Forum Summary Report

Introduction

The World Teacher’s Day Forum held on 5\(^{th}\) and 6\(^{th}\) October in Bangkok focused on the key issues in teacher policy. The scope of discussion was defined with the 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendations Concerning the Status of Teachers, as 2016 is also the 50\(^{th}\) Anniversary of the Recommendations. The key areas covered are, teacher recruitment and preparation, teacher professional development, teacher’s professional status, rights and conditions. It is recognized that the recommendations are still pertinent after fifty years, and many Asia Pacific member states still face shortage of teachers. With the shift of focus to quality education in the SDG4 Goals: Education 2030, the challenge is far greater and deeper than teacher shortage. This report summarizes the key issues and questions raised and discussed during the Forum, and serves to provide inputs to inform the member states and the respective UNESCO education sections on future directions and themes for research study that would lead to relevant policy recommendations to promote teacher’s status, motivate with better conditions and career progression opportunities, direct greater attention and resources to build teacher competency through professional development policies, so as to attain goals articulated in SDG 4 by 2030.

Keynotes

The two keynotes set the premise for the Forum to address the following agenda:

- To review teacher policies with reference to the 1966 Recommendations and examine the gaps in promoting teacher status and improving their working conditions
- To discuss policies impacting teacher issues

**Keynote 1: Setting the Context**

*Title:* Revisiting the 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Teachers in the Context of Education 2030  
*Speaker:* Mr. Libing Wang, Chief of Section, Educational Innovation and Skills Development, UNESCO Bangkok

Keynote 1 has set forth a few key points for the Forum participants’ deliberation and discussion. Firstly, there is still teacher shortage in Asia and the Pacific despite the increased recruitment since the millennium, and with persistent teacher distribution disparity adversely affecting rural and urban underserved areas. The effort to provide quality education has been hampered by two trends of concern, firstly the constantly high need to replace attrition of teachers, and secondly the low pupil-qualified-teacher ratio (PQTR) in schools. The approach to ensure quality teaching also need to consider the shift in the teaching and learning landscape, which requires increased student-centered pedagogical practices, and hence the need to focus
more on teacher competency in teacher preparation and continuing professional development. It was stressed that the 1966 Recommendations are still valid and much needs to be done on the part of policy makers and key stakeholders to truly fulfill them in order to deliver quality education. The Keynote has drawn attention to the following domains in teacher policy:

- Capacity building for teacher education institutions (TEIs)
- Diversify modalities of professional development to include build knowledge in educational research and inquiry-based pedagogy
- Align teacher employment and deployment structures to national manpower and employment-related laws, also making the teaching profession appealing
- Balance between professional autonomy with social accountability

**Keynote 2: Key ideas and key players in teacher development**

*Title: The Role of School Leadership in teacher Career Progression*

*Speaker: Mrs. Belinda Charles, Dean, Academy of Principals, Singapore*

Keynote 2 continues to put forth key issues in line with the Forum’s agenda by directing attention to the pivotal role school leadership plays in teachers’ professional development, status, morale and motivation. It was asserted that the school leaders’ roles should be to focus on developing a system that supports continuing development of teacher competency in pedagogy, and more significantly, building a collaborative learning culture and cultivating a new mindset of ‘teacher-as-leaders’. The idea is to expand the notion of a classroom teacher to that of a curriculum leader, pedagogical mentor and collaborator and teacher-researcher, so as to raise the professional status of teachers, accord them the professional responsibility and empowerment through trust, support, development and motivation. It was stressed that the country example on the system and concept of teacher-as-leaders cited was not an outcome of a short term approach but a concerted national policy effort that has spanned over nearly three decades.

Keynote 2 is a timely message given the findings of UNESCO publication, *Asia-Pacific Teachers: Career Progression and Professional Development*, launched in conjunction with this year’s World Teacher’s Day. The findings highlighted various aspects in the teaching that makes the profession a choice career, and the top two factors has shown 62% of respondents from a 9-country study citing opportunities for career advancement, and 58% for relevant professional development as motivating factors, and the idea of teachers as curriculum and pedagogical leaders are highly relevant in view of the published study.

**Forum discussion: Teacher issues and policies**

The issues discussed in the Forum include (the list is in a chronological order of topics covered):

1. Teacher shortage
2. Teacher recruitment
3. Teacher education
4. Teacher professional development
5. Retention, conditions and motivation
6. Teacher evaluation
1. Teacher shortage

The shortage of teachers in the Asia-pacific in the majority of the member states range from mild to moderate levels, while a few still faces critical shortage. The key issues discussed focused on the more significant shortage of qualified and trained teachers, which directly impact on quality of teaching and student learning. For the ECCE sector, there is still significant shortage in most Asia-Pacific countries, and the lack of accreditation body to verify the quality of training for ECCE teachers and practitioners has added to the problem.

