

Managing the teaching workforce: Lessons from high performing secondary schools

INFORMATION BRIEF

Introduction

Teachers are at the heart of the learning process and teacher quality is the single most important influence on learning outcomes at the school level. Teachers need leadership and support to be effective and to help reach those with the greatest needs.

The most recent Secondary Grade Learning Assessment (SGLA) shows high levels of lesson observations, feedback on observations to teachers and lesson plan use. Yet, learning levels remain low with JSS2 and SSS2 pupils falling behind curriculum expectations by around two and five years respectively. With many large class sizes across the country, the introduction of FQSE is expected to increase enrolment still further putting immense pressure on classrooms and teachers, most of whom are volunteers. Despite these challenges, there are schools that perform better than expected through effective teacher management among other strategies.

This is one of a series of four briefings produced from a study conducted by the UKAid-funded Leh Wi Lan programme which recognises the importance of effective teacher management among other factors by casting a light on the activities of better performing schools.



High performing schools have robust recruitment processes, cascade learning within the school and promote effective lesson plan use.

Better performing schools

Recruit staff through enhanced recruitment processes.

Schools augment Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) recruitment guidelines with their own more demanding recruitment processes to test skills of applicants and this has enabled them to recruit better quality staff. One principal described their teacher recruitment as a *“formidable process”* which involved referring to MBSSE teacher recruitment guidelines in addition to an in-depth interview and lesson observation testing a candidate’s “handle over content, classroom and time management and pedagogy”. They went on to affirm that *“trained and qualified has to mean something in practice in the classroom”*.

Use seminars and techniques like ‘learning circles’ to cascade learning.

This enables schools to get maximum value from training opportunities so that the whole school can benefit when just one or two staff members attend in service training. One member of staff:

“After we receive external training we come back and organise a seminar for those teachers who were not part of the training so we can share with our colleagues what we learn and what we should be doing.”

Another top performing school has institutionalised weekly training, covering training covered in LWL, gender-based violence, child centred learning, teaching pedagogy and classroom management. These same schools encourage staff to apply general pedagogical techniques from LPM training to other subjects.

Promote lesson planning at every opportunity. Schools are using staff training, classroom monitoring and regular feedback to encourage use of lesson plans and Lesson Plan Manuals (LPMs) amongst teachers and this is helping classroom teaching evolve from a 'chalk and talk' culture to more interactive teaching methods. One hard-to-reach school used learning circles to share LPM training across all staff. Another introduced what it called 'team teaching' where two teachers plan out a subject together and then each teach an aspect of the lesson to the class while the other watches and provide inputs where necessary. Lesson Plan Manual training is also helping teachers understand the actual learning level that the students are currently at and *"communicate to children at a level they can understand"*.

73% of teachers across all secondary schools in Sierra Leone are now using MBSSE lesson plans, although only 52 per cent of teachers can correctly name all five parts of the lesson plan¹.



Benefit from the financial and moral support of their communities. Community support plays an important role in motivating school staff. One CTA chairperson said:

"We often meet and come up with a reasonable amount of money to give to the principal who would then give to the teachers as a stipend as a way of motivating them to deliver their services".

A CTA member from another school said their teachers delivered so well despite the challenges they face is *"all to do with their motivation and personal sacrifice"* and *"not wanting the children to be uneducated"*. Indeed, the CTA are so grateful and impressed, they mobilise their resources from small scale farming and offer food items such as *"millet and groundnut as a form of encouragement for their services"*.

Methodology

This Briefing Paper explores key findings on teacher management from a qualitative deep dive study that highlights pockets of effective learning ('positive deviance') to consider what, if any, lessons can be replicated elsewhere to help other secondary schools make greater progress towards achieving their performance goals.

The study covered three districts of Western Rural, Kono and Karene targeting three schools in each area – two high performing schools and one average or low performing school, according to average pupil results in the May-June 2019 SGLAs.

The three-person research team included two Sierra Leonean researchers and spent three days in each school using key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs) and lesson/school observations to develop case studies. FGDs were carried out separately for boys and girls with the same set of eight pupils who had been randomly selected for the SGLA pupil test.

¹ SGLA III

Leh Wi Lan/Sierra Leone Secondary Education Improvement Programme (SSEIP) is a five-year (2016–2021) UKaid-funded programme aimed at improving English and mathematics learning achievement in all secondary schools of Sierra Leone, especially for girls. This study was designed and implemented by Leh Wi Lan's monitoring, evidence, and research workstream in close collaboration with the Sierra Leone Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE). Any views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of UK Department for International Development (DFID) or MBSSE.