[Teacher motivation and learning outcomes](#)

[Teachers and teacher education](#)

Providing a quality education for all lies at the heart of the Education 2030 Agenda. Achieving this goal will require 'well-qualified, trained, adequately remunerated, and motivated teachers' (UNESCO, 2016: 30). However, global trends indicate that teacher motivation has been falling in recent years, leading to teacher shortages (Crehan, 2016; UNESCO IICBA, 2017). With motivation playing an important role in teacher performance, reversing this trend is critical to maintaining quality teaching and thus positively impacting student learning outcomes (TTF, 2016; World Bank, 2018). Motivating teachers with the proper incentives is key to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 targets 4.1 (ensuring all girls and boys complete a quality education) and 4.c (substantially increasing the supply of qualified teachers) (United Nations, 2015).

What we know

Both high- and low-income countries around the world face issues in both attracting and retaining quality teachers, due largely to poor motivation and incentive structures (Crehan, 2016; Han and Yin, 2016; UNESCO IICBA, 2017). Data show that teacher salaries have fallen compared to other occupations with similar educational requirements, leading the profession to suffer a drop in prestige (GMR, 2015; UNESCO, 2019b; World Bank, 2018). In many low-income countries, teachers are facing rising pupil/teacher ratios (PTRs) and deteriorating working conditions due to increased student enrolment rates (UNESCO IICBA, 2017; World Bank, 2018). Additional factors contributing to lowered teacher motivation include lack of support from leadership, poor accountability, inadequate living conditions, or violence in schools (TTF, 2016; World Bank, 2018; UNESCO, 2019b; UNESCO IICBA, 2017). Such issues may lead to increased teacher absenteeism and attrition, meaning students receive fewer hours of instruction (Ramachandran et al., 2018; UNESCO IICBA, 2017).

With teacher motivation driven by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, finding the proper incentives to influence them is complex and multifaceted (Crehan, 2016; Martin, 2018). While many systems have experimented with motivating teachers through bonus pay for meeting specific targets, results have been mixed for such direct extrinsic motivation (Crehan, 2016; Education Commission, 2019; World Bank, 2018). Instead, research shows that allowing teachers more agency to work towards different promotion opportunities can offer a strong incentive to remain in the profession (Cabus, Haelermans, and Flink, 2020; Calvert, 2016; Cordingley et al., 2019; Tournier et al., 2019). Measures that improve teachers' professionalism, such as collaboration and continuous professional development, have also been shown to improve motivation (Cordingley et al., 2019; Education Commission, 2019; Tournier et al., 2019). School leaders can play a vital role in inspiring teachers, by offering support, consistent standards, and effective evaluation and accountability structures. Such support from school leaders can further improve professionalism and reduce rates of teacher absenteeism (Education Commission, 2019; Martin, 2018; TTF, 2016).

Challenges

Lack of financial resources

In countries where salaries place teachers at or below the poverty line, or where a teacher's salary is well below that of professions requiring similar levels of qualifications, research shows that few other policy options can improve motivation among teachers without low pay being addressed first (Tournier et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2019b). Even so, many governments do not have resources to spare for salary increases. For most low- and middle-income countries, teacher salaries already account for 75 per cent or more of the education budget (World Bank, 2018). As such, ministries of education are faced with difficult decisions of whether to pay higher salaries to fewer teachers – and thus increase PTRs – or pay lower salaries to a higher number of teachers and keep ratios at more manageable levels (UNESCO, 2019b).

Inadequate teaching and learning environment

Poor working conditions also affect teacher motivation. Limited education budgets may also lead to insufficient resources for school infrastructure or teaching materials. Data indicate, for example, that approximately 25 per cent of primary schools globally do not have access to clean drinking water or single-sex sanitation facilities (UIS, TTF, and GEMR Team, 2019). Shortages of equipment such as desks, books, computers, and other teaching materials can frustrate teachers and cause drops in motivation (TTF, 2016; UNESCO IICBA, 2017; World Bank, 2018).

Cultural and societal perceptions

Findings from the Global Teacher Status 2018 study suggest that there is a correlation between teacher status and student learning outcomes in a country (Dolton et al., 2018). In many countries, teaching is considered a profession of last resort and does not enjoy the same esteem as other occupations requiring similar levels of education. This makes recruiting and retaining quality candidates especially difficult. Young teachers often leave the profession after only a few years to seek opportunities in other fields offering higher pay or more prestige (IBF International Consulting, 2013). Improving incentives to attract and retain teachers that are better qualified can shift these views, but changing perceptions can take a long time and requires ongoing efforts (World Bank, 2018).

Weak teacher management structures

Many countries have weak teacher management systems. School leaders often do not have suitable training or background experience to provide teachers with proper support or oversight (Chiriboga Montalvo and Pinto Haro, 2019; Tournier et al., 2019; Yimam, 2019). This can lead to teachers losing trust in their leadership and the established system, lowering expectations and motivation (Cordingley et al., 2019). Leaders who recruit or assess teachers based on patronage or political leanings also raise frustrations and reduce confidence in the validity of the system (Education Commission, 2019).

