

**Advancing Equity Globally: Innovations in Curriculum, Teaching,  
Teacher Education and Professional Development**

education policy analysis  
archives

A peer-reviewed, independent,  
open access, multilingual journal



Arizona State University

Volume 34 Number 1

January 13, 2026

ISSN 1068-2341

**Advancing Equitable Access to Quality Education  
Globally: Innovations in Curriculum, Teacher Education,  
and Professional Development**

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**Citation:** Tatto, M. T., & Mutton, T. (2026). Advancing equitable access to quality education globally: Innovations in curriculum, teacher education, and professional development. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 34(1). <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.34.10048> This article is part of the special issue **Advancing Equity Globally: Innovations in Curriculum, Teaching, Teacher Education and Professional Development**, guest edited by Maria Teresa Tatto and Trevor Mutton.

**Abstract:** This article introduces the special issue “Advancing Equitable Access to Quality Education Globally: Innovations in Curriculum, Teacher Education, and Professional Development,” featuring articles that report on a multi-country project examining the challenges and opportunities of globalization for three types of reforms that have seen significant innovation in the past decade. These reforms encompass the school curriculum, teachers' education, and teachers'

Journal website: <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/>  
Facebook: /EPAAA  
Twitter: @epaa\_aape

Manuscript received: 23/7/2024  
Revisions received: 17/10/2025  
Accepted: 9/12/2025

professional development (collectively referred to in this article as SCTEPD). The reporting countries were undergoing rapid transformation that incorporated the three reforms when we began our work, and included: India, New Zealand, Peru, Scotland, and Wales. This introductory article offers a retrospective and prospective discussion of global reforms in three key areas of SCTEPD, providing context for the articles that follow. In this introductory article, we use Cohen and Mehta's (2017) theoretical framework to analyze these reforms, aiming to understand the conditions that lead to successful, lasting reforms and the extent to which these reforms have increased equity and quality in education for all learners.

**Keywords:** education quality; equitable access; curriculum reform; teacher education and development reform; UNESCO SDG4

### **Avanzando el acceso equitativo a una educación de calidad a nivel global: Innovaciones en currículo, formación docente y desarrollo profesional**

**Resumen:** Este artículo introduce el número especial “Avanzando el acceso equitativo a una educación de calidad a nivel global: Innovaciones en currículo, formación docente y desarrollo profesional”, que presenta artículos derivados de un proyecto multinacional que examinó los desafíos y oportunidades de la globalización para tres tipos de reformas que han experimentado innovaciones significativas en la última década. Estas reformas abarcan el currículo escolar, la formación del profesorado y el desarrollo profesional docente (referidos colectivamente en este artículo como SCTEPD). Los países participantes se encontraban en procesos de transformación acelerada que incorporaban las tres reformas al inicio de nuestro trabajo e incluían: India, Nueva Zelanda, Perú, Escocia y Gales. Este artículo introductorio ofrece una discusión retrospectiva y prospectiva sobre las reformas globales en tres áreas clave de SCTEPD, proporcionando contexto para los artículos que conforman el número. En este artículo, utilizamos el marco teórico de Cohen y Mehta (2017) para analizar estas reformas, con el objetivo de comprender las condiciones que posibilitan reformas exitosas y duraderas, así como el grado en que han incrementado la equidad y la calidad educativa para todos los estudiantes.

**Palabras clave:** calidad educativa; acceso equitativo; reforma curricular; reforma de la formación y el desarrollo docente; ODS 4 de la UNESCO

### **Avançando o acesso equitativo a uma educação de qualidade globalmente: Inovações em currículo, formação de professores e desenvolvimento profissional**

**Resumo:** Este artigo apresenta o dossiê “Avançando o acesso equitativo a uma educação de qualidade globalmente: Inovações em currículo, formação de professores e desenvolvimento profissional”, que reúne artigos de um projeto multicountry que examinou os desafios e as oportunidades da globalização para três tipos de reformas que passaram por inovações significativas na última década. Essas reformas envolvem o currículo escolar, a formação docente e o desenvolvimento profissional de professores (referidos coletivamente neste artigo como SCTEPD). Os países participantes estavam passando por processos de transformação acelerada que incorporavam as três reformas quando iniciamos nosso trabalho, incluindo: Índia, Aotearoa Nova Zelândia, Peru, Escócia e País de Gales. Este artigo introdutório oferece uma discussão retrospectiva e prospectiva sobre reformas globais em três áreas centrais de SCTEPD, fornecendo contexto para os artigos que seguem. Utilizamos o referencial teórico de Cohen e Mehta (2017) para analisar essas reformas, buscando compreender as condições que possibilitam reformas bem-sucedidas e duradouras e até que ponto elas ampliaram a equidade e a qualidade da educação para todos os aprendizes.

**Palavras-chave:** qualidade da educação; acesso equitativo; reforma curricular; reforma da formação e do desenvolvimento docente; ODS 4 da UNESCO

## **Advancing Equitable Access to Quality Education Globally: Innovations in Curriculum, Teacher Education, and Professional Development**

Education systems are changing quickly worldwide, but not for everyone's benefit (Fuller & Kim, 2022). While most nation-states have managed to provide basic education for their citizens for years, this reality escapes many. Inequality in educational opportunities is abundant, especially among minority groups or those traditionally disadvantaged because of their language, geographical location, race, and socioeconomic status (Gorard & Smith, 2004; OECD, 2012). Nevertheless, even with access to school, classroom life can be challenging for students who are often marginalized in the U.S. education system—primarily students of color, especially African American, Latino, Native American, and low-income students. (Delpit, 2006).

