BRITISH COUNCIL

Schools Connect

—

Exploring principles

March 2024

Exploring principles of effective continuing professional development for teachers in low- and middle-income countries

By P. Cordingley, B. Crisp, R. Raybould, A. Lightfoot and S. Copeland, Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE)

Key Points

- It is widely acknowledged that continuous professional development (CPD) supports the quality of teaching, however, there is relatively little good quality research on CPD initiatives in lower resource contexts.

- Recommendations for increasing the availability of high-quality research from and about low-resource contexts include: improving access to information about research opportunities and to funding; including or translating languages other than English; ensuring equitable involvement of local researchers in international research; supporting female researchers' involvement in projects; sharing knowledge; supporting payment of open access publication fees.

- Twelve key principles derived from existing evidence on what factors create the most successful CPD opportunities, currently largely framed around high-income contexts, are considered as they might apply to lower resource contexts. Challenges and possible solutions are identified.

- Challenges include: lack of high quality tools and resources; the language of CPD delivery; a possible lack of focus on student well-being; teachers' attitudes towards the profession; unfamiliarity with assessment for learning (AfL); access to specialist expertise; school leaders' awareness of the content of CPD; gaps in awareness and experience of enquiry-oriented, exploratory approaches to CPD.

- Recommendations include: develop high quality curriculum and CPD materials; provide CPD activities, tools and protocols to embed learning in practice; provide follow-up support, monitoring and coaching; consider language skills of facilitators and translation of CPD materials; include student well-being goals in CPD programme; focus on igniting teachers' interest in learning; provide AfL tools for teachers; embed specialist expertise in the CPD programme; encourage teachers and school leaders to explore CPD learning; share evidence of the success of enquiry-oriented, exploratory approaches to CPD.

Introduction

It is widely accepted that 'the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers' (Barber and Mourshed, 2007), and the quality of teaching is facilitated by professional development. Learning lessons about the factors enabling successful continuing professional development (CPD) that has a positive impact on student outcomes is therefore of paramount importance.

This insight note describes the findings of a team at the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE), who have worked with the British Council to explore the current state of research evidence around CPD for teachers in lower-resource contexts. The aims of the review of evidence are to:

1. Consider the applicability of existing evidence on what factors create the most successful CPD opportunities, currently largely framed around high-income contexts, to low- and middle-income contexts;

2. Consider the availability of evidence from and about low-resource contexts;

3. Provide recommendations for evidence-based decision making in the design of CPD programmes in low-resource contexts;

4. Provide recommendations for increasing the availability of high-quality research from and about low-resource contexts.

The research involved identifying and synthesizing evidence from two umbrella reviews of effective CPD, two systematic qualitative reviews on challenges and effective practice in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), and empirical studies from South America, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. The synthesis was then mapped onto key practice-focused issues.

12 Key principles of effective CPD: Challenges for LMICs and recommendations

There are 12 key principles for effective CPD as outlined in the evidence explored in the umbrella review. These are considered specifically in relation to LMICs from the perspectives of challenges and recommendations.

Principle 1: CPD is organised around providers' aspirations for students' learning and those of participating teachers and the school/system.	
Challenge 1: Organising CPD around teachers' aspirations for students is challenging to apply to large classes and probably not common practice.	**Recommendations(s):** Invite teachers to focus on three specific students (with different characteristics) when exploring new approaches via CPD. Illustrate programme goals in terms of the ways in which student learning outcomes will be enhanced.
Challenge 2: There is a tendency to assume that lectures and accreditation are reliable indicators that CPD is working.	**Recommendations(s):** Ensure that planning for CPD is informed by good awareness of current practices in that context. Ensure that professional dialogue is focused on how students are responding to the changes teachers are making to their approach.

