OCTOBER 2024

**LEARNING BRIEF #13**


# Teachers: The change-makers at the heart of girls' education

Girls' Education Challenge

UKaid from the British people

**The Girls' Education Challenge (GEC)** is the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's 12-year, £855 million Global Fund which aims to improve the educational opportunities of the world's most marginalised girls. The GEC is comprised of two types of project: 1) GEC-Transition (GEC-T) projects, which work within schools and support girls most at risk of dropping out; and 2) Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) projects, which target highly marginalised girls who have already dropped out or who have never been able to enrol in school.

## Teachers play a critical role in achieving inclusive, quality education for all, particularly marginalised girls. They make a crucial contribution to learning (and the continuity of learning during periods of disruption) and, importantly, also support their students' mental health and wellbeing.

We know that just one inspiring teacher can have a transformative, positive and lifelong impact on a child. Data from the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) confirmed this through the significant proportion of girls who repeatedly spoke about their teachers as 'influential'. They talked about teachers who had changed their lives and whose behaviour – when reported as kind, welcoming and supportive of learning – represented a bright spot in their lives, bringing renewed hope and optimism.

However, teachers are not a homogenous group whose role in the GEC is solely focused on ensuring learning happens. Teachers reflect the society and values in which they live. The teaching profession commands varying levels of status and respect from wider society. Teachers encounter numerous challenges around gender equality and fair pay, workloads, and career progression. Teachers are recruited and appointed based on very different levels of education, training and proficiency in the language of instruction.

Supportive behaviours and effective pedagogical practices do not happen in a vacuum. When teachers have the training, support and motivation they need, their ability to impact the educational outcomes of the girls they teach is unmatched. As a result, support to teachers was one of two areas of intervention in which all GEC projects, without exception, engaged (the other was community engagement).

Across GEC projects, teachers were the frontline workers in the classroom, delivering curricular or tailormade catch-up content to GEC girls, and supporting learning processes within that space. They were also given additional responsibilities for identifying girls at risk of drop-out, and reporting and referring safeguarding issues.

Teachers were often asked to be the conduits of information and influence other teachers –

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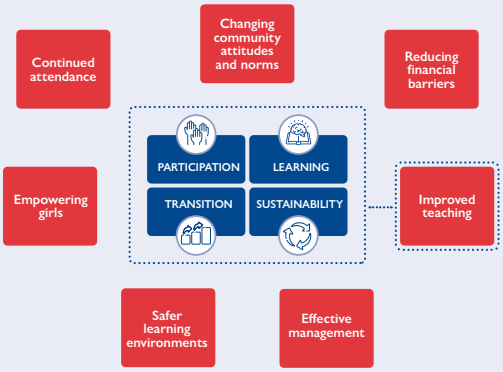
whether around COVID-19 practices or on deeper pedagogical matters – and were sometimes tasked with cascading training to others. Teachers took on leadership roles, leading girls' clubs, school-based inclusion teams or a school improvement plan process. Headteachers, already in formal leadership roles, found themselves overseeing and ensuring the sustainability of school improvement work initiated by the GEC to improve their schools in the long run.

Without appropriate training and development, teachers can also perpetuate unhelpful ways of working (e.g., not showing up for class), unequal gender norms, oppression and marginalisation.

This Learning Brief looks at the ways GEC projects supported teachers in developing their pedagogical skills through teacher professional development (TPD) and how increased knowledge acquisition translated into changed practice and improved outcomes in the classroom.

**The Girls' Education Challenge Learning Brief series:**
To capitalise on its vast portfolio of 41 projects, operating across 17 countries, the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) has compiled a wealth of project learning regarding key interventions related to girls' education. While these Learning Briefs are rooted in both quantitative and qualitative evidence, they are not research papers or evidence reports. Rather, they provide a synthesis of learning from GEC intervention designs and implementation approaches that have been paramount for supporting improvements in girls' learning. The GEC projects take a holistic approach to improve the educational environment and conditions that support improved learning, participation, transition and sustainability outcomes. This Learning Brief is focused on effective education for girls' in emergencies and protracted crisis which contribute to achieving the highlighted outcomes:



## The GEC approach to teacher professional development and support

Each GEC project had a teaching and learning approach tailored to the context informed by the girls' contexts and the implementing organisation's programmatic experience and approaches. Projects also worked in different contexts and targeted girls with specific learning (and wider) needs, so they also took different approaches to support teachers, including training, coaching, teacher learning circles, and supporting teachers to acquire skills, capabilities and sometimes qualifications.

That said, two principles underpinned the overall GEC's approach to teacher support:

1. The project has up-to-date information on the professional development and other needs of teachers and educators and those providing support (teacher educators, trainers, headteachers, etc.).
2. The project is confident that teaching and learning activities respond to the assessed needs of teachers and educators and affect positive change in classroom practices.[1]

The GEC's lack of a prescriptive approach to teacher professional development was intentional. Projects conducted thorough assessments and built a deep understanding of teachers' needs before planning activities and interventions.

Early monitoring assessment and midline evaluations found that TPD was not as effective as expected. While post-training assessments might suggest teachers enjoyed the training and learned something new, the extent to which that translated into changed classroom practice – and ultimately improved learning outcomes – was very limited.

Over the lifetime of the GEC, projects moved beyond 'transferring knowledge' in their teacher training to a more ongoing, context-based, inclusive approach. A major factor in this paradigm shift was the projects' realisation that one-size-fits-all training is problematic for reasons such as being decontextualised, divorced from realities, privileged in its 'coloniality of knowledge' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013), and dependent on treating teachers as a homogenous group.[2]

Therefore, teachers were consulted on their needs and, as a result, were more engaged in designing and leading the training process. This allowed for a more individualised approach which better responded to teachers' and learners' needs. This meant their professional development was more likely to translate into better classroom practice.

The following taxonomy, developed by authors synthesising research evidence around teacher professional development in Africa drawing upon Kennedy's (2005) framework, is useful in reflecting the breadth of modalities deployed by GEC projects (*see Figure 1*).[3]

**"Each GEC project had a teaching and learning approach tailored to the context informed by the girls' contexts and the implementing organisation's programmatic experience and approaches"**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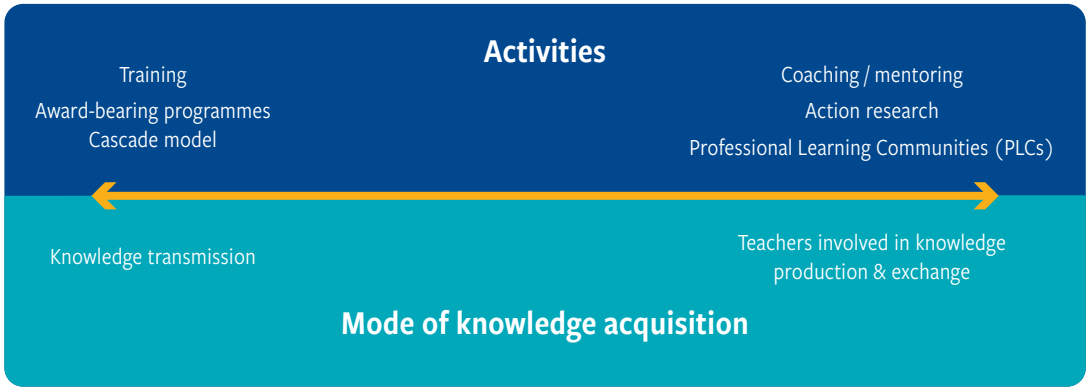


***Figure 1:*** *Teacher professional development (Taken from Mitchell, R. et al. (2024)*[2]

[1] These are reflected in the Teaching and Learning standard used across GEC projects

[2] Teacher professional development in Africa (teachertaskforce.org)

[3] Mitchell, R., Ayinselya, R.A., Barrett, A.M, Cortez Ochoa, A.A., David, O., Imaniriho, D., Nwako, Z.A., Reda, N.W. & Singh, M. (2024). Teacher professional development in Africa: A critical synthesis of research evidence. CIRE, Bristol. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10944685, adapted from Kennedy. A, (2005) Models of Continuing Professional Development: A framework for analysis, Journal of In-Service Education , 31 10.1080/13674580500200277

## Engaging those responsible for teacher professional development

All projects sought to involve Ministries of Education. Typically, in the settings/contexts where GEC projects were working, projects aimed to avoid placing responsibility for learning outcomes entirely on teachers. Instead, they positioned their teacher support as an element of a wider plan to tackle other issues within the school and wider system, such as a lack of resources, girls' readiness to learn, low teacher numbers and inadequate infrastructure (e.g. classrooms, water and sanitation facilities).

Partnerships with Ministries varied from light-touch, 'approval-focused' engagement (such as getting approval to use GEC project-developed teacher training content) to deeper and longer-term efforts to strengthen or reform TPD structures and financing. Many projects ensured that their TPD fitted into any existing frameworks. In Ethiopia, Ghana, Rwanda and Tanzania project-provided TPD could contribute towards the evidence teachers needed for promotion. Regarding the content of TPD, while projects worked within national guidelines, these tended to be generic. Because projects were responding to the analysed needs of teachers and their learners, the content tended to stay within general guidelines but offered bespoke content (and approaches/ways of delivery) to the TPD offer.

Universities or autonomous/semi-autonomous government agencies are another important actor to engage in TPD as they are often the official TPD actors in a country. The extent to which the GEC involved these institutions reflects wider findings that this kind of collaboration tends to be small-scale and that the interests and agendas of international actors are prioritised. Where projects did create this kind of partnership, they opened up promising space for further engagement and system-strengthening work. For example, EDT's partnership with the Kenyan Institute of Special Education

With broad convergence around global norms for TPD based on research and policy coming out of the Global North (Tabulawa 2003; Mitchell & Milligan 2023) and the prevalence of GEC consortia comprised of international NGOs, international actors played a significant role. This often led to a strong emphasis on gender-responsive pedagogy (GRP), as theories of change suggested that gender inequitable learning processes in the classroom could be addressed through improved teacher application of GRP. The GEC generated much positive evidence from teachers and girls around the usefulness and relevance of GRP-related TPD, as explored in the impact section below. However, this trend towards GRP reflects a broader tendency for top-down implementation of TPD approaches.

## Types of teacher support

Most teacher support activities fell into the TPD category, and their ultimate goal was knowledge acquisition—and its translation into changed practice in the classroom.

One area that attracted considerable attention and resources was the focus on improving the knowledge and skills of the people whose role is to support teachers. The interventions in this area were varied, whether in leadership training for headteachers, support for senior teachers and coaches to mentor other teachers, or training inputs for those mandated to supervise, inspect, regulate or coach teachers.

However, projects which saw the greatest improvement in learning outcomes also focused on at least one of the other areas:

- teacher wellbeing and mental health
- teachers' professional aspirations
- strengthening motivating factors

Looking at the projects (GEC-T) that worked with in-school girls and government teachers it is evident where the weight of TPD interventions fell across the portfolio (*see Figure 2*).

Child-centred pedagogy and gender-responsive pedagogy training were part of most projects' TPD packages. However, over time, many projects began to use school-based communities of practice (CoPs) and coaching, which became some of the most-used interventions. Moving from centralised training to school-based TPD allowed for experimentation, support for applying new skills, and ongoing reflection within the realities of teachers' classrooms.

In Nigeria, the ENGINE project, led by Mercy Corps, organised cluster-level sessions and local government-level sessions for teachers once a quarter, led by highly trained subject matter experts. They deepened their knowledge of classroom management, pupil-teacher relationships, lesson plan development and teaching methodology. In DR Congo, the REALISE project, led by Save the Children, supported headteachers and inspectors to conduct lesson observations and coaching sessions that supported teachers. In Somalia, the EGEP project, led by Relief International, introduced teacher peer-to-peer sessions alongside coaching provided by experts from Teacher Training Institutions (TTIs).

Subject-specific pedagogy was not an early focus of TPD, but as projects gathered more evidence of subject-specific bottlenecks, such as teachers' low English proficiencies or unease with teaching higher-order numeracy skills, these became a more explicit area of focus. Project monitoring found that when subject knowledge was low, teachers were more likely to fall back on methods such as writing on the board and getting learners to copy, which didn't allow for deeper understanding.

**"One area that attracted considerable attention and resources was the focus on improving the knowledge and skills of the people whose role is to support teachers."**

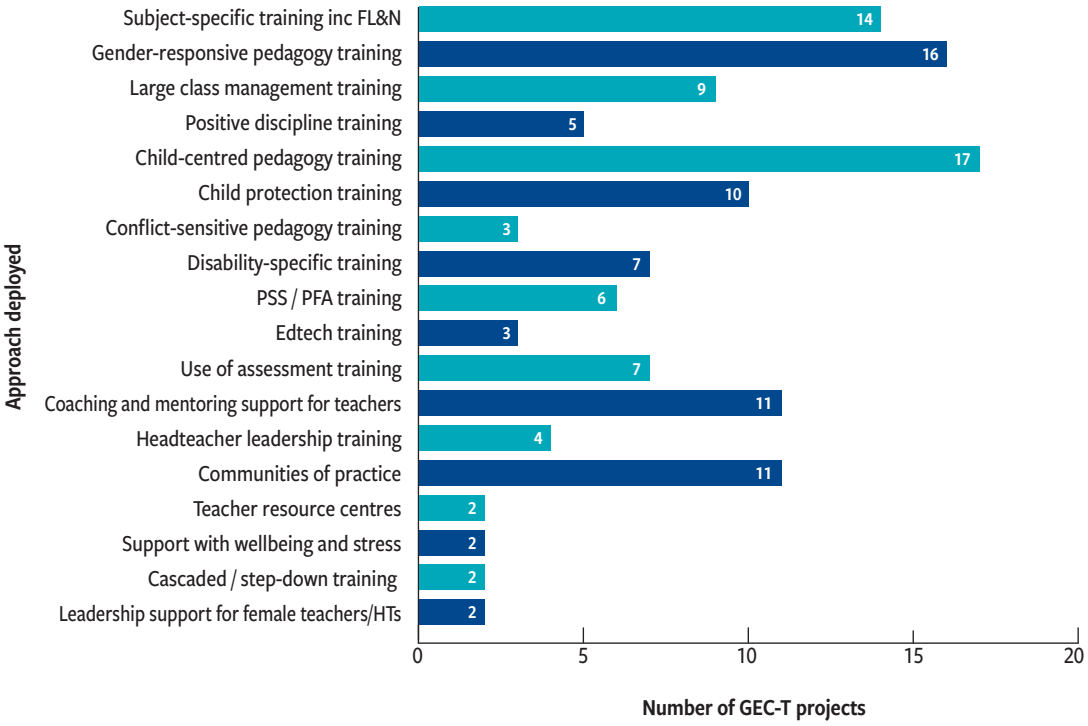


***Figure 2:*** *Activities deployed in TPD training in GEC-T projects*

Thus, the importance of not just emphasising knowledge of subject content, but also the strategies to teach the subject combined with knowledge of how students learn the subject. For example, a core part of the training conducted by the Discovery Project in Nigeria and Kenya, led by ImpactEd, provided teachers with strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy, concepts that teachers had identified as being difficult to teach or an area in which they lacked confidence, knowledge and skills. For literacy, these included strategies for developing phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension and fluency.

This resonates with a major GEC principle that data and evidence about what is happening in classrooms, what teachers know, think, feel and do, and how this all translates into teaching and learning processes must be the starting point for decision-making about the shape and nature of TPD interventions.

### Spotlight on EdTech training

The iMlango project, led by Avanti Communications in Kenya, improved the digital literacy skills of 5,179 teachers when they discovered that teachers needed to be more familiar with IT basics in order for them to use iMlango computer labs, projectors and the content. iMlango provided continuous training and local teams also provided leadership guidance to headteachers.

The MGCubed project, led by Plan International in Ghana, provided solar-powered and satellite-enabled distance learning infrastructure (projector, modem, computer and solar charger) to schools, and broadcast learning content and lessons from studios in Accra, conducted by 'Master Teachers'. This enabled teachers in schools or teacher trainers to deliver interactive learning sessions to students, teachers, communities and government officials. MGCubed project staff noted the benefit of combining face-to-face initial training with virtual follow-ups. While initial in-person training was important for relationship-building and ensuring teacher buy-in, regular online follow-up training opportunities enabled teachers to engage in remote peer learning, which was less structured and based on individual teachers' needs. It is important to point out that supply of equipment was only made alongside a clear and proven strategy for how and why it would be used. Some projects also used EdTech as a means of reaching teachers with other kinds of professional development content. For example, the Discovery Project delivered teacher professional development through the Cell-Ed platform to teachers, and SAGE in Zimbabwe used WhatsApp (often alongside Zoom and paper-based materials) to deliver training to teachers when schools were closed.

### Spotlight on psychosocial training

Girls in project areas in Somalia had very high rates of anxiety and depression (identified through the use of the Washington Group questions at evaluation points). The SOMGEP and AGES projects incorporated more social and emotional learning and mental health approaches to strengthen girls' social and emotional resilience. This also included helping teachers, through training, to provide psychosocial support through social and emotional skills learning. (see **'More than grades: The importance of social and emotional learning in girls' education'**)

In Kenya, the KEEP project, led by WUSC, worked with girls in Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps and the surrounding communities for whom conflict, displacement and extreme poverty had made access to education extremely challenging. The project employed female counsellors who provided training to teachers around psychosocial support. This counselling had a positive impact on girls' wellbeing and confidence. Girls reported that useful aspects included emotional support, strategies to deal with stress, goal setting, self-discipline and focus, self-belief and confidence, problem solving, career support, resisting negative cultural practices and assertive communication.

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**Spotlight on instructional leadership**

Many GEC projects focused on headteachers, as they found that school leaders were essential to shifting school cultures. The majority of projects included headteachers in teacher trainings. However, a few projects used interventions specifically to develop leadership that is supportive of TPD. In many GEC contexts, headteachers have largely administrative roles, with a disconnect between the bureaucratic demands on their time and the needs of their teachers and learners. As a result, training, mentoring or coaching aimed at redressing this balance and building leadership competencies became an important part of work to change classroom practice and school environments.

*"Previously, we were preoccupied with administrative tasks and were unable to give educational leadership and supervision the attention it deserved. Following this training, we are putting an emphasis on efficient teaching and learning techniques. We now realise that coaching and classroom observation [should be] given more weight."*

School director, STAGES project, led by Link Education International in Ethiopia

*"I had only academic knowledge but now I am a better school administrator through the support I have received. I learned quite a lot about myself. I did not know that I am a leader. The project helped me to be a better leader. The headteacher and school mentorship programme – The National Leaders of Education – has been one of the best programmes and I look forward to implementing it with many other schools. It brings schools together, sharing ideas and bettering each other. This is an idea that should never stop."*

John Obimo Omondi, Headteacher, Tujisaidie Community School, Kenya – WWW project, led by EDT in Kenya

*"I can say that now there is improved communication between the school administration and the staff... that link was formerly not there ... we realised that there were solutions to those small challenges we used to have."*

Head of Department, PEAS project in Uganda

## The impact on teachers

Many projects used changes in girls' learning levels to measure their success with teachers, but many projects also measured changes in teaching quality. As projects and their external evaluators used different indicators and evaluation approaches, it is not possible to aggregate impact. However, some indicators were more regularly used, and the table below presents what we know about impact where multiple projects collected data on this indicator in approximately the same timeframe and compared with either baseline data from the same cohort or data from the comparison cohort.

| | Baseline/ comparison | Endline/ treatment |
|---|---|---|
| Evidence of appropriate preparation | 34% | 55% |
| Usage of child-centred pedagogy | 38% | 63% |
| Supportive, welcoming and inclusive environment | 60% | 92% |

Evaluations generally found that teacher quality had increased significantly immediately following training or intensive support. However, accounts of how sustained the changes were and how much they could be deployed when project support receded suggested a slightly more uneven story.

Understanding the impact of teacher support on teachers and the extent to which different teachers (in terms of gender, rurality, ethnicity, disability, political affiliation, professional experience and career level) were differently impacted is limited.

Nonetheless, some key themes emerged from the quantitative and qualitative data, highlighting teachers' perceptions of the support they received and girls' commentaries on how this filtered down to their lived experiences.

The next section focuses on how working with teachers impacts girls' lives in and out of the classroom. We identified eight key areas that make a difference in and out of the classroom, impacting teachers' work and the learning environments that girls access.

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**"Evaluations generally found that teacher quality had increased significantly immediately following training or intensive support."**

## The impact inside the classroom


### 01 Technical knowledge

Teachers whose capacity was strengthened by GEC projects reported deepening their technical knowledge. Many projects measured this using tools such as post-training questionnaires. For facilitators trained by ENGINE, the sessions delivered by subject matter experts led to a more comprehensive and advanced understanding of classroom management, pupil-teacher relationships, lesson plan development and teaching methodologies.

Projects focused on helping teachers understand what 'good teaching' looks like, which was a critical foundation before skills could be applied in the classroom. Teacher Training Institutes and coaches who worked with EGEP noted that even when teachers struggled with teaching areas, there was at least an improved awareness of what was expected of them and what 'quality teaching' actually was.

Most GEC teachers found the training content relevant to their daily experiences. In Ethiopia, where research identified that teachers often find continuous professional development (CPD) content to be of limited relevance to teachers' realities, STAGES delivered training that both teachers and those in the wider education ecosystem found highly relevant.

However, while non-subject-specific skills were considered relevant, subject-specific skills often needed to be at a higher level rather than just foundational. The CHANGE project, led by People in Need in Ethiopia, found that teaching quality and girls' learning outcomes improved regarding literacy components but that reading comprehension did not, suggesting the need for a greater focus on higher-order skills.

### 02 Application in the classroom

While improved knowledge was important, the ability of projects' TPD approaches to improve learning outcomes depended on whether teachers could and would apply what they learned inside their classrooms on a day-to-day basis.

In Nepal, nearly all teachers trained by STEM reported changes in lesson planning, using teaching aids and assessing students' learning outcomes, and 82% of girls from the STEM project said that their teachers practice child-friendly practice, compared to 49% of girls in control schools whose teachers had not been trained by the project. Another project, Sisters for Sisters' Education, found that teachers recorded difficulties in applying their new skills in large classrooms but took up group teaching, with one Maths teacher explaining, *"I divide students into large groups and ask them to solve mathematical problems. One of the students from each group has to present the method they applied before the whole class."*

In Uganda, headteachers from schools supported by Opportunity International found that lessons had become more structured, learning had become more child-centred and participatory, and teacher-student relationships had improved. A headteacher from a school supported by the SCHIP project said, *"Teachers now plan lessons, evaluate and give feedback to learners."*

In Ethiopia, teachers from the Excelling Against the Odds project explained that, before the training, they would assess class understanding by asking five or six students a question and interpreting that as representative of the class. After the training, they assessed the whole class; if everyone did not understand a topic, they would cover it again.

