



# Innovative Teaching and Learning Practices: A Guideline Document

A Multi-Modal Approach to Teacher Professional Development in Low Resource Settings

Villa College, Maldives  
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# About the Guideline Document

This guideline document is developed as part of the project ‘A multimodal Approach to Teacher Professional Development in Low Resource Setting’, an international project led by Villa College, Maldives. It consists of highlights from project insights, findings, examples of successful action research and recommendations for upscaling similar projects.

The guideline document consists of four sections: Section 1) Background and Introduction; Section 2) Highlights from the BASK Study; Section 3) Example of successful action research from South Asian Teacher Educators Fellowship; and Section 4) Lessons learned and Recommendation.

It aims to guide the Maldivian education system, educational organizations including government entities, universities, colleges and schools, teachers and teacher educators on adapting and integrating innovative teacher professional development approaches to enhance their teaching and learning practices.

This guideline will be useful for educational stakeholders in the Maldives and this could be useful for other similar educational contexts. The guideline document is designed as a comprehensive guide, intended to support stakeholders and improve the education system as a whole.

The guide is valuable in adopting effective practices such as action research, mentoring, communities of practice and reflection, which are yet to become habits in the Maldives education practices. This document assists teachers and teacher educators in implementing action research in their own practices or collaboratively with other teachers based on the successful action research experiences of the South Asian Teacher Educators (SATE) fellowship of the project. Lastly, it presents policy makers with opportunities and potential for scaling the innovative approaches tested and proven to be successful in the project.

# Table of Contents

<b>About the Guideline Document .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Abbreviations and Acronyms.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Section 1: Background and Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
MATPD Project.....	1
Teacher Professional Development in Maldives .....	2
<b>Section 2: Highlights from the BASK Study .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Distance Teacher Professional Development .....	3
Understanding Action Research .....	3
Mentoring Practices.....	4
Reflective Practices.....	5
Professional Learning Communities .....	5
<b>SECTION 3: Examples of Successful Action Research from South Asian Teacher Educators Fellowship...7</b>	
Challenging Pre-school Teachers Gendered Expectations Through Conscientisation .....	7
Using Comic Strips and Writing Process Method to Develop Creative Writing Skills in English Language among Key Stage 2 Students in Maldives.....	8
Using Social-Emotional Learning Strategies to Promote Empathy, Social Awareness and Relationship Skills Among Students of Key Stage 2.....	8
The Role of Literature in Global Citizenship Education for Peacebuilding in Maldivian ESL Classrooms .	9
Fostering Empathetic Behaviour through Storytelling among Primary Students of Maldives .....	10
<b>SECTION 4: Lessons Learned and Recommendations .....</b>	<b>11</b>
Distance Teacher Professional Development .....	11
Action Research .....	11
Mentoring .....	12
Reflection .....	12
Professional Learning Communities .....	13

# Abbreviations and Acronyms

GCED	Global Citizenship Education
GPE-KIX	Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
MATPD	A Multi-modal Approach to Teacher Professional Development in Low Resource Settings
PLCs	Professional Learning Communities
SATE	South Asian Teacher Educators
SEL	Social Emotional Learning
SCA	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
TPD	Teacher Professional Development
TISS	Tata Institute of Social Science

# Section 1: Background and Introduction

## MATPD Project

The 'A Multi-modal Approach to Teacher Professional Development in Low Resource Settings' (MATPD project inaugurated on 1st November 2021) is a project funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) under the Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (GPE-KIX). The project is led by Villa College in collaboration with the Tata Institute of Social Sciences' (TISS) of India and the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA). The project is implemented in Afghanistan, Maldives and Nepal.

This Project executed two innovative approaches on Teacher Professional development (TPD) developed by TISS utilizing various technologies and modalities for TPD that are suitable for different contexts. It is focused on enhancing professional growth through action research and social learning by creating Professional Learning Communities. The project aimed to influence the policy, practice, and further research in distance teacher professional development through action research and communities of practice.

