

Reforming Teacher Professional Development in Punjab: Will it work?

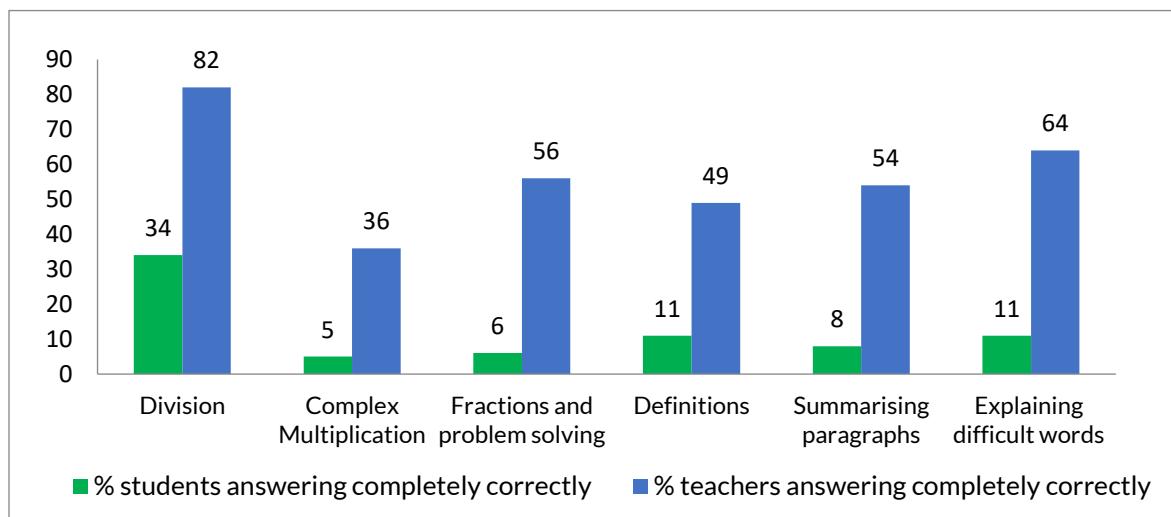
Amal Aslam

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Introduction

Teacher professional development is an important feature of education systems around the world and Pakistan is no exception. Even in high-performing education systems, teachers are trained at regular intervals so that they can learn and re-learn subject knowledge and teaching methods. In a country like Pakistan, teacher professional development is even more critical in the context of imperfect teacher recruitment policies and pre-service teacher education programs. Evidence suggests that teachers, even new entrants, lack the very knowledge they are meant to impart and/or the skills needed to meaningfully convey educational content to students. This is evident in **Figure 1**, which shows a comparison of teacher and student competencies on the same mathematics and language tests conducted as part of the SchoolTELLS¹ survey in Punjab in 2011.² Bringing teachers up to par must be a priority in education policy in Pakistan as raising the quality of teachers is key to improving student learning.

Figure 1: Competencies of teachers and students on identical tests in Punjab (2011)



Source: Aslam, Jamil and Rawal, 2011:3.

¹ School Teacher Effectiveness and Learning Level of Students survey.

² Aslam, M., Jamil, B. & Rawal, S. (2011). Teachers and school quality: Some policy pointers from Rural Punjab, pp.1-4. Retrieved from:

http://aserpakistan.org/document/aser_policy_briefs/2011/Policy_Brief_Teachers_and_School_Quality.pdf.

The existing professional development model

Punjab was the first province in Pakistan to address shortcomings in its in-service teacher training system by way of introduction of a continuous professional development (CPD) model for its primary teachers in 2006. District teacher educators (DTEs) were recruited and deployed to serve as key actors in this CPD model. They hold primary responsibility for teacher professional development both in the school and at the cluster level (each cluster contains 25 to 30 schools within a 15-kilometer radius). DTEs comprise a mobile workforce of over 3,000 dispersed throughout Punjab with about 2 DTEs per cluster, each of whom is responsible for 10 to 15 schools. DTEs are required to:

1. Visit teachers *in* schools in their clusters twice every month to offer on-the-job mentoring and training support. DTEs are to identify, assess and redress specific knowledge and skill gaps in teachers in these one-on-one interactions. During these school visits the DTE is expected to:
 - a. Conduct student assessments to gauge learning.
 - b. Observe teacher practice in the classroom.
 - c. Guide and mentor teachers on how to improve their knowledge and skills.
2. Train teachers, as a collective, for one day every quarter at the cluster-training centers known as CTSCs³ where all teachers of a district congregate.

