Understanding the effectiveness of professional development opportunities for teachers delivered remotely

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Foreword

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From March 2020 onwards it became clear that if professional development for teachers was to continue, there would need to be an accelerated shift to remote learning solutions. With the ability of teachers to engage with face-to-face opportunities significantly constrained by the response to the impact of the pandemic, many organisations, the British Council included, sought to develop and strengthen provision that could be accessed remotely.

A year on from the beginning of the pandemic, this report evaluates the effectiveness of teacher development opportunities delivered remotely.

The evaluation looks at existing literature around remote learning effectiveness in general and at specific examples of the use of different remote channels currently being deployed on three British Council teacher development programmes in Palestine, Egypt and Syria; and on one regional programme involving teachers from across the Middle East and North Africa region.

From the literature review and a review of data from these four case studies, the report generates insights into the nature, challenge and opportunities of remotely delivered professional development for teachers, provides recommendations around good practice in the organisation of such kinds of teacher learning, and puts forward the case for a continued emphasis on remote delivery in line with the overall conclusions of its effectiveness.

The report is essential reading for individuals and organisations with a stake in teacher learning and contributes significantly to our understanding of what works in relation to the professional development of teachers, especially regarding opportunities engaged with in remote learning settings.

I would like to thank Steve Mann, the author of the report, for the clarity of his approach to the assignment, his hard work in both the review of the secondary research sources and his primary research, and for producing a report that makes an extremely valuable contribution to our understanding of the impact of these 'new' ways of working on the professional growth of teachers.

Steve and I would also like to thank Runna Badwan, Dina Halim, Micheline Esso for providing support and review in relation to their respective programmes in Palestine, Egypt and Syria; and to thank Hala Ahmed for her input around the region-wide Teacher Networking Initiative; and to thank Amira Wahid for her tireless coordination of the assignment and ensuring its completion. The report is very much a team effort.

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Acronyms

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AQUEDUTO	The Association for Quality Education and Training Online
AR	Action Research
BC	British Council
BAAL	British Association for Applied Linguistics
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CDE	Crisis Distance Education
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
CoP	Community of Practice
CoPL	Community of Practice Leader
CP	Course Participant
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
EES	English for Education Systems
E-TAG	Electronic Teacher Activity Group
F2F	Face to face
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
INSET	In-service Training
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
L1	First Language (Mother Tongue)
L2	Second Language
LMS	Learning Management System
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MoE	Ministry of Education
NCED	National Centre for Educational Development
NTTP	National Teacher Training Programme
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territory
PD	Professional Development
PPT	PowerPoint
TA	Thematic Analysis
TAG	Teacher Activity Group
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TNI	Teacher Networking Initiative
TfS	Teaching for Success
TSG	Teacher Study Groups
UNWRA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

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Executive Summary

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Overall conclusion

The overall conclusion is that teachers can learn effectively through remote PD providing there is adequate induction, clear explanation, and ongoing support. Synchronous sessions are particularly valuable in fostering peer interaction and dialogue and discussions focussed on ways to motivate pupils and improve outcomes. The data presented in all four case studies shows that teachers prefer F2F to remote PD. However, the data also shows that teachers appreciate and value learning online with other teachers and levels of satisfaction are consistently high across the four case studies.

Brief introduction

This British Council report is focussed on the impact and effectiveness of remote online learning opportunities for teachers and teacher educators in the Middle East and North Africa region.

The report provides a literature review, covering important themes related to COVID-19, remote and online learning and current evidence about maximising PD effectiveness; and evaluates the PD opportunities offered in four different programmes, with a particular focus on the shift to remote learning as a response to COVID-19. The PD here is in the form of TAGs and CoPs.

The four programmes that form the case study are the MENA-wide CoP Leader Support Programme, the Egyptian National Teacher Training Programme (second year), TfS Syria, and TfS Palestine.

The report provides an analysis of primary data collected from December 2020 to March 2021 and adopts a mixed methods case study approach, characterised by the combination of at least one qualitative and one quantitative research component (Creswell, 2011). The main attraction of this method is that it can bring the best of both paradigms (quantitative and qualitative) by complementing each other and mitigating the weaknesses inherent in the individual approaches (Dörnyei, 2007).

The report considers the effectiveness of remote PD opportunities for each case in turn. It then brings together common findings and implications across the four cases.

Key contributions to effective remote delivery

We looked at the relevant existing literature and investigated four of the British Council's own programmes. We found that the following contributed to the effectiveness of remotely delivered PD for teachers:

• Providing a regular structure in synchronous sessions (e.g. review, warmers, input, open dialogue, demonstrations, video, tasks, breakout discussions).

• Giving teachers the opportunity to experience digital tools in synchronous sessions and then encouraging them to try them in their own classrooms.

• Using a flipped model with at least some tasks being done before synchronous sessions.

• Having a well-organised asynchronous platform to support work in conjunction with synchronous sessions.

• Getting to know the teachers' needs and taking them into account.

• Giving teachers specific roles within the group.

• Creating opportunities in both synchronous and asynchronous environments for peer-to-peer sharing.

• Integrating video into synchronous sessions to make explicit connections to the classroom and for modelling.

• Integrating quizzes and polls (e.g. Kahoot, Mentimeter, Wordwall, Nearpod and Flipgrid) which has a positive effect on engagement and interaction.

• Employing WhatsApp. This app plays a particularly important role in fostering interpersonal interactions, enabling flipped learning, and for organisational purposes (e.g. information, reminders and resources).

• Providing specific ideas and tasks for teachers to try out in classrooms (either F2F or online).

• Providing basic digital induction and training.

Key literature reviewed

The data collected for the study and the following literature has helped arrive at the list above. Roe (2020) provides a comprehensive review of how the current pandemic has pushed remote learning to the fore. Remote learning occurs when participants *'are in distanced locations as opposed to a traditional classroom setting and all information is disseminated through technology, such as discussion boards, video conferencing, etc.'* Adarkwah (2020) provides important evidence showing how the pivot to remote learning has revealed that countries have varied dramatically in their readiness to leverage the use of technology to support online learning (see also Bergdahl and Nouri, 2020; Tejedor et al., 2020). Hodges et al. (2020) and Hartshorne et al. (2020) also have helpful insights in considering key aspects of emergency remote teaching and PD during the pandemic.

Ur (2017) and Padwad and Parnham (2019) are useful resources for concrete ideas on how to provide a regular structure in TAG and CoP sessions. Borg (2015) and Borg et al. (2020) provide important information about running TAGs and getting to know the teachers' needs and taking them into account (see also Carrillo and Flores, 2020). Lightfoot (2019) provides a good guide to ICT and giving teachers the opportunity to experience digital tools in PD and then trying them in their own classrooms. Those teachers who have confidence in this area who were already digitally competent feel less stressed about online teaching (see Abaci et al., 2020: Peterson et al., 2020).

Kiddle and Prince (2019), Dragas (2019) and Padwad and Parnham (2019) are good resources for considering how to integrate video into synchronous sessions to make explicit connections to the classroom. Rose (2019) shows how online polls have a positive effect on engagement and interaction.

Akçayır and Akçayır (2018) and Egbert et al. (2015) provide useful literature on employing a flipped model with at least some tasks being done before synchronous session, while Rhodes et al. (2020) is an important source for considering how to blend synchronous and asynchronous delivery. Hbaci et al. (2020) provide important arguments on the importance of good quality induction. Giving teachers specific roles within the group helps to foster *'collaborative teacher development'* (Johnson 2009: 241), while creating opportunities in both synchronous and asynchronous environments for peer-to-peer sharing consolidates the PD process and improves outcomes for learners (Hayes, 2019). This encourages sharing between teachers and is constructivist and dialogic (see Wyatt and Dikilitaş 2015; Mann and Walsh, 2017). Rossignoli et al. (2019) is also helpful in providing specific ideas and tasks for teachers to try out in classrooms (either F2F or online).

Motteram and Dawson (2019) and Motteram et al. (2020) have provided valuable accounts of the potential of utilising WhatsApp for language teacher development in contexts of constraint.

Case studies - key data and findings

The survey data confirms that remote professional development can be effective for teachers (even if they are not used to this medium of PD). There are also significant challenges that need to be considered and technological barriers are particularly difficult to overcome.

Qualitative data shows that teacher educators have been resilient, collaborative, patient and innovative in CoPs and TAGs. Learning gains have been passed on to colleagues within their institutions. This kind of remote PD should not be seen just as a poor, expedient or less effective substitute for face-to-face PD.

Qualitative data confirms that being part of a TAG or CoP has been a site for sharing ideas, materials, and resources, as well as an important emotional support in these challenging times. Teachers report that Electronic Teacher Activity Groups (E-TAGs) have been important sites for both social contact and emotional support during the pandemic. Teachers and students have understandably been disorientated, anxious, worried about their students, and emotionally taxed.

Survey data confirms that teachers prefer F2F but that remote PD is valuable, giving teachers the opportunity to retrieve videos, links, and other materials while saving time on travel and concentrating their effort on learning. Qualitative data finds that teachers appreciate the greater flexibility of remote PD.

The participants reported in both survey data and focus groups that they felt they had a significant opportunity to develop their digital literacy skills; getting a chance to experience digital resources and thereby becoming more confident in using them.

Across the whole data set it is very clear that the opportunities/advantages inherent in learning online in the current pandemic situation have been appreciated. Teachers report general pedagogic improvement and a greater understanding of classroom options.

There is perceived value from participant survey data and focus groups in defining roles within the TAGs (as well as confirming the core timetabling and organisation features of the group). There were strong indications that division of labour and 'taking it in turns' was seen as positive.

Observation of TAG and CoP sessions shows that teachers respond positively to videos of teaching and where video examples and short clips were used there was some reflective and concrete discussion.

There is strong evidence from both teachers and teacher educators that providing a regular structure is crucial in ensuring a secure and productive remote PD experience. Elements like review, warmers, input, open dialogue, demonstrations, video, tasks, breakout discussions work better if there is a regular sequence or pattern.

Not all the recorded remote PD sessions observed showed sustained dialogue. In fact, some were fairly trainer-centred and this can be a tendency with remote PD (see McAleavy et al. 2018). More work needs to be done to find ways to encourage peer-to-peer discussion in synchronous sessions.

Attendance across different CoPs and TAGs varied considerably, with some groups having very regular attendance, while in others, teachers and teacher educators suggest that there has been significant attrition. This was often simply due to connection issues and lack of infrastructure. However, there is further scope to improve TAG attendance and monitoring reasons why attendance varies.

The data set reveals that teachers and teacher educators would welcome more online focussed PD so that they can teach online more effectively. In particular, they want more ideas and focus on shaping the online experience to the teachers' or learners' needs; and training on digital competence, particularly on enhancing interaction and motivation, and on digital online assessment.

Teachers are appreciative of the opportunity of TAGs and CoPs (and related events such as webinars and conferences) which are organised for them.

Emerging themes

Mixed experiences of remote PD

Whilst remote/online/distance learning has been with us for many years, in many ways, F2F professional development has always been assumed to be the most effective medium for training. However, for various reasons (e.g. geography, cost of travel, financial or political factors), remote learning has gained currency as a viable alternative. In contexts like Syria and to some extent Palestine, remote PD has been for some time the only (or at least the most viable) option for the British Council. In other contexts such as Egypt, remote learning is less valued and less visible. However, for countries like Egypt (along with the majority of countries across the world), the pandemic has 'supercharged' both the need for and the practice of remote learning and professional development.

Collaboration is significant and important online

Digital platforms can provide access to information, resources and repositories of content. The four case studies show that online collaboration is important and enables significant opportunities for teachers to connect and collaborate (in line with Ally et al. 2014; Lightfoot 2019).

Widespread use of tools

TAGs and CoPs have been sites for sharing tools. These have been various, and many have been demonstrated and introduced by teacher educators. There was widespread use of various tools such as Wordwall, Mentimeter, Quizizz, Baamboozle, Quill, Nearpod, ClassKick, Socrative, Kahoot, Quizlet, Crowdsignal, Doddle, AnswerGarden.

Crossing borders

Although individual countries have varied in their responses to the pandemic (e.g. whether lockdowns have happened, travel restrictions imposed, borders closed, and closing or partially closing schools), the CoP Leader Support Programme (Case 1) has shown how regional cooperation is well received by teacher educators. There is a strong sense of regional solidarity.

Local or international teacher educators

Consideration needs to be given to the balance between local teacher educators and 'international teacher educators'. Although there has rightly been recognition that local teacher educators are often in a better position to gauge the local context and needs of teachers, some of the data

in this study confirms that local teachers prefer and appreciate 'international' colleagues. Remote learning means that teachers in Argentina and the Philippines can teach school children in Uruguay and teachers around the world can teach remotely in Gaza (e.g. The Hands Up Project).

Consideration needs to be given to the language for delivering PD.

In the Syrian programme the target teachers are not primarily English teachers. They teach Maths, Science and Geography and so it makes sense for the PD to be conducted in Arabic. For English teachers in the other programmes, PD will usually be delivered in English but not necessarily exclusively. Translanguaging is a viable and often desirable way of conducting PD, especially for Maths and Science teachers. However, these decisions should not be ideologically driven. They should be outcomes of negotiation and discussion between teachers and teacher educators.

Remote learning has a role to play in the future

Although it would be fair to say that the majority of teachers would prefer a F2F model of PD, there have been growing calls for such PD to have follow up and not be a 'one-shot' affair. In other words, all PD works better if it is ongoing and sustained (Weston and Hindly 2019). A hybrid model can help sustain PD beyond a F2F training event.

Flexibility

Teachers consider that learning online gave all of them the autonomy to manage the time and effort they could invest on learning. They said that instead of transporting themselves physically to the place where CPD training was happening, teachers had more flexibility on deciding when and how to dedicate themselves to their professional development.

Follow-up and support

In all four programmes, there is evidence that teacher educators and e-moderators are offering encouragement and support beyond the synchronous sessions. As already stated above, CPD processes are more effective with follow-up (Lamb, 1995). Avoiding a one-off PD design is important (Wedell 2009) and there is room for more follow-up work and monitoring of these CoPs and TAGs. The remote PD process has been well received. Not only should the interaction in the process be engaging but it is important to build in opportunities for follow-up, reflection and communication (Wright and Bolitho 2007). One-shot, top-down, approaches to CPD are, in many cases, limited in terms of their

long-term impact (see Murphy 2000, Joyce and Showers 2002, Vescio et al. 2008, and Cooper 2009).

Innovation

This report has established that, across the four programmes, there are many instances of professional commitment and innovation in finding ways to continue supporting the professional development of teachers and the learning of teachers' students. Teachers have found ways to use phones and social messaging (especially WhatsApp) to communicate with and engage students and their parents. They have shared ideas, tools, worksheets, activities and solutions.

Use of cameras in synchronous sessions

One interesting issue is the reluctance to use the camera function in Microsoft Teams or Zoom. This was evident in both CoP and TAG sessions and is certainly an issue for teachers with their students. The students use the chat a little to show homework or respond but as one Palestinian teacher said, '*because our community or our country, we don't like to use the camera*'. Internet speeds and data-packages are also factors here too.

No teacher left behind

The pandemic has made more evident what we already knew. Some countries (e.g. Yemen) do not have the infrastructure or provision of affordable data packages to access PD in the same way as it is possible in countries like Bahrain. Further work needs to be done on exploiting low-tech solutions as well as utilising less greedy platforms and apps. Data across all four programmes confirms that WhatsApp is often the preferred and most viable means of communicating between teachers and between teachers and teacher educators. WhatsApp is being used by teachers to provide worksheets and quizzes to language learners.

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Introduction

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic a great deal of learning, training and teaching has had to be delivered remotely. This report focuses on the experiences and perceptions of remote PD from the point of view of teachers and teacher educators in four programmes in the MENA region. The report examines participants' engagement and interaction in both synchronous and asynchronous modes of teaching and learning, as well as describing which tools and platforms they found useful in these learning mediums.

The report considers both the positive and negative aspects of participants' experience, especially in relation to the remote development and fostering of virtual CoPs and TAGs. In many cases TAGs, due to the pandemic, had shifted from F2F to remote delivery. The different contexts also vary in their online history and technological infrastructure. TfS Syria has been primarily online for years. TfS Palestine also has more of a history of online. TAGs in Egypt have only been online since October 2020.

The first of these programmes (the MENA Regional CoP Leader Support Programme: Case 1) had an explicit aim of helping leaders of their individual community of practice initiatives to be more effective in supporting teachers and fostering a facilitative and engaging remote PD environment. In contrast, being able to teach better remotely was not a core objective of the other three programmes (NTTP, Egypt: Case 2, TfS Palestine: Case 3, TfS Syria: Case 4) and so any learning gains about remote teaching in these programmes can be seen as more of a by-product. In Cases 2, 3 and 4 the report is primarily focussed on teachers' experience of being trained and working collaboratively in a remote learning context.

The data included in this report includes recordings of training sessions, TAG group recordings, document analyses, focus groups, interviews and survey data. The data is thematically analysed in order to better understand teachers' experience and their learning gains working online. This inevitably includes both synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning.

In terms of an early caveat, this research has been conducted at distance, conducting interviews and focus groups through MS Teams, collecting survey data through Forms, reviewing recordings of TAGs on Zoom, reviewing online artefacts (e.g. Facebook pages, Google Docs, padlets, and Edmodo). On the one hand this is a limitation (i.e. the lack of observation and F2F meetings), on the other hand it is congruent with the focus (remote PD). Case studies are a limitation (each case is very different and so commonalities are difficult to establish) but this kind of approach also offers useful comparisons and contrasts (Duff 2018).

Teacher Development and the British Council

This report is focussed on the impact and effectiveness of online learning teacher development supported by the BC. This teacher development has been fostered through TAGs and CoPs for teachers and teacher educators in the Middle East and North Africa region, and evaluates the effectiveness and impact of such training. The BC has been at the forefront of efforts to mitigate the worst effects of the current pandemic and support English language teachers who are working remotely (e.g. British Council 2020a; 2020b; 2021).

The BC has an important role in supporting teacher development globally. As Kiely (2019: 85) says:

'Particularly important is the British Council, which has led on major developments in ELTE in a range of contexts, both as British Council programmes, and as partnership programmes with ministries of education and other education authorities.'

The PD programmes featured here are part of global efforts (e.g. through the TfS programme and the CPD Framework for Teachers) to raise the quality of English language teaching provision. Not only does the BC have an important role to play in fostering and encouraging such efforts but also through publications and research reports that evaluate the effectiveness and impact of such work. A particularly important theme in these accounts for programme managers and teacher educators is '*a space for considering how stakeholders have evaluated the innovation being reported'* (Edge and Mann, 2013: 23).

More generally, it is widely recognised that a teacher's PD is crucial. The OECD, for example, has underlined the significance of the development of teachers for effective education provision (OECD 2009). PD is always related to a whole host of contextual realities, professional characteristics, and pedagogical practices. These vary at institutional and individual levels and PD needs to take account of teachers' educational background and any pre-service teacher training and subsequent opportunities for CPD they have had. Many studies have established that PD is affected by '*issues of school leadership, feedback systems, and school climate*' as well as '*emerging policy and research interests related to innovation and teaching in diverse environments and settings*' (Ainley and Carstens 2018: 4).

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a unique and new set of contextual realities (see Ferdig et al. 2020). It has both made teacher development more urgent and more difficult to achieve. At the same time, as Rossignoli et al. (2019: 4) argue, there is always a need to understand '*what works*' in teacher development, and '*under which system conditions, so that policymakers can focus their investment with confidence*'. The global pandemic is both a challenge and an opportunity to evaluate the contribution that remote learning can offer in providing flexible and scalable options for teachers to work collaboratively (and for teachers to work remotely in supporting students' learning).

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Research Methodology

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The most important aspect of this research methodology is that it seeks to collect and analyse primary data in the emerging and the challenging current situation of a global pandemic, with collection taking place between December 2020 and March 2021. The vast majority of research carried out in the context of COVID-19 is based on reviewing and collating previous research into remote learning, including research in contexts of constraint (not primary data that has been actually collected since March 2020). In other words, most contributions in 2020 were surveys and reviews of other research articles written pre-pandemic rather than primary research. In addition, as Bond (2020: 192) asserts most of the studies published in 2020 were based primarily on survey data:

'89 studies were included for synthesis in the present article, and the results are discussed against a bio-ecological model of student engagement. The results indicate that the majority of research was conducted in Europe and Asia, predominantly focussed on teachers, with more studies undertaken in high schools. Online surveys were the most used method, although future research must include all study design information.'

This is why this research combines survey data with interviews, focus groups and observations of online meetings. We have made a conscious effort to draw on a wide range of data (and not just surveys) - within a short time frame for this kind of study - in order to understand the effectiveness of professional development opportunities for teachers delivered remotely during these challenging times.

Having said the above, this paucity of good quality primary research on responses to COVID-19 is fast being remedied, partly because academic journals have developed clear and explicit policies to fast-track pandemic related research (e.g. Abdelhafez, 2021; Alves et al. 2021: Marek et al. 2021; Oducado et al. 2021). The literature review provides more detail of this emerging primary data.

Mixed methods

The research methodology employed here is a mixed methods research design, characterised by the combination of at least one qualitative and one quantitative research component (Creswell, 2011). The main attraction of this method is that it can bring the best of both paradigms (quantitative and qualitative) by complementing each other and mitigating the weaknesses inherent in the individual approaches (Dörnyei, 2007). A mixed method aims to achieve the kind of broad understanding that Johnson et al. (2007: 23) see as essential to support reliable claims:

'Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration.'

A mixed methods research methodology has the capacity to capture both general trends but rich and particular insights too (Paltridge and Phakiti 2018). Although we adopted a mixed methods research approach, the qualitative elements are seen as the most important in this report as they give insight into the detail of PD processes, example voices of teachers and teacher educators, as well as recordings of actual PD in progress.

The research followed a number of recommendations from Dörnyei (2007) in establishing rigour. Existing data sets were reviewed for initial findings and contextual information. This included reviewing asynchronous platforms and project documents, as well as analysing recordings of TAG sessions and training events. In summary, the mixed-methods approach adopted aimed to capture various stakeholder evaluations through qualitative interviews, focus groups, document analysis and questionnaires.

As stated above, the qualitative research is prioritised in the mixed methods adopted. The basic aim of qualitative research is '*to understand better some aspect(s) of the lived world*' (Richards, 2003: 10), aiming at detailed descriptions of people's

perceptions, with the major goal of gaining an insider, or emic, perspective (Burns, 2010). For this reason, the data collection began with observations of TAG sessions and training events. Insights derived from recordings of TAGs, interactions on platforms and survey data were important in achieving an initial understanding of the levels of engagement, types of interaction and nature of learning gains from the participant perspective. Usually, qualitative researchers '*study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them*' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 3). In this case the educational settings (e.g. remote CPD events) are online and so opportunities for fieldwork or F2F participant observation are not possible. However, there are strong arguments for treating the training events and TAGs as 'natural settings', even if a great deal of remote teaching and training is a result of an 'unnatural' global pandemic.

Research Data

In terms of the data collected, the most important insights are derived from interviews and focus groups with stakeholders (e.g. trainers and teachers in CoPs and TAGs). However, recorded examples of TAG sessions and CoP training events have also been analysed. In some cases, it was possible to conduct participant observation in synchronous events (several MS Teams meetings in the MENA CoP Leader Support Programme). However, the majority of TAGs observed were recordings of either MS Teams or Zoom meetings, across all four programmes. Surveys added some quantitative evaluations and insights into views on remote learning in relation to the PD being undertaken. This was useful for gauging general preferences and levels of satisfaction, as well perceptions of learning gains. The response levels varied and ranged from 21% to 54% for teacher educators and 3.5% and 6.8% of the total teacher cohort:

Survey name	Number of responses	% of total cohort
MENA CoP Leader	24	54%
NTTP Teacher Educator	109	21%
NTTP Teacher	700	3.5%
OPT Teacher	48	6.8%
Syrian Teacher	5	8%

(The report also includes insights from interviews with programme managers and other stakeholders.)

Analysis of asynchronous platforms (e.g. Edmodo, Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom) added important additional detail. In some cases, there were previous reports, focus group data and documents that provided the basis for

both questions and assessing progress and development (especially in making evaluations about a shift from F2F PD to remote PD.

Research Process

The research followed the following steps with some overlap between December 2020 and March 2021:

- Online participation
- Interviews with programme managers
- Review of recordings of online TAG sessions
- Literature review
- Focus groups and interviews
- Survey design
- Survey analysis
- Generation of transcripts and coding (otter.ai)
- Reviewing themes across data types
- Report drafting with key stakeholders

In terms of the research process, the research began with online participation (e.g. in MS Teams based training and interviews with the four programme managers). This participant observation was helpful in experiencing the online dynamics of sessions, levels of engagement and attendance. It also helped shape the questions used in the focus groups. Interviews with programme managers established important contextual information and programmes aims, as well as establishing existing reports and survey data.

Recordings of synchronous training events and TAG meetings were reviewed and in some cases the researcher attended and took part in synchronous training. At the same time, recordings of TAGs were reviewed, as well as existing documents and reports. Emerging themes were checked and elaborated on through the design and analysis of survey data.

The report from Rossignoli et al. (2019) was helpful in providing areas of focus for interviews and focus groups. In particular focussing on levels of participation, engagement in meetings, timing and time allocation, quality of content and its fostering of dialogue, appropriate leadership and facilitation, as well as other enabling factors. Borg et al. (2020) was an excellent resource for considering the effectiveness and facilitation of TAGs.

Recordings of both CoP and TAG meetings, interviews and focus groups were uploaded into Otter.ai to produce initial transcriptions. Otter. ai offers a good quality initial transcription and is linked to the original audio or video file. It can identify then separate each speaker according to the timbre of his/her voice with reasonable accuracy. This voice recognition tool is particularly good for focus groups. Other tools (e.g. Dragon Dictate)

are probably marginally better for monologues but are not so good at voice differentiation. The tool also provides summary keywords (e.g. 'community', 'WhatsApp') based on frequency. There is a percentage figure for each speaker (which is useful for reflecting on the interviewer/interviewee balance). It is possible to search across the set of transcriptions for particular terms (e.g. 'support'). Transcripts were then checked and coded. In some cases, the quotations have been 'tidied' slightly, removing hesitation and repetition, but keeping the choices of words and phrases spoken.

The majority of qualitative data gathered was through qualitative interviews and focus groups (see Appendix 3). The approach to interviews and focus groups recognises the co-constructed nature of the data and employs a lot of follow-up questions and probing for detail of TAG processes and outcomes (Mann 2016).

The data included in this report includes recordings of training sessions, TAG groups, document analysis, focus groups, interviews and survey data. In more detail, the research design adopted consisted of:

• Interviews with programme managers of the four projects

• Focus groups with both teachers and teacher educators

• Synchronous observations of online training and TAG sessions

• Asynchronous review of online training and TAG sessions

• Semi-structured focus groups and interviews with those involved in all four case studies featured in this report

• Document analysis (reviewing existing materials and programme documentation)

• Surveys of teachers to establish their views and experiences of remote learning

Taking into account these various sources of data establishes 'methodological triangulation' (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003).

Research ethics

The research project was explained to all participants and their consent was obtained for their data to be used for the purposes of this report through a consent form and information sheet (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). Ethical considerations followed current BERA and BAAL advice (see British Association for Applied Linguistics, 2016: British Educational Research Association, 2018). Consent forms were sent before interviews and permission for recording was confirmed at the beginning of focus groups and interviews.

Analysing of recordings

In order to evaluate the design of the projects, in relation to the participants' engagement and learning gains, recordings of training events, focus groups and interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (TA), following Vaismoradi et al. (2013). Braun and Clarke (2006: 79) define TA as '*a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data*'. An initial coding scheme was drawn up based on the interviews, focus groups and synchronous and asynchronous observations. Survey data sought to provide more quantitative data about these patterns.

Literature Review

An important element of this research project was conducting a desk review which provides theoretical background and insights from research into the provision of CPD, especially when delivered remotely. The focus of this report touches on a number of different areas, particularly as the CPD being researched here is happening in the form of Communities of Practice (CoPs) and Teacher Activity Groups (TAGs). The first section of this review considers matters of terminology in order to differentiate forms of remote or online learning and training. The next section then reviews a number of studies that have focussed specifically on COVID-19, specifically by documenting aspects of the shift to remote learning in delivering PD. The review then brings together evidence about the benefits and constraints of such remote options. The review provides a short section on important contributions that highlights what we know about provision of CPD itself. Finally, the literature review considers key contributions on the nature and importance of TAGs and CoPs, as an important emerging form of CPD. This review is wide-ranging because it attempts to capture the complexities and nuances of this unique set of circumstances.

Remote Learning

Online learning as a concept, and as a keyword, has consistently been a focus of education research for over two decades (Singh and Thurman, 2019). However, a number of terms have emerged over the years, such as remote, distance, open, online, blended, e-learning and flipped. In various reports, books and articles, they all act as prefixes for learning or education (i.e. blended learning, distance education), and are sometimes used interchangeably (see Ali, 2020). Although the differences might be subtle, they are worth briefly considering in this literature review.

Open learning, distance learning and online learning are all used to capture a mode of delivery and process that does not require being in the same physical space at the same time (usually referred to as F2F). This might be from choice, to provide greater flexibility in terms of time, due to geography, or for financial reasons. All these related online fields have made arguments that such modes should be

welcomed as an essential force in democratising education (Jones, 1997) on the basis that they create opportunities for inclusion and increase diversity. In particular, online courses have the potential to open the possibilities for greater numbers of students from challenging socioeconomic backgrounds (Chaney, 2001). There are also good arguments that such options have opened access to education for students with special needs and also for reaching students in remote areas. Undoubtedly because of this, ICT has become an integral part of education systems in both developed and developing countries (Law, 2008). In fact, most training organisations foreground digital literacy and digital skills as core elements.

In addition, there is widespread use of blended or flipped training, where the input is delivered at least partly online (Egbert et al., 2015). This flipped content usually means pre-recorded content (where the input is before the synchronous session and the session itself is used for discussion, reflection and related tasks). In such cases, students are typically expected to learn from content on platforms in an asynchronous and autonomous way (perhaps with a few pre-listening activities or follow up questions), before coming to the session or seminar for the further tasks and discussion. However, the terms blended or flipped training are still difficult to pin down fully and can be questioned.

Essentially most academics and journalists have recently turned to the terms 'remote teaching and learning' because this way of working has been thrust upon us by our current circumstances. In the same way, when people talk about governments' policies in asking non-key workers to stay at home, the term 'remote working' has become most dominant. This is partly because online/distance/open learning is usually planned, designed, piloted and developed over time. The position adopted here is that remote learning is a better term to capture the reality that responses to COVID-19 have not been planned or user-tested. There was not enough time or training to make this happen; responses were therefore relatively unplanned, on the hoof, and improvised. This does not mean that they were not good or that they did not draw successfully on lessons learned from the related fields (remote, distance, open, online, blended,

e-learning, flipped). Neither does it mean that strong capacity building efforts had not been put in place. Rather, the position taken here is that remote learning is marginally the better term for capturing such a reactive and responsive mode, with its various shifts and pivots (see also Oyedotun 2020).

Roe (2020: 1) talks about the current use of the term 'remote' and refers to the work of Mette Gottlieb, who advises on distance learning on Microsoft products like Office 365 and SharePoint. He says that,

'With the current health crisis, remote learning has become the norm. Remote learning, ...occurs when employees and instructors are in distanced locations as opposed to a traditional classroom setting and all information is disseminated through technology, such as discussion boards, video conferencing, etc. As the pandemic places constraints on physical presence, remote learning has rapidly become the new normal.'

To further the point made above, taken at its best, remote learning incorporates the best methodology and technological options available (e.g. apps and platforms). It also looks to all kinds of distance learning, open and online models in arriving at the best remote response (e.g. balance between synchronous and asynchronous support).

It is worth noting that this kind of responsive remote learning has also been termed 'crisis distance education' (CDE). The use of this term seeks to highlight the unique nature of this current reliance on and necessity for distance education (Al Lily et al., 2020). Similar to the arguments made above about 'remote learning', it recognises both the immediacy and inevitably rushed nature of the response (there has not been a chance to plan, conduct needs analysis and work with stakeholders in advance). Neither is it necessarily seen as the future and there are often assumptions that we will return to 'normal' and our previous educational realities. Equally there are many current arguments that the 'new normal' will shape a new 'future normal'. CDE accounts argue that responses have been a uniquely international endeavour. Although individual nation states have varied in response to the pandemic (enforcing lockdowns, travel restrictions, closing borders, and closing or partially closing schools) the pandemic has not respected borders, meaning that responses and innovations have crossed such borders.

COVID-19

COVID-19 has caused a range of difficulties for education. Between March 2020 and June 2020 most countries in the world experienced unprecedented lockdowns, which led to the immediate closure of schools and universities. As a result, many countries were forced to replace traditional F2F teaching with remote education as a defensive strategy (i.e. to prevent further virus

spread). A report commissioned for the World Bank (2020) summarised the main problem for education:

'The sudden closure of schools during COVID-19 has left many teachers across several countries uncertain about their role, unable to use technology effectively to communicate and teach, and unprepared for classroom challenges when schools reopen (Beteille et al., 2020: 2).'

As a recent OECD report says, '*for educators, the COVID-19 pandemic is a quintessential adaptive and transformative challenge, one for which there is no preconfigured playbook that can guide appropriate responses*' (Reimers et al., 2020: 1). The four programmes featured in this report have had to work quickly to develop a revised playbook (albeit in different ways) and with the caveat that OPT and Syria already employed online PD as a significant delivery channel. It is useful to look at both the nature of the challenge and what emerging evidence can provide as a point of reference in understanding the effectiveness of the options adopted by programme managers and teacher educators (see UNESCO 2020; Reimers and Schleicher 2020 for useful advice).

Perhaps the most obvious starting point for this part of the literature review is assessing the evidence of several research reviews that have been prompted by COVID-19 and the widespread 'pivot' to online delivery, when normal F2F training was disrupted or became impossible (Salmon, 2020). What is obvious is that the COVID-19 pandemic has forced educational institutions and training organisations all over the world to move to online learning in delivering teaching and learning (Zhou et al., 2020). In other words, different forms of remote education have become the '*de facto solution*' in the effort to continue undisrupted lessons around the globe, as over 100 countries worldwide closed their schools (Kerres, 2020).

However, this pivot to remote learning has revealed that countries have varied dramatically in their readiness to leverage the use of technology to support online learning (Adarkwah, 2020; Bergdahl and Nouri, 2020; Tejedor et al., 2020). In terms of the MENA region, there are a number of studies that look specifically at the effects of COVID-19 on Arabic culture and education (e.g. Lily et al. 2020; Hazaea and Toujan, 2021). It could be argued that some of these challenges in the MENA region with online learning are longstanding (see Abouchedid and Eid, 2004) but there are plenty of signs that schools and universities were not ready for the challenge (e.g. Hbaci et al., 2020).

As stated above, one of the most obvious problems in the pivot to remote learning was that planning time was not available. As a result of the closure of universities and schools, teachers and students

had to adapt to remote teaching rapidly. Levels of preparedness for this rapid transition have varied. Many teachers and teacher educators have had to learn '*on the hoof*' (Paudel, 2021). It is undoubtedly the case that those countries and institutions with a stronger history of open or distance learning were better able to make the switch to online learning. However, the lack of advance notification of such a pivot was a significant issue for many countries. Bozkurt and Sharma (2020) report that the switch in many countries happened with a few days' notice and in others with only a matter of hours. Such an abrupt shift meant a lack of induction, piloting and capacity building (Hbaci et al., 2020).

As a result of the sudden shift to online learning, teachers and students have often been left disorientated, anxious, lacking in motivation and emotionally taxed. The lack of planning time and the absence of pre-existing playbooks has left many teachers rudderless and without a compass, looking for guidance and largely confused (Hbaci et al., 2020). There is also emerging evidence of the impact on student's psychological distress across all educational ages (Hasan and Bao, 2020). Social media has also not helped, often spreading rumours and fake news that creates more anxiety. Radwan et al. 2020), for example, in a study in the Gaza Strip (OPT), show how pervasive and damaging social media were in 'spreading panic'. On the other hand, as we shall see later, apps such as WhatsApp and Telegram have proved to be versatile and have provided a means for sharing and teacher support (Suryana et al., 2021). There has been innovation in the use of platforms (such as Moodle, Google Classroom and Edmodo) in providing materials, advice and support. It is a mixed picture with confusion and anxiety in many cases, as well as innovation and resilience in others; the COVID-19 pandemic has shocked teachers in all contexts, and at the same time inspired at least some of them to find solutions to problems they have not encountered in the past.

Another obvious factor in relation to teachers and their well-being is that teaching can sometimes be an isolated and stressful profession (see Travers and Cooper, 1996) and this is especially true in times of crisis or when teachers have to make changes to their methodology or way of working (Troman and Woods, 2001). The COVID-19 pandemic has created a unique set of strains, pressures and negative emotions (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Mseleku, 2020) with teachers stripped of some well-established support mechanisms (e.g. staffrooms and other social contact). In this kind of scenario, memberships of TAGs or CoPs are especially important (Borg 2018b; Borg et al., 2020), potentially providing both professional support, focussed interaction, and emotional support (we say more about this factor later in this section).

Another potential negative factor for teachers (and one that increases stress) is that they can feel *forced* to 'use digital resources … to successfully fulfil their work tasks'. That is to say, they '*perceived the obligation to teach, and not the intrinsic desire to teach, so a large number of them did not feel psychologically that they were doing this activity because they were able to do it, but because they were obliged to*' (Panisoara, et al., 2020: 19). If teachers are not 'ready' in this sense and not able to quickly buy into the abrupt changes in working patterns then they are not likely to be prepared either methodologically or emotionally (Gao and Zhang, 2020). They are also less likely to convince their own learners to commit to new ways of working (Panisoara, 2020).

One of the central questions for this report is how effective remote PD has been for teachers in a context where many teachers and students had to learn instantly how to adapt to remote teaching (Assunção Flores and Swennen, 2020). Where the use of online platforms and technological tools had been in place already this pivot was less of a challenge (Lily et al., 2020). In a similar vein, a range of studies have reported that those teachers who were already digitally competent felt less stressed (e.g. Abaci et al., 2020; Peterson et al., 2020). However, various studies cited above estimate that only a minority of teachers had the digital skills to cope with this switch online (something in the region of 15%).