### *Specific Objectives*

- Generate knowledge about the enablers for an integrative distance teacher professional development model in low resource settings.
- Enhance the capacity of teacher educators and teachers by developing their leadership skills and knowledge in constructive use of new media and technology to enhance their practices.
- To mobilize support of and share insights with relevant stakeholders on adapting, adopting, and sustainability of pedagogically rich TPD approaches

### *Key Project Activities*

The project began with Landscape Mapping Study (LMS) that explored the current status of TPD practices in each country. This was followed by the commencement of the South Asian Teacher Educators (SATE) Fellowship, in which 15 teacher educators (fellows) took part in training courses and conducted action research with school teachers. Simultaneously data was collected on fellows' Behaviour, Attitude, Skills and Knowledge (BASK) pre and post fellowship. This is to understand developments in content, pedagogy, inclusion, and distance education and examine the change in their BASK towards mentoring, action research, communities of practice and reflection. A BASK study report was developed based on the findings. Additionally, an action research compendium was prepared based on the Action Research of fellows. Lastly, this

guideline was developed that consists of perspective for policy and practice of distance TPD.

## **Teacher Professional Development in Maldives**

With the rapid changes in the education system and the geographical distribution of the country, there have been challenges to provide quality education to the outer island of the Maldives. Maldives has invested in developing the Information Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure to support distance teaching and learning initiatives, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, to support and train teachers in using and integrating ICT in teaching and learning practices. The use of digital platforms such as G-suits, digital educational resources and mobile applications are some of the strategic approaches adopted by teachers to overcome the geographical barriers. These approaches provide a platform for distance TPD enabling teachers from outer islands to access professional development training and resources. However, at times teachers working in outer islands travel to the capital city to attend face to face professional development conducted in the Capital.

Uptake of distance TPD is not just to overcome the dispersed nature of the country but a commitment to continuous learning and adaptation among educators. The SATE fellowship of the MATPD project is one example of effective distance professional development. It provided a combination of face to face and online enrichment sessions for teacher educators.

## Section 2: Highlights from the BASK Study

### Distance Teacher Professional Development

Professional Development aims to provide the teachers with a new set of experiences, skills, resources and knowledge that equips them to implement innovative practices. These developments range from training in various formats such as face to face, Training of Trainers (ToT), short term mentoring sessions to workshops of action research. Mostly the professional development sessions are tailored on need basis, online Professional Development (PD) are becoming a preferred choice for teachers as it eliminates the travel and rescheduling classes during the PD sessions.

Online / distance learning requires a secure internet connection. While distance learning can be an effective modality for learning, it can also be challenging if participants have limited knowledge and competencies to use the internet. The distance learning PDs have been vital in the Maldives due to its geographical disbursement of the islands. It has always been challenging and costly to travel from islands to the capital city where the PDs are conducted. Hence, with the introduction of distance learning modality, teachers find it beneficial. However, the greater challenge lies in the teachers' perception of how well they could use the online resources in their daily classrooms. With the fellowship fellows were able to get a grasp of the online modality. The fellows' engagement in the virtual platforms increased.

### Understanding Action Research

Action research, the term itself, had not been new to the participants and they had some understanding of action research even at the initial phase of the project prior to the SATE fellowship. Their understanding had been enhanced through discussions with colleagues and from books mostly. Journals, TPDs, conferences and webinars have also contributed to their knowledge and understanding. However, even though there were participants who were in more senior posts like lecturers, who had the experience of supervising the action research of their students to some extent, not many had the experience of conducting an action research themselves. Furthermore, MATPD had given the opportunity for almost all of them, to engage in the processes of conducting action research and following it step by step.

The Fellowship had also strengthened their beliefs about how useful action research could be in contributing to the professional development of those involved with teaching. Nevertheless, being collaborative researchers in the process and getting teachers to conduct the action



research had been a difficult task, as the PDs offered for the teachers were not intensive training on action research due to time limitations and the mindset of teachers involved.

