

Case study: **Building teacher confidence through supervision and coaching in Jordan**

A growing concern for education policymakers is how to improve teaching and learning quality at scale. In turn, leading thinkers are calling for more attention to the ‘architecture’ of education systems: the delivery structures, and workforce roles that will reform teaching and learning practices (Education Commission 2019; Banerjee et al, 2017; Bold et al, 2013).

Education Development Trust and IIEP-UNESCO are collaborating on a major new study to contribute to this agenda. 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. Drawing on six case studies of promising practice – across India, Jordan, Kenya, Rwanda, Shanghai and Wales – it will offer insights into the characteristics of these instructional leaders and what more can be done to support their potential as change agents.

These short case studies offer initial insights from the research. Full findings will be available in early summer 2021.

Strengthening the Supervisor role in Jordan

Supervisors in Jordan currently play an important part in driving forward pedagogical improvement. Traditionally, roleholders are highly educated and trained, and subject specific supervisors provide direct assistance to teachers by providing specialist technical support. In 2015 the national approach to supervision shifted from an evaluative role - where supervisors scored teachers’ lessons – to a more supportive position leading teacher training, coaching and communities of practice (MoE, 2015).

Within the context of these wider reforms, a recent innovation across five governorates in Jordan – led by the Improving English Skills (IES) project – has further strengthened the supervisor role. The IES project was led by Education Development Trust and Queen Rania Teaching Academy (QRTA) from January 2017 to June 2019 and worked to develop the English language teaching skills of public-school teachers of Syrian refugees. It built the capacity of education supervisors in coaching skills and evidence-based practice to facilitate teachers’ professional development and the implementation of new pedagogical skills into classroom

practice. The project covered the governorates of Irbid, Mafraq, Ajloun, Amman, Madaba and Zarqa, which have high concentrations of Syrian refugees, over the course of the project IES worked with 51 supervisors, 503 teachers reaching approximately 20,000 students.

Based on initial analysis for the research study, interesting features of these middle tier reforms include:

- **The focus on supervisors leading teachers through a cycle of improvement**, using a specialist coaching technique inspired by clinical supervision in the healthcare sector. This helped teachers to implement new pedagogical techniques into their real-world classroom practice
- **A strong focus on the use of international evidence and local diagnostics** by supervisors to support teacher practice
- **The culture and mindset shift experienced by respondents**, including a sense of partnership between supervisor and teacher, greater confidence and motivation of teachers to try new teaching techniques, and an emphasis on cultivating ownership of change by teachers

Evidence-based supervision: leading teachers through a cycle of improvement

The supervisors worked with teachers in structured cycles of coaching which include: observation of practice, discussion of issues, selection of interventions to address the problem based on international evidence, trialling of new practice, and support for reflection and review. A summary of the model is shown in Figure 1 below.

METHODS

Evidence for this case study draws on programme evaluation data collected during programme implementation. It also draws on desk research of a range of programme documentation, as well as interviews with supervisors and QRTA and Education Development Trust staff.

Each supervisor was assigned a cluster of five schools and around 10 teachers to train, coach and support. As teachers took their own learning from the programme into the classroom supervisors used their skills in coaching and evidence to evaluate teacher learning and performance and then select appropriate treatments to work on with teachers towards improved student learning. Supervisors trained teachers in workshops throughout the year and led reflective meetings for teachers to discuss their experience of implementation.

Supervisors received training in coaching, evidence based supervision, and teacher effectiveness research which was designed to build on existing skills and their position as skilled professionals within the local education system. Participants were also asked to complete a portfolio over six months demonstrating them putting their learning into practice. The trainings were interactive and collaborative in design with the information designed to be practical and relevant for the context of Jordan.