Principle 2: Effective CPD programmes focus on enabling teachers to develop their pedagogy, practice and understanding of content and theory in connection with each other.	
Challenge 1: Running long-term CPD, which enables development of theory and practice in connection with each other, is challenging when resources are constrained.	**Recommendations(s):** Include CPD activities, tools and protocols for embedding new learning in day-to-day practice and provide follow-up support, monitoring and coaching. Focus on how/why developing theory and practice together is useful..
Challenge 2: The impact of CPD delivered in teachers' first language was significantly more effective. In multilingual contexts, CPD is often offered in the official language as opposed to the language(s) the teachers are most familiar with.	**Recommendations(s):** Consider language skills when recruiting CPD facilitators and the benefits of translation of tools and resources.

Principle 3: Effective programmes explicitly describe CPD as a process of taking shared responsibility (between programme providers, participants and their schools) for excellence in student achievement and well-being.	
Challenge 1: The perceived purpose of education may prioritise equipping students to perform well in assessments, rather than supporting well-being.	**Recommendations(s):** Ensure that planning for CPD events and follow-up activities include specific student well-being goals alongside achievement goals.
Challenge 2: School leaders may not emphasise student well-being or have access to the associated knowledge and skills.	**Recommendations(s):** CPD providers can consider encouraging teachers and school leaders to explore what participants are learning during routine meetings in school and as part of debriefing in school development of, for example, new schemes of learning.

Principle 4: Effective programmes help to reinforce and enhance teachers' professional identities and professional growth as well as their knowledge and skills.	
Challenge 1: Participants may have become teachers as a stopgap or because of perceived social status or job security – all of which might affect the ability to bring about improvement via appeals to their professional status.	**Recommendations(s):** Programmes can feature a focus on igniting teachers' love of learning, kindling this flame in their students and demonstrate the links between this, the CPD programme and professional status and growth. Build in goal setting and high expectations about the potential outcomes of collaborative enquiries and debrief after implementation of new ideas.

Principle 5: In order to ensure that teachers can achieve high-quality practice, providers need to:	
• make explicit the value and contribution of specialist expertise to professional learning • encourage teachers to value their own expertise and access that of their colleagues • build subject expertise and expertise about the community participants are serving, about how children learn and about school leadership into the CPD programmes they provide.	
Challenge 1: Access to specialist expertise from both within and beyond the serving teacher workforce may be problematic, particularly in the context of large countries with poor transportation infrastructure.	**Recommendations(s):** Providers can consider how specialist expertise is embedded in the programme and ensure specialists have a good understanding of the local context. Providers can give facilitators access to resources developed in consultation with specialists familiar with the needs of the local communities.

Principle 6: Effective CPD programmes ensure that combinations of iterative, evidence-rich CPD activities include assessment for learning (AfL) for teachers.	
Challenge 1: Formative and summative assessment of students is not widespread. Training for teachers in AfL is not always valued or readily available.	**Recommendations(s):** Start with a good understanding of the assessment systems teachers are working with. Provide formative and summative assessment tools for teachers. Participants can use them to explore how their own learning is intersecting with their students' learning experiences and outcomes.

Principle 7: Effective CPD programmes encourage school leaders to explicitly promote and model professional learning for their colleagues.	
Challenge 1: School leaders are often not very knowledgeable about the process and content of CPD that their teachers experience.	**Recommendations(s):** Providers can focus on developing leadership engagement with and capacity to support professional learning.

Principle 8: Effective programmes focus on CPD by building on a deep understanding of teachers':

- professional identities, practices and motivations
- existing knowledge, skills and beliefs – especially as they relate to knowledge of local communities, local cultural beliefs and practices, and local languages.

Challenge 1: There is not widespread understanding of the value of building on teachers' starting points. Expertise in how this can be done is not readily available.	**Recommendations(s):** Build on teachers' starting points; develop resources that take account of the challenges the CPD presents to teachers, and give teachers choices about which strategies to adopt; give participants formative assessment tools to use in their classrooms, so that teachers' professional conversations are rooted in the experience of their students.

Principle 9: Effective CPD provides opportunities for peer-supported, exploratory dialogue focused on exploring new practices and students' responses to changes.