Even after implementing action research in these schools, it was evident that teachers needed more awareness relating to the importance of action research and not perceive it as an additional burden to their workload. Thus, training on action research for a positive and acceptable part of professional development is essential to build a sustainable form of PD through a culture of action research.

## **Mentoring Practices**

Mentoring was the other component that was a part of the project and conducted simultaneously with action research. Similar to the experience of action research, all the participants from senior posts such as lecturers had experienced the role of being a mentor as they had mentored their research students. Additionally, the principals and leading teachers too had mentored other staff in their schools and teachers have had the opportunity to mentor their student teachers during teaching practicums. Thus, mentoring was not a new process for them and they all had been mentored during their teacher training.

What had added to their understanding of mentoring was the collaborative nature in which mentoring has to be conducted. Besides, it was the first time they were mentored by two mentors who could provide them guidance in two different aspects and contribute to a combined product which was the process and outcomes of their action research. For a lot of the participants, this was the first time for mentoring via a blended mode whereby their academic mentors were far away in time while field mentors were within reach for some of them. Therefore, part of mentoring had been done face-to-face during the Fellowship and the rest was mostly online for some. Moreover, most of their ideas revolved around the idea of mentoring for the psychological support or for the wellbeing of the teacher and not in terms of pedagogical mentoring prior to the Fellowship.

Participants also learnt a lot of skills related to mentoring such as listening and communication skills which proved to be useful while mentoring the teachers in their action research. The experience had enlightened them on the need of mentoring in the schools especially for novice teachers and also the relevance of the idea of applying blended mode of mentoring due to the geographical barriers in the country.

## **Reflective Practices**

Reflection is a common practice among teacher educators of Maldives, however it is not practiced formally. Fellows have a clear understanding of the concept of reflection and most commonly reflect on their lessons after class and reflect on students' work to examine whether an approach worked or not. Among least common reflective practices, prior to the fellowship, fellows neither observed and reflected on their peers' work nor requested peers to observe their teaching practices to reflect on feedback. Even though this could be an effective approach in improving teaching practices, the hesitancy may stem from the fear of being judged or criticized.

During the fellowship journey, fellows reflected on different areas such as capacity building sessions, both face to face and online, conducting action research and data collection methods. Additionally, they were encouraged to write weekly reflection journals and had reflection sessions with teachers they worked with in their action research. The latter was mainly to ensure that the interventions went well and had reflection sessions online as well. Unfortunately, due to time constraints and heavy workload fellows were unable to continue the weekly reflection journaling.

Reflections during an action research are expected to create awareness on different forms of knowledge, actions and what is necessary to bring a change, in other words, to find a solution for an issue. The structured opportunity provided by the fellowship to reflect increased their engagement of reflection in the end.

## **Professional Learning Communities**

The fellows engage in both formal and informal Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), which are essential for acquiring knowledge, pedagogical skills and self efficacy. Online collaboration, particularly through asynchronous discussions on virtual platforms, is valuable for fellows, especially considering their dispersed locations. Online professional development communities have significant potential to enhance professional development for teachers. Subject-specific PLCs are beneficial for fellows, providing a platform to delve into relevant subject-related topics, share best practices, and address teaching concerns. The fellows actively engaged in capacity building and support groups, which served as forums for sharing expertise, addressing teaching and learning issues, and nurturing continuous professional development.

The SATE fellowship allowed fellows to engage in cross country dialogues. The fellows frequently engaged in cross country interactions, particularly with Nepal fellows as they were physically present, which enhanced learning and professional development by offering new perspectives and understanding different cultures. Face to face interactions are crucial for facilitating the cross

country and cross-cultural learning allowing fellows to build trust, develop rapport and communicate non-verbally.

Despite access to online platforms like Telegram groups, few participants actively engaged with others, highlighting the need for effective strategies to encourage participation and foster meaningful interactions. Promising approaches to enhance engagement on online platforms include scenario-based discussions, emphasizing participation from the start, forming small interest-based groups, and posing regular questions related to relevant topics.

