

EaSTE Policy Paper Brief

**Enhancing Engagement in Online CPD
Programmes: Insights from EaSTE**





Acknowledgements

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Glossary of terms

AEOs	Assistant Education Officers
CoP	Communities of Practice
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DSEs	District Subject Experts
EaSTE	English as a Subject for Teachers and Educators
EDI	Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
LMS	Learning Management System
PEELI	Punjab Education and English Language Initiative (PEELI)
PST	Primary School Teachers
QAED	Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development
SED	School Education Department
SLO	Student Learning Outcomes
SNC	Single National Curriculum

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Policy Paper

Introduction

This policy paper outlines how online models of continuing professional development can support teachers and their students' learning, highlighting the associated challenges and making recommendations for how these can be overcome. It draws on learning from an evaluation of the English as a Subject for Teachers and Educators (EaSTE) project, an online Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme launched in Punjab, Pakistan, to improve the English language teaching skills of 140,000 Primary School Teachers (PSTs). The analysis shows that the programme led to promising positive changes in teaching practices, with teachers adopting strategies like mind mapping, flashcards, and scaffolding techniques. The programme also led to enhanced student engagement levels and oral communication skills.

However, the evaluation identifies challenges related to the engagement and motivation of teachers and the completion rates of the course. Key barriers include administrative workload, weaker content support, low incentives, and technological issues such as poor connectivity and limited digital literacy. The paper suggests policy recommendations to enhance future online CPD programmes, such as linking professional development to career progression, reviewing teacher contracts to reduce non-teaching duties, improving access to technology, strengthening head teacher training, and exploring blended learning models. Drawing on successful CPD initiatives within Pakistan and other similar contexts, the paper advocates for systemic reforms to boost teacher engagement, motivation, and student learning outcomes.

Background and introduction to EaSTE

The net enrolment rate at the primary level in Punjab has seen significant growth, reaching 70 per cent in 2020 (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2020). While enrolment has improved, challenges remain in teacher capacity, pedagogical practices, and English language proficiency—key factors in enhancing student learning. Research indicates that targeted CPD can improve teachers' instructional strategies, leading to better student engagement and achievement (Dar & Khan, 2021). Online CPD, in particular, offers accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and flexibility, allowing teachers to enhance their digital skills and collaborate within their school environments (Hennessy et al., 2022). As English becomes increasingly vital in academic and professional contexts, a structured online Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme focused on English language teaching, classroom communication, and student-centered learning is essential.

In response, the Punjab government launched the English as a Subject for Teachers and Educators (EaSTE) programme to address these challenges and improve the quality of teaching alongside the

rising enrolment rate. Launched in March 2022 in collaboration with the British Council and Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development (QAED), Punjab, EaSTE aimed to improve English language teaching skills among 140,000 Primary School Teachers (PSTs). EaSTE offered five self-access online courses through a Learning Management System (LMS), with teachers completing five six-week modules over two years. Supported by Assistant Education Officers (AEOs), the programme included mentorship, school visits, and Communities of Practice through webinars and forums. This policy paper presents the evaluation findings and recommendations for future online Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes, particularly in similar contexts.

The findings of this paper are based on an external endline evaluation of EaSTE, which assessed its impact on teachers' knowledge, pedagogical practices, and student engagement. Using a mixed-methods approach, data was collected through 4,000 teacher surveys, 40 stakeholder interviews, 144 classroom observations, and 15 focus group discussions with Education Managers,

including District Subject Experts (DSEs) and Assistant Education Officers (AEOs). The evaluation aimed to identify successes, challenges, and design elements, providing recommendations for improving future CPD programmes. Findings from these different sources were triangulated to identify key challenges in the implementation of large-scale online CPD programmes and policy-level recommendations for the future.

The infographic below represents the demographic indicators of the sample part of the endline evaluation.

Gender



Locality



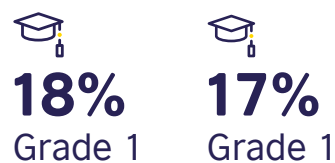
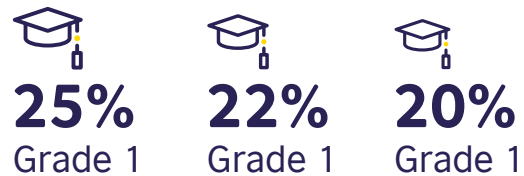
Age



Types of schools



Grade



Findings from EaSTE

Findings from the endline evaluation highlighted that EaSTE positively impacted the pedagogical practices of teachers. The evidence suggests that there has been an improvement in teachers using a mix of strategies and activities like mind mapping, flash cards, and scaffolding techniques to enhance the language skills of learners. Student engagement in English lessons and oral communication skills increased moderately as well. Seventy per cent of the teachers in the endline evaluation highlighted that they feel confident in implementing the learnings from EaSTE in classrooms.