There may also be particular effects of COVID-19 in the MENA region which are emerging. People in this region began to advise each other to conform to distancing initiatives for the safety of all in mid-2020. They started to think collectively about how to maximise distancing. This '*infers that Arabs have united to disunite and have bound to unbind, thus forming an unorthodox societal concept: ''distanceship''* (Lily et al., 2020: 8). Such distancing inevitably means having to switch online. Many countries were already trying to establish e-learning platforms before COVID-19 but with some resistance. For example, Aljaraideh and Al Bataineh (2019: 99) talk about, '*a culture of conservatism in Jordanian higher education*' despite evidence that, '*e-learning platforms, tools, applications, and lecturers can play key roles in distance education and boost the students' satisfaction level'.*

Benefits of online learning

This section of the review looks briefly at some fundamental evidence of the benefits of online learning. The use of the term online in this section is deliberate (contrasting with remote learning, which may or may not have these benefits). In other words, most recent contributions use the term online learning (rather than 'distance,' 'open' or 'remote') but there are still common themes and priorities for us to consider.

The first point to make is that the surge in opportunities for online learning obviously pre-date COVID-19. The pervasive and increasing familiarity with and availability of the internet and greater accessibility of technology have created a greater demand for online learning worldwide (Chaney, 2010). Faez et al. (2017) also show the pervasive shift from providing solely F2F delivery to either wholescale online provision or the incorporation of online components within courses (to create hybrid or blended options).

While it is harder to match the obvious advantages of synchronous F2F teacher education, online learning arguably has its own advantages (Appana 2008; Paudel, 2021). As Kiddle and Prince (2019: 117) put it, teachers *can take their time to replay videos, to reread texts or comments in fora* and when *posting their responses, they have time to consider what to say and how to say it*. If teachers are working in their L2, they do not need to grapple with language difficulties or to feel that they are taking too long to respond (as may be the case with F2F). They can use online dictionaries and resources to check their online contribution. Another possible advantage of online learning is captured by Millin (2020: 2):

'Live online teaching through platforms such as Zoom puts teachers and students (or trainers and trainees) on a more equal footing: it's harder for one person to physically dominate the classroom when your videos are the same size. This could encourage greater sharing of ideas and help students/ trainees to feel more involved in their learning.'

The Council of Independent Colleges' (2016) report is a meta-analysis of the benefits of online learning. Overall, the data shows that students who are engaged in online learning performed better than those in F2F sessions. Although, significantly, students who blended online and traditional learning performed the best of all. In recent years, it is has become much more possible to have rich interactive synchronous sessions to complement the asynchronous aspects of courses. This combination is widely welcomed by teachers and teacher educators engaged in CPD (Kiddle and Prince, 2019).

Online courses foster autonomy and have been found to be conducive to students who favour self-regulated learning (Hu and Driscoll, 2013). Especially with asynchronous elements, there is flexibility about when and where to study (see Paudel, 2021). There is also evidence that online learning brings expanded opportunities and greater flexibility (see Thomson, 2010) and this removes potential barriers to engagement with education:

'The expansiveness of distance education may be delivering the transformation that education has been waiting for, slowly breaking down the financial and locational barriers that have acted as hurdles and, at times, unsurpassable barricades to equal opportunities and quality education for all students (Gilbert 2015:8).'

One of the possible advantages of online learning is the variety of modes of communication afforded (Kiddle and Prince, 2019). In synchronous sessions (conducted in Zoom, Skype or MS Teams), a teacher can be present in the same online space but contribute in different ways (e.g. just by using the chat function, or by unmuting and making a verbal contribution, or by sharing a picture). There is the option to turn off cameras; using only audio contributions can allow participants to ignore concerns about how they look, or having to interpret the expressions of others. They can focus just on the words and text. At the same time, *'those who feel confident in their ability to understand and respond can use the video tools'* (Kiddle and Prince, 2019: 117). Each of these choices can be made without necessarily explaining the reasons for them.

Considering this evidence as a whole and drawing on advice from AQUEDUTO (the Association for Quality Education and Training Online), we can claim that what follows are at least potential benefits. Online learning:

• Provides flexibility and choice about pacing learning and access.

• Encourages better time management.

• Demonstrates and encourages motivation and autonomy.

• Provides opportunities for virtual communication and collaboration.

• Leads to the sharing of specific resources (such as lesson plans, videos).

• Enables greater contact with a wide pool of teachers (possibly leading to greater internationalisation and cross-cultural understanding).

• Increases digital skills.

Constraints of online learning

Having listed the potential benefits above, the evidence about learning gains from online education are mixed. Kirtman's study (2009) actually suggests that there are similar learning outcomes whether students are in a traditional or online class. Overall, the evidence is inconclusive with many accounts also claiming that there are plenty of potential problems with online learning (e.g. Kizilcec and Halawa, 2015; Aljaraideh and Al Bataineh, 2019; Lassoued et al., 2020). Even when online features are of an 'add-on' variety, they may not necessarily be seen by participants as effective as F2F. Faez et al. (2017) for example reports that although the use of an online platform for further discussions was felt to be a useful pedagogical tool, it did not lead to discussions that were as effective as F2F communications.

Interestingly, beyond the often-claimed promises, learners from developing countries tend to score lower in online learning and are more likely to withdraw from the online courses compared to their colleagues in developed countries (Kizilcec and Halawa, 2015). At least some of the countries in the MENA region have had difficulties with transition to online learning both before COVID-19 (e.g. Aljaraideh and Al Bataineh's 2019 study in Jordan) and during COVID-19 (e.g. Lassoued et al., 2020).

It needs to be said at this point, whether talking about benefits or constraints of online learning, that there are few rigorous accounts. As Kirtman (2009: 104) tell us, much of the research in the area of online teaching and learning '*has not focussed on learning outcomes or academic achievement*'. There are far more 'how-to-guides', tips and keys for success in facilitating good quality online learning (e.g. Haavind and Tinker, 2001; Salmon, 2004). A great deal of this work is based on practitioner experience and student comments, usually relying solely on survey data (Paudel, 2021).

Access to appropriate ICT resources is still a challenge in many of the contexts featured in this report. Online learning is obviously heavily dependent on ICT facilities and if these are not appropriate, there are persistent problems (Arthur-Nyarko and Kariuki, 2019). These are barriers which are evident in many educational contexts, including high cost of equipment and data, inadequate infrastructure within the country or region (including accessibility to quality internet connection and electricity), lack of relevant ICT skills, and lack of training (Adarkwah, 2020). There is an uneven distribution of access to ICT among different populations, teacher groups, and homes as network coverage is demonstrably not of adequate quality everywhere in the MENA region (Lembani et al., 2019). Inadequate access to technology, studying materials and computers can leave students marginalised and anxious,

which detrimentally affects the online learning process (Queiros and de Villiers, 2016). The high cost of purchasing ICT equipment affects the adoption of online learning and can cause access problems in developing or transitioning contexts, exacerbated by the teachers' lack of familiarity with online learning (Sinha and Bagarukayo, 2019).

Another issue that does seem to be fairly consistent across different studies is that instructors and tutors are resistant to online learning, at least initially (Aljaraideh and Al Bataineh, 2019) and this resistance can result in lack of willingness to engage with online initiatives (either as teachers or teacher educators).

CPD

Effective CPD has a positive correlation with higher student learning gains and is internationally seen as crucial (Joyce and Showers, 2002). The BC TfS approach represents the major thrust of the BC's approach to CPD in state education systems and forms the basis of much of the content in the four programmes featured in this report. The BC vision is that '*all teachers in the world have high-quality continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities that improve their own practice and their learners' success*.' The nature of this provision is supported by evidence and research into effective continuing professional development where improving the quality of teaching has the most impact on improving the outcomes of learners. CPD is the most effective way to improve the quality of teaching (Hayes, 2019). Evidence shows that top-down approaches are less effective than programmes which actively include sharing between teachers and are constructivist and dialogic (see Mann and Walsh, 2017). Wyatt and Dikilitaş (2015) show that engaging teachers in more constructivist CPD positions them as knowledge generators and makes them more likely to engage in research and gain deeper practical knowledge.

Evidence from Allier-Gagneur et al. (2020) suggests that characteristics of effective teacher education programmes, including online versions, involve a focus on pupil learning outcomes; sharing effective teaching practices using modelling; acknowledging teachers' existing knowledge, views, and experiences, and a focus on building on this existing knowledge. They also argue for a focus on developing practical subject pedagogy rather than theoretical general pedagogy and empowering teachers to become reflective practitioners. CPD should be structured around practice-based cycles of trial and refinement (see also Hayes, 2019). CPD works better if it incorporates peer support and engagement and has a vision for motivating teachers (see Lamb and Wyatt, 2019). The closer the CPD is to the classroom, and being school-based, the better (Walsh 2002; Allier-Gagneur et al., 2020).

CPD also works better if it has a systematic and clear policy, with support and recognition from teachers' institutions and Ministries of Education.

CPD is important in making sure that teachers maintain their commitment and develop and extend their teaching skills. It has a positive effect on both teachers' sense of professional worth and also their ongoing engagement in the profession (Day and Leitch, 2007). The quality of the CPD design experience in which teachers participate is critical to their learning gains (Hayes, 2019). However, a lot of CPD or INSET initiatives do not meet their goals. Sometimes the needs of the teachers are not properly understood or taken into account (Borg, 2015).

Integration of technology is an important element of most recent approaches to CPD. ICT can help to shift the power, control and agency to the teacher to make decisions about where to place their focus, and improve the inclusivity of professional development (Lightfoot, 2019). In particular, the inclusion of video or classroom observation allows for demonstration of real-life situations, provides time for practice and feedback, and facilitates ongoing opportunities for follow-up and coaching (Cooper, 2009).

Established good practices for CPD

The following list of good practices for CPD is drawn from Hayes (2019), Mann and Walsh (2017), Bates and Morgan (2018), and Walsh and Mann (2019). It highlights key principles of effective CPD that are relevant for both online and F2F contexts:

Avoiding transmissive and top-down approaches

Although a focus on content is always important and '*anchors everything*' (Bates and Morgan 2018: 623), it is important to make space for collaboration, peer-talk and connecting theory and input to classroom events and experiences. A didactic model '*in which facilitators simply tell teachers what to do, or give them materials without giving them opportunities to develop skills and inquire into their impact on pupil learning is not effective*' (Cordingley et al., 2015). It is better if teachers can be involved in and consulted on the design of CPD as it is more likely to be effective (Popova et al., 2018).

Participant-centred

The CPD process should build on and acknowledge teachers' existing knowledge and experiences, keeping it close and relevant to their actual role (Hayes 2019). If the process foregrounds the values of collaboration and mutual support, it

is more likely to be effective (Wolter, 2000). The trainer should connect new knowledge to existing experiences, beliefs and '*personal theories*' (James, 2001). Positioning teachers as active participants can involve examining learner data, classroom materials and helping participants to grapple with aspects of practice (rather than prioritising theory and conceptual information).

Connecting theory and practice

The most important goal of CPD is to connect input and tasks to teachers' context in an effort to try to connect practice and theory (Wallace and Bau, 1991). It is not enough to present theory and expect teachers to apply it to their practice (Edge and Richards, 1993). The connection needs to be visible and pragmatic. Providing opportunities to practise skills in a positive environment (perhaps in tasks or microteaching) can help establish a fuller understanding of an innovation (Hayes, 2014) and help cement this connection. Sharing and reflecting on knowledge is an important part of this connection. A sharing orientation and emphasis will strengthen and extend teachers' current practices (Mann and Walsh, 2017). It is important to give space to the articulation and sharing of different kinds of teacher knowledge (Freeman, 2002).

An interactive social experience

The goal of CPD should be to establish what Desimone (2011: 69) calls an '*interactive learning community*'. CPD works better if there are varied opportunities for peer collaboration and talk. A group where a social environment is established and where group dynamics are fostered and interaction is central is more likely to be a positive experience (Edge and Richard, 1993). However, collaboration is '*necessary, but not sufficient*' (Cordingley, 2015) and needs to be closely aligned with structured input and appropriate and achievable goals. Promoting a collaborative trusting atmosphere is key and '*establishing a trusting relationship is instrumental to creating a support group that works together to solve problems of practice*' (Bates and Morgan, 2018: 624). Such collaborations allow teachers to take risks and address instructional issues or dilemmas with one another.

Positive and trusting atmosphere

Successful CPD requires positive group dynamics, trust and respect (Vangrieken et al., 2017). An important aspect of establishing a positive atmosphere is a focus on growth and development rather than deficit views of training (Wedell, 2009). If there is a trusting environment in CPD, teachers are more likely to be honest and reflective (Mann and Walsh, 2017).

Example and data-led

Inclusion of vignettes, narratives, learner-feedback, transcripts, videos and real teaching materials create stronger CPD (Mann and Walsh, 2017). This can be through video, demonstration lessons, peer observations, or case studies of teaching (Bates and Morgan, 2018) but short videos have higher positive evaluations from teachers than whole lessons (see Mann et al., 2019).

Sustained and followed-up

An approach to professional learning, no matter how active, is not sufficient if it is not sustained and followed up (Darling-Hammond, 2010). That is to say, CPD works better when it is ongoing and sustained and avoids a one-off design (Wedell, 2009). Not only should the interaction in the actual synchronous process be engaging, but it is important to build in opportunities for follow-up reflection and communication (Wright and Bolitho, 2007: 180). One-shot, top-down, approaches to CPD are, in many cases, limited in terms of their long-term impact (see Joyce and Showers, 2002). If trainers, mentors, e-moderators or coaches can offer ongoing encouragement and support, CPD processes will be more effective (Lamb, 1995).

CoPs/TAGs

CoPs, TAGs and TSGs (Teacher Study Groups) have positive benefits for student learning (see Firestone et al., 2020 for a fuller review) where teachers collaboratively work on issues of contextual relevance, reflect on affordances and constraints and develop action plans to work towards solutions and innovation. Such groups can facilitate critical reflection and teacher agency (McAleavy et al., 2018). Of the four cases featured in this report, the first uses the term CoP. The other three use TAG. In what follows, we unpack these terms and provide some insights into their constitution and value.

CoPs

The latest international evidence shows that a highly effective option for CPD is the formation of CoPs (e.g. Al-Habsi et al., 2021). *'Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly'* (Wenger, 2011: 1). In such groups, teachers collaborate on their professional development. The concept has been widely adopted for professional groups of various kinds within language teacher education (Hayes, 2019). They offer important forms of professional collaboration as well as social and emotional support. Johnson (2009: 241) confirms that *'collaborative teacher development'* is an increasingly common kind of teacher development found in a wide range of language teaching contexts.

A CoP values the contributions of all participants and is bottom-up in the sense of trying to find solutions to individual or common problems. This sense of learning how to do things better, as a form of PD, has been linked to the concept of *'kaizen'* (see Edge and Mann, 2014). *'Kaizen'* can be translated as *'kai'* (change) and *'zen'* (good) and, taken together, has the meaning of something like continuous improvement. The focus of CoP (and *kaizen*) means there is focus on:

• The practice of continuous quality improvement within one's teaching

• Innovation based on many small changes rather than radical changes

• Ideas for change and improvement that come from teachers themselves (and not just experts)

• Teachers taking ownership for their work and related improvements and innovations.

However, as Borg et al. (2020) warn, the concept of CoP might not be universally applicable:

'It must be acknowledged, though, that evidence of 'what works' in teacher professional development is not typically derived from the kinds of under-researched low-resource contexts the British Council works in. This does not mean such global evidence is irrelevant to such contexts, but its applicability does need to be critically considered.'

Rossignoli et al. (2019), though, is also a good example of a positive account in a low-resource context. Their report on the development of CoPs in Rwanda, where teachers have the opportunity to participate in school and cluster-based CoPs in collaboration with their colleagues, highlights how teachers can take charge of their professional development agenda by sharing experiences and supporting each other to improve their teaching practice. It also shows the importance of a strong professional dialogue and the positive correlation between the strength of *'professional dialogue'* (as measured by an index) and CoP effectiveness (Rossignoli et al., 2019). The following items were statistically significant components of this *'professional dialogue'*:

• Discussing common problems faced in the classroom

• Sharing classroom experiences and solutions to common problems faced in the classroom

• Sharing feedback with colleagues

• Planning action points to be implemented after the meeting for improving teaching and learning

• Having relevant content (in relation to perceived needs).

TAGs

The development of TAGs has emerged strongly in the last few years as a good way to frame CoPs (Borg et al., 2020). TAGs are semi-formal groups of teachers working on their CPD according to their needs and interests (Mann and Walsh, 2017). Regular sessions take place where teachers share ideas and reflect on practice and practise their English. Ideally the commitment is ongoing (or at least for over a year), so that strong social dynamics can be established. Usually, they are F2F groups, but online groups have been used too (e.g. in Syria and OPT). Often TAGs are supported by a mentor or facilitator. The precise nature of the support that this facilitator provides varies from TAG to TAG, as does the source of any external input (i.e. not from the teachers themselves). While there is some variability in the role of facilitators/co-ordinator/trainer, the role is predominately to support the ongoing development through ongoing encouragement. As Borg (2019: 8) says, there *'is a role for a facilitator, co-ordinator or teacher educator, but the focus is on teacher-driven sharing, collaboration, interaction and reflection'*.

Most TAGs will have a leader/moderator/facilitator. The question of whether a CoP is constituted through a TAG means considering dimensions of power. Related to this power dynamic, TAGs will vary in the apparent balance between transmissive and dialogic approaches (Mann and Walsh, 2017). As we said above, getting the balance between more transmissive/ top-down and more constructivist/ bottom-up designs of CPD is crucial. Wyatt and Ager (2016) argue that top-down approaches (including formal courses and workshops) on predetermined topics provided by experts may not relate to teachers' interests and needs. This is particularly important because analysis of CPD for English teachers in Latin America and the Middle East (Howard et al., 2016) argues that much of the CPD on offer in these countries is top down (provided by 'experts') and can be characterised as transmissive (and this is a further reason why TAGs are worth supporting as an alternative).

The nature of the social aspect of TAGs should not be underestimated. It is also worth recognising the extent of 'small talk' and off-topic discussion taking place (see Xiao and Zhao, 2011; Parnham et al., 2018; Padwad and Parnham, 2019). This kind of social interaction is an important part of developing trust but also creating the kind of social presence that helps ensure, trust, empathy and cognitive engagement (Gunawardena, 1995).

There are studies emerging in contexts of constraint and TAG groups in India and Nepal have had reported successes. In Nepal, TAGs have been used within the English Language Teacher Education Project (EL-TEP), a two-year pilot project implemented by the National Centre for Educational Development (NCED) teachers' development unit under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the BC in Nepal. Borg et al. (2020) provide an overview of various TAG schemes but the largest-scale example of this is the TEJAS teacher development project in Maharashtra, India. TEJAS ('bright light' in Hindi) is a three-year teacher development and capacity building project for government primary school teachers in Maharashtra, India. Teachers develop their English language skills and teaching competencies in the TAGs. This capacity building project is a joint initiative between the BC, the Government of Maharashtra and Tata Trust (for further details see Padwad and Parnham, 2019).

Potential benefits of TAGs

Borg (2018b) conducted a research review of teacher activity groups in the MENA region. Based on discussions with groups of teachers and facilitators in different contexts, there is clear evidence that TAGs are valued as both a positive professional and social experience. Borg (2018b) reports that teachers recognise how TAGs differ from conventional kinds of training and appreciate the chance to meet collaborate, interact and to learn with peers.

TAGs are often compared with regular training events in the literature. Perhaps the most important claimed difference between TAGs and training events is that TAGs are more sustainable. They rely primarily on the member of the TAG for this sustainability, as Penny Ur (2017: 3) makes clear in a BC report about Romanian teacher TAGs:

'You have within your teaching routine the main tools for personal progress: your experience and your reflections on it, interaction with other teachers in your institution. Teacher development takes place when teachers, working as individuals or in a group, consciously take advantage of such resources to forward their own professional development.'

One of the common benefits of TAGs reported is the close connection to the teachers' classrooms (Padwad and Parnham, 2019).

Potential limitations of TAGs

There are also potential limitations of TAGs, especially if they are functioning without a systematic clear policy, and without support and recognition from teachers' institutions and Ministries of Education (Allier-Gagneur et al. 2020). If facilitators are of the 'chalk and talk' variety then attrition may be high and levels of satisfaction low (Mann and Walsh, 2017). They can also be difficult to sustain, if the teachers

feel overburdened with teaching and assessment commitments (Vangrieken et al., 2017).

Borg et al. (2020) in their comprehensive overview highlight some potential limitations, especially in establishing impact. They say it is *'difficult to reach informed conclusions about the effectiveness of TAGs without robust impact evaluations'*. However, what is feasible (both in terms of evaluating either the benefits or limitations) will *'always be determined by the resources available'* (Borg et al., 2020: 28). In a similar vein, they also warn that it is difficult to establish 'trustworthy data'. It is relatively easy to assess teacher satisfaction, how stakeholders feel, what activities were completed and how many people were affected; but measuring these aspects does not provide robust evidence of impact (i.e. whether TAGs lead to any actual change or if the TAG model is more effective than traditional workshop-style training).

Remote professional development

This last section of the desk review summarises the nature of remote PD. Given the various themes, explored above, this literature is broadly in agreement with Rhodes et al. (2020) that these are the established key findings and implications that arise from literature:

1. Professional development can be supported effectively through remote delivery and teachers can gain both knowledge and skills through remote CPD. Rhodes et al. (2020) make clear that this knowledge and skill will lead to gains in pupil outcomes. Although the question of whether remotely delivered PD is more or less effective than F2F PD is yet to be determined, there are some '*specific benefits*' that include '*lower costs and time incurred through travel*'. Indeed, they argue that other design principles are likely to be more important to CPD outcomes than the modality of delivery.

2. Remote coaching, mentoring and expert support can be effective alone or as part of broader CPD programmes. The use of e-moderators, coaches and mentors can help improve skills and knowledge of teachers when delivered remotely and may reduce feelings of isolation in professionals. There is evidence that such personal support helps learning gains for remote programmes.

3. The use of video can enhance remote CPD. Although a variety of tools and modalities within remote teaching is always desirable, the use of video is identified across a number of reviews as a particularly effective element of CPD that enables teaching staff to review their own and reflect on others' actions in the classroom. The targeted use of videos is associated with gains in practitioner knowledge and pupil outcomes. Video viewing is unlikely to be impactful in isolation and should instead be paired with other learning resources, such as viewing guides or discussion with other professionals. In this sense, the TAG format is ideal if video can be integrated gradually.

4. Interactive content and opportunities for collaboration are important for remote professional development. Rhodes et al. (2020: 3) suggest that *'more interactive content tends to increase the time practitioners take to complete PD and is associated with better completion rates, knowledge and skill acquisition'*. Tools such as regular email surveys are a low-cost way of enabling ongoing interaction with PD content. However, if content and information is hard to access, this can have a detrimental effect on user engagement. TAGs are by definition collaborative and this ensures interaction and may also improve CPD outcomes through enabling dialogic reflective practice as well as problem-solving.

5. Remote professional development requires supportive school conditions (support from leaders, protected time, tech-specific training, platform ease of access). School leaders and other stakeholders have a critical role to play in ensuring conditions are provided for remote CPD to be successful.

Case Studies

Case 1: MENA Regional CoP Leader Support Programme

Background and context

The first of these remote PD programmes for English language teachers and teacher educators (The MENA Regional CoP Leader Support Programme: Case 1) had an explicit aim of helping the leaders of the recruited community of practice (CoP) to go on to successfully set up their own CoP. The programme started in September 2020 and ran to the end of February 2021. Its main aim was to work with Community of Practice Leaders (CoPLs) to both encourage them to set up CoPs and successfully offer leadership for teachers in their area. The CoPLs had the specific aim of creating the conditions for successful and sustainable peer-to-peer remote collaboration amongst teachers, in order for them to develop along their professional practice pathway. The programme covered eight topics:

1. What are communities of practice? How do they work? What are the key success ingredients?

2. What are the effective ways of working with adult learners?

3. How do you set up a CoP? How do you encourage teachers to get involved?

4. Facilitation or training? What are the qualities of a good facilitator? How do I run a successful CoP meeting for teachers?

5. How do I use the Professional Practice Pathways in my CoP?

6. How can we measure the success of a community of practice? How can CoPs be used to provide feedback on teacher learning?

7. Why is reflection important? What are the tools used by teachers to help them reflect on their learning?

8. How can we ensure CoPs are sustainable?

The MENA Regional CoP Leader Support Programme is part of the Teacher Networking Initiative (TNI) and can be seen as an important element of responding to the challenges arising from the global pandemic. The initiative was a broad-based drive to improve interaction and contact between teachers and teacher educators in the MENA region and direct them towards content useful for online teaching and interaction. The main elements were the 'Ask Hala' webinar series, the 'Professional Practice Pathways', two teacher networking conferences held in October 2020 and January 2021, and the CoPLs programme itself.

The Teacher Networking Initiative originally targeted countries where there is little or no English for Education Systems (EES) programming (the Gulf, Yemen, Iraq, Algeria, Libya, Lebanon, Jordan). Over time this grew, partly because of the increase in level of interest from teachers in other countries in the region. The 'Ask Hala' webinar series and the online conferences attracted teachers from across the 17 different countries in the region. The CoPL Programme currently involves teacher educators from the following countries: Yemen, Algeria, Palestine, Bahrain, Lebanon, Oman, Iraq, Jordan.

The first Teacher Networking Initiative online conference established the priorities for the CoPL programme. It was held in October 2020 and helped to raise the profile of the Teacher Networking Initiative (including panels and presentations). It played a significant role in increasing awareness of the opportunities presented by remote delivery for the CoPL and helping to minimise the constraints of not being able to come together F2. Together with the 'Ask Hala' webinar series (which is an experience showing how to work with the affordances and constraints of Microsoft Teams), it was an important step in engaging participants in discussion and consideration of the practicalities of remote delivery and the benefits of peer collaboration. As the conference tied in with World Teachers' Day, it aimed to foreground two key themes relevant to the challenge of school disruption during 2020. The first was establishing solidarity across national boundaries and empathy amongst teachers in the MENA region.

The CoPL programme itself consisted primarily of a series of synchronous MS Teams based sessions but was also supported through materials available on an asynchronous Edmodo platform. The programme has a good balance of structure (including concrete materials/PPTs/videos) and flexibility; it does not convey a monolithic way of setting up and facilitating a CoP (indeed there is strong evidence below that CoPs varied in the way they were run).

The overall aim of CoPs (that CoP leaders would go on to establish) is to create the conditions for successful and sustainable peer-to-peer collaboration amongst teachers, to support teachers to be more confident and effective in the remote delivery environment and to encourage them to take responsibility for their own professional development. The qualitative and quantitative data (detailed below) confirms that the aims of the programme have been met. There is a lot of work on contextual needs and the particular needs of teacher educators evident in all data sets. The programme foregrounds establishing facilitative ways of working, providing positive feedback, establishing the purpose of the CoP with the teachers and finding out about the teachers' needs and what they want to improve. The CoP Leader Support Programme practises what it preaches in that there is variety in presentation and integration of digital tools in the synchronous MS Teams sessions, as well as a strong technical and digital focus through asynchronous channels.

The programme engaged CoPLs in a training process, in order for them to attain a better understanding of the concept of a CoP. More specifically, it should enable them to develop skills in setting up a CoP remotely, acquire key facilitation skills and understand the nature of working with adult learners. They should also be able to sustain and motivate teacher engagement; and provide guidance on how to promote reflection on and application of new skills, and how to evaluate success. These aims have also been met.

The CoPL programme is well integrated into a wider programme of PD. There is integration of slides and recordings from the monthly 'Ask Hala' webinar series. These provide the headline topics for the Teacher Networking Initiative. The CoPLs are also shown how to integrate the 'Professional Practice Pathways' materials. These form the bulk of the suggested learning materials for CoPLs' work with their teachers and have very favourable evaluations across all data sets.

It is worth saying right at the start of this evaluation, that this is both a good time to try to establish a series of CoP networks (there is an obvious need during a global pandemic) but also a challenging one (potential participants are pre occupied, anxious, and sometimes demotivated in their professional roles). For a programme set up quickly and in a reactive manner, there is strong evidence that the programme has adapted and innovated during the September 2020 to February 2021 time period. It was clearly challenging to set up: the programme leaders depended on word of mouth, reaching out to local contacts who might know teacher educators who they thought could act as catalysts, facilitators and change agents.

Overall, the CoPL PD programme has achieved its stated goals. The review of recorded MS Teams-based training sessions showed a positive atmosphere, some vocal and enthusiastic participants, effective interaction, sharing of opinions, relevant and good quality materials and modelling, clear structure and support, and the facilitation of an empathetic and non-judgemental environment. The following quantitative data (the survey) and qualitative data (interviews, focus groups and recordings of CoP session) will demonstrate the effectiveness of the PD programme in more detail.

Survey data

This section of the report presents the main findings of the survey data. This survey presents data focussing on the CoPLs' experience of both taking part in remote PD and then going on to set up and facilitate their own CoP groups.

In question 1 of the survey, 100% of the respondents positively evaluated the quality of the CoPL training programme. 56%, 36% and 8% of the participants rated the overall experience as 'Excellent', 'Good', and 'Satisfactory', respectively:

Figure 1

8%

36%

56%

● Excellent ● Good ● Satisfactory

Figure 2

Legend: ● Excellent ● Good ● Satisfactory ● Poor

	Learning with other COP leaders	The Edmodo learning platform	Support materials	The synchronous team sessions
Poor	4%	4%		
Satisfactory	16%	20%	12%	4%
Good	52%	52%	32%	36%
Excellent	28%	24%	56%	60%

Figure 3a

Legend: ● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Partly agree ● Do not agree

	The programme has helped me create a positive online learning experience for teachers	The programme has helped me motivate teachers to be active in online groups	The programme has helped me to be a better online teacher educator	The programme has helped me to help my teachers with their digital competencies	I have enjoyed working with other teacher educators online
Partly agree	8%	16%	16%	20%	4%
Agree	56%	56%	52%	52%	40%
Strongly agree	36%	28%	32%	28%	56%

Figure 3b

Legend: ● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Partly agree ● Do not agree

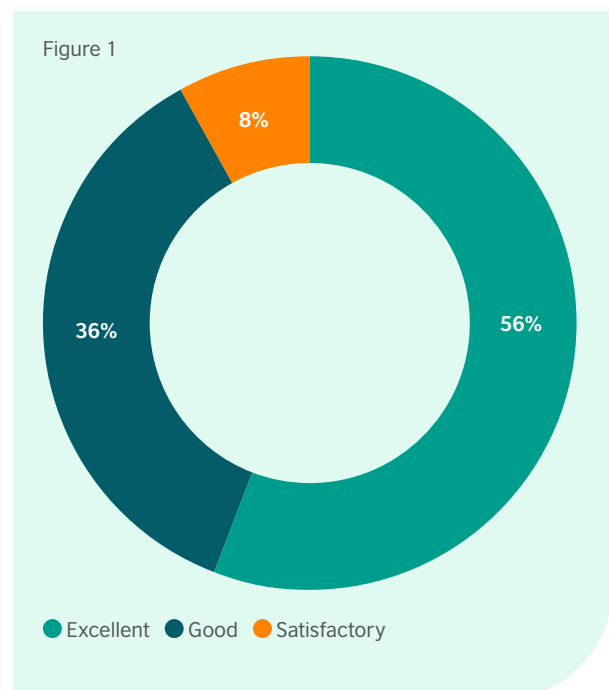|	The programme has helped me share digital resources with my teachers	I have had access to the resources I need to support teachers remotely	I am more able to use different online tools and platforms to support teachers remotely	Remote teacher education is not as effective as face-to-face teacher education	Being a remote teacher educator has been a challenging process compared with "face-to-face"
Do not agree				16%	8%
Partly agree	16%	24%	24%	32%	4%
Agree	36%	36%	32%	28%	56%
Strongly agree	48%	40%	44%	24%	32%

When referring to the features of the CoPL training programme, most of the responses show a positive evaluation of the various components of the course. Concerning the opportunity of learning with other CoPLs, 52% of the respondents rated the experience as 'good', and 28% as 'excellent'. The use of Edmodo as the asynchronous LMS (learning management system) of the training was categorised as 'good' (52%) and 'excellent' (24%), while the support material and the synchronous MS Teams sessions were mainly perceived as excellent (56% and 60%, respectively). As figure 2 clearly shows, the synchronous elements of the course were rated more highly than the asynchronous elements; there are further comments on Edmodo itself later in the report. Support materials were made available through both Edmodo and as attachments and links in synchronous MS Teams sessions and 88% rated them as either excellent or good:

See left Figure 2. Perceptions on features of the CoPL training programme.

When consulted about their point of view on the learning and skills achieved through the remote PD, the data is a very positive endorsement of the programme. No CoPL rated the course as poor and a strong majority selected 'strongly agree' and 'agree' for each statement relating to impacts from aspects of the programme (see figure 3). CoPLs 'strongly agreed' with having enjoyed working with other teacher educators online (56%) and very few only 'partly agreed'. They had clearly received help in order to share digital resources with their teachers ('strongly agree' 48% and 'agree' 36%). They also said they had access to the resources they needed to support teachers remotely, as indicated by the responses 'strongly agree' (40%) and 'agree' (36%). Similar ratings were also given in response to being better able to use different online tools and platforms following the programme. In addition, the majority of respondents agreed that the support they received through the programme had helped to create a positive online learning experience for teachers and motivate teachers to be active in online groups. They felt like better online facilitators and could help their teachers with their digital competencies. However, concerning their experience as remote teacher educators, 88% of the participants 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement that working remotely has been a challenging process compared with F2F. Clearly teachers prefer F2F to remote teaching. That being said, only 16% expressed a strong antipathy to remote learning and the data below suggests some positive learning gains:

See left Figures 3a and b: The programme and the impacts of some its different aspects.

In relation to the stage at which the participants are working in their CoP teacher group (figure 4), it is interesting to see that 72% of them have already started, out of which 48% indicate that their experience has had some success and 24% rate it as very successful. This is impressive in the relatively short time span and given that it would have taken some time to reach out and recruit a viable CoP group:

Figure 4. The stages at which participants are working in the CoP teacher groups.

Figure 4

My CoP teacher group has started and is very successful

My CoP teacher group has started and has had some success

My CoP teacher group has not started

Figure 5

● Very successful　● Successful　● Partly successful

	Acquiring key facilitation skills for CoPs	Providing guidance on how to sustain and motivate teacher engagement	Providing guidance on how to promote reflection on and application of new skills	Providing guidance on how to evaluate success
Partly successful	16%	12%	16%	24%
Successful	44%	56%	60%	56%
Very successful	40%	32%	24%	20%

Figure 5

16% · 48% · 36%

● Very successful　● Successful　● Partly successful

Question 5 of the survey, which focuses on the success of the CoP Leader Support Programme in terms of the participants' learning, sees 48% of respondents viewing it as 'successful' and 36% as 'very successful'. This indicated that the outcomes of the training were effectively accomplished regarding the development of the participants' skills in setting up a CoP, insights into working with adult learners and guidance on how to work on teachers' professional development through remote/online teaching. These are grouped together because the ratings were exactly the same (see figure 5). As shown, other learning gains considered either 'successful' and 'very successful' by the participants were acquiring key facilitation skills for CoPs (84%), providing guidance on how to sustain and motivate teacher engagement (88%), providing guidance on how to promote reflection on and application of new skills (84%) and on how to evaluate success (76%):

See above and left Figure 5. The success of the CoP Leader Support Programme.

Regarding the teacher educators' self-perception of their own level of digital competence, 60% of them categorised it as 'high' and 24% of them as 'very high'. On the other hand, the teacher educators classed the level of digital competence of the teachers in their CoP, as 'high' (44%) and 'average' (36%) with no teachers rated as 'very high'. In this respect, it is important to clarify that only 20% of the teachers have a reported 'low' (16%) or 'very low' (4%) level of competence. However, CoPLs were recruited partly related to their digital ability and so this is not a surprising finding. Similarly, teachers would not be able to 'take part' without some level of digital skills.:

See right Figure 6. Perceived levels of digital competency.

Figure 6

● How would you describe your level of digital competence as a teacher educator?

● Thinking about the teachers in your CoP, how would you describe their general levels of digital competence?

	Very high	High	Average	Low	Very low
Teacher educator	24%	60%	16%		
CoP teachers		44%	36%	16%	4%

Figure 7

Activity	Percentage
Had individual video meetings or tutorials with learners/parents (e.g. on Zoom)	40%
Supported my learners remotely in some other way	44%
Designed online materials and shared these with my learners	52%
Made PowerPoints (or similar) and shared these with teachers	56%
Provided content on a platform (e.g. Google Classroom) for my learners to access	60%
Conducted live/synchronous online lessons with my learners (e.g. on Zoom, Teams or Google Classroom)	64%
Used a social media group (e.g. WhatsApp or Facebook) with learners	88%

The above table (figure 7) shows that teachers had successfully adopted strategies or tools with both their own learners and with the teachers in their CoP. Both materials (e.g. PowerPoints) and platforms (e.g. Edmodo, Google Classroom) were being used by over half of the teacher educators. The highest number of teacher educators had used synchronous online sessions. The reason why this is not higher is because 28% of the CoPLs had not started their group at the time of the survey.

When consulted about the activities that the remote teacher educators have carried out to support teachers, 88% of them have used a social media group (e.g. WhatsApp or Facebook) with learners, 64% of them have conducted live/synchronous online lessons with their learners (e.g. on Zoom, MS Teams or Google Classroom), and 60% of them have provided content on a platform (e.g.