## **SECTION 3: Examples of Successful Action Research from South Asian Teacher Educators Fellowship**

### **Challenging Pre-school Teachers Gendered Expectations Through Conscientisation**

By: Dr. Fazeela Ibrahim

In order to address the gender stereotyped actions observed in the classroom and to recognise the gender roles and stereotypical biases among teachers, an action research was conducted by the researcher collaboratively with six pre-school teachers from a public school in Male'. A professional development session for 'conscientisation' and awareness of teachers regarding gender biases and stereotypes was conducted for teachers, followed by classroom observations and reflective discussions. Two cycles of interventions were carried out.

Findings revealed that although teachers believed both men and women are equally responsible and capable, they acknowledged gender biased perceptions. For instance, tasks at home mainly attributed to men were related to household maintenance and resolving internet and IT issues etc, while preparing meals and caring for children were perceived as women's responsibility. Classroom observations of toy and play preferences of students revealed that the highest preferences of girls were baby dolls and kitchenware; boys chose building blocks and vehicles, though all children played with all toys, to different degrees. Girls also liked the color pink, and boys blue.

At the end of the action research, both the researcher and the pre-school teachers involved were more aware of the unintentional practices of teachers and behaviors of students that may be reinforcing gender stereotyping and influencing the mindset of children. Though teachers initially believed that there were no indications of gender stereotyping behaviors in the classroom, it was captured during classroom observations. To address these issues, it is important to involve teachers in professional development on managing gender biased actions in class. For future studies, parents' involvement could have been more comprehensive to understand how it is reinforced at home and identify ways to gender stereotyping.

# **Using Comic Strips and Writing Process Method to Develop Creative Writing Skills in English Language among Key Stage 2 Students in Maldives**

By: Dr. Fathimath Muna

Creative writing proficiency has been profoundly a challenging skill for the students to master in the Maldivian secondary grades. Not many students are able to express themselves effectively in writing. Therefore, this action research was conducted in the largest public school in Hulhumale, Maldives, situated in a suburban area, targeting grade 6 students. The focus of the study was on enhancing the teaching of writing skills of grade 6 language teachers. As a result, a sample of 6 teachers were selected from the school.

The intervention was based on using comic strips to enhance writing skills. The intervention proved to have a significant improvement in the writing skills of the students when comic strips were incorporated into the writing lessons. Firstly, students' involvement in the teaching and learning process improved, with increased motivation in creative writing using comic strips, followed by a marked achievement in their writing skills. The teachers were eager to report that students had been highly engaged and active in the lessons following the intervention. It had been a huge learning experience for the fellow researcher too.

The most amazing part of the intervention was the nature in which it improved the engagement of students remarkably. Students who had not shown a keen interest in writing before had indulged in the writing process when comic strips had been used. One notable accomplishment is the involvement of even SEN students in the writing lessons.

# **Using Social-Emotional Learning Strategies to Promote Empathy, Social Awareness and Relationship Skills Among Students of Key Stage 2**

By: Ahmed Aboobakuru

The focus of this study was to understand how Social Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies promote empathy, social awareness and relationship skills among the students of Key Stage 5 of research school. This research was carried out at a school from an atoll which is the most populated secondary school in that atoll. For this action research three major components of intervention were carried out. The first component of the intervention was implementing weekly SEL lessons about a specific skill on social awareness domain in the CASEL (2021) framework. The second

component of the intervention was daily morning meetings with students (Circle Time) focusing on empathy, relationship skills and later social awareness. Every morning teachers spent 10-15 minutes with students for Circle Time to carry out a discussion with students based on the topics, based on empathy, relationship skills and social awareness. The last component of the intervention was students' weekly journals. Students were given pre-determined questions that they had to answer in their journals. Students complete the journals weekly and handover them to the teachers. The participants read those journals weekly and complete the teachers journal which later on the researcher used to gather data.