Almost 94 per cent of the teachers in the endline evaluation stated that EaSTE helped them in the development of an action plan to further improve their language skills.

However, one of the key challenges encountered during the implementation of the EaSTE programme was the low completion rates and declining engagement and motivation levels among Primary School Teachers (PSTs). Self-paced teacher training courses or MOOCs generally tend to have lower completion rates, ranging from five to 40 per cent, unless strong support systems and incentives are

embedded within the programmes (Zhang et al., 2022). Similar observations were made during EaSTE's endline evaluation. The table below, derived from the data from the Learning Management System (LMS), indicates that module 2 on Reading and Critical Thinking Skills had the highest completion rate at 57.14 per cent. However, this figure dropped significantly to just 22.46 per cent by the end of module 4. An analysis of the log-in rates also shows a lack of overall interest in the course. In module 1, 141,023 teachers logged in the course. By the end of the course, in module 5, the number of teachers who logged in was only 34,457. This depicts a sharp decline of 75 per cent. Similarly, there was a decline observed in average course progress (which implies the average module progress of PSTs), also declining from 71.08 per cent in module 1 to 11.28 per cent in module 5. In comparison, previous face-to-face training programmes, such as the British Council-Punjab Education and English Language Initiative (PEELI), generated higher completion and engagement rates. The overall participation and completion rate of PSTs in PEELI was 79.5 per cent.

Table 1: Data from LMS

Module	Enrolled Participants	Logged In	Average Course Progress	Certificate of Achievement	Discussion Forum - Form Replies	Completion Rate
Module 1	144,191	141,023	71.08%	87,095	117,997	43.89
Module 2	141,948	126,868	71.21%	101,807	44,842	57.14
Module 3	136,012	110,219	51.05%	79,382	38,467	36.76
Module 4	134,752	79,419	32.25%	55,320	25,766	22.46
Module 5	70,156	34,457	11.28%	7,315	9,861	2.39

Teachers' administrative workload

During focus groups and interviews, Primary School Teachers (PSTs) reported that, in addition to their teaching responsibilities, they were frequently assigned administrative duties. During the EaSTE programme, they were engaged in tasks such as wheat distribution, election duties, and census

assignments, which affected their ability to complete the modules on time. Evidence from EaSTE and the wider South Asian region suggests that assigning non-teaching duties to public school teachers leads to demotivation amongst teachers (Hennessy et al., 2022).

Challenges in the cascade model: Limited pedagogical support for PSTs

The EaSTE model followed a cascade approach, where training was delivered from British Council trainers to the Education Department's District Subject Experts (DSEs), who then trained Assistant Education Officers (AEOs). In turn, AEOs were responsible for supporting Public Primary School Teachers (PSTs) through Communities of Practice (CoP) sessions. These training were conducted to support teachers in schools to implement their learnings from LMS. This model was chosen to achieve the required scale, but also in response to the PESP Sector Plan (2019-20 - 2023-24) which emphasizes decentralized professional development and revising the roles and responsibilities of AEOs, with a greater focus on mentoring and ongoing support for schools, head teachers, and teachers. It specifically outlined that AEOs should provide observation, feedback, and mentoring to teachers.

However, evidence from EaSTE indicates that AEOs lacked the necessary skills to provide content and subject-specific (English) support to PSTs. Observations from CoP sessions and feedback from PSTs revealed that AEOs primarily focused on

logistical issues and completion rates rather than engaging with the course content and pedagogical aspects. Only a handful of AEOs were able to explain the material to PSTs, while most showed a general lack of interest in the training, likely due to their multiple administrative responsibilities. As the training filtered through multiple layers—British Council trainers to DSEs to AEOs to PSTs—the essence of the course was diluted. This lack of direct content support and feedback on their classroom practice further demotivated teachers, as they struggled to grasp the material and complete the course online without adequate guidance from AEOs. Lack of support at the school level was consistently highlighted by PSTs as one of the core challenges in completing the course. To ensure the success of online CPD programmes, there is a need for stronger support mechanisms at the school level to ensure that teachers receive real-time feedback and their concerns are addressed. Including School Heads, instead of AEOs, in the cascade layers could have enabled the provision of in-house support for PSTs and addressed issues related to feedback and content support.





