

Forum: UNESCO

Issue: Empowering teachers and educators in developing countries.

Officer: Naysha Kapre

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Introduction

Education is universally acknowledged as a cornerstone of development, but its success depends on one crucial factor: the empowerment of teachers. This is a worldwide issue, affecting countries from Sweden to Sudan. However, developing nations, in particular, face challenges such as insufficient training, inadequate resources, and lack of support. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure access to education.

The important thing to note is that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Majority of the world's countries are classified as developing by the IMF, and each one has its own factors that lead to a lack of equitable and quality education, including teacher retention rates, government involvement or lack thereof, cultural norms, and current political climate.

This is an issue that has raised alarm bells at the UN, and in 2022 the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres established a High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession to determine how the teaching profession could be changed and supported to be able to play its role in an effective manner and contribute to achieving SDG4.

Key Terms

Teacher Empowerment

Equipping educators with the resources, skills, support, and autonomy needed to perform their roles effectively.

Professional Development

Continuous training of educators in order to enhance the skills of the educators and ensure quality education

Educational Equity

Ensuring fair access to educational resources and opportunities for all students and teachers, regardless of socio-economic background

Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDs)

Low-income countries which are highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks, have low levels of human assets and face severe structural impediments to sustainable development.

Teacher Attrition

Teacher attrition refers to the process by which teachers leave the teaching profession, either by transferring to a different field, retiring, or leaving for personal or professional reasons.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)

SDG 4 is part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development established by the UN in 2015. SDG4 is a commitment to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."

Background Information

Teacher empowerment is a critical factor in ensuring the quality of education, particularly in developing nations which face challenges such as teacher shortages, limited resources, and inadequate training. To improve the quality of education, it is necessary to empower educators, which involves providing them with the resources necessary to perform their roles and improve the quality of education.

A UNESCO report on teachers revealed that in 2024, there is an urgent need for 44 million primary and secondary teachers worldwide by 2030, with Sub-Saharan Africa especially affected, with a need for 15 million new teachers by 2030. A teacher deficit threatens the ability of many developing nations to provide quality education.

In 2022, UNESCO data showed that about 26% of primary and 39% of secondary school teachers do not have qualification requirements in low-income countries, compared to respectively 14% and 16% globally at the time.

These statistics underscore the need to train, equip, and support educators in regions which need them the most. Addressing the issue of teacher empowerment would lead to a more skilled workforce, furthering the economic development and social progress of developing nations.

In 2015, UNESCO member states agreed on a level of investment in education, that being 4-6% of their GDP, or 15-20% of public expenditure, but the majority of countries have not yet reached this threshold. In 2023, UNESCO estimated that the gap in investment for education was \$100 billion a year.

Countries and Organizations Involved

International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030

The International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, otherwise known as the Teacher Task Force, was created in 2008 with the aim of advocating for teachers and raising awareness in achieving SDG4. Their current goals, as outlined in their 2022-2025 Strategic Plan is to provide knowledge on teachers and their training, creating an awareness of the priority of teachers in education, and fostering regional policy in support of teachers.

High-Level Panel On the Teaching Profession

The High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession was established in 2022 following the Transforming Education Summit. It was tasked with setting out a clear plan of action on how the teaching profession could be better supported. In 2024, the

Panel released 59 recommendations on how the teaching profession could be supported. The Panel is very clear about the fact that teachers must be included in policy making regarding the teaching profession. It calls for an international Fund to protect the teaching profession from austerity measures that could be instated by governments. This Fund would also ensure that teachers working in emergency situations would still receive funds, a problem faced in regions with instability such as Yemen and South Sudan.

South Sudan

South Sudan is dealing with a severe teacher shortage, which is made worse with issues of teacher retention and less people entering the teaching profession. Teacher salaries are not provided on a regular basis, and even when they are, they are incredibly low. The National Teachers Union of South Sudan (NTUSS) is incredibly supportive of the fund proposed by the High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession because it would help fix the problem with teacher salaries, and potentially increase teacher retention rates.

Afghanistan

Teacher empowerment in Afghanistan coincides with another issue: women's empowerment. Under Taliban rule, women have been moved out of public life almost entirely, and this has had an impact on education. Girls are only allowed to learn until the 6th grade, and despite this, enrollments in primary schools have dropped significantly. Additionally, women aren't allowed to teach at all. These developments have only exacerbated the teacher shortage. In response, UNESCO has invested in programmes which deliver education via radio or television.

Yemen

Yemen has been locked in a civil war since 2014, and an estimated 4.5 million Yemeni nationals are internally displaced. The collapse of the Yemeni economy has also meant that education has fallen by the wayside. Conservation cultural norms, similar to Afghanistan, also mean that girls are pulled out of education early, preventing them from learning literacy skills like reading or writing.

Timeline of Events

1966: UNESCO and the International Labour Organization adopt the *Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers*, outlining teachers' rights and responsibilities.

1994: The World Teachers' Day is established to recognize teachers' contributions.

2000: The Dakar Framework for Action emphasizes teacher quality as key to achieving universal education goals.

2015-2016: The Sustainable Development Goals are adopted as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with SDG 4 committing to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

2020: COVID-19 pandemic increases the use of online learning, highlighting the need for training teachers with digital resources and training.

Relevant UN Treaties and Resolutions

UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/77/192 (2022)

A/RES/77/192 was adopted on the 15th of December 2022, and is part of the UN's effort to achieve SDG 4 (Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.) It recognizes the critical role of teachers and the importance of *'strengthening their capacities, skills and competencies by providing support, including through the necessary trainings, devices, materials and technological infrastructure'*.

2030 Agenda For Sustainable Development (SDG 4)

The 2030 Agenda For Sustainable Development was launched in September of 2015, with the goal of *'ending poverty in all its forms'*. The UN 2030 Agenda envisions *"a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination"*. Sustainable Development Goal 4, in particular, is focused on providing inclusive and equitable education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Teachers unions and NGOs have been instrumental in attempting to empower teachers, such as the Teacher Foundation. These NGOs, often alongside governments, have implemented professional development programs to enhance teacher's skills, knowledge, and teaching methods. These events are organized at local, national, or regional levels. But these programs have faced challenges in developing nations, for example, in countries like India and Kenya, government initiatives have attempted to provide regular training, but are often undermined by a lack of resources or inconsistency.

Another solution that has been tested by countries such as Zambia and Malawi is increasing teacher salaries. This solution addresses the teacher attrition that has been a result of poor salaries and lack of compensation. The issue this solution faced was high inflation and high cost-of-living in these countries.

Increasing the use of technology in education is also a proposed solution, one that gained more traction following the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of online learning. With the recent boom in AI technology, empowering teachers with digital tools, and increasing e-learning has been floated as a possible solution, but the limited access to technology in developing nations poses a challenge. Additionally, teachers may lack the digital literacy required to utilize and take full advantage of these tools.

The Beijing Consensus on AI in education goes over the potential for the use of AI in education, and making education more personalized for each student, and states while that AI could be a powerful tool in empowering and supporting teachers, the human interactions that go into the learning process between student and teacher are at the core of the education process and cannot be replaced by machines. The Beijing Consensus is also very specific in stating that machines cannot replace teachers and is focused on a human-centric AI approach, highlighting the use of AI in empowering education, whether it be teachers or management.

Possible Solutions

The most obvious solution, and the one being explored by the UN right now is training more teachers and the investments and policy support that go hand in hand with training more teachers. This solution involves including governments and NGOs, as is happening in developing countries over the world. Issues regarding the effectiveness of these programs are prevalent, a complaint being that post-program support is lacking, in part due to insufficient investment into these programs by governments.

The other option that must be considered in this age of rapid transformation and innovation is the introduction of AI technology in education, which is a solution that UNESCO has acknowledged in context to the Education 2030 Agenda.

The concern being raised is the risk of increasing the divide between countries with respect to AI technologies and the additional impact it could have on the quality of education received by students worldwide. The use of AI was discussed in the Beijing Consensus on AI and education (2019) and one of the concerns was that the way AI is trained can inherently cause the AI to contain bias. The Beijing Consensus also brings up the issue of legal and ethical risks related to data privacy and security, a concern raised in the discussion of AI development in general.

The use of AI in education has already been employed in tasks such grading and monitoring performance but there remains a lack of strong regulation surrounding AI in education. The EU was the first to pass an AI Act in May of 2024, which also deemed education as a field at high risk from AI. The question of whether AI regulation will be at a national or international level also remains to be seen.

What must also be called into question when considering each solution is the feasibility of the solution, and taking into account previous attempts at such a solution. It is important to maintain the sovereignty of member states while still finding a solution to the problem

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