

Cultural Relations Collection

Edited by J.P. Singh



Strengthening Global Schools Systems and the Role of the UK

Psyche Kennett and Jill Knight



Education

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The British Council

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries. We do this by making a positive contribution to the UK and the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust.

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Foreword

I am delighted at the release and publication of the first contributions to what I hope will be an important collection on cultural relations and the mission of the British Council. Not always easy to describe and at times even more difficult to measure, when you see cultural relations in action you know what it is about: working over the long term with individuals, communities and institutions in a spirit of mutuality.

Our mission is not only about what we do but also how we engage. This is what distinguishes a cultural relations approach from other forms of public or cultural diplomacy. It is about activities and opportunities, but it is also about how relationships are formed and nourished. And in our case as the British Council it happens in over one hundred countries, working with the English language and through cultural engagement in the arts, education and skills.

This collection provides an overview and analysis of diverse examples of this distinctive cultural relations approach and how it is used to further the British Council's charitable objects, and how the approach benefits both the UK and the people with whom we work. The ways of working apply whether convening the global leaders of international higher education, or building partnerships with civil society organisations or artists within a single country. The cultural relations thread also applies across the British Council's largest programmes, including those such as English Language teaching which deliver income.

Over the past decade the British Council has been consolidating its activities in order to increase the commonality across different countries and regions. Yet a cultural relations approach will always necessitate some variety, because mutuality involves degrees of exchange, co-production and adaptation to local needs. An example in this collection shows how in 2016 within Shakespeare Lives, a global programme celebrating the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, and operating to consistent global production values, a small, country-based arts investment in Nigeria saw the production and touring of a locally relevant Shakespeare play performed in Nigerian Pidgin.

The collection also reflects on the long view and includes two contributions which draw on historical investigation to understand the British Council's role over many decades in Burma/Myanmar and the Soviet Union/Russia, drawing on deep scholarship of post-colonialism and the Cold War respectively. It is to be applauded that the editors and authors allow such critical reflection, avoiding the risk of self-congratulation and enabling organisational learning and growth.

Reading these contributions together as a collection reminds me that while all these different areas constitute cultural relations in their own right, together they add up to more than the sum of their parts. Hard work in one area leads to networks and builds the trust that enables the British Council to undertake activities in different areas and with diverse kinds of partners.

It is not always easy to quantify cultural relations or the impact of an individual institution like the British Council over the arc of time and geography. Today, great effort is put into evaluating both the programmatic and organisational impact of our work. Yet the methodologies to assess the effects of multiple decades of engagement are still developing. Friends made, understanding gained and trust increased are things we know to be important. Proving their worth is harder.

Historical investigation helps, but in the end, as Martin Rose says of cultural relations in his essay in this collection: "It has been said of diplomacy that its success can be measured by wars not fought.... The same might be said of the British Council, though it operates at a more human level with individuals and communities rather than nations." Seen in this way, cultural relations is as much about the absence of negatives as the presence of positives. Cultural relations delivers the calm, reflective response as well as the bustling, creative one. This collection, authored by both well-known scholars and authoritative practitioners shows both. And it does so in a way that I hope you find to be accessible, enlightening and compelling. I commend it to you with enthusiasm.

Sir Ciarán Devane,
Chief Executive, *British Council*

Preface to the Cultural Relations Collection

The British Council is often viewed as an organisation that ‘does’, and it does a great deal, but it is also a ‘thinking’ and learning organisation and in recent years has begun to increase its investment in commissioning, using and sometimes undertaking research. It does so for three key reasons.

As an organisation that provides thought leadership in cultural relations it is important that the British Council contributes to, demonstrates and shares a thorough understanding of cultural relations, and of how this approach contributes to the United Kingdom’s attraction and trusted connections in international relations. It does this, for example, through regular studies on the influence and measurement of soft power that track perceptions of the UK, particularly among young people across the world.

Second, we commission and undertake research as trusted expert practitioners in the thematic areas in which we work: in the arts, international education, English language teaching and assessment, and activities undertaken largely with young people in communities and civil society organisations, such as through the Active Citizens Programme. In each of these areas we convene informed debates based on the provision, sharing or curating of new knowledge, in many cases disseminated in well regarded publications and series.

A third reason is to increase the evidence and understanding for ourselves and others of what works to generate cultural relations impact and why. We seek to demonstrate engagement of the highest standard to supporters and partners, while also building our capacity as an organisation to benefit from using research and evidence, both our own and work by others’, in order to make strategic decisions, engage global stakeholders, and exchange knowledge. Together, each of these research areas contributes useful new knowledge to further our charitable purpose through generating new insights and understanding in areas relevant to our work, in turn enhancing our ability to influence policy or to impact debates.

This cultural relations collection arose out of an early initiative when the British Council first established the small research team that would become part of the new global function led from the Research and Policy Insight Directorate. In commissioning a series of in-house and external studies it had three key aims. The first was to clarify our understanding of cultural relations as an encompassing venture that permeated all our work, whether specific to a sector or not and whether income generating or not. Here the contributions on English language and on assessment are particularly illustrative. The second aim was to provide an opportunity to country offices and regional teams, through a competitive bidding process, to commission research on initiatives that were able to illustrate a cultural relations approach in action at a local level. The fascinating contribution on Shakespeare in Nigerian Pidgin stems from this call. A third aim was to grapple with the challenges of understanding and demonstrating impact when reviewing the British Council’s work in an area of activity or in a country over a long period of time. The contributions on science diplomacy and on Myanmar fit here and demonstrate the richness of reviewing cultural relations over time, alongside the challenges of making assessments across the long arc of history.

This cultural relations collection has provided an opportunity to show the work of the British Council in its rich diversity, linked by this common thread and demonstrating that as with the best partnerships, mutuality in approach often produces things that are not what were originally designed, which are often better as a result and that sometimes grow in ways over which no individual or organisation has control.