The strong emphasis on coaching skills meant that supervisors' observations of teachers served to build teacher capacity and strengthened the relationship between teacher and supervisor. The coaching

Figure 1. Evidence based supervision model

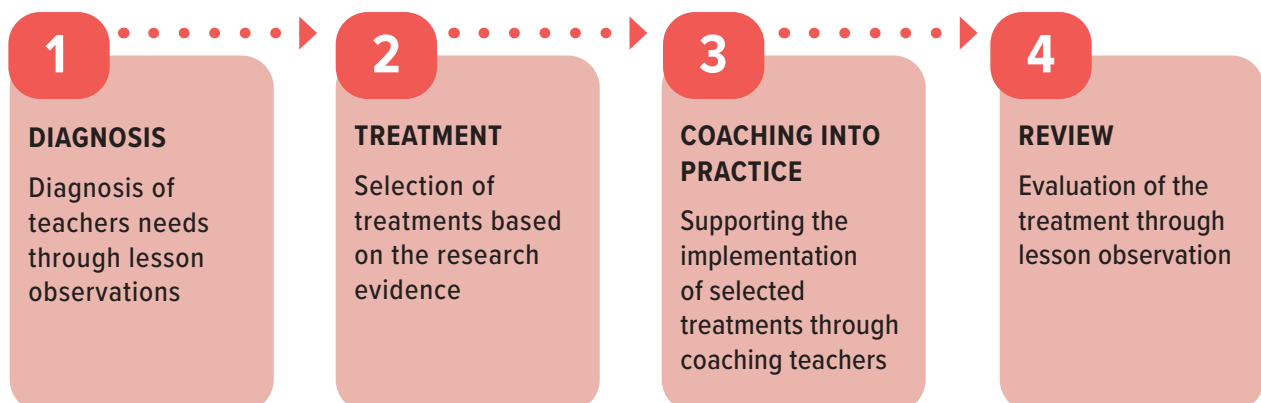


Figure 2. Example of treatment card translating international evidence for use by supervisors



methodology gave a common language for teachers and supervisors to use. Supervisors described profound shifts from previous ways of working, explaining changes in the kinds of questions supervisors asked teachers, and in how they shifted towards finding solutions together:

“You feel the supervisor is an analyst. He can analyse the situation and if you find the problem you can look for solutions. The role of coaching... The coach’s role is to help the teacher find a solution by himself.” Supervisor, focus group 2018/19

“After observation, such as through questioning. I take the teachers’ words and the teachers’ notes and I don’t give solutions; I ask questions.”

(Supervisor, Amman)

Both teachers and supervisors reported feeling more connected to each other, having more personal conversations and communicating outside of school visits through WhatsApp groups and personal calls.

Supervisors also spoke about sharing their knowledge with other supervisors and teachers they support who were not part of the project – for example using the content in training delivered to novice public school students, and creating videos about coaching techniques to share with

“As part of this programme, we have built up a very positive trusting relationship with our teachers. And we have become like partners.” (Supervisor, focus group 2018/19)

“I began to listen more to the teachers, to listen more to their needs and the kind of the questions that I ask to my teachers to stimulate or encourage them to give the solutions from their real environment and real practices as a teacher.” (Supervisor 005)

colleagues. In interviews conducted in 2020 it was evident that supervisors were continuing to use the skills they developed in the programme.

A strong focus on the use of international evidence and local diagnostics by supervisors to support teacher pedagogy

The evidence-based supervisor approach is underpinned by the use of diagnostics and evidence. Steps 1 and 3 of the methodology involve diagnostic lesson observation, where supervisors use evidence to understand teachers’ professional development needs.

In self reported surveys supervisors reported improvements across three domains of diagnostic lesson observation, coaching and giving feedback and teacher effectiveness.

Supervisors told researchers in interviews that the quality for the feedback they gave to teachers had improved as they now had the opportunity to reflect on their observation and focus more on students learning.

Step 2 of the methodology centres on the selection of treatment. One of the key innovations is the translation of international evidence for easy use by supervisors through a ‘treatment card’ (see below). The treatment cards set out a range of high impact teaching solutions based on wider international evidence.

Education Development Trust

Modelling

Modelling (demonstrating a procedure) can be more effective than using just verbal instructions, particularly within young learners. To be effective the process needs to be as follows:

1. Teacher/expert demonstration linking to prior knowledge/skills.
2. Each part needs to be gone through in a clear, structured and sequential way with an explanation of what is being done.
3. Learners memorise steps and imitate them (Ausubel, 1968).