DTEs were seen as the antidote to the shortcomings of the one-off, inadequate, irregular trainings that teachers were receiving thus far that were often lacking alignment with teachers' actual needs.

More than 10 years later, policymakers are revamping the CPD model. While a host of changes have been proposed, a key change is the elimination of the post of DTE. This policy note describes the proposed changes, motivations for reform, and the advantages and challenges posed in the revised model. This note is based on conversations with relevant officials and stakeholders in Punjab's education sector. It reflects their views as of May 18th, 2017, when the last of these conversations was conducted.

What are the proposed changes?

A number of inter-linked changes are being suggested to the CPD framework in Punjab. Rollout of the revised teacher-training model is expected to take place in September 2017. However, formal

³ Cluster Training and Support Centers

approvals and notifications from the office of the Chief Minister are yet to be issued. Proposed changes relate to the staff, structure and duration, and coverage of CPD in the province:

- 1) **Staff:** The post of the DTE will be eliminated altogether. Assistant education officers (AEOs) and subject specialists will replace DTEs to cater to the professional development needs of teachers in the school and at the cluster level (see **Box 1** for a description of AEOs and subject specialists).⁴ Both the AEOs and the subject specialists will be stationed at an academic development unit (ADU) to be established in the cluster-training centers.

Box 1: A look at AEOs and subject specialists

Till now, AEOs have only been responsible for primary and elementary school inspections (with three annual visits to each school), monitoring and data collection on indicators including teacher attendance, student enrolment and missing facilities in schools, and making recommendations for the opening of new schools or upgrading existing schools. AEOs are also the main point of contact between primary and elementary school head teachers and the education department and provide some authorization/oversight to head teachers in these schools. AEOs form the bottom of the hierarchy in the district education department and report to the Deputy District Education Officer (D-DEO) in a chain that ultimately leads up to the District Coordination Officer (DCO).

Subject specialists refers to a new category of CPD personnel that will be recruited and trained by the DSD to serve at the cluster level. Subject specialists for all nine areas including English, Urdu, mathematics, Islamiat, social studies, science (across physics, biology, and chemistry), and pedagogy will be hired. It is possible that some of the existing DTEs will be accommodated as subject specialists (in the form of pedagogy experts in particular) as the DSD wants to capitalize on the capacity building/other investments it has made in DTEs over the years by incorporating those who have performed well in the past.

- 2) **Structure and Duration:** AEOs will visit schools twice a month to conduct student tests and teacher observations. AEOs will identify weak teachers – as well as the areas they are struggling in - and refer them to subject specialists at the cluster center. These teachers will visit subject specialists once a month to be trained by them while schools are in session (see **Figure 2** for more details). In addition, subject specialists at the cluster level will train teachers for one whole month during the summer holidays. This adds up to about 240 hours of training that teachers will receive annually.

⁴ The description of AEOs' current roles and responsibilities comes from Canada Pakistan Basic Education Project. (2009). Districts education office management handbook, p.9.

- 3) **Coverage:** The CPD model will now deliver in-service teacher training not just to primary but also to elementary and secondary teachers.