Dan Shah
Director Research and Policy Insight
British Council

Editor's Note

Education is at the core of human well-being. Political ideas and institutions, historically and transnationally, have promoted education as the vehicle for improving living conditions and to question cultures of oppression. Educator Paolo Freire, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2000), wrote of dialogic education as the way to allow people to name their world and problem-solve their difficulties through a process of consciousness awakening.

This contribution on the role of the British Council in education and language addresses the role of education in transforming our world. The connections between education and the British Council's cultural relations approach stand out; the education work speaks to cultural relations values such as trust and respect, networks and partnerships, capacity-building, inclusion and diversity. The education work also connects with the global institutionalisation of these worldviews, such as through the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and their predecessor the Millennium Development Goals, which prioritise education in many different ways. We are often aware of UN agencies' roles in furthering global education, for example the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). UNESCO was formed as a result of meetings among the allied ministers of education in 1942 in London, who initially conceived of it as an educational organisation. This contribution highlights how national cultural institutes such as the British Council connect not just with global educational goals but intensively with national priorities. It provides empirical evidence at a cross-national level from 28 countries where the British Council operates, and in three countries analyses specific cases in greater depth. The contribution also details British Council cultural relations approach in education.

Introduction

How does the quality of global schooling benefit from bi-national partnerships? This contribution collates national and subnational education school system priorities around the world and analyses how the British Council and its UK partners respond to those priorities through a cultural relations approach. The objectives of the research were to understand the main strategic priorities for school systems in countries where the British Council operates, and to consider how UK school systems (in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) and British Council are viewed by the governments in those countries.

The contribution begins with a focus on what international school systems are demanding – summarising international policy for strengthening school systems and examining the alignment of national and subnational priorities from 28 countries to those policies. The countries chosen represented the six regions in which British Council works with school systems and where it has at least one project in each country.² Overall 48 projects were analysed in total. The strength of the British Council's engagement is mapped out according to key school-system priorities and illustrated with case studies from Madrid, Lebanon and Bangladesh that showcase different sets of demographic and material challenges.

The role of the UK is then described, in terms of the resources and mechanisms the British Council draws on to support school system reform. The contribution emphasises the British Council's cultural relations approach in advancing goals such as inclusion and access, quality of curriculum and teaching, and equity. These goals also relate to national priorities and the UN's Agenda 2030, underpinned by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With the UK as one of the leading providers of education globally, and with the country's world-renowned universities, the soft power of British education cannot be underestimated.

²The countries were Latvia, Brandenburg, France, Madrid, Romania (European Union); Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Tunisia (Middle East North Africa); Bangladesh, Maharashtra, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka (South Asia); China, Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar, Thailand (East Asia); Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Rwanda (Sub-Saharan Africa); and Brazil, Colombia, Peru (the Americas).

The International Context

In 2000 the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) launched by the United Nations (UN) emphasised universal primary education, with enhanced access to education becoming a global priority. Yet after fifteen years, it became clear that although global enrolment in primary education had increased from 83 per cent in 2000 to 91 per cent, it was acknowledged that the quality of education had not increased at the same rate. In many countries education authorities had ticked the MDG enrolment target box but children were often packed into dysfunctional school systems where the quality of teaching was very low, if in fact teaching happened at all.

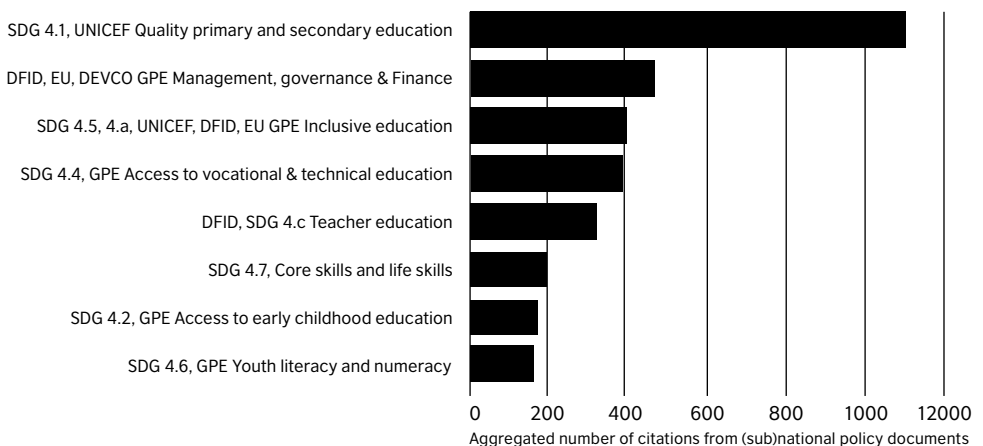
In 2015, the SDGs sought to redress the issue of quality, which is why UN's 'Leave No-One Behind' agenda emphasises equitable, inclusive, high-quality teaching and learning, which provides school leavers with access to employability and further education. Meanwhile, having achieved 91 per cent enrolment at primary level, the focus on access has moved down to early childhood care and education (ECCE). This is based on research that shows that children who attend pre-school are more likely to complete primary and secondary education as a result.

What are international school systems demanding? The UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4, for inclusive, high-quality, equitable education has a strong influence on school priorities around the world. SDG 4 sets targets for the 2030 Agenda that relate to education at pre-school, primary and secondary level (the parameters of this study).

Other international bodies align with SDG4 as well. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) focuses on the concepts of quality and inequality. The UK government's Department for International Development (DFID) 2018 policy supports the SDG 4 emphasis on inclusion for the most marginalised (such as children with special needs and those affected by conflict) but goes on to emphasise funding for quality improvement in teaching skills and the governance aspects of equitable school reform. The European Commission Development Cooperation (EC DEVCO) for Education 2018 policy emphasises the 'Leave No-One Behind' agenda in fragile contexts, as well as financial solutions, while the 2018 policy of the World Bank group, Global Partnership for Education (GPE) focuses on such areas as planning, fostering political will to increase education funding, and giving all children (especially the vulnerable) access to equitable, effective, high-quality learning.

What international school systems are seeking is evident from Figure 1, which shows how school priorities in the 28 countries studied align with international policy.

