

## **[Panel Session]**

# **Challenges of Teachers in Promoting Quality basic Education**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The role of teachers in providing and promoting quality basic education cannot be overemphasized. Many education sector studies have concluded that good teaching practice or teaching quality is one of the two most important determinants of student outcomes. The other important determinant is effective school leadership which consists of instructional leadership and change management leadership. Thus, it is often said that the quality of a school cannot go beyond the quality of its teachers and leaders.

## **TEACHING PROCESS**

There are many factors that contribute to good teaching. In the same vein there are many factors that impact on the personal and professional life of a teacher and consequently on his/her performance as a teacher.

It must be recognized that while national education systems in Southeast Asia are characterized by varying degrees of decentralization of educational management, teaching has always been and will likely remain to be a largely decentralized process. By this we mean that inside the classroom, the teacher has virtually full control of the situation, making decisions on the basis of circumstances prevailing in the classroom including student behavior and taking appropriate action.

A teacher's actual performance inside the classroom however is influenced by what has happened to the teacher before the class and what will happen to him/her after the class. Interventions to promote good teaching will therefore have to consider these different stages - before, during and after a teacher's actual job performance inside the classroom.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD TEACHER**

In very simple terms, a good teacher must possess and demonstrate the following characteristics:

- technically competent
- physically, mentally and emotionally fit
- motivated and committed

In this regard, SEAMEO INNOTECH, a Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology belonging to the network of the Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) has undertaken two important projects in the past few years whose outputs would be helpful in appreciating what these three characteristics specifically mean. These characteristics can serve as an ideal which teachers may aspire to achieve.

## **Competency Standards for Southeast Asian Teachers**

The Center took the lead in the development of a Competency Framework for Southeast Asian Teachers of the 21st Century, in collaboration with the Ministries of Education of the SEAMEO member-countries. These competencies are described in detail in Annex A. The Competency Framework identifies the general competencies and their corresponding specific tasks or subcompetencies. It is useful for designing professional development programs for teachers.

## **Passion for Teaching**

In November 2011, SEAMEO INNOTECH conducted a Regional Education Forum with the theme “Rediscovering the Passion for Teaching”. This theme was suggested by the SEAMEO INNOTECH Governing Board in the light of observations that many teachers have lost the passion for teaching, most probably as a consequence of the varied challenges which teachers in Southeast Asia experience. The participants many of whom were outstanding teachers in their respective countries proposed a Success Profile of a Passionate Teacher consisting of Competencies, Personal Attributes and Experiences. Competencies are the set of Knowledge, Skills and Values required of a teacher to passionately and successfully carry out his/her tasks and responsibilities. Personal Attributes are the general characteristics and personal traits of a teacher which sets him/her apart from other professions. Experiences are those that a teacher must/should go through as part of his/her learning journey contributing to continuous professional enhancement.

The detailed Success Profile is presented in Annex B.

## **CHALLENGES OF TEACHERS**

Having described the ideal characteristics of teachers which reflect teacher quality, we may now examine what are the challenges or obstacles that impede their ability to provide and promote quality basic education.

Basically there are three areas of challenges, namely:

- pre-service teacher preparation
- learning environment
- working conditions

### **Pre-service Teacher Preparation**

In many countries in Southeast Asia, teacher education is not usually a ‘first choice’ course among secondary school graduates due to perceptions on the difficult working conditions and the low status of the teaching profession. It has not been able to attract the best talents among secondary school graduates.

The curricula of teacher education programs have been slow to respond to the rapidly changing environment of schools. As a consequence graduates of teacher education programs are inadequately prepared to handle actual classroom conditions. What they have learned in teacher education programs does not fully address the demands of actual practice.

At the secondary education level, subject area specialization is required of teachers. Unfortunately, for the science and mathematics subjects, only few teacher education students specialize in these subject areas since the high school graduates who are good in these subjects usually prefer courses other than teacher education. As a consequence, there are many science and mathematics teachers who did not specialize in these subject areas in their teacher education course and yet, out of necessity, they have to teach these subjects.