Figure 2: Proposed structure for professional development of teachers in Punjab

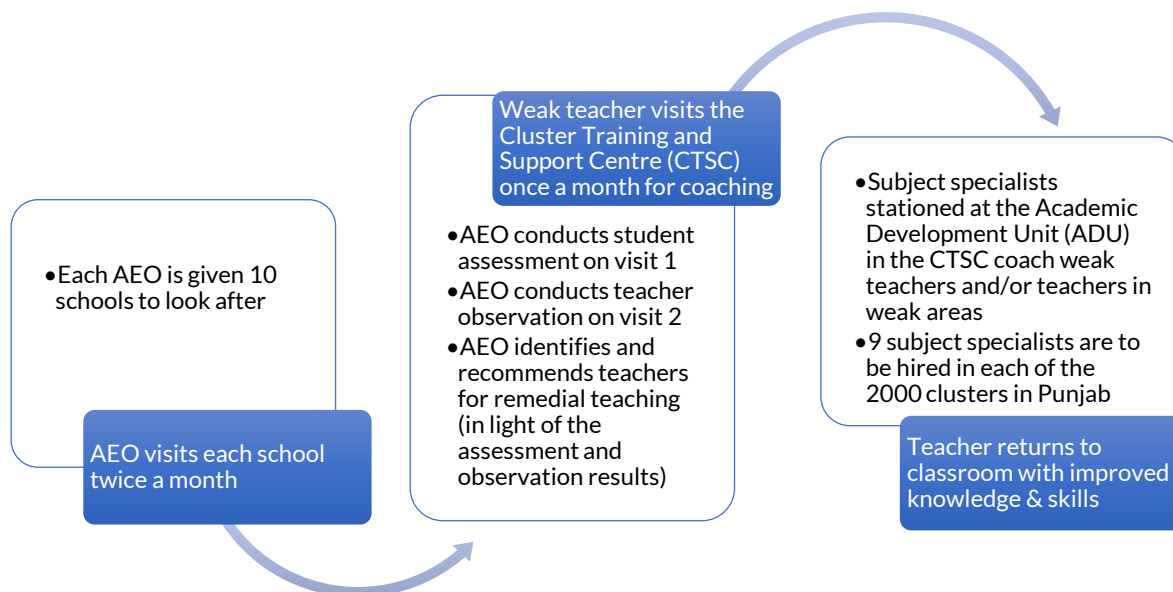


Table 1: Comparison of old and new CPD model in Punjab

Dimension	Old CPD Model	New CPD Model
Scope	Primary school teachers only	Primary, middle, and high school teachers
Staff	Approximately 3000 DTEs	Approximately 4000 AEOs and 18,000 subject specialists
Structure and frequency	Teachers trained by DTEs for one day every quarter at the cluster center and twice a month in schools	Teachers trained by subject specialists for one whole month every summer and for one day every month at cluster center Teachers are also visited in schools twice a month by AEOs who test students and assess teacher knowledge and skill
Duration	Teachers receive a total of 50 to 60 hours of training annually	Teachers receive 240 hours of training annually

Why the change?

There appear to be four main motivations for proposed changes to the CPD model.

1. **Lack of linkages between departments:** There is some misgiving that the current CPD model and its personnel, operated and managed by the DSD, have been working in isolation from the district education department. While there has technically been no overlap until now between the responsibilities of CPD personnel like DTEs and district officers such as AEOs, there have been several instances of stepping on each other's toes. For example, a frequent point of contention between the School Education Department (SED) and the DSD has been the AEO's approval of teacher leave on a day when the DTE has a scheduled teacher observation visit that the DTE is subsequently unable to complete and report on. Bringing the AEO in as a CPD actor involves the district education department in teacher professional development and creates a link between the department and the DSD.
2. **Too many monitors:** The SED and the DSD are concerned that too many different officials, including but not limited to DTEs and AEOs, are monitoring teachers and causing confusion within the school. While each official is monitoring and collecting data on different indicators, marrying some of these efforts could be a more efficient use of funds and human resources. Co-opting the AEO seems to do just that.
3. **Variable quality of DTEs:** Lack of standardization of in-service teacher training across Punjab has been a key criticism of the existing CPD framework. DTEs vary a great deal in terms of qualifications and skill with the result that mentoring and support to teachers is of uneven quality across the province. As DTEs are recruited at the local level, it is the luck of the draw whether a particular locality has good candidates available to fill the position. Another failure of the system is that even appointed DTEs who are "qualified" on paper (i.e. possess a master's degree and have teaching experience) may not have the kind of detailed subject knowledge necessary for them to adequately support teachers. Consider the case of a teacher requiring assistance in science but is assigned to a DTE with a degree in Islamiyat. Hiring subject specialists in all disciplines at the cluster level ensures that teachers have access to persons well versed in all subjects at the local level.
4. **Limited training exposure:** There is dissatisfaction with the actual number of contact hours between DTEs and teachers. The DSD has found that in practice DTEs are only interacting with teachers to mentor them for an hour a month. This is because the DTE has no time to interact with teachers during his first visit, in which he assesses students. On his second visit of the month the DTE can scarcely spare an hour as he is required to execute other responsibilities including observing the teacher, looking at the overall school development plan with head teachers, and reviewing the lesson plans prepared by

