

Schools Connect

Cultural Relations in Schools: Evolving Practice in a Globalised World

Executive summary



This summary provides an overview of key findings from the Learn More study, ‘*Cultural Relations in Schools: Evolving Practice for a Globalised World*’, completed in April 2024 for the British Council. While this summary highlights the main conclusions, it does not include the full range of evidence and supporting data presented in the report. For a complete understanding of the study’s methodology, detailed analysis and comprehensive source citations, please refer to the full report.

Cultural Relations are part of an evolving practice focused on fostering mutual exchanges, trust and long-term cooperation among cultures and individuals. At the British Council, cultural relations represent the essence of the work we carry out, including in schools. A recent study looked at the state of cultural relations through schools globally and across different cultural organisations.



Defining cultural relations in schools

Cultural relations in schools are mutually beneficial partnerships and activities that take place between education systems. They enable us to meet today's learning needs and to address tomorrow's global challenges.

Cultural relations in schools present the following common features:

Mutuality

Activities bring mutual benefit to all those involved in the partnership. Engaging with policymakers and partners through a cultural relations approach means jointly identifying solutions to education challenges and working together to address them. This can lead to systemic change across education systems worldwide, with students, teachers and school leaders acting as agents of change.

Systemic reach

Cultural relations in schools support policy development and systemic transformation at all levels within education systems through partnerships, collaborations, and technical assistance. Education systems benefit from internationalisation, cultural exchange, and learning from the most effective practices worldwide.

Tailored to today's learning needs

Thanks to coordinated efforts across different education systems and peer exchanges on effective practice among educators worldwide, cultural relations in schools help tackle the learning crisis affecting primary and secondary level education globally.

Preparing future generations for tomorrow's challenges

Preparing future generations for tomorrow's challenges. Cultural relations through schools prepare students to find shared solutions to global challenges. The global outlook of cultural relations on SDGs, sustainability, and ties of mutual trust and cooperation has the potential to create 'global citizens', which will be able to work and trade internationally and solve society's impending challenges linked to climate, health and security.

The impact of cultural relations in schools

Cultural relations activities and programming usually include:

Capacity building of education practitioners, teachers, and school leaders:

through the provision of training materials and opportunities, the creation of international networks of educators to exchange information and effective practices, and the promotion of roundtables and events for international exchange and peer learning.

System-level and policy support:

through the provision of technical assistance to curriculum development, policy dialogue and advocacy.