An important issue was raised regarding balancing between providing enough teachers, whether they are sufficiently qualified, or that of slowing the recruitment process to ensure recruited teachers have sufficient qualification. It has been observed that inadequate qualifications amongst teachers generally affect developing systems rather than advanced education systems in more established economies with decreased enrolment due to maturing population, such as Japan, Korea and Singapore. A proposed approach for developing systems and economies with growing population and teacher shortages is to prioritize quantity recruitment only as a stop-gap, short term intervention that must be followed-up with a long-term sustained commitment to provide underqualified teachers with on-the-job training and continuing education, with the target for all teachers to eventually attain the required qualifications.

2. Teacher recruitment

Most participants have agreed that teacher recruitment should target teachers who have the passion and delight in teaching. The focus should be on the approach and strategy to identify such candidates, and make teaching a career that is sufficiently appealing to them.

A related issue raised is on the definition of a good teacher. This has implications on recruitment policy as the notion of a good teacher shapes the recruitment criteria, which could include suitable job temperament and dispositions. That consequently led to another question raised, on whether a teacher-candidate’s academic knowledge and achievements should be the dominant criteria for recruitment and selection, especially when teacher qualification is a recognized quality linked to teacher competency.

3. Teacher education (pre-service)

The issue of the focus of teacher preparation has been keenly discussed. A debatable issue was on the notion of teacher competency, revisiting the question ‘What makes a good teacher’? There was no conclusive consensus on the definition of teacher competency, but the participants and panellists generally agreed that the broad criteria could include:

- Good subject knowledge
- Good pedagogical knowledge
- Good student knowledge

One argument that was put forward was the need to develop the spiritual-emotional capacity of teachers rather than merely focusing on content mastery and cognitive development. It has been stressed that teachers need a holistic preparation in order to help them connect with the students when they begin teaching. It has been emphasized that the psychological and spiritual aspects of preparation, or the soft
skills of teaching, deserve greater focus as learning outcomes in teacher education. The argument is for teacher education not to narrowly focus on the teaching of knowledge, but also develop humanistic skills, as teachers must have the very same qualities that they are trying to teach and inculcate in children. The basis of this argument is that a teacher needs to learn to understand oneself before he/she learns to understand others. The suggestion is for teacher education to include the following teaching and learning domains and respective desired outcomes:

- **Cognitive learning domain** – Content and pedagogical knowledge, ICT literacy;
- **Physical learning domain** – Classroom management and communication skills;
- **Spiritual learning domain** – Ethical and moral values; and
- **Emotional learning domain** – Compassion and understanding of the learning needs of all profiles of students.

It was argued that teachers need to do more than teach from the book, as teachers need to see themselves in the bigger picture as one of the care-givers and role models in a student’s life, and hence, a more holistic teacher education is needed.

4. **Teacher professional development / PD (in-service)**

A key question was raised on the ways to engage teachers to be more involved in their own PD. It is acknowledged that the acquisition of teaching knowledge need not always be a lone pursuit. Teachers may not have the opportunity to be exposed to a wide repertoire of professional knowledge within their own classroom context but they can broaden their knowledge and skills through professional collaboration. Teachers need to build trust amongst peers and grow professionally as a community. This is especially pertinent for teachers in terms of knowledge in pedagogical research, and the participants agreed that there should be a strong research culture amongst teachers.

A few examples of PD approaches were cited where there are strengths as well as gaps in addressing teacher’s professional needs. One of the country example given was the large skills gap between qualified veteran and younger teachers. Although such gaps are common generally in the teaching force, the problem was that younger teachers in the country are often resistant to participating in PD activities, as the content of the PD could not meet the needs for their classroom practice. Another country example shows that the central policy on PD accord schools full autonomy on PD matters, with no mandatory baseline requirement in PD. As such, there is a trend showing that better schools have PD programmes than other schools, if at all.

There was consensus that PD should be more than training activities and the desirable outcome is more than just capturing content but also developing a mindset of continuing reflection on teaching. Relating teacher PD and reflective practices back to the notion of a good teacher in the 21st Century - good teachers are more than trained adults who transmit knowledge but are those who can develop the young to be problem solvers, who possess transversal skills that can be applied beyond national boundaries. Teaching will become more important in the future as there is a need for future generations to be involved in problem solving for more complex challenges.