Ausubel, D.P. (1968). *Educational psychology: a cognitive view*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Programme staff described how the approach really valued supervisors as experts and researchers – the treatment approach then allowed them to approach work with each teacher almost as a research cycle in itself. It helped to integrate research evidence into the classroom.

The culture and mindset shift experienced by respondents

Teachers described changes and impact on themselves as professionals on several levels.

Firstly, they described how they felt more confident as practitioners given the supervisors’ support, and how this led them to try new things in the classroom. In the self-assessment survey conducted as part of the evaluation of the project in 2019 both teachers and supervisors reported improvement in teaching skills in all the areas measured – including student feedback and assessment and student engagement and behaviour. Teachers indicated that they now use a wider variety of strategies and were more willing to try new practices. One example of this was teachers who reported that they were using coaching methodology with their own students and were more focused on the students themselves in lessons.

“Before we just read the text and translated it many times... now we ask questions before, during and after to demonstrate understanding [strategy for teaching reading]. This is better than the way we used in the past and the good students interact in this way better than in the past.” (Teacher, Khadija)

“This programme meant I change the way I teach totally. I now engage with the whole class when teaching.” (Teacher, Amman)

Secondly, they described a sense of joint responsibility with the supervisor for student learning, and a shift away from a more hierarchical relationship. Focusing on students themselves had supported a mindset shift and became a clearer motivation for the work. Supervisors and teachers became more focused on improving student learning and working hand in hand and collaboratively as teacher and supervisor:

“We are looking for evidence and teaching inside the classroom. Teachers now accept it is their role. The culture has shifted to not blaming children for being weak. Now they [teachers] are starting to think they are accountable for their student’s weakness.” (Supervisor, Irbid)

“It is about observing the students. It is reflected on students themselves. They are enthusiastic about using the techniques. They realise something is different.”

(Supervisor, focus group 2018/19)

Teachers, supervisors and QRTA staff gave examples of sharing resources, work and lessons plans, and supervisors and QRTA trainers were included in WhatsApp groups. These examples demonstrate a new openness, allowing the new coaching and teaching skills to flourish.

Key takeaways

The evidence-based supervision model led by Education Development Trust and QRTA in Jordan is a highly promising example of middle tier reform. It is a good example of how middle tier professionals can act as change agents, helping teachers to take positive action in the classroom, through skilled coaching techniques which help teachers bridge the 'theory-practice gap'. It is also a good example of how reforms can build on existing system strengths: supervisors in Jordan typically have strong academic knowledge and the 'treatment cards' which draw on international evidence helped them to apply and translate their knowledge. The coaching approach was also central in building more open and honest relationships with teachers, working with them as partners in improving student learning, and meaning that teachers were more motivated to act on their feedback.

References

Abhijit Banerjee & Rukmini Banerji & James Berry & Esther Duflo & Harini Kannan & Shobhini Mukerji & Marc Shotland & Michael Walton, 2017. "From Proof of Concept to Scalable Policies: Challenges and Solutions, with an Application," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, American Economic Association, vol. 31(4), pages 73-102, Fall. Retrieved from: <https://ideas.repec.org/a/aea/jecper/v31y2017i4p73-102.html>

Bold, T., Mwangi, K., Mwabu, G., and Ng'ang'a, A., Sandefur, J. 2013., *Scaling Up What Works: Experimental Evidence on External Validity in Kenyan Education*. Center for Global Development Working Paper No. 321. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2241240> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2241240>

Education Commission. 2019. *Transforming the education workforce: Learning teams for a learning generation*. New York: Education Commission.

Churches, R., Aghajanian, L. and Hutchinson, G. (2018). *Evidence-based supervision: An evidence-in-practice thinkpiece*. Reading: Education Development Trust.

Ministry of Education, Jordan. (2015). *The Educational Supervision Guide, 2nd version*. Amman.

Ministry of Education, Jordan. (2018). *Education Strategic Plan 2018-2022*. Amman.

Ministry of Education, Jordan. (2019). *The General Supervision Study*. Amman

UNHCR. 2018. *Syria Refugee Response – Jordan. Operational Portal – Refugee Situations*. [Online] Available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/36> [accessed July 2018]