International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030

Policy Dialogue Forum and governance meetings

1-3 December 2021

*Innovation in teacher policy and practice
for educational recovery*

Concept note

(16 November 2021)

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Teacher Task Force - 2021 Policy Dialogue Forum

This year, the 13th Policy Dialogue Forum and governance meetings of the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (TTF) will take place from 1-3 December 2021 in Kigali, Rwanda and on-line. Jointly organized by the TTF Secretariat, and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Rwanda, the over-arching theme of this year's policy dialogue forum is *Innovation in teacher policy and practice for educational recovery* with particular attention to: i) innovation in teaching and learning (ii) initial and in-service teacher education and (iii) education policy.

As the engine of improvement in education, innovation is a critical factor for education to be inclusive, equitable and of good quality; it thus needs to be at the heart of education policies and policy making. The 2021 Policy Dialogue Forum will bring together education stakeholders from around the world, both in-person and on-line, to discuss the complexities of the post-COVID era and identify how to 'build back better' and ensure that education systems harness and expand collective capabilities for innovation. It will generate policy recommendations for ministries, civil society organisations, international organisations and donors that support teachers, school leaders, teacher educators and policy-makers.

Background to the Teacher Task Force

In the spirit of the Education 2030 Agenda, the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 contributes to increasing the number of teachers and the quality of teaching globally through appropriate policies. It adheres to the international community's pledge to "...ensure that teachers and educators are empowered, adequately recruited, well-trained, professionally qualified, motivated and supported within well-resourced, efficient and effectively governed systems." The Teacher Task Force pursues this mission through the three strategic areas of its work (advocacy, knowledge creation and sharing, country support and engagement).

A flagship activity of the TTF identified in the *2018-2021 Strategic Plan* is the annual Policy Dialogue Forum, which fosters knowledge exchange and capacity-building among TTF members from countries and organizations representing various constituencies on crucial issues to facilitate progress towards the implementation of SDG 4.c and the Education 2030 Agenda. Through the Policy Dialogue Forum, the TTF offers a platform for education actors and teacher stakeholders (including policy makers, teachers, representatives from teacher organizations, civil society organizations, researchers, the UN and other international organizations, private sector organizations and foundations) to delve into what it takes to teach and educate all children, youth and adults and to reaffirm the relevance of education as an equalizing factor in society. In bringing multiple stakeholders together, the PDF aims to foster more effective and focused exchange of knowledge and experiences and provide a unique opportunity for alliance building for advocacy and resource mobilization for achieving inclusive quality education for all.

Introduction[1]

In preparation for the 13th Policy Dialogue Forum and governance meetings to be held on 1-3 December 2021, this note explores the potential of innovation as realised during the COVID-19 pandemic in three key education areas:

- innovation in teaching and learning (face-to-face or virtual classrooms) led by teachers and by systems;

- initial and in-service teacher education: innovations in curriculum and delivery to respond to gaps identified during the pandemic and emerging forms of teacher learning and professional development;

- education policy: innovation in policy making; policies that facilitate innovation across education settings; innovative policies; and policies to advocate for innovation.

The note concludes with recommendations for enhancing innovative capacity and steering and managing innovations in education systems.

Innovation in education

Historically, innovation has rarely been perceived as a typical feature of education; over 100 years ago, the renowned educator John Dewey commented on the cautious approach to new ideas in many schools and education systems (Dewey, 1916). The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this narrative. Innovation became essential as education systems and educators endeavoured to ensure that learning continued for all students after schools and other learning institutions closed. In 2020, at the height of global school closures that affected 1.6 billion learners, the Teacher Task Force released its *Call for Action on Teachers,* an appeal to give teachers the preparation and support they require to ensure that education systems can better respond to needs. Innovation was seen as a key means by which this could happen (International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2020).

