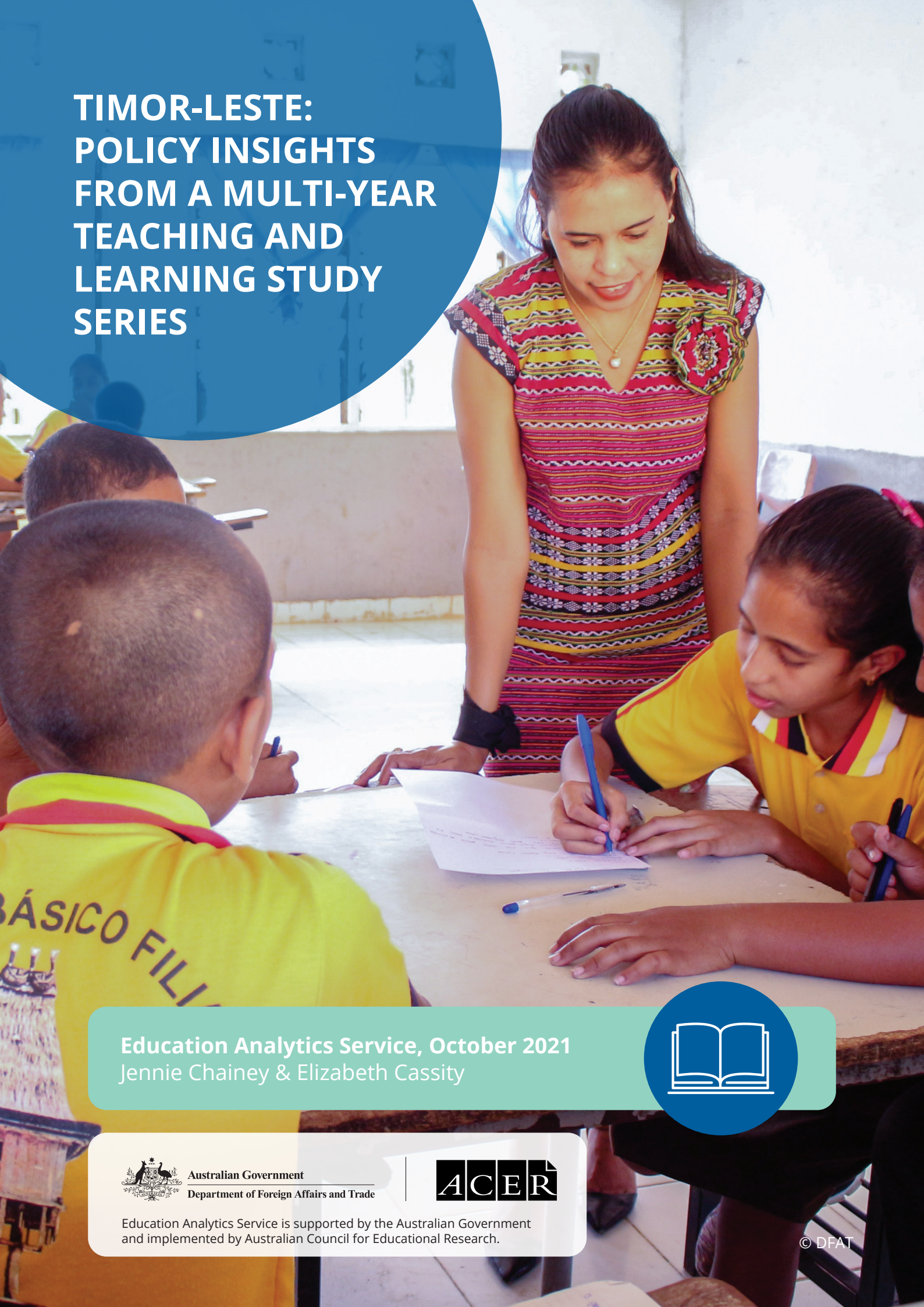


TIMOR-LESTE: POLICY INSIGHTS FROM A MULTI-YEAR TEACHING AND LEARNING STUDY SERIES



Education Analytics Service, October 2021
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The Australian Government is supporting significant education reforms in Timor-Leste. This policy note summarises findings on primary school teacher practice and student learning outcomes during the phased introduction of major curriculum changes. Key areas identified for action include the need to promote inclusive classroom practices and address capacity gaps in this area. In addition, establish measures to ensure effective school leadership and school practices continue once the Apoiu Lideransa liuhosi Mentorina no Apendizajen (ALMA) program support ceases or there are institutional changes. Part of a multi-year study, the Education Analytics Service is investigating how ALMA is making a difference to the Government of Timor-Leste's primary education reforms. The study series was commissioned by the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), to investigate teacher and learning development initiatives in three countries: Lao PDR, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu.

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Apoi Lideransa liuhosi Mentoria no Aprendizajen¹ (ALMA)



The Timor-Leste Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) began a staged implementation of a new primary education curriculum for pre-school to Grade 6 in 2015. The new curriculum promotes teaching practices that support student-centred learning, and organises subject content into sequenced and scripted lessons for each grade. To introduce the new curriculum, the MoEYS provided teacher training using a cascade model.

The ALMA program aims to supplement the MoEYS teacher training and new curriculum materials. Commencing in 2016, ALMA was developed in partnership between DFAT and the MoEYS to build school leadership and teacher capacity, and support the effective implementation of Timor-Leste's new curriculum, through the following core components:

"Leaders of Learning" Program

Periodic leadership training sessions for school leaders focused on school-based management, observation and feedback skills, provision of teacher support, literacy and numeracy assessment, teacher peer learning groups, disability inclusion, and parent-community involvement.

School-based peer professional learning groups²

Facilitated peer-learning sessions for school leaders and teachers within a school cluster to collaborate on lesson planning, provide feedback to each other on teaching simulations, discuss resources and problem solve challenges experienced in teaching and learning.