**"In Uganda, headteachers from schools supported by Opportunity International found that lessons had become more structured, learning had become more child-centred and participatory, and teacher-student relationships had improved."**

The Discovery Project saw success in Nigeria when teachers applied new knowledge about using teaching aids, such as cardboard papers, picture cards and video clips. These made lessons more practical and engaging for students.

In Kenya, teachers supported by the iMlango project found it easier to provide visual demonstrations and teach the whole class simultaneously. 91% of their students said it was exciting when teachers used iMlango-introduced technology.

However, GEC projects encountered a recurring bottleneck regarding teachers' ability to apply their new knowledge and skills in large classrooms. Where training and coaching had not considered large class sizes, teachers found that they wanted to apply new strategies or tools but could not. Teachers involved in the ENGAGE project found it difficult to deploy safeguarding or gender-responsive pedagogy in their classes of 70+, and teachers supported by the Discovery Project also struggled, finding it much easier to apply their learning in their smaller remedial classes. Teachers supported by Sisters for Sisters' Education noted that class sizes and a 'rigid course structure' were double barriers to applying new pedagogies.

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## 03 Coaching

Projects that deployed coaching as a mechanism for supporting teachers found the impact particularly deep and long-lasting. EGEP coaches observed that their support was most useful for improving classroom management and supporting teachers to manage classroom seating effectively, greetings at the start of each day, and how to identify and manage differences among students, including those with disabilities and low academic performance. Coaching improved teachers' confidence, so they were no longer bothered by classroom observations and were comfortable pointing to areas they wished to improve. School inspectors involved in the REALISE project found that coaching was more impactful than training. They identified that it resulted in more positive and constructive relationships between education leaders and teachers. It was found that the coaching approach was more effective when it allowed teachers to manage their professional development through ongoing reflection and examination of their teaching practices in real time.

## 04 Girls' learning

All projects intended for these changes in teaching quality to impact girls' learning. While all projects found correlations between these two results, some used regression analysis to unpack whether the relationship was causal. The REAP project in Rwanda used linear regressions to identify that their work in supporting teachers by creating a supportive climate had a direct effect on the extent to which girls actively participated in lessons. The Discovery Project found a positive association between exposure to a teacher they had trained and improved learning outcomes in all three countries they worked (Kenya, Nigeria and Ghana).

Many projects asked girls what they thought of their teachers and if they had seen changes in teaching practice. Girls taught by Discovery-trained teachers said there was an environment where they felt comfortable to ask questions, to make mistakes, or to admit that they have not yet understood something. The changes that girls were most likely to describe related to teacher behaviour and demeanour, rather than pedagogical technique. Girls taught by teachers trained by the STAGE project focused on the teachers' patience and cultivation of a free and welcoming atmosphere.

*"The [teachers] had time to teach us considering our situation. They saw the good in us and were patient in dealing with us."*

*"I liked [the teachers], as compared to my previous schooling experience, all answers were acceptable in class, and the freedom of expression methods used were also perfect."*

## 05 School-related gender-based violence

The GEC's focus on tackling school-related gender-based violence led many projects to reflect this emphasis in their teacher engagement approaches. Projects found that teachers used corporal punishment as a classroom or behaviour management technique in contexts where corporal punishment was normalised, regulation or sanctions were weakly enforced, and more so within high-stress situations. The ACTED project in Pakistan saw that teachers displayed more aggressive behaviours directly after the COVID-19-related lockdowns and the 2022 floods to 'push' learners further to cover for the learning losses experienced. Where projects addressed teachers' views, values, needs and skills in this area in a comprehensive, contextually relevant and supported way, they saw significant impact.

The AGES project in Somalia made teacher discipline a major focus of their approach and saw a significant decline in corporal punishment in the schools that they worked in. Their monitoring was robust enough to identify specific geographies where disciplinary practices had not changed and tailor additional support accordingly. They also found that while physical abuse had gone down, other forms of violence, such as harsh language, had continued. By shifting attention away from a focus on eliminating corporal punishment and onto additional training time on reducing these more subtle forms of violence, the project saw all forms of violence reduced. Further learning on this topic can be found within the GEC Learning Brief 'Ending Violence in Schools'.

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## 06 Inclusive practices

GEC projects also significantly impacted the extent to which teachers included children with disabilities equally and adapted their teaching appropriately. Some projects tasked teachers with assessing disability, such as SCHIP in Uganda, which rolled out its Special Needs Identification Tool to support teachers in assessing learning needs early on – a tool so successful that it has since been rolled out nationally by the Ministry of Education and Sports.

Projects transformed teachers' awareness of how their actions and strategies can unintentionally exclude or prevent children with disabilities from learning effectively.

Other projects considered which particularly marginalised groups needed extra support and helped teachers deliver this.

The REALISE project in DR Congo included a conflict-sensitive pedagogy module within their teacher training materials, and teachers reported that when they applied strategies they had learned, they reported less conflict between boys and girls.

PEAS identified that students who had been out of school for a long time because of Uganda's extended school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic needed extra support from teachers and trained teachers to use telephone trees to reach and counsel learners – with 81% of girls reached by a phone call from a teacher. Many projects extended the idea of general inclusion of certain groups to girls. They supported teachers to think about how they were creating gender-equal classrooms and finding opportunities to challenge gender norms safely.

*"The phone calls [from my teachers during school closure] were helpful... because they showed that the teachers were concerned about our wellbeing. The phone calls encouraged and motivated me to revise my books at home. The phone calls encouraged me to continue having hope about returning to school. They improved my parents' and teachers' trust and relationship because they showed that teachers are concerned about our future."*

**Student from PEAS school, Uganda**

Cluster supervisors supported by STAGES in Ethiopia found that trained teachers were calling on girls and boys more equally in class to answer a question, give an opinion or share a different perspective and the percentage of girls from the STEM project in Nepal who said that their teachers treated them differently from boys halved by the end of the project.

# The impact outside the classroom

## Teacher motivation and wellbeing

The EFL project in Kenya saw an increase in teachers feeling motivated to help girls learn, and the ACTED project in Pakistan found high levels of interest amongst project-supported entry-level teachers in continuing within the profession and securing mainstream teaching jobs. Some projects hypothesised that engagement within CPD in itself was likely to increase motivation and change the way that teachers thought about themselves and the profession, as illustrated by this quote from the Sisters for Sisters' Education project in Nepal: *"Whenever a teacher participates in any training, apart from the skills, the teacher also gets a sense of self-worth that s/he is responsible in shaping children's future."* Furthermore, some projects saw that when this engagement was formalised to some degree, for example instigating CoPs in the Childhope, Ethiopia project increased teacher motivation. CoPs also served another function during COVID-19 as the remote CoPs were a source of wellbeing for teachers.

This connects to the projects' work in understanding teachers' mental health.[4] CAMFED partnered with the University of Warwick to use the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) with 180 teachers, amongst others, within GEC schools.[5] However, very few implementers systematically addressed teachers' mental health. STAR-G in Mozambique was an exception in how they integrated teachers' mental health into their training package.

Many projects saw teacher motivation reflected in absenteeism rates, which sometimes could be as high as 50%. Those who measured teacher absenteeism tended to see this reduced. The STEM project in Nepal saw teacher absenteeism drop from 42% at the midline to 10% at the endline.

## Positive 'knock-on' effects

Some of the most exciting impacts were seen amongst non-project teachers because best practices and coaching were being spread – the mechanisms by which this kind of scale was achieved varied. For STEM in Nepal, the strengthening of subject committees meant that skills were transferred from trained to non-trained teachers within monthly sharing exercises. Teacher training institutes in Somalia that had been coaching teachers in EGEP-supported schools were asked by the Ministries of Education to extend their coaching to other non-project schools.

Other projects saw potentially transformative signs of institutionalisation and system change. In Kenya, the Education for Life project worked with other education civil society actors and UN agencies to develop national Accelerated Education Guidelines, bringing several of their learnings around teachers' inclusive practices.

In Uganda, PEAS have seen the scaling of their Inspect and Improve model to over 200 schools.

In other contexts, institutionalising support to teachers proved harder. The STAR-G project in Mozambique found a lack of willingness and ability at the government level to continue using TTCs to deliver STAR-G material for teacher training. A recurring challenge reported by every GEC project was the unintended impact of increasing teacher capacity – that the teacher would then, because of the new skills acquired, be transferred somewhere else, promoted, or voluntarily move on.

**"Some of the most exciting impacts were seen amongst non-project teachers because best practices and coaching were being spread."**

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[3] Further reading on this topic: Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support for Teachers in Africa | International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (unesco.org)

[4] In the adult sample, the mean WEMWBS score was 55.9 with a standard deviation of 8.34. For teachers, this score was 57.51 (scores range from 14 to 70 and higher scores indicate greater positive mental wellbeing)

## Factors for success and recommendations

### 01 TPD approaches that respond to teachers' realities and girls' priorities

GEC projects that saw the greatest impact on teaching quality and subsequent learning outcomes prioritised understanding teachers' and girls' needs and realities. They found that what didn't work was when there was a disconnect between the support provided and the reality of teachers' own lived experiences in their classrooms. Similarly, projects often found that a shift from teacher-centred approaches to child-centred pedagogy took longer and was harder to achieve than expected, perhaps underestimating the power of personal experiences (of how teachers were taught) and what is normalised as standard teaching practice.

A key learning was the importance of grounding teacher support in the realities they faced. Some projects achieved this by involving teachers in developing TPD approaches and teaching and learning materials.

It became clear that teachers only sometimes had a strong knowledge of the subject they specialised in or taught. Where teachers struggled to teach higher-order skills or in the language of instruction (in which they lacked proficiency), TPD strategies were adapted to respond to this.

Understanding teachers' needs is not just limited to pedagogical or subject-specific knowledge and skills but also recognises their wider environment. Teachers in Kenya (through the iMlango project) and Somalia (through the EGEP project) supported digital platforms to access CPD content. Still, they were constrained by a lack of internet and device access. CPD was delivered via WhatsApp in Pakistan (through the ACTED project), which teachers could easily access.

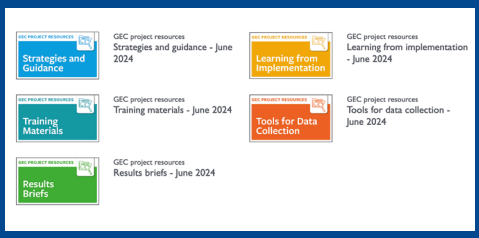
Some projects also sought girls' perspectives on what makes a good teacher. Many GEC girls highlighted teachers who were kind, supportive, patient, non-violent and effective in helping them learn.

#### Recommendations

- Generate a robust understanding of teachers' needs and learners' priorities at the design phase of any intervention—but also continuously. Teachers themselves can lead and create the processes and tools and have meaningful input into converting this understanding into a sustainable CPD strategy.
- Take a multidimensional approach to defining and measuring 'teaching quality', rooted in a wider socio-emotional understanding of learning and connected with girls' ideas about what makes a good teacher.
- Face issues around subject knowledge or language of instruction proficiency upfront, working respectfully with teachers to systematically address these gaps. Not only is it important that teachers have in-depth knowledge of their subject, but they must also know how learners learn their subject and the best methods to imbue learning.
- TPD should be ongoing and school-based when feasible to ensure an individualised, context-based approach that can respond to teachers' and learners' 'live' needs.