Google Classroom) for their learners to access. The highest rating, which is for the use of social media groups, perhaps helps explain why some of the other ratings in the table were not higher. Some teachers (especially in Yemen) had only used social media apps (especially WhatsApp) because their teachers did not necessarily have good enough internet for synchronous sessions. In relation to the use of materials, 56% of the teacher educators have made PPTs (or similar) and shared those with teachers, while 52% of them have designed online materials and shared these with their learners. On the other hand, fewer CoPLs (40%) have had individual video meetings or tutorials with learners/parents (e.g. on Zoom) and 44% have supported their learners remotely in some other way. Further to this, the answers to question 8 referring to some of the other actions that remote teacher educators have undertaken to support

Figure 8

● Strongly agree   ● Agree   ● Partly agree   ● Do not agree
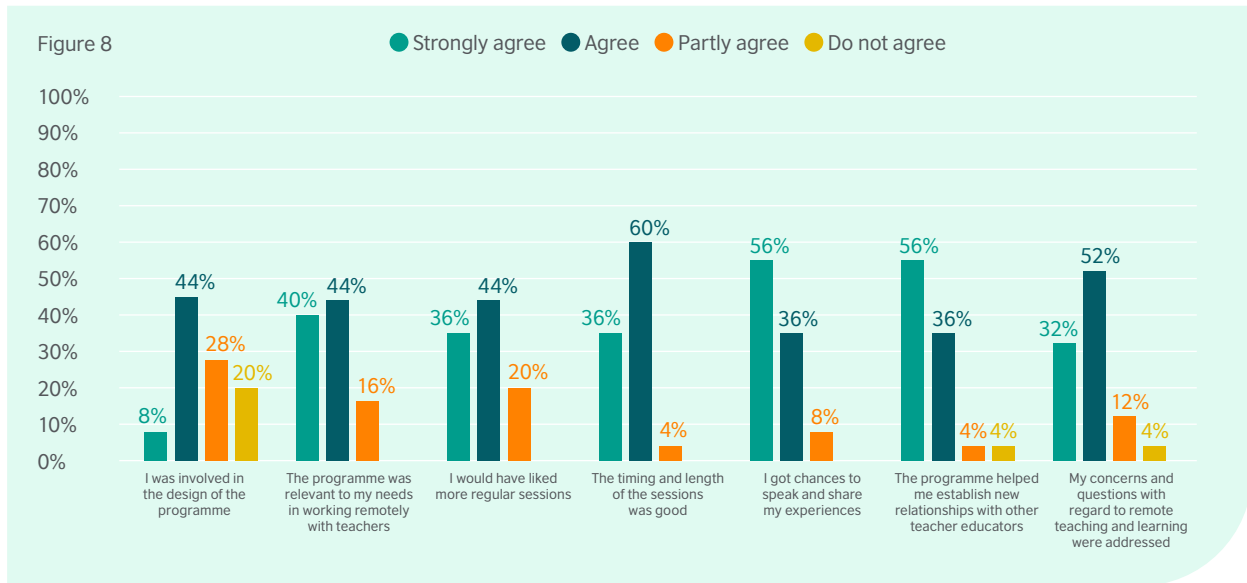
teachers included sharing additional material and CPD opportunities (e.g., webinars or workshops) from other sources, providing personalised feedback, using specific tools (e.g. Google Forms), responding to technical questions and giving them the chance to lead the teacher group. There was also mention of 'group projects' and use of 'a monthly newsletter' and 'Instagram accounts':

See page 33 Figure 7. Types of support provided.

In relation to question 9 (figure 8) about the participants' involvement in the CoP Leader Support Programme, 56% of respondents 'strongly agreed' and 36% agreed with the fact that the training helped them establish new relationships with other teacher educators, giving them opportunity to speak and share their experiences. The participants were happy with timing and length of the sessions, with at least 96% responding that they agreed or strongly agreed with it being good. Most (84%) agreed that their concerns and questions regarding remote teaching and learning were addressed. There was also evidence of involvement in the design of the programme ('agree' 44%) but unsurprisingly there was only 8% who 'strongly agreed' (as although their needs had been taken into account and the programme is seen as relevant, it was essentially designed and delivered by the BC). The statements in which the percentage of answers were close between 'strongly agree' and 'agree' were about the relevance of the programme to the needs in working remotely with teachers (40% and 44%, respectively), and about the participants' preference on having more regular sessions (36% and 44%, respectively):

See above Figure 8. Involvement in the programme.

The remainder of the survey was in the form of open questions and the following is a summary. When asked what was different about learning online, the

participants responded with ideas ranging between positive and negative standpoints. Among the positive, they mentioned the continuous support they received after the sessions, the availability of the material and session recordings - which contributed to the flexibility of the training and the time the participants needed to invest on learning. They also indicated the opportunity they had to meet teachers, teacher educators and ELT experts from other countries as one of the positive features of the programme (this correlates with the high number, 92%, who felt that they had established new relationships with other teacher educators). On the other hand, they found learning online to be more challenging than F2F due to the lack of the social component and interaction which results in less engagement and motivation. They also mentioned the need to become more digitally competent to access resources (but as we see later in the qualitative data, there is strong evidence that they had become more digitally competent). There was also mention of connectivity issues that some of them faced which hindered their participation in synchronous sessions.

Regarding the opportunities/advantages inherent in learning online, the participants indicated repeatedly the chance to develop their digital literacy skills and self-learning while studying more about digital resources and becoming confident in using them. They also emphasised appreciation of the opportunity to share knowledge, ideas, and experiences in an enjoyable way with other educators from 'around the Arab world' during the pandemic.

In relation to the barriers of only being able to work online, the most frequent answer referred to connectivity issues, although they appreciated the opportunity to shift to an asynchronous mode to overcome such difficulties. Another

challenge mentioned by the participants was the teachers' lack of personal computers and limited digital literacy. In such cases, they borrowed computers from institutions and gave them personalised sessions on how to teach remotely.

Some suggestions for supporting more effective online learning for teachers included to continue promoting and sponsoring more free online courses and webinars for the enrolment of a significant number of teachers. The ideas also included contextualising the online experience to the teachers' needs, more training for them on their digital competences and online assessment.

Qualitative data

The following section develops a thematic analysis of some of the key findings from the survey with evidence from focus groups and observations of CoPLs online. Most of the quotations are from three focus groups: a focus group with teacher educators (including informants from Yemen, Palestine and Bahrain) and two groups with teachers (including informants from Lebanon, Oman, Bahrain. Yemen, Palestine and Iraq). The report data is anonymous and so we have integrated the 'voices' of the CoPLs and the CoP teachers to support the evaluations being made.

Overall, levels of satisfaction with the programme are high. This is evidenced in the qualitative data that confirms the positive results in the survey data above. The remotely delivered programme '*is well structured*' and there is evidence that the number and timing of sessions is appropriate, although some CoPLs would like more: '*I think it could be nice if we have more sessions or at least a way we can have some support later on*'. The sessions themselves are well received and this is a typical CoPL comment:

'*I feel the sessions are very organised. The objectives are very clear to us. And we learn a lot of things from the sessions, whether how they're being presented or the topics itself, or how to motivate learners. So I feel every time we're doing something different.*'

There is also evidence the CoP discussion can give them more confidence to cope with the demands of remote learning:

'*I think for online learning, it helps students gain more confidence because what I see from my experience with my students, I teach Grade 4 and they are now more confident in using the technology because every time when I provide them with a new tool, and they are getting used to it, then every time they ask for more. So I think they gained confidence, they are now no longer only focussing on learning the languages, but also they're learning the technology part. So like implementing the 21st century...*'

Overall understanding of CoPs

Most leaders felt they had a better understanding of the aims and purposes of a CoP and this gave them '*the confidence to go ahead and recruit people*'. The BC CPD Framework for teacher educators had made them more aware of 'enabling skills' and the importance CoPs put on encouraging benchmarking and networking opportunities. The online conference in October has also helped with establishing understanding and expectations. One CoPL said '*it has given me the confidence to go ahead with my group*'.

There was a realisation that remote CoPs constitute an alternative to other forms of CPD, which are not currently available: '*I mean, because of COVID. I used to go, I've been to so many places and attend a lot of webinars, as I'm always working on continuing professional development*'. There is a lot of evidence in focus groups that the participants (both CoPLs and teachers) understand the aims and values of the CoP: '*I didn't know about community of practice but i like sharing ideas and discussing our challenges*'. There is strong evidence that this confidence filters down into the actual CoP group, as one teacher explains: '*... I've gained confidence and we are no longer just focussing on the language itself, but we are all learning about the technology part, so like implementing the 21st century skills*'.

Taking it into their own practice

The synchronous sessions helped to model strategies and CoPs felt more confident about how to go about the whole process. CoPLs reported that their CoP had helped them get to know their teachers and design a programme of activities which was engaging and had helped to motivate the teachers. In order to do this effectively, CoPLs also reported that they had applied what they had learned and adopted many of the tools and ideas they have experienced in their sessions: '*I borrow the good ideas and focus on the learning process of the webinars, but adapt it to my group*'. They noticed the way the facilitator conducted the MS Teams sessions and reflected on it: '*and the other thing that I learned from her, is she likes to share many interactive activities, she is good at introducing the topic as moving from one slide to others with examples*'. They recalled specific details in focus groups: '*I saw how she intervenes in meetings. And the way in which she asks us to reflect or help me be like, which would you like to put in your pencil case, what would you put in the waste-bin, all of these details are stuck in my mind*'. This CoPL was referring to a particular reflective task at the end of each session where participants were invited to put one thing in a pencil case (to use), one thing in the refrigerator (for later possible use) and one thing they would not use (the waste-bin). They also liked the use of

'The Wall of Wisdom' where they could also share reflections. One of the things the facilitator obviously tried to do was repeat the use of the same tools so that CoPLs got used to them and felt comfortable with them. Developing such routines is especially important in an online environment. In summary, the teachers' focus groups confirm that many of the ideas have contributed to successful CoPs.

Setting up their own CoPs

The qualitative data confirms the survey results, in that the programme has been helpful in enabling the CoPLs to be more structured and organised in their approach to remote PD: '*before Community of Practice, I have some of colleagues we communicate with each other, but our communication was really haphazard, not organised*'. The modules provide clear steps and procedures: '*I can follow the steps that they suggested for me*'. Many leaders had established viable groups and established communication channels (mostly through WhatsApp). Some groups had designed and employed their own logo and tried to make their CoP distinctive in other ways (e.g. using newsletters). Most groups had used Zoom as their preferred platform (where they discussed lesson delivery ideas) although this varied with use of MS Teams, and other platforms (e.g. Google Meet). They realise that an important first step in setting up is 'establishing needs' and this CoPL comment is typical: '*to see what they need exactly what they want to learn. Because through this pandemic, I feel like most teachers, they struggled through certain things, and they needed some sort of support*'. One of the leaders remarked that the session facilitator's use of Google Forms to collect information about the group members had inspired him.

Teachers comments confirm that they like the variety of the tasks adopted in their CoPs. The following are typical comments about promoting interaction through the use of different tools: '*so we discussed many topics such as how to use the Zoom, what are the differences between adults and children learning? And what is what is the purpose of this group. …I have learned a lot of things …also speaking skills, sometimes, there are many activities. And during the discussion, during that discussion, we use different platforms such as Padlet. And sometimes we record our voices*'.

There is a great deal of variety in timing and frequency of meetings. Most meet once a week - but others meet twice a week or once a month. Most CoP meetings range from 60 to 90 minutes. These decisions have been made according to the needs and wants of the group. One group in Iraq meets weekly but the teachers communicate via WhatsApp most days: '*I have joined the community of practice, maybe four or five months ago, and we have a group on WhatsApp. And we meet, actually, we chat, like every day, especially teachers, but at our meeting*

…he sent us a new activity to present different skills in the curriculum…so when we exchange our experience, I get benefit a lot, like I could find many solutions that I have never thought about before'.

Challenges of remote teaching for CoPs

Overall, the CoPs that CoPLs set up vary. The numbers range from small groups (four or five) to much bigger groups (30 to 40). Some CoPLs had found it hard to recruit willing teachers. Teachers in Bahrain for example are '*more likely to question the needs of coming together and forming a CoP*' and numbers in groups there are lower. As one CoPL said, in Bahrain, '*some of my colleagues say why should I do this? I've already got access to webinars and good sites so i can find my own resources*' and others say, '*my school is well equipped and has a good LMS*'. A country like Yemen is very different. There are far fewer resources and there's also a strong social need to come together as a form of mutual support. However, they are not blessed with the kind of infrastructure and equipment that countries like Bahrain have. So, they tend to have larger groups and tend to use WhatsApp as their preferred platform.

Some of the challenges are less related to technology and more related to teachers' levels of commitment and sometimes it is difficult to differentiate the two. CoPLs said that '*teachers are overloaded with work and issues coming from the pandemic*', that there were '*low levels of participation*' and that '*teachers expect to receive information and hardly give any feedback*'. There were other comments which suggest that some teachers are not willing to participate and '*hardly give any feedback*'. These are likely the CoPLs that had only '*partial success*' in setting up a CoP (see survey data above).

The CoPs provide a forum for sharing experiences and in many contexts remote learning has started as a real challenge but has become more familiar, as one teacher explains:

'*…it is a very strange idea to use electronic education for the students and for their families, because as you know, students, they are very familiar with their everyday coming to school, okay, sitting in the class, playing, doing things as usual. And now they are in their house. And, you know, it is very difficult for me to communicate with them through this bad internet. So, it was a challenge. Really, for me, it's a challenge. But now with the passage of time, as I said, it's become familiar and something very ordinary.*'

In some ways at least CoPs have helped mitigate this challenge.

Pedagogic Tools and Options

The synchronous sessions demonstrated various techniques and tools (mostly with Mentimeter and Wordwall), so there was live '*drag and drop*', '*matching*', and '*ranking*'. CoPLs liked the strong visuals: '*there were good pictures and slides*' and the quizzes: '*I like quizzes like WordWall*'. They appreciated the modelling of these tools: '*I learned technical skills regarding dealing with Edmodo and Mentimenter ... I use mentimeter now with my community practice members to vote*'. This was a common focus group comment: ' *... and we have also learned how to use digital tools, like Mentimeter, and quizzes and also Google Forms*'.

Leaders appreciated the facilitator's use of Mentimeter and other tools to increase interactivity and in some cases they had used these interactive tools in their own synchronous teaching. In fact, there were several focus group comments about having a greater working knowledge of the balance between synchronous and asynchronous options (one CoPL talked about '*understanding more about blending them*'). This in turn helped engage teachers within their developing CoPs. Observation of recordings of sessions confirms that this integration of varied tools is a key factor in giving them an engaging remote PD training event.

It is clear from the focus groups that CoPs function as significant spaces for experimenting with different tools and platforms. The following teacher describes how trying different tools, like Kahoot and Nearpod, in the CoP allows her to then implement it in her own practice with learners:

'*...like, for example, yesterday, I just learned about the Nearpod. And it was very fun... and I'm planning to use it next week with my students. It engaged us all during our meeting. So I think having a lot of tools or applications to use for students during the meeting. This was one of the most beneficial things.*'

Asynchronous platforms

Focus groups confirmed that a great number of the websites and tools demonstrated in synchronous sessions and explained on Edmodo had been used by CoPLs. The survey and focus groups established that CoPLs had mixed feelings about Edmodo itself. A good deal of this was because they were used to other LMS platforms (e.g. MS Suite or Google Suite).

While most comments were positive, there are some comments which suggest that teachers and teacher educators are not used to this kind of platform. The organisers stressed that this platform is at heart educational and free to use and many users appreciated its features. One of the CoPLs was impressed that Edmodo made efforts to inform through engaging content on '*keeping learning going for students during

the difficult times of the pandemic*' and another spoke of '*the practical resources that Edmodo makes available*'. Other comments confirmed that the range of guides, videos, tools and activities helped them to shape their pedagogy and engage learners effectively online. One CoP commented that Edmodo is more '*searchable*' than WhatsApp - although some CoPLs said they did not check it regularly. However, there were more positive comments too: '*In Edmodo, the folder that we have the pathways and the toolkit, it's just for me. It's full of knowledge because I can expand anything special about certain topics that I'm looking for*'.

Most of the CoPLs are also teachers and they shared their experiences of working online in their CoPs. Many teachers are using MS Teams but it has been challenging for students to adapt to this platform and this way of working: '*at the beginning it seems very easy, but then with some certain activities it can be very challenging when we want to them into groups to do some speaking task or to do a writing activity for instance*'. In addition, students '*always expect a lot of activities. They tend to feel bored or sometimes there are a lot of connection problems, so the online classes demotivate them*'. Due to feelings of dissatisfaction with MS Teams, some CoPLs have explored Google Classroom and describe it as: '*this is the right option with different tools available in the same place*'.

Balancing synchronous and asynchronous

The main challenge for the CoPs set up was the need to deliver the programme remotely, especially for participants who live in a country where access to the internet is a constant challenge. This is one of the reasons why the balance between synchronous and asynchronous platforms has been well judged on the CoPL programme. It is fair to say the synchronous events were particularly well reviewed by participants but there is evident appreciation that the pragmatic combination adopted here worked well.

Maximising participation and attendance

The attendance and interaction have been impressive right from the beginning of the CoP programme and reviewing recordings of sessions confirms consistent levels of attendance (although attendance registers were not kept). However, the session facilitator recognises that the CoP programme was launched at a time when fatigue with remote learning was setting in:

'*And because it's online, and teachers and teacher educators across the whole world are drained by attending this enormous, endless number of webinars and online events, it was fun at the beginning, but,*

I mean, as the time goes, no, they are done with it… so the content must be super engaging.'

Despite this backdrop of fatigue, the programme has responded well to the challenge of the pandemic and is certainly seen as engaging by CoPLs. However, there is also evidence of such fatigue: '*I'm tired with all the online events and looking at my screen*'. For this reason, maximising participation and engagement is a constant challenge.

Having said the above, there are a lot of reported learning gains related to planning for and maximising teacher participation and engagement: '*She continuously sent us links or anything to keep us engaged and active and this is one thing that I like because this is something that we want to do with our students*'. There was a realisation that engaging teachers in online settings is both a challenge and a necessity: '*it's the engagement. How can we build the motivation and maintain it and the level of engagement from the participant? This is the biggest challenge*'.

This challenge is even more evident in teachers' accounts of their own teaching. The importance of finding ways to encourage participation reveal themselves in the teacher focus groups where there are lots of accounts of using particular tools to get more participation with learners. This is a typical account from a teacher, talking about her learners:

'So everybody would be able to try at least one word or something, to share ideas, even Padlet. I love this app. Whatever I want my students to share any ideas, for example, in my writing lessons, I'd ask them to write some advantages and disadvantages. So they would share their ideas, they would have time to think about it during the lesson. And they send me any of their ideas during the lesson. And even after the lesson on my page on Padlet. So this would be, yeah, one of my solutions for having everybody participating in the lesson.'

Encouraging interaction

The CoP Leader Support Programme was successful in modelling different ways of encouraging interaction in synchronous sessions: '*I learned how to manage a session with my CoP, using many interactive activities*' and this was seen as key in maintaining motivation. However, there were many comments about the challenges of establishing and maintaining interaction in an online environment for the CoPs in running their own groups remotely.

Two things are worth noting in relation to interaction in the CoPL sessions. There was no evidence of the use of '*breakout rooms*', apparently because that functionality was not available on the version of MS Teams used. Although the interaction levels were good, observations suggested it tended to

be the same CoPLs who self-selected. There was comparatively limited engagement in Edmodo again with a small number making regular postings.

Social media

One of the most noteworthy aspects of CoPs is the widespread use of WhatsApp and also some use of a '*Facebook group*' as alternatives to other platforms: '*with WhatsApp we inform the teachers with the dates of workshops and meetings and share some ideas*'. Especially where there is a lockdown, this proves invaluable as this teacher explains:

'We used to go to school, like one day, a week, every grade has one day, but now that we don't go to school, it's entirely locked down. So we only teach over online and we have a lot of students who don't have laptops or phones. So it's kind of a challenge for us. That's why we teach on WhatsApp. So they use their parent's phone and something like that..'.

In some contexts, particularly Yemen, WhatsApp is by far the most viable option. '*We are trying to have a weekly training session on WhatsApp group, the leaders support teachers with materials and teaching suggestions. In Yemen we are all using WhatsApp and it helps because the internet connection is bad*'.

There is less use of Facebook, but it is still significant and it is clear that it helping with networking:

'…through the Facebook group that we inform the teachers with the dates of workshops, and meetings … I shared what I find important for them valuable as tips for teaching techniques, revising theories of teaching. And later on, I started my own Facebook group with about 200 teachers.'

Sometimes Facebook is used to create a flipped approach as one teacher explains:

'…to engage more students I use the technique of a flipped classroom, now I for example, if I want to teach them a new lesson, I send them a video by using my Facebook or they can use for example, their parent's Facebook because they don't have Facebook account…'

Practical tips

Although many CoPLs feel that that programme is useful, there are still calls for '*practical tips*' that are usable with teachers. One teacher educator suggested '*more practical steps for implementing CoPs with teachers*'. The evidence across the data set though suggests that there are plenty of practical activities; the synchronous sessions and Edmodo platform included links to many practical ideas and tasks. There were other calls for more details of '*practical activities*' but it was not always clear what this meant. Other CoPs were positive about the practical element: '*Let me talk*

about the content. Now the content is helpful, and it is full with tips that I can take up in the field'.

There are also examples of teachers talking about their CoP as helping with practical ideas:

'…actually, in the last session, for example, we discussed many tips, like for example, some global applications that are helpful and engaging to be used in remote learning a … we discussed how to manage our class with warm-ups and reflection tasks…'

Collaboration ('*buddying*')

One strong theme is that the CoP fosters collaboration: '*we have learned how to collaborate and how to engage and motivate our members in our CoPs*'. There was also evidence that a '*more facilitative*' stance of the CoPL programme had led to more collaboration between CoPLs and teachers. Indeed, there was a strong sense that CoP leaders took on board suggestions from teachers and made efforts to get their feedback and shape future sessions: '*One more thing is that recently we have created a survey in order to know how we have been doing in our CoP group. And that to get some feedback , I mean, some ideas about our upcoming sessions*'.

Some leaders had engaged in a '*twinning activity*' (for example a leader from Palestine had twinned with a leader in Yemen). On the CoP Leader Support Programme there is encouragement to do this (called '*buddying*') and there was evidence in focus groups that this had happened. There were several comments about the desirability of buddying/ twinning. One CoPL said it is '*good to link up with others from Palestine or Egypt*' and others were in the process doing this: '*…with CoP leaders from other countries and, I mean, I contacted with some of them and now what I'm trying to buddy with a leader from Lebanon and another leader …from Bahrain*'. Two focus group informants felt that the forming of sub-groups of buddies should have been encouraged right at the beginning of the process.

Emotional support

CoPs have been an important site for emotional support: '*with all the challenges we face, at least we are not alone*'. A great deal of the talk in CoPs is about technology, methodology and ways to engage learners but there is also an important support function. As one of the CoPLs said, '*I think coming together in a community has helped on so many different levels, it's a communal thing. Yeah, we come together to discuss the schools, the water problems, we come together to discuss the transport problems, the outbreak of the disease, the power cuts in some areas*' but at the same time they are definitely coming together to discuss how to teach. In summary, there is evidence that the social and

emotional support is an important factor, especially in times of challenge in contexts of constraint.

Resilience

There are plenty of reports from teachers about difficulties of remote learning with learners and the CoPs are good sites for discussion and sharing of these challenges. Across the data set there is evidence that this means that despite many problems the teachers do not give up. They try to find out what the problems are and identify solutions and show resilience (see Capstick and Dalaney 2016 for accounts of resilience).

'Also, there is their lack of motivation, some students don't want to participate. I asked some of them, why don't you participate actively and efficiently? While teaching various teams (MS Teams)? They answered me because I don't like Teams, I don't like electronic teaching, so I faced many challenges, but still I tried to conquer and to get rid of these things by using the many motivating applications in order to overcome this challenge.'

The focus groups were full of such accounts. Even when teachers could get their learners in synchronous teaching spaces, it was difficult to know who was there, who was participating and eliciting responses was a persistent problem:

'…encouraging the students into participating in the lesson, sometimes it's difficult to know that everybody is into the lessons. So because I have only 55 minutes, my class and in my class there are around 50 students, so it's difficult to have all the students participating. But breaking the students into groups could be one of the solutions. But I do use the whiteboard on Teams. So everybody would be able to try at least one word or something, to share ideas, even Padlet. I love this app.'

There were comments about '*taking risks*' and trying something different: '*…plus being brave, this is very important, being brave to use or apply any of the strategies or applications that we're open to*'. Another teacher talked about being '*fearless and trying new technological tools*'. This seems to be an attitudinal stance that is fostered by the CoPs.

A greater understanding of roles

One of the strong learning areas evident was in the appreciation that becoming less didactic and more facilitative was helpful in boosting both the CoPLs' and teachers' confidence. CoPLs talked about becoming '*less authority*' and '*more facilitator*'. The evidence is that there are learning gains around understanding '*in terms of what is a facilitator and the difference between a facilitator and trainer.*' '*Being a CoP leader means being organised*', where you try to '*raise levels of engagement*' and '*thinking*

about the purposes of the community'. There were many comments in the focus groups that show reflection on roles: '*I think about the relationship between other participants and how we can improve the learning process*'. One key challenge for remote learning and part of the role of the CoP is getting to know the members of the group, especially if it is a really big group. The importance of needs analysis and doing this '*getting to know you work*' has made an impression on the CoPLs: '*I think when you're establishing your CoPs, try to get to know your teachers. Try to create like create a questionnaire to know what interests them*'. Another said, '*what certain topics they would like to know more about. What are their weaknesses like, what they want to focus about?*'

One element of at least some groups was a division of labour ('*taking it in turns*'). CoPLs talked about giving different roles to increase engagement and effectiveness. Some asked '*of the group to write a report*', others '*had started a blog*'. One of the teachers describes such a process:

'And then we divided the group, each one has a role. So one will be one of us will be responsible for providing us with the materials one will be responsible for presenting, and we take turns every meeting… take turns in providing us with the information.'

More likely to engage in other online CPD activities

There were comments from CoPLs and teachers which suggested that the CoPLs had been a site for sharing and reporting on wider CPD activities (e.g. webinars, Coursera courses, podcasts). Teachers in some groups had given a '*short presentation on the useful ideas*'. One teacher's comment is a good example of this:

'We can talk about the webinars that we have attended… there are reflections and the group has created a logbook to list the useful webinars or articles we have read. Last week I talked about TEFL Commute which has lots of good episodes… this was about topic "animals" and they discussed how "animal knowledge" can be taught to students I learned that onomatopoeic sounds may be interesting for my students…'

Although the CoPs have not been in existence for long there is evidence that they have fostered wider connections and interest in '*CPD resources that we find online*'.

Awareness of other teachers left behind

To some extent, just by willing to be a member of a CoP, these teachers are already committed and engaged. A great number of teachers (outside these CoPs) have been left behind as one CoP member explains: '*especially the older ones, they don't know how to use the technology, so they just gave up*'.

Another talks about how difficult it is for some teachers to get used to new ways of working that have been sudden and imposed:

'So I think there are many challenges, for example, most of the teachers are not familiar with how to use these platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet and Teams. So they are new for them. So they need time, in order to improve their skills and in order to be familiar with them.'

Despite this, many teachers (in CoPs) have passed on their knowledge to colleagues. When it was possible, they met F2F:

'We do show and tell, where teachers can present new ideas and share them with the other teachers. So during our summer break, we have done some show and tell to share some of the platforms that we use with our online teaching and with planning our lessons. So there are alternative ways I feel like to support even teachers, besides the CoP, from my organisation, doing just small workshop between teachers themselves.'

This account is typical of many and there is obviously a trickle-down effect to teachers outside CoPs:

'Since last March, we starting just using WhatsApp with the students that is as an asynchronous platform. And until now, our organisation just sent videos to our students, there is no face to face. Our school is closed right now. So I decided to volunteer and give my students lessons through Zoom, because I learned from the community that we should have plan to have asynchronous platforms and synchronous platform.'

This is partly because remote learning takes a lot of resilience: '*Because what I know it can be very frustrating. While we're teaching, we're having a lot of technical issues, students are having technical issues. Our lessons don't go as we plan. So I feel that the most important skill is for a teacher never to give up not to feel demotivated because the feeling would be transferred to the students*'.

Recommendations

It is not possible to make too many definitive statements about a relatively short programme that was developed as a response to the pandemic, but the early signs are encouraging. The programme was well run and delivered, and the data shows high levels of satisfaction with the aims, content and delivery. What follows reviews the data to at least articulate possible areas of discussion for future planning.

Further CoP promotion

There is evidently a demand for more CoPs. One leader is typical when she says '*I received a lot of emails, like several emails from teachers from here and there. I suggested if they can create their own CoP because they're teaching in schools, so their teaching experience is different from mine and it would be a great opportunity for them as well*'. It may be that when the pandemic ends there will be at least an appetite for hybrid models of CoP but online groups are likely to persist.

Tracking CoPs as they progress further

Further work can be done on tracking the progress and satisfaction levels of these emergent CoPs in the MENA region. A longitudinal study looking closely at a few groups over a year would be good. This might include recording of meetings to gauge opportunities for reflection. This would enable more accounts of good practice and sharing of resources too. There have been previous calls for more research on teacher associations (see Smith and Kuchah, 2016). They say that teacher associations are almost invisible in literature on PD but are important elements of teachers' professional lives.

Gender issues

We have not included this as a theme because it has not been an explicit focus of the research. However, on the basis of the recordings watched, men do not seem to self-select or contribute to the chat in synchronous sessions. Women do most of the interactive work - this is interesting in comparison with the findings of Sowden (2019) which shows that men tend to dominate positions of power in conference committees in the MENA region. This study is not in a position to make a rigorous analysis of why this is the case but it is noticeable in the recordings and may be worth further research.

Introduce a buddy or twinning system earlier in the programme

Establish a buddy system of small breakout groups: '*I have one suggestion for the launching of the programme. I think that if we have tasks from the first moment from the first session, having the teachers or the leaders working together from the first time, this would make a routine that will be helpful in the later stages*'.

Case 2: National Teacher Training Programme, Egypt (NTTP) 2020-2021

This section of the report concentrates on the NTTP in Egypt. It examines the impact of the shift to remote learning for TAGs in the latest phase of the NTTP programme. The data in this report was collected from December 2020 to March 2021. The BC has developed a strong working partnership with the Egyptian Ministry of Education (MoE) and the following section provides some details about the history and scale of this programme. This is followed by survey data and then discussion of qualitative data, before providing recommendations arising from analysis of the data and the literature review.

Background and context

The TAGs featured in this case study are part of an on-going PD programme across Egypt. The materials used are from the BC (TfS) platform. TfS is the BC's approach to teacher development in state education systems and informs the PD programme for teachers. The NTTP in Egypt aims to improve teaching and training practices and raise the level of English language and pedagogical ability of English teachers in primary schools. It has made an important PD contribution in Egypt reaching up to 22,000 teachers in public and official primary schools across the country in the 27 governorates, and the impact is estimated to reach five million learners.

The NTTP programme supports educational reform in Egypt by improving the English language proficiency of and embedding and consolidating the principle of continuous professional development for teachers in the country. This supports Egypt's 'Vision 2030' and 'The New Education System 2.0'. Regarding 'Egypt 2030', 'Pillar 7' is a particular focus (concerned with *developing teachers' professional and technical skills*'. The NTTP programme has been in existence for over three years focussing on developing the quality of education in elementary classrooms (grades 1-6).

The first two years (2017-19) were focussed on capacity development and enhancing the skills of a cadre of teacher educators who could facilitate TAGs. The first year of working with teachers (2019-20) involved teachers in 27 governorates in Egypt. At the end of the third year,

there were 750 TAGs across Egypt led by 500 teacher educators, also supported by mentors, supervisors and inspectors in all governorates.

The overall aims of the programme are to build and enhance training capabilities and skills for teaching English language. It focuses on both pedagogic skills and linguistic competence. It has a strong emphasis on digital and 21st century skills. As well as raising the linguistic and educational competence of English language teachers in primary schools, the programme also includes primary teachers of mathematics and science in official schools (see also Borg 2018a for an evaluation of year 1).

Overall, this partnership programme aims to ensure that teachers have access to high-quality CPD opportunities in Egypt, so that they can improve their own practice and their learners' success. TfS, which informs the design and content of the programme, is based on current research into effective continuing professional development and has two main principles:

• Improving the quality of teaching has the most impact on improving the outcomes of learners

• CPD is the most effective way to improve the quality of teaching.

There are incentives for both teacher educators and trainees for being involved in TAGs. For instance, trainers could be given more advanced courses for a discount or for free at a later date. In addition, teacher educators can apply or be nominated for scholarships to upgrade their professional profile. The BC has provided extra opportunities for development such as attending IATEFL (although it was cancelled in 2020) to two teacher educators who have shown special dedication and effort through the programme and similarly for the 20 teacher educators who are currently attending a NILE (Norwich Institute for Language Education) course (From Teacher to Trainer: https://www.nile-elt.com/product?catalog=From-Teacher-to-Trainer-Online).

Teachers in the past have received certificates, prizes or awards for the best achievers. The BC includes some of the strongest emerging ideas on the BC Facebook page or on YouTube.

Programme overview

The NTTP in Egypt has three main aims:

1. Supporting teachers to improve their English language skills

2. Supporting teachers to develop their knowledge and skills of learning centred teaching techniques which they can apply in their classrooms

3. Building the capacity of teacher educators who can lead on CPD through TAGs for teachers.

Teacher educators had initially been recruited to the NTTP programme through an announcement on the MoE Facebook page, followed by a phone interview. They then had three phases of training (one week for each phase). In focus groups the teacher educators rated this training very highly. After the first year of NTTP they were given further training: '*they gave us very new, interesting topics such as how to integrate and develop the 21st century skills, how to focus on pronunciation and things like that*'. After the first year, the programme was expanded, and teacher educators helped to recruit further TAG leaders (through a nomination and interview process). Currently the number of teacher educators who delivered the training is 460 (100 are relatively new, and conducting their first TAG(s), with some of the newer ones attending TAGs in the previous phase as teachers. They showed great progress and passed the interview. They were then trained to join existing teacher educators and deliver TAGs of their own.

NTTP in 2020/2021

Despite the difficulties and challenges that Egypt has faced since the beginning of the pandemic pandemic, NTTP has continued to work towards its core goals. TAGs have been moved online in an effort to consolidate CPD and ensure sustainability, continuing to work with the same 22,000 teachers for the second year of training (the fourth year of the full NTTP programme). This movement online was supported by further training for the running and support of Electronic Teacher Activity Groups (E-TAGs). Additional trainers were recruited to provide this support and training. This training focussed on the use of online platforms and also ensured the supply of online resources and training material for the second-year TAGs too.

There was also development of new support systems for the E-TAGs. One of the most recent additions to the programme has been the recruitment of five 'digi gurus' (this is the term used by programme managers) and these IT experts' role is to support teachers and teacher educators through the pandemic. There was the introduction of a buddy system (where a more experienced peer supported a more novice one). There was also development of a multi-channel communication system to provide general support, in addition to continuing academic and other regular support.

The implementation of E-TAGs began with a pilot phase in May to July 2020 with the participation of a sample of 125 trainers from all 27 governorates of Egypt. There were four online training sessions and 3,375 teachers participated in these learning groups. The results of the pilot phase were that 84% said they strongly support the idea of continuing to attend E-TAGs online. A similar percentage expressed great confidence (80%) in engaging in continuing professional development activities online (as a result of attending E-TAGs). The data generally confirmed that online training was a high-quality event (95% strongly agree/agree that they had acquired new knowledge and/or skills from participating in the experimental phase of NTTP online training).

This report concerns the more intensive October 2020 to March 2021 period. During this phase there has been a different structure of TAGs adopted. Now there are two TAGs per month for a duration of 90 minutes each. The first is more theoretical and the second is more applied or practical in nature. There has also been the introduction of 'e-books' (One e-book for the teacher educator and another reflective journal for the TAG teachers). The main topics covered were the core interventions of Lesson Planning in a CLIL Context, Digital Skills, 21st century skills and Language Input (Speaking) with pronunciation as a subskill and the three cross-cutting themes of 'being a reflective practitioner', 'applying learner centred techniques' and 'being digitally enabled'.

Survey data

We conducted a survey with both teacher educators and teachers.

Teacher educators' survey

Focussing on the rating that teacher educators gave to their overall experience of leading a TAG, 96% of the participants evaluated it very positively (with 50% of the participants ranking their experience as 'Excellent' and 46% as 'Good'):

Figure 9. Teacher educators' overall experience of leading the TAGs.

Figure 9

1%
3%
46%
50%

● Excellent ● Good ● Satisfactory ● Poor
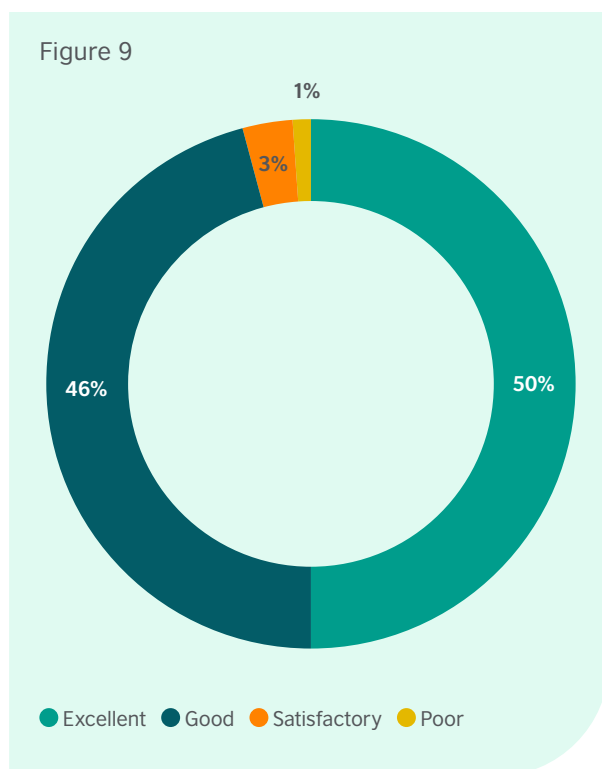
In terms of the specific details of teacher educators' experience working with TAGs, the responses were predominantly positive. As can be seen in figure 10, 82% of the participants 'agreed' (53%) or 'strongly agreed' (29%) with the statement that the TAGs have provided resources and materials that their teachers need to teach online. 73% of the participants either 'agreed' (35%) or 'strongly agreed' (38%) with the assertion that they have enjoyed working with their teachers online. Regarding the process of leading an online TAG compared with F2F TAGs, 86% of the teacher educators 'agreed' (36%) and 'strongly agreed' (50%) with the idea that has been a challenging process. Similarly, 89% considered that F2F TAGs are more effective than online TAGs by 'agreeing' (28%) or 'strongly agreeing' (61%) with such statements:

See right Figure 10. Teacher educators' perceptions on working in the TAGs.