Poor incentivisation for online CPD programmes

As with previous PD courses, performance in EaSTE was neither linked to recognition nor monetary incentives, nor was there any accountability for low performance. The general lack of career progression and limited incentives have historically contributed to low teacher motivation (Bari et al., 2013). Beyond design and implementation factors, contextual elements such as rewards for PD are crucial for improving learning outcomes and pedagogical practices (Nawab & Bissaker, 2021). In this context, the PSTs were aware that their participation and performance in online CPD programmes have no impact on promotions or

salary increments, further diminishing their engagement. Additionally, the answer keys for the module quizzes were available online on different YouTube channels. The availability of module quiz keys proved discouraging for many teachers who had been putting in genuine effort, leading to further demotivation, as stated consistently in interviews and focus group discussions. The availability of these answer keys also potentially devalues the completion rates outlined above, as completion in some cases may have been the result of copying answers rather than engaging with the content.

Technology disruptions and connectivity issues

Connectivity remained a major challenge, with the LMS system frequently inaccessible during peak daytime hours but more stable at night. This led to frequent errors that disrupted access and usability during the day. An overwhelming 84.7 per cent of PSTs in the study reported experiencing technical difficulties while using the application to complete the course. Network issues were particularly prevalent in rural areas of Punjab, with some

teachers even having to travel from their homes to locations with better signal strength to access the online course. Additionally, the application was only available on mobile devices, with no desktop version, further complicating access. These persistent connectivity and accessibility issues made smooth course completion nearly impossible for many PSTs, further lowering their motivation to complete the training.

Policy recommendations

Based on the evidence from EaSTE, challenges discussed above, and international practices, the following policy recommendations are presented to enhance engagement and motivation levels in online CPD programmes, particularly in the context of developing countries. Findings from the

implementation of CPD programmes in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Kenya (See Appendix A) have also been studied to inform policy recommendations. The policy recommendations have been divided into System, Institutional, and Programme level categories.

System-level reforms

Developing incentives and accountability structures

Despite PESP 2019/2020-2023/24 outlining decentralised training initiatives and Performance-Based Professional Development, teacher promotions in Punjab are largely based on seniority, Performance Evaluation Reports (PERs), and qualifications rather than actual teaching performance or professional development (PD) activities. Moreover, the Punjab Recruitment Policy 2022 for Educators does not link teacher promotions or salary increments to participation in PD programmes. Teacher performance is assessed based on student exam results and punctuality, but it does not evaluate whether teachers are improving their teaching methodologies through training (Government of Punjab, School Education Department, 2022).

To ensure that teachers are motivated in any CPD programme, particularly in online self-paced courses like EaSTE, their performance in the PD needs to be linked to their salary increments and promotions in a way that recognises professional growth and contributions to student learning outcomes (Bari et al., 2013). Mandatory PD credits for career advancement should be allotted. Teachers need to complete a certain number of training hours or certifications to qualify for promotions. Accreditations and certifications tied with incentives (such as merit points for transfer, promotion, or bonuses) can also help with completion rates

(Nawab & Bissaker, 2021). In this regard, Sindh has incentivised PD by introducing the Teacher Licensing Policy 2023. The teacher license will be renewed every five years by submitting proof of completing at least 5 credit hours of CPD through Sindh Teachers Education Development Authority (STEDA)-approved programmes. Moreover, countries like South Korea and Singapore have successfully implemented structured PD-linked promotions, leading to salary increases and career progression (Education Commission, 2019).

The data from the LMS on course completion and performance can be utilised to award bonuses and awards to increase recognition for engagement and performance (GoP, 2019). District-wise events can be organised to award certificates of acknowledgment to PSTs with top performance and high module completion rates. These events can be publicised on local media channels to create a sense of honour and prestige. Additionally, teachers demonstrating outstanding performance can be provided with classroom resources such as books, technology, or supplies. To further incentivise engagement, gift vouchers can also be distributed as a token of appreciation.

Similarly, accountability mechanisms should be set for teachers whose performance lags in professional development initiatives. The impact of teachers on student performance or their performance in professional development is not formally assessed, meaning that ineffective teachers remain in the system without repercussions.

Revising teaching contracts

During the focus groups and interviews, PSTs highlighted the assignment of administrative duties for census, elections, and wheat distribution as a significant challenge that hindered their course module progress. To ensure that teachers have time to invest in PD activities, teachers' contracts should be reviewed to exclude administrative and extra duties that are part of their job description. It should be ensured that they are not overburdened with non-teaching administrative tasks (e.g., election duty, census, social campaigns), leaving them with little time or motivation for PD. Moreover, there should be protected PD hours within the school schedule, so teachers do not have to complete training in their personal time (Khan & Umar, 2024).