Figure 1: How school priorities in 28 countries align with international policy



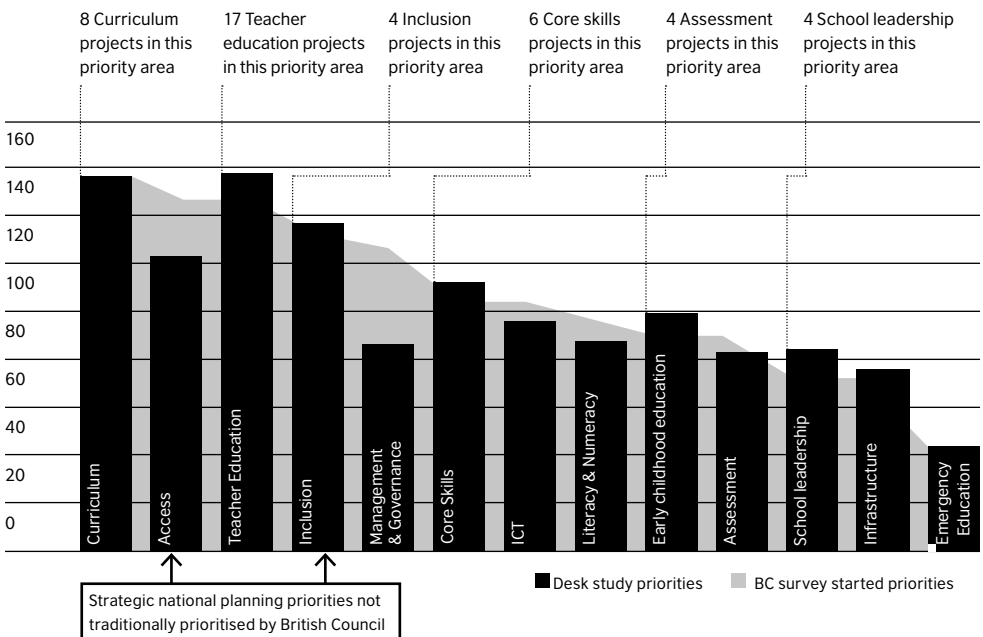
British Council: Alignment with National and Subnational Policies

A survey asked British Council education experts in the 28 countries studied to analyse the national or subnational priorities where they worked, according to the following categories, which were located through desk research of national education policy documents.

- Access to education
- Inclusion and equality
- Curriculum
- Teacher education
- Assessment
- Literacy and numeracy
- Core skills
- ICT in education/digital learning
- Emergency education
- School management and leadership
- Management, administration and governance systems
- Infrastructure
- Early years

An analysis of each (sub)national government’s education policy documents was carried out, and the above categories were scored according to the priority given to them. The same evaluation scale was used on the priorities that British Council described in the survey. Results were then collated to show how the policy analysis compared to the survey analysis, that is, how well perceptions of priorities by British Council respondents, who were the organisation’s education specialists in situ, aligned with stated priorities in policy documents. Figure 2 shows the alignment between British Council perceptions of (sub)national school system priorities and the stated needs of the education authorities where they work.

Figure 2: Alignment of key programmes with the priorities for 28 (sub)national governments (Aggregated priority score)

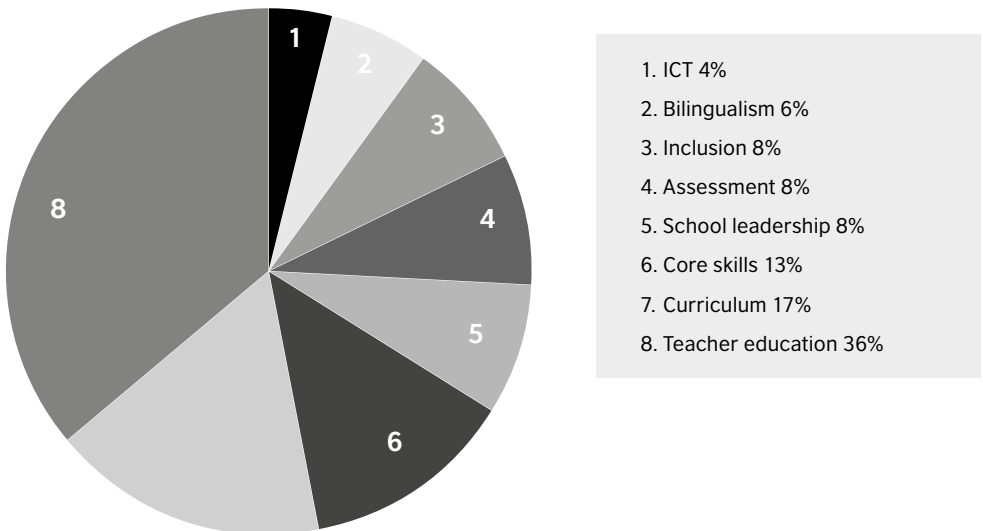


Perhaps unsurprisingly, given general international rallying behind the SDGs, there was strong coherence between the desk research priorities and British Council respondents' stated priorities in the survey. Their alignment is closest concerning curriculum, inclusion, core skills, ICT, literacy and numeracy, early childhood education, infrastructure and emergency education. The British Council clearly prioritises in the same way as the countries and states where they work, not least because when values and professional judgement coincide, commitment to mutuality prevails.

Most importantly, the British Council's responsiveness to (sub)national school system priorities is borne out by the fact that the British Council has at least one on-going project in each of the 28 countries/states which meets a stated priority of that (sub)national school system.

Forty-eight key projects were analysed in the countries surveyed that were in direct response to a school system priority in the specific country or state where the project operates and requested by the respective (sub)national education authorities. Figure 3 shows the percentage breakdown of types of project.

Figure 3: Key British Council projects that address school priorities in 28 countries



The predominance of English language teaching and learning projects (ELT), teacher education, and curriculum development projects shows that British Council is requested by governments and responds to priorities within its traditional sphere of influence and expertise. Two thirds of the projects analysed are either ELT or have a core element of English. The British Council was able to meet 84 per cent of requests made by government in the countries surveyed. It was unable to meet eight requests related to ELT teacher training, curriculum, assessment and governance – all due to lack of funding.