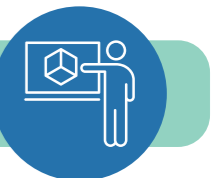
Mentoring support for school leaders and teachers

Mentors from overseas and within Timor-Leste provide on-the-job mentoring support to school leaders as they apply the learning gained from the leadership training. Mentors also build teacher capacity through supporting the peer learning groups and student literacy and numeracy assessments, and providing classroom observation and feedback sessions.

Educational technology

School leaders are provided with a tablet uploaded with the new curriculum, lesson plans and materials. Each tablet has custom-built applications and a dashboard to collect, store and submit classroom observation data, and retrieve and analyse information. Tablets enable efficient information sharing and monitoring, and also allow school leaders to film classes and access good practice and motivational videos.

Study Design



The Education Analytics Service has been commissioned to undertake an independent study to investigate the extent to which ALMA investment has improved teaching quality and student learning through three research questions:

1. To what extent does the ALMA program support improved teaching quality in Timor-Leste?
2. To what extent does the ALMA program support the effective implementation of Timor-Leste's National Basic Education Curriculum?
3. To what extent does teacher involvement in the ALMA program lead to improved learning outcomes for Timor-Leste students?

This study uses a mixed methods approach, utilising both quantitative and qualitative methods. The study is implemented across a variety of contexts over multiple years to see how effectively the ALMA investments have been implemented in different municipalities across the various phases of the ALMA program. The study commenced after the intervention began and is not longitudinal. These design choices were made in line with the preferences of DFAT and education ministry counterparts.

¹ The program name is in Tetun language. Previously known as the *Professional Learning and Mentoring Program* (PLMP).

² The ALMA component name in Tetun language is *Grupu Traballu ba Professor* (GTP). Previously known as the Peer Learning Group (PLG).

Key Findings



This approach presents an opportunity to study multiple population groups rather than just one subset which allows for a wider breadth of analysis, a stated priority of the Government of Timor-Leste. The inclusion of multiple municipalities is particularly beneficial when considering research implications for policy goals as it allows a country-wide understanding of how the ALMA intervention impacts teaching quality and student learning.

