

Supporting teachers from the middle tier: The Teacher Development Coordinator Programme in Delhi



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Case Study for the IIEP-UNESCO and Education Development Trust Project Research Project 'Instructional leaders at the middle tier of education systems'.

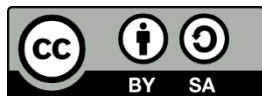
This work was conducted under the supervision of Barbara Tournier and Chloé Chimier at the International Institute for Educational Planning of UNESCO (IIEP-UNESCO).

This case study was prepared by David Childress, and is one of the 5 case studies of promising practice carried out as part of the IIEP-UNESCO and Education Development Trust research project on ‘Instructional leaders at the middle tier of education systems’. The research is looking at ‘middle tier’ roles in education systems: those professionals, such as district supervisors, pedagogical coaches and teacher mentors, who work across schools to support teaching and learning. It offers insights into their potential as change agents and how to strengthen their role in the education delivery chain.

For more information on this project, visit www.iiep.unesco.org/en/instructional-leaders.

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Executive Summary

In recent years, the Delhi government has made education reform a priority in terms of both focus and budgetary allocations (Sahoo, 2020; SCERT, 2019). As part of these reforms, and in partnership with international NGO STiR Education, the Teacher Development Coordinator (TDC) programme has attempted to enhance teaching and learning outcomes by creating two new support roles in Delhi's middle tier. Each government school has selected one teacher to serve in the role of TDC, and they serve as mentors, role models, and collaborative leaders to other teachers in their school. Likewise, a Mentor Teacher (MT) is typically assigned between four and six schools, and they provide guidance and feedback to both TDCs and teachers on best practices and new strategies. Through this system of peer support, collaboration, and feedback, this programme has acted as a catalyst for teachers to improve both their professional development and motivation.

Utilizing a qualitative research approach that involved a series of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, this project aims to better understand the makeup of the middle tier in Delhi while also seeking out those practices that enable its successes. The driving research questions for this project are as follows:

- What roles exist within Delhi's middle tier that serve as instructional leaders? What are their functions in relation to teaching and learning and how are they tasked with leading change?
- How are these role holders recruited and trained? What are the skills, competencies, and behaviours associated with these positions? What role does the middle tier workforce play in informing the design of teaching and learning reforms?
- What wider institutional frameworks act as enabling conditions or existing barriers for the middle tier to act as drivers of change?

The main mission of the TDC programme is to create an improved academic environment among schools and teachers and, in turn, improve student learning outcomes and performance. To do this, it seeks to aid teachers to become intrinsically motivated professionals, with a growth mindset that focuses on facilitating lifelong learning instead of simply delivering content to students. By utilising TDCs and Mentor Teachers, Delhi has created a system of support and collaboration for its teachers through providing needs-based professional development and training. Recruiting highly motivated classroom teachers, Delhi trains its Mentor Teachers and TDCs to role model best practices found both nationally and internationally. Also featuring a vigorous feedback loop, the programme's design team takes information from the classroom, school, and district level in its planning of new strategies and recommendations.

With such an expansive support system for teachers and schools, the TDC programme has had noticeable positive effects since its initial implementation. These can be seen through increased teacher collaboration, a shift to a more professional culture in schools, improvements in student outcomes, greater ownership from Delhi's middle tier over the programme, enhanced usage and application of feedback and data, and strengthening connections to adapt to difficult situations. Even so, the programme has also faced some challenges, including an initial lack of buy-in, feelings of being overburdened with heavy administrative duties, struggles in communication, and job turnover. There remains room for optimism in looking ahead, however, as the

programme continues to gain momentum and Delhi's increased ownership has provided a sustainable foundation.

Considering some key takeaways from this programme, it can offer guidance to education policy makers looking to institute their own programmatic or structural reforms. Focusing on teachers, it seems that aiming to improve their motivation in multiple ways as well as providing them mentors offering solely positive feedback has proven effective. These changes have in turn enhanced student learning outcomes without directly targeting the students themselves. By bridging the gap between theory and practice through its needs-based, interactive training opportunities, Delhi has seemed to enhance its system of teacher professional development. In designing multiple layers of support reaching from the classroom to the state level, this programme has also created a multi-layered system that can adapt to difficult situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, by fully utilising the middle tier of its education system to help design and implement large-scale reforms, Delhi has begun to transform the culture and environment in all of its government schools. While Delhi has taken advantage of a supportive political climate and outside help from an innovative NGO to achieve its results, these takeaways can prove useful when designing other structural reforms across diverse contexts.