A lack of clarity about educational equity and systemic issues, including a fragmented curriculum, troubles the field (Levinson et al., 2022), worsening serious problems with teacher recruitment and retention, teacher training and development, and resource distribution (Ingersoll et al., 2019). The same authors say that respect and support teachers get from education systems—such as pay, resources, and professional recognition—greatly influence recruitment and retention. Additionally, teachers feel ineffective in their roles; they often mention their inability to help all students learn and see preparation and professional development as crucial for their success (Ingersoll et al., 2019). Moreover, teachers face increased demands for accountability, testing, and a strict curriculum that controls their work and threatens their professionalism (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Tatto, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d). International research shows that teacher preparation is lacking in several areas, not only in subject knowledge but also in pedagogy and, most importantly, in preparing teachers to teach students from diverse cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, and national origins (Ainscow, 2020; Cerna, 2019).

The UNESCO SDG4 and similar global actors have highlighted the global imperative for equity in education, placing the curriculum and teachers at the center of this call (UNESCO, 2015, 2017). The need for curriculum innovation, qualified teachers, and support in terms of ongoing professional learning became more urgent during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dorn et al., 2021). This well-known and universally acknowledged situation underlines the need for innovation in curriculum, teacher education, and development. This is where a powerful vision is needed.

The articles in this special issue, “Advancing Equity Globally: Innovations in Curriculum, Teacher Education, and Professional Development,” stem from a project examining the challenges and opportunities of globalization for three types of reforms that have seen significant innovation in the past decade. These reforms encompass the school curriculum, teachers' education, and teachers' professional development (collectively referred to in this article as SCTEPD). Departing from a global perspective and moving to local contexts, we explore innovative approaches to ensure equitable access to quality education for marginalized and vulnerable groups via curriculum design, teacher education, and professional development reforms.

Curriculum innovations aim to adapt curricula to meet learners' diverse needs, incorporating digital, personalized, and competency-based approaches. Teacher education reform refers to initiatives aimed at enhancing teacher training to better equip educators with the skills necessary to support diverse student populations. It may also include the development of new curricula for teacher education programs. Professional development reforms aim to implement ongoing professional development programs that focus on improving teachers' knowledge and skills, often in conjunction with curriculum reform.

The central premise of our work is that, while we have witnessed multiple curriculum reforms over time, these may occur independently of reforms in teacher education and teacher

development. We argue that the partial character of the reforms tends to limit their success and will likely have a limited duration. We are therefore interested here in examples of reforms that have attempted an integrative approach, that is, those reforms that seek holistic innovations across the curriculum, teacher education, and development. To achieve this, we consulted colleagues in countries where significant reforms were underway in response to global initiatives, such as UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). To better understand a range of innovations leading to systemic change, we have formed an international partnership with teacher educators and educationalists who possess deep knowledge of the school curriculum, teacher education, and development programs in their respective regions, including countries as diverse as India, New Zealand, Peru, Scotland, and Wales. The case studies stemming from this work comprise the contents of the present issue, inform our work.

As we began our work, we established that global initiatives, such as UNESCO's SDG4, are implemented both nationally and locally, and it is essential to consider the support these reforms receive at the national and local levels. We adopt a global retrospective and prospective approach, encompassing a brief review of reforms implemented in the past and the present, to explore how these may inform a vision for a future agenda focused on resilient and sustainable systemic quality-equity-oriented change (Abson et al., 2017; Hjorth & Bagheri, 2006). We utilize Cohen and Mehta's (2017) theoretical framework to analyze reforms, aiming to understand the conditions that lead to successful and lasting reforms, as well as the extent to which these reforms have increased access and equity in education for all learners.

We aim to document such innovations in a few countries that form the basis of this special issue—their theory of change, and their degree of success at both the system and local levels—to develop an evidence-based vision for change. This introductory article provides a global context for worldwide reform efforts, documenting key developments in these important movements.

For instance, with a significant Indigenous population, Mexico implemented during 2018 a national law allowing children to be educated in their language. This legislation led to the development of government-sponsored free textbooks in several Indigenous languages and teacher preparation for these populations, thereby improving access to education for previously neglected populations—such reform continues (albeit in different forms) to this day. Currently, Wales is undergoing systemic curriculum and assessment reforms to address extreme poverty among a significant section of the population. The Wales reforms broadened the conceptions of learning, allowing teachers more freedom to shape teaching and assessment methods. This initiative has led to a comprehensive overhaul of teacher education and professional development, aimed at enhancing the quality of learning, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In the often-fragmented field of education, our study aims to provide a clearer understanding of the challenges and opportunities of globalization for local, coherent curricular change, teacher education, and teacher development in promoting quality and equity-oriented global mindsets in education which aim to provide all students with the opportunity to achieve their full potential, regardless of their own personal or social background (Ainscow & Chapman, 2025; OECD, 2018; Sahlberg & Cobbold, 2021; Tatto, 1996). We believe that global quality-equity movements can facilitate national and local systemic change, and we examine how educators may overcome one of the most significant constraints to reform: the lack of coherence across the curriculum, teacher education, and development reform and policy priorities (Newmann et al., 2001).

While not abundant, recent international research highlights a growing commitment to improving educational quality and equity through innovations in curriculum design, teacher education, and professional development. Countries are increasingly revisiting their curricula to better serve diverse student populations. The OECD (2023) emphasizes inclusive frameworks and

culturally responsive teaching as central strategies for bridging equity gaps, offering comparative data and policy guidance to support reform efforts.