Innovation in education occurs in response to problems, challenges or opportunities. It implies not only novelty but also the promise of benefits (McLean & Gargani, 2019). Innovation can take a range of forms:

- an instructional practice, such as adapting teaching to learning level rather than grade for basic reading and maths skills (Teaching at the Right Level[2]) or using rap music to teach maths patterns;

- a way of organising activities, for example establishing professional learning communities and mentoring programmes for teachers across clusters of schools;

- an educational tool or resource, such as an app with virtual experiments for senior high school students or a life-skills and well-being workbook co-developed with young women.

Conceptualising, designing, or refining an invention is creative work. In the holistic perspective adopted here, innovation is the *implementation and diffusion* of the invention in a *particular context* (Fagerberg, 2006). The context could be a single classroom, a school or teacher education institution, or a district or cluster of institutions, or a whole system.

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[2] https://www.teachingattherightlevel.org/

Innovation is highly dependent on the context. The invention does not have to be "new to the world"; it can also refer to something that is new to those who use it (Edler & Fegerberg, 2017). Innovations in one place may be standard practice in another place (OECD, 2014); iMlango[3]'s use of individualised maths tutoring through an online platform in primary schools in rural Kenya (Brugha et al, 2020) is an innovation even though similar technology is ubiquitous in other contexts.

What are the motives or impulses to innovate? As we have seen during the pandemic, innovation in education is necessary because it opens up possibilities to improve and transform educational practices and outcomes (Ravitch, 2005). It is the driver of progress in teaching and learning.

Specific aims for educational innovations are varied, reflecting the diversity of global education settings and the objectives of the systems in which they are undertaken. Typically, they include ambitions to:

- achieve greater inclusion and equity, including gender equality, in access to, and participation in, learning for all students;

- improve student learning outcomes beyond literacy and numeracy, particularly students from marginalised groups and communities;

- ensure education remains relevant to community and national needs;

- maximise the value of public investment in education by increasing efficiency and effectiveness.

A period of turbulence and uncertainty, as in the current pandemic, creates pressures to innovate, leading to clusters of innovations that stimulate further innovations.

Successful innovations respond effectively to a defined need. Nevertheless, many promising innovations are not taken to scale by governments or other actors. The reasons are complex and often only partly related to the quality or potential of the innovation (Olsen et al, 2021). For example, an innovation may not align with the perspectives and priorities of decision makers or funders, who may have different notions of what impacts are desirable or may require different types of data. Furthermore, by nature, innovations are untested, particularly with regard to costs. This may deter decision makers from supporting an innovation. To ensure that an innovation is adopted more widely and scaled up, it is essential to conduct continuous, evidence-informed dialogue about the innovation with all stakeholders (McLean & Gargani, 2019).

The increasing availability and deployment of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and new digital tools can foster innovation by extending or transforming teaching and learning practices; by enabling new processes or ways of organising activities; and by facilitating the scaling up of proven innovations (OECD, 2016). A recent audit of over 3,000 educational innovations from 166 countries found that over half of these involved digital technologies (Winthrop et al, 2018). But ICTs are not a silver bullet (Peters, 2020). They can strengthen communication and collaboration but risk amplifying inequalities. In many places, the innovative capacity of technology is limited by infrastructure, access and teachers' and students' digital skills. In sub-Saharan Africa, ICT use in education expanded by over 100% in the first few months of the pandemic but overall, only 6% of students were estimated to be using ICTs to support their learning (Crawfurd, 2020). The Teacher Task Force recently reported that just 12% of countries in sub-Saharan Africa said they had provided ICT tools and Internet access to teachers and only 15% reported that they had provided related training. In one in five sub-Saharan

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[3] https://www.imlango.com/

Africa countries, no professional support to teachers was provided (International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2021).

Teachers play a pivotal role in educational innovation and much educational innovation is grounded in teacher professionalism (Thurlings et al, 2015). In rapidly changing contexts with numerous challenges – pandemic-related school closures, technological advances, shifting educational goals and curricula, climate change and democratic instability – teachers need to use evidence-informed professional judgement to select the pedagogies that best meet their students' learning needs (Fullan, 1991). This requires enhanced teacher professionalism in which teachers have autonomy and agency to question and challenge the status quo and to develop innovative practice, both in their own classroom and collectively in professional communities. To innovate, teachers need an environment that values willingness, and courage fostered through effective leadership to take risks and seize opportunities by departing from established ways of practice.