Strengthening institutional frameworks for stakeholder collaboration

Strengthening institutional frameworks and stakeholder engagement in CPD is critical for ensuring scalable, sustainable, and effective teacher training in Pakistan. A multi-tier support structure is

essential, where national education authorities set policy directions, provincial training institutions contextualise training, and district-level education officers ensure localised implementation (McAleavy et al., 2024). Pakistan's existing CPD ecosystem, including institutions such as Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development (QAED), Provincial Institutes of Teacher Education (PITEs), and District Training and Support Centers (DTSCs), must be strengthened and aligned to create a coordinated system of professional learning.

A key aspect of institutional strengthening is the engagement of experts, universities, and research organizations to develop high-quality, evidence-based training content that reflects modern pedagogical best practices. Additionally, establishing stronger linkages between schools, teacher training colleges, and district education offices can enhance ongoing mentorship and support for teachers, rather than limiting CPD to isolated workshops. Collaboration with private sector education initiatives and NGOs can bring in innovation, while leveraging existing systems like EMIS and the COACH portal can enable real-time monitoring, assessment, and personalised training interventions (Education Commission, 2019; Mufti, 2024).

Institution-level interventions

School-based professional development support and capacity building of head teachers

Evidence from EaSTE highlights that teachers lacked in-school support to address issues related to online course content, concepts, and technical knowledge. Support from Assistant Education Officers (AEOs) responsible for conducting Communities of Practice (CoP) sessions for the teachers, also generated mixed feedback with some AEOs focusing on content questions and conceptual understanding while others focused on logistical aspects like completion rates. To ensure the success of online CPD programmes, there is a need for stronger support mechanisms at the school level to ensure that teachers receive real-time feedback and their concerns are addressed. Support of school leadership and timely feedback are crucial contextual factors that help facilitate new learning and retain it.

In this regard, capacity building of Head Teachers is crucial. Well-trained Head Teachers, as instructional

leaders, can provide ongoing coaching, real-time feedback, and modeling of best teaching practices (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Furthermore, empowering Head Teachers in teacher development aligns with the concept of distributed leadership, which emphasises the importance of school-based capacity building and peer-driven professional learning (Harris, 2005). Schools where leaders actively engage in teacher coaching, evaluation, and collaborative planning see overall higher teacher motivation and better student learning outcomes (Talis, 2018). Successful school leaders play a critical role in supporting PD by encouraging participation and integrating training into school routines. Moreover, there should be a designated time for school-based PD embedded in the timetables for professional learning where teachers can discuss their learnings from online CPD programmes and seek support from more experienced staff or the Head Teacher in the school. Therefore, capacity-building programmes for Head Teachers should be conducted that enhance their capacity to provide instructional leadership at the school level.

Strong M&E systems to inform data-driven decision making

For the success of large-scale online CPD programmes in the public sector, strong Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems must be embedded within the education system and overall national CPD framework to drive data-driven decision making.

Although in Punjab CPD has been decentralised to provincial, district, and cluster levels, implementation needs improvement. The PESP Cluster Training and Support Centers (CTSCs) role is to provide localised training and mentorship to teachers. However, effective implementation remains a challenge, and the level of support provided by CTSCs remains varied, according to evidence gathered as part of the EaSTE evaluation. This calls for a need for strong M&E systems and structures across all levels that also inform

evidence-based decision making. The performance of CTSCs, Communities of Practice sessions, AEOs, and other stakeholders and systems involved in the implementation of online CPD programmes should be monitored and evaluated against set indicators.

The Punjab Government collects large-scale data on observations conducted by AEOs, which is integrated and displayed through a large-scale dashboard. There is a need to use this data more effectively to design targeted CPD interventions focusing on pedagogical areas where teachers are struggling. Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, targeted CPD programmes should be developed. For example, data should be leveraged to assess teaching competencies that teachers need to develop the most in a certain geographical area, with online CPD initiatives developed accordingly. Similarly, data from observations can be assessed to identify areas where subject teachers are struggling in their domains and offer subject-specific training accordingly.

Programme-level enhancements

Increasing access to technology and combining low-tech solutions

Addressing technology access and connectivity challenges in online CPD programmes for teachers requires policy-level interventions to ensure equitable access, improved digital infrastructure and enhanced teacher digital literacy. The EaSTE programme evaluation highlighted key concerns, including internet connectivity issues, difficulties in accessing the LMS and challenges faced by older teachers in navigating the application.