#### Resources and tools:

Projects have collated tools that support teacher professional development programming, from training materials for teachers/facilitators/mentors to improving teaching.




**"A key learning was the importance of grounding teacher support in the realities they faced."**

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## 02 Take inclusion seriously

Projects that positively impacted the learning of the most marginalised girls took the delivery of inclusion-related TPD content seriously. When gender-responsive pedagogy, or disability-inclusive pedagogy, was given the specialist attention it requires and delivered in a way attuned to teachers' and girls' needs, it was more likely to result in lasting changes to teaching practices. A starting point for this was supporting teachers to recognise and identify their discriminatory practices.

Most GEC projects failed to shift deeper underlying discriminatory ideas, such as a belief that girls are 'naturally' shyer, suggesting that gender-based pedagogy had a surface-level impact. Projects which gave due time for teachers and school leaders to explore their values and ideas were able to generate deeper change.

When projects employed/ took advice from disability experts, anticipated changes in pedagogy and girls with disabilities' learning were stronger than when technical expertise was limited or lacking. It was also important to consider learners who didn't speak the language of instruction well, as they were more likely to fall behind in learning.

### Recommendations

- Co-design GESI-related content or materials with teachers and sufficiently qualified GESI specialists, allowing CPD approaches enough time and skill to recognise that attitudinal change is nuanced and takes time. Interventions can be sustained with follow-ups/refreshers/ monitoring/ feedback, etc, at regular intervals.
- If involved in teacher recruitment, recruit and train teachers from marginalised communities. Also, recruit female teachers when they are underrepresented in the sector, as is often the case at the secondary level. This may be more relevant for projects in the non-formal sector where teachers are selected.
- When relevant, support teachers to accommodate and support learners who don't speak the language of instruction. For example, by providing materials in their language or training teachers on code switching.

## 03 Consider and plan for all levels of the educational ecosystem

GEC projects that understood that teachers do not operate within a vacuum were more successful at increasing teacher motivation and raising the likelihood that changes seen within the project lifetime would be sustained. Parents and community leaders were strong allies for teachers when mobilised appropriately.

School leaders are critical figures whose support can make or break a teacher's ability to sustain changes.

The Excelling against the Odds project in Ethiopia encountered a problematic attitude early on in implementation, in which school principals assumed that the project was responsible for all activities and, therefore, did not understand they needed to support trained teachers. Overcoming this misapprehension was crucial to the project's support, as was facilitating a shift away from 'management' and onto 'leadership'. However, relying solely on school leaders to address systemic issues such as teacher turnover was also problematic. For example, headteachers supported by the Uganda CSU project tried to cascade training to recruits but found they could not do this due to insufficient time or the mandate that would encourage recruits to join the training.

### Recommendations

- Map out the different influences and powerholders within an individual teacher's ecosystem and understand who needs to be reached, why and how to support their professional development.
- Involve headteachers, school principals and school management from the outset in projects and ensure they are partners in project design and delivery rather than 'recipients' of training. When feasible, create opportunities for peer mentorship amongst school leaders.

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## 04 Prioritise teacher motivation

GEC projects were designed, first and foremost, to work directly with girls and deliver a range of ambitious outcomes for them. As a result, only some TPD strategies engaged comprehensively with the issue of teacher motivation. However, as data on teachers' perceptions was generated, projects began to get a stronger idea of the constraints on teaching quality caused by motivation, mental health and absenteeism, particularly in the aftermath of COVID-19.

Teacher absenteeism negatively impacted girls' exposure to learning or time on task and thus diminished the value attributed to educating girls. The CHANGE project in Ethiopia saw a direct link between parents perceiving that teachers would be absent and consequently choosing to hold their daughters back from school. However, it is critical not to blame teachers themselves. Projects with nuanced monitoring strategies understood that absenteeism drivers included low salaries, violence and insecurity.

Projects that addressed teacher motivation found positive impacts on effectiveness and sustainability. The Discovery Project and the PEAS project in Uganda focused on decent and fair payment for extra tasks. In Nigeria, the Discovery Project paid teachers stipends for their extra work in teaching remedial classes. Compared to Kenya, where this could not happen for regulatory reasons, remedial lessons were much more likely to go ahead and far more effective in their delivery and outcomes.

A strategy used by EGEP in Somalia impacted both teachers and learners. The project found that teachers did not recognise their success and its impact on students. So, they began sharing student feedback and learning improvements with teachers to instil feelings of pride.

Providing opportunities for teachers to come together, share knowledge and skills, and build each other up professionally was found to have a positive impact on both their well-being and their motivation. Another effective motivator was to support avenues for promotion or teacher qualification. Some projects ensured TPD and training approaches were aligned to promotion avenues, while others supported teachers who weren't qualified to obtain formal qualifications. For example, the IGATE project in Sierra Leone supported female teachers who taught in rural project schools to gain a teaching qualification through hybrid learning.

### Recommendations

- Focus on motivation and base approaches on what teachers think, feel and aspire to be.
- Consider how gender and power impact motivation and professional opportunity.
- Engage with structural, systemic bottlenecks, such as teachers' pay, and forge alliances with those positioned to advocate or influence in this area.
- Understand the dynamics of teacher absenteeism – when and why it happens – and work with system actors to see how these issues can be resolved.
- Provide opportunities for peer-to-peer teacher professional development such as school-based or cluster-based communities of practice.
- Support the promotion and formal qualification of teachers, particularly those from marginalised communities or female teachers where they are underrepresented, and ensure effective/ quality support structures.

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## 05 Engage and empower teachers and ensure effective/quality support structures

The introduction to this Learning Brief drew distinctions between teacher-led and teacher-owned CPD processes and top-down strategies imposed from the outside. Training generally falls into the latter category, and coaching or peer-based mechanisms into the former. The GEC found that training was generally well-received and that teachers initially felt they could apply it in class.