Systemic inequities across demographic groups remain a pressing concern. A study published in *Frontiers in Education* (Naim, 2025) outlines successful interventions such as inclusive teaching practices and equitable funding models, providing a framework for evaluating equity-focused reforms across educational systems. Global trends in curriculum and teacher education reform complement these efforts.

Professional development (PD) is another vital area of innovation. A synthesis of 33 PD programs across 14 countries by Popova et al. (2022) identifies key features of effective PD, including mentoring, subject-specific focus, and career incentives. However, the study also critiques the gap between evidence-based practices and actual government-funded initiatives. Similarly, the International Development Research Centre (2024) in Canada draws on research from the Global South to highlight scalable and sustainable PD models that incorporate stakeholder engagement, peer collaboration, and technology, emphasizing the importance of context-sensitive design.

Finally, broader global agendas—such as sustainability, digitalization, and diversity—are influencing national education reforms. Akgün and Alpaydın (2024) present case studies from Algeria, South Korea, and Malaysia, demonstrating how curriculum and teacher training innovations are being adapted to meet these changing priorities while promoting equity and quality. Our goal here (and more broadly in this special issue) is to explore international innovations in school curriculum, teacher education, and professional development that address educational quality and equity.

## Theoretical Framework

We utilize Cohen and Mehta's (2017) theoretical framework to analyze SCTEPD reforms, focusing on policies that aim to ensure educational equity and understanding the conditions that lead to successful and lasting reforms. Despite their focus on the historical analysis of reforms in the United States, Cohen and Mehta (2017) identify key factors that may explain the success or failure of reforms in a globalized context. They argue that successful reforms tend to address (a) problems educators recognize and want to solve; (b) align with prevailing norms, values, and political pressures; (c) provide necessary tools, materials, and guidance for implementation; and (d) require minimal changes to existing practices for system-wide adoption. The examples of successful reforms in the US that they cite include the creation of public elementary and secondary schools, age grading, standardized testing, extracurricular activities, and liberalization in student treatment.

In contrast, unsuccessful reforms, according to Cohen and Mehta (2017), (a) fail to address felt needs or solve recognized problems; (b) require profound changes in teaching practices without adequate support; (c) lack broad political or public support. Examples of failed reforms in the US include progressive education, 1950s/1960s curriculum reforms, and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) standards. Cohen and Mehta (2017) also identify what they call “niche” reforms, which operate in protected environments with specialized missions, recruit motivated participants, and build their infrastructure. Examples include Montessori and Waldorf schools, Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs of study, Comprehensive School Reform Designs (CSRDs), and high-performing charter schools.

For our project and the articles in this issue, improving education to boost quality and equity through SCTEPD was initially envisioned as a system-wide reform. However, these efforts, as shown in this issue, face significant challenges, as demonstrated by the cases of India, New Zealand, and Peru. How educators view the legitimacy and relevance of the reform indeed depends—as Cohen & Mehta suggest—on its alignment with current norms, values, and political pressures, as well as the governance system (centralized or decentralized), and the availability of materials and

guidance for implementation, the strength of infrastructure, and the pressure to change existing practices. These factors can make large-scale change difficult. Likewise, political resistance and lack of professional control can hinder progress where sustained leadership and broad support are necessary. While systemic reform in Wales seems to meet all these conditions, likely ensuring sustainable success, we agree that incremental progress through niche reforms and collaborative efforts may also be adequate in advancing educational improvements, as illustrated in case studies presented in this issue about New Zealand's Māori language immersion education reform and Scotland's Race-Cognizant Teacher Education Policies.

## **An Overview of Global Educational Reforms Seeking to Increase Equitable Access to Quality Education**

We define educational reform as the process of making changes to a system, policy, or institution to improve it. In education, reform often aims to enhance the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning. According to the Education Revolution Association (2024), reforms are essential for addressing persistent opportunity gaps and driving meaningful change.

Education quality refers to an educational system that provides learners with the necessary knowledge, skills, and values to reach their full potential and become active, responsible citizens. It goes beyond academic achievement to include critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, communication, and social skills. Nor and Sihes (2021) and Pithers and Soden (2000) emphasize that these competencies are essential for preparing students for the complexities of modern life and work. Tonegawa (2023) further argues that inclusive education aligned with SDG4 promotes equity and social justice, requiring systemic frameworks to ensure effectiveness.

A key goal of education is to provide equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities for all children. Samira (2024) identifies socioeconomic status, race, gender, and geography as key factors influencing disparities in access and outcomes and highlights successful interventions such as targeted scholarships and inclusive teaching practices.

Educational reform typically aims to introduce new ideas, methods, or tools to improve processes or solve issues. In education, innovation can involve creating new teaching strategies, technologies, or curricula designed to enhance learning outcomes. Serdyukov (2017) notes that innovation must be evidence-based and scalable to be effective. Recent research compiled by Terada and Merrill (2024) shows that embracing student mistakes, outdoor learning, and AI tools can significantly increase engagement and retention. Tonegawa (2023) and Yang et al. (2025) illustrate how innovation, equity, and access are interconnected themes in transforming education systems to meet the 2030 Agenda.

The recent waves of educational reform have been driven by calls from UNESCO's SDG4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for everyone. UNESCO (2024) explains how countries are reforming their education systems to meet SDG 4, with a focus on closing gaps and promoting lifelong learning. Yang et al. (2025) introduce an Input-Process-Output-Feedback (IPOF) framework, a conceptual model used to describe dynamic systems of interaction, to guide inclusive education reform, highlighting the importance of coherent policy, practice, and feedback systems.