Concerning the success of the TAG programme in terms of the teachers' learning, the participants evaluated it positively. 77% of the teacher educators consider the programme either 'successful' (41%) or 'very successful' (36%) in promoting the acquisition of new teaching skills. 78% of the participants ranked the programme as being either 'successful' (50%) or 'very successful' (28%) in improving teachers' English competence. In relation to the development of teachers' skills in teaching remotely, the responses show that 77% of the teacher educators think that the programme is either 'successful' (50%) or 'very successful' (27%). A similar pattern occurs with the fact that the programme provides guidance on how to support and motivate learning online, to such statement the participants classed it as 'successful' (57%) and 'very successful' (18%):

See right Figure 11. Perceived impact of the TAGs on teacher's learning.

Regarding the teacher educators' self-perception of their own level of digital competence, 85% of the participants have confidence of their skills by categorising them as either 'high' (55%) or 'very high' (30%). On the other hand, when referring to the level of digital competence of their teachers, the responses show that teacher educators categorised them predominantly as 'average' (52%) with only some at the 'high' level (22%):

See right Figure 12. Digital competence of teachers and teacher educators.

Figure 10

Legend: ● Do not agree ● Partly agree ● Agree ● Strongly Agree

	Do not agree	Partly agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The TAG has provided resources and materials that my teachers need to teach online	3%	15%	53%	29%
I have enjoyed working with my teachers online	2%	26%	35%	38%
Leading an online TAG has been a challenging process compared with 'face-to-face' TAGs	2%	13%	36%	50%
'Face–to–face' TAGs are more effective than online TAGs	2	10%	28%	61%

Figure 11

Legend: ● Very successful ● Successful ● Partly successful ● Not successful

	Very successful	Successful	Partly successful	Not successful
Acquiring new teaching skills	36%	41%	21%	2%
Improving teachers' English competence	28%	50%	21%	1%
Developing teachers' skills in teaching remotely	27%	50%	20%	4%
Providing guidance on how to support and motivate learning online	18%	57%	22%	3%

Figure 12

Legend:
● How would you describe the level of digital competence of your teachers?
● How would you describe your level of digital competence as a teacher educator?

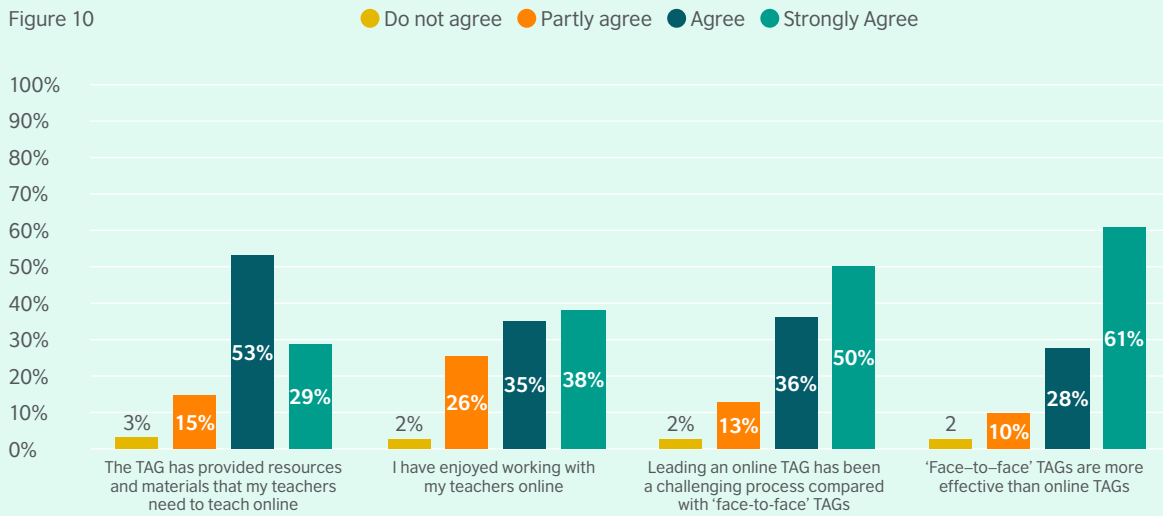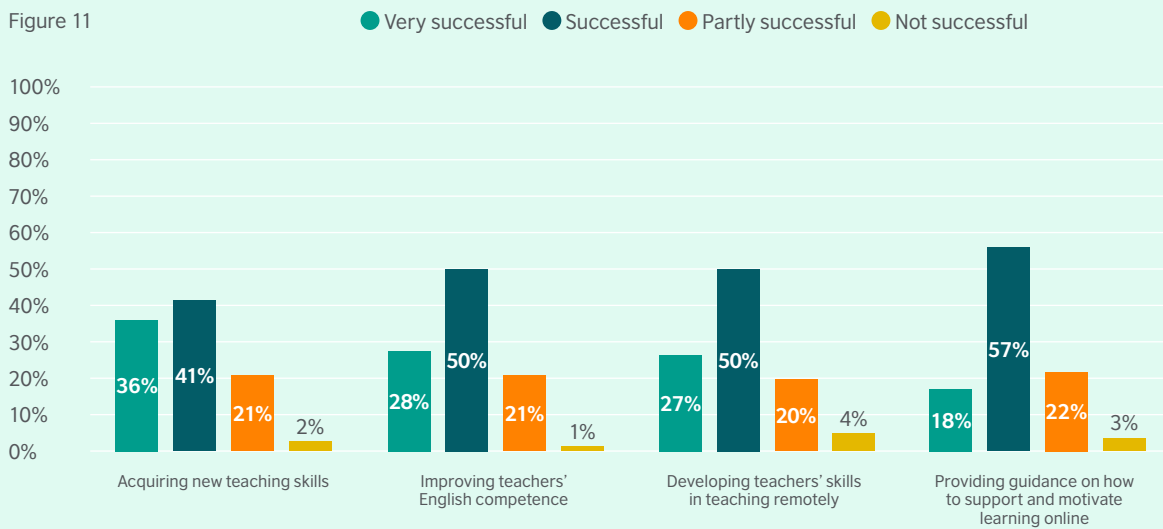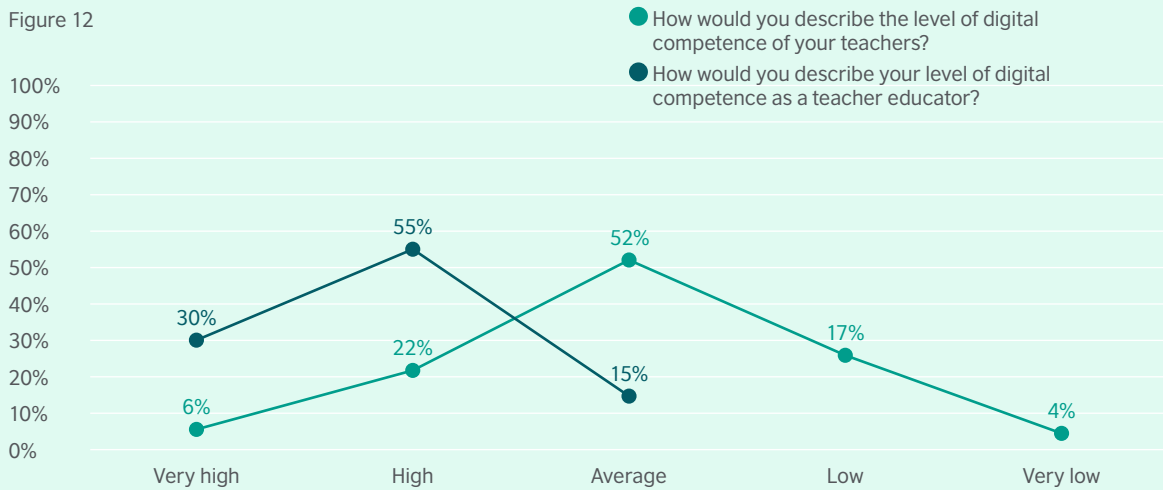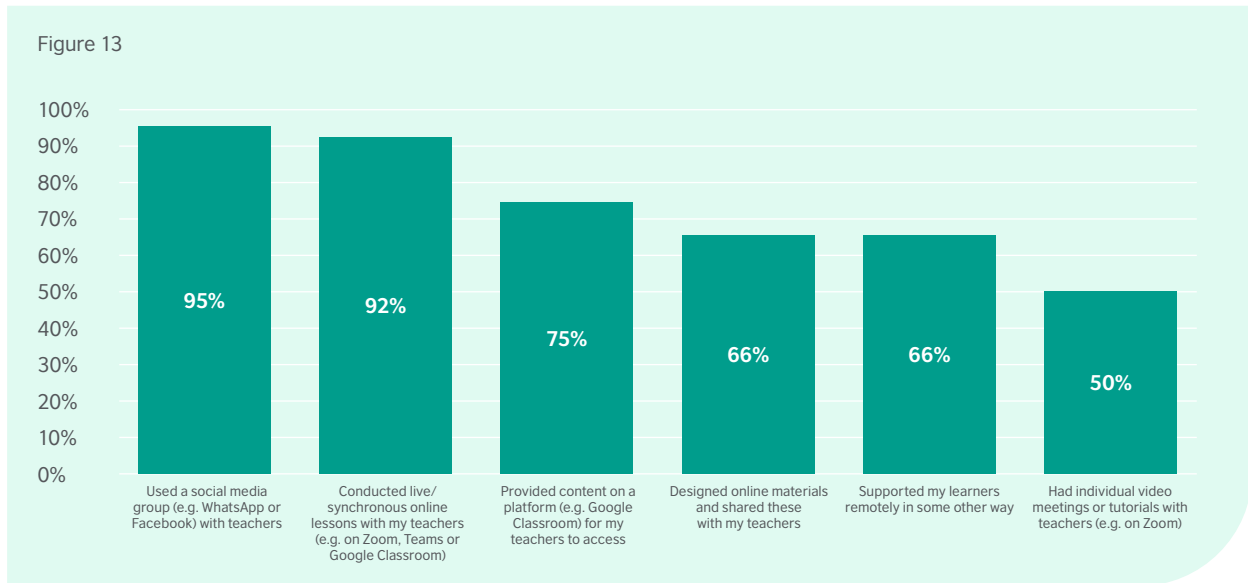|	Very high	High	Average	Low	Very low
Level of digital competence of teachers	6%	22%	52%	17%	4%
Level of digital competence as a teacher educator	30%	55%	15%		

Figure 13

When consulted about the activities that the remote teacher educators have carried out to support their teachers, the highest rate of responses (95%) relates to social media use (e.g. use of a WhatsApp or Facebook group), followed by 92% of them having conducted live/synchronous online lessons with their teachers (e.g. on Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Classroom). In addition, 75% of remote teacher educators have provided content on a platform (e.g. Google Classroom) for their teachers to access, while 66% of them have supported their learners remotely in some other way. Similarly, 66% of the participants stated they have designed online materials and shared these with their teachers. The assertion with the lowest rate of responses referred to the teacher educator having had individual video meetings or tutorials with teachers (e.g. on Zoom) at 50%:

See above Figure 13. Activities teacher educators have used with their teachers.

In relation to other strategies used by the teacher educators to support their teachers remotely, there was a similar pattern among the participants' answers on the technical help they provided to teachers with low digital competence. In this respect, the strategies range from phone calls and recommendations of websites or YouTube channels for further guidance, to paying F2F visits to teach teachers how to become confident users of technology. The use of videos or screencast was a common resource among teacher educators to create tutorials on the use of certain online tools or to share more digital resources. As well as that, teacher educators are keen to promote participation and connections among teachers (e.g. pairing teachers with different digital competence that could help each other). They also rewarded teachers with certificates, and shared information about webinars and online events.

In answering an open question about opportunities and advantages of learning online, teacher educators frequently referred to the fact that it can happen anytime and anywhere. Such an advantage favours teachers living in remote places, who would otherwise have to travel long distances and/or spend time and money on transportation to attend CPD training events. Another advantage identified by teacher educators is that during the impact of COVID-19, learning online helps to reduce the rate of infection as it reduces F2F contact. Furthermore, it increases the opportunities to communicate with colleagues from other geographical areas and to access a wider range of online resources.

In responding to an open question about the difficulties/barriers of only being able to work online, teacher educators highlighted aspects related to connectivity issues, lack of electronic devices, low digital competence, and lack of motivation. In relation to connectivity issues, the participants stated that many teachers had problems with low or poor internet connection, which hindered their participation in the sessions. Thus, some of the strategies that the teacher educators implemented were choosing days and times for the meetings in which the connection speed was stable and sharing summaries and materials of the synchronous sessions via WhatsApp.

Another relevant difficulty faced by teacher educators was related to teachers not having suitable electronic devices to take part in the synchronous sessions. In such cases, teacher educators suggested teachers pair themselves with a colleague with a suitable device and connection so that they could work together. For the challenge of the teachers' low digital competence, teacher educators trained them privately on how to use the platforms, gave them technical help via phone calls or shared video tutorials via WhatsApp.

When referring to the lack of motivation from the participants, teacher educators stated that the situation was evidenced through minimal involvement during discussions and low attendance to the meetings. In this regard, online badges and certificates were issued to motivate participants.

Summarising the final comments and feedback from teacher educators on the programme, they suggested promoting more practical training and induction on how to use online tools or applications that could be available to a larger number of participants. In this regard, the consulted teacher educators also consider it necessary to encourage teacher participation in E-TAGs by either issuing certificates, adding a F2F option to the groups or adopting a blended approach.

Teachers' survey

Concerning teachers' experience of being part of an E-TAG, 98% of the participants referred to it as being either 'Excellent' (58%) or 'Good' (40%). This is a similar pattern to the one above, which referred to teacher educators leading the groups. This confirms that the participants who responded to the survey as well as the TAG leaders found the overall experience as being positive for their professional development:

Figure 14. Teachers experience of being involved in the TAGs.

Figure 14

2% 1%

40%

58%

● Excellent ● Good ● Moderate ● Poor

Figure 15

● Do not agree   ● Partly agree   ● Agree   ● Strongly agree

Being in an online TAG has been a challenging process compared with 'face-to-face' TAGs: 6%, 13%, 56%, 25%

The TAG has provided resources and materials that I need to teach online: 2%, 9%, 58%, 32%

'Face–to–face' TAGs are more effective than online TAGs: 6%, 16%, 38%, 40%

I have enjoyed working with other teachers online: 2%, 5%, 50%, 42%

Figure 16

● Strongly agree   ● Agree   ● Partly agree   ● Do not agree

My TAG has helped me share digital resources with my learners: 27%, 59%, 13%, 2%

My TAG has helped me to help my learners with their digital competencies: 25%, 61%, 13%, 2%

My TAG has helped me create a positive online experience for my learners: 36%, 55%, 7%, 1%

My TAG has helped me improve my competence in English: 41%, 54%, 4%, 1%

My TAG has helped me to be a better teacher: 52%, 43%, 4%, 1%

Figure 17

● Very successful   ● Successful   ● Partly successful   ● Not successful

Acquiring new teaching skills: 39%, 56%, 5%

Improving my English competence: 34%, 59%, 6%

Developing my skills in teaching remotely: 31%, 59%, 9%, 1%

Providing guidance on how to support and motivate learning online: 27%, 61%, 11%, 2%

Focussing on the specific details of teachers' experience taking part in TAGs, there were positive responses in most categories despite a high rating for the whole experience as being demanding. 81% of the teachers rated the E-TAG as a more challenging process than F2F TAGs, with 56% 'agreeing' and 25% 'strongly agreeing'. These are similar results to the ones obtained from the teacher educators' survey in which 86% of the participants showed the tendency to view the process of leading an online TAG as challenging. As can been seen below, in relation to the resources and materials provided by TAGs, 90% of the teachers considered them helpful for teaching online, by either 'agreeing' (58%) or 'strongly agreeing' (32%) with the statement. In a similar vein, 78% of the participants either 'agreed' (38%) or 'strongly agreed' (40%) with the assertion that F2F TAGs are more effective than online TAGs; however, 92% of the teachers reported that they have enjoyed working with other teachers online by choosing 'agree' (50%) and 'strongly agree' (42%). On the whole, the data strongly suggests that although online is not the preferred teacher education medium for either teachers or teacher educators, the levels of enjoyment of working in this way are very similar (at 72% and 73%):

See left Figure 15. Teachers' perceptions on taking part in the TAGs.

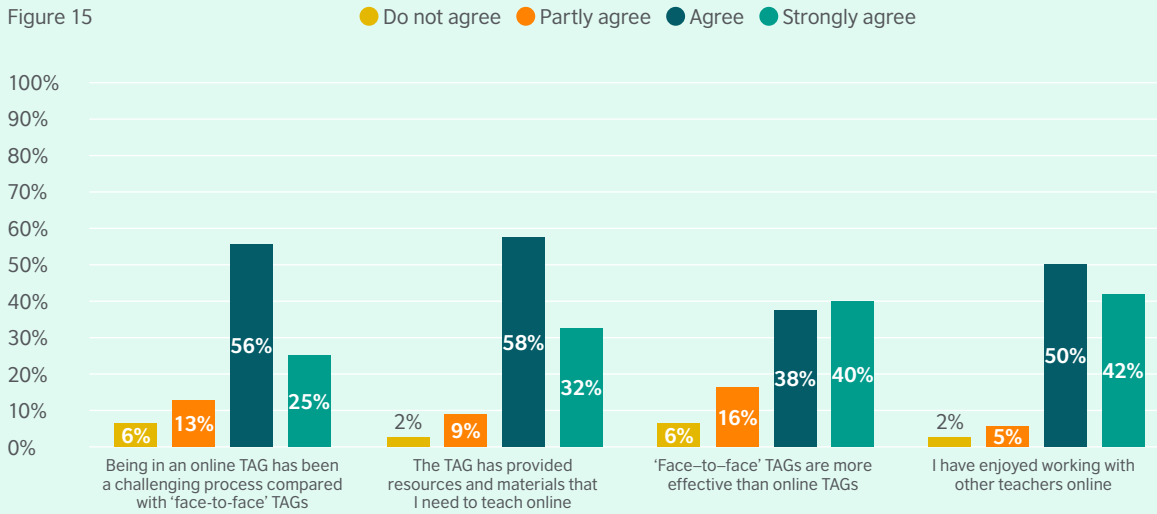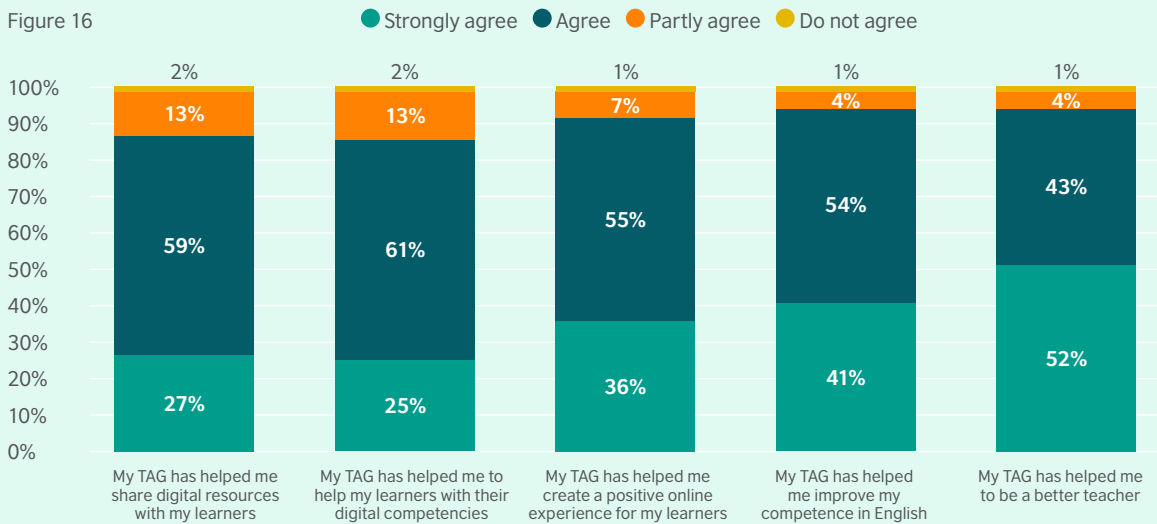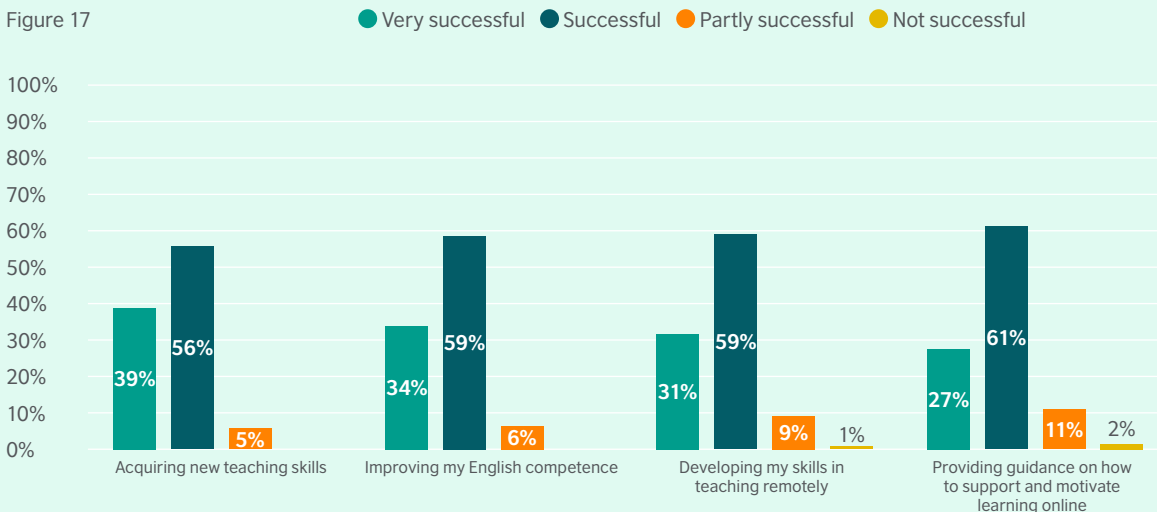In relation to the benefits of online TAGs for teachers, the participants showed a positive tendency towards them by mostly choosing to respond with 'agree' or 'strongly agree'. 86% of the teachers 'agreed' (59%) and 'strongly agreed' (27%) with the assertion that their TAG has helped them share digital resources with their learners. Similarly, 86% of the teachers considered that their TAG has helped them to help their learners with their digital competencies by expressing 'agreement' (61%) and 'strong agreement' (25%) towards this statement. Regarding the help received from the TAGs to create a positive online experience for their learners, 91% of the teachers 'agreed' and 'strongly agreed' that it did. This demonstrates strong support for the idea that there has been a knock-on effect from experiencing online tools and activities. In addition, 95% of the participants either 'agreed' (54%) or 'strongly agreed' (41%) with the TAG having helped them improve their competence in English, and 95% responded favourably towards the idea that their TAG has helped them to be a better teacher by choosing 'agree' (43%) and 'strongly agree' (52%):

See left Figure 16. Benefits of online TAGs for teachers.

Regarding the success of the TAG programme in terms of learning, the teachers were optimistic about the accomplishment of learning goals. As can be seen in figure 17, 95% reported that the programme was either 'successful' (56%) or 'very successful'

(39%) in helping them to acquire new teaching skills. 93% of the responses show a tendency to consider the programme either 'successful' (59%) or 'very successful' (34%) in improving the teachers' English competence. Likewise, 90% of the teachers classed the programme as 'successful' (59%) or 'very successful' (31%) in developing their skills in teaching remotely. Concerning the guidance given by the programme on how to support and motivate learning online, the participants classed it as 'successful' (57%) or 'very successful' (18%). When the teachers' responses are compared with those of the teacher educators (above), there is a remarkable similarity in their views on the programme:

See left Figure 17. Learning gains from the TAGs.

In terms of the teachers' confidence in using digital tools for teaching, 71% of the responses show that the participants are self-confident in their skills by either ranking them as 'high' (57%) or 'very high' (14%). Such results are significantly different from the perception of teacher educators, indicating that teacher self-assessment is higher than their rating given by teacher educators (who rated 52% of them as average):

Figure 18. Teachers' confidence in using digital tools.

Figure 18

1%   14%   57%   28%

● Very high ● High ● Average ● Low

Figure 19
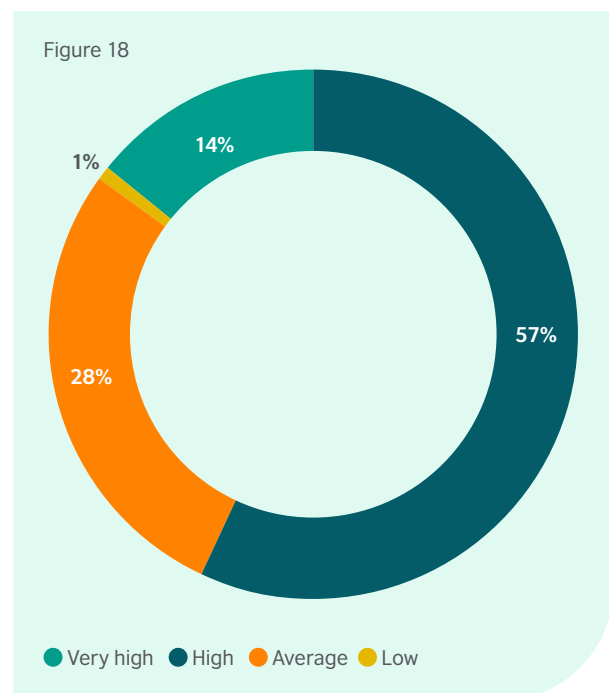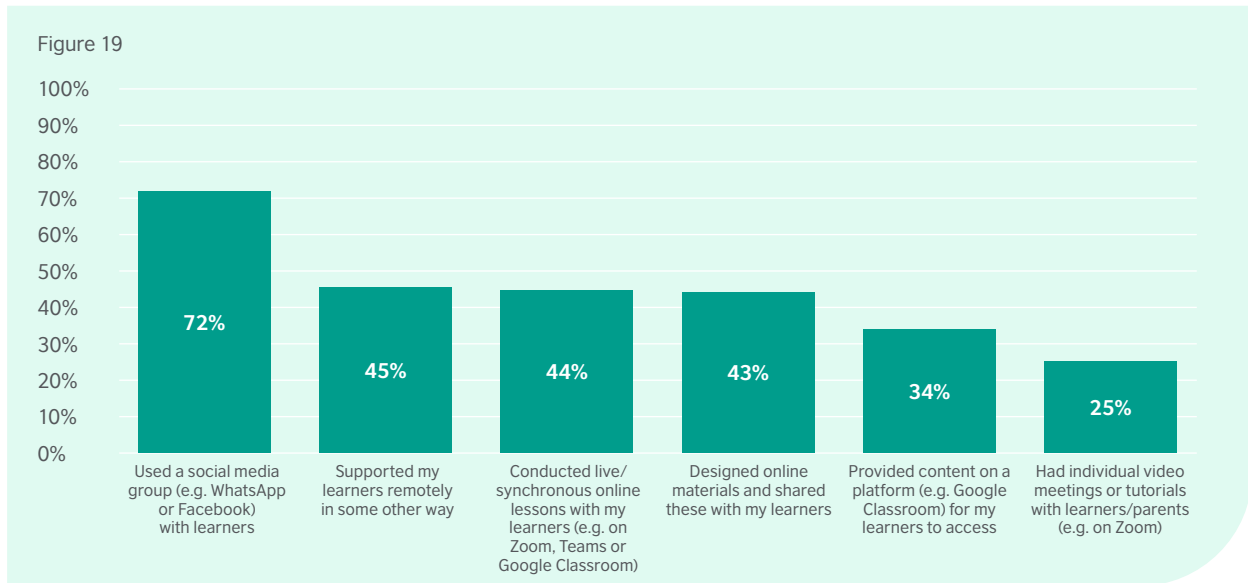
Focussing on the activities that the teachers have implemented to support their learners, the strategy with the highest rate of application (72%) is with the use of a social media group (e.g. WhatsApp or Facebook). This is much higher than other strategies, which are all used by less than 50% of the teachers'. 45% of teachers say they have supported their learners remotely in some other way. Similarly, 44% of the teachers have conducted live/synchronous online lessons (e.g. on Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Classroom), while 43% of them designed online materials and shared these with their learners. The strategies with the lowest rate of use are the provision of content on a platform for the learners to access (34%) and individual video meetings or tutorials with learners/parents (e.g. on Zoom) at 25%:

See above Figure 19. Activities teachers have used with their learners.

Regarding other strategies used by the teachers to support their learners remotely (Q8), they included the use of additional tools for interaction, supplementary activities and resources for self-learning. Many teachers had used WhatsApp to support learners. Among the extra tools they use to communicate with learners the teachers mentioned phone calls and the use of Skype, Telegram, Edmodo, email, and Facebook. The supplementary activities used by the teachers involve online quizzes and competitions through Kahoot, Nearpod and Flipgrid; while the resources include videos from educational channels or the teachers' own videos on their personal channel on YouTube.

In their answers to Q9, which refers to the characteristics that made online learning different (compared to F2F), the teachers' responses raised aspects related to infrastructure, interactions, and management of time and effort. In relation to the infrastructure, teachers stated that they need to rely more on elements that they cannot control, for example having adequate electronic devices, steady internet connection and stable electric power. Concerning interaction, teachers considered that learning online was less interactive than F2F, since there was less contact with their colleagues and the communication seemed more one-way than a two-way exchange. However, teachers also stated that in the case of introverted participants, online learning increased the possibilities for them to express themselves. Furthermore, teachers consider that learning online gave them the autonomy to manage their time and the effort they invested in learning. They said that instead of transporting themselves physically to the place where CPD training was happening, teachers had more flexibility on deciding when and how to dedicate themselves to their professional development.

Summarising the opportunities/advantages of learning online in Q10, teachers mentioned safety during times of pandemic, access to immediate resources, saving time, and the student learning experience. Teachers considered that online learning represented a safe alternative that provided the chance for them to continue learning during the outbreak of COVID-19. It allowed teachers to discover options to continue developing professionally, and to have access to a wide range of resources and materials available online. The participants stated that they had the opportunity to retrieve videos, links, and other materials while saving time on transportation and concentrating their effort on learning. For the teachers, the overall experience gave them insights into the process that learners go through while learning online, which allowed them to understand modern learning styles.

In relation to the difficulties/barriers of only being able to work online (Q11), teachers reported connectivity issues, lack of electronic devices, technical problems, and difficulties in doing online assessment of learners. In the case of internet

connection, both teachers and students faced the same challenge of not being able to access the information online due to a lack of or unstable connectivity. In such circumstances, teachers had to move to places where the connection was optimal or create a social media group to communicate with the students (e.g. Facebook or WhatsApp), and/or identify the best time of the day when the internet connection was stable in the area.

Concerning the lack of adequate electronic devices for online teaching, teachers recommended learners pair themselves with other classmates and to work together. However, there were cases in which learners came from a low socioeconomic background and were not able to afford electronic devices and there were no suitable devices to share. In these cases, teachers printed booklets to share with their students when possible. In regard to technical problems, these were faced by both teachers and learners. Teachers worked together with their colleagues to sort out the issues, while in the case of the learners, teachers had to provide additional help via phone calls, text messages, and video tutorials. In terms of online assessment, teachers faced the difficulty of providing feedback to a large number of students. To solve this, some of them used videos to provide additional guidance and feedback.

In Q12, the teachers shared their final comments and feedback on the programme. They recommended creating more CPD opportunities on online teaching strategies and e-assessment, as well as sessions focussed on teaching online CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). The survey participants also included the suggestion of issuing certificates to the participants and promoting spaces and opportunities for the exchange of teaching experiences among the teachers.

Qualitative data

The qualitative data is based on observations of recorded TAGs and focus groups with teacher educators and teachers. There was also a focus group with 'digi gurus' (who provide pedagogically focussed IT support), an interview with programme managers and an interview with a senior trainer (from the TAG teacher educators). The teacher educators had been facilitating the TAGs F2F last year and had switched to remote working this year, so provided key insights into the switch to online delivery. Focus groups included teacher educators from English focussed TAGs and also one teacher from a Maths/Science TAG. What follows are the main themes evident from this data set.

Aims of the programme

It is not an explicit aim of the programme to support teachers to be more confident and effective in the remote delivery environment. However, the promotion of digital competence and 21st century skills are clearly important elements of the existing programme that help in the remote learning environment (Roe, 2020). The qualitative data below concentrates on the effectiveness of remote PD in these E-TAGs. However, there are also comments on whether involvement in the TAG has had an effect on the way that teachers have worked with their learners during the pandemic. In other words, we are interested in whether the remote delivery of their PD has had an impact on both their experience of PD, and their understanding and practice.

The survey data shows high levels of satisfaction with the E-TAGs. Overall, the qualitative data shows that aims of the programme have been met for many teachers, under difficult circumstances: '*we have adapted to the E-TAGs and the teachers are happy with the modules*'. However, there are some obvious challenges, and the following sections aim to provide a balanced picture of both constraints and affordances in remote PD.

Overall evaluation of online TAG sessions

In the qualitative data there are a good number of positive comments about TAG involvement; both teachers and teacher educators are very positive about the programme and towards the BC's contribution and involvement. Particularly in this difficult period of time, TAGs have been a site of emotional and social support (beyond the programme aims as detailed above). Teachers valued the opportunity to work with teachers from other schools in Egypt. In general terms, comments in focus groups support the survey data and show that remotely delivered TAGs are valued and important sites for PD: '*that's the main thing. It's a wonderful thing to speak with other people without holding your breath with a mask!*'.

It is important though to provide a caveat at this point. Certainly, the feedback in the qualitative data (as in the survey above) is very positive about TAG groups. However, the teachers who have responded to the survey and volunteered for focus groups are probably more 'connected' and used to the online environment than those who have not responded to the survey. This may explain why the scores are generally higher in the teacher survey than the teacher educator survey (in that the teacher educators may know that a good number of teachers have not been able to engage). In later sections, we have also tried to include comments about 'other teachers' who may have had a less positive experience.

Alongside the more positive comments, there are more mixed comments. Teacher educators said that it was difficult to motivate teachers to make the switch to remote learning: *'it was hard to convince them … to spend some time online with you know, someone already they already know … but this is something virtual … it is harder.* There are plenty of comments which suggest that online TAGs are not seen as good as F2F: *'it is one of the disadvantages of online learning … because people want to see a person and to contact face to face …they don't like the online learning as a whole'.* The following is a typical explanation:

'I want to say that the electronic can't be effective mostly with my teachers. The most important thing with my trainees last year was the real interaction between me and them all …but the electronic tags didn't allow me the participate with them all because of the limit time of the session … in my opinion these E-TAGs tags will not be as effective as what we did in the last TAGs.'

However, what appears to have happened in many TAG groups is that if they tried it and stuck with it, they got over their initial reluctance and enjoyed it and part of this derives from the teacher educator's willingness to convince them that the effort is worth it: *'Yes, I convinced them using Zoom chat rooms. It's wonderful … So they love the idea a lot'.* However, it is also the case that some teacher educators who ran teacher-centred TAG sessions F2F, were not able to make the transition and keep things teacher-centred online.

Some teacher educators saw E-TAGs as more flexible for the teachers: *'because then you can take your TAG while you are under your blanket, it's easy for you… ladies can cook, and I can hear them. So great, an advantage for them'.* This element of convenience for those that get online is appreciated: *'Yeah, they loved that they have that choice. At the time that is convenient to them. They love it'.*

A lot of comments suggest that teacher educators provide emotional support as well as pedagogic and technical support. They need to deal with and respond to high levels of frustration: *'many of the teachers were not happy'.* This support even extended to other teacher educators who were much happier with the previous F2F delivery:

'But she said, 'I'm going to quit. I'm not going to facilitate any more TAGs. I'm not using technology with anyone, that's it' … so I think the emotional support is more valuable than just having the information about technology … because the frustration of not knowing the information. I'm a teacher, I have 15 or 20 years of experience. And I'm sitting in front of this button, and I don't know what it's going to do.'

In addition, for the teachers working with their students, there has been a marked 'pivot' in TAGs towards digital methodology and tools. Sometimes synchronous meetings are possible and sometimes tools like WhatsApp are used as more of an asynchronous delivery tool.

The overall position would be to say that they would prefer a mix of F2F and remote TAGs (rather than exclusively remote or F2F forms of PD). This supports the survey data which clearly shows a preference for F2F but also a positive evaluation of the current remote delivery. Teachers understand that this is the only choice at the moment and understand that they need to adapt.

Size and structure

The groups vary considerably in size. Many of the TAGs have about 30 members and others have fou or five. Some of the teacher educators have two E-TAGs but most have just one. It is hard to say what is a perfect size for a TAG. Perhaps a TAG which is largely WhatsApp based can accommodate 30+ but this is too many for an online Zoom based session.

The new two-part structure was working well in previous F2F TAGs as one teacher educator explains:

'In this last phase there are two TAGs per month per month. One is theoretical, which we present the slides and explain and discuss the features…and then the second TAG is microteaching, one or two teachers are chosen to present a micro teaching for ten minutes. And then we have a discussion and feedback and suggest an action plan.'

Teacher educators spoke of promoting levels of engagement (Engage, Learn, Act and Impact). There was strong evidence that the first three levels are present in TAGs. The 'impact' is more difficult to evaluate, although there is evidence that the second TAG session (with its emphasis on more practical implementation) is seeing teachers bring evidence of at least some successful implementation of TAG-generated ideas and materials. However, evidence from a senior trainer would suggest, based on her observations of about 30 E-TAGs, that the application side of things has been impacted: *'what is happening*

is that the application part is just diminished ...they are not willing, yeah, to do an online session in front of their colleagues or they are not ready yet'. From the side of the teacher educator, they don't see people who are encouraged. 'So they kept just doing the input sessions ...I have observed about, about like, 30 E-TAGs. ...only one session was an application'.

Content and modules

Teachers in focus groups spoke overwhelmingly favourably about the TfS modules. They found them understandable, useful and relevant for their needs. The modules were selected by programme managers in Cairo and were based on needs analyses of the teachers. Teachers were supported by a 150-page reflective journal ('Extend. Embed. Enhance'). The TfS materials were generally felt to be appropriate and informative. In general terms, the TfS modules are more focussed on methodology and linguistic competence but there are certainly some 'knock-on' benefits in supporting teachers in teaching all skills remotely while also keeping learners safe online.