Three case studies illustrate the British Council and partner expertise in different school system priority areas. In each case we discuss the context, challenges, action, and impact. The British Council's strengths in teacher training, inclusive pedagogies, and curriculum development along with setting up partnerships with UK institutions are important and speak to its cultural relations approach. The three cases below also highlight the British Council's work in different country contexts: Madrid is a prosperous country encouraging bilingual education; Lebanon is facing a humanitarian crisis with the influx of Syrian refugees; and Bangladesh is constrained by a variety of resource challenges.

Madrid: *Bilingual Education and Equity*

In 1996 the Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional (Spain's Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport) and the British Council signed an agreement to introduce an integrated Spanish-English curriculum in Spanish state schools. The British Council partnered with Bath University to help design this. Since then bilingual education has been introduced at every level of education from age three through to sixteen years. It is present in every autonomous region and reaches more than 40,000 pupils every year, many of them from less advantaged backgrounds.

The aims of the national Bilingual Education Programme are to:

- promote the acquisition and learning of both (i.e. Spanish and English) languages through an integrated content-based curriculum
- encourage awareness of the diversity of both cultures
- facilitate the exchange of teachers and children
- encourage the use of modern technologies in learning other languages
- where appropriate, promote the certification of studies under both educational systems

While the British Council maintains its role as a formal partner with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport on the national Bilingual Education Programme, it functions predominantly as a service provider to the Regional Education Authority of Madrid, and supports other regions, providing technical assistance, research, training and other services.

National priorities and British Council actions

Current priorities of the Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional are focused on reducing the rate of early school leaving and improving the transition from education and training to the labour market. They include:

- improving the quality of education and training, foreign language learning, and use of information and communication technologies to address disparities in regional educational outcomes
- improving transitions from primary to lower secondary to upper secondary school, reducing drop out and grade repetition
- strengthening all aspects of the bilingual education programme through improved initial teacher training, continuing professional development and school management training
- ensuring transfer of effective methodology from the bilingual to the non-bilingual programme

British Council inputs to the bilingual education programme of the Autonomous Region of Madrid since 2016 have addressed the national priorities directly and indirectly. The inputs have been varied and include:

- In-country summer teacher training and continuing professional development (CPD) courses delivered through face-to-face and online courses on a range of topics such as Teaching English in Early Years and Classroom Management, as well as English language improvement.
- UK study visits organised for school leaders and teachers, enabling them to improve their English language skills as well as observe models of best practice in the classroom and in school management
- Providing support for the Madrid Regional Government's 'Global Classrooms' debating programme in English
- Hosting an annual conference for teachers. Attention is taken to ensure that the conference incorporates sessions that focus on bilingual and non-bilingual teaching in local public schools
- Recruitment of Language Assistants, carried out by the British Council UK on behalf of the national Bilingual Education Programme
- Providing in-country support for the Language Assistants Programme, with induction sessions for language assistants on arrival in Madrid and local troubleshooting
- Holding seminars to engage experts and policymakers in discussions on innovation and best practice in language teaching and learning.

Impact assessment

The English Impact Study was conducted by the British Council in the Autonomous Region of Madrid in 2017. The study tested skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking as well as grammar and vocabulary. Students also completed a questionnaire to collect data on their language-learning opportunities in and outside the classroom, language-learning motivation and socio-economic background.

The aims of the study were to evaluate students' English language capability, to compare outcomes in schools participating in the region's bilingual programme with those not, and to understand the relationship between language-learning motivation and increased proficiency. The findings of the research have been presented at a number of national, regional and international conferences and are being used to inform the Madrid bilingual education programme and guide education policy.

Research on 'the influence of school-based policy on the success of bilingual programmes in Spain' was commissioned by the British Council in 2014 within the context of the national Bilingual Education Programme and resulted in the development of a self-access tool for schools to help them evaluate the implementation of their programmes and decide on developmental priorities. The British Council's use of rigorous research methods has reinforced its status as a valued research partner with key education partners in Spain. The success in conducting the English Impact Study has led to opportunities for a follow-up research project linking British and Spanish universities.

Perceptions of the UK: The British Council is seen in Spain as a leading player in the development and provision of bilingual education, not least because of the long history of the British Council School in Madrid that was and remains a pioneer of bilingual education. More generally and across the country as a whole, British Council is seen as a leader in content and language integrated learning (CLIL), which involves the teaching of other subjects in the foreign language. Demand for UK expertise remains strong in this field, providing opportunities for the reinforcement of the bilateral relationship.

New perspectives on teaching and learning:

UK study visits and in-country training have exposed teachers to participatory, learner-centred, communicative, task-based teaching methods, often leading to a remodelling of their teaching approach. There is some evidence of transfer of skills to teachers working in a non-bilingual programme in schools where they work alongside a bilingual programme. Most teacher training colleges, who are responsible for training primary school teachers, have incorporated CLIL as a topic in their pre-service training.

Repetition and dropout rates: The percentage of grade repetition in the 2016–2017 academic year was slightly higher in non-bilingual public schools compared with public bilingual schools. In addition, the rate of early school leaving has decreased in the Autonomous Region of Madrid, reaching in 2016 the target of 15 per cent established in the European Objectives 2020. Given the correlation between repetition and dropout rates and the quality of education provided, these statistics suggest further benefits gained from the bilingual education programme.

Access, quality, equity and achievement:

English Impact results show that on average, across bilingual and non-bilingual schools, 72.5 per cent of 15 year olds in the Region of Madrid have level B1 or higher in English (meaning that they can communicate in a fluent manner) – nearly twice the 42 per cent average of the 14 countries that participated in the 2012 European Study of Linguistic Competences and far exceeding Spain's national average of 28 per cent.

English Impact also shows that students from bilingual schools outperform students from non-bilingual schools across all language skills. Of particular note is the finding that students at bilingual schools from all socio-economic backgrounds score higher in English than students at non-bilingual schools. Communicative ability in English is no longer the purview of the privileged who can attend private language schools but is now the reach of all children who attend bilingual schools, regardless of socio-economic background.