Innovations are not merely intuitive assertions, however. To innovate, teachers also need connections with their peers, researchers, evidence from previous innovations, and emerging knowledge from diverse fields such as learning sciences, psychology, gender studies, artificial intelligence, augmented/virtual reality, neuroscience, and systems theory.

Educational innovation is often conflated with education reform or change, and the differences are not clear cut. Reform or change do not necessarily involve introducing something new (Cerna, 2014). Reform is a structured and conscious process of producing change, usually driven from the top of the system. Change is simply something that happens between two moments in time. Innovations, on the other hand, purposefully aim to bring about improvements by introducing something new. Some innovation is top-down; in an education system open to change, however, innovation should also harness bottom-up approaches where evidence is available of their value.

Theme 1: Innovation in teaching and learning

Pioneering teachers have always innovated in the classroom. To improve their students' learning environment and learning experiences, teacher have employed new pedagogies, assessment practices, methods of classroom management, creative use of resources, and collaboration with peers and external partners, from social workers to storytellers. Enabling these grassroots innovations is important; they draw on several forms of knowledge and practice that might otherwise be excluded from the innovation process. However, until recently, teachers rarely had opportunities to share their creativity and the benefits of these innovations for student learning and well-being. The spread of social messaging and social media is changing this picture by offering channels to make these innovations visible, encouraging other teachers to try new ideas and facilitating recognition for teachers' innovation as private knowledge becomes public knowledge.

Many classroom innovations have been conceptualised outside schools and transferred into them rather than originating in grassroots or bottom-up innovation. But innovations brought into schools from outside have rarely led to sustainable changes in students' learning outcomes (Fullan, 1991). This is often because teachers have been distanced from the conceptualisation of the innovation; the innovation is "done to" rather than "done with" teachers. Teachers need to be partners in innovation if innovations are to flourish. Innovations need to build on the practical wisdom of teachers (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991) and harness teachers' intrinsic motivation to engage with solutions they have created themselves.

During the pandemic, many governments and other education providers are innovating to expand online learning platforms or putting in place more traditional distance learning approaches via radio and television. But a considerable proportion of students are not able to access these opportunities

for regular academic learning (OECD, 2021; UNESCO et al, 2020). In response, teachers, individually and collaboratively, are drawing on their sense of moral urgency and professional capabilities to innovate in ways that complemented and extended learning in many different contexts, including by[4]:

- developing new pedagogic practices and methodologies, such as giving lessons on WhatsApp or running small group learning sessions, producing radio lessons and establishing YouTube channels for peer teachers and students complemented by alternative means of assessment;

- creating, adapting and distributing learning materials to students, for example writing and printing simple workbooks for individual or small group study and adapting print and audio-visual learning materials for children with disabilities;

- engaging in partnerships with parents and communities through social messaging and remote "visits", such as daily SMS messages outlining learning ideas to parents and caregivers;

- providing students with social-emotional support and building resilience by disseminating critical protection-related information, facilitating direct links to psychosocial first aid, implementing student buddy systems, and establishing phone hotlines to answer students' academic queries and provide psychosocial support.

Few of the ideas underpinning these innovations are original but they are often new to the individual teacher and their students, and unique in the way in which they have been implemented. Effective innovations that involved ICTs were those which were contextually appropriate, harnessing devices and tools within families and communities.

Effective collaboration was a feature of many innovations. Newly reinvigorated partnerships with families, caregivers, community health and social welfare workers were able to address a range of issues that affect students' learning and well-being: socio-emotional needs, discrimination, cyber-bullying, gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, health and sanitation issues. Many innovations were designed explicitly to support girls, students with disabilities and those in highly marginalised communities, for example through the use of social networks and relationship building that can protect girls from violence and early marriage (GEC, 2020).