The participants agreed that the core competency of teachers, such as classroom management and constructivist teaching approaches, applies to all teachers but it was also agreed that teachers must be given
choices in PD. The scope of PD should not be narrowly confined to formal platforms like workshops and seminars, because in-school coaching could be highly relevant for their practical application. As the teaching context is very different across the districts and schools, teachers could benefit from peer coaching, sharing, and internalization of knowledge through reflection. The key is to convince both schools and teachers of the importance and necessity of continuing PD. It is easier to build that conviction if the policy approach to PD is holistic, allows for flexibility and caters for contextualization. For example, in ECCE there is a need for the teachers to work closely with professionals from other sectors, such as health workers, carers, social workers, and generic PD is unable to cater for such specific needs. Hence, it is important for developers of PD policy to consult teachers, involving them in dialogues on PD processes, gathering and valuing their feedback. It was also added that quality PD can help raise teacher’s status as well-planned and effective PD can increase their professional credibility and respect from the community.

More questions on PD were raised and discussed. Firstly, a question was brought up on the sponsorship, provision, regulation, and quality assurance of PD. Based on the sharing by participants from several member states, teacher PD across the region ranges from fully centralized funded and regulated to entirely without central provision or subsidy. It was suggested that data should be gathered from the ground and further in-depth study could be done by UNESCO. There was a suggestion to shift teacher’s mindset about PD provision. Instead of waiting for centralized provision, which can be greatly delayed by cumbersome bureaucracy in policy actions, teachers and the school community are very much in a nimble position to start PD initiatives.

The second question was raised on whether it is timely for UNESCO to consider moving into the direction of developing a Convention to replace the Recommendations.1 This was mooted given the comments that in an ideal situation, professional teachers should have dialogues and conversations with the respective authorities, to bring about policy changes. However, existing teacher associations have no control on and little influence over teacher policies. Thus, there is a suggestion at the Forum that it is time to think about the possibility of a Convention.

5. Retention, conditions and motivation

A remark was made at the Forum, “Teachers are admired but not envied”, which echoes a long-standing challenge with regard to teacher retention. There is unanimous agreement that the work involved in teaching is tough and the challenge cannot simply be resolved by recruiting passionate teachers. A more concerted policy effort is needed to keep teachers supported, motivated and to prevent attrition because of work burnout and unsustainable conditions. There is a need to set teachers’ compensation according to the demands of their responsibilities. It was shared at the Forum there is research evidence that correlates teacher compensation and the quality of the teachers. It was also shared that in the one of the countries, the teachers are dedicated despite the fact that the starting salary is quite low. However, the consequence of the low pay meant that teachers would seek overseas teaching or related jobs to receive a higher salary.

Low salary is a much greater challenge for the ECCE level as ECCE teachers generally receive about 60%-70% of the salary of teachers of other levels (primary and secondary levels). Although ECCE teachers’ and

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1 Under UNESCO normative instruments, International Conventions are legally binding, subject to ratification, acceptance or accession by States. They define rules with which the States undertake to comply, while Recommendations are not legally binding but are intended to influence the development of national laws and practices.
practitioners’ remuneration has improved over the years but this sector has only recently gained more attention from policy makers and more commitment from the respective governments is still needed.

6. Teacher evaluation
There was no direct mention of teacher performance appraisal at the Forum. Evaluation was the keyword used but the discussions did touch on some aspects of teacher appraisal. The main focus of discussion on teacher evaluation at the Forum advocated for a holistic and transparent teacher evaluation policy that defines teacher competency, articulates evidence of competency while maintaining a holistic and balanced approach. The notion of appraisal was touched on when a point was put forth for policy makers to rethink the purpose of evaluation. It was argued that there should be clarity on whether the evaluation was intended for reviewing teaching practice, measuring teaching performance, or for identification and selection of career development pathways. The first of the three purposes is more formative in nature while the latter two are closer to the concept of appraisal.

Another key issue identified with regard to the validity of evaluation is the capacity and role of the evaluator, the evaluation approach, processes and strategies. The Forum participants agreed that such a crucial role requires a highly qualified person with relevant background knowledge of teaching and understanding of local context. There was consensus to support a more constructivist, contextualized and reflective approach in teacher evaluation rather than narrowly focusing on teaching competency and performance.

Conclusion
The following is a summary of questions and topics raised and discussed during the Forum:

- Teacher Competency:
  - The possibility of the development of a teacher competency framework (Primary, lower secondary) and the study of qualities and attributes that constitute teacher competency and supports professionalization of teaching
  - The type of PD (pre- and in-service) that supports the building of the identified competencies.
  - Teacher’s motivation in PD
  - Teacher’s ownership in PD (examples of ground-up PD initiatives, learning communities, mentoring, etc.)
  - The best practices in PD planning, sponsorship, regulation and feedback system

- Teacher Evaluation – on a possible holistic approach in teacher evaluation that supports teacher retention:
  - Approach and structure of evaluation that sustain teachers’ motivation
  - Constructivist approach and strategies in evaluation that supports teachers’ professional growth and effectiveness

The discussed topics and issues pertaining to teacher policies are potential areas for further studies and research, and they are fully in line with the 1966 Recommendations, which are still highly pertinent.