

Roles of Teachers in the SDG4 Age: An Introductory Note

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Abstract

“Teachers are the key to achieving all of the SDG4-Education 2030 agenda.”
(Education 2030 Framework for Action, p. 21).

This note reviews how teacher-related issues are addressed in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) on education, and at each of the key steps since the preparation for the post 2015 education agenda in 2013 leading up to the adoption of SDG4. The note makes a comparative review on how teacher roles have been addressed in major global education agenda documents to shed light on features of SDG4 and how teacher roles are spelled out in it.

Teachers in the Process up to SDG4

Global Thematic Consultation

As a part of the process to inform the formulating the post-2015 development agenda, global thematic consultations were conducted on a range of themes including one on education, in parallel with national and regional consultations. The report of the thematic consultation on education was jointly produced by UNESCO and UNICEF and emphasized issues on teachers around: trained and motivated teachers; an adequate supply of teachers; support and professional development for teachers; participation of teachers and all other stakeholders (in monitoring and analysis of progress), and empowerment of teachers to take on more responsibility for education management (UNESCO & UNICEF, 2013).

The report also recognized the central role of teachers in ensuring quality education and learning, for which teacher qualification, competence, commitment and motivation were considered as important aspects. The report further pointed out that good employment conditions, work environment, pre- and in-service training and teacher recruitment and deployment were essential for the support for teachers to be effective (op. cit., p. 28).

UNESCO Position Paper

Subsequently, based on the consultation report, UNESCO produced a concept note on the post-2015 education agenda in November 2013 which was further polished into the UNESCO Position Paper and was presented to its Executive Board in February 2014. The position paper recommended “Ensure equitable and quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030” to be an overarching goal and proposed 10 targets around 6 priority areas: basic education; post-basic and tertiary education; youth and adult literacy; skills for work and life; and quality and relevant teaching and learning; and financing for education (UNESCO, 2014a). Again, teachers are regarded as one of the critical contributors to quality education. The paper recognized that “well-trained and motivated teachers who teach effectively using inclusive, gender-responsive and participatory pedagogical approaches” as essential inputs to ensure effective learning outcomes, and proposed one target specifically for teachers: “Close the teachers’ gap by recruiting adequate numbers of teachers who are well-trained, meet national standards and can effectively deliver relevant content, with emphasis on gender balance” (op. cit., p. 4). In this 10-page paper, however, the word “teacher” appears only three times.

Muscat Agreement –Voices of “Education Community”

The UNESCO position paper was presented to the EFA Steering Committee (EFA-

SC) for its deliberations. EFA-SC was set up in 2012 as a global coordinating mechanism to advance EFA objectives and comprised broad-ranging stakeholders: representatives of member states (6 plus one E9 post), EFA convening agencies (5), GPE, OECD, civil society and teacher organizations (3), private sector (1) and the Republic of Korea as a host of World Education Forum (discussed later). Their deliberations proposed revisions and reorganization of the position paper, and the draft joint proposal of the Steering Committee was discussed, further modified, and in a summary form, the Muscat Agreement was adopted at the EFA Global Education Meeting in May 2014. Reflecting the Muscat Agreement and discussions at the Oman GEM, the EFA-SC's joint proposal document was subsequently finalized on June 3, 2014.

The Muscat Agreement added one key concept of inclusion to the overarching goal to read “Ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030” for the post-2015 education agenda so as to echo with the emerging spirit of SDGs: *leaving no one behind*. Under the goal were included 7 targets. Its 6th target stated: “By 2030, all governments ensure that all learners are taught by qualified, professionally-trained, motivated and well-supported teachers” (UNESCO, 2014b, p. 3). It was a thoughtful phrasing which placed learners as a main concern, while emphasizing the role of teachers.

The Joint Proposal had a more detailed narrative on each of the seven proposed targets. It noted that “well-qualified teachers using appropriate pedagogical approaches” were indispensable for quality education and learning outcomes. On the target 6, the proposal pointed out the shortage of teachers was a critical concern and urged governments to provide “appropriate incentives, including competitive remuneration, clear career paths and professional development” (p. 6) and teachers themselves need to be held responsible for student’s learning outcomes (EFA Steering Committee, 2014). While other targets look to the year 2030, a shorter time-scale was envisaged for this target, as teachers are central to achieving other targets. The Joint Proposal classified 5 targets on ECCE, basic education, youth and adult literacy, knowledge and skills for decent work, and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Global Citizenship Education (GCED) as “outcome targets” while Target 6 on teachers and Target 7 on finance as “inputs targets.”