Educational reforms like these have become a global movement, supported by globalization, or the processes through which the world becomes more connected via trade, technology, and cultural exchange. Jackson (2016) explains that globalization causes increased interdependence among countries, affecting educational policies and practices worldwide. Sravani (2023) examines how globalization influences curriculum, teaching methods, and policy, while also raising concerns about educational inequality and cultural standardization.

As background for the articles in this issue, in this section, we provide a global overview of educational reforms in the school curriculum, teacher education, and teacher professional development (SCTEPD) in K-12 education. Retrospectively, we searched for reforms that have been successful and adopted worldwide. We note that these reforms have stood the test of time and, in many cases, have become the standard way of organizing education. In the following section (holistic reforms), we highlight recent examples of countries that have engaged in SCTEPD reforms to varying degrees. While we aimed to find holistic approaches, it is clear that the process is incremental.

Before reviewing these reforms, it is important to discuss a key worldwide reform that has prompted continuous SCTEPD reforms: Universal access to education. Making education mandatory through compulsory education laws ensured that all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, had the opportunity to receive an education. This represented a significant step toward educational equity. As noted by the Center on Education Policy (2020), these reforms were fundamental in promoting the common good by expanding access to public education and reducing disparities in educational attainment. Additionally, McCowan (2010) emphasizes that universal access is a cornerstone of democratic societies, enabling broader participation in civic life and economic opportunities.

Poed (2020) also underscores that inclusive education policies, based on compulsory education frameworks, are crucial for achieving social inclusion and equal access to high-quality learning environments. The introduction of compulsory education laws had a profound impact on society. It contributed to higher literacy rates, better economic opportunities, and greater social mobility. These reforms laid the foundation for modern public education systems and continue to influence educational policies worldwide.

## **Curriculum Reform**

The curriculum refers to the courses and content offered or taught by a school or educational institution. It encompasses everything taught and learned, from specific subjects to broader educational experiences, including examinations (Gouëdard et al., 2020). Curricular changes occur in a contested terrain and define the knowledge that a society considers valuable for its population.

One of the most important curriculum reforms is the introduction of compulsory education laws in the 19th century (Demirel Ucan & Ucan, 2019). These laws mandated that children must attend school for a certain number of days and years, ensuring that education became accessible to all. While this reform initially emerged in a few countries, it rapidly spread worldwide, with notable exceptions mostly found among countries that challenge Western education models and philosophies.

### ***Standardized Curriculum***

Compulsory education laws often led to the development of standardized curricula, helping ensure that all students received a consistent, comprehensive education. This standardization was instrumental in aligning instruction with national educational goals and promoting equity across diverse regions. As Pinar et al. (1995) explain, curriculum development has historically served as a public mechanism to define and regulate what should be taught, reflecting broader societal values and expectations. The National Academies Press (2020) also emphasizes that standards-based reforms—particularly in the context of inclusive education—have contributed to more coherent and equitable curriculum frameworks. Additionally, historical analyses of public education in the United States show that the 19th-century Common School Movement (the precursor of public schools) was

closely tied to efforts to standardize instruction and promote civic and moral education across social classes (Center on Education Policy, 2020; Marshall, 2012).

### **Teacher Education Reform**

Increases in student enrollment led to a greater need for trained teachers, prompting the establishment of teacher training programs and institutions that significantly improved the quality of education. As Tatto (2021a) notes, the expansion of compulsory education in the United States prompted major reforms in teacher preparation, including the development of professional standards and certification pathways to ensure the quality of teaching. The American Psychological Association (2014) emphasizes that evaluating teacher preparation programs through student learning outcomes, standardized observations, and surveys has become essential for maintaining high standards in teacher education. Additionally, Gough (1977) highlights that while teacher training programs equip educators with foundational teaching skills, they must also evolve to support teachers in curriculum development and inclusive pedagogical practices.

Teacher education involves the systematic preparation and training of individuals to become professional educators. This process encompasses foundational studies, curriculum design, pedagogical theory, and practical teaching experiences. Historically, teacher education was rooted in Normal Schools, institutions established in the 19th century to train teachers in basic instructional methods. Over time, the locus of teacher preparation shifted to higher education institutions, reflecting broader educational reforms and the increasing complexity of teaching as a profession (Adler, 1984).

### ***Professionalization of Teaching***

One of the most significant reforms in teacher education has been the professionalization of the teaching profession. This movement gained momentum in the mid-20th century with the establishment of organizations such as the National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards in 1946, which aimed to elevate teaching to the status of a recognized profession (McDonald, 1951). The professionalization process emphasized the development of ethical standards, specialized knowledge, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

Central to this movement has been the implementation of teacher certification and licensure standards, which serve to regulate entry into the profession and ensure a baseline of competency. These standards have evolved to prioritize pedagogical training alongside subject-matter expertise, reflecting a shift in educational priorities and institutional control (Tobin, 2012). While certification systems vary globally, they are implemented under the belief that they serve as mechanisms to uphold professional standards and enhance educational outcomes (Boyd et al. 2007).