Lesson planning remains a core TAG activity with plenty of evidence that teachers appreciate the focus on materials, tasks and examples from usable materials: *'they are relevant to my context'*. Speaking is seen as a major gain in involvement in TAG groups. There is some evidence that breakout rooms are well used to promote discussion and sharing in TAG sessions.

There is a strong developing focus in TAGs on 21st century skills, especially collaboration and creativity. Teacher educators reported that teachers in the TAG groups are now more enthusiastic about integrating 21st century skills in their teaching. One teacher educator said that he believed that '*teachers have started to change their way of teaching and making learning English more exciting for their students*'; another said that '*students now enjoy learning English more and more and now they get more opportunities to use it'*. There is also an important focus on teaching large classes, which is based on teachers' real needs:

'As you know, in Egypt, we suffer from this problem ... like we can say that we have big sized classes in which we have to deal with many, many, many students, and how to afford the needs, how to accommodate the material you have, and then deal with the needs. This is an issue which we sometimes face, and we have to find together some solutions to such a problem.'

In summary, the topics covered are perceived as helpful by teachers. They are broadly seen as relevant to their context, as well as their needs, levels and interests.

Initial difficulties

There have been significant initial difficulties in running TAGs remotely and also for teachers working to support their own students. One of the 'digi gurus' captures this nicely, talking about supporting her teachers:

'We have had about eight TAGs, so far. We have them but it's not easy at first. At first you have to make them convinced that we have no other choice. We have to use technology right now. Even if you have little bit of issues in your home or you have lack of technology, we need to try.'

Another teacher educator talks about the initial difficulty of working online and the growing pains involved:

'My TAG group, before going online, I had three groups ... each has 30 teachers ... some of them in villages having moved to work online. It was so horrible. I tried to convince them. At first they were not convinced. But, you know, step by step, they were convinced that nothing's going to happen, other than this. We were obliged to do this. So they began. Not all of them attend, but the majority do.'

The remote TAGs have provided a useful forum for talking about teachers' difficulties and teething problems and for finding ways to support their students remotely. There were plenty of accounts of initial problems with the shift to remote learning in the focus groups. These challenges have been particularly difficult in rural areas of Egypt (see also Aguliera and Nightengale-Lee 2020 for issues with rural contexts). Many schools were closed in December 2020 and have not re-opened at the time of writing. The shift online for teachers has not been easy:

'It is difficult for remote teachers to evaluate if the students are understanding the content or what they are being asked to do ...teachers have to rely on the reaction of a few students or chat responses. This means it is difficult to know if the session is going well.'

For students without much access to the internet at least there are two TV channels: 'Our School' delivered by the MoE (one for primary and preparatory) and another channel for the secondary stage. Programming is also available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnxju7_Ug6VbC6en6tBL6Aw/featured

Teachers have encouraged their students to use this during school closure. Moreover, for those teachers who can solve issues of access, there is a general positivity about what is possible when teaching online.

Attendance and motivation

In general terms, Egyptian teachers on the NTTP are not well prepared for communication online in TAGs. Attrition and attendance levels confirm that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on teacher engagement and development. Many teachers do not have sufficient access to online resources (either because of problems with equipment and/or access). Even those teachers who do attend TAGs spoke of colleagues who have been left behind: '*There are supposed to be 54. But not all of them attend the virtual meetings on Zoom, mostly due to internet connection. So the average is about 20 to 25*'. Most teachers in focus groups also reported the attendance for remote TAGs was not as high as in F2F TAGs. Not so many teachers attended and there were a good number of the teachers who started the synchronous session and then dropped out. It was difficult for TAG leaders to know why this was happening, although connection issues were probably the biggest factor. There has been negotiation of suitable times for online meetings and teacher educators said they had encouraged attendance through reminders. TAG leaders also say that teachers need positive reinforcement: '*they need Wow, you are so great today, some motivations, some phrases*'. Attendance was better in some governorates than others: '*a lot of teacher educators are telling me that the ratio of attendance is very low. Yeah. Especially in remote areas like, like, for example, Sinai…*'.

One of the problems for some teacher educators was that they didn't know how to record attendance. This is one of the reasons why the BC has not been able to get accurate data about attendance for these E-TAGS: '*COVID-19 has made it more difficult to get accurate records of attendance*'.

The data shows a mixed picture in terms of the flexibility that online TAGS offer. For some teacher educators it is beneficial: '*Okay, you are working most of the day, … so after you come back home at nine o'clock or 8pm and can start our TAG the time you want …It's easy for you*'. Other data shows that this flexibility has not been enough to keep attendance levels high. Much of this is probably explained by the fatigue with online working as well as lack of access.

There may be a need to incentivise TAG membership further. Teachers appreciate getting certificates for involvement in a first cycle but once they have this certificate, further certificates are not so valued: '*now they have phase one and they already have a certificate with the British Council name on it, so, 'what is there for me''*. Closer and more regular monitoring from MoE would appear to help: '*when some representatives from the minister of education came to the TAG, they felt that is a benefit*'. Another suggested that more involvement from MoE would help seems to boost attendance and reduce dropout rates:

'*So we had a visit from one of the representatives of the MoE for one of my TAGs. The second one my TAGs. I had the full number! No one disappeared! Everyone came. Brilliant.*'

In summary remote PD requires higher levels of motivation, which many teachers do not have: '*Online, CPD needs much more motivation than face to face*'.

Teachers' engagement with digital platforms for their teaching

Teachers certainly have difficulties engaging when they have poor internet connection: '*That's why teachers suffer from lack of connection. They don't have the proper computer, laptop or smartphone to help them look online*'. However, there are some other issues that arise too. There is initial resistance to working remotely and some teachers feel that they can 'get by' with watching YouTube videos or making use of open educational resources (OER):

'*It is not as good as F2F. It is harder to convince them. They say 'I can watch it on YouTube' or 'No, I'm not obligated to be with you'. I had to convince them each and every time that we are delivering new things. And the interaction between us online - that is the good thing. You cannot have that on YouTube …I have to convince them of continuing to participate in the TAGs.*'

There was some reported use of both Zoom and more recently MS Teams in supporting teachers synchronously in TAGs. This had led to teachers feeling more confident with synchronous online delivery with their own students because of their TAG experience with Zoom sessions. The teacher educators reported that teachers now have more experience of working online and are getting used to navigating information on the shared platform.

Social media is well used on the NTTP programme. Posts to the NTTP Facebook's page from trainers encourage comments and sharing from teachers. There are a variety of videos posted, as well as polls and links. The senior trainers offer support, advice (both videos and posts) through this medium.

There is some evidence that teachers have supported their students online, but this is very patchy, and the majority of students have not been supported. Some schools have invested in platforms (usually some form of LMS) and this has helped but they are in the minority. However, in some cases the engagement with Zoom as a synchronous platform in TAGs has had knock-on benefits to both teacher's students and also in some cases their colleagues. It has also led to more parental involvement around homework tasks. It is also worth pointing out that some teachers have gone on to set up WhatsApp groups with their students, seeing this as the most effective way to communicate with them.

Interaction

The synchronous Microsoft Teams or Zoom sessions are working well for at least some TAGs. They provide the basis for significant PD interaction, which is a mix of teacher educator presentation, teacher mini-presentation, and teacher to teacher educator dialogue. The two-part sequence adopted means that interaction is much more varied in the second meeting (the applied/practical TAG), where there is some evidence of the use of breakout rooms. Overall though, it is hard to characterise the E-TAGs as dialogic as there is little evidence of peer-to-peer interaction (in the main room or break-out rooms). However, teacher educators are planning to do more of this in the future and is best seen as inevitable as they get used to the platforms and their functionality.

Some of the problems experienced in running synchronous sessions will be familiar to anyone who has run online classes. When trainers/teachers elicit written messages (i.e. responses through the Zoom text function), it can take a few minutes for them to appear on the teacher screen. There are also observable difficulties with elicitation, wait-time and cueing/turn-taking. Observations of TAGs showed many instances where connectivity had the effect of slowing interaction (with a great deal of repeating and 'can you hear me now', as well as misunderstandings). It is perhaps difficult to attribute these all to the remote TAG environment but certainly that was the impression given by the recordings. Taking all this into account, the shift from one hour to 90 minutes is pragmatic, in that it allows more time for interaction.

Most participants do not have their camera switched on. This lack of visual information and its lack of correspondence with verbal cues, means it is more difficult for the teacher to establish and maintain positive rapport with the students or audience (social and cognitive presence).

Balancing theory and practice

The current structure of the course and the sequence of having one more theoretical or input driven TAG followed by a more practical or applied TAG was working well in previous F2F versions. There was some evidence that this split is still appreciated both by teacher and teacher educators:

'In the theoretical session, I'm giving them some information about certain topics. And I discussed them, and I divided them into rooms, and they discussed their opinions about what they have been given as material. I listen to them … In the practical TAG, I'm a little bit monitoring and guiding because they did most of the work, which I enjoyed very much. So I'm a monitor. I'm a guide, a facilitator and an instructor at the same time.'

The teachers appreciate the chance to share ideas and feedback. The second TAG session should provide opportunities for real dialogue and exchange, as well as reflection and planning:

'And then we started with the school year … with our teachers again, which is year two. And now we are giving them two TAGs per month. One is theoretical, which we present the slides and explain and discuss the features, the ideas … then the second TAG is microteaching. One, two teachers are chosen to present a micro teaching for ten minutes. And then we have a discussion and feedback and suggest an action plan.'

Learning gains

The data collected from this iteration of the E-TAGs in Egypt is consistent with previously collected post-course observation data. Interviews and survey data confirm reported learning gains for teachers that are similar in nature to those learning gains from F2F TAGs. Evidence from teachers in focus groups support the idea that there have been tangible learning gains. There have been new ideas and skills, opportunities for reflection, more productive and enjoyable lessons for students, increased motivation, incorporation of new techniques and ideas into their teaching. Here is a selection of typical quotations:

'NTTP has helped me change my ideas because I have a good habit to reflect on my teaching and find ways to improve myself … in my TAG, we share experiences, materials and knowledge. I am more adventurous because of the programme.'

'I have new energy towards teaching and learning.'

'I think I became any more systematic. I think more of the steps in something like that.'

'I have the skills now to make my lesson more enjoyable for the students and I have more strategies to make the classes productive.'

'The TAG discussion really developed my teaching and can make the class more interesting with games. The students are more active and enjoy speaking more in the class.'

There were practical ideas that helped teachers cope with students who were not motivated to learn but there were examples of learning from their students about online tools and games: *'We now live in-touch with our children…. they are better than us in using online games and on using technology'*.

Digital skills

The MoE acted quickly to switch to distance education during the COVID 19 lockdown, however, most of the teachers were not familiar with digital tools and distant teaching. As one teacher described: '*My school lacks digital thinking. Learners and teachers all have low-tech, and we are not used to working with technology*'. The biggest challenge is that many learners do not have sufficient access or skills: '*I wanted to include all my students and encourage them, but they did not always want to work, and it's been hard*'.

To some degree, one of the upsides of the pivot to remote PD and online teaching may have been a crash-course in the kind of technological or 21st century skills that both the teachers and teacher educators had highly rated as future learning areas (in the first year NTTP report in 2019). Certainly, the modules of this phase of TfS Egypt foreground a technology focus, which may not have been the case before. Such a focus on technology was always appropriate to the teachers and their context but is even more important in the current context.

In some cases, TAGs have provided a good forum for the discussion of digital options. Being able to experience digital tools in a TAG setting has certainly had an impact on their use with learners with examples of quizzes and interactive tools common and embedded in task cycles with students. There are also some interesting examples of teachers being resourceful and working with the technological constraints they faced. It is also interesting that some teacher educators have some success with the argument that online learning is a good additional tool for them despite some of the constraints: '*But this is something virtual. So it lacks that interaction that they love during the TAG … but some of them now are convinced. That's why they attend you know, I tried to address this using some activities online and telling them that they will be able to use this in their classrooms because we are going to blend*'.

There is good use of WhatsApp and there are some instances of teachers supporting their learners through this platform - although this is limited to homework tasks, advice and www links. In addition, teachers have used particular tools that have been demonstrated in TAGs and incorporated them into their teaching.

However, there are some barriers reported for other teachers. There is a serious issue with attitude and mistrust of technology: '*They need to learn more about digital literacy so that we can use internet connections, but if they feel that they are not safe on the internet, they won't use it most*' and '*There are hackers who will take over my data on my cell phone, so I would not*'. As stated earlier in this case study, it is undoubtedly the case that the focus group may represent teachers who are more positive about technology and digital skills than would be typical of most Egyptian primary teachers and these teachers are fully aware that many of their colleagues are not making the transition, not just the older ones: '*the problem is in use internet …are not very good at dealing with the technology … we are starting it anyway. I have some colleagues and they are not all old, they are young, but they can't use Zoom… and others are not interested*'. Many teachers do not have email. Teachers and teacher educators think that more training is necessary from the MoE in digital skills.

Digi gurus

The involvement of IT experts, 'digi gurus,' has been a very successful addition to the programme. They work to support different numbers of teacher educators (between 30 and 250 of them). Teacher educators made many supportive comments and had valued having someone to guide them and offer advice. The gains in digital support undoubtedly filter down to teachers and then to students. They communicate and offer advice both to whole groups but also to individuals too. This is seen as beneficial because sometimes teachers experience a face-threat when revealing that they are not very technically proficient in front of the whole TAG group: '*we could communicate individually… if someone asked me in private, because some of them feel shy …so I can give them what they need*'. The digi gurus offer advice and help with demos available to the whole group: '*I prepare a demo … I collect most of the questions we hear from teacher educators and answer their questions on the whole. They are committed, professional and resourceful.*'

Opportunities for reflection

There were comments from both teacher educators and teachers that a reflective culture is being fostered that is learner-centred and often focussed on the use of appropriate digital tools. The two-part TAG structure is designed to make it more likely that there are spaces for reflection (both between the sessions and during the session):

'So we will have like some reflection on what we did already with them … they go and apply. And once they apply, we give them some feedback in order to improve their performance and reflect on what they learned, and how to translate this to the classroom setting.'

In terms of short-term outcomes, the data confirms improved awareness and knowledge of TAG modules (e.g. pronunciation and lesson planning). In terms of more medium-term impact there is evidence of a reflective culture being fostered through TAGs, especially in areas of materials use and adaptation and technology.

However, observations of TAGs do not show many examples of reflection or 'application' in action.

The ability to share screens and use video may help in encouraging more reflection about digital tools and platforms: '*They show material, the data, they show something … They show pictures, which they speak about … they share the screen with us, and we could see everything very well … and then we discuss*'.

There was variation in the recordings of TAG meetings. There were examples of more open discussion and these were appreciated by teachers. Reviewing the recorded synchronous sessions there is a contrast between TAG sessions where there is clearly open and more dialogic reflection and others where the trainer was quite dominant and where teachers were involved it could be described as mini presentation rather than being dialogic in nature or encouraging reflection. There also may be perceived pressure for trainers to cover the TfS material and to complete the course at the expense of reflection. Overall, the switch online has certainly reduced opportunities for reflection and application of ideas.

Each TAG will be assessed by a portfolio, where the teacher should have a record of his/her performance based on the content delivered through the TAGs. For example, if she/he wants to focus on particular strategies that have been adopted they need to provide appropriate evidence of his/her grasp of what has been implemented. This kind of portfolio has been shown to encourage reflection (see Gulzar and Barratt, 2019).

Video

Video has been shown to support reflection (Mann et al., 2019) and there are instances of video use in the dataset, and this has the potential to be used more widely. One reason why it may not be more widespread is that sharing video requires great bandwidth and uses more data. Despite this, focus groups confirm that these are valued by teachers: '*we watch the video and then we discuss what happened … the classroom activities*'. Some of these videos were local and some were from other teaching contexts: '*I also liked the videos of other teachers in Asian teachers and something like that, they're very interesting, any models interesting*'.

There are positive comments about videos that are shared in both the survey data and the focus group data. There are also examples of teacher educators using screencast videos to demonstrate how to use features of Zoom, which is the most popular synchronous platform in Egypt: '*Teachers are sharing links that helped them interact effectively with me. I also make videos to show them how to deal with Zoom as joining and creating a meeting. They make use of these videos to interact with their students*'.

Recommendations

There have been several reports now which establish that TAGs work well in Egypt (e.g. Borg, 2020). Teachers appreciate working together and TAGs are worth fostering and supporting. Considering the various constraints, the NTTP programme is well run and delivered. The data shows high levels of satisfaction with the aims, content and delivery. What follows reviews the data to articulate possible areas of discussion and highlights areas for future planning and research.

Increasing digital literacy for teachers

Although many teachers working in TAGs are increasing their digital literacy, it is probably necessary to develop an e-course for all teachers in Egypt. At the moment there are high levels of mistrust of the online environment. Teachers need to have a basic understanding of what is safe and secure on the internet and which tools and resources might help them in their work with students. For TAG participants a short course which provides an induction to the Zoom platform before starting the course would be preferable (see Brereton, 2021 for a guide). Efforts should be made to encourage greater use of social media platforms like Facebook. Only about 80 of the 22,000 teachers are regular contributors on the NTTP Facebook platform. This might be linked to mistrust of the internet.

More training for online teaching

All data sets point to the importance of creating more CPD opportunities to enhance online teaching strategies and especially e-assessment. There is also a necessity to include input for primary school teachers about how to teach CLIL online.

Hybrid or flipped TAGs

There are comments from teacher educators which suggest that a hybrid model or flipped model might be worth employing for TAGs. Beyond the current pandemic, it is worth trying different 'blends' to find out whether teachers would prefer a mix of F2F and remote TAGs (rather than exclusively remote or F2F forms of PD). If teacher educators are going to stay online they may need further training on making the second TAG session reflective. However, this will depend on whether teachers are willing to make the transition too.

Technical support

It is worth increasing the number of digi gurus - most of them are dealing with a high number of teachers-educators in addition to running their TAG. One digi-guru is supporting 250 teacher educators (although not all of them ask questions).

Further incentivise TAG involvement and attendance

There should be further discussion with the MoE about ways to incentivise attendance. Egyptian teachers like to have a certificate from the BC, and this is valued but a clearer relationship between meeting KPIs, TAG membership and portfolios could be explored. It may be worth considering an e-platform for teachers to upload and share portfolios (especially if they include usable materials and resources). Perhaps such a portfolio could play a more recognised role in promotion and/or at least certification as a professional instructor in Egypt.

Ensure more MoE interest in TAGs

Teacher educators feel that more 'visits' to TAGs from Ministry officials and supervisors would help encourage higher numbers to continue to attend TAGs. At the moment, there is evidence that teachers may simply attend, switch off their camera, mute and then not play any real role in the TAG session.

Tracking the impact of TAGs

There is a need for further research that follows up TAG engagement in order to establish whether professional relationships and networks carry on beyond the programmed PD. Further work can be done on tracking the progress and satisfaction levels of TAG participants in Egypt. It will also be interesting to see whether the pivot to remote learning will have knock-on effects on teachers' capacity to work in a more flipped or blended way with their students. It would be good to conduct further research to consider whether the two-part structure (90 minutes for part 1 theoretical and 90 minutes for part 2 more applied) results in greater collaboration and group talk of a constructivist nature. At the moment the 'applied' part has been set back by the move to remote PD.

Video

Use of video should be further encouraged in TAGs. Mercer et al. (2017: 9) point to the particular value of video in coming towards a more dialogic and collaborative version of the relationship between theory and practice and allowing teachers to consider alternatives in a collaborative way.

Case 3: Teaching for Success in Occupied Palestinian Territory 2020-2021

This section of the report concentrates on TAGs in OPT. It examines the impact of an increased emphasis on remote learning for the TAGs (in terms of both programme content and delivery channel) in the latest phase of the TfS teacher development programme. The data in this report was collected from December 2020 to March 2021.

Background and context (including aims and programme details)

The TAGs featured in this case study are part of an on-going PD programme. They are sometimes called PALTAGs by the teachers and teacher educators in Palestine. TfS is the BC's approach to teacher development in state education systems and informs the PD programme for teachers in Palestine (see https://www.britishcouncil.ps/en/teaching-success).

Such programmes aim to ensure that teachers have access to high-quality CPD opportunities, so that they can improve their own practice and their learners' success. As such, TfS is based on current research into effective continuing professional development. There are two main research-based findings that drive this vision:

• Improving the quality of teaching has the most impact on improving the outcomes of learners.

• CPD is the most effective way to improve the quality of teaching.

In Palestine, The BC has developed a strong working partnership with both MoE of the OPT and UNRWA in order to provide TAGs, which help meet these goals.

Although TfS (OPT) is relevant to teachers of all subjects, the TAGs analysed here all feature teachers of English. For these teachers, TAGs are aimed at both enhancing language competence and methodology. In response to the global pandemic, the modules in this phase of TfS (OPT) foreground technology as a focus, which might not have been the case before. Such a focus on technology was always appropriate to the teachers and their context, but is even more important in the current context.

In supporting TAGs, there are both local teacher educators and non-local teacher educators (currently from Romania). Some non-local teacher educators are working directly with teachers. In various reports, and indeed in focus groups, teacher educators are variously called 'teacher educators', 'e-moderators' or 'facilitators', partly because these terms all say something different about the role they play: TAGs are online, they lead the group, and their role is to foster and encourage dialogue.

The UNRWA teacher educators who were involved in previous phases were not able to facilitate the current phase of TAGs and so non-locals were recruited; the local teacher educators have not had the capacity to facilitate TAGs this year due to extra commitments/responsibilities brought on by the pandemic and partial school closures. In MoE areas too there is also some use of non-local teacher educators, who are working as mentors/trainers, for local teacher educators who are facilitating their own TAGs. Mentors tend to take a backseat in the actual sessions but work with the local teacher to reflect on the progress and management of the TAGs afterwards. Local teacher educators are each responsible for one TAG. This is actually part of their official role with the MoE as a 'supervisor'. Leading a TAG can be seen as part of their overall responsibilities (running different training/development courses for teachers and completing yearly evaluations of teachers).

One of the reasons why this BC/MoE/UNRWA planned programme was put into action was that there were several perceived problems with English teaching in OPT. These problems, which were outlined in a research report (British Council 2019b), can be summarised as follows:

• *Attitude towards CPD*: Teachers expressed a negative or impassive attitude towards CPD. Some teachers felt that CPD is something which 'is done to them' and does not meet their needs or interests.

• *Workload:* Many teachers have a heavy workload, teaching many classes per week - often large mixed ability classes. Particularly the male teachers have more than one job and engage in tutoring. There are

typically low salaries in this area.

• *Classroom methodology and motivation:* Many teachers teach English through the medium of Arabic and speaking skills are often taught inadequately or not at all. There is also limited use of group work, cooperative and inclusive learning methods. Many teachers use traditional methods of lecturing without engaging students in the learning process. Most of the attention is on grammar and not much access is provided to high quality supplementary resources.

• *21st century skills:* A lack of access to technology is another impediment to learning English. Phase 2 (see below) put more focus on this than in Phase 1.

As well as these key areas for training, there was a lack of skills in adapting textbooks, as well as a lack of evidence of the promotion of critical thinking skills. In fact, there was only one textbook available which was usually strictly followed. Teachers lacked skills in assessment practice, relying almost entirely on summative assessment techniques.

In terms of the history of TAGs in OPT, there are some useful publications. The first is a 'Teaching for Success Occupied Palestinian Territories: Project Report 2018-2019' (British Council, 2019b). The second is the work done by Simon Borg (see Borg et al., 2020). Summarising these reports:

Phase 1 - Began in September 2017. The first eight-month phase involved 44 TAGs and 780 teachers of English in Grades 5 to 12. At the end of the first phase, there was also a PALTAG Symposium. The first phase provided limited training for the teacher educators involved. In the first phase, TAGs were held once a month for two hours and were more like workshops (compared with subsequent phases). A 'PALTAG Facebook group' was used to foster interaction among teachers, beyond the actual sessions.

Phase 2 - This ran for six months (from September 2018) and was smaller in scale than the first phase. There were 14 TAGs (each led by a supervisor/teacher educator). A total of 210 teachers were enrolled. Phase 2 had more of a CPD strategy and started to have more elements of online training. Materials were adopted from the BC's TfS catalogue. Sessions were led by an e-moderator. Teachers were encouraged to be more active (e.g. they took it in turns to deliver a ten-minute presentation based on the application of new activities or tasks that had been introduced in the TAG). In this phase, WhatsApp groups were also set up to encourage more interaction and sharing beyond the synchronous sessions in addition to ongoing Facebook elements.

In Phase 2, the following sequence was used for the TAGs: general discussion of any problems; issues and questions with any part of the course; individual teacher presentations to share innovative classroom practices; whole-group discussion of online teaching modules and their application in the classroom; action planning where teachers develop a plan or series of steps for what they might do in their classrooms before the next TAG (Borg et al., 2020). As we will see, this pattern is very similar to the online TAGs observed in 2021.

Survey data

In terms of the ratings the teachers gave to their experience of being part of a TAG, 95% of the participants were positive about it by ranking it either 'Excellent' (60%) or 'Good' (35%), as can be seen in the following figure.

Figure 20. Participants' perceptions on being part of TAG.

Figure 20

Excellent • Good • Moderate

4%
35%
60%

Figure 21

Do not agree　Partly agree　Agree　Strongly agree

Being in an online TAG has been a challenging process compared with 'face-to-face' TAGs
- 6%
- 13%
- 60%
- 21%

The TAG has provided resources and materials that I need to teach online
- 2%
- 19%
- 60%
- 19%

'Face–to–face' TAGs are more effective than online TAGs
- 13%
- 13%
- 27%
- 48%

I have enjoyed working with other teachers online
- 2%
- 6%
- 56%
- 35%

Figure 22

Strongly agree　Agree　Partly agree　Do not agree

My TAG has helped me share digital resources with my learners
- 2%
- 21%
- 52%
- 25%

My TAG has helped me to help my learners with their digital competencies
- 27%
- 56%
- 17%

My TAG has helped me create a positive online experience for my learners
- 2%
- 10%
- 69%
- 19%

My TAG has helped me improve my competence in English
- 17%
- 69%
- 15%

My TAG has helped me to be a better teacher
- 17%
- 56%
- 27%

Figure 23

Very successful　Successful　Partly successful

Acquiring new teaching skills
- 23%
- 69%
- 8%

Improving my English competence
- 19%
- 58%
- 23%

Developing my skills in teaching remotely
- 13%
- 69%
- 19%

Providing guidance on how to support and motivate learning online
- 19%
- 65%
- 17%
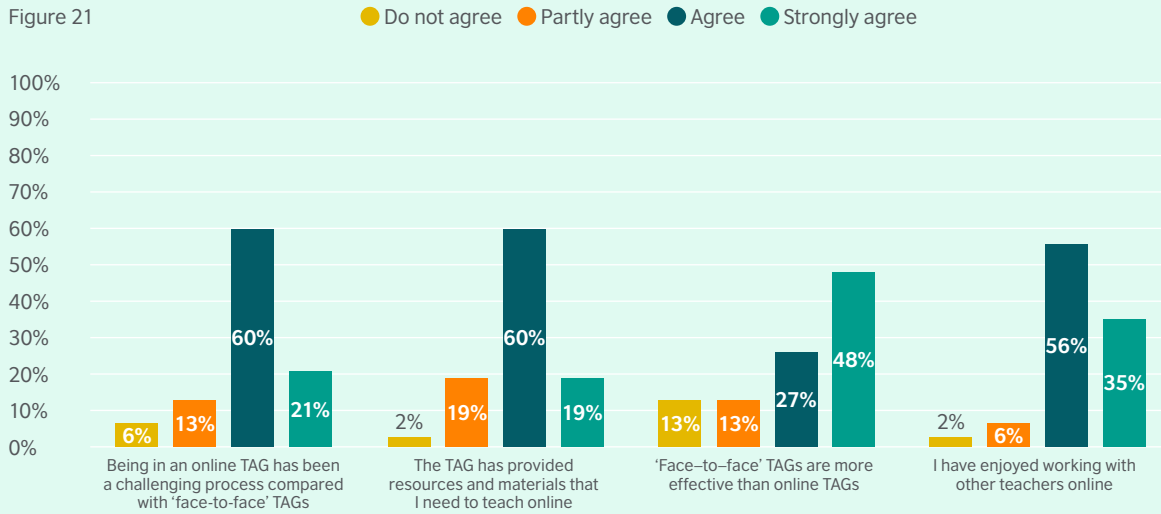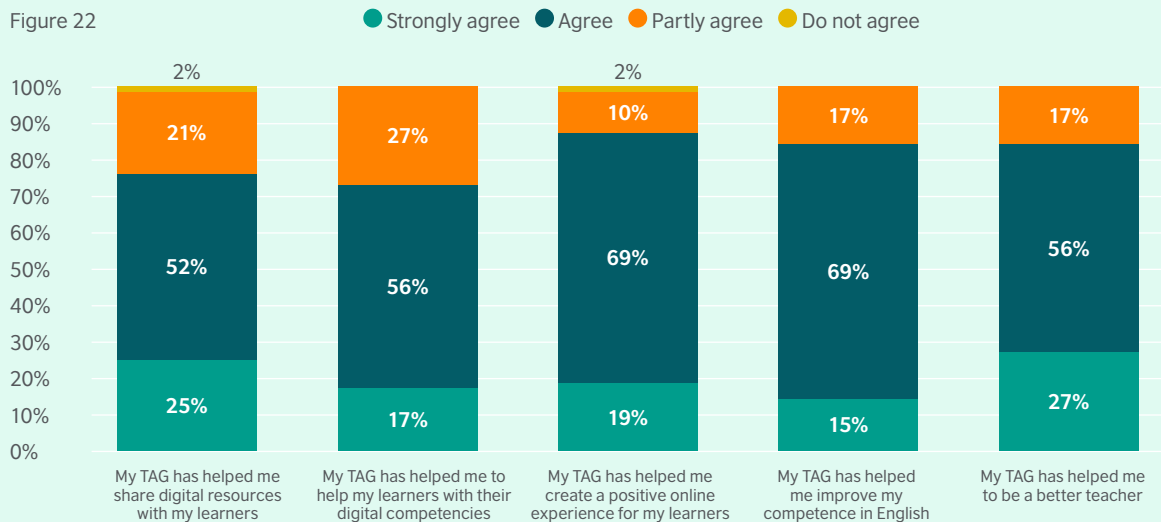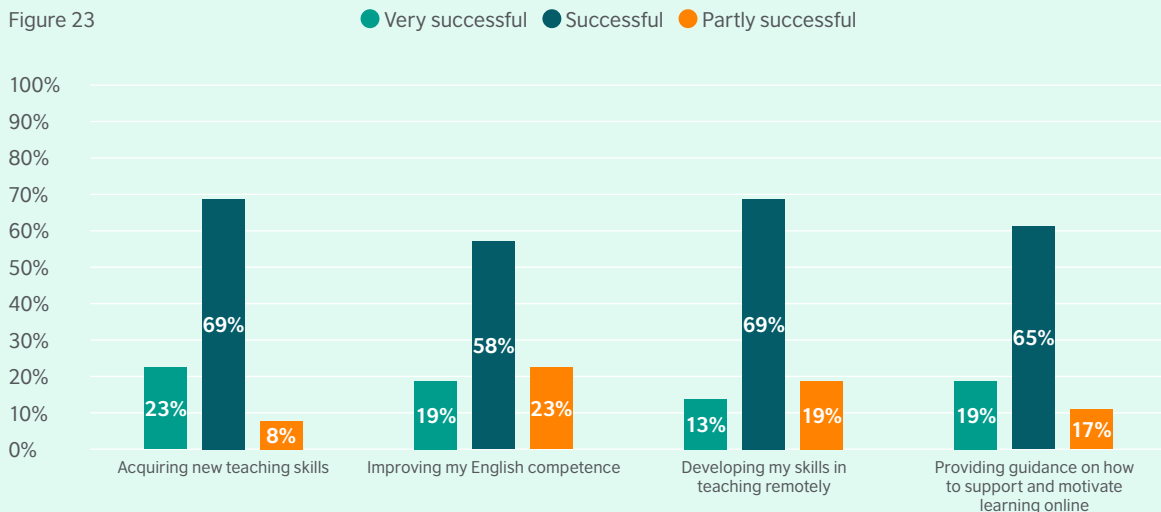
Focussing on the teachers' experience of belonging to an online TAG, 60% of them agreed with the statement that being online has been a challenging process compared with F2F TAGs (with a further 21% 'strongly agreeing'). Despite considering their online participation a challenge, teachers were mostly positive about the remote TAG groups. The highest percentage of respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the TAG has provided resources and materials that they need to teach online (79%), and that they have enjoyed working with other teachers online (91% 'agree' and 'strongly agree'). Another positive rating was for the assertion that F2F TAGs are more effective than online TAGs, to which 48% of the teachers 'strongly agreed' (and 27% 'agreed'):

See left Figure 21. Teachers' experience of belonging to an online TAG.

Concerning the benefits of online TAGs, more than 50% of the teachers perceived an advantage from such groups by choosing the option 'agree' in each statement. As can be seen below, there are only a very small number who 'do not agree' with these statements. The ratios of 'strongly agree' and 'partly agree' are fairly evenly split. The statements in which the highest rate of respondents agreed were about the help they received to create a positive online experience for their learners (69%), to improve their own competence in English (69%), to help their learners with their digital competencies (56%), and to be a better teacher (56%). Meanwhile, the lowest rating was for the help that the participants received to share digital resources with their learners (52%). In summary, the TAGs were evaluated very positively:

See left Figure 22. Benefits of online TAGs.

Concerning the evaluation of the TAG programme in terms of the teachers' learning gains, the majority of respondents perceived it as 'successful'. The outcomes with the highest rating were acquiring new teaching skills, with 69% reporting the TAG as 'successful' and 23% as 'very successful', developing the participants' skills in teaching remotely, with 69% 'successful' and 13% 'very successful'. This was followed by providing guidance on how to support and motivate learning online, with 65% 'successful' and 19% 'very successful', and improving the teachers' English competence, with 58% 'successful' and 19% 'very successful'. The pivot to online learning and greater emphasis on technology and methodology probably explains the slightly lower rating given to 'improving English competence':

See left Figure 23. Evaluating the success of the TAG in terms of the teachers' learning gains.

In relation to the teachers' confidence of using digital tools for teaching, 56% percent of the participants ranked it as 'high' and 10% as 'very high'. However, a significant 31% of participants ranked their confidence as 'average'. Nevertheless, taken as a whole, this is evidence that the TAGs have undoubtedly increased their digital confidence:

Figure 24. Confidence of using digital tools for teaching.

Figure 24

Legend: Very High, High, Average, ~~Low~~, Very Low

Figure 25
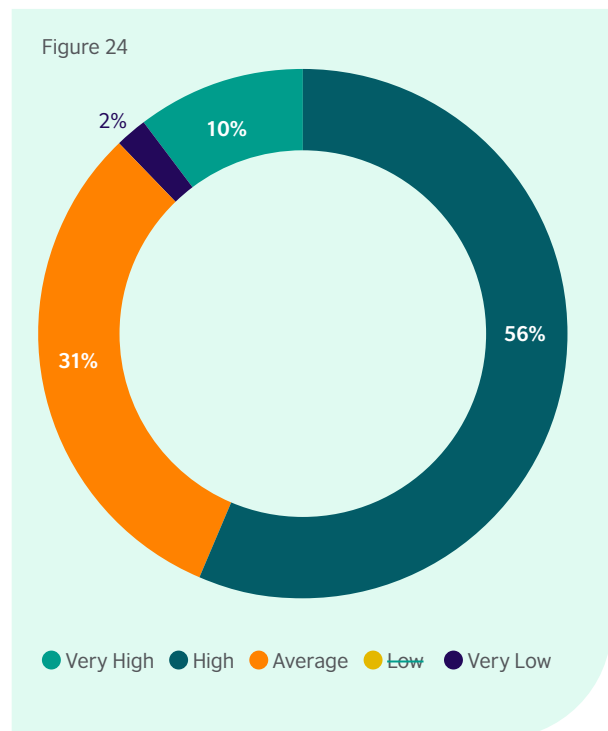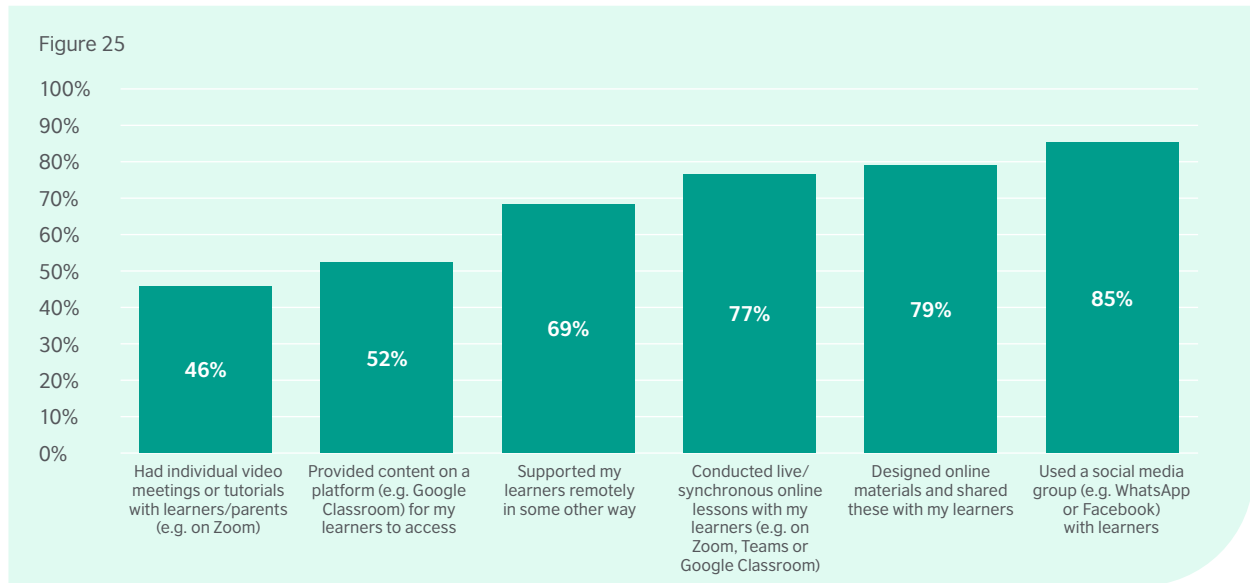
When consulted about the activities that the remote teachers have carried out to support their learners, 85% of them have used a social media group (e.g. WhatsApp or Facebook) with learners, and 79% of them have designed online materials and shared these with their learners. In addition, 77% of the remote teachers have conducted live/synchronous online lessons with their learners (e.g. on Zoom, MS Teams or Google Classroom), while 69% of them have supported their learners remotely in some other way. The statements with the lowest rates referred to the teacher having provided content on platforms (e.g. Google Classroom) for their learners to access, and holding individual video meetings or tutorials with learners/parents (e.g. on Zoom):

See above Figure 25. The activities teachers have used with their learners.

In relation to other strategies used by the teachers to support their learners remotely, there was a similar emphasis among the participants' answers on the use of supplementary online tools for asynchronous tasks and self-learning. The teachers use videos of their own recorded lessons or provide links to videos on educational channels on YouTube. They also design online quizzes using Google Forms, Kahoot or Edpuzzle. Other types of communication tools are Facebook messenger and Telegram to provide the lesson content or technical help if needed. There are plenty of appreciative comments about the technical help provided by teacher educators/facilitators, as the following responses from the participants show.

Figure 26. Strategies utilised by the teachers to support learners.

ID Responses

ID	Responses
1	Provide my students with the PowerPoint That I made
2	Non
3	I dont have other ideas
4	I used Telegram voice chat and my skills in designing advertisements to attrack students attention towards content
5	What's up groups, the students share their work and make videos or record messages .
6	Providing learning tasks
7	Provide learners with online games/recorded lessons if the were busy or absent.
8	In learning more about the course and understand more information about it
9	I think that the teachers must provide with training in how to use the most important applications which relates with teaching
10	Interaction and engagement IT requirement. Individual and collaborative work.
11	My learners also improved their levels in using online tools.
12	I helped my students and colleagues when any technical need asked.
13	1-I praised their hard work and encouraged them . 2-We met regularly to talk about challenges and how we could solve them. 3-Clear plan and instruction were given to them. 4-Provided them with online materials like songs, stories, attractive worksheets ... 5- I always tell them ," You all can do your best, never give up. It's your responsibility and you have to challenge the circumstances."
14	I worked on Messanger, whats app teams and also I have many differnt educational viedeos related to the subject
15	Listen to their problems in dealing with the online sessions and trying to help them
16	On line games, on line work sheets, YouTube videos.
17	Youtube
18	Professional growth
19	To have the required materials to follow on line session as laptops for i use only my simple mobile
20	Using some applications and websites like keynote, Edpuzzle.
21	teaching comparative and superlative using kahoot ,it application
22	Sharing videos
23	I discuss each their work in private chat.
24	Video/pictures/games
25	Encourage students to participate in some school competitions .
26	I tried to make use of more than one means of communication.
27	I encourage my learners to use some programs , websites and resources to help them learn better
28	many pupils enjoy in learning on line because teachers provide resources in teaching
29	Not much Many students are not able to learn by online learning for one reason or another
30	Using Facebook and whats up are good and useful in primary schools
31	Keeping in touch with them and encouraging them using many applications
32	check their homework online. Give them feedback
33	No comment
34	Responding to threir chats/questions via messenger groups or mails
35	Every students should have computer
36	Send videos on our English Club for learners to watch and provide them with self learning materials
37	Sending videos on our English Club for learners to watch and provide them with self learning material
38	Using audio visual materials. Coloured pictures . This may enhance students' motivation.

39	strengthen the internet for students
40	Using recorded online workshop and distribute for novices teachers to help them on line classes
41	Non
42	Parents and ss must be qulified to deal with remote learning as I prepared my lessons to be dealt online especially games but not all of them can do that Also they can't deal with the lesson online very much as I teach small children who need help.
43	Nothing
44	I trained my students on using Zoom and Teams before they were officially required by the MoE in Palestine.
45	Use different platforms..
46	Providing students with link for educational TV channel
47	I used and designed online quizzes and exams using google forms website
48	I support my learners by contacting them most of the time by messeges voice recordings, they like it so much, they feel that that are still at school and dealing closely with their teacher.

In terms of the main difference of having their professional development online compared with F2F, the pattern of replies, shown below, from the teachers shows that the main emerging feature is self-paced and autonomous learning, but also the lack of close interaction with colleagues. The participants stated that they depend more on themselves to learn online, so their professional development is more challenging in terms of time management and the digital skills required to handle the tools they need to use. Likewise, in online professional development, the interaction with others is difficult since there is not an opportunity to get to know colleagues as well as in F2F meetings, in which oral communication is supported by body language, gestures and facial expressions.
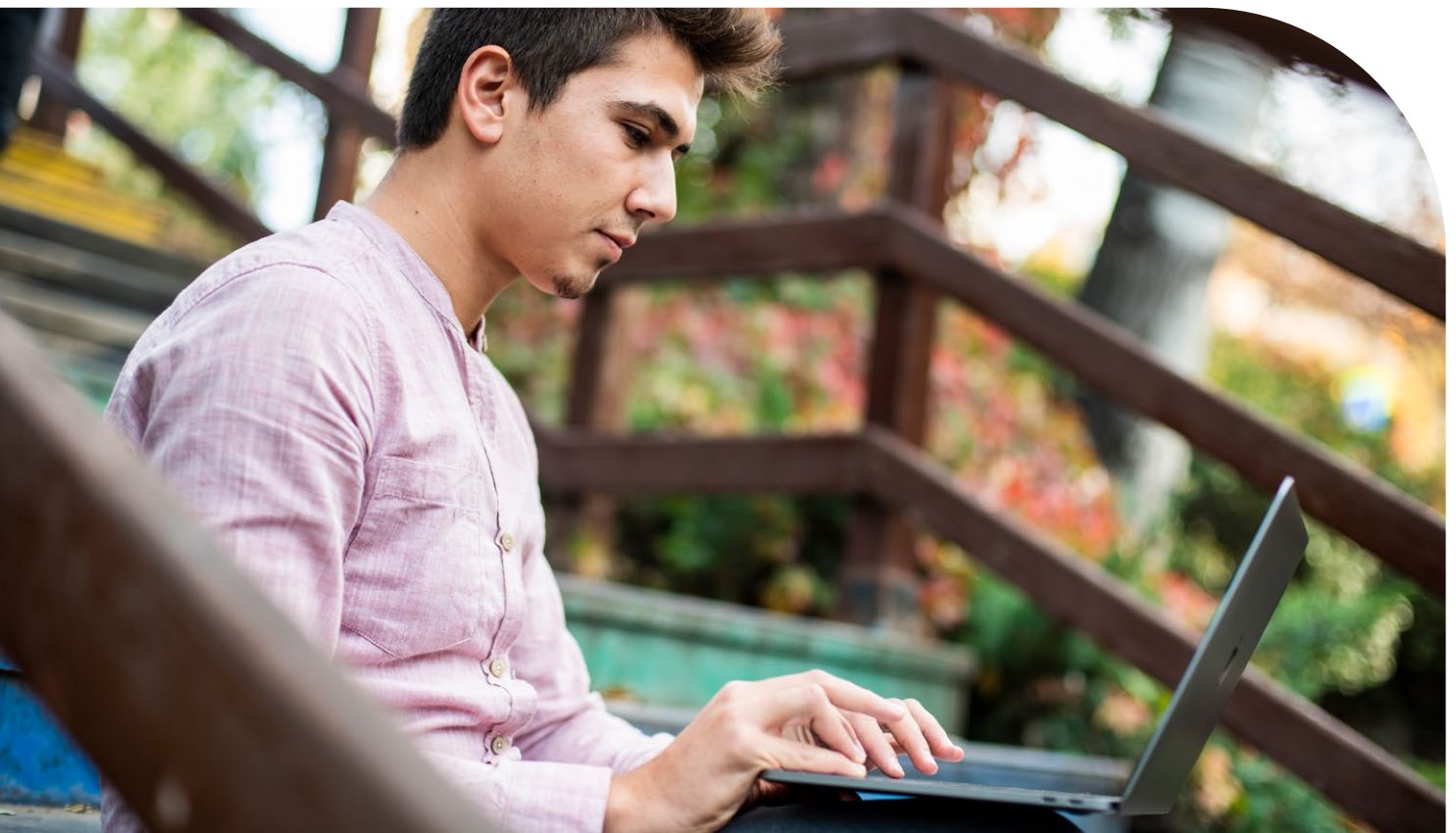
Figure 27. Comparing professional development online with F2F.

8. What was different about having your professional development online (compared with F2F)?

ID Responses

ID	Responses
1	Flexibility Time manage.ent
2	Harder.. Needs infrastructure that is not available in gaza..
3	Problem with the network connection
4	It's more attractive and it paves the way for a better communicative and interactive learning
5	Teacher has no control on the students and the students can not feel of obligation as in face to face.
6	Seeing each other while discussing
7	Internet connection/time/learners and parents knowledge of using these programs.
8	Preparation time is very different and longer than Face to Face
9	We can use different resources more freely
10	face-to-face learning means a live, two-way interaction. -Online learning, then, will mean anything that doesn't include a live instructor. -So, online learning here is where a student sits down and learns through a self-paced system completely
11	Using the digital tools is creative because I can change my way of teaching online
12	Online learning and teaching added alot to our skills and experiences in many aspects, we learned to do many things we didn't know about it before. Such as, making online exams, using zoom and teams, sharing electronic items in different ways.
13	Through face-to-face communication, you can obtain additional information that can be inferred through body language, gestures and tone of voice, and thus face-to-face education is more informative. But compared with distance education, we find that it completely inspects body language and depends on non-verbal communication in interactions.
14	In my opinion teaching face to face has more excellent results than teaching online , sometimes I feel proud on my working online but sometimes I can't reach the what I want from pupils especially the youn ones .
15	It's easier to teach face to face and also we can easily control the class
16	It is more challenging.
17	Time management and technology tools challenges
18	Communication with colleagues was more interesting
19	It is difficult to have an effect by online session
20	Online meetings save Time and efforts
21	tiated ept of them reall students participated and nos
22	Face to face is easier especially with young learners
23	Learning online makes us imagine how our learners recieve our teaching.
24	Lack of knowledge of people face to face, as well as the difficulty of dealing with technology
25	professional development face to face doesn't need much time and efforts like professional development online.
26	Face to face sessions are closer and warmer, we look at each other and can follwo what others say easily. You know , the technical activities are so frustrating.
27	We have faced some problems to catch all the learners since we teach in a remote school near borders .. To 30% of the students the remote learning has advanced their level of sharing and developing themselves .
28	I think i depend on my self to get the information not in a spoon that motivate me to get the knowledge
29	Nothing could be hinest as contacting with students face to face . Their feeling, ideas, facial expressions, failur or success
30	Face to face is more effective but due to this exceptional circumstances because of corona virus , it's good and we develop our skills in using technology in t

31	New experience Using technology to the maximum
32	There was less concentration on the material
33	The same thing
34	Is to be part of the process and practise every single thing that we learn or study. Face to face is much more helpful to apply and adapt the best for us and achieve much better it's also motivate us to learn from each other.
35	Meeting teachers around country
36	Sharing ideas with other teachers
37	F2F is better because it helps to understand and discuss freely .Using body language is good for communication.
38	Adopting the material in a way which suit the situation, students' needs and levels.
39	the interaction of my students different in the online and face to face.
40	Many differences ;but the most important one I think that it's so essential to be in contact with the students face to face because that gives us a
41	Face to face is easier and more enjoyable
42	Easier to support your work with video
43	Communicated with colleagues teaching different grades.
44	It is not time consume, and you do the tasks in your pace.
45	It's more flexible.
46	Having professional development online is more challenging than face to face development
47	Face to Face I think is better for my learners and for my development, I think Face to Face can give me the chance to meet and know my learners more and better which would absolutely reflect on my work, I can also know the weekness point in my learners and concentrate on it during the class or some times after it.

When referring to the opportunities/advantages in learning online for their professional development, teachers' answers referred to the chance of getting to experience first-hand what their students go through when learning online. In other words, while enhancing their own digital literacy, the participants said they were also able to develop further their own self-learning skills. Similarly, they praised the opportunity of learning about online tools, strategies, and methods, but also the chance of seeing colleagues' work and receiving feedback from them.

Figure 28. Opportunities/advantages of online professional development.

9. What were the opportunities/advantages in learning online for your professional development?

ID Responses

1	No fixed schedule No transports, so it reduces cost
2	Parents are involved in the learning process specially with young learners
3	It is better than not learning at all
4	The main drawness is that it needs too much time to complete the modules and the content cannot been applied on students in a short time
5	Being able to keep in touch with the learning process. Communication with others and build self learning abilities.
6	Preparing online materials
7	Explore new techniques and programmes used in the learning online.
8	New experience in your life
9	We know other applications we dont know it before
10	No effort. No long time
11	Its an opportunity to know new people,strategies.Then ,the idea of the potfolio is wonderful,to put all your worke and experience in a file..that's nice.
12	Online learning and teaching added alot to our skills and experiences in many aspects, we learned to do many things we didn't know about it before. Such as, making online exams, using zoom and teams, sharing electronic items in different ways.
13	Advantages of learning online: 1- Students can improve their. communication skills 2-They can also review course materials repeatedly. 3-They can learn self-decipline by managing their time and tasks. 4-Learning Online may demonstrate motivation among learners.
14	Teaching online gave me the chance to practise using internet and know more about different apps that help and support my work .
15	Dealing with students online needs more usage of technology and more efficient programs that can help them understand more
16	Although it is challenging,it is safer because of the Corona virus.
17	New teaching methods to deal with huge technologies
18	More experience about using online strategies
19	Exchange ideas , experience .it developed my ability on using on line methods
20	i googled more games and applied them like words puzzles and so on
21	Keeping in touch with students even in difficult situations
22	The webinars, seeing colleagues' work and hearing feedback from colleagues.
23	I discovered a lot of ways to teach students remotely and use useful videos for them
24	Enhanced my digital literacy. Gave me an opportunity to explore online platforms.
25	It can give the best alternative next to in person meetings. It just saves time and helps us move on.
26	I have passed through a fabulous sessions and online meeting in which we share the ideas of our teaching methods based on the TAGs outcomes
27	I think I get better and I become confidence in learning on line
28	Saving time Effective in self learning Atract the students
29	It helped me improve my skills in using technology
30	Saving time/being accustomed to using teams and zoom apps
31	I don't see any advantages
32	learn more about educatinal websites and achieve more skills in teaching our As. On line
33	Recognize new ways of teaching
34	Exchange experience Share thoughts and ideas

35	Share ideas with other teachers
36	Showing pictures and videos which attract students and motivate them to learn. Online worksheets and exams.
37	I t can help my students during this crisis.
38	You build warm relationship with my students
39	Had a training course on using Zoom. Had to go search the You tube for tutorials on how to use Office 365 and its application.
40	Very excellent opportunity..improve me remote strategies..I learned many tools help my students through the online sessions
41	It enables me to work on my spare time. Helps me break borders
42	In fact, it helped me a lot in developing my digital skills and my skills in teaching remotely as well
43	I learned the electronic tasks that can be sent to my learners. And I also learned to deal with the conputer more which my learners got benifite from it, because I send them videos, audios that can be played as much as they want and at the time they prefer.

Summarising the difficulties/barriers of only being able to work online and how they overcame them, the participating teachers referred to the contextual constraints of the OPT in relation to power cuts, lack of a stable internet connection and technological devices, especially in the case of their learners. For such reasons, it was difficult to communicate with the students initially. It was necessary for the teachers to communicate with families through the principals as intermediaries.

Subsequently, teachers stated that they carried out a needs analysis to understand their students' needs, problems and start an action plan. Teachers adopted a blended learning approach, providing live sessions, but also recording them and suggesting additional materials for the learners to access at their own pace, especially when facing constraints. In addition, teachers kept in constant communication through different social groups and phone calls to help learners and parents if needed. Throughout, the teachers counted on each other to deal with technology and learn about online tools.

Concerning the comments and feedback of the teachers about the programme, they suggested promoting more webinars on the use of online tools and methods to encourage students' participation in online classes. They also highlighted the need for technological devices and equipment that allows for effective communication between teachers and learners.

Qualitative data

The following section develops a thematic presentation of some of the key findings from focus groups and observations of TAGs online. It also includes comments from interviews with one of the programme managers and an interview with an e-moderator. Most of the quotations are from three focus groups: a focus group with teacher educators (including informants from Palestine and Romania) and two groups with teachers (with teachers from Gaza and the West Bank in OPT). The report data is anonymous and so we have integrated the 'voices' of the TAG facilitators and teachers to support and illustrate the evaluations being made. The report takes into account reviews of TAG sessions delivered online, as well as online materials, reports and previous feedback.

In terms of the TAG observations, four TAGs were observed, two from the West Bank and two from Gaza. All of the teachers have participated in TAGs before, although they were working with a new facilitator. One was run by a local teacher educator (but supported by her mentor from Romania). The other was run by a TAG facilitator from Romania. The teachers present were all employed by the MoE. The TAG facilitator from Romania had been a trainer on the previous iteration of the scheme, although she did not know these particular teachers. There were two TAGs from Gaza working with UNRWA teachers. These were both run by a TAG facilitator from Romania but with some support from a local teacher educator in each case.

Aims of the programme

The overall aim of the TAGs are similar to those in Phase 2 above. In this latest phase of the OPT programme there are 35 TAGs operating. In terms of timing, the TAGs are between 90 minutes and 120 minutes. Previously F2F TAGs

were 120 minutes. The teachers in focus groups felt that currently 90 minutes was enough.

It is not an explicit aim of the programme to support teachers to be more confident and effective in the remote delivery environment. However, the promotion of digital competence and 21st century skills are of particular importance in the remote learning environment (Roe, 2020) and the qualitative data below considers whether involvement in the TAG has had an effect on the way that they have worked with their learners during the pandemic. In other words, we are interested in this report in whether the remote delivery of their PD has had an impact on both their understanding and on their practice.

The programme has been running now for four years and as well as TAGs there has been increasing capacity building work with teacher trainers (through training and support from e-moderators and mentors). In the current phase, there are different kinds of pathway ('Foundation' and 'Advanced') as the Programme Manager explains:

'But the difference this year, is there are multiple pathways - sort of multiple courses running at the same time. And there's a greater focus on teacher educators, as facilitators, and mentors to their teachers. So the teacher educators, for the first time, are receiving direct support and training.'

Also, in previous phases teachers had been grouped by primary/secondary but this time the groups are mixed. The rationale for this was not clear but teachers were relatively agnostic about this decision.

Overall evaluation of online TAG sessions

Feedback on TAG meetings across the whole data set was very positive. During the focus groups, some teachers highlighted the benefit of reflecting with their peers and sharing examples of activities and strategies used in similar classroom settings. They liked the mix of input that was more 'international' but always linked to '*our local issues*'. They valued the opportunity to work with teachers from other schools in Palestine. In general terms, comments in focus groups support the survey data and show that remotely delivered TAGs are highly valued and important sites for PD.

TAG participants who had experienced these remotely delivered TAGs reported in the focus groups that they had enjoyed them and they appreciated the flexibility of the remote sessions (some said that they were sometimes able to multitask e.g. '*do some cooking at the same time*'). However, there were also challenges, which are documented in more detail below. The overall position would be to say that they would prefer a

mix of F2F and remote TAGs (rather than exclusively remote or F2F forms of PD). This supports the survey data which clearly shows a preference for F2F but also a positive evaluation of the current remote delivery. The Programme Manager reported that in terms of making the switch online, in previous focus groups, trainers had expressed some reluctance to work online but are becoming more positive now, having experienced it and got used to it.

Since the move online, there has been more reliance on outside teacher facilitators (from Romania). This is surprising given the investment that has previously taken place in 'capacity building' of both supervisors and teacher educators. However, the feedback from teachers is that they appreciate the mix of local teacher educators and more 'international' involvement.

In summary, for the teachers working with their students, there has been a marked 'pivot' in TAGs towards digital methodology and tools. Sometimes synchronous meetings are possible and sometimes tools like WhatsApp are used as more of an asynchronous delivery tool:

'So from the very beginning, we use WhatsApp groups, from the very beginning of the term, and we use to send the students the materials and ask them to do them, and resend the materials back again.'

Therefore, the TAGs are a helpful site to explore and share such experiences. Comments about teacher educators/facilitators were very positive overall and this is typical:

'And I learned a lot … she is very helpful to us and helps us in discussing our experience at school and then sharing our strategies. And she helped us in finding solution for many problems that we face at the moment.'

TAGs are also an important site for emotional and social support: '*and then we also find new friends, new colleagues in teaching, and along with them tools that we have learned online and we help each other … because we all face difficulties…'*

Content and modules

In all cases, the modules were selected by programme managers and were based on needs analyses of the teachers. The TfS materials were generally felt to be '*useful and authentic*' by teacher educators but needed to be '*tweaked so that they are relevant to these teachers*'.

In general terms, the TfS modules are more focussed on methodology and linguistic competence but there are certainly some 'knock-on' benefits in supporting teachers in teaching all skills remotely while also keeping learners safe online. In fact, the modules chosen were certainly influenced by the

pandemic and current needs. Some modules are compulsory (again recommended on the basis of needs analysis) and some are optional. In other words, the rest of the modules can be done by the teachers (but they decide if they find them useful and if they want to work through the material).

The following modules are all at least potentially related to 'Engaging with learning technologies' and formed the basis of the observed TAG sessions. All the modules come under the umbrella of 'engaging with learning technologies' and are available via the BC CPD online platform (TfS):

• Developing reading skills with digital tools

• Game-based learning

• Low-resource contexts

• Mobile learning

• Practicing listening and speaking with online audio

• Video conferencing

• Online writing for learners and teachers

• Developing vocabulary with technology

• Cyber well-being

• Social networking for educational use

However, one of the TAG groups (working with MoE teachers) are using the same set of modules that was used with TAGs in 2020 and these are (at least on the face of it) less obviously focussed on digital skills and remote delivery:

• Understanding differentiation

• Understanding approaches to inclusive learning

• Understanding 21st century skills

• Engaging with assessment for learning

• Understanding motivation in the classroom

The other TAG group were doing the 'Advanced Foundations 1' programme and this pathway is for teachers from the MoE who received 'Excellent' on the Foundations 1 course in their last course. They take these modules:

• Understanding speaking: maximising interaction

• Engaging with grammar: different approaches

• Engaging with learning technologies: low-resource contexts

• Engaging with special educational needs: inclusive assessment approaches

• Engaging with professional development: the reflective teacher

Previous feedback has been acted on (the length of sessions has been increased from one hour to 90 minutes). In previous reports it was claimed that one hour was not enough. Previous focus groups

had also stated that: '*Some teachers are very engaged and active during the session, while others are inactive*' and observations of the online TAG groups support teacher comments that sessions are '*interactive and interesting*' with '*plenty of useful learning activities*'. The sessions are perceived as useful, especially for 'communication and technical skills'. Also, teachers were happy that the number of assignments had been reduced from three to one. Although they had not begun to work on the assignment, this shift had been welcome.

The topics covered are perceived as useful by teachers. They are broadly seen as relevant to context, as well as their needs, levels and interests.

Induction and orientation

Some TAG teachers had some form of pre-course online orientation. This was supposed to happen for all TAGs, but they varied in whether they had actually received induction. In fact, the Programme Manager had planned for this to happen, but the pandemic had interrupted plans: '*It was supposed to, but we don't actually know for sure if all teacher educators did this for their teachers… We really wanted to do a basic digital literacy skills training F2F for teachers who needed it, but we weren't able to due to COVID-19*'. This is something that the Project Manager thinks would '*help a lot of teachers and hopefully we'll be able to in the future*'.

Teachers' engagement with digital platforms for their teaching

The teacher educators, especially the Advanced Foundations group, reported that the teachers now have more experience of working online and getting used to navigating information on the shared platform. In addition, the MoE platform (E-School), which was set up three years ago, has been more widely used in the last year to set homework and this has led to more parental involvement (checking and engagement) around homework tasks (see later section on 'involving parents').

There was some reported use of both Zoom and more recently MS Teams in supporting learners synchronously. Although schools in Palestine had not been closed by the Ministry there were some local outbreaks and so individual schools had been closed and, in some cases, there had been synchronous teaching. Teachers reported that they felt more confident with synchronous online delivery because of their previous experience with Zoom sessions.

In many cases the engagement with Zoom as a synchronous platform has knock-on benefits for both teachers and students and also in some cases their colleagues (outside TAGs):

'But when I entered a TAG and started working on the modules, I decided to practice new things, from the things which we, which I am learning, such as Zoom meetings. So I did several Zoom meetings for my students. And then I developed this idea. I did Zoom meetings with other teachers from other schools. I like it, get the students meet together in one Zoom meeting.'

While schools themselves have not made it compulsory to have synchronous meetings with students, in many cases the TAG teachers were more confident and offered support in ways that their colleagues did not:

'So I got many questions from the students, and they need to meet me face to face. So since I can't meet them, I use the Zoom meeting. And it was also an extra activity because like, not all of the teachers did that. Yeah. So I'm not obliged to do this...it might be considered as an extra activity.'

It is also worth pointing out that some teachers have gone on to set up WhatsApp groups with their students:

'Yeah, there were many difficulties in Gaza. Most of the students didn't have mobiles, laptops, computers.. so I had a difficulty at the beginning … the students didn't have the courage, okay to be involved in the new way of teaching ...I use Telegram … I encourage the students to download the app Telegram … I used to send the students materials, videos, and I created my own content.'

Attendance

There has been negotiation of suitable times for online meetings and although times are not convenient for all, teachers have been consulted and the times adopted are decided after considering all teacher views. However, there is evidence from teacher educators that attendance is not as high as in the F2F sessions. This is perhaps not surprising as data is not being collected centrally (either by BC or MoE/UNRWA).

During the pilot phase, the BC did try to get hold of records of attendance, but teacher educators were not consistent in supplying the information. In addition, MoE and UNRWA had also tracked attendance during the previous F2F TAGs and this had perhaps encouraged higher attendance/participation. Since the current sessions are online and outside of school hours, they are not being monitored by MoE or UNRWA. This has probably affected participation in the sense that teachers feel it is more of an option. Much of this is probably explained by fatigue from (as well as lack of access to) online learning which is affecting student attendance for remote learning too: *'I mean, attendance for a session (Zoom) is decreasing. I don't know why. I think. Yeah, it's hard to deal to continue the year if the situation is still in the same way'*. In fact, even if students 'appear' to be present they may not be, as one teacher said about her own daughter: *'sometimes my daughter is supposed to have the Teams and uses my mobile phone but she is just playing in her room'*. However it is something of a mixed picture, as other teachers were much more positive about their students: *'they found difficulties like us as teachers, but after a while, after a period of time for teachers, and for students, it's much, much better and much easier. Now. We get used to do the online lessons, and the students also are getting used to it'*.

Interaction

The synchronous MS Teams or Zoom sessions are working well for TAGs. They provide the basis for significant PD interaction, which is a mix of teacher educator presentation, teacher mini-presentation, teacher to teacher educator dialogue. It has not been possible to conduct a thorough analysis of this mix, but it is at least interesting to note the variety of interaction patterns in these online/remote TAGs. It is difficult to describe it as fully dialogic as there is little evidence of peer-to-peer interaction (or break-out rooms). However, teacher educators are planning to do more of this in the future. As one TAG local teacher educator said: *'switching from to online teaching is a challenge for us all … there are many connection problems .. so it is not always possible to include everyone'*. Observation of TAGs showed many instances where connectivity had the effect of slowing interaction (with a great deal of repeating and 'can you hear me now?', as well as misunderstandings). There are obvious difficulties with cueing, elicitation and wait-time. It is perhaps difficult to attribute these all to the remote TAG environment but certainly that was the impression given by the recordings. Taking all this into account, the shift from one hour to 90 minutes is pragmatic, in that it allows for more time for interaction.

Balancing theory and practice

Previous focus groups had requested *'practical activities and less theory-based content'* and current TAGs are providing a more practical orientation. However, e-moderators and teacher educators commented that it was sometimes a challenge to contextualise theoretical content from the TfS modules. They reported that it could be challenging trying to make it relevant (especially for teachers at the primary stage). However, teachers in focus groups spoke overwhelmingly favourably about the TfS modules. They found them understandable, useful and relevant for their needs.

Learning gains

The data collected from this iteration of the TAGs in OPT is consistent with previously collected post-course observation data. Interviews and survey data confirm learning gains for teachers are similar in nature to those learning gains from F2F TAGs. In this iteration there are positive comments about transfer to the classroom: '*more variety of activities*' and greater use of storytelling, riddles and games and an: '*increase in group work and pair work in classes'.* Such '*games and songs make the class more enjoyable*'.

There are plenty of comments which confirm that teachers copy many of the activities in the online TAG or at least apply them (including '*use of notebooks*' and '*informal assessment*'). There are reports of new ideas being adopted and the general evaluation of '*feeling more effective as a teacher'* and '*incorporating higher order thinking skills*' into teaching so that learners are more 'active' where '*learning is clarified*' or '*explained more clearly*'. There were practical ideas that helped teachers cope with students who were not motivated to learn:

'*…they don't want to study and they just want to play… they are far away from all the subjects … they care for science and Arabic more than English … so she advised me to let them listen to stories which are seen and spoken at the same time…*'

There are also some examples which suggest learning gains from previous TAGs are being built on and talked about in current TAGs:

'*I can maybe do group working. Last year, we applied group working between the students, and we used games with the group, working between them.*'

Not all the digital learning gains can be attributed to the TAG of course and at least some of the teachers are clearly already receptive and eager to add to their repertoire of skills. This is an account of such a digital journey, from first steps (breaking the ice) to increasing use of digital tools in which the PALTAG is an important element:

'*And I broke the ice ….in communicating with others, other teachers who teach with me at the same level so when I joined PALTAG, okay, I found myself in this training course, I found it because I like online teaching. I like using Zoom, I like using technical tools …I found it myself and I got lots of benefits. And my students, as you know, students are interested in graphics are interested in videos and interactive materials, more than being just receptive. Students without interactive, the teacher or the media or the tools.*'

Involving parents

It is also interesting to note the way in which the pandemic may have brought parents into more of an active role in supporting their children's learning, encouraged by the teacher: '*..the parents hold the telephones, parents record on WhatsApp*'. The teachers are sometimes working with both teacher and students: '*So as a teacher, I have to deal with two: children and their parents. I teach the parents the methodology, and teach them how to teach the objectives*'.

Although this finding is not directly related to teacher remote PD, it does show their resourcefulness. The following shows how an insight into how a parent is scaffolded to support their child:

'*And I asked them (the parents) to read it back to me. So after they did this, so I said, Okay, you're fine. Now go and do the conversation with your students. And I asked them to send me videos for them while they are doing the dialogue, and I presented some of these videos in one of our TAG meetings.*'

This led to positive endorsement from her teacher educator who said, '*she liked that the student is doing the dialogue without looking at the book while the father is reading the question*'. Where it was evident, teachers valued this parental involvement:

'*Yeah, I like the idea that parents are being involved in the teaching process. Because like this, they start to feel like what are teachers facing in classrooms, and when students go to school, and they came back home, we revise with them, in COVID-19, we need to teach them and revise with them … it's very good for for them to see the real, level of their students because some parents overestimate their children's abilities.*'

Digital skills

The TAGs have provided a good forum for the discussion of digital options. This was clearly a priority for all teachers as explained here:

'*So we discuss many topics, most of them are about this online learning and all the challenges that these days we are troubled by, for most of us everything is online and this is something new for most of us…*'

Teachers have used particular tools (demonstrated in TAGs) and then incorporated them into their teaching: '*and I got lots of benefits. And my students, as you know, students are interested graphics, they are interested in videos and interactive materials, more than being just receptive*'. Being able to experience digital tools in a TAG setting has certainly had an impact on their use with learners with examples of quizzes and interactive tools common and embedded in task cycles:

'So also after that, like, I trained myself to do word clouds, and then asked my students to comment on the words and do some post activities after sending them the word clouds, which I of course, knew about from the tag modules.'

There are also some interesting examples of teachers being resourceful and working with the technological constraints they faced: *'I moved to use Voice Chat with the students. Because when I use Zoom, Zoom is something that takes too much of your internet connection. So not all students can join the Zoom'*.

Opportunities for reflection

There was variation in the recordings of TAG meetings. Some were examples of more open discussion and these were appreciated by teachers: *'we had a lot of opportunities for discussion'* and observations of TAG meetings confirm good levels of discussion and reflection. However, there was a contrast between TAG sessions where there was open and more dialogic reflection and others where the trainer was quite dominant and where teachers were involved in what could be described as mini-presentation rather than being dialogic in nature. This may be due to perceived pressure for trainers to cover material from the TfS.

Use of video

Compared with TAGs in Egypt and Syria, there was more use of video visible in TAGs in both observations and in reports from teachers. The online content was felt to be useful and teachers talked about watching them more than once: *'I watch them a lot of times, I rewatch them to make sure that I'm, you know, getting everything from it'*. The TAG teachers particularly liked the use of video. However, they reported that videos are best if they are shorter (clips) and some of the video on the site is still too long (although trainers recognise that they can direct teachers to sections of the videos). All the teacher educators spoke of the importance of keeping videos manageable. There were examples in both observed TAGs and in focus groups that teachers are sharing videos within the Zoom sessions. One teacher in Jericho had asked her students to film short comments about the topic 'healthy food' and she had edited these together with Windows Movie Maker and then shared this in an Advanced Foundations course. In most TAG groups teachers were encouraged to share videos from their classes: *'We sent some videos to refer to, to share with her our experiences in the class and we talked and discussed about this by Teams'*.

There are positive comments about videos: *'I got benefit from the videos presented in the modules'*. Teachers reported that they have more ideas for particular skills and strategies, such as: *'creating differentiated tasks in my teaching'* and *'I understand more about teaching young learners'*. The use of video makes the learning objectives more visible and potential more achievable in their own practice:

'I would like to say that I benefit from the group work for students … and we had watched and we discussed about the group work. Then I noticed that group work for students is much better than working alone…'

Recommendations

There have been several reports now which establish that TAGs work well in OPT (e.g. Borg, 2020). Teachers appreciate working together. It is not possible to make too many definitive statements about a relatively short programme that was developed as a response to the pandemic, but the early signs are encouraging in terms of remote PD too. The programme was well run and delivered, and the data shows high levels of satisfaction with the aims, content and delivery. What follows reviews the data to articulate possible areas of discussion for future planning and research.

Hybrid TAGs

Beyond the current pandemic, it is worth experimenting with different hybrid versions (combining online elements with F2F) to achieve optimal outcomes. When the pandemic ends, there will be at least an appetite for hybrid models of CoP. In general, teachers would prefer a mix of F2F and remote TAGs rather than exclusively remote or F2F forms of PD.

Tracking the impact of TAGs

There is a need for further research that follows up TAG engagement to establish whether professional relationships and networks carry on beyond the programmed PD. Further work can be done on tracking the progress and satisfaction levels of TAG participants in OPT. In terms of sustainability it might be worth trying some TAGs without a facilitator (at least with groups that have a good sense of how a TAG session might be run, once they have experienced a facilitated version). This might enable greater numbers to take part in the programme.

Content

The evidence collected in this report shows that participants value the content and delivery of the TAG content. However, there may still be a pressure to get through the TfS module material (rather than treating it as a catalyst for discussion and reflection). The view taken here is that the balance between received knowledge (from TfS) and the sharing (from teacher's own experience) can be further shifted in favour of the later.

Portfolio assessment

Although this report was written before the submission of portfolios from the TAG teachers, this innovation has been welcomed by both teachers and teacher educators. Further work might be done on integrating evidence of digital skills and reflection within such a portfolio. It may be worth establishing an e-portfolio platform (perhaps within the current MoE E-School portal) so that teachers could share and showcase aspects of their practice (see Gulzar and Barrett, 2019).

Digital skills training and induction

There were calls in focus groups from teachers to have more training on the Zoom platform before starting the course. Certainly, the programme needs to ensure that all teachers have basic digital training before the TAG so that time in sessions is not focussed on how to use tools and more time is created for reflection and sharing. This would probably be best achieved in the form of an online asynchronous course which would require a 'pass' to ensure completion and engagement. This should largely be video based with screen capture to demonstrate key features of materials, platforms and tools.

Mentors

The mentoring relationship between local teacher educators is working well. They have one-to-one sessions with their mentors for support if they need help preparing for their TAGs or are facing other issues with the facilitation. These mentor relationships are seen as helpful and supportive and so should be continued.

Curated webspace

This might be housed in the E-School portal or in a joint MoE/UNWRA/BC platform and would enable more accounts of good practice in TAGs (how to go about running a TAG), a suite of TAG session materials, and sharing of resources too.

Video

Use of video should be further encouraged. Mercer et al. (2017: 9) point to the particular value of video in coming towards a more dialogic and collaborative version of the relationship between theory and practice and allowing teachers to consider alternatives in a collaborative way.

One of the advantages of a more hybrid model (see above) is that teachers could watch video of peer-presentations outside the actual TAG to create more space for discussion in the 90 minutes. Although there is evidence of some video being shared, there is a need for an agreed ethical policy on sharing of videos and investigation of length of clips with MoE involvement and support. A dedicated platform might give access to an appropriate balance of local and self-recorded video with videos from other contexts.

Case 4: Syria - Teaching for Success Programme

This case study of remote PD with Syrian teachers is relatively short, compared with the previous three cases, because it is different in four major ways:

1. Teachers in Syria have been working online on their PD for several years; remote PD has been the norm due to the precarious and unstable political and social context (i.e. there is much less of a 'pivot' than in other cases).

2. It is arguable that these are not TAGs in the same ways as in OPT and Egypt. Teachers have not been recruited to 'join TAGs' and the Programme Manager reported that they would not relate to this term. Their case is more like regular training and therefore best seen as a remotely delivered workshop.

3. The third difference is that the groups we are focussing on in this case study are constituted of mainly Arabic, Maths and Science primary teachers, where the focus is on building on educational and classroom competencies. Mostly because of the nature of the cohort, the workshops are conducted in L1 (Arabic).

4. This is a relatively small cohort and the dataset is limited. Whereas the NTTP programme has 22,000 teachers, this is much smaller in scale. It is also something of a mixed cohort because some of the data collected relates to online training conducted in 2019, but the focus group with teacher educators concentrated mainly on a current 2021 cohort of teachers in North East Syria.

None of the caveats detailed in the paragraph above makes this PD in Syria any less important. Indeed, Syrian teachers are working in extremely challenging circumstances and, as we shall see, these teachers see the PD experience as extremely valuable and wish their colleagues could be included. As such, there are strong arguments for expanding the current provision in some way. In summary, despite the important differences outlined above, we can still usefully evaluate the nature and effectiveness of this case of remotely delivered PD.

Background and context

The BC does not have an official presence in Syria and its office closed in 2013. The Programme detailed in this case study is managed by BC staff in Lebanon. The following background summary includes information from a scoping report written by Ruskin Education and an interview with the Programme Manager.

The BC started a scoping process to better understand both context and needs of Syrian teachers in 2015. This involved consultants going to Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon to form a better understanding. This process helped establish key information about both the Syrian educational context as well as education status in neighbouring countries (as many Syrians were and continue to be refugees in these countries). These scoping reports were not published but involved part of the needs analysis adding to information from partners (Save the Children and UNICEF) and other stakeholders and a report by Ruskin Education (2016). The Ruskin report (2016: 19) articulated the mission for the BC for its first pilot:

'Therefore, the ultimate aim of the proposed pilot is to strengthen the quality of education for Syrian children through providing teachers with the skills they need to establish a regular culture of learning and achievement for students through a basic consistency in teaching rigour and quality that will improve students' learning outcomes and core competencies in literacy and maths.'

This helped shape the BC's role in both improving language competence and keeping the focus primarily on improving the educational experiences of Syrian students. After further consultations with partner organisations, particularly Save the Children and UNICEF, a larger scale plan was developed for teachers in Syria. Save the Children and UNICEF were largely focussed on the rehabilitation of schools, infrastructure and child protection, as well as psycho-social support. BC efforts began in 2018, when it was decided to run a remote course for 40 teachers, formed of teachers that office staff still had contract details for (through

email, WhatsApp and Facebook). This was a mix of English language and methodology: '*improving their English and how to teach it in their classrooms*'. It involved teachers from both government and non-government areas in Syria. Those in government areas were able to cross the border in 2018 and take part in a F2F induction workshop in Beirut. This version of the course was based on TfS materials and they used this platform to access materials.

This initial course was evaluated by Simon Borg in 2019. His report found that e-moderators and teachers completing the course were very positive about their overall experience. Teachers reported that '*the course had impacted positively on their English*', (they particularly valued the focus on pronunciation) and provided many examples of '*how it had led to changes in their teaching*' (Borg, 2019b: 3). There was a relatively low completion rate, in terms of teachers who completed the course (28%), but over 95% of the teachers who completed the whole course felt they were better teachers as a result of this training and that it '*gave them a sense of achievement and optimism*' (2019b: 3).

The dropout rate/low completion rate is understandable in this context as the Programme Manager explains in an interview:

'*So, drop out reasons were mainly due to heavy displacement …especially in the non-government area, because teachers are affected by shelling or being forced to move to other countries. And in these times, also the internet was not good, or the training itself didn't remain a priority for them. I mean, it started as a priority for them but then priorities changed. Yeah. So, they had to drop out. But we have contact with them, almost all of them. So even if they drop out, for any new programme, they receive information later, because their numbers are on WhatsApp. And we have a phone number that we use for all programmes.*'

In 2019 it was decided to expand the programme and call it 'Teaching for Success Syria'. Instead of using existing contacts, there was an open call through the BC Facebook page and communicated through Save the Children and UNICEF channels. It was also promoted by The Whole of Syria (an organisation that monitors and supports the humanitarian education response for children in Syria).

TfS is a worldwide initiative and the most important part of the BC's approach to teacher development in state education systems. It has also been an important contribution in Syria (see https://syria.britishcouncil.org/en/events/call-application-teaching-success-programme). TfS Syria provides an online PD programme for Syrian teachers. It aims at supporting them to improve their performance and achieve better results for their learners. One of the main stated aims on the web page above is involving teachers '*in a learning journey as part of a community of practice to share experience, gain best practices, and address the difficulties and challenges they face in their classrooms*'. The programme uses a set of modules on teaching and learning methodologies such as teaching approaches, learning assessment, individual differences, and classroom management. These materials are exclusively in English. However, for the current cohort and a previous cohort in 2019, a selection of these materials were translated into Arabic. The online synchronous Zoom sessions are facilitated by BC e-moderators.

One of the decisions that was taken was to focus on relatively novice teachers. The scoping studies had established that there was a significant shortage in teaching capacity in the country, mainly because of displacement to neighbouring counties and this shortage has got worse. These novice teachers do not necessarily have significant training or knowledge of appropriate pedagogies. Therefore, one of the criteria adopted was that participants should have three to five years' experience. They were also selected based on geography in order to establish clusters in different areas. This provided coverage across the country but also the possibility of future contact between group members. There were also CPD inventions around promoting action research (AR). The BC wanted to promote AR in Syria because it was felt likely to provide some nature of stability and sustainability to what the BC was providing; encouraging teachers to become more autonomous; identifying problems in their classrooms and addressing them. This strand of PD provision involved 120 teachers.

However, as previously mentioned, the current focus is on TfS delivered in Arabic (and not the pathways aimed at English teachers). The first cohort to have training on methodology in Arabic was in 2019. The aims were built around fundamental elements of primary school teaching: '*And we were introducing Arabic methodology of teaching … and they were really motivated … they really needed the skills of lesson management and classroom management, lesson planning, dealing with difficult students, and even dealing with special education needs*'. The aim was to welcome all primary subject teachers: '*because Arabic is the main language of instruction in Syria*'.

In order for TfS Syria to deliver courses in Arabic, it was not possible to recruit the e-moderators from the BC pool (as there were no e-moderators who were L1 Arabic speakers). The BC team took the decision to recruit e-moderators from outside the pool. This had the advantage of being able to secure L1 speakers of Arabic, but it meant that they needed training to get BC recognition as a qualified e-moderator. This training was also necessary because an important part of the

overall TfS Syria goal was developing teachers' digital literacy. Therefore, the Programme Manager and BC Team in Beirut identified teacher trainers who had experience of being teacher trainers, and who had the experience of the Syria context work, but they did not necessarily have online training experience. They then took the mandatory course run by a consultant that the BC uses so that they have e-moderation skills (https://www.theconsultants-e.com/e-moderation/). During the course they learn about the following key points:

• Develop and run online socialising activities

• Motivate online learners

• Establish an effective online tutor presence

• Develop your own skills through collaborative work

• Develop the skills to work asynchronously and synchronously

• Design and implement a variety of online task types

• Effectively guide online discussions

• Use a range of online tools to support learning

• Assess online learners

• Design effective online courses

• Conduct effective online feedback and reflection

Previous survey data

It is worth briefly summarising the survey data previously collected. The programme managers conducted the surveys in April/ May 2020 for all teachers involved in the 2019 cohort including all-subjects and English teachers. This provides solid contextual information to inform the current case study.

Three surveys were translated from Arabic into English for the purposes of this report. They were relatively short surveys probing different aspects of the teachers' learning experience and background. Survey one had 32 responses. The first question suggested that just over half the teachers took Educational Curriculum (56.25%) and the remainder completed Action Research in Arabic (46.75%). The general levels of satisfaction were high with over 90% rating it a high-quality course which met their expectations and where the contents of the course were relevant to the teaching context. Feedback on the moderators was extremely positive with 100% 'strongly agree' or 'agree' that the moderators had been helpful in helping to put the content into practice. They were also seen as available for help and support.

The levels of challenge within the course were appropriate (with over 84% judging the content as just right). Participants were very positive about all aspects of the course (particularly

synchronous workshops delivered through Zoom) and the ease of use of the platform. The forums were slightly less positively evaluated.

The overall comments suggest that the programme has been effective in increasing teachers' self-confidence. In particular, there were very strong endorsements of the trainers/ moderators. Comments also suggest that teachers want more training in the future. Overall, the data suggests high levels of engagement and perceived usefulness. However, there were a couple of comments about the difficulty of engaging with the forum and not being able to download content. Clearly there were also at least occasional access and broadband issues.

Survey two has similar levels of satisfaction from the 33 respondents. All the statements achieve over 95% in the 'strongly agree' and 'agree' category (with very similar splits between strongly agree and agree). However, 'I learned new teaching ideas that I can apply in my classroom' is rated the highest (with 70% strongly agree 30% agree). Fewer participants felt that the course helped them 'create a more inclusive classroom' (36.36% strongly agree). Interestingly the survey picked up information about technical challenges, so question two is important in identifying technical problems they might have faced (80% agreed or strongly agreed that they had faced problems). However, these problems do not have a significant impact on learning gain (as over 80% said that technical problems have not significantly impacted them). A reason for this is that support was clearly available (over 90% agreed or strongly agreed in this regard), so where participants had technical problems, e-moderators were clearly able to respond.

There are varied comments arising in the open-ended section. Comments are wide-ranging relating to the 'needs of the learners', 'teacher qualifications', 'content and up-to-date teaching methods'. There is a cluster of comments around the idea of increasing their capacity in distance/remote teaching (a request for '*distance learning modalities to be more explicit*', '*remote teaching', 'distance learning modalities*' and '*distance learning methods during crisis*', '*distance education*', '*teaching methods that contribute to facilitating development distance education*'). Not surprisingly, more than half the respondents seem to be struggling with student psychological problems. There are specific calls for help with psychological support and child protection issues ('*psychological support for children', 'child protection and child psychological support*' and '*dealing with students who suffer from attention deficit*' and '*child protection in crisis*' as well as '*psychological effects due to war and psychological stress*'). There is also a significant strand calling for active methods, learning through play, technology, teaching aids and useful software programs. Interestingly there

are also several calls for 'Train the Trainer' content. There also are some striking and understandable aspirational requests ('*spread love and peace*').

Survey three has 11 responses and attempts to get more concrete detail about context; (a) what kind of situation do you teach in, for example, a school, at home? (b) how old are your students? (c) how many students do you typically have in a class? (d) what kinds of resources and materials are available to you to teach?

Although there is some variation in the ages that are taught (ranging between six and 14). The average age is around 3 to 4 years. Most schools have around 35 students, but some have as many as 55. Some teachers only have a textbook whereas others have videos and overhead projectors. Where teachers only have a textbook, they sometimes have 'colour paper' and 'toys'. In some schools there is a library. There is some variety in the teachers themselves, as some of them have a more wide-ranging role (for example one is a project manager for 107 schools). This probably explains comments on an earlier survey about the need for 'Train the Trainer' content.

Question two on this survey was designed to see how much flexibility teachers have (in relation to institutional guidelines or curriculum). Most report having to follow a fixed curriculum (i.e. from '*the directorate of education*'), although there is still some element of control. One teacher says, '*we sometimes add something simple to clarify*' another says, '*we do not follow textbooks 100%*'. Some teachers have more control, and this may be because they are not teaching in government-controlled areas. However, this is not explicit in the survey data. Overall, the majority of responses suggest little flexibility. This is interesting as the earlier survey data suggested that they have the ability to take on board at least some of the TfS content.

Question three asks about changes teachers have made since taking the BC course. 9% report having made 'small changes', 72% have made 'a number of changes' and 18% report 'significant change'. This data broadly supports the view that changes have been made to teaching and the participants have engaged well with the course. Question 4 asked for details about what they 'did not do before training' and some learning points arising seem to suggest '*classifying students intelligences*' and aspects of the '*students personality*', '*being able to treat children with special educational needs differently*', '*incorporating action research*', '*controlling the class', 'using icebreakers', 'discussing options and perspectives with students and colleagues', 'different kinds of assessment', 'collecting data about students', 'dividing the class into groups*', and '*use of games*'. Again, there are a lot of comments about classroom management ('*diverse questions*' and '*focussing on smart questions*').

Current situation in Syria

The current situation in Syria is uniquely challenging. The COVID-19 pandemic is just one of many challenges. Save the Children report that 6.7 million people are internally displaced. Daily life is precarious and insecure with 12.4 million people food insecure and 1.3 million severely food insecure. Electricity supply is sporadic at best, especially for many in the North and North-East regions. There are estimated to be a shortage of between 40,000 and 60,000 teachers across Syria and COVID-19 has made the situation worse with school closures. A report in February 2021 on ReliefWeb (2021) reports Save the Children sources in saying that an estimated half of the children that were going to school in North Syria before the COVID-19 outbreak have now dropped out. An estimated 2.45 million children, or one in three, were already out of school, by the end of 2019 in the whole of Syria. COVID-19 has pushed an additional 50% out of education in the north of the country, resulting in two thirds of children being out of school in northern Syria. Child labour '*is a particular grave concern in North East Syria, where 79% of the teachers said students dropped out because they had to support their families financially*' (ReliefWeb, 2021).

Current North East Syria cohort

The current focus on teachers in North East Syria for TfS Syria was partly because they did not get targeted in the first programme so there was a sense in which this area had been neglected:

'It was an area that we didn't target in our program, because there was no clarity about, like how to approach this, and we didn't have any partner or platform to share our programmes. But then, now that there's more clarity, we launched a call for specifically North East Syria teachers. And we have now 95 or 100 teachers, who are taking training.'

The current cohort includes a group of teachers of English in North East Syria, but this is not the focus of this report. The North East Syria teachers trained in Arabic receive training in the following modules:

• Getting started

• Understanding Special Educational Needs

• Understanding lesson planning

• Understanding and anticipating classroom management problems

Some previous cohorts in Syria had received training in action research. However, the current cohort trained in Arabic does not have an action research element. It uses the translated TfS modules above in Arabic. In making these selections for the current cohort, previous feedback had been taken into account:

'Another, I mean, another challenge was like in Cohort One, they said there was they were very overwhelmed with the content, like we gave too many modules in a short period of time. So, we tried to mitigate that in the next one like in 2019, we try to give one module per month, but with more in-depth knowledge.'

This part of Syria is on the Iraq border, but this does not always help them with connectivity, although Iraq does supply some electricity: '*they come from different villages. And in the villages, the internet coverage from Iraq is so poor. So, they go to the centres or to schools where the signal is stronger in order to, to participate and be part of the virtual session*'.
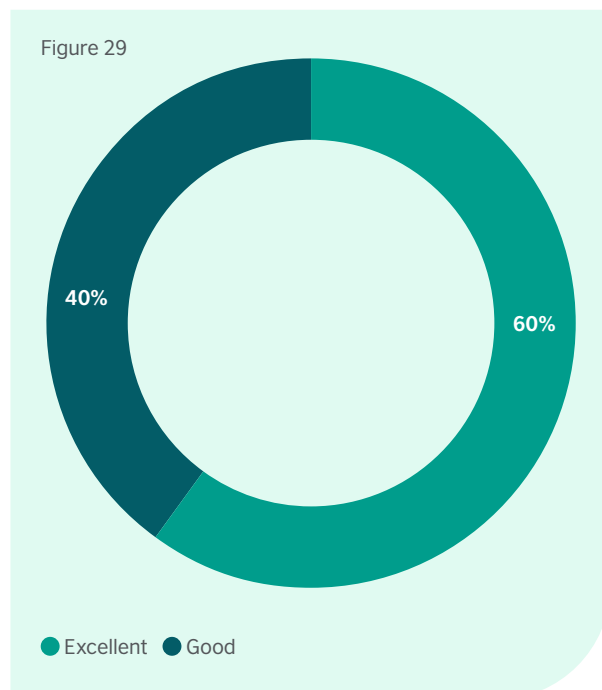
In relation to the application process, there were some initial difficulties. Specifically, it was difficult for teachers to download the form and send it by email, so the BC put the application on Google Forms. They then shared the link with a local partner who shared it with a number of local schools. They got 100 applications and there were between 15 and 18 teachers in each group.

Survey data

In relation to the teachers' experience being part of the online TfS programme, 100% of the respondents referred to their involvement as being either 'Excellent' (60%) or 'Good' (40%):

Figure 29. Rating your experience of being part of TfS.

In terms of the specific details of the teachers' experiences of taking part in the online TfS programme, the overall set of replies, as seen below, show the participants' positive view on the programme. 80% of the teachers 'disagreed' (40%) or only 'partly agreed' (40%) that being in an online TfS programme has been a challenging process compared with a F2F one. When referring to the resources and materials provided, 80% of the teachers 'agreed' (40%) and 'strongly agreed' (40%) with the fact that the course had provided resources and materials to teach online. On the other hand, 80% of the participants affirmed by either 'agreeing' (60%) or 'strongly agreeing' (20%) that the F2F TfS Programme is more effective than the online one. Despite this assertion, 80% of the teachers considered that they have enjoyed working with other teachers online by 'agreeing' (60%) and 'strongly agreeing' (20%) with this statement:

See right Figure 30. Experience of the TfS programme.

Concerning the benefits of the online TfS Programme, the teachers seemed to have received favourable assistance through the training. 60% of them strongly agreed (20%) and agreed (40%) with the claim that the online programme has helped them to help their learners with their digital competencies. However, 80% strongly agreed (60%) and agreed (20%) with the idea of having the training in Arabic (rather than English). By contrast, the same percentage (80%) of teachers either strongly agreed (20%) or agreed (60%) with the assertions that the online programme has helped them share digital resources with their learners, create a positive learning experience for them, and become better teachers:

See right Figure 31. Benefits of the TfS programme.

Figure 29

● Excellent ● Good

Figure 30

● Do not agree ● Partly agree ● Agree ● Strongly agree

	Do not agree	Partly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Being in an online Teaching for Success programme has been a challenging process compared with 'face-to-face' Teaching for Success programme	40%	40%	20%	
Teaching for Success programme has provided resources and materials that I need to teach	20%	40%	40%	
'Face-to-face' Teaching for Success programme are more effective than online Teaching for Success programme	20%		60%	20%
I have enjoyed working with other teachers online		20%	60%	20%

Figure 31

● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Partly agree

	Strongly agree	Agree	Partly agree
Teaching for Success programme has helped me to help my learners with their digital competencies	20%	40%	40%
I think it is a good idea to have the training in Arabic (rather than English)	60%	20%	20%
Teaching for Success programme has helped me share digital resources with my learners	20%	60%	20%
Teaching for Success programme has helped me create a positive learning experience for my learners	20%	60%	20%
Teaching for Success programme has helped me to be a better teacher	20%	60%	20%

Figure 32

● Very successful ● Successful ● Partly successful ● Not successful
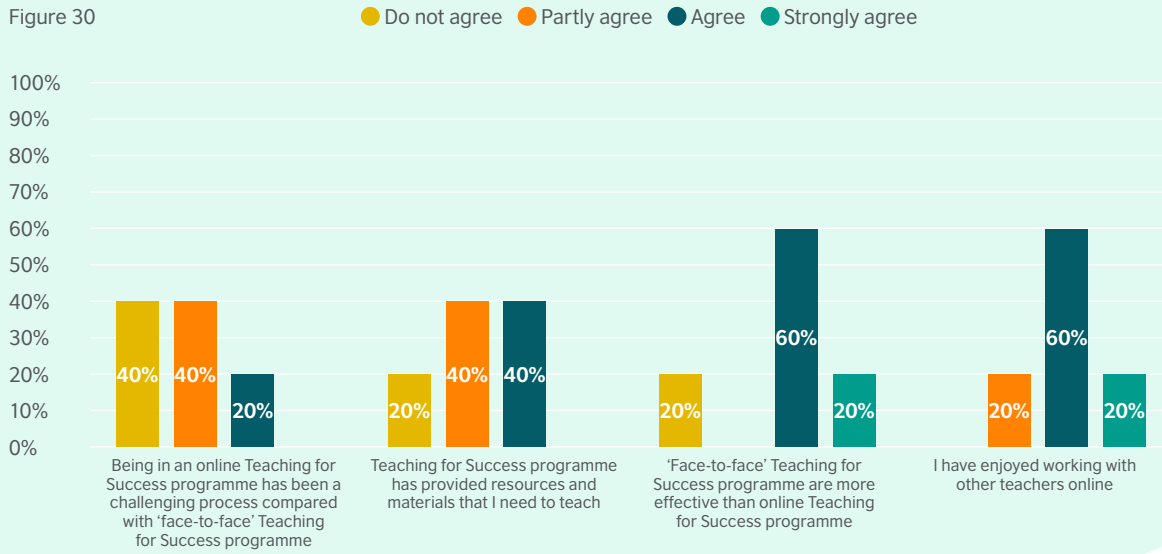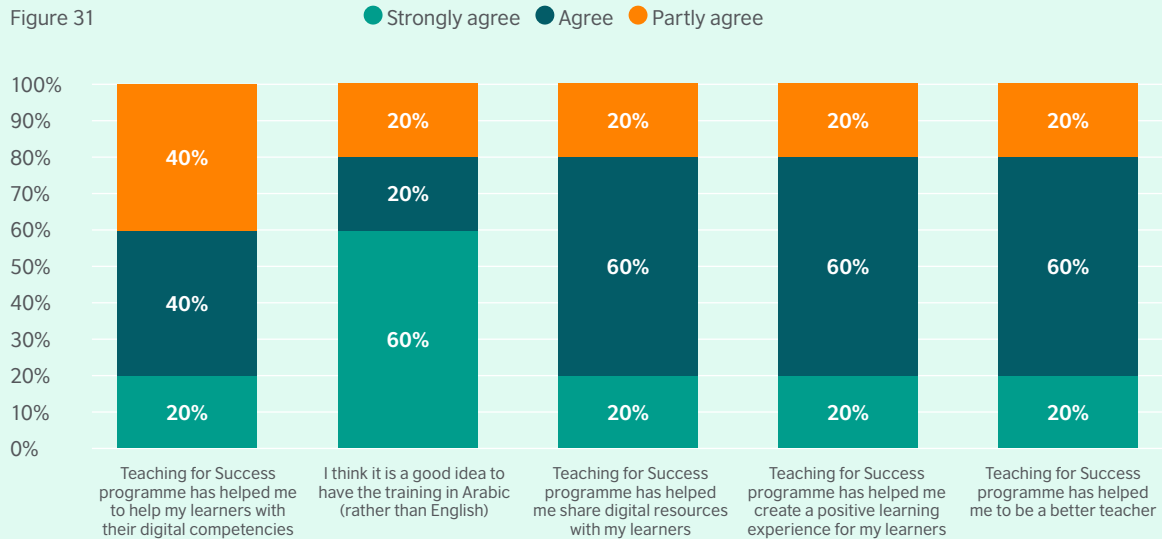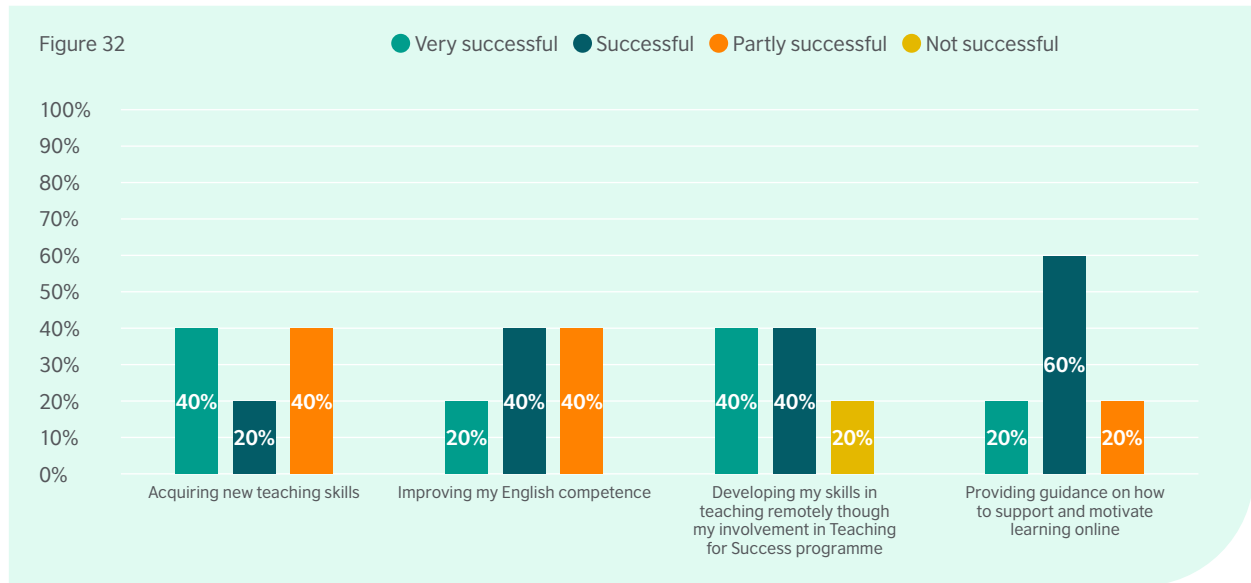

Regarding the success of the programme in terms of learning, the responses showed a positive tendency towards the fulfilment of the teachers' learning goals. When referring to the acquisition of new teaching skills, 60% of the participants ranked the programme as being either 'very successful' (40%) or 'successful' (20%). Similarly, 60% of the teachers considered that the programme was 'very successful' (20%) or 'successful' (40%) in improving their English competence. In relation to the development of teachers' skills in teaching remotely, 80% of the teachers rated the training as either 'very successful' (40%) or 'successful' (40%). Likewise, 80% of the responses referred to the programme as being 'very successful' (20%) or 'successful' (60%) in providing guidance on how to support and motivate learning online:

See above Figure 32. Learning gains from the TfS programme.

In terms of the teachers' confidence in using digital tools for teaching, 60% of the responses show that the participants have a high level of confidence. No teachers chose 'very high' and 20% rate their skills as 'average':

Figure 33. Confidence in using digital tools.

Figure 33

● High ● Average ● Low
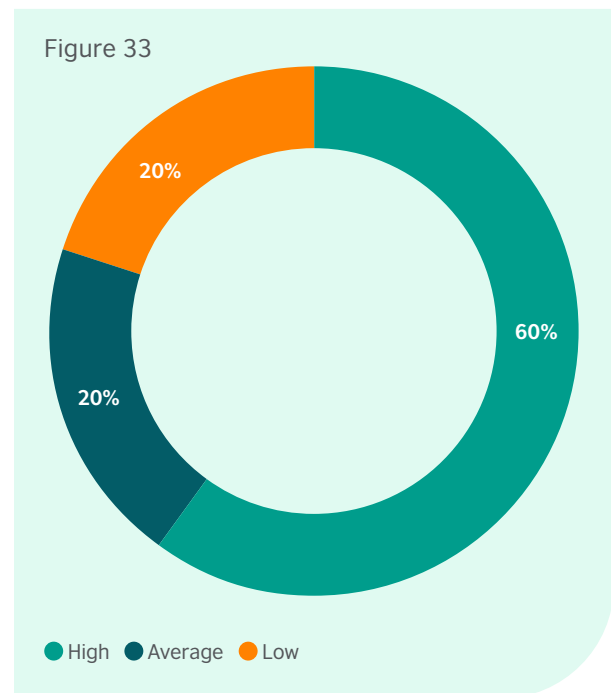
Focussing on the current situation of teachers in Syria, most of the teaching is being held F2F with groups of up to 50 students. In the case of this survey respondents, the teachers teach in primary school, so they cover several subjects, among them English, Maths, Arabic language, and Science. Depending on the school, some teachers are able to use PPT slides and projectors, while others face the challenge of not having any teaching materials.

Summarising the actions that the teachers have implemented to give extra support to their learners, they mentioned the use of WhatsApp groups and e-mails with students

to discuss with them and/or their parents to provide further details on daily homework.

In relation to the differences about learning online compared with F2F, teachers interpreted this as a question about their current teaching. They mentioned the fact that they are in camps and the internet connection is not available to all the students. Hence, some teachers shared their Wi-Fi hotspots with their learners, so that they can access the information online. Other teachers pointed out the challenge of interpreting reactions and engaging learners online. Thus, it is difficult for teachers to determine if learners are understanding the lesson or if they are in need of encouragement to participate.

Regarding the opportunities/advantages in learning online, teachers were positive about the possibilities given by the technology to continue providing education during the current circumstances. Teachers also highlighted that learning online increases learners' autonomy on accessing knowledge anywhere at any time, while reducing the time, effort and money invested on transportation and printed materials.

In terms of the difficulties/barriers of only being able to work online, mostly focussed on poor internet availability. They also highlighted the issue of the reliability and integrity of online assessment. In addition, teachers mentioned the inability to supervise the learning process online, requiring them to provide homework in the form of quizzes and exercises to be completed by learners after the lessons. Related to the integrity of online examinations, teachers have identified several cases of plagiarism.

The final comments and feedback from the teachers in Syria are related to their demand for more training courses, as well as the need for electronic devices, so that online teaching and learning can continue being promoted.

Qualitative research

The following section develops a thematic presentation of some of the key findings from focus groups and an observation of an online training session. It also includes comments from interviews with one of the programme managers. Most of the quotations are from two focus groups: a focus group with teacher educators (based in Lebanon) and a focus group with two teachers (who had taken the course in 2019). The report data is anonymous and so we have integrated the 'voices' of the teacher and teachers to support and illustrate the evaluations being made.

As explained in the introduction, this is something of a mixed data set. The teacher educators mostly talked about the current cohort in North East Syria (October 2020 - March 2021) and the teachers from a previous cohort (2019). On a more positive note, it does give us perspectives on two cohorts to add to the survey data collected and summarised earlier. Although we tried to establish a time to talk to teachers in this cohort, in the end it was not possible for them to put a group together. This is partly because the BC currently has a policy of using MS Teams rather than Zoom for data collection and the teachers in North East Syria do not have access to this software. Instead, we talked to two Syrian teachers currently in Lebanon who had worked for Save the Children in Lebanon and had taken the Arabic Methodology course in the previous cohort in 2019 (one from group 5 and the other from group 6).

Overall evaluation

The overall evaluation of TfS materials delivered is very positive: '*I love it … some teachers cannot join this course … so that's a problem … I think Syria needs these ideas about teaching*'. The focus groups provided other very positive views on the programme: '*I want to say something, this training was very beneficial. For me, I think for all teachers*'. There was also a strong appeal for more of this kind of training: '*Syria needs this training, but many teachers can't get it because of the internet problem*'. The focus on classroom methodology for primary teachers was endorsed: '*yeah methodology. Exactly. lesson planning. Educational, special educational needs. Yeah. Yeah*'.

The teachers all have an appropriate level of previous experience to bring to the training event. Some of them are experienced teachers and some are currently teacher trainers: '*Participants are all experienced … the teachers, especially those who are teaching Arabic. And some of them are trainers, they're training teachers. This is what they're telling me. And they're working hard, they're overloaded. Sometimes they don't have time to reply, but they're trying their best to reply in the forum to really participate*'. The teachers working for UNICEF are particularly strong and help ensure that dialogue in synchronous sessions is of a good standard: '*there are competent teachers, especially those who are working with UNICEF. And in the live sessions, they're answering questions, we have really excellent discussions*'.

The teachers spoke positively about session structure, variety and materials. They appreciated the link between one session and the last and the chances for genuine dialogue. This is summarised by an e-moderator: '*So we always started with remembering the last one. Yeah. And learning new things. So, every time we have a new subject, we'll talk about it. And the others talk about our experience and our teaching*'. In the recorded synchronous Zoom session, there were frequent examples of

extended teacher turns which showed that there was a strong level of teacher engagement. For example, a teacher spoke at length about *'patterns of interaction'* in the classroom, as well as *'post-lesson evaluation'* as key elements of her practice.

Course content

Overall, the course content is received positively. The teachers contrasted previous teacher training they had (which was very theoretical) with this more practical and classroom-based approach. As one e-moderator explains: *'I came to do TfS, which is the modules for Syrian teachers inside Syria … you find that their knowledge is kind of theoretical, sometimes they know the theory, but seek practice'*.

One challenge for e-moderators and the Programme Manager is that the TfS platform and the module content is exclusively in English. The e-moderators had to translate this content into English: *'So first, the basic PowerPoint is from the British Council … sometimes we have problems with translations … I have to correct many words in Arabic'*. For this reason, they selected and translated key slides.

Due to technological challenges e-moderators could not rely on synchronous sharing of slides, so content was often sent in advance, usually in the form of PDFs:

'So, I add a lot of things to the PowerPoint. Yeah, like questions, like feedback, like add a lot of things. And because of the problem with the internet. So today, I'm going to ask them about three lesson plans… I sent the PDF document in order to read this document before the session.'

When synchronous sessions go well there is enjoyable discussion: *'I use breakout rooms to discuss different things for one hour, sometimes one hour and a half. Depends. And usually, I see that they enjoy it. They like the discussion. And they tell me a lot of things about it'*.

The teachers appreciate a regular structure to the synchronous sessions. This is seen as especially important by e-moderators:

'The approach they follow is the regular approach that I follow in an English classroom, when I teach it starts, every session starts with a warmer, then discussing what has happened previously, then sharing the outcomes of the session. What are we going to learn in this session, some activating schemata of teaching methodology or teaching vocabulary terminology, sorry, pedagogical terms or things like that. And then the PowerPoint, which is already created by the teaching for success project.'

As well as building sessions around translated TfS PPT material, they also integrate tasks from a 'trainer book', which is related to the 'trainee book': *'So there are a lot of comments and tasks in the trainer book that e-moderators find useful'*.

Video content is also included as input: *'And our teacher showed some videos that I think about'.* There is also at least some sharing of teachers' video: *'I share some video that I make… I remember one time I have a comment about some tools for students. So, I am recording a video when I am doing this tool… after that I sent a video… to share in this session'.* The other group (group 5) did not share video but did share pictures. The teacher from group 6 reported that video helped make things more specific. He made a comparison between his diploma and this TfS training: *'I feel it's different, diploma and this training… we are doing something more specific and more deeply'*.

Support

The e-moderators felt well supported in their role and had welcomed the training and support then got from BC support staff: *'they have supported us all the time'*. They had completed a four-week e-moderator training course, as well as orientation meetings. They were well informed about the TfS platform and had been given time to work on the task of making changes to existing PPT materials, particularly changing the content into Arabic. The e-moderator training had been helpful in practicing Zoom sessions and how to use the forum and other tools, such as WhatsApp. The Programme Manager had offered advice on particular challenges. In the focus group, the e-moderators were very happy with their induction and support. Indeed, the e-moderators are now very experienced and have been working with several cohorts. The teachers also felt that the e-moderators were very professional and committed. They appreciated the levels of support especially when things went wrong with connectivity.

Technological challenges

There are many technological challenges, and this is undoubtedly the major barrier. It also explains issues with attendance and participation, which impacts on the options for the teacher educators. The teacher educators would have liked to use breakout rooms for example in Zoom sessions, but it is often not worth it because it inevitably leads to further connections issues. There is evidence that the problem is much worse with the present cohort: *'No, I didn't face this problem before in previous projects, especially in Syria, but I don't know why this time'.* This is a cause of massive frustration for all concerned:

'So, it was heavily focussed on like, the technical issues, but the thing is that the technical issues caused a lot of frustration … Oh, yeah, it's just a

technical issue, but like, the minute their, their user is blocked, it puts them really down, because they need, I think, a certain time to get connected again, and then it has to be done by us. So, there are some delays. So, this is something they all mentioned.'

Often it is not simply a matter of poor internet connection, it is the lack of electricity: '*it's not in our hand, which is the electricity and the internet connection in Syria…I know what's the situation like in Syria, so there is no electricity, because the major electric station has been damaged. So actually, it's kind of generators that generate electricity*'. The teachers who are in Syrian villages in the North East face the greatest challenge: '*It's easier for some Course Participants (CPs) because they are in the same camp*'. The more diverse groups have more problems: '*they come from different villages from different regions… sometimes they joined for five minutes and all of a sudden, they're out*'.

The teachers that can overcome the technical challenges are engaged and participating fully, but others cannot connect:

'But others are excellent. Still. Others Yeah, excellent. What they're facing, they're attending, they're joining the live sessions, the Zoom sessions, but I think the others are good teachers, but the main problem is the internet.'

Many of the teachers have old phones with limited functionality:

'Some of them have very old phones and they cannot open a document. A PDF document … so I'm helping them before the meeting, please read this document just to prepare them for the live session. After that, I sent the link for the recording asking questions just to engage them still with this.'

Synchronous sessions

Zoom sessions were used exclusively for synchronous online sessions. Each week e-moderators conducted a Zoom session with their teachers. Usually, content was sent out before the synchronous sessions. These self-access materials were then the focus of discussion and review. E-moderators were positive about these sessions, although there were many problems with connection, and this helps to explain the variation in times of sessions (anything between 60 mins and 120 mins). Teachers were not always able to log in on time and there were lots of dropouts and delays.

There was variety in the way PPT slides were used in these sessions, according to e-moderators. Sometimes they were sent out in advance and sometimes simply presented synchronously. The recording of a Zoom session reviewed for this report featured a session about lesson planning. The PPT slides were varied and helped specify

useful questions that teachers could engage with when planning their lessons. The teachers were encouraged to elicit the different characteristics, components, and stages of their own lesson plan. There was extensive discussion of the components that the teachers can use (and do use) to plan their lessons. This recording of a Zoom session also featured the use of breakout rooms. The e-moderator put teachers in rooms but three other teachers had poor internet connection and so they had their discussion in the main room instead of the breakout rooms, and the e-moderator moved between the rooms.

Although the recording of a TfS session showed good use of breakout rooms, the focus group suggested that in the current cohort this was not working so well. Tasks were attempted in breakout rooms during Zoom but both e-moderators said they had problems. They found that it often caused connectivity glitches and lost time.

It is interesting to note that one of the upsides of the decision to have clusters of teachers in one area (e.g. in camps) is that it sometimes possible for them to gather in one place and be F2F (although obviously still remote from the e-moderator):

'…so, when it comes to joining the classes, or the virtual sessions, they gather all together in one in one tent, or in one camp or, or in one caravan, whatever the place is. And we don't do breakout rooms because they are all in the same room.'

'…and they mute their phones or their computers. And they listen to me via one computer and then I do the discussion. I do the discussion in pairs and groups because they are all 18 CPS in the same room.'

This is not possible for most groups: '*the other groups are all made up of teachers who cannot be F2F*'.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp is often used to make up for problems with connecting to synchronous sessions: '*Yeah, I'm ready in order to inform others who cannot be there…. I always send the link … through WhatsApp … so that they can watch the recording*'. WhatsApp is used in advance of synchronous sessions, in a flipped approach, including questions, so teachers can reflect. It is also used after the Zoom session, the e-moderators send round a link for the recorded session for the teachers that have missed it.

