. However, any momentum gained from years of efforts to institutionalize standards and policies for improving teacher quality has halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving the global education landscape drastically transformed.

The new normal in education imposes more demands, especially from public school teachers who already faced systemic challenges and barriers pre-pandemic. Apart from compounding existing problems, the shift from face-to-face to distance learning requires teachers to adopt new technical skills and adapt tried-and-tested methods rapidly.

This brief presents five principles in training, developing, and supporting teachers to embody certain teacher qualities necessary in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given the changing education context and the crucial role of teachers in ensuring learning continuity, **this brief presents five principles in training, developing, and supporting teachers to embody certain teacher qualities necessary in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.** The definition of teacher quality is based on the teacher respondents' perceptions and personal reflections on what makes an effective teacher during a pandemic.

These principles are anchored on a study supported by the Asian Development Bank, which explored teacher quality during the COVID-19 pandemic in three countries: Bangladesh, Cambodia, and the Philippines. While these principles result from the data of these three countries at specific points in time, they fundamentally cut across different contexts.



PRINCIPLE 1

Continue to Address
Students' Learning
Needs



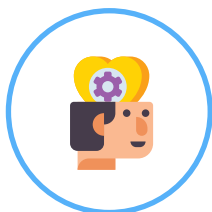
PRINCIPLE 2

Continue Training
Teachers for
Targeted Skills



PRINCIPLE 3

Enhance Teacher
Support Through
Non-Training Means



PRINCIPLE 4

Recognize Adaptation
to the New Normal as
Effective Work



PRINCIPLE 5

Invest in Mindset
Development During
Non-Crisis Times

Notably, some of these principles are already implemented and only require further enhancement. It is worth recognizing the efforts of national education agencies and non-government organizations who are working hand-in-hand to ensure learning continuity. Below are recommendations and some use cases from the Ministry/Department of Education and the Teach for Organization¹ (TFO) of each country, demonstrating how the five principles are currently being operationalized.

PRINCIPLE

RECOMMENDATION/USE CASE



PRINCIPLE 1:

Continue to Address Students' Learning Needs

- ✓ Students' capacity to receive education has been shown to play a role in teachers' effectiveness. Teachers believe that they are effective if they can teach and connect to their students. Hence, investment and policies targeted at improving students' access to technology and providing support to parent/guardian training and capacity building will benefit both students and teachers.
- ✓ The Philippines' national education agency tried to address the gap in access to technology by introducing printed modules to schools. In Bangladesh, the hiring of personal tutors and teachers visiting households has become a trend.
- ✓ Teach for the Philippines has provided printed modules and communication/mobile data subsidies to minimize the barriers to learning resources for its program participants.

¹Teach for Organization is a collective representation for Teach for Bangladesh, Teach for Cambodia, and Teach for the Philippines. It follows a model of recruiting, selecting, and deploying newly graduates and professionals to teach in public schools for two years as Teacher Fellows.

PRINCIPLE



PRINCIPLE 2:

Continue Training Teachers for Targeted Skills

RECOMMENDATION/USE CASE

- ✓ There seems to be a relationship between the number of training sessions received by teachers and their perception of effectiveness. However, training is a function of what is currently needed, and foreseeing training needs in a scenario like a pandemic remains challenging.
- ✓ During the pandemic, the training trend seems to focus on technical skills like the use of technology in Cambodia, and module development in Bangladesh and in the Philippines. It is a challenge for government education agencies to pivot and address gaps in teacher training rapidly, so it is essential to find synergies with other players in the sector like higher educational institutions, teacher education institutions, and non-government organizations like Teach for Organizations to address skills gaps.
- ✓ Each country identified a specific focus on what kind of training teachers need. In Bangladesh, they focused on capacitating teachers to teach fundamental content like literacy and technology. In Cambodia, they emphasized on capacitating teachers to use technology. In the Philippines, the focus was on module development.
- ✓ Teach for Organizations was able to redesign its intensive teacher training programs to adapt to the learners' and school communities' evolving needs while remaining aligned with their respective national education agencies' direction.



PRINCIPLE



PRINCIPLE 3:

Enhance Teacher Support Through Non-Training Means

RECOMMENDATION/USE CASE

- ✓ Teachers sought social connection for support. They specifically highlighted the emotional, psychological, and professional support received from co-teachers, TFO co-Fellows, and TFO coaches. Since teachers are usually highly relational individuals, support for adapting to changes in their work goes beyond training inputs. Teachers need a mechanism where they can connect, relate with, and learn from one another. Doing so would distribute the work of national education agencies, since the transfer of knowledge and teaching best practices during the new normal organically happens among teachers. If done correctly, this would be a good demonstration of a bottom-up approach where policy implementers (i.e. teachers) inform policy makers in the creation of relevant and useful policies.
- ✓ Pre-pandemic, the Philippines' Department of Education had established the Learning Action Cells (LAC) program, where teachers learn from one another. The goal of LAC is for teachers to learn together by sharing their best practices in the classroom.
- ✓ TFOs provide individualized coaching support to their teachers. The model of TFOs allows teachers to get access to a Coach that offers guidance on work and personal well-being. Teacher Fellows and Teacher Leaders² emphasized the importance of receiving emotional support through their Coaches during a crisis.

²Existing public school teachers in the Philippines can apply to Teach for the Philippines' Public School Teacher Pathways Program, where they receive the same training and support that Teacher Fellows receive. If accepted, these teachers are identified as Teacher Leaders.

PRINCIPLE



PRINCIPLE 4:

Recognize Adaptation to the New Normal as Effective Work

RECOMMENDATION/USE CASE

- ✓ The effectiveness of teachers is typically measured against a certain standard. Pre-pandemic, quantifying and qualifying what makes a teacher's work effective is still an ongoing conversation, even though some standards have been set. As teachers translate new education policies geared towards addressing gaps, it is crucial to recognize the heavy-lifting that teachers are required to do for activities like writing modules, re-writing lesson plans, learning new technology, and teaching in a distance learning setup, to name a few. If teachers can be formally recognized for these auxiliary crisis-response efforts, they will feel more encouraged, confident, and effective in their work.



PRINCIPLE 5:

Invest in Mindset Development During Non-Crisis Times

- ✓ Mindset development doesn't happen overnight; moreso amid a pandemic. When asked about what has been most helpful during the pandemic, TFO teachers identified the mindset development training they received during their initial intensive training as incredibly useful during times of crisis. This indicates that, unlike technical skills training, mindset training can be done preemptively. Although it is not possible to predict what kind of skills a certain school will require, preparation for times of crisis can happen during non-crisis times in the form of mindset development. The Department/ Ministry of Education should consider embedding mindset development as part of the national pre-service and in-service training plan for teachers.



The definition of teacher quality and what makes an effective teacher will always be an ongoing and evolving discussion. In determining teacher quality during this pandemic, an evidence-based and participatory approach would be the most ideal. Teachers should not be left behind in receiving support and recognition for the importance of their role—all the more in conversations that directly affect their work. They are reliable thought partners in finding practical solutions, and there is significant value in listening to their voices, in learning from their community knowledge, and in acknowledging their commitment to implement policies (including pivots) made at a policy level. Now, more than ever, teachers continue to be critical to nation-building not only because of their significant influence on future generations, but also because of their dedication and capacity to directly improve the quality of their work and the quality of the education system that they are a part of.

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