Further test results show that there is no significant difference in students' performance in Spanish, chemistry, history and other subjects in bilingual and non-bilingual schools, meaning that CLIL does not reduce success in these subjects as previously intimated by bilingual education detractors.

Together these results show that the British Council has significantly contributed to increasing equitable access to high-quality teaching and learning through its support of the bilingual education programme. Although it is only implemented in Madrid thus far, it nevertheless constitutes an excellent start. Moreover, English Impact Madrid has established a benchmark on the level of English across publicly funded schools in the Madrid region, which has resulted in a powerful endorsement of the impact of the programme.

Internationalism

Through international school partnerships and classroom interactions with language assistants, students and teachers are exposed to different cultures, enabling them to develop the knowledge, skills and values to live and work in a globalised economy.

Specific instances of UK influence in the school system of the Autonomous Region of Madrid include:

- Use of global British Council courses, e.g. CLIL essentials, Special Educational Needs; use of British Council UK experts for summer training courses
- Recruitment and initial induction of language assistants
- Participation of the Assessment Research Group (ARG) in the UK who contributed their expertise to the English Impact Madrid project through the data analysis and subsequent report preparation
- Expertise of Bath University in the design and analysis of the motivation questionnaire used in English Impact Madrid.
- Use of British Council's Aptis for Teens test to assess English language ability in English Impact Madrid

Lebanon: *Inclusion and Language for Resilience*

Since 2014 the British Council has assisted the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) in integrating the large influx of Syrian refugee children into the Lebanese school system. Syrian children have difficulties entering and staying enrolled in Lebanese schools due to the different education systems. In Syria, the medium of instruction is Arabic, and English and French are taught as a subject only at secondary school, while in Lebanon English is used as the medium of instruction for maths and science from an early grade.

The British Council has supported formal, non-formal and community-based informal education programmes along the humanitarian-development nexus, addressing issues of inclusion, tolerance and diversity, and the promotion of equal access to high-quality education for all. The British Council is also supporting MEHE in the process of developing a comprehensive special needs education framework that addresses barriers to relevant education and employment for children and youth with special educational needs and disability (SEND).

The Lebanese public education system caters for less than a third of Lebanese students, with approximately 70 per cent of children attending private schools. The large influx of Syrian refugees in recent years has severely strained the public education system, putting huge pressure on already overstretched resources and infrastructure and increasing the challenges faced by MEHE and its institutions exponentially.

Lebanese teachers in public schools generally lack the skills to support Syrian students in their language learning and many are not aware of the psycho-social impact of the violence and displacement Syrian children and youth have experienced. As a result, many out-of-school children are demotivated to enrol, and for those who are enrolled, levels of achievement are low, attendance is poor, and dropout is high.

Lebanon's disability law requires that all schools accept children and youth with a disability, and ensure their premises provide appropriate access and resources. Of the 14,000 Lebanese children registered with a disability,² only 5,800 are in one of the 100 specialised institutions contracted by the Ministry of Social Affairs. There is a lack of statistics to explain if the others are integrated in mainstream education or are not in school at all. As for Syrian refugee children, there has been no comprehensive assessment of disability prevalence. However, a study conducted in 2016 by the American University of Beirut indicates that almost two thirds of all children who have a physical, sensorial, mental, or intellectual disability were not enrolled in school.

MEHE has recently requested technical assistance from the British Council – because of its expertise in SEND – to assist in the development of a national strategy for inclusion to address special needs. They have also asked for support for a pilot of special schools with a focus on dealing with moderate to severe cases.

²Lebanon's official statistics body, like many others in the region, defines disability in accordance with 'the medical model' rather than 'the social model'. As a result, although around 14,000 Lebanese children have been registered to date, it is estimated that there are actually around 40,000 additional children with disabilities in Lebanon who have not been registered.

National priorities and British Council actions

The education sector seeks to implement a five-year programme (2017-2021) to sustain increased and equitable access to high-quality education and learning for all Lebanese and non-Lebanese children aged between 3 and 18 years, in alignment with SDG 4.

The programme has three pillars:

Pillar I: improved access to education opportunities

Pillar II: improved quality of education services

Pillar III: strengthened capacity of the education system.

Proposed activities to address inclusion include:

- development of a comprehensive special-needs education framework that addresses barriers to relevant education and employment for children and youth with special needs
- teacher training strongly focused on inclusive, learner-centred pedagogy, as well as skills to support teaching to children with different learning back-grounds and special needs; sustained supply and updating of appropriate tools and materials
- training of school personnel to ensure active involvement in the appropriate referral of children and youth with physical or cognitive special needs

In response, British Council actions include the following:

Accessing education: Language Integration for Syrian refugee children – in response to a request from MEHE, the British Council worked with the Institut Francais du Liban to assist the Lebanese school system in dealing with the large influx of Syrian refugee school children who, due to their lack of foreign language learning, were experiencing difficulties accessing the school system. The project ran from October 2013 to February 2016.

The British Council provided materials and master training for Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERD) national trainers and MEHE academic guidance counsellors. The national trainers then cascaded the training to Lebanese state school teachers, addressing attitude and motivation to foreign language learning through promoting diversity and social cohesion, and providing teachers with skills and appropriate teaching materials.

Strengthening teacher education in a

plurilingual society (STEPS): The STEPS training programme (September 2015 to March 2016) aimed to promote the acceptance of cultural and linguistic diversity among teachers and students in Lebanese public schools, as a means of developing positive attitudes to learning a foreign language. The programme targeted Syrian refugee children aged between six and nine, providing training for academic guidance counsellors who mentor Lebanese teachers. The training focused on teaching strategies and training materials for teachers to use to supplement the state course book.

Parents homework support group pilot:

Running from February to May 2016, this pilot project aimed to provide basic strategies to Syrian refugee parents to enable them to facilitate their own homework support groups and help other Syrian refugee parents and children with their foreign-language-based homework.