Teachers at the UN-Based Process

The Muscat Agreement and the Joint Proposal were submitted to the Open Working Group (OWG) of the United Nations to inform the UN-based process of formulating the post 2015 development agenda. OWG held a series of sessions (total 13) and their outcome document was submitted to the United Nations General Assembly in August, 2014. At this time, SDGs were to have 17 goals, education was the fourth, and each goal was composed of numbered targets and alphabetically ordered targets on means of implementation. Education goal stated, “**Ensure inclusive and equitable quality**

education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,” with 7 targets and 3 means of implementation targets. The target on teachers was included in one of the three latter. Several target sentences of Goal 4 still did not have specific numerical targets which were expressed as [x]. The teacher target, one of them, started with “By 2030, increase by [x] per cent the supply of qualified teachers....” (United Nations, 2014, p. 14).

Teachers in the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Teachers in SDG4

Following the next stage of inter-governmental negotiations, the United Nations at the General Assembly adopted “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” on September 25, 2015. The 2020 Agenda emphasizes being transformative, aspirational, as well as universal. The new agenda calls for transformative actions to achieve its objectives; it is aspirational in all aspects and universally relevant to all the countries and people. In this spirit, all the undecided figures had been fixed or restated by then. Education has successfully had its own stand-alone objective as SDG4, and Target 4.c on teachers now goes: “By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States” (United Nations, 2015). Namely, “increase by [x] per cent” in the OWG’s final proposal was replaced with “substantially increase.” The 2030 Agenda document, however, does not have a detailed narrative to go with individual goal and target statements.

Teachers in Education 2030 and its Framework for Action

In parallel with the UN-based process, and taking note of the discussions of the intergovernmental negotiations, UNESCO and the EFA Steering Committee continued to pave the way to formulating the global education agenda which was to succeed the Dakar Framework for Action. The World Education Forum was held in Incheon, South Korea, in May 2015, and adopted the Incheon Declaration. To reiterate the commitment of member states and other participating stakeholders, the declaration stated 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” (UNESCO, 2015, p. iv).

Originally, it was envisaged that the Incheon WEF would adopt both the political declaration (Incheon Declaration) and its corresponding framework for action as a package of the new education agenda, Education 2030. However, it was a shared idea among the EFA-SC that having two similar but different education development frameworks, as it

happened during the preceding period,¹ should be avoided for the sake of a clear sense of policy prioritization. In view of having a single global education framework ensuring the consistency with SDGs, the Incheon WEF decided that the adoption of the framework for action that was to have a full description of goal and target statements should wait until after the SDGs summit. The framework document was thus adopted at the UNESCO ministerial meeting in November 2015, two months after the adoption of SDGs.

The framework document provides narratives and indicative strategies on all the SDG4 targets, and touches upon issues of teachers from diverse perspectives. Primarily, in relation to the quality and learning, it says, “sufficient numbers² of teachers and educators of quality using learner-centered, active and collaborative pedagogical approaches” and regards teachers as essential resources for quality education and learning (UNESCO, 2015, p. 8). More broadly, it argues that policies and regulations concerning teachers should cover the empowerment of teachers and educators, adequate recruitment and equitable deployment, pre-service and continuous training, professional qualification framework, remuneration and decent working conditions, motivation, career development, school leadership, and support within well-resourced and gender-sensitive management systems. Teacher engagement in policy-making, planning and monitoring is seen as important.

The need for teacher training is also mentioned as a part of indicative strategies for addressing gender and vulnerability issues (4.5), to promote ESD and GCED (4.7) as well as to manage ICT and social networks.