### **Learning Environment**

In many developing countries, education systems are underfunded, thereby leading to inadequate provision of basic resources such as teachers, classrooms and instructional materials. Thus, many class sizes tend to be large particularly in urban areas. Compounded by the diversity of learners, teachers often face challenges in handling such classes such as being unable to monitor individual student performance and to provide differentiated instruction.

## **Working Conditions**

Teacher salaries are generally low in many Southeast Asian countries especially when compared with those in other professions. Since teachers account for a very large proportion of the Civil Service, even modest salary increases would have a significant impact on the national budget. Opportunities for career advancement and professional development are also limited.

Working hours are in many cases long. In addition there are many demands on teachers both inside and outside the school, such as administrative duties in school and out-of-school work rendered for local communities and local governments.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO HELP TEACHERS PROMOTE QUALITY BASIC EDUCATION**

### **Instructional Support System and Continuing Professional Development**

A strong system of instructional support coupled with continuing professional development can directly impact on the performance of teachers. Instructional support at the school level should be the focus of the leadership responsibility of school heads. It may also be provided by fellow teachers and specialists operating at higher levels, such as at the town and city or provincial levels, forming communities of practice as a venue for professional support.

Staff development is a primary responsibility of school heads. School-based in-service training programs must be developed in response to individual professional development needs of teachers.

A system of providing constructive feedback to teachers regarding their actual performance should be institutionalized through formal performance evaluation mechanisms. To the extent possible, parents and other stakeholders should participate in providing feedback.

### **Policy Environment**

Sustained increases in budgetary support for public education in line with UNESCO benchmarks would allow for increases in teacher compensation as well as improvements in learning conditions in schools through adequate provision of basic resources. Furthermore, financial support for continuing professional development of teachers can also be expanded.

Initiatives to promote career mobility of teachers within Ministries of Education can improve the image of the teaching profession, hopefully attracting better students into teacher education programs. Steps should also be taken to ensure that good teachers are retained and rewarded for their performance. An example is introducing a Master Teacher Scheme which allows for granting higher salaries to good and experienced teachers without their having to shift to the administrator track.

Recently, the Philippine government decided to pay science and mathematics teachers higher salaries compared to other teachers. This move is part of the effort to retain them and to attract more students to specialize in these subject, in teacher education programs. Earlier non-specialists among secondary school science and mathematics teachers were sent for training for two consecutive summers to enable them to acquire a certificate of specialization for the subject(s) they are currently teaching.

Inasmuch as Ministries of education exercise some degree of control or influence over teacher training institutions, periodic reviews of teacher education curricula should be conducted to ensure that these keep abreast of developments in learning environments in schools.

### **Recognition of Teachers**

Initiatives have been taken by both the public and private sectors to give due recognition to the role teachers play

in our society. At the international level, UNESCO has declared October 5 of every year as World Teachers Day. At the national level, Ministries of Education have collaborated with the private sector to celebrate such an event. For instance, in the Philippines, a National Teachers Month has been officially declared by the President of the Philippines, starting in September and culminating on October 5 of every year. The celebration started six years ago as a private sector – led activity but has now become a joint public-private sector undertaking.

Nationwide searches for outstanding teachers have been conducted both by Ministries of Education and the private sector, involving both monetary and non-monetary rewards. Winners are featured in official awarding ceremonies as well as in the mass media.

### **Concluding Remarks**

While the critical role of teachers is recognized, many challenges are experienced by teachers as they carry out their noble responsibility. Concrete actions are required to develop good teachers and to enable them to cope with the challenges associated with their work. These have to be initiated, not by government alone but also by the many education stakeholders so that they can contribute to and benefit from quality basic education.

### **References:**

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3. Competency Framework for Southeast Asian Teachers for the 21st Century, SEAMEO INNOTECH
4. National Competency-Based Teacher Standards, Department of Education, Philippines

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