To effectively tackle these technological barriers, targeted approaches are essential. Data from EaSTE and similar programmes should be leveraged to identify regions with the most significant connectivity issues, such as South Punjab, and inform tailored interventions. PSTs and schools in these areas could be provided with broadband connectivity devices to improve access. Evidence from countries in similar contexts demonstrates that CPD programme success increases when schools are equipped with appropriate ICT and digital infrastructure (Ogola, 2018). For instance, Kenya's Digital Learning Programme successfully expanded CPD access by providing subsidised internet for educators (Piper et al., 2017).

Additionally, dedicated professional development spaces should be established within schools, ensuring stable internet access and computer availability for teachers. In regions with little to no internet connectivity, the government should invest in satellite internet solutions (e.g., Starlink or local satellite networks) to extend access to remote schools.

Before launching mass online CPD programmes, it is crucial to equip teachers with essential digital literacy skills. Many educators in the programme struggled with navigating digital platforms. The government can consider introducing structured digital literacy training as a prerequisite for online CPD participation. These trainings would ideally cover basic ICT skills, LMS navigation, troubleshooting common technical issues, and online classroom management to ensure teachers can fully engage with digital learning platforms.

Furthermore, alternative low-tech solutions can enhance accessibility. WhatsApp groups and communities should be utilised to provide mentorship and technical support, particularly when LMS platforms experience disruptions. To ensure inclusion and accommodate varying degrees of access to technology during Covid-19, a highly successful remote, catch-up programme known as

Learning Bridges was implemented in Jordan which adopted a differentiated approach and including a no-tech option, whereby activity packs were printed and distributed to schools on a weekly basis for families without technology access (McAleavy et al., 2024). Governments should also leverage TV and FM radio stations to broadcast teacher training sessions, reaching those without internet access. Existing platforms like Pakistan's TeleSchool and Radio School, which have been effective in remote learning for students, could be adapted for teacher CPD to ensure wider accessibility.

Blended learning approaches

Although the online mode of delivery was highly welcomed by PSTs due to its accessibility, flexibility, and scalability, there was a broad consensus that incorporating some in-person training days would enhance the overall effectiveness of the online CPD programme. Research also suggests that while online professional development allows teachers to engage with content at their own pace, a fully online approach may lack critical components of hands-on learning, peer interaction, and real-time feedback, which are essential for effective teacher training (Means et al., 2013).

In-person training days can address several limitations of a purely online model by providing

opportunities for collaborative learning, classroom simulations, and immediate mentor support. These sessions could have been facilitated with DSEs or course trainers. Face-to-face sessions could have enabled PSTs to engage in active discussions with trainers, participate in peer observations, and practise new teaching strategies in a controlled setting, thereby bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Insights from past face-to-face professional development projects, such as the Punjab Education and English Language Initiative (PEELI), indicate that 95.8 per cent of the PSTs considered the in-person training useful and stated that it incorporated and demonstrated a student-centered methodology, while 97.7 per cent agreed that the trainers were competent to deliver the training and were satisfied with the support.

Additionally, in-person sessions could be particularly beneficial for teachers who struggled with digital literacy or required additional support in navigating the LMS. To maximise the impact of the online CPD programmes, it is recommended that a blended learning model be adopted, incorporating strategically placed in-person workshops/reflective sessions throughout the course duration. These sessions could be used for hands-on activities, live demonstrations, and peer collaboration, ensuring that the benefits of both online and face-to-face learning are fully realised.



Conclusion

The findings from the EaSTE programme highlight the need for systemic improvements in the design and implementation of online CPD initiatives. While the programme successfully introduced scalable, flexible learning opportunities for teachers, its low engagement and completion rates indicate that motivation, support structures, and incentives remain key barriers to success. Addressing these gaps requires a holistic policy shift, ensuring that CPD participation is valued, recognised, and integrated into teacher career progression.

Additionally, providing school-based mentoring, revising teacher workload policies, improving technological access, and adopting a blended learning approach will be critical in making online CPD more effective and sustainable. Moving forward, a data-driven, teacher-centered approach that prioritises engagement, accessibility, and professional growth will be essential in building a more robust, high-impact CPD framework that not only enhances teaching practices but also strengthens the overall education system in Punjab.