Challenge 1: There are gaps in awareness and experience of the need for teachers to develop their practice through peer-supported, exploratory dialogue rather than more traditional, didactic, transmission-based approaches to CPD..	**Recommendations(s):** Share evidence about the role of peer-supported exploratory dialogue in effective CPD, while noting the sensitivities involved in this kind of professional dialogue. Providers may also want to share with commissioners, school leaders and participants prior to the programme. Create professional learning resources to support powerful professional dialogue.

Principle 10: Effective CPD provides opportunities for participants to explore their habits, assumptions and beliefs. This is done by trying new approaches that disrupt the status quo sufficiently to enable new ways of looking at the curriculum.

Challenge 1: Offering disruptions to practices may seem like a politically sensitive challenge.	**Recommendations(s):** Positioning these 'disruptive' activities as powerful professional practice is likely to be helpful. Locate examples in LMICs' jurisdictions that have experimented with these approaches.

Principle 11: Effective CPD provides opportunities for sustained, iterative combinations of evidence-rich, enquiry-oriented activities which enable participants to try out, practise and refine new approaches and then integrate them in their day-to-day teaching.

Challenge 1: The emphasis is often more upon giving teachers new knowledge and approaches, expecting them to use them and monitoring that they did so.	**Recommendations(s):** Ensure that CPD programmes include tools for embedding learning in day-to-day practice; use technology to help sustain ongoing coaching and liaison; organise follow-up work as collaborative enquiries and create a vehicle for debriefing what has been learned and achieved. Structures are needed that identify positive practice such as appreciative enquiry.

Principle 12: Effective CPD provides opportunities for participants to access high-quality tools and resources for teaching and learning, which function to make professional learning and specific pedagogical practices more manageable for practitioners. These need to be relevant to the programme content and designed to help participants manage complexity and take account of the practical, cognitive and emotional demands of applying the CPD.

Challenge 1: The assumption that high-quality tools and resources are available.	**Recommendations(s):** Develop curriculum tools to complement and illustrate CPD programme content in action.

Review of research and recommendations

A review of the nature of the evidence evaluated in the research revealed that that there were far fewer studies of CPD in LMICs than higher-income countries; and that of those that do exist, the majority are comparatively surface-level. Issues related to both number and quality of the research, and ways these may be addressed include:

- **Funding and communication of opportunities**. Improving access to information about opportunities is key, and funding for research could be made available more equitably so that researchers and institutions based in lower-income countries have greater opportunities to apply.

- **Language**. Acceptance of languages other than English for publication and/or improved facilities for translation into English will enable greater access to important knowledge often retained only in the country of origin.

- **Roles in research projects**. Researchers from LMICs are increasingly being invited to participate in projects led by institutions in higher-income contexts, however, often the roles of these locally based researchers are limited to data collection and translation. Ensuring more equitable involvement at all phases of the research project with appropriate support for building skills is a better approach

- **Gender**. In some contexts, it is important to address differences between the ability of female and male researchers to become involved in international projects or publish their work.

- **Sharing knowledge**. Finding ways to help researchers develop their understanding of international publication protocols or other dissemination strategies would support the sharing of knowledge.