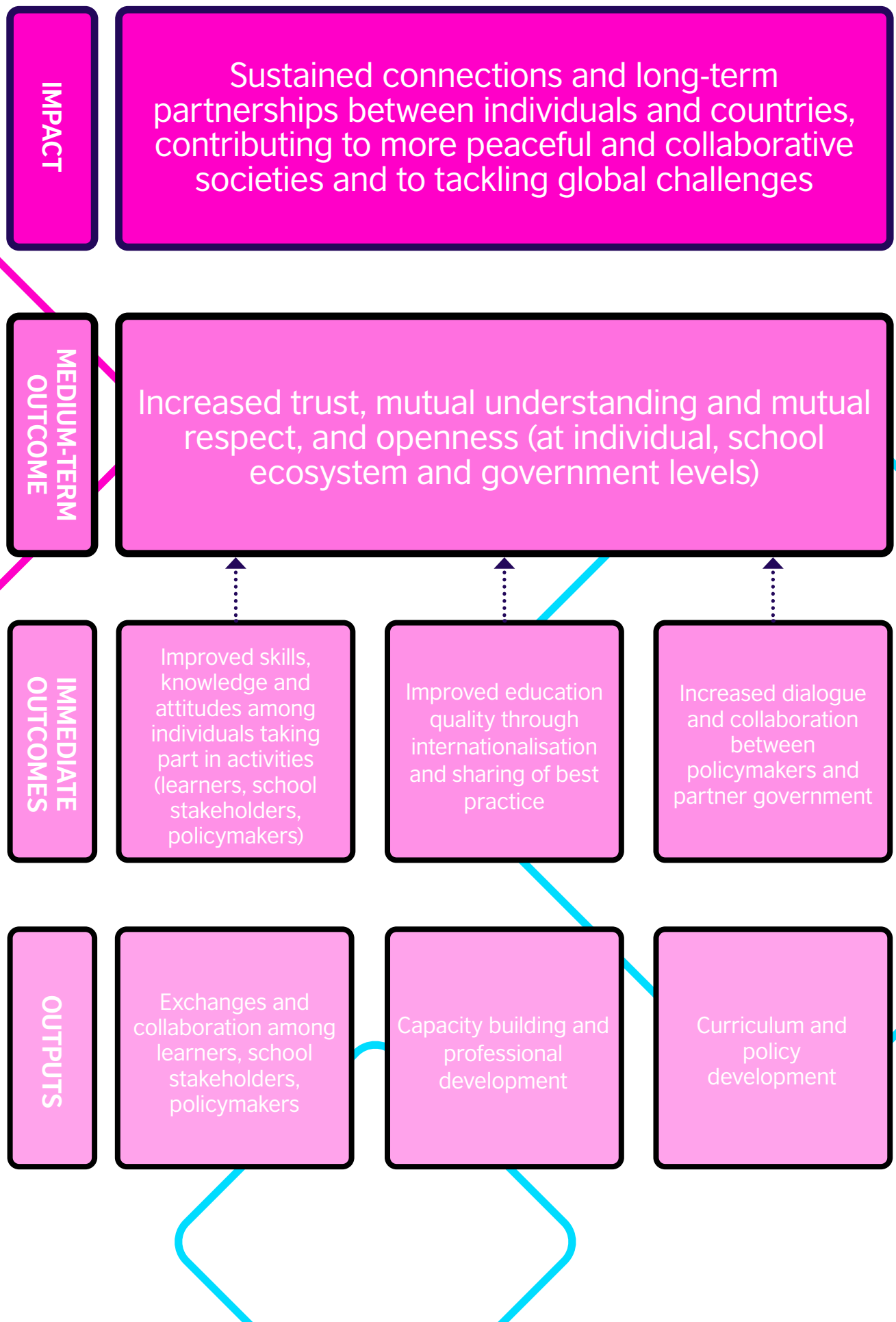
International learning opportunities:

cross-country collaborative projects, cultural exchanges, and peer exchanges.

Evidence suggests that these activities lead to results in three main outcome areas:

- 1: Improved skills, knowledge and attitudes** among individuals involved in learning and exchange activities.
- 2: Improved education** quality through the internationalisation and sharing of effective practices.
- 3: Increased dialogue and collaboration** among policymakers and governments.

The logic model of cultural relations in schools:



Key takeaways

- Education programmes that apply a cultural relations approach are characterised by elements of mutuality, sustainable partnerships, and a focus on global challenges.

This approach is reflected both in direct implementation, through the facilitation of exchanges and capacity-building initiatives, as well as system-level transformation, through policy design and curriculum review. Applying a cultural relations approach to education initiatives serves to i) enhance increasingly in-demand skills, global competence, knowledge, and attitudes among participants, ii) support internationalisation across education systems, and iii) increase dialogue and collaboration among government partners. In the short term, this fosters closer links between individuals, education systems, and governments in the education field and beyond. In the long term, it creates the conditions for today's children to grow into a generation of active global citizens.

- Cultural relations are at the core of the British Council's operating model and ethos. With its long-standing experience, in-country presence and local knowledge, there is potential for the British Council to be an even more prominent actor and thought leader in cultural relations through the education space.

The British Council's country offices with their continued, grassroots presence in partner countries, are a key strength compared to traditional Overseas Development Assistance (ODA).

- Cultural relations through education do not necessarily have an explicit ambition to deliver Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) goals, as they promote cultural relations among countries more broadly and do have a specific focus on LMICs.

However, a cultural relations approach can be applied to international development programming, including interventions that focus on education.

- Measurement and evidence-building on both the intrinsic and instrumental value of cultural relations in schools need to be enhanced.

The British Council is uniquely placed to contribute to the global evidence base on the effects of applying a cultural relations approach to education programming. This would require ensuring all projects are linked to the overarching cultural relations framework and that they have clear MEAL plans, including data collection with stakeholders and participants. A stronger focus on process evaluations could strengthen the evidence of the 'how', and not just the 'what' of cultural relations.

The full report can be accessed at britishcouncil.org/research-insight/cultural-relations-schools