However, even when this was the case, most of those trained felt the training needed to be more extensive, in-depth, longer, include repetition or be more intense. For example, 80% of the teachers trained by REAP in Rwanda felt that the training needed to be revised to cover the intended topics. Teachers and project staff from the Cheshire Services Uganda project and STAGES project in Ethiopia suggested that CPD should be continuous, giving teachers repeated exposure to new lessons, refresher sessions and technical support.

Another major lesson was the limitations of a 'cascade' model. Where projects intended for trained teachers to formally or informally share their knowledge with others, assumptions around their time, willingness, capacity and power to do this were incorrect. A lack of time in the school timetable was cited as a key obstacle. Teachers did not always feel sufficiently confident in the skills or convinced of the content to pass them on. In Nepal, cascade training took place within informal contexts and was highly uneven. Some unevenness was also seen within models that brought teachers together in group sessions, with some teachers participating more than others.

That said, teachers and headteachers also articulated the benefits of this approach, who felt that content and discussion were much more contextually relevant and welcomed the solidarity and support of a peer-to-peer approach.

Peer-to-peer approaches like peer learning circles or communities of practice were found to have a tangible impact on teaching practice when certain conditions were met: they received wider support. They were facilitated by someone skilled enough to ensure that sessions were meaningful and benefited everyone. Some projects even found a wider impact on school culture.

*"By the end of the project, 109 Communities of Practice (CoPs) had been established, and the endline evaluation showed that 93% of teachers stated that being a member of a CoP allowed them to reflect on and improve their teaching practices. Most importantly, when teachers lead CoPs, they engage positively, demonstrating that it can enhance the quality of the teachers in Ethiopian schools.*

© People in Need, Sajana Shrestha

*"Teachers had not appreciated the benefit of lesson observations in the past, perceiving them as a 'top-down' management tool for management inspections. The teacher-led element ensured that the teachers worked towards finding solutions to problems rather than imposed solutions, enabling them to become problem solvers. The CoPs created a culture of change for improvement. Where project monitoring had previously identified that teachers were not engaged in conversations about the process of teaching or education, the CoPs created a space where this became the norm. The CoPs also built agency within the teachers around the notion of change and developed a culture of reciprocity where teachers valued and embraced each other's work."*

External evaluator, Excelling Against The Odds

Coaching was also viewed as an effective CPD strategy with wider impacts beyond a teacher's progress. In the DR Congo, the REALISE project saw that coaching changed relationships between education leaders and teachers, creating more positive and constructive power dynamics in the school. Although teachers were initially uncomfortable with observation in Somalia, they highly supported it by the end as they felt it gave them valuable, individual and tailored guidance.

### Recommendations

- Invest in the institutionalisation of CPD that engages and empowers teachers and responds to teachers' and learners' 'live' needs.
- Analyse the professional development needs of those who educate and support teachers, such as coaches and master trainers.
- Give coaches and teacher educators the support, budgets, power, and access to data they need, and invest in professional development that centres on their needs and the needs of the teachers in their context.

## 06 Plan for sustainability

Two major sustainability challenges were encountered across the GEC in its engagement with teachers.

Firstly, projects faced the dilemma that a well-trained teacher would leave the school that the project had hoped they would positively influence. This was a point of frustration but could also be seen positively as a way in which GEC inputs had a wider impact on communities and regions. Projects often sought to mitigate this risk by encouraging cascading or supporting those in the wider ecosystem (e.g. headteachers). However, few projects were able to address this comprehensively. Issues around turnover were also present at a higher level, as the turnover of senior education officials was also an impediment to institutionalising CPD interventions.

The second challenge was the financial blocks experienced by coaches, inspectors or local Ministry officials. Budget constraints limited school visits and CPD inputs, particularly to remote locations. In Somalia, these challenges were compounded by roadblocks and poor weather. In Nigeria, the ENGINE enlisted headteachers to conduct supervision visits instead of depending on master trainers based in a local town. This was effective when the headteacher did not have to travel far, and it built the engagement of headteachers more generally.

### Recommendation

- Plan for scale from the start: think about how those tasked with visiting schools can do this long-term without dependency on project funding.



## 07 Aim for systemic change

Several factors were consistently present where GEC projects achieved a degree of system-level change.

Firstly, projects that identified and responded to gaps in Ministry of Education CPD priorities capitalised on this knowledge and data.

Some GEC projects were able to generate and communicate evidence around the positive impact of female teachers and role models on girls and schools and work closely with those within Ministries interested in structural reform to address this. PEAS found that girls' engagement with a senior woman teacher increased the odds of girls developing reading and writing skills by 264% – a highly persuasive statistic to be shared with policy and decision-makers.

Secondly, the dominance of projects working at the primary level and on foundational learning meant that GEC projects often had a unique entry point for Ministry engagement and often worked with a cohort of teachers who were otherwise not exposed to any other programme.

Finally, GEC projects were clear about the impact and learnings around their work with teachers. Strong monitoring and evaluation, focusing on reflection and learning, meant they had much to say about teachers' perspectives, priorities and impact on learning outcomes. While there were some challenges with measuring teaching quality – from being unable to observe lessons during COVID-19 to problems with measuring inclusion and gender-responsiveness – projects could share stories about what had changed (or not) and why. Combined with strong relationships with the Ministries of Education, they had key ingredients for potential systemic change.

### Recommendations

- Engage with Ministries of Education before any planned programme or intervention to understand gaps in CPD and most strategic entry points.
- Create evidence and communication plans that meet the system's needs and allow actors to be influenced and supported in decision-making.
- Plan for success and for staff to move on. They are likely to stay in the system, which is good and likely to promote the programme and approach. Plan to train enough over time to sustain numbers within the project and understand movements in the education system.

Girls' Education Challenge

UKaid from the British people

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