Innovative ways of communicating and collaborating include the use of apps to monitor student learning in Argentina and Uruguay (Marinelli et al, 2020), and partnerships between teachers and health workers in Kenya to distribute and collect student assignments (GEC, 2020).

In these responses teachers have shown ingenuity, creativity and flexibility. This incalculable collective resource should be harnessed and expanded to support further innovation that re-engages all students and accelerates their learning in the post-COVID-19 phase. In parallel, pandemic innovations need to be robustly assessed. Decisions to scale up innovations need to be informed by evidence of their effectiveness (including from teachers and their students) and of their contribution to equity and inclusion (McLean & Gargani, 2019).

Guiding questions on how innovation in teaching and learning can be encouraged, recognised and sustained:

- What resources, support and other facilitating factors (from ministries, local districts, school leaders and their peers) do teachers need in order to enhance their capacity to innovate in their practice?

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[4] As references in a number of recent publications: GEC, 2020; International Commission on the Futures of Education 2020; OCED, UNESCO &TTF, 2020; UNESCO 2020b).

- What priority should be given to bridging gaps in technology, connectivity and skills to ensure all students and teachers can benefit from innovations that use ICTs?

- What mechanisms are needed to encourage teachers to share innovations and evidence of their usefulness so that they can be codified and evaluated?

- What criteria should be used to assess whether scaling up a teaching and learning innovation is justified?

- What has been learnt from innovative gender-responsive teaching and learning to make teaching and learning more inclusive and equitable?

Theme 2: Innovation in teacher education

As teaching and learning shifted to distance and online modes during the pandemic, many teachers struggled to adjust to these new ways of working. Gaps in teachers' skills and knowledge emerged: pedagogic use of digital tools; digital literacies; supporting students' social and emotional needs; responding to gender issues such as gender-based violence; assisting students with disabilities; and working with communities. In many situations teachers had the dual role of teacher and parent given given their own children were/ are also schooled through distance education. The pressure for immediate professional development was immense.

In response, different forms of teacher education proliferated, formal, non-formal and informal, online and blended. They were driven by national government agencies, local governments, teacher education institutions, development partners and often by teachers themselves (Minea- Pic, 2020).

Many of these forms of teacher education were new – and new to many of the teachers, pre-service and in-service, who enrolled in these online or blended programmes. Initial reports indicate potential for greater use of blended continuing professional development programmes to enable more flexible learning (important for those in remote areas or with family responsibilities), to develop teachers' confidence in digital pedagogies through participation in virtual social learning spaces, and to allow for local adaptations to support equity in provision (OECD, 2021).

However, in many countries, teacher enrolment in online or blended continuing professional development has been modest and there is some concern over gender disparities. Following school closures in March 2020, the Rwandan Education Board strengthened its online learning portal to include professional development for teachers and school leaders, with a focus on digital skills. However, phone interviews with Rwandan headteachers and teachers showed that only 9% of female teachers had online experience, compared with 22% of their male peers (Carter et al, 2020).

The pandemic revealed a need to rethink the teacher education curriculum (pre-service and continuing professional development) to include areas previously given inadequate attention: ICTs, education for sustainable development, implementing remedial or accelerated learning programmes, inclusive and gender-sensitive pedagogies, and climate change (VVOB, 2021). In addition, teachers need support to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to initiate and drive innovations in pedagogies, including problem solving, collaboration, critical thinking and resilience in experimenting (UNESCO, 2020c).

Particularly striking is the large number of self-organised and government-supported communities of practitioners that have emerged during the pandemic. Such collaborations enable teachers to strengthen their pedagogic knowledge and skills and reaffirm their sense of belonging to a larger community and support network, as well as their professional identity.

In South Korea, although Internet access is almost universal, many teachers were anxious and uncomfortable when schools closed and classes moved online. The government responded with several initiatives, including the Community of 10,000 Representative Teachers, with one teacher from each of the country's 10,000 schools (OECD, 2021). The community connects teachers with the Ministry of Education, with metropolitan and provincial offices of education, and with public education support initiatives to enable joint approaches to solving problems relating to online classes. The community, which led to the sharing of over 2 million posts, was complemented by Teacher-On, an initiative in which volunteer teachers, with support from local offices of education, assisted teachers with technical difficulties by remotely connecting to their devices (Cho and Riley, 2020).

In other places, practitioner community approaches have included remote peer observation and coaching (South Africa), webinars (Brazil), subject knowledge development (Kenya) and interactive presentations (United Kingdom). SMS and social messaging platforms on teachers' phones have been critical to the functioning of many of these communities. Such opportunities are not available, however, for teachers in remote rural areas without connectivity or power, for teachers in places where data is expensive or for teachers without regular access to a device – predominantly older or female teachers.

Such practitioner communities existed before COVID-19 and their value was recognized by teachers in many places (Mendenhall, 2018) but they were rarely acknowledged or supported by governments. Now they are becoming an established feature of the professional support environment. Not only do the scale and diversity of these collaborations represent an innovation in many contexts but interactions within their peer community are encouraging many participating teachers to innovate in their own professional practice (OECD, 2021).

Teacher education needs to rise to the challenge of giving teachers the professional development they need. This is the moment for collaborative problem analysis, adventurous experimentation and technical innovation.

Guiding questions on how to develop new, more diverse forms of teacher education:

- What competencies do teachers need to be confident pedagogic innovators? And hence how does the curriculum of teacher education need to be rethought to enable teachers to continuously develop the competencies needed to adapt to changing contexts and student needs?

- Given the increased digitalisation of teacher education programmes, what kinds of blends in modes of teacher education are appropriate to ensure equity for teachers?

- What is needed to promote and sustain teacher participation in emergent communities of practitioners in virtual and real spaces? What is the optimal scale for these communities to ensure equity of impact and sustainability with available resources?

- What are the implications of innovative forms of teacher education for the competencies and experiences required of teacher educators? What forms of support and resources do they require?

- How do education systems need to change to foster teacher agency and autonomy and to avoid constraining teachers' creativity, professionalism and pedagogical judgement? What is the role of school leadership in fostering teacher agency and autonomy?

Theme 3: Innovation in policy and enabling innovation through policy

Myriad groups can be involved in educational decision-making processes, but their ability to exert influence is often not equal. The process can be obscure, and it is not always informed by contextually relevant evidence.

Innovative approaches to developing policy in a more open and user-centred way are emerging, using iterative cycles of implementation (Norman, 2020). Typically, a much broader group of people – such as teachers, teacher representatives, parents, community members – are involved, engaged through different channels including social media and crowd sourcing. Data and evidence are used to understand what is happening and why, including practice-based evidence and research about teachers' and students' personal and professional experiences.

Approaching policy making in this innovative, inclusive manner is more likely to lead to policies that foster further innovation across the education ecosystem.

For example, during the pandemic, the vice-president of the Danish Union of Teachers engaged in detailed negotiations with the education minister, health authorities and other teacher unions to agree on what safety measures to put in place for the return of younger students in April 2020. These were widely accepted by stakeholders, including parents. Key to this successful policy development was trust, the government's openness to scientific advice, and flexibility for school leaders and teachers to develop unique school plans within the framework of municipal and central government plans (Orange, 2020).

Such social dialogue in policy making was not universal during the pandemic; 29% of teacher unions reported not being consulted and only 9% reported that their views were fully taken into account in educational responses (UNESCO, 2020c). Sustained, structured social dialogue is emerging, however, to inform a range of teacher policies in an increasing number of places.

In Uganda, for example, a diverse set of stakeholders have been working with the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa, under the Norwegian Teacher Initiative, to put into operation the National Teacher Policy recently agreed by the government of Uganda. The National Teacher Policy emphasises dialogue between teachers and the Ministry of Education and Sports and includes developing an implementation plan for ministry engagement in social and policy dialogue with teacher representatives. To support this, the Norwegian Teacher Initiative has been building teacher union leaders' capacity to engage in effective dialogue with employers. The National Teacher Policy also includes establishing a Ugandan National Teacher Council. To help ensure that teachers' voices are prioritised in the nascent teacher council, this work has involved members of the task force mandated to establish the council along with ministry officials, members of the Uganda National Teachers' Union, principals of teacher training institutions, academics and partners from the private education sector (UNESCO, 2020a).

The ways in which educators can innovate are shaped by their own capacity and capabilities, and the characteristics of the environment in which they work – its goals, structures and practices. For innovations to flourish and spread, governments and their partners, such as funding agencies, need to ensure policies are sufficiently flexible to permit and foster variations across micro-contexts that improve teaching and learning (OECD, 2014). This involves considering issues of trust, accountability and decentralisation.

Policies themselves can be innovative by using evidence from pilots to scale up an innovation. For example, a pilot pathway into teaching for rural women in Sierra Leone is being expanded to increase the number of female teachers in these communities (Crisp et al, 2017). In Cameroon, sex-disaggregated indicators on teachers' living and working conditions are being used to increase gender

responsiveness to local conditions facing teachers (UNESCO – IICBA, 2016). Selection of innovations to scale up should be based on criteria including equity, quality and cost effectiveness, and use evidence from several perspectives – students, teachers and others involved in the innovation (Morel et al, 2019).

Few countries have formal structures to promote, support and measure innovation. Such mechanisms – including a knowledge management system to link innovation, research and education priorities – are essential to create an enabling environment for educational innovations (OECD, 2009).

Guiding questions on innovative policy-making and orientating policy to enable and sustain innovation:

- How can teacher policies become more flexible to encourage a culture of experimentation across the education ecosystem? How can public education systems, working at scale, embrace local innovations that meet local needs while ensuring consistency in quality?

- What steps need to be taken to enable more innovation in policy making? Who might be involved, and how, and what new sources of evidence might be drawn on?

- What policies and coalitions are needed to advocate for innovation at different levels in education systems? What role could funding agencies, civil society organisations and other partners play in promoting, supporting and sustaining innovation?

Expected Outcomes

As the engine of improvement in education, innovation is critical for improving education quality for all learners and needs to be at the heart of educational policies and policy-making. The complexities of the post-COVID-19 challenges to education – including exacerbated inequality and restrictions on funding, combined with previously unmet challenges – demand that collective capabilities for innovation are harnessed and expanded.

To nurture and embed this potential to "build back better" and ensure education systems become more adaptive and resilient to shocks, the Teacher Task Force Policy Dialogue Forum will generate lessons learnt and policy recommendations for TTF members and beyond, including ministries, civil society organisations, international organisations and donors that:

- help teachers, school leaders and officials to foster innovations in teaching and learning by providing appropriate resources, including platforms for collaboration and dissemination, professional development opportunities and recognition of practitioner innovations;

- improve teacher education by diagnosing gaps in teacher education curricula; integrating new collaborative, online and hybrid professional learning models; and aligning curricula with shifting teacher standards and teacher appraisal;

- ensure critical, evidence-based appraisal of bottom-up and top-down and inter-disciplinary / cross-sectoral innovations to inform decisions about scaling them up or encouraging their spread;

- foster innovation in new or revised policies on all aspects of teacher preparation and work – including recruitment; preparation and professional development; deployment; remuneration; standards; accountability; employment and working conditions – with flexibility to allow for experimentation and local variation;

- develop or revise teacher policy frameworks at national, sub-national and local levels through an open innovative inclusive approach, harnessing and building on existing social dialogue mechanisms.

- provide concrete and actionable recommendations which will benefit TTF members and help guide the work of the network within the new *2022-2025 Strategic Plan*.

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