Retention support programme: The British Council provided teaching materials aligned with the Lebanese curriculum, coaching materials and master training for CERD national trainers. They in turn trained NGO trainers to provide teachers with strategies and skills to support Lebanese and Syrian refugee students at risk of dropping out. The model also motivated students towards language learning and promoted diversity and social cohesion within the classroom. It was evaluated to ensure it could provide a standardised model for all NGOs. The programme, in partnership with UNICEF, ran from April 2016 to February 2017.

Foreign language groups: This project aimed to mitigate the French-English language barrier by training university students (mostly Lebanese) as mentors to run foreign-language groups for Syrian refugee children enrolled at basic education level. The aim was to support Syrian refugee children in learning a foreign language (English or French) and to enhance host and refugee community social integration. As a result, the likelihood that the children will remain in education has increased.

At CERD's request, UNICEF funded British Council support for the refinement of the community-based early childhood education package, specifically in the area of foreign language education (October to December 2016).

Inclusive pedagogies: A British Council course was delivered through Connecting Classrooms,³ in which teachers learned a variety of techniques such as inclusive classroom management, as well as exploring the theoretical concepts around inclusion. They then returned to their schools to put the learning into practice, before reconvening after three months to share the results. Lebanon has the largest Connecting Classrooms programme in the region with more than 50 international partnerships with UK schools and over 3,500 teachers and head teachers participating in a wide range of programme activities.

Since 2013 the British Council has been a founder of the Organising Committee for Annual National Day for Students with Learning Difficulties and has been a partner in organising a celebration of the National Day for Students with Learning Difficulties. The aim is to increase public awareness of students with special needs. Activities take place throughout the month of April and include sports events, student debates and capacity building workshops.

Impact assessment

Lebanon is a country that has experienced its own social and economic challenges over many decades. It has hosted a number of other refugee communities. The sudden and large influx of Syrian refugees has led to a fair degree of anti-refugee sentiment. National trainers have expanded the range of courses they can offer Lebanese teachers to include inclusive pedagogies and other topics in which they have received training from the British Council.

Sensitisation to social inclusion: By addressing the quality of language teaching and the broader issues of language awareness, the British Council training programmes have been able to respond to some of the key issues driving social tension in Lebanon, with trained teachers reporting greater empathy and less hostility towards the refugees as a result of participating in the programme. Public awareness of the rights and needs of children with SEND has increased, as has awareness among teachers and trainers of the problems that Syrian refugee children face in the classroom due to lack of foreign-language skills.

Institutional capacity development: The institutional capacity of the MEHE to train qualified teachers to cope with the rise in student numbers with different languages has been enhanced. The MEHE is better able to provide long-term development support and take over the role currently played by the humanitarian relief effort.

³Connecting Classrooms is the British Council's global education programme for schools (co-funded by DFID), which aims to build the capacity of teachers, school leaders and policy makers to integrate a range of core skills into the curriculum, helping young people to develop the knowledge, skills and values to live and work in a globalised economy.

Inclusive pedagogy

A 2016 evaluation showed that STEPS-trained teachers have the appropriate tools to help Syrian refugee school-age children improve their foreign-language skills in order to access education. They demonstrate that increased engagement with refugee children's identities helps contribute to their sense of security and aid their process of adaptation. Trained teachers report that both Lebanese school children as well as Syrian refugee children benefit from the training in language support given to public school teachers.

At the request of the British Council and the Ministry of Education in Lebanon in April 2015, a UK expert carried out a scoping visit to review progress in developing an inclusive education agenda in Lebanon and to advise on the next steps in the development of a National Action Plan. British Council UK hosted a study visit in March 2018 for 18 policymakers and SEND educators from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, nine of whom were from Lebanon. Participants visited specialist schools and attended presentations by UK experts on: SEND Policy in England, Employability and SEND, Leadership and SEND, Reform of SEND, and Curriculum and Inclusion. Because of the British Council's expertise in SEND, MEHE has recently requested its technical assistance in the development of a national strategy for inclusion, with special attention to SEND.

The influence of the UK goes hand-in-hand with a partner country's influence on the UK. The British Council's work in Lebanon has influenced the work of UK experts in Language for Resilience, studies of the impact of language on refugee and host communities, and in identification of different ways that language skills enhance resilience.

Bangladesh: *Policy Dialogue and the Influence of the UK*

In 2016, British Council Bangladesh identified assessment as a valuable issue through which to engage education decision makers and, through policy dialogue, to develop a strategic approach to assessment reform, showcase the work of the British Council and UK partners, as well as position itself for future education development opportunities. This was in response to both school-based and national system needs. Support in technical assistance came from the Open University UK, the Norwich Institute for Language Education, Lancaster University and the British Council's Language Assessment Research Group. The strength of the British Council and the UK in the field of assessment, and the high regard for UK examinations within Bangladesh were contributing factors.

The Bangladesh policy dialogue followed British Council efforts to enable key partners from education ministries to design a UK tour that met their specific needs, accessing different expertise from across the four UK school systems. Study tours form an integral part of an on-going intervention in improving global school systems. An 'appreciative inquiry' approach is used to encourage visiting educationalists to adopt a more critical thinking approach to what they see, to deconstruct UK models into the principles that underpin good practice and apply these principles to their home situations. This is seen as a two-way process, synthesising experience from both countries. This dimension of internationalism in school systems, not just schools, is gaining in popularity and there is a growing appreciation of what a visiting delegation has to offer and what the UK and the British Council can learn from them.

Bangladesh priorities and British Council actions

Over the past two decades, Bangladesh has made impressive gains in improving access to education, especially at the primary level and for girls. While improving equitable access and retention remain a priority, especially at secondary level, efforts are now concentrated on improving the quality and relevance of education and on strengthening governance, management, and accountability.