- **Open-access publication fees**. Waiving or otherwise supporting the payment of open-access publication fees will enable researchers from lower-resource countries to publish.
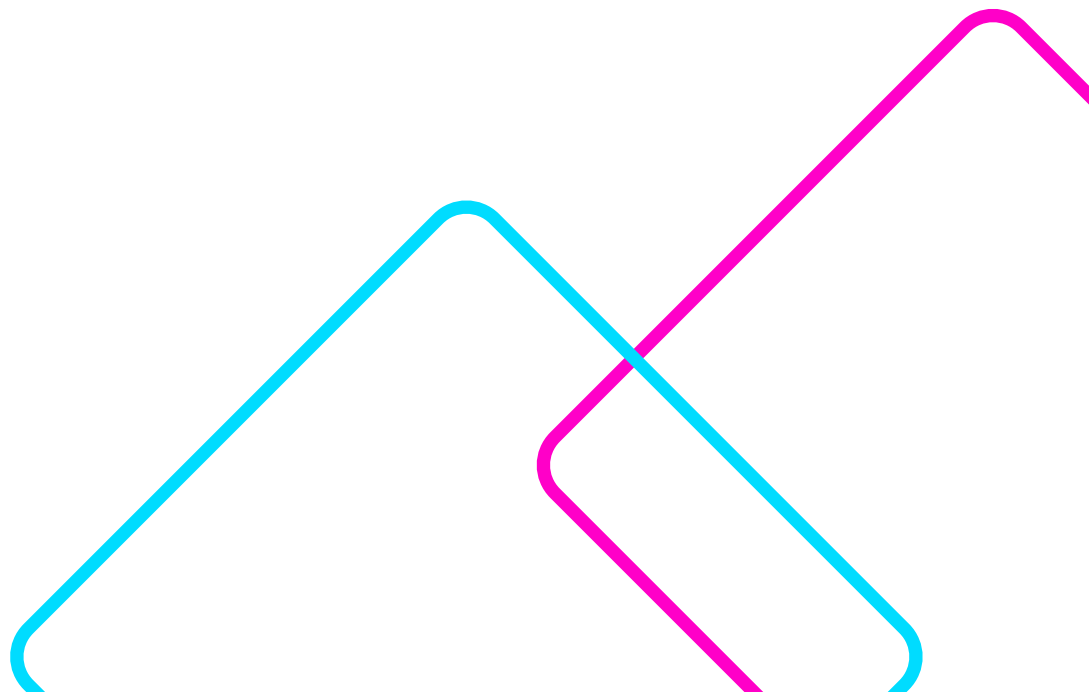
Bibliography

Aromataris, E., Fernandez, R., Godfrey, C. M., Holly, C., Khalil, H. and Tungpunkom, P (2015). Summarizing systematic reviews: Methodological development, conduct and reporting of an umbrella review approach. *International Journal of Evidence Based Healthcare*, 13(3), 132–140. [Online] Available at: http://doi:10.1097/XEB.0000000000000055

Barber, M. and Mourshed, M. (2007). How the world's best-performing school systems come out on top. McKinsey & Co.

Colbert, V. and Arboleda, J. (2016). Bringing a student-centred participatory pedagogy to scale in Colombia. *Journal of Educational Change*, 17, 385–410. [Online] Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-016-9283-7

Cordingley, P., Higgins, S., Greany, T., Buckler, N., Coles-Jordan, D., Crisp, B., Saunders, L. and Coe, R. (2015). Developing great teaching: Lessons from the international reviews into effective professional development. Teacher Development Trust.

Cordingley, P., Higgins, S., Greany, T., Crisp, B., Araviaki, E., Coe, R. and Johns, P. (2020). Developing great leadership of CPDL. CUREE.

Hardman, F., Ackers, J., Abrishamian, N. and O'Sullivan, M. (2011). Developing a systemic approach to teacher education in sub-Saharan Africa: Emerging lessons from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 41(5), 669–683.

Orr, D., Westbrook, J., Pryor, J., Durrani, N., Sebba, J. and Adu-Yeboah, C. (2013). What are the impacts and cost-effectiveness of strategies to improve performance of untrained and under-trained teachers in the classroom in developing countries? London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Centre, Institute of Education, University of London.

Robinson, V., Hohepa, M. and Lloyd, C. (2009). School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why. Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (BES).

Simkhada, P., van Teijlingen, E., Devkota, B., Pathak, S. R. and Sathian, B. (2014). Accessing research literature: A mixed-methods study of academics in Higher Education Institutions in Nepal. *Nepal Journal of Epidemiology.4(4), 405–414*.

Singh, A. K., Rind, I. A. and Sabur, Z. (2020). Continuous professional development of school teachers: Experiences of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. In P. M. Sarangapani and Y. Sayed (Eds.), *Handbook of Education Systems in South Asia*, 1–27. Global Education Systems. Singapore: Springer.

Westbrook, J., Durrani, N., Brown, R., Orr, D., Pryor, J., Boddy, J. and Salvi, F. (2013). Pedagogy, curriculum, teaching practices and teacher education in developing countries. Final report. Education Rigorous Literature Review. Department for International Development. EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.