The result indicated through SEL based activities, many competencies related to empathy, social awareness and relationship skill can be instilled in students. All the research participants have observed and experienced that these SEL strategies not only support building a positive classroom climate but also enhance students' interest to study and improve their self-confidence.

The research indicated that presently the school does not specifically focus on SEL. However, the school was practicing circle time every Monday in which a bit of SEL strategies were practiced. Besides, the findings of this study demonstrated the SEL strategies promoted students to build productive relationships with their classmates and teachers.

## **The Role of Literature in Global Citizenship Education for Peacebuilding in Maldivian ESL Classrooms**

By: Aminath Wafa Waheed

The primary motivation behind English language teaching is to foster communicative competence and intercultural competence among learners. This action research explores the potential of literature in fostering peacebuilding among Grade 9 ESL students. Five ESL teachers participated, each possessing a first degree in English language teaching and varying levels of experience. The study addresses the reluctance of educators to discuss sensitive topics and seeks to empower teachers to facilitate peace-oriented dialogue. Two sessions of professional development on Global Citizenship Education (GCED) and Peacebuilding were conducted for teachers to equip them with strategies for integrating peace concepts using literary texts. A poem was used as the focal point of classroom discussion.

The study found that using stories in class really helped students talk about global issues, with students actively analyzing the poem's themes and language. Metaphors and emotive language were noted as particularly impactful in fostering peace-oriented dialogue. Teachers' reflections revealed valuable insights into student perspectives on power, discrimination, and community cohesion. Notably, small group discussions facilitated greater student participation and comprehension of complex themes.

The implications extend to policymakers, urging the adoption of GCED principles to address societal challenges and achieve sustainable development goals. Moreover, the study advocates for the integration of peacebuilding strategies into teacher training programs, fostering a culture of dialogue and understanding within Maldivian educational institutions.

## **Fostering Empathetic Behaviour through Storytelling among Primary Students of Maldives**

By: Visama Hassan

The National Curriculum Framework of Maldives highlights the importance of fostering empathy among students, aiming to integrate this value into both formal and informal curricula to promote peace within the country. This study investigates the use of storytelling as a means of cultivating empathy. Conducted in a specific school located in Hulhumale', within the greater Male' area, where there is a diverse student population including migrants from outer atolls, the research engaged eight teachers from third-grade classes in an action research process.

The study's findings indicated that although schools have implemented storytelling initiatives, the intentional cultivation of values through narratives has not been a prominent focus. Rather, the primary emphasis has been on enhancing students' linguistic skills. However, in terms of the story's plots and characters, the findings indicate that storytelling holds potential for instilling empathy among students. Notably, the children demonstrated an ability not only to grasp the emotions of the characters but also to formulate their own conclusions. The study implies that storytelling can be used as a very effective tool to inculcate the value of empathy in primary students.

## SECTION 4: Lessons Learned and Recommendations

### Distance Teacher Professional Development

The insights gained from BASK baseline and endline study on TPD highlights that there has been a positive shift in the fellows perception of PD as one off and the use of technology for PDs esp in reaching to teachers working in remote areas. While Online / distance learning can be an effective modality for learning, and less time consuming, it also poses challenges as not all teachers are equipped with the necessary tools to learn through this medium. Hence, the greater challenge lies with teachers' self efficacy in the usage of online resources in their daily classrooms.

#### *Recommendations*

- Policy makers to conduct regular distance learning PDs session rather than one off sessions
- Establish a mechanism for PD monitoring and evaluation of usage of online resources
- Establish routine refresher for in service teachers to be familiar with online resources, mentoring, action research and inclusive education.
- Conduct pre-service PDs for teachers who are in training.

### Action Research

One of the major learnings from the project was that action research and mentoring complemented each other. It was also discovered that action research is a rarely used concept in schools and teachers are reluctant to engage in action research due to lack of knowledge of action research and time limitations. MATPD BASK reports shows that action research conducted not only benefited teachers in their pedagogy but students as well. All in all, it can be concluded that action research can be a very effective form for sustainable professional development and teachers require close guidance to engage in it.

#### *Recommendations*

- Schools should adopt action research to compensate for the disadvantages of having one off sessions of professional development.



- Major roles can be played by leading teachers in adopting action research in collaboration with teachers. Action research will support their own professional development and develop pedagogic leadership capabilities and agency for identifying contextual solutions.
- Policy makers to ensure that teachers are required to be mentored throughout the process of action research.
- Space and time for collaboration among teachers within the schedule of the schools will support opportunities to find solutions together and learn from each other.

## **Mentoring**

Mentoring was found to be a common practice in schools although this was done in a very informal manner as there are no strict guidelines for mentoring in the schools. Nevertheless almost every teacher or teacher educator has had the experience of being mentored at some point in their training or career. However, only a few had experienced mentoring others. It was also evident that mentoring needs to be a two way, collaborative process and both the mentee and the mentor benefited from each other. Mentoring also required some specific skills such as communication skills and listening skills. Most of all, mentoring was proven to be a way that could motivate teachers to engage in action research. The whole process of mentoring in the action research resulted in better teaching and learning as more effective pedagogies were adopted through the action research processes. Barriers relating to gender and levels of seniority were found to hinder the mentoring process.

### ***Recommendations***

- Policy makers incorporate more formal mechanisms for mentoring into the school system for improving the teaching and learning process.
- Policy makers should advocate the use of mentoring to motivate the teachers to engage in action research as a driving force for its successful implementation.
- The schools should put the mentors' expertise (knowledge and experience) at the forefront of the relationship despite seniority or gender in accepting the mentors' guidance.

## **Reflection**

What is learned from the reflection component of the fellowship is that all fellows had a hard time to continue weekly reflection journaling. This is mainly because of their heavy workload, it is not prioritized and they are accustomed to reflect in their own time, informally. It is evident that fellows understand the importance of reflection, and they do reflect from time to time. Although they have observed their action research implementation and had reflective discussion

sessions on it, they are not comfortable with their peers observing, reflecting and giving feedback on their classroom practices.

### ***Recommendations***

- School leaders should create a supportive environment for peer observation to promote collaborative reflections and peer learning.
- Policy makers need to create structured reflective sessions to formalize the process.
- Encourage teachers to use digital platforms for reflection, as this may make the process convenient with teachers and teacher educators' heavy workload.
- Policy makers and school principals to create awareness on the importance of reflection and areas in which reflection could be most effective.

## **Professional Learning Communities**

The SATE fellowship has highlighted several key learnings from the PLCs aspect. It shows the importance of both formal and informal learning communities, emphasizing the value of diverse learning experiences including workshops, courses, research conferences and online collaboration. Online PLCs offer opportunities for teachers to connect, share experience and enhance their professional growth. Cross country interaction, facilitated by the fellowship, enriched learning experience by providing diverse perspectives and cultural understanding. Face - to - face sessions played a crucial role in fostering trust and rapport among participants, particularly for cross cultural learning. Effective strategies such as scenario based discussions need to be introduced to foster active participation. In order to promote meaningful interactions, PLCs must be formed as subject specific small groups.

### ***Recommendations***

- School management to provide a range of formal and informal social learning opportunities for teachers
- Policy makers and school management to strengthen online collaboration by re-designing online programmes and sessions to foster personal networks of practice among teachers.
- Policy makers and School management to encourage the use of virtual platforms for asynchronous discussions, recognising their effectiveness in accommodating busy schedules
- PLC's need to be customized based on job profiles to ensure relevance and effectiveness for example: subject teachers' groups, Principles groups, Reading Teachers groups.
- Policy makers need to provide resources and support for capacity building, allowing educators to share best practices, address teaching learning issues, and enhance teachers professional development.

- The policy makers need to develop targeted strategies to address disparities in resources and support, particularly for teachers in the islands (rural and remote areas).
- School management and the incharge of PLC's Need to implement effective strategies to encourage active participation and meaningful interaction in online platforms.