teachers for all subjects and all primary grades.⁵ In the revised model, subject specialists will train teachers for one whole day of the month, ensuring at least six hours of contact between teachers and trainers every month that school is in session.

Will it work?

There are many advantages of the proposed reforms to teacher professional development in Punjab. These include opportunities for the SED and the DSD to work together for the betterment of school quality, a reduction in the number of monitors visiting schools, improvement in the quality of training resources that teachers have access to, and an increase in training time/exposure to professional development for teachers (an almost four-fold increase compared with the existing CPD model). This is also the first time in Punjab's history that elementary and secondary school teachers will also be provided with regular or continuous professional development support. However, the suggested reforms also pose some challenges that must be addressed to ensure the effectiveness of the new model. These are discussed below.

Will quality of training and support really improve?

One of the main criticisms of the existing CPD model is variability in the quality of training/support that teachers receive. Lack of standardization of training remains a concern in the revised model in the case of both AEOs and subject specialists. AEOs have not been engaged in the CPD of teachers in Punjab until now and need to be facilitated to shift from their traditional administrative role to the academic support role that is additionally required of them. The DSD will be training AEOs on their revised roles, in particular on how to support teachers and conduct student assessments and teacher observations.

While subject specialists could, in theory, have a positive effect on teacher training, the revised model presupposes the availability of subject specialists in all nine areas identified at the cluster level. As was the case with DTE recruitment, some localities or clusters may not have the kind of subject specialists that the DSD wants to recruit. Now the DSD has set the selection criteria for subject specialists as holding a master's degree in that particular subject and having at least three years of teaching experience in public schools. However, the DSD itself has noted that where such a subject specialist is not available it will relax its standards and be willing to hire people holding a bachelor's degree, having less than the prescribed years of teaching experience, or working in the private sector. This raises the possibility that uneven quality of training will persist. The DSD could mitigate this problem by using technology and standardized digital educational content and learning materials as a solution to ensure that all teachers in the province have access to identical training and resources.

⁵ Society for the Advancement of Education. (2014). Education Monitor: Reviewing quality of key education inputs in Pakistan, p.56.

Are mandates and reporting structures clear?

Ensuring clarity of roles and reporting protocols of AEOs and subject specialists in shifting bureaucratic structures will be key to running the revised model effectively. The SED and the DSD need to ensure that the AEO takes ownership of his or her new roles and responsibilities. Till now, the AEO has only operated within the ambit and hierarchy of the district education department. As a CPD actor, the AEO will also need to coordinate with the DSD (as per policy, in-service teacher education is the mandate of the DSD). AEOs in particular will need to share consolidated reports on student and teacher assessments and observations with the DSD on a regular basis. It will also be critical that the communication flow between AEOs and subject specialists is smooth. This is being facilitated through the stationing of both AEOs and subject specialists in the same physical space at the ADU in the cluster center.

Conclusion

The CPD model in Punjab is being revamped after more than a decade. The impetus to restructure CPD in the province has now gained momentum. However, before changes are implemented it is important for policymakers to ask whether the “AEO + subject specialists” configuration will suffer from some of the same limitations of DTEs. While there are many advantages of the proposed model including the SED and DSD working together to improve teacher quality and student learning, reduction in the number of monitors and officers visiting schools, and a substantial increase in teacher training time, much still rests on the quality of existing and future AEOs and subject specialists as well as ownership of the revised structure by these actors. These challenges are only magnified after considering the sheer scale at which the revised CPD model will be implemented – for primary, elementary, *and* secondary school teachers.

About the author

Amal Aslam is a research manager at the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS).