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## Supporting in-service teachers

### BRIEF 5

#### Teacher education

#### **Strong in-service support programmes connected to opportunities for continuous professional development can have a large impact on student learning.**

All teachers need regular opportunities to grow as professionals and improve their work. In-service support programmes that are based on teachers' needs and enable them to learn more about teaching can have a large impact on student learning. Research suggests that such programmes may be most effective when they are: linked to teacher appraisal and teachers' needs, on-going, participatory, school-based, and collaborative.

#### **Issues and Discussion**

**Types of In-Service Support:** In general, teachers who have had some in-service support teach better than those who have not, but programmes are offered in a variety of delivery modes by different institutions in different country contexts.(15) Support for in-service teachers is often referred to as continuous professional development, offering teachers opportunities to develop both their content knowledge and their pedagogical and other skills. Governments, non-governmental organizations, private companies, or schools themselves may offer school-based continuous professional development programmes. Many of these institutions may also offer online or distance programmes based at institutions other than schools. Workshops, meetings, and other short courses are probably the most common modalities for offering professional development opportunities, though not necessarily the most effective.(3) Other types of support to in-service teachers include mentoring programmes and professional learning communities.

**Components of Effective In-Service Support Programmes:** Becoming an effective teacher is a long process that requires developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to raise student achievement.(17) Several general characteristics—being based on teachers' needs, on-going, participatory, school-based, and collaborative—ensure programmes are more effective, though each programme should be designed with the local context and needs in mind.(17)(9)

*1. Based on Teachers' Needs:* Support programmes that are disconnected from teachers' realities are much less effective and also discourage motivation among teachers.(2)(3)(11) For this reason, effective programmes are based on an evaluation of teachers' needs, such as those identified through teacher appraisal systems, or through teachers' own reflections on the opportunities they need for professional development.(7)

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2. *On-going Support*: The term continuous professional development (CPD) is commonly used because it suggests that support should be on-going. Single workshops or seminars are less effective than programmes with on-going support.(2)(8)(15)(17) For example, on-going teacher coaching and mentoring by principals/head teachers, expert teachers, or instructional coaches can help teachers learn specific teaching techniques and are more effective than single workshops or one-time meetings. Coaching and mentoring are most effective when coaches observe teachers, model helpful instructional methods, and then provide feedback to teachers as they practice them.(2)

3. *Participatory Approach*: Many programmes are taught through more traditional pedagogical forms, such as lectures, but programmes are more effective when teachers participate actively by practicing new methods and techniques.(17) Moreover, teachers are more likely to implement new and better teaching practices if the programmes involve them in learning how to use them.(2)(11) Programmes that merely provide teaching materials have not been particularly effective.(11)

4. *School-Based Support*: Programmes that occur in schools are most effective because they focus on the teaching and learning process in the particular context of the school, though they need to be monitored and supported to ensure quality.(3)(17) This is also important because effective programmes focus on the specific needs of teachers, including subject knowledge, approaches to classroom management, etc.(4) For example, lesson study programmes where teachers design, teach, and critique lessons in groups are effective in part because they occur in specific school contexts and focus on the necessary areas for improvement in that school.(11) Mentoring programmes have similar advantages because the mentors are able to provide specific feedback related to the local school context.(11)

5. *Collaborative Support*: The most effective programmes include opportunities for teachers to collaborate with one another as well as with administrators and community members.(17) Opportunities to share experiences, resources, and lesson plans can help teachers solve problems in their own classrooms.(13)(19) One common collaborative approach is to form *professional learning communities* (PLCs) within a school. Teachers meet together as a PLC to discuss educational readings, solve a problem with instructional practice, or share classroom management strategies within a safe and non-evaluative community.(2) Research suggests strong PLCs can improve school culture, student learning, the use of learner-centred pedagogy.(8) Bringing subject area teachers together from different schools can also encourage collaboration among teachers who may be the only teacher of that subject in their school.(16)

## **Inclusiveness and Equity**

**Supporting Beginning Teachers**: All teachers benefit from support, but it is especially important for beginning teachers, who are less effective than those with 5 or more years of experience.(6) Many beginning teachers also face additional challenges due to positions in rural schools and therefore need considerable guidance to improve their instruction.(13) Induction programmes that help beginning teachers adjust to the school may take many forms, including observing expert teachers, reflecting on their own teaching, participating in discussions with other teachers, teaching a lighter workload, or meeting with an experienced mentor teacher to gain additional insights.(5)(17) These programmes can help teachers stay at the school longer and teach more effectively, but the number of hours spent meeting with a mentor matters.(11) Similar approaches can also be effective with undertrained or underperforming teachers.(11)

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## Policy examples

- Ghana [[PDF](#)]

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