Limited career flexibility

Many teacher career structures are based on a single salary scale, where teachers earn promotions based solely on academic qualifications or years of experience (Chimier and Tournier, 2018 Crehan, 2016; UNESCO, 2019b). However, research shows that this model can stifle teacher agency and reduce motivation (Crehan, 2016; Tournier et al., 2019). Career structures offering more options and

choice can improve teacher motivation, but such structures are complicated to implement and typically lead to upheaval in established systems (Chiriboga Montalvo and Pinto Haro, 2019; Sayed and de Kock, 2019; Tournier et al., 2019).

Equity and inclusion

Gender

While women make up the majority of the global teaching force, they are underrepresented at the secondary school level, as well as in school leadership and management positions (UNESCO, 2018, 2019a). This lack of opportunity for career progression can have demotivating effects on women teachers seeking professional growth and advancement. In OECD countries, women teachers face a 13.5 per cent wage gap in comparison to men (OECD, 2018). Other factors that lower women teachers' motivation, especially in displacement or extremely rural settings, include lack of suitable housing, physical safety concerns, and sexual harassment (UNESCO, 2018, 2019a). Such issues can result in a lack of incentives for women to work in such difficult environments. With women teachers and school heads shown to act as role models and improve retention of girls in school in rural and low-income settings, this can have a potentially detrimental effect on girls' education (UNESCO, 2018, 2019a).

Low-resource schools

School environments and working conditions tend to be worst in rural or low-resource areas. Because of this, these schools have higher rates of teacher turnover and absenteeism, causing students who are already in disadvantaged circumstances to face lower learning opportunities (UNESCO, 2019b; World Bank, 2018). Without providing proper incentives to motivate teachers to work in these areas, the gaps between students in low- and high-resource schools will continue to widen.

Policy and planning

Establish basic conditions for teachers

While it is recommended that countries devote six per cent of their gross domestic product to education to meet Education for All requirements, only 41 countries in the world currently do so (UNESCO, 2019b). Providing competitive salaries for teachers does not solve every motivation problem, but it is important to establish at least a basic level of financial incentive. It is also important to ensure regularity of pay. If governments cannot designate enough money for teachers to earn a competitive salary, other measures offer little hope of improving teacher motivation (Tournier et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2019b).

Widen opportunities for career progression?

When developing teacher career structures, diverse options for promotion can provide teachers with more self-determination (Chimier and Tournier, 2018; Crehan, 2016). This could include horizontal mobility (earning promotions through more senior teaching positions) as well as traditional vertical mobility that leads to leadership and management positions (Tournier et al., 2019). In conjunction with this, incentives for each promotion level to include salary increases and extra responsibilities could be considered (Martin, 2018; Tournier et al., 2019). Such career progression helps improve teacher motivation and retention by creating goals for teachers to strive towards instead of merely

waiting a set amount of time for their next promotion (UNESCO, 2019b). Teacher pay for performance schemes have been found to improve student achievement in some contexts; however, in order for such schemes to function correctly, other mechanisms need to be in place such as a mechanism to assess teacher performance and student learning, as well as a salary scale to make such incentives relevant (World Bank, 2013: 9).

Accountability and feedback structures

School heads cannot expect to have motivated and high-performing teachers without setting out proper guidance and expectations. Written standards with indicators of success to strive towards can provide teachers with direction and motivation (UNESCO, 2019b). Policies should also include a focus on leaders providing oversight and feedback to foster teacher improvement (Martin, 2018; UNESCO IICBA, 2017). It is important to strike a balance between teacher accountability and the support they receive through more formative evaluation (very often the former takes precedence over the latter), and separate as much as possible to ensure trust. Professional and participatory accountability mechanisms are interesting strategies to nurture and sustain professional growth and motivation among teachers (Tournier et al., 2019).

Introduce more collaboration and professional development

By purposely incorporating opportunities for collaboration and quality professional development, well-designed teacher policies can build professionalism (Tournier et al., 2019). When teachers work together in a collaborative and mutually supportive environment, their motivation and confidence can begin to build (Crehan, Tournier, and Chimier, 2019; Education Commission, 2019; STiR Education, n.d.). Teacher networks have been found to increase the amount of time teachers spend in the classroom, leading to gains in actual teaching time (Jeevan, 2017). Collaboration can lead directly to senior teachers providing important professional development for their junior colleagues (Tournier et al., 2019). Professional development should include relevant topics that teachers can use, otherwise it could have a demotivating effect by seeming to teachers to be a waste of time and resources.

Increase teacher inputs to leadership decisions

To better encourage teachers to feel they have a stake in the education system, they should be involved in decision-making processes whenever possible. Seeking teacher input at both the school and system level can lead to higher feelings of agency and improve overall motivation (Calvert, 2016). Whether deciding new policies at the ministry level or simply shifting the focus of a school's priorities, teacher input should be valued and sought out.

Plans and policies

Policies

- Kenya: [Teachers Service Commission strategic plan](#) (2019–2023)
- Cambodia: [Teacher Policy Action Plan](#) (2015–2020)
- Pakistan: [Teacher Education Strategy](#) (2018)

Tools

- OECD. [Teachers matter: Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers. Pointers for policy development](#) (2011)
- UNESCO. [Teacher Policy Development Guide](#) (2019)
- World Bank. [Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) – Teachers](#) (2020)
- VVOB. [Professional learning communities: A guideline for South African schools](#) (2015)

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