- The national education policy emphasises the learning of English for communicative purposes. The English curriculum has been developed with a view to supporting and preparing the country's younger generation for the competitive globalised world. However, assessment at primary and secondary levels is on reading and writing only, leading to inadequate competence in speaking and listening skills.
- The Government of Bangladesh has been exploring ways to remedy this for years. Studies of earlier communication-skills improvement programmes suggested that teachers did not receive sufficient support to be able to implement them effectively, and that without providing adequate training to the teachers, a huge gap would be created between the Ministry of Education's intention and classroom reality.
- Two new sector-wide education reform programmes (one for primary and the other for secondary level education) have components addressing assessment, and as part of the reforms, continuous assessment of speaking and listening skills will be included in all grades. Capacity development is required at all levels in order to produce valid and reliable assessment tasks and for them to be carried out effectively and reliably at classroom level.
- Little data is available on student achievement. Relevant and reliable data is needed by the government to inform its policies and classroom practice, measure the success of new initiatives and ensure effective use of national resources. National student assessments, which can provide a link between tracking learning outcomes over time and testing the effectiveness of the education reform initiatives, need to be strengthened and institutionalised.

Research: Research by the British Council (with technical assistance from the Open University UK) in March 2016 led to the development of an Assessment Framework for introducing continuous assessment of speaking and listening skills in July 2016, with technical assistance provided by Lancaster University.

At the behest of the Bangladesh Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MPME), two further research studies were conducted in 2017 to assess the readiness of primary and higher secondary schools for the introduction of continuous assessment. Here technical assistance was provided by Norwich Institute for Language Education (NILE) and Lancaster University respectively.

Capacity building: In February 2016, 32 participants who play a key role in developing and implementing education policy in Bangladesh attended an 'Assessment for Learning' event at Hornby Regional School in Dhaka. In January 2017, 35 technical experts from the MPME attended a second regional Hornby school in Dhaka on designing communicative English language assessment.

Data collection for education management: In 2016 and 2017 the British Council piloted its in-house research tool, English Impact,⁴ among 1,753 students in 150 government-funded secondary schools and madrasas. The pilot was conducted in collaboration with the MPME to provide insight into student achievement, evidence to inform English language policy and to serve as a baseline to measure the impact of future reform initiatives.

The British Council's Cultural Relations Approach to Education

The British Council's legacy of trust and respect is earned through years of 'being there', building strategic relationships with education decision-makers and institutions, and partnering with governments to develop and implement innovative short, medium and long term solutions to school system priorities. This commitment is shown in varying degrees and aspects by the Madrid, Lebanon and Bangladesh case studies. In Madrid, for example, by staying with interventions that started as pilots but were then scaled up into national projects, over time this cemented a long-standing relationship that allowed for continuity in finding solutions. It also positioned the British Council (and thus the UK) for policy dialogue and involvement in the management and governance aspects of school system priorities.

In Lebanon, the British Council built expertise in inclusion of forcibly displaced children and youth. As Syrian children transitioned into mainstream Lebanese government schools, so the British Council began to transfer Language for Resilience approaches to teacher training in the Lebanese education authority school systems. As in the case of Madrid, work on social inclusion extended to work on SEND, further engaging UK expertise and creating positive connections.

How familiar education decision-makers are with the UK and how they regard the role of the UK in influencing solutions for their own school system priorities depends on a number of factors. The expertise provided includes technical assistance to projects and programmes in the form of university, consultancy firm and individual consultant contributions, international accreditation through UK-designed internationally recognised examinations and validated national school assessments and study tours to see various aspects of school systems in the UK.

The British Council draws on a range of UK resources to support education authorities and decision-makers in implementing school system reforms that speak to both the attractiveness of its soft power and its cultural relations approach. These are summarised below.

Technical assistance

The British Council works with a range of UK partners to support school system priorities in a way that benefits Britain as well as the countries in which they work. The following gives a snapshot of just some of the key UK partners who provided technical assistance to British Council school-strengthening projects in the 28 countries and states surveyed.

- The Universities of Lancaster and Bath, Cambridge International Examinations and the University of Bedfordshire's Centre for Research in English Language Learning supported British Council assessment projects in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Madrid, Latvia, Nepal and Uruguay
- The University of Reading supported remote teacher training and mentoring in Iraq, and Iris Connect supports CPD in Thailand, also from an on-line platform
- Norwich Institute for Language Education (NILE) supported a range of British Council programmes including young learner curriculum development in Peru, English Impact assessment in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, and teacher training in Tunisia
- Teach for All UK supported competency-based curriculum in Latvia
- In Sri Lanka, Career Connect in UK supported how careers guidance is taught in schools, and Save the Children is conducting research in social inclusion
- Individual UK consultants, too numerous to list, provide technical assistance in specific areas of education to school system strengthening projects and programmes around the world.

Study visits to UK school systems

The British Council enables key partners from education ministries to design a UK tour that meets their specific needs, accessing different expertise from across the four UK school systems. For example:

- Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence is a good example of how to prioritise STEM, health and wellbeing, digital skills, and CPD. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) provides an innovative model for strengthening transitions between pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary systems
- Wales is the UK go-to system for bilingual and multilingual approaches to education
- Northern Ireland works with other conflict affected countries on peace and conflict transformation
- England can showcase school leadership in a system which also emphasises autonomy in assessment systems and financial management. It can also highlight internationalism and strengthened global learning, and schools that prioritise core skills and development of resilience, creativity and critical thinking

Study tours form an integral part of an on-going intervention in improving global school systems. An 'appreciative inquiry' approach is used to encourage visiting educationalists to adopt a more critical thinking approach to what they see, to deconstruct UK models into the principles that underpin good practice and apply these principles to their home situations. This is seen as a two-way process, synthesising experience from both countries. This dimension of internationalism in school systems, not just schools, is gaining in popularity and there is a growing appreciation of what the visiting delegation have to offer and what the UK and British Council can learn from them.

Experience in inclusive education for SEND

The British Council is in a good position to advise on how to access UK resources and best practices for SEND because of its role as a leader in reframing the debate on intersectional diversity and a flexible needs-based approach to mainstream inclusion. It strongly supports global school systems with expertise from the UK on inclusive education policy and practice for minority, SEND, and gender equity.⁵

Study tours visit UK school systems to see SEND best practices in action: whole school approaches and the work of organisations like the National Association of Educational Needs (NASEN), and the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT), who coordinate teacher training for a multi-agency approach to children with SEND, to name just two.