In the first two years of the study, reported here, student assessment data was analysed from existing sources – the 2017 Classroom Based Assessment (CBA) and Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)³ – providing insights into the student learning outcomes from the first phase of ALMA. Qualitative case study data was collected from just over 100 education stakeholders at the national level and across four municipalities in Timor-Leste, through interviewing senior level stakeholders at the MoEYS, ALMA program mentors, school leaders (school directors, school coordinators, adjuntos), inspectors, municipal directors and teachers.

Quantitative	Existing student assessment data.
Qualitative	Range of school case studies – purposively selected by ALMA phase and municipality each study year. Interviews and focus group discussions with education stakeholders, classroom observations from 2021.
Intended study duration ⁴	5 years, with three cycles of data collection.
Reporting	Interim Report 1 (summarised here) Interim Report 2 (summarised here) Final Report EAS Study Series Final Report

Table 1: Overview of data collection methods, tools, intended study duration and reporting

The first two years of this study focused on the experiences of Timor-Leste education stakeholders with different phases of the ALMA program.

To date, the findings indicate that ALMA has been effective in supporting:

1. Improved teaching quality through facilitating instructional leadership, empowering teachers to build their knowledge, motivation, self-confidence, and increased access to education technology by school leaders to observe and provide feedback to teachers.
2. Implementation of the new curriculum by supporting teachers to align their practice to the curriculum, and enabling leaders to effectively monitor teaching against it through the use of education technology.
3. Improved student engagement, participation and interest in lessons, which are factors linked to improved student learning outcomes.

The findings highlight three key issues emerging from the study that are useful for priority action.

Monitoring learning

The challenge for Timor-Leste is there is very little valid and reliable data on student learning outcomes.

While student achievement data was collected after the first year of ALMA, there have been no subsequent collections since 2017.

- While project-driven data collections provide important snapshots of learning at particular points in time and for particular student cohorts, the ability to monitor the longer impact of teaching and learning reforms, like that of Timor-Leste's new curriculum and ALMA program, is limited.
- Systematic approaches to monitoring learning achievement would enable MoEYS and education stakeholders to track changes to student achievement levels and equity over time, and make requisite changes to curricular, teaching, assessment and resourcing.

- Detailed data on student achievement can also be used to monitor and report progress against UN Sustainable Development Goals in Education (SDG 4), with a particular focus on equity.

Promoting gender and disability-inclusive classrooms

One emerging issue identified as a critical area of concern is the promotion of disability and gender-inclusive classroom practices. While school leaders and teachers recognise educational equity as a human right, they face significant capacity gaps in the ability to implement equitable systems at schools.

- It is likely teachers are unable to identify students across the full spectrum of impairments and children with disabilities are kept out of the school system.
- Teachers reported trialling a range of strategies in classrooms to encourage active engagement of both girls and boys in class activities, to varying success.
- School leaders and teachers identified a range of gaps including limited knowledge of inclusive classroom practices, limited ability to identify students with special education needs, large class sizes and ambitious curriculum content constraining teacher availability to provide additional support to students.

Program sustainability

Results from the study indicate the ALMA program is effective in supporting improved teaching quality through facilitating instructional leadership and empowering school leaders to support teachers.

- School leader and mentor observations and feedback, alongside peer learning, has strengthened teacher knowledge and motivation, confidence, preparation, positive discipline and classroom management skills.
- Case study data indicates that a number of school leaders have developed an improved understanding of effective leadership and management because of ALMA.
- The peer learning process and use of educational technology has helped teachers to prepare and present lessons, and provided teachers with opportunities to reflect on teaching practice,

share challenges and workshop solutions.

- The introduction of student-centred approaches, on top of teaching quality improvements such as peer learning groups, is associated with improvements in student well-being, engagement, interest in lessons and attendance.

However, findings show that ALMA activities require ongoing active support to sustain capacity and motivation for the continuation of professional learning.

- Despite teachers reporting peer learning groups to be valuable, they are reliant on municipal and school leaders to lead the coordination of such activities. Limited budget, travel distance, road conditions, weather and competing commitments, were presented as obstacles to them taking place.
- School leadership changes and resulting institutional knowledge gaps have created a risk for the continuation of ALMA activities.