### ***Certification and Licensure***

This reform introduced rigorous standards for teacher certification and licensure, ensuring that educators possess the necessary knowledge and skills to teach effectively. Typically, certification requires candidates to complete an accredited teacher education program, pass standardized competency exams, and engage in ongoing professional development throughout their careers. These requirements aim to uphold high standards of teaching quality and accountability, especially following federal initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which emphasized the employment of "highly qualified" teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Teacher certification has undergone significant evolution since the early 20th century, with an increasing emphasis on formal education, testing, and accreditation. For example, many states now require completion of a bachelor's degree, passing state licensing exams, and demonstrating subject-matter competence. Additionally, professional development remains a cornerstone of

licensure renewal, ensuring that teachers continuously refine their instructional practices in response to changing educational needs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Research comparing traditional and alternative certification pathways suggests that, while traditionally prepared teachers undergo extensive coursework and supervised teaching, alternatively certified teachers may enter the profession with stronger pre-service qualifications, particularly in subject-specific areas such as science (Boyd et al., 2006). However, the effectiveness of these pathways varies, with alternatively certified teachers leaving their schools early, which affects continuity and student outcomes (Boyd et al., 2011).

### ***Teacher Education Programs in Higher Education Institutions***

The certification and licensure reforms led to the development of comprehensive teacher education programs at universities and colleges. These programs are designed to cultivate both subject matter expertise and pedagogical skills, equipping future educators to meet the diverse needs of their classrooms. Research shows that well-structured teacher education programs that integrate clinical practice with coursework on learning and teaching produce teachers who are more effective and more likely to remain in the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

Moreover, the educational development of university teachers has become a distinct field of research and practice, emphasizing the need for nuanced approaches to teaching quality and professional growth. Institutions have responded by establishing Teaching and Learning Centers and promoting the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), which support educators in refining their instructional methods and adapting to diverse learning trajectories (Bélisle et al., 2024).

These programs also emphasize the importance of understanding learners' diverse experiences and frames of reference, enabling teachers to organize productive learning environments and adapt instruction to varied student needs (Darling-Hammond, 2000). As higher education continues to evolve, teacher education programs must remain responsive to emerging challenges and maintain a balance between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

### **Professional Development Reforms**

Professional development for teachers is an ongoing process of learning and reflection designed to enhance teaching practices. It involves both structured and unstructured activities that improve teachers' knowledge, skills, and classroom effectiveness. Unlike pre-service teacher education, which is typically standardized, professional development (PD) encompasses a wide variety of models, including workshops, coaching, collaborative inquiry, and online learning, with their effectiveness varying significantly across contexts (VanVeen et al., 2012).

Research emphasizes that effective PD is content-focused, incorporates active learning, supports collaboration, and is sustained. These features are associated with improved teaching practices and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). However, many traditional PD models—such as one-off workshops—have been criticized for their limited impact, prompting a shift toward more embedded and collaborative approaches.

### ***Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)***

One of the most impactful reforms in teacher professional development is the implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)—collaborative groups of educators engaged in ongoing, reflective dialogue about teaching and learning. PLCs foster shared responsibility, collective inquiry, and continuous improvement (Stoll et al., 2006). Research shows they enhance teacher efficacy, promote innovative practices, and build interpersonal trust (Liu & Yin, 2024; Liu et al., 2022). Effective PLCs are marked by strong leadership, a focus on student learning, and a culture of trust and collaboration (Hudson et al., 2024).

PLCs embed professional learning into daily routines, transforming development into a continuous, job-embedded process. Teachers engage in cycles of inquiry, feedback, and strategy refinement, staying aligned with current research and methodologies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). A cornerstone of PLCs is data-informed instruction. Teachers regularly assess student performance using tools like standardized tests, formative assessments, and observations, then collaboratively analyze the data to tailor teaching strategies (Hamilton et al., 2009). This process fosters shared accountability and reflective practice (O'Connor & Park, 2023), leading to targeted interventions and improved learning outcomes (Venables, 2011). Data-driven collaboration bridges assessment and pedagogy, creating responsive, student-centered environments.

PLCs cultivate a collaborative culture where educators engage in structured dialogue to share strategies, analyze student data, and refine instruction. This process fosters mutual accountability and continuous improvement (Butler & Schnellert, 2012). Trust, shared beliefs, and a commitment to student success underpin effective collaboration, boosting teacher confidence and resilience (Pyhältö et al., 2015). The de-privatization of teaching—through peer observation and feedback—enhances transparency and professional growth (Hallam et al., 2015). PLCs thus represent a shift from isolated practice to collective, evidence-based development. This sustained engagement builds a resilient, adaptive workforce capable of responding to dynamic educational demands.

### ***Continuous Professional Development (CPD)***

Closely aligned with PLCs is the emphasis on Continuous Professional Development (CPD), which supports lifelong learning for educators. CPD includes workshops, advanced degrees, peer collaboration, and online courses, helping teachers stay current with evolving educational practices. It is a key driver of teacher effectiveness, student achievement, and job satisfaction (Zhang et al., 2021).

Beyond formal coursework, CPD encompasses reflective practices, social interactions, and experiential learning. Increasingly, it is recognized as a structured system distinct from traditional university education, supported by professional bodies that institutionalize lifelong learning (Friedman, 2023). Sustained, collaborative CPD programs focused on student outcomes significantly improve teaching practices and adaptability (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Its integration into policy reflects a broader commitment to professional excellence.

The introduction of PLCs and CPD has profoundly shaped the teaching profession. These reforms have elevated instructional quality, enhanced student achievement, and raised the status of teaching. By establishing high standards for preparation and ongoing development, they attract qualified individuals and influence global educational policy, underscoring the central role of teacher quality in student success (Stoll et al., 2006; Zhang et al., 2021).

## **Examples of Holistic Approaches**

As noted above, curriculum, teacher education, and development reforms (SCTEPD) reforms can occur in isolation, so our exploration seeks not only to document successful reforms in all three areas but also to identify instances where these elements collectively aim to create a more quality and equitable educational environment in nation-states, and whether global aims inspire these efforts. Such reforms are also more likely to be successful (Cohen & Metha, 2017).