⁵ British Council publications: *Unlocking a World of Potential: Core Skills for All* (2017) and *Creating an Inclusive School Environment* (2019) describe success factors in this area, illustrated with case studies, while training material includes the Gender Toolkit: Gender Inclusion in Schools; the SEN Inclusion Toolkit; the Teaching for Success (TfS) Inclusive Pedagogies, and SEN modules, to name a few.

Connecting Classrooms

Connecting Classrooms is a global education programme for schools, co-funded by the British Council and DFID.⁶ It aims to build the capacity of teachers, school leaders and policy makers to integrate a range of core skills into the curriculum, helping young people to develop the knowledge, skills and values to live and work in a globalised economy. It fosters inclusive, participatory, learner-centred pedagogy; critical thinking and problem solving; ICT and autonomous learning; global citizenship skills through international school links; school leadership; and parent and community support for the changing landscape of the classroom and the school.

Even though Connecting Classrooms was not originally designed to be an education reform intervention, it is increasingly being used to leverage wider reform (such as in the Punjab in Pakistan and in Sri Lanka). In Lebanon and Sudan, for example, there is strong buy-in from the education authority and Connecting Classrooms impacts powerfully on (sub) national school systems.⁷

Conferences: National and international conferences play a role in showcasing UK expertise in school system priorities. Most countries surveyed made use of conferences to showcase their work and get further inputs from peers in the region and from UK specialists

Scholarships for teachers and education

leaders: Every year Hornby scholarships are awarded by British Councils around the world to key education authority partners and academics who advise on or influence English language teaching in school systems. The scholarships fund study on the one-year Masters in TESOL at the University of Warwick.

⁶ Connecting Classrooms is a global programme for schools (see footnote 4).

⁷ Connecting Classrooms has been independently evaluated in earlier phases. The impact of Connecting Classrooms for phase three is being analysed in an evaluation commissioned by the British Council. As such, to fully discuss its impact on global school systems is beyond the remit of this contribution.

Conclusion

United Kingdom's expertise and comparative advantage in education provides the country with enormous soft power resources reflected through its values, institutions and foreign policy work. The British Council has helped to promote this soft power through its cultural relations approach to working in the education sector, informed by a spirit of reciprocal trust and respect, a commitment to inclusion and diversity, and situated in processes of mutual learning and capacity-building, networking and partnership.

National and subnational government priorities align strongly with international donor and SDG policies on free, equitable, effective, quality primary and secondary education. The British Council has an accurate understanding of current international, national and subnational policies and priorities in the countries and states where it works.

The British Council is clearly responsive to (sub) national school system requests for assistance in priority areas. It has at least one on-going project which meets a stated priority of the (sub)national school system in each country or state surveyed.

The priorities that the British Council is most often requested to help with and most frequently able to respond to are teacher education, curriculum and assessment, especially for English Language Teaching. The British Council's emphasis on teacher education and curriculum (more than half of all projects analysed) meets DFID's principle priority of strengthening teacher quality, skills, and knowledge. These activities lead to strong positive perceptions of the UK and its education system.

This is especially true in the area of teacher education, where the British Council is implementing projects strengthening teacher quality, skills and knowledge through an integrated approach that combines face-to-face, remote, and school-based training, mentoring, CPD, online, and other media self-access approaches. The UK can support overseas demand by working with education decision makers to ensure that positive outcomes from in-service training, school-based training and CPD are incorporated into pre-service training for primary and secondary teachers. In order to maximise impact and sustainability, it is important that teacher education combines face-to-face teacher training courses with school-based training, follow-up and CPD, not simply one or the other. This builds sustainable capacity across school systems.

Some projects use a CPD model which presupposes that 'peers' have all had high-quality initial training, even though the assumption is not justified in many under-resourced environments. In such environments, governments are often unwilling to formally release teachers and trainers for the longer-term course-based training they really need. Education decision makers in government systems tend to argue that their schools cannot function if teachers are pulled out for training. Although this is a legitimate argument (because of teacher shortages and limited funding), it also means that teachers and trainers are unable to attend the longer-term training they need.

UK expertise is particularly pertinent in national assessment. This feeds into policy and planning, builds the reputation of the UK, and helps the British Council position itself for further policy dialogue in key priority areas, such as equity, access, inclusion and the motivational behaviour behind transitions, retention, and completion.

In addition, the British Council leads the field with its very positive and proactive work on Language for Resilience (LrR) for forcibly displaced people, on its use of inclusive pedagogies and on its use of UK model schools for special needs and disabilities (SEND) to meet (sub)national school priorities for inclusion. Given the renewed emphasis in 2018 by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), DFID, EC DEVCO, the SDGs and UNICEF on girls' education and gender equity, especially in lower income countries where girls have harder access to education, even more can be done in this respect to support system reform.

School leaders and school governance are intrinsic to sustaining good-quality reform. Understanding of and responses to (sub)national priorities in management and governance can be strengthened through policy dialogue. They can also operate at the level of human resource management and by linking school level leadership with management and governance at (sub)national level government. Greater engagement with the country's human resource management system for schools, in terms of trainer status, release, secondment, deployment, payment and accreditation enhances the status of key influencers.

In sum, the British Council draws on a rich but changing resource of UK school system specialisation and expertise to support key education decision makers in the countries where it works. This input includes UK technical assistance from universities and education service providers, study visits that focus on particular strengths of school systems in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, scholarships, conferences, and international awards. This brings benefit both to Britain and to partnering (sub)national school systems.

UK resources are best used to support and enhance (sub)national school system reform when they are integrated into project design and influence is mapped on project outcomes. There is a direct and clearly evident cause and result relationship between technical assistance and tailored training courses in the UK. Study tours, conferences and individual scholarships are influential although the outcomes can be accounted for less clearly and directly. Where there is an emphasis on understanding the underlying principles of UK models of education on the part of individual change agents and then adapting them to the strengths and needs of or within a particular (sub)national education system, impact can be discerned from what is absorbed and adapted in any change process, although tracking such impact is obviously difficult.

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