Recommendations



Monitoring learning

Supporting the development of a national assessment strategy and capacity

Timor-Leste currently does not have a national assessment strategy in place. The development of a national assessment strategy for Timor-Leste is a critical step towards establishing an assessment system and capacity that can support the collection of valid and reliable data on students' knowledge and skills in key learning domains.

- A strategy would determine the purpose of a national assessment program, the design, and how the program would be implemented and data used.
- Ensuring there is ongoing commitment and consistent resourcing for a regular assessment program is vital.

³World Bank (2018). Lessons learned from an early assessment (2017) of two innovations in basic education in Timor-Leste. Final Draft, 25 January 2018.

⁴Study durations have been impacted by COVID-19 travel restrictions and school closures.

- An aspect to consider is how the capacity of policy makers, principals and teachers is strengthened to support them to interpret, understand and use the data to improve learning.

Promoting gender and disability-inclusive classrooms

Implementing accountability measures to promote inclusive classrooms and stakeholder engagement.

To address the gaps in implementing inclusive classrooms, an exploration of systemic levers could be used to identify, measure and monitor the promotion of gender equity and encourage participation of students with disability in schools. The key to understanding inclusive classrooms and sustaining stakeholder engagement on the issue is transparency of data.

- Regular and systemised collections of student achievement data can be used effectively to make evidence-based decisions and policies to promote inclusive classrooms, curriculum reform, changes to teaching standards and practices, as well as professional development programs for teachers and school leaders.
- Enhancing the use of data tracking of inclusive practices by MoEYS is also a key step to tailor support to teachers, principals and communities for inclusive classroom practices.

Promoting inclusive classroom practices within schools, such as incorporating techniques for teaching students with diverse abilities, is likely to require ongoing investment and engagement by all stakeholders within the education system and the community. The key is to invest in capacity building.

- An initial measure could be developing gender and disability inclusion training for school leaders, teachers and mentors. This could cover topic areas such as identification, inclusive attitudes and values, and inclusive teaching strategies which enable the curriculum to be delivered in ways to suit the learner.
- Given women are underrepresented in school leadership roles, supporting female school leadership is an important step towards improving gender equality in the leadership ranks, and potentially more inclusive classroom practices.

Program Sustainability

Supporting transition and systematising knowledge transfer.

The facilitation of ongoing professional learning through observations, feedback and peer learning processes is an important part of school leadership. At the same time, these interventions are at risk once the phased ALMA support finishes.

- Possibilities to support transition towards the completion of ALMA could include scaling down mentor support for a period while scaling up and institutionalising the mentoring role in MoEYS, such as within the inspectorate.
- Support to school leaders to form strategies to continue components in less costly ways, such as rotated or within-school peer learning, and the provision of periodic training and resourcing, could help interventions continue.

Changes to school leadership also pose challenges to integrating and sustaining improved teacher and leader capacities. Supporting school and municipal leaders to undertake succession planning could ensure that newly deployed leaders are more likely to sustain improvements to school-level practices.

- One option is to expand the design of the Leaders of Learning program by including a component of leadership change management. Should this be incorporated, future policies could implement further monitoring and evaluation procedures to ensure lessons learned from the training can be fully integrated with the current teaching and planning practices.
- Other possibilities include extending the current inclusion of promising female teachers in the leadership training to a wider cohort of teachers, and providing induction training to newly deployed municipal leaders and school leaders who have been posted to ALMA schools.

Further Reading



Cassity, E., Chainey, J. Hollingsworth, H., Pereira, T., Sarmiento, D. & Wong, D. (2019). 'Teacher professional learning in Timor-Leste, Lao PDR and Vanuatu: Inclusive programs that support education system actors'. *Panel presented at UKFIET, The Education and Development Forum*. Oxford: United Kingdom.

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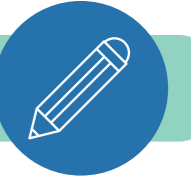
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