WhatsApp is also used as a fallback or plan B when something goes more drastically wrong:

'…we were talking about strategies for or the components of a lesson plan, and all of a sudden, everybody disappeared… so I transferred the same question to WhatsApp, and I received

comments … and then what I did is I moved these discussions that happened through WhatsApp … to the British Council platform.'

As a response to the electricity and connectivity issues, the e-moderators have had to be flexible and push out as much content as they can through WhatsApp: *'So, I created a forum, I created something like a forum on a WhatsApp group, I named it the forum in Arabic just to help them, so if they have time, they can really send ideas there'*.

One of the teachers talked about the value of WhatsApp too:

'Yeah, we always talk on WhatsApp. We have a group on WhatsApp or send email to each other when we have an assignment … that we have to do in the week. So always in touch.'

Although WhatsApp has proved invaluable it is not able to solve all problems and this is depressing and frustrating for the e-moderators involved:

'…but still, I'm trying my best really to motivate them to tell them please reply to your friends via WhatsApp or something like this as much as possible. But frankly, speaking, I'm not very happy. Why? Even with WhatsApp some cannot. They don't have the internet to answer via WhatsApp.'

Overall though, WhatsApp is invaluable in keeping up communication and providing links to TfS or Google Drive. In some cases, the e-moderators use WeTransfer to send the recording of sessions: *'After I finished the Zoom session, I convert, I convert the audio file, I upload it to WeTransfer. And I created a shareable link out of it, and I send it to them by WhatsApp'*.

In summary, the e-moderators reported that without WhatsApp it would have been impossible to adapt and continue to support the remote PD of these teachers in Syria.

Medium of Instruction (Arabic)

It was not possible to get data from the current cohort about the fact that Arabic is used as their medium of instruction. The survey data above suggests that most teachers think this is a good idea. The teachers in the focus group, however, were of the opinion that it would have been better to have had the training in English: *'For me, it's better to speak in English because I can develop my language and I can use it. Especially in Syria. We can't use English so much'*. Another teacher spoke of being ready to take on the challenge of English: *'an opportunity of doing practice. And let me try'*. However, this may not be a representative sample of either of two cohorts, as they volunteered for a focus group to be conducted in English (although there was a translator present). However, the views are worth considering: *'No, I think we can mix it.*

Choose the language that you prefer for me, I am sure I should prefer to be in English because I want to practice it. Maybe I can't really speak English, so they prefer to be in Arabic and maybe you can make a choice'. This point of view is line with current views of translanguaging (e.g. García, 2009) where the focus is on communication rather than the language itself.

One of the e-moderators had previously worked with TfS materials and groups in English: *'At the beginning, I really had Teaching for Success in English. Now we're having it in Arabic. I like to have it in English, but it's good now you know'*. Overall, the decision to go with Arabic medium is probably the right one for the current cohort in North East Syria. The Zoom session we reviewed from 2019 which was conducted in Arabic suggested that the teachers' English level was probably not high enough for the TfS training to be delivered in English (despite the comments from the two teachers in the focus group above). The translation shows how the e-moderator apologises when she showed them the headings that are written in English on the TfS platform.

Engagement and motivation

Syrian teachers may lack a new mobile phone and a good internet connection, but they certainly do not lack motivation. The levels of motivation are very high, as one e-moderator confirms: *'…and I do Arabic methodology of teaching … the amount of motivation is like awesome … it's amazing'*. Another e-moderator said: *'so it's not an issue of motivation or engagement. It's the whole war situation that created this motivation in them. Like I mean, those traumatised teachers are teaching traumatised kids'*. The teachers value and appreciate the chance to work on something positive.

The current Arabic methodology course is very well attended and the e-moderators' assessment is that when they do not attend it is because of connectivity problems, as there are always messages to this effect on WhatsApp. The e-moderators try to involve teachers in deciding the most appropriate time for the group and this helps keep attendance and engagement high: *'I send the Doodle poll of the times and they suggest for example, my Arabic session is always on Monday at the end of our week, because our week starts on Tuesday and ends on Monday'*.

The focus group with the 2019 teachers also suggests that motivation was high, although there were more issues with attendance: *'we were in our group. We were ten maybe … but there are always some specific person who was … always in the class … there were maybe about five of us'*. However, there was evidence that engagement and motivation went beyond the actual synchronous Zoom session: *'when we make a group work for assignment, some assignment … we make another WhatsApp group … to discuss that assignment and divided the work…'*.

Learning gains

Evidence from the focus groups shows learning gains in making teaching more learner-centred, a greater understanding of classroom management, a greater range of tasks and strategies, more appreciation of classroom language and instructions, as well as ways to making learning enjoyable.

Most of the learning gains talked about by teachers in the focus group were related to methodology and making their teaching more learner centred: '…so that you can use it in teaching groups and how we can use play and we can make it fun … for them and make them love to be in our school'. Another teacher reported that she had previously had a problem with lesson management: '… I lost a lot of time, I don't know how to order what we have to do…so it was very helpful for me … I learned how to make the primary school students happy … I can make them happy and enjoy'. There were also reported strong gains in classroom strategies and language. In addition, the teachers reported greater understanding of specific tools and strategies that they could then use in the classroom. Another area of gain was assessment of learning. One teacher said: '… how to assess the learning … how to how to do feedback. And during this session, and my class, so there are a lot of methods and ways to do feedback. I learned some strategies that helped me in my class to do feedback'. He gave an example of such a strategy: 'I use, like a card that I give a student to collect all their feedback about the subject that we're talking in my class. So, this is a way that I collect all the student feedback'.

A number of the comments teachers made in the focus group confirm that the TfS training has given them more ideas about how to make learning enjoyable and motivating for learners: 'some activities that I'm doing during the session to change a student's mood in class … when do some activity, group activity, role play … that makes students more glad and enjoy more and be active in with me in class'. Another teacher talked about using jigsaw reading to increase interaction and help students work together.

Resilience and flexibility

From the various challenges reported above and the evidence that motivation and engagement is still very high, we can make a claim that these e-moderators and teachers are both resilient and flexible in trying to maintain effective remote PD. There are plenty of individual accounts from e-moderators, which are testament to such individual resilience: 'Yeah. And one of them one of them is, as a very motivated teacher. He stayed outside when it was raining heavily. And I'm, I'm I want to join even if even if it's raining…'. The importance of flexibility in such challenging circumstances is expressed by both e-moderators:

'Another thing is the flexibility when working with teachers in fragile contexts. And in a challenging one, so you don't only have the internet, electricity problems, but you also have huge problems that risk their lives in terms of, let's say, conflict, or at least now the economic situation. And in Syria, which may, like, professional development, not exactly, it's a need, perhaps not a priority for teachers in the country.'

TfS Syria is helping to support resilience: 'It's really language and resilience happening there. It is really an issue. Yes, we want to make things better, we will try to make things better in one way or another. And luckily, the British Council created us this project …'.

E-moderators adapt to the technological barriers in different ways. They are constantly seeking the best balance of Zoom, email and WhatsApp. As we saw above, WhatsApp provides a tool that enables flexibility:

'So, what I do is I, I give them a minute or two, I set a timer on the screen, as if I am in a F2F class, but it's virtually, it's a timer, then they share their knowledge. If any of them disappears during the session, they immediately send me WhatsApp and no, this is my comment. And this is what I wanted to say.'

The e-moderators are happy to keep teaching and extend sessions (even 2.5 hours if the internet has been particularly challenging for the group).

Platform for content

As previously mentioned, one of the main challenges of teaching the course in Arabic is that the TfS materials were originally written in English: 'it is not so well organised or as many resources because they need to be translated in Arabic'. This has meant a different way of dealing with the TfS content:

'So, it was a learning process for us as well … they did a content set up on the platform … as a self-access learning journey … when these are delivered in English, you will have modules set up on the platform, so the teachers would go access them, like self-access, and then meet their moderators for live sessions. For the Arabic teachers, it wasn't the case, because we don't have a built-in content on the platform in Arabic. Yeah, we created that through like the PowerPoint that we have put on the system, some videos at the forum. And of course, we gave them offline materials too…'

The e-moderators were of the opinion that the materials are still useful but there's a lot of work to do to ensure a good quality of translation: 'I mean, we do have the resources actually, but it's not translated and familiarised into Arabic and translation is not enough in this case'. Ideally they would like more work to be done on the platform: 'to build in the materials technology wise …the Teaching for Success platform is not able to

incorporate Arabic ...the forum was very challenging to upload things and to engage. It was a headache for them, to be honest, because like the system was not designed or built to incorporate that'.

Implications

This is a well-run course that has found ways to target different groups of teachers in Syria. It is certainly worth trying to deliver TfS materials in Arabic and to concentrate on classroom methodology as a form of capacity building. There is a strong view from the e-moderators that there is a considerable need and demand for this kind of remote PD. One of them speaks from experience:

'So actually, the Syrian teachers need more and more of this methodology training. So, it's a need. Because you don't know how much destruction happened in Syria during this war. You don't know how much mental damage happened. I visited Syria two times during the war in 2017. And last year, in October, we went just before the Corona, and both times I found that education is going backwards. So, the more or we provide our knowledge, our expertise to them, because we were lucky to leave Syria before things started burning.'

The decision to focus on a neglected area of Syria has been validated by the participants. It was not possible to talk directly to the current cohort, but the view of the e-moderators is certainly that the course has been valuable and welcomed by the teachers. Previous cohorts have reported that the TfS materials delivered in Arabic have given them more confidence to make learning more learner-centred and enjoyable: '*...it's always happy and funny for them. When I want to know how they are improving in something I can give them a game, if I want to know what did they learn? I give them a game*'.

Overall, similar to the survey data, there is still a preference for F2F even though there is an acceptance that this is currently not possible for teachers: '*I think it's more active ... we can do some activity, more activity ... more effective session if we do like a session in a room and discussion*', and another teacher expressed the following opinion: '*I think it's better to be face to face. Because when you deal with someone and interact with him and talk with him, you can learn more, you can learn from his feeling about his what he do...*'.

Recommendations

It is hard to make robust recommendations given the limited and mixed-cohort data set. The following are offered as potential talking points for future planning of remote PD in Syria.

Continue and expand programme

It is recommended that BC continue and expand this important work. There were many appreciative comments from teachers who have been involved in the programme. It helps Syrian teachers to be connected to the outside world: '*it's a window to the world because they are detached in their countries from any other learning opportunity*'. Especially in North East Syria, education has 'gone backwards' and there is a strong demand from teachers to improve the situation.

Translanguaging

It may be worth adopting a translanguaging approach, rather than adopting Arabic or English wholesale. There is not enough evidence for this report to make the judgement about whether the switch to Arabic, as the training language, is the right policy. On the face of it, it seems like a good idea to conduct training in L1 if the teachers are teaching Maths and Science or generalists. There certainly is not enough data here to question that decision. However, the two teachers in the focus group would have preferred to have the training in English and suggested that a mix of languages might be a good policy: '*try doing this .... It's like a suggestion*'.

Investment in a more multilingual TfS platform

If more training is going to be delivered in L1 (in this case Arabic) more investment is needed in establishing an online platform for translated TfS materials. More investigation can be done on how this might be achieved. There is more work to be done on making the forum more user-friendly too.

Making application easier

It is recommended that BC develop an online form which is easier for Syrian teachers to simply fill in on a smartphone. Many do not have email, and this causes problems for application: '*They like they don't know how to access emails, and they don't know how to function on this*'. A form that could be filled in online, on either a computer or smartphone, would help. Such a feature would be appreciated by teachers: '*we usually we put the form for the application of the website and teachers to apply need to fill in that and send it by email, because we don't have the feature on the British Council website to fill it online and submitted online*'.

WhatsApp

It is recommended to plan and deliver a WhatsApp based PD project that might be more scalable and able to reach a much larger number of teachers with low data videos or cartoons focussed on improving classroom methodology. This would be a significant investment for BC but might work rather like the previous projects in India (see Padwad and Parnham, 2019).

Implications and Recommendations

This report has brought to light some of the successes, challenges, innovations and responses evident across four remotely-delivered PD programmes in the MENA region. The BC in cooperation with Ministries of Education, UNWRA, and Save the Children has been proactive in seeking to support teachers and teacher educators in these extraordinary times. The four programmes featured in the case studies are very different in terms of history, scale and technological context. However, some common themes have emerged in the findings, and this section summarises some specific implications and recommendations, including possibilities for future research.

Effective remote PD

Broadly speaking the four cases presented above provide strong evidence that remote PD can be effective. The data presented in all four cases shows that teachers prefer F2F to remote PD. However, the data also shows that teachers appreciate and value learning online with other teachers and levels of satisfaction are consistently high across the cases (with positive endorsement of TAG experience at 95% on average). The data also shows some evidence that remote PD can have successful outcomes in teachers' practice in the classroom (Cordingley et al. 2015) and be a viable and motivating alternative to F2F.

Remote PD offers greater flexibility for teachers: '*it's best not to waste the time travelling to the TAG meeting*'. Online TAGs and CoPs become sites of exchange and support where there is an important element of choice, working both synchronously and asynchronously: '*when we share our ideas on WhatsApp, we don't need to think about a schedule, we can post when we like*'.

All four cases show that teachers can learn effectively through remote PD, providing there is adequate induction, clear explanation, and ongoing support. Synchronous sessions generally are seen as more valuable than asynchronous platforms and materials. This is because teachers particularly value peer interaction and dialogue and discussions focussed on ways to motivate pupils and improve outcomes. Some teacher educators have been slow to implement breakout rooms and

greater use of these is advisable. In some cases, this is because they were not possible because of poor internet connectivity or because software versions did not allow a breakout function. There is important future research that can be done to find the most appropriate mix of synchronous and asynchronous remote PD work in the future.

TAGs and CoPs

The data provided in Cases 2 (NTTP) and 3 (TfS OPT) support previous findings on TAGs (see Ur 2017; Borg et al. 2020) and the benefits of F2F TAGs are relevant to remotely delivered TAGs. They work best when they are local, in the sense that other teachers face similar contexts and concerns. Synchronous platforms and tools such as WhatsApp help provide a strong social and collaborative identity for the group in remote PD. The survey data makes clear that teachers enjoy being part of an online community, there is a shared purpose established, and they see themselves as part of community of teachers engaged in improving classroom practice. There is evidence from both survey and qualitative data that resilience is also fostered in TAGs. There is further research that can be done on whether this kind of collaboration and support fostered in TAGs and CoPs endures beyond facilitated interventions. We need to know more about whether such TAGs can carry on in a bottom-up and sustainable way.

Broadly, both teachers and TAG facilitators are very positive about the TAGs in terms of perceived learning gains, and this is consistent with previous studies on F2F groups (e.g. Borg 2018b). This report confirms that TAGs offer support, sharing, a sense of community, a joint basis for adjustments, innovations, and finding ways to adapt (Borg et al. 2020). They also promote teacher agency (McAleavy et al., 2018). Similar to other recent studies (e.g. Lepp et al. 2021), teachers' discussion in TAGs is mostly motivated by short-term goals, particularly maintaining social interaction with and between students, ensuring engagement, and supporting student motivation. The reviewed recordings of TAGs show that teachers have the opportunity to participate in discussion and we know that strong dialogue leads to outcomes that are more likely to be effective (Rossignoli et al. 2019).

Despite the positive comments about remote PD TAGs, the move online has also meant some inevitable teething pains. Consequently, there is scope for developing remote TAGs further in order to make them even more effective and useful for participants. Further research can track the progress of a TAG both by recording meetings and interaction (both synchronous and asynchronous) and developing a robust means of tracking this discussion and reflection to specific learning gains demonstrated in classrooms (i.e. observed adoption of materials, tools, strategies introduced in remote PD).

TAG and CoP Facilitation

There is evidence in the case studies that teachers work well with CoP leaders or TAG facilitators who teach in similar contexts. All four cases provide strong support to the position that teachers value local leaders and facilitators. In some cases, CoP leaders felt that their own teaching context was very different from teachers in their group, but most identified with and were familiar with teachers' teaching context. In this respect, the programmes are in line with Motteram and Dawson's (2019) position that it is important to find local, trusted and skilled colleagues who work in and understand the local context. In this way, they can understand the needs, context and teachers' ways of thinking. This helps build a TAG or CoP that is relevant to local needs. In most cases, this has been possible and has worked well. OPT is an exception because local contingencies have meant relying on outside e-moderators (from Romania). It is important to say however, that the levels of satisfaction with these e-moderators is extremely high. In some contexts and with some groups, there may well be an important role for more 'international' e-moderators. As ever, local contingencies or teacher feedback are key factors in making such a decision. Local e-moderators mean that translanguaging is more of possibility and this may be appropriate for many groups. On the other hand, 'international' e-moderators may be valued by teachers because they require participants to communicate and develop ideas in L2.

Synchronous sessions

In terms of synchronous sessions, Zoom is more widely used than MS Teams or Skype in the dataset. It is also seen by e-moderators as more user-friendly than other synchronous platforms. The CoPL programme (Case 1) used MS Teams but the other three cases used primarily Zoom. The synchronous MS Teams or Zoom sessions are working well for TAGs and CoPs. They provide the basis for significant interaction which is a mix of teacher educator presentation, teacher mini-presentation, and teacher to teacher educator

dialogue. E-moderators/facilitators across all four cases showed awareness, in focus groups, that substantive interactive content can lead to better engagement and learning gains (Rhodes et al. 2020).

Participation in both TAGs and CoPL sessions show good levels of interaction and engagement from those that were contributing. Not all the recorded sessions showed sustained dialogue, and some were fairly trainer-centred and this can be a tendency with remote PD (see McAleavy et al. 2018). One feature that certainly helped was the use of online polls (in line with Rose 2019).

In the future, one focus for research would be analysing differences in interaction patterns in F2F TAGs and online/remote TAGs. The pattern adopted in Case 2 (NTTP) of sequencing a more input focussed TAG with a more experiential and reflective TAG is potentially a good idea, but more work needs to be done on making the second session genuinely dialogic. This is also an area for fruitful future research.

Flipped and Hybrid PD

There are plenty of arguments that the genie is out of the bottle and that CPD will not be able to rely on F2F training in the future. At the very least, there will be expectations that F2F will be better combined with remote PD in future training iterations. Of course, there are still significant barriers. Online education costs more to develop, is relatively greedy in time for materials development and more expensive to develop than F2F courses (Turk and Cherney, 2016). However, this short-term investment is potentially cost-effective in the longer term. Going forward, Rhodes et al. (2020: 3) argue that blending synchronous and asynchronous delivery and blending F2F and remote learning may offer specific benefits by enabling trainees '*to feel part of a community while retaining travel cost savings, flexibility and social distance during remote and asynchronous elements*'. In contexts of constraint such as Syria, it is likely that remote learning is the only viable option, although those teachers in government controlled areas may be able to attend F2F events organised by the BC in Beirut. OPT teachers will probably prefer judicious mixing of F2F and remote learning options as the inconvenience of travelling to F2F events is the major factor there.

Further work needs to be done to explore appropriate use of flipped and hybrid models rather than thinking of choosing simply F2F or remote PD. In many ways the F2F versus remote/distance learning debate should be a debate that belongs in the past for PD. There may still be interventions that rely exclusively on F2F and those that rely exclusively on remote delivery, However, the challenge and opportunity for most programmes will be to arrive at the appropriate mix. So that

different phases (planning and needs analysis, delivery and engagement, and follow-up) will seek the most the appropriate blend, according to factors such as geography, availability and funding. One possibility for Case 2 (NTTP) would be to make the first part asynchronous (with pre-recorded content). Hybrid models also have more chance of sustaining engagement and ensuring follow-up (Wedell 2009).

In the dataset, often flipped elements are a response to problems with synchronous sessions and connectivity with MS Teams and Zoom rather than designed features (cf. Akçayır and Akçayır 2018). Certainly, this was the case in TfS Syria. Across all four cases, there is room for more content (including PPTs and videos) to be available before the session. This increases interest and engagement during the session and with e-moderators/facilitators. Getting the balance right between synchronous and asynchronous elements for course designers is an ongoing challenge (Kiddle and Prince 2019) but can help ensure effective PD.

Tools for remote PD

The four cases show that remote PD methodology was inevitably influenced by what technological tools they had available to them and their teachers. Various tools helped to engage participants, foster interaction and were adopted and used by teachers in many cases with their own learners.

The overall picture shows many instances of resourcefulness and commitment in utilising available digital tools purposefully to increase engagement. The data shows that TAGs and CoPs have been sites for sharing tools and then using such tools with their learners. These tools have been various, and many have been demonstrated and modelled by teacher educators. Mentimeter for example allows monitoring and motivational assessment. Online surveys and polls are both good ways to keep up with teachers' engagement (see also Rose 2019) and have been shown to be effective in terms of learning gains (Rhodes et al. 2020). There was widespread use of other tools such as Wordwall, Quizizz, Baamboozle, Quill, Nearpod, ClassKick, Socrative, Kahoot, Quizlet, Crowdsignal, Doddle, AnswerGarden and others. Although these provided much needed variety and interactivity, some of them only allow limited use before needing to upgrade and that has been a source of frustration for teachers.

Teachers need free tools that they can keep using in order to share quizzes and tasks. Ministries of Education should investigate country-wide licences for some of these so that teachers have a stable and interactive source for motivating and assessing students. A number of TAG leaders and teachers have turned to Google Classroom and other elements of the Google Suite because there currently is no cost. This cloud-based suite of free tools and features is tailored for schools and learners at home (Docs, Sheets, Forms, Slides, Google Meet)

COVID-19

The pandemic has had a strong effect on the running and importance of TAGs and CoP initiatives across the four programmes featured in this report. On the one hand, TAGs and CoPs are more important than ever; as sites for sharing, collaboration, problem-solving and emotional support. On the other hand, it has highlighted structural difficulties of lack of access to technology and support. The pandemic has engendered instances of resourcefulness and innovation, but it has also brought into focus inequalities and psychological and emotional difficulties for teachers. Teachers in interviews have said things like, '*I really miss being with my students in the classroom*' and '*it's not the same being online*' (see Dhendup and Sherab 2021).

There is good evidence that TAGs and CoPs have played a role in both emotional support and providing a form of continuity during COVID-19. The cases show that stronger relationships and increased technology skills are 'silver linings' (see Bataineh et al. 2021) in these difficult times.

Digital divide

The report confirms that at least a good proportion of the respondents felt their digital skills were good and this helped them engage in remote PD. This finding is similar to Sowton's study of teacher groups in the MENA region (Sowton 2018). Many teachers and learners had already started to integrate technology and digital literacy development into their teaching. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has turbo-charged this direction of travel. It has been a challenging time in which teachers and teacher educators have had to adapt as quickly as possible. Despite individual efforts, many education systems were not prepared for this challenge. Alternatives to F2F classroom instruction were not readily available and in many cases teachers and learners have had to improvise and do the best they can. For other teachers, it has sapped confidence and motivation in times of challenge and uncertainty.

Ministries of Education will have to take stock, but the direction of travel is clear, and training is more urgent than ever to reduce an apparent digital divide. The necessity of making sure that teachers are versatile, connected, and digitally competent will become even more important in the future. This drive will need to make sure that teachers and learners have access to appropriate technology and support. Teachers have told us in focus groups that their colleagues and students have been negatively affected by a lack of ICT tools, problems with internet access and electricity and these are the most obvious and significant

barriers to online learning (rather than motivation and lack of agency). High cost of equipment and data, inadequate infrastructure, reluctance by both teachers and students to use ICT, and lack of ICT skills are still barriers in many countries (see Adarkwah, 2020; Bergdahl and Nouri, 2020). There may well be a case for employing more 'digi gurus' that have been successful in the NTTP programme.

These four case studies confirm what we already know in terms of PD opportunities. There is a strong digital divide when you compare countries such as Yemen and Jordan with countries like Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. Teachers in Syria face a particular struggle. This is a difficult challenge to address, but it needs action: *'The pandemic has brought the need to bridge digital divides into sharp focus, with countries and schools adept at using such technologies facing fewer challenges in meeting learning goals'* (Beteille et al. 2020: 1). There are plenty of teachers and learners that have been left behind. To some extent, the teachers featured in these case studies are the lucky ones or at least the more resourceful and resilient teachers. We need to bear in mind that teachers who respond to a survey through a link from an email or Facebook pages are by definition 'connected'. As one teacher said: '*But what I've noticed in that period of time that many teachers are left behind, not just students, and this is was really frustrating, because I'm busy with communicating with my students and at the same time, I want to help my colleagues'*. More teachers need access to appropriate technology and support (see Tejedor et al. 2020). There is a need for further research to review existing provision and consider alternatives such as those suggested by the OECD (Reimers et al. 2020) for addressing inequality (see also Engzell et al. 2020).

On a positive note, there is strong evidence that the CoPs and TAGs in these four cases create conditions for sharing ideas on the integration of technology both as a response to the pandemic and as a potential ongoing way of improving engagement, interaction and motivation. This is in line with other research in the MENA region (e.g. Al-Habsi et al. 2021).

Induction and digital training

All four programmes would benefit from more basic digital training before the TAG or CoP so that time in sessions is not focussed on how to use tools and more time is created for reflection and dialogue. This would probably be best achieved in the form of an online asynchronous course which would require a 'pass' to ensure completion and engagement. This could largely be video based with screen capture to demonstrate key features of materials, platforms and tools. However, students across the MENA region also need upskilling as they are not used to many fairly basic forms of online learning, '*I used

the worksheet on Google Forms, but they found it difficult because they didn't do it from before. I use it one time with my students with 6th Grade. So my students, they need more training on this technique…'.

WhatsApp

Across the four programmes there is widespread use of WhatsApp and its role has been crucial in maintaining effective communication for remote PD. The dataset is full of instances of teachers sharing information, tasks, advice, links and support. Teachers have found ways to use phones and social messaging (especially WhatsApp) to communicate with and engage students and their parents. They have shared ideas, tools, worksheets, activities and solutions. This is line with the work of Motteram and others on the use of WhatsApp in challenging contexts (Pakistan and refugee camps in Jordan). Motteram and Dawson (2019) and Motteram et al. (2020) have provided a valuable account of videoconferencing tools and the potential of utilising WhatsApp for language teacher development. The data in our report is consistent with their findings, in that the main uses of WhatsApp are for interpersonal interactions, flipped learning, professional development, and organisational purposes.

As Rossignoli et al. (2019) remind us that most evidence on collaborative teacher professional development is from high income contexts, and there are few studies which have looked at low-cost adaptations. The teachers in this case study are from relatively low-income contexts and it's clear that WhatsApp is playing a crucial role. Particularly in Syria, a PD project that is designed around the use of WhatsApp is recommended. More research is needed to see how WhatsApp can be utilised further to help build teacher networks that would be scalable and cost-effective, in order to support sharing and reflection (Farahian and Parhamnia 2021). Research can take into account the advice in Koomar et al. (2020) for effective teacher education in low-connectivity settings as well as suggestions in Parnham et al. (2018).

Video

Across the dataset, there are some good examples where video is being integrated but this varies between programmes. Those teachers who are exposed to video in TAGs and CoPs greatly appreciate it and it helps make theoretical knowledge and new innovations much more grounded in practice for them. Remote PD has a great deal to gain from video integration as it establishes a specific connection with the classroom (Mann et al. 2019). Evidence from teachers in Egypt, OPT and Syria confirms that video is memorable and a strong catalyst for sharing and reflection. This is in line with current thinking about the use of video for CPD (e.g. Dragas

2019). In OPT and Egypt there are good examples of teacher educators using video both as input and as the basis for reflection and discussion.

Video helps bring classroom examples into the remote PD environment for teachers to discuss (Walsh 2020). It also helps e-moderators/facilitators model specific aspects of classroom methodology. The following is a good example of such a modelling priority in NTTP: '*I usually use the videos in the theoretical part, for example, we are showing them something about problem solving and how to create, or how to involve the students in problem solving and critical thinking, something like that. So we showed them a model of teachers who are teaching the same way*'. Furthermore, there are also instances of videos used for reflection: '*… we asked them to reflect on this session that they have watched or shared. What did the teacher do to allow the student to solve the problem on their own? And how did the students react and so on? So we start to elicit from the teachers themselves and they start to discuss, evaluate, give feedback'.* The dataset supports the view that video works best in 'chunk-style' videos of around five minutes. This is similar to the findings of Humphries and Clark (2021).

The British Council role

There is no doubt that the BC has shown an important role in supporting the use of technology for the continuation of education in these times of crisis (see also British Council 2020a). As many teachers and teacher educators have found themselves in an unfamiliar situation of having to teach their classes remotely, often with little or no previous experience, the support provided (e.g. British Council 2020b; British Council 2021) has been important. This support has helped teachers with their own well-being and the care and engagement of students and parents in efforts to support children's home learning. Of course, these resources and support have been almost exclusively online and so it is likely that many teachers and learners have been left behind. Many teachers cannot afford even the most basic internet packages and this 'scarce data' has to be shared (British Council 2020a).

The TfS materials are providing valuable content and structure for TAGs in these case studies. Other BC resources such as the TeachingEnglish website are also appreciated by teacher educators in their work. Taken as a whole, these resources and interventions are contributing to providing much needed support as teachers navigate their way through the world of remote teaching.

Limitations

There have been some significant limitations in this research. Firstly, it was conducted in a relatively short period of time (Dec 2020 to March 2021). It relied on convenience sampling for focus groups. Therefore, one of the inherent difficulties of this kind of report is that it features the voices of those who are willing to be interviewed or join a focus group, and the views of those who took the time to respond to surveys. There is always the danger that these are the more committed and engaged and that there are, perhaps inevitably, others for whom the pandemic has been more destructive and debilitating, or for whom remote PD is an irrelevance.

It is difficult to make robust assessments of online participation with recordings. Often the synchronous chat function is not visible on the recording and it is also difficult to gauge levels of engagement, beyond those that contribute orally. Recordings of MS Teams and Zoom sessions do not allow a full description of participation. Most participants had their camera switched off, limiting evaluation of real-time engagement. Therefore, the review of recordings only allows a relatively impressionist picture of the proportion of participants who are actively engaged. This does not mean that they were not engaged, it simply means that, compared with F2F visits, it is harder for a researcher to evaluate levels of engagement and motivation.

The survey data responses were similar to most other research reports where response is voluntary. In this case it was around 15% of the total cohort for teachers (although NTTP teacher educators at 21% and CoP leaders at 54% provide a much higher level of response).

Borg et al. (2020) make the argument that is relatively difficult to establish impact of TAGs, whereas capturing data of participant satisfaction is relatively easy. Unfortunately, most monitoring and evaluation (M&E) reports are not afforded the luxury of longitudinal study. They offer limited time to collect data and evaluate its significance. The lack of time means that most studies and reports are not able to track longer term impact or outcomes. This report agrees with Borg et al. (2020) that there needs to be more longitudinal studies that evaluate impact and transfer of perceived learning gains into observable classroom behaviours. This will help establish a more robust justification for the design of PD interventions.

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Conclusion

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This report has primarily drawn on focus group, interview and survey data and analysed it using qualitative thematic analysis. It has looked particularly at four separate programmes: MENA CoP Leader Support Programme, NTTP Egypt, TfS Syria, and TfS Palestine. The pandemic has brought into sharp focus some of the challenges of engaging teachings in remote PD. At the same time, it has shown that TAGs can play an important role in responding to and dealing with such scenarios.

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly accelerated the development of remote modes of PD. This has meant seeking an appropriate balance of asynchronous input and support (through platforms like Edmodo, Moodle and TfS). Asynchronous platforms have been used to support PD for some time. The more striking change has been the much greater use of synchronous technologies to provide real-time teacher development opportunities. These case studies have provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of this kind of remote PD. We have advanced our understanding of how to evaluate remote/online and consider a number of emerging themes for future research and consideration.

Remote learning is challenging and keeping attendance and motivation high is not easy. The pandemic has forced many PD programmes into a steep learning curve. However, we are getting better at raising our collective knowledge of what works and how we can best foster interaction and engagement online. Through these four case studies, we wanted to know if PD delivered remotely can be effective. The case studies confirm that remote PD can be effective. We know more about what experiences teachers and teacher educators have had, in being obliged to learn remotely rather than F2F. The pandemic obliged us all to take on this challenge and respond. The evidence in this report shows that teachers and teacher educators are learning and developing, sharing practice and supporting each other. We should not assume that remote or online PD is a just a poor substitute, however we need to establish a more robust understanding of its affordances and constraints. In some respects, it is better than F2F. It is more flexible (when it combines synchronous and asynchronous elements), and it can work well if teacher educators are resilient, open to innovation and able to adapt. There are many reasons why, in the future, F2F may not be possible and many of us have had a crash course in what teachers in contexts of constraint and geographically remote have been experiencing for years.

The feelings of challenge and shared adversity provoked by COVID-19 can be deployed to drive helpful changes, if appropriately planned. As Salmon puts it:

'Organisations that actively seek to "future-proof" – to harness and shape constructive developments – are more likely to use their scarce resources and energy in an optimal fashion, against their longer-term mission and goals.' (2020: 1)

Such 'future-proofing' will be a significant challenge, but it is likely that TAGs and CoPs will be an important part of achieving an inclusive and optimal overall design for PD. While we all share the hope that educational provision soon returns to the kind of 'normal' that most of us desire, *'changes in national curricula must be made to increase flexibility, and technological readiness must be accelerated'* (Aliyyah et al. 2020: 103). PD efforts with teachers will increasingly focus on making the most of technology to enhance F2F training and education but also to establish or at least improve asynchronous support and provision. In other words, we will move faster towards hybridity, with flipped and blended designs.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Consent form

BRITISH COUNCIL

Privacy notice – consent for use of photographs and written/visual/audio recordings

Please read this form carefully. We (the British Council) will use this form to show that you have given written consent for us to use your personal information. This means we can use, free of charge, any images and/or written, visual or audio recording we have made of you, including your name, for promotional materials and for any programmes, publications, websites, electronic publications and social media services worldwide produced by, or on behalf of, the British Council. You can withdraw your consent at any time by contacting [email/postal address].

Please complete, sign and return this form to a representative of the British Council.

Data protection

The British Council complies with data protection law in the UK and equivalent laws in other countries. You can ask for a copy of the information we hold on you and make us correct any inaccuracies. If you have concerns about how we have used your personal information, you have the right to complain to a privacy regulator. You can find out more on the privacy section of our website or contact your local British Council office. We will review the information we hold on you every five years and dispose of it securely if we no longer need it.

Name ....

Age (if under 18) ....   Date of birth (if under 18) ....

Tel. ....   Email ....

Event/project/activity ....

I agree:

- to the British Council photographing and/or recording me and give permission to the British Council to use any material in the photographs and/or recordings where the copyright or any other rights are owned by me

- that the British Council can use, free of charge, the photographs and/or recordings made of me, in their original format or edited, adapted or altered, for promotional materials and for any programmes, publications, websites, electronic publications and social media services worldwide produced by or on behalf of the British Council

- that the British Council can pass the photographs and/or recordings of me, and my name, to external press and media agencies, publishers and broadcasters, and to partners and other third parties which the British Council works with, anywhere in the world, for these purposes.

By signing this consent form, I agree to the terms set out above

Signature ....

Date ....

IMPORTANT: *TO BE COMPLETED WHERE THE INDIVIDUAL IS UNDER THE AGE OF 18*

As the subject's parent / legal guardian, I agree to the terms set out in this consent form

Name of parent / legal guardian ....

Signature ....

Tel. ....   Email ....

Appendix 2: Information sheet

Understanding the effectiveness of professional development opportunities for teachers delivered remotely

The British Council is investigating the impact and effectiveness of online learning opportunities for teachers and teacher educators in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic a great deal of learning, training and teaching has had to be delivered remotely; we are interested in your experiences of this and understanding both the positive and any negative aspects of your experience, especially in relation to the development of virtual communities of practice and teacher activity groups.

Specifically, we are interested in evaluating the methods, quality and effectiveness of delivery of the professional development opportunities you have experienced and their impact on you as a learner and as a teacher or teacher educator.

Overall, the research will provide valuable insight into effectiveness of this kind of learning, advance our understanding of how to evaluate learning, application and impact in remote/online delivery settings and enable us to make recommendations for future online teacher development opportunities.

Dr Steve Mann will be conducting focus groups, interviews and collecting survey data in order to better understand your experience and the learning gains of working online. This will include both synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning.

Dr Steve Mann is *Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics* at the University of Warwick in the UK. His research interests are related to teacher development, professional interaction, qualitative research and reflective practice. He works with a group of PhD students who focus on teacher education and development, spoken interaction, mentoring, and technology in relation to professional exchange and development. If you have any questions or views on this project, you are welcome to contact him directly at steve.mann@warwick.ac.uk

Appendix 3 : Details of focus group participants

Focus groups attendance sheets

MENA

	FG Type	Date	Name	Country
1	MENA CoP Leaders	26-Jan-2021	Participant 1	OPT
			Participant 2	Jordan
			Participant 3	Yemen
			Participant 4	Oman
2	MENA CoP Teachers FG(1)	2-Feb-2021	Participant 5	Bahrain
			Participant 6	Yemen
			Participant 7	Yemen
			Participant 8	Yemen
3	MENA CoP Teachers FG (2)	7-Mar-2021	Participant 9	Lebanon
			Participant 10	Lebanon
			Participant 11	Bahrain
			Participant 12	Bahrain
			Participant 13	Bahrain
4	MENA CoP Teachers FG(3)		Participant 14	Yemen
			Participant 15	Iraq
			Participant 16	Iraq
			Participant 17	Iraq
			Participant 18	OPT

Egypt

	FG Type		Name
5	NTTP Senior Teachers	8-Feb-2021	Participant 19
			Participant 20
6	NTTP Digi Gurus	9-Feb-2021	Participant 21
			Participant 22
			Participant 23
7	Teachers Trainer Interview	11-Feb-2021	Participant 24
8	NTTP Teachers	18-Feb-2021	Participant 25
			Participant 26
			Participant 27

Occupied Palestinian Territories

	FG Type	Date	Name
9	UNWRA TAG Teachers	21-Feb-2021	Participant 28
			Participant 29
			Participant 30
			Participant 31
			Participant 32
10	OPT Ministry TAG Teachers FG (1)	17-Feb-2021	Participant 33
11	OPT Ministry TAG Teachers FG (2)	28-Feb-2021	Participant 34
			Participant 35
			Participant 36
			Participant 37

Syria

	FG Type	Date	Name
12	Syrian E-moderators	25-Feb-2021	Participant 38
			Participant 39
13	Syrian Teachers	28-Feb-2021	Participant 40
			Participant 41