Appendix A: Evidence from CPD Programmes			
Country	Challenge	Recommendation	Intervention
Bangladesh	Lack of subject-specific CPD and limited institutional support for English language teachers, leading to ineffective pedagogy (Education Impact Assessment, 2018).	Leveraging established systems and structures	The English in Action programme in Bangladesh utilised mobile technology to support teachers with short instructional videos showcasing simple teaching techniques. Teachers engaged in reflection, peer sharing, and ongoing support, which contributed to significant student improvement. After one year, students' ability to communicate at a basic level in English increased from 36 to 70 per cent. A key success factor was the programme's emphasis on collaboration between teachers and district staff. The involvement of district-level officials, including Upazila staff and education officers, not only strengthened classroom learning outcomes but also enhanced technical skills at the district level, reinforcing the programme's long-term sustainability.
Ethiopia	Weak monitoring and evaluation systems limit accountability and data-driven decision-making in teacher professional development (McAleavy, Smallbones, & Walker, 2024).	Strengthening monitoring & evaluation for sustainable CPD	In 2019, Ethiopia's Ministry of Education (MoE) partnered with EDT under the World Bank's General Education Quality Improvement Programme (GEQIP) to implement the Data for Delivery (D4D) approach , enhancing real-time monitoring of school performance. Using tablet-based data collection and custom-built digital dashboards, the initiative provided national, regional, and district education leaders with timely insights to improve resource allocation and decision-making. By 2024, MoE successfully assumed control of the system, ensuring long-term sustainability. The programme highlights the importance of robust Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) systems in driving data-driven teacher development, offering a model for South Asian CPD programmes to enhance accountability, engagement and targeted interventions.

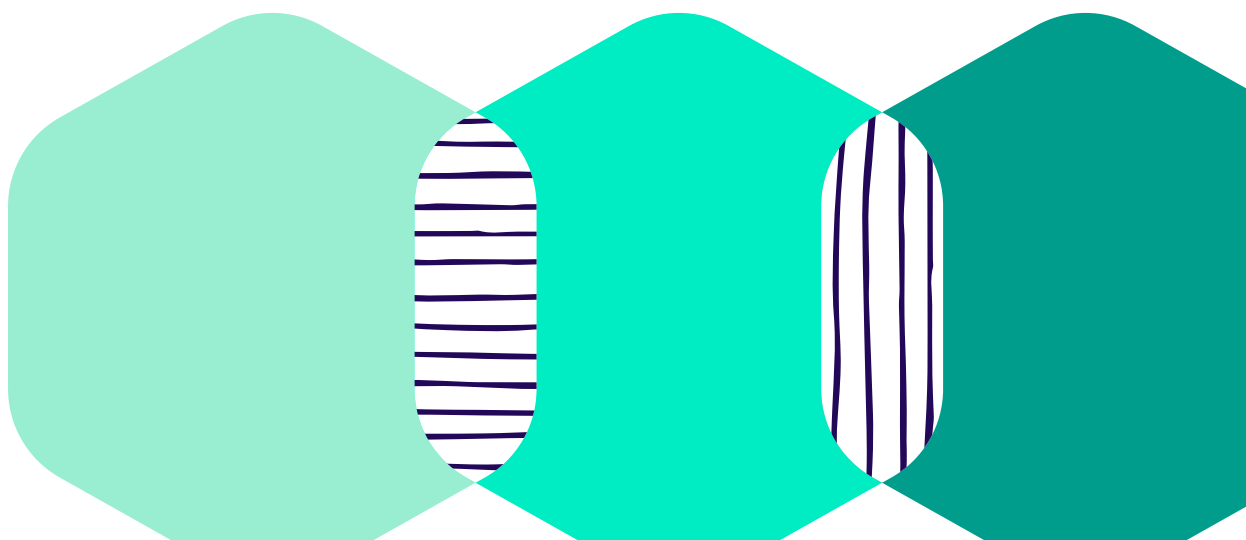
Kenya	Limited use of classroom-based assessment data for instructional improvement and CPD planning (World Bank Group, 2021).	Data-driven targeted interventions, integrated policies, systems, and strategies	Kenya's Tusome programme integrated digital tools for instructional support and data-driven decision-making. Curriculum support officers conducted regular classroom visits using tablets, which enabled them to provide real-time instructional feedback and upload data on student reading progress and teacher practices. This approach allowed district offices to generate an aggregated view of their schools' performance and compare it with other districts. The use of classroom-level monitoring and data collection marked a shift from traditional educational norms in Sub-Saharan Africa, setting a precedent for improved accountability and targeted intervention strategies.
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