Integrating SCTEPD reforms around securing educational equity is crucial for several reasons. When reforms are integrated, students experience a holistic learning experience that connects academic content with real-world applications. By aligning courses and skills, students receive a well-rounded education that fosters critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability. Project-based learning and interdisciplinary curricula have been shown to enhance student engagement and

readiness for college and careers, especially when embedded in teacher preparation programs (Bhroin & King, 2020).

Aligning teacher education with curricular improvements also enhances teacher preparedness. When instructors are equipped with new teaching methods, inclusive pedagogies, and technologies, they can better meet the diverse learning needs of their students (Rodrigues, 2020). Continuous professional development ensures that teachers stay updated with educational changes, enabling them to support their students effectively and foster inclusive learning environments (Bhroin & King, 2020). Consistency and coherence are vital to these processes. Integrating reforms ensure that teacher education and development complement curricular improvements. This coherence facilitates the implementation of innovative educational methods and policies, creating a more effective and unified education system (Sundberg, 2022).

Education systems must be adaptable to a continuously changing environment. An integrated approach incorporates modern technology, pedagogical techniques, and inclusive education initiatives, making the school system more responsive to future challenges. This adaptability is crucial for preparing students to navigate and succeed in an increasingly complex and interconnected world (Bhroin & King, 2020).

Several countries have introduced significant reforms in SCTEPD to advance sustainable equity in education. One of the most notable examples is Finland. Finland is renowned for its innovative education system (Morgan, 2014). The country has implemented a comprehensive reform that emphasizes equity and inclusion, aligning with the philosophy of the Finnish education system. Schools are funded to ensure that all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, have access to high-quality education. Special education services are integrated into the regular classroom, with a strong focus on supporting students with diverse needs (Honkasilta et al., 2029). To meet these ambitious goals, Finland's curriculum reform emphasizes the development of critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. It is designed to be flexible, allowing teachers to tailor their instruction to meet the needs of their students. The curriculum also emphasizes the importance of student well-being and holistic development. Teacher preparation is a key aspect of the reform: Finnish teachers are highly trained, with a strong emphasis on research-based education (Niemi & Lavonen, 2020; Sahlberg, 2021). All teachers are required to hold a master's degree, and teacher education programs are rigorous and highly selective. Continuous professional development is also a key component, ensuring that teachers remain up-to-date with the latest educational practices. The Finnish education reform has consistently led to high performance in international assessments, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). More importantly, it has created an education system that provides all students with the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background.

### **An Analytical Approach to Introducing the Articles in this Issue**

The articles in this special issue examine reforms initiated with the explicit aim of increasing equitable access to quality education for students. To achieve this, we have endeavored to document the processes, challenges, and opportunities of educational reform in the following countries: India, New Zealand, Peru, Scotland, and Wales, and engage in an analysis of the degree of success of these reforms using Cohen and Mehta's framework. Table 1.1-1.5 serves as an advanced organizer for the rest of the issue, providing a brief description of each article, followed by an analysis applying Cohen & Metha's framework and a conclusion.

**Table 1.1***Analysis of Reforms Across Countries Using the Cohen and Mehta Framework: India*

<b>Case 1. India</b>					
Mythili Ramchand and Meera Chandran, in “Quality, Equity, and Scale in the Indian School Education System – Large-Scale Policy Reforms,” analyze how equity and quality have shaped major Indian education reforms over the past 20 years. They assess initiatives like the National Curriculum Framework (2005), Teacher Education Framework (2009), Right to Education Act (2009), and National Education Policy (2020), using data to evaluate their impact on marginalized groups and India’s progress toward inclusive education.					
<b>Name and Type of Reform:</b> Right to Education Act (2009): <b>Systemic</b>					
<b>Conditions Present in the Country</b>					
	(a) Problems educators recognize and want to solve	(b) Align with prevailing norms, values, and political pressures	(c) Provide necessary tools, materials, and guidance for implementation	(d) Require minimal changes to existing practices for system-wide adoption	(e) Lack of broad political or public support, infrastructure, or financial resources
Curriculum	Yes	Yes	Moderate	No	Yes
Teacher Education	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Professional Development	No	Yes	Yes	Moderate	No
<b>Conclusion:</b> The Right to Education Act (2009) was a landmark systemic reform that legally mandated universal access to schooling for children aged 6–14 and introduced a comprehensive vision of educational quality, encompassing institutions, curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher training. However, as the table above shows, while educators recognized the need for reform in curriculum and teacher education, implementation has been constrained by limited financial resources, inadequate tools for teachers, and entrenched systemic inequities. Subsequent amendments, inadequate political will, and insufficient investment in teacher preparation and professional development further diluted the Act’s promise of systemic quality. Provisions such as the 25% reservation for students from socio-economically weaker sections in private schools have reinforced structural divides rather than resolved them, while government provisioning has remained weak. Although the RTE Act represents a systemic reform, its impact has been uneven, and its transformative potential has been hindered by a narrowing of focus to access and minimum learning outcomes. The reform remains significant as a legal mandate, but its future effectiveness depends on renewed political commitment, equitable financing, and deeper curricular and teacher education reforms.					