Indicators

The framework also presented a set of 11 global indicators, one or two for each of the targets, and a broader set of thematic indicators to better inform the country policy process and to allow international comparability. The global indicators form part of the SDGs indicator framework and are meant to be reported by countries. The global indicator for Target 4.c monitors the proportion of teachers who have received organized teacher training at each level of education. Other thematic indicators on teachers were proposed for respective areas of teachers “qualified” (percentage of qualified teachers and pupil/qualified teacher ratio), “trained” (pupil/trained teacher ratio), “motivated” (average teacher salary relative to other comparable professions), and “supported” (percentage of teachers who received in-service training in the last 12 months) (UNESCO, 2015).

¹ MDGs had Goal 2 on universalizing primary education and Goal 3 on gender equality which also used education indicators. Both MDGs and Dakar Framework for Action envisaged the same time frame of 2000-2015, but the text of these goal statement were not exactly the same.

² By 2030, 3.2 million more teachers are required to achieve universal primary education, and 5.1 million more will be needed to achieve universal lower secondary education (UNESCO, 2015, paragraph 71).

Comparison with Jomtien and Dakar

The SDG4's breadth of elaborated roles and issues of teachers is outstanding when compared with preceding declaration and frameworks. I have checked key documents on the global education agenda – the World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien Declaration) and its framework for action (UNESCO, 1990), Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000), and SDG 4, by depicting key words used to discuss teacher issues, and categorizing them around the domains. The result is presented in Table below.

The Jomtien Declaration and its framework for action were adopted at the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien in 1990, which marked a major milestone in the history of advancing global educational development. Under the theme “Meeting Basic Learning Needs,” the conference discussed teacher issues, mostly around basic education, including their status referring to the 1966 Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers, the need to improve conditions of service with such measures as training and incentives, and teachers’ involvement in planning, monitoring and evaluation.

The Dakar Framework for Action of 2000 reaffirmed the commitments made by the Jomtien Declaration, and maintained the emphasis on teacher status and teachers’ role in providing quality education. In addition, the framework referred to the impact of HIV/AIDS, the need to increase the supply of teachers and their responsibility to provide the learning environment that is free of gender bias.

The comparison underscores features of SDG4 in addressing teacher issues. While the previous two frameworks had in scope mainly basic education and basic learning, SDG4 covers the entire scope of learning, from early childhood to school-age and adult population, and life-long learning. It also stresses inclusion and learning outcomes – not only cognitive, but also socio-emotional. This justifiably broadens the coverage of teacher issues in SDG4.

Table 1. Teacher Issues in Major Global Agenda Documents

	Jomtien Declaration & FfA	Dakar FfA	Incheon Declaration, SDG 4 and FfA
Appearance of “teacher” in Framework for Action (FfA)	12	27	64
Supply		HIV/AIDS, attract, retain	recruitment, sufficient number, deployment
Status / right	conditions of service, status	status, morale, remuneration, health	empowered, motivated, remunerated, decent working conditions (right), career development
Quality support	in-service training, technologies, incentives, innovation, quality education, absenteeism	teacher effectiveness, pre/in-service training,	training, qualification (framework), pedagogies, quality education, school leadership, ESD and GCED, ICT, pedagogical support
Responsibility	ethical responsibility	teacher behavior (gender bias), professional responsibilities	gender, vulnerability
Participation	planning, managing, monitoring, evaluation; teachers’ union		policy-making, planning, monitoring

The number of appearances of the term “teacher” increased from 12 in Jomtien to 27 in Dakar and to 64 in SDG4. The statements of SDG4 apparently derive from the findings of analytical work, and cite numerical information (such as number of teachers needed). SDG4 allocates more space for discussing pedagogical matters (to promote ESD and GCED, climate change and sustainable livelihood, for instance) that require more attention to non-cognitive aspects, and use of ICT among others.

The New Environment

Today, roles of teachers in the new environment are even further complicated by the increasing demand for the 21st century skills, emerging effects of technologies including artificial intelligence (AI) on teaching and learning styles, as well as the full consequences of COVID-19 that are yet to be known. Already, the traditional roles of teachers “to teach” is being replaced with “to facilitate” (UNESCO, 2019, for instance). The report of the International Commission on Futures of Education, which is set up by UNESCO and is expected to submit its report in 2021, is expected to spell out the critical roles of teachers. Such a challenging environment makes it all the more important that education policy makers and system designers should pay adequate attention that these changing contexts are adding on the burden teachers are shouldering.

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