**Table 1.2a***Analysis of Reforms across Countries Using the Cohen and Mehta Framework: New Zealand/ Aotearoa Reform 1***Case 2a. New Zealand, Aotearoa Reform 1**

Piata Allen and Tony Trinick, in “Navigating Contested Terrain: The Impact of Comprehensive Reforms on the Quality and Equity of Indigenous Education in Aotearoa, New Zealand,” explore two reforms. The first is Māori language immersion schooling, where it is found that while outcomes have improved, challenges persist due to the dominance of English-medium education and teacher shortages.

**Name and Type of Reform:** Māori language immersion education: **Niche**

Conditions Present in the Country					
	(a) Problems educators recognize and want to solve	(b) Align with prevailing norms, values, and political pressures	(c) Provide necessary tools, materials, and guidance for implementation	(d) Require minimal changes to existing practices for system- wide adoption	(e) Lack of broad political or public support, infrastructure, or financial resources
Curriculum	Yes	Yes	Somewhat	No	Somewhat
Teacher Education	Yes	No	Somewhat	No	Somewhat
Professional Development	Yes	No	Somewhat	No	Somewhat

**Conclusion:** The Māori language immersion education system evolved from Māori communities' desire to counter the decline of the Māori language exacerbated by assimilatory education and social policies, such as English language-only schooling. Māori language immersion education led to structural and administrative changes in colonial schooling norms. This demonstrates that when schooling policy is designed to directly benefit Māori students, as is the case for Māori language immersion education, the data shows that Māori students can thrive. However, an ongoing challenge for Māori language immersion education, as shown in the most recent assessment intervention, the Co-Requisite Standards (discussed in the following example), is ensuring policy settings address the unique linguistic challenges of Māori language immersion education.

**Table 1.2b***Analysis of Reforms across Countries Using the Cohen and Mehta Framework: New Zealand/ Aotearoa Reform 2*

<b>Case 2b. New Zealand, Aotearoa Reform 2</b>					
Piata Allen and Tony Trinick, in “Navigating Contested Terrain: The Impact of Comprehensive Reforms on the Quality and Equity of Indigenous Education in Aotearoa, New Zealand,” the authors utilize the Cultural Symmetry Framework, which proposes equity-focused metrics. They examine the impacts of reform through the lens of mathematics curriculum and teacher training.					
<b>Name and Type of Reform:</b> Co-requisite Numeracy Assessments: <b>Systemic</b>					
<b>Conditions Present in the Country</b>					
	(a) Problems educators recognize and want to solve	(b) Align with prevailing norms, values, and political pressures	(c) Provide necessary tools, materials, and guidance for implementation	(d) Require minimal changes to existing practices for system-wide adoption	(e) Lack of broad political or public support, infrastructure, or financial resources
Curriculum	N/A	N/A	No	N/A	Yes
Teacher Education	No	No	No	Somewhat	Yes
Professional Development	No	No	Somewhat	No	Yes
<b>Conclusion:</b> The co-requisite numeracy assessments reform appears to assume that a standardized national exam can improve educational quality and equity, despite minimal support for teachers, students, and families in understanding and engaging with the assessment program. Not surprisingly, these assessments seem exacerbate pervasive equity concerns in the Aotearoa New Zealand Education System, particularly for Māori students in English language instruction schooling. For students in Māori language immersion schooling, a negative self-perception of mathematics ability caused by poorly resourced assessment programs not designed expressly for Māori language immersion settings has arguably limited the effectiveness of these programs.					

**Table 1.3***Analysis of Reforms across Countries Using the Cohen and Mehta Framework: Peru*

<b>Case 3. Peru</b>					
Giovanna Moreano, Claudia Zegarra, and Yina Rivera, in “New Intercultural Bilingual Education Teacher Preparation Curriculum: Opportunities and Challenges to Reduce Educational Inequities in Peru,” assess Peru’s ITE-IBE curriculum using an actor-centered approach. They highlight alignment with national standards but point to limited cultural focus, funding gaps, and high educator turnover, emphasizing needs for institutional support and contextual understanding in IBE teacher training.					
<b>Name and Type of Reform:</b> New Intercultural Bilingual Education Teacher Preparation Curricula - Systemic					
<b>Conditions Present in the Country</b>					
	(a) Problems educators recognize and want to solve	(b) Align with prevailing norms, values, and political pressures	(c) Provide necessary tools, materials, and guidance for implementation	(d) Require minimal changes to existing practices for system-wide adoption	(e) Lack of broad political or public support, infrastructure, or financial resources
Curriculum	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Teacher Education	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Professional Development	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
<p><b>Conclusion:</b> The New Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) Teacher Preparation Curriculum is an initiative of the Peruvian Ministry of Education to enhance the quality of teacher education across all basic education services. The reform aimed to address the persistent issue of low-quality teacher preparation in intercultural bilingual education and across the spectrum of basic education. At the core of this reform was the objective of updating teacher education curricula to align with existing national teacher policy frameworks, most notably, the <i>Marco de Buen Desempeño Docente (Framework for Good Teaching Performance)</i>, which establishes standards for teaching practice and guides policies on teacher evaluation as well as in-service teacher professional development. However, the context in which the IBE teacher preparation curriculum is being implemented presents significant challenges compared to the contexts of other teacher education curricula. The study revealed that the necessary conditions for successful implementation are lacking. For instance, there are no mechanisms in place to hire community elders or bilingual teachers with deep cultural knowledge of students' backgrounds. Further, the Ministry of Education's efforts to provide support—through instructional materials, financial resources, or guidance for the pedagogical and institutional transformations required—have been limited. From the perspective of key stakeholders, such efforts have been perceived as insufficient or ineffective in facilitating the appropriation of the new curriculum by teacher educators and institutional leadership within teacher education institutions.</p>					

**Table 1.4***Analysis of Reforms across Countries Using the Cohen and Mehta Framework: Scotland***Case 4. Scotland**

Aileen Kennedy and Nicola Carse, in “Advancing Equity in Scotland: Developing Race-Cognizant Policy in Teacher Education,” examine Scotland’s anti-racism initiatives in teacher education, including *Teaching in a Diverse Scotland* (2018), racial literacy programs, and the National Anti-Racism Framework (2023). Using McConnell’s policy analysis framework, they assess progress and consider future directions amid political change.

**Name and Type of Reform:** Race-Cognizant Teacher Education Policies in Scotland (*Teaching in a Diverse Scotland*, *Building Racial Literacy* (BRL), *Anti-Racism Framework for Initial Teacher Education* (ITE)) – **Niche and Cluster of interconnected reforms in teacher education and workforce diversity policy**

	Conditions Present in the Country				
	(a) Problems educators recognize and want to solve	(b) Align with prevailing norms, values, and political pressures	(c) Provide necessary tools, materials, and guidance for implementation	(d) Require minimal changes to existing practices for system-wide adoption	(e) Lack of broad political or public support, infrastructure, or financial resources
Curriculum	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	No	No
Teacher Education	Yes	Yes	Moderate	No	No
Professional Development	Yes	Yes	yes	No	Limited

**Conclusion:** Our research into race-cognizant teacher education policy in Scotland found that while there has been a clear shift toward embedding anti-racist commitments across teacher education—through initiatives such as *Teaching in a Diverse Scotland*, the *Building Racial Literacy* programme, and the *National Anti-Racism Framework for ITE*—the impact of these policies remains uneven and limited in scope. Evaluation evidence demonstrates strong support for professional learning efforts, such as the BRL programme, among participants; yet, systemic barriers—such as limited political reach, a lack of structural accountability, and modest increases in minority ethnic teacher representation—continue to constrain broader adoption. Moreover, while Scotland’s political and cultural context appears permissive of anti-racist reform, progress is precarious due to a lack of sustained research investment and potential political shifts. Overall, we found partial progress through niche reforms, with more substantial uptake in professional development than in curriculum change or teacher education structures, underscoring the need for a deeper, system-wide commitment and resourcing.

**Table 1.5***Analysis of Reforms across Countries Using the Cohen and Mehta Framework: Wales*

<b>Case 5. Wales</b>						
Alma Harris, Michelle Jones, and Anna Bryant, in "Towards Equity and Quality in Education: Analyzing Contemporary Reform in Wales," examine reforms addressing poverty's impact on education. They emphasize equity as central to system performance and advocate for strengthening teacher professionalism through curriculum reform and accredited learning, highlighting trust and supportive conditions as key to sustainable, equitable education.						
<b>Name and Type of reform:</b> Curriculum for Wales, Initial Teacher Education, National MA Wales - <b>Systemic</b>						
<b>Conditions Present in the Country</b>						
	(a) Problems educators recognize and want to solve	(b) Align with prevailing norms, values, and political pressures	(c) Provide necessary tools, materials, and guidance for implementation	(d) Require minimal changes to existing practices for system-wide adoption	(e) Lack of broad political or public support, infrastructure, or financial resources	
Curriculum	Yes	Yes	Moderate	No	Supported	
Teacher Education	Yes	Yes	Moderate	No	Supported	
Professional Development	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Supported	
<b>Conclusion.</b> The reforms in Wales are part of a systemic investment in teachers (Teacher Education and Professional Development) and teaching (Curriculum) with the prime aim of building the capacity to improve the performance of the education system. These reforms were prompted by an OECD (2014) report, 'Improving Schools in Wales: An OECD Perspective,' which highlighted the need for significant improvements in learning and teaching processes, including greater investment in teacher education, professional development, and consideration of curriculum change. A New Curriculum for Wales was introduced in 2022, representing a significant shift in the content and nature of the taught curriculum. Changes to teacher education and professional development also emerged to support the implementation of the new curriculum. The reform process underway in Wales is systemic (i.e., it is being fully implemented across the system) and is fully supported by the Welsh Government and middle-tier organizations responsible for overseeing and supporting these major reform strategies.						

Building on our group's analysis of the scope of these reforms and the factors that shaped their success or limitations, we apply Cohen and Mehta's framework to examine their reach. The analysis reveals that most reforms were ambitious, aiming to address equity and quality concerns at the system level. This is evident in India's Right to Education Act, which achieved moderate success, and New Zealand's Numeracy Assessment reform, which sought—but ultimately failed—to support Māori students. Similarly, Peru's Intercultural Bilingual Education Teacher Preparation Curricula faced diminished potential due to insufficient resources and support, while Wales' reforms in curriculum, initial teacher education, and the National Master of Arts program demonstrate more sustained success. Two countries pursued niche reforms with modest achievements: New Zealand's Māori language immersion education, where conditions remain challenging for Māori students, and Scotland's race-conscious teacher education policies—a cluster of interconnected initiatives in teacher education and workforce diversity—whose success remains uncertain due to limited political backing.

Consistent with Cohen and Mehta (2017), our analysis indicates that reforms resonating with educators' concerns tend to gain traction more readily, particularly when they align with prevailing educational norms, societal values, and political expectations. Such alignment ensures that proposed changes are not only relevant but also acceptable to stakeholders across the system. For successful adoption, reforms must be supported by careful planning, organizational coordination, and collaboration, as well as practical resources—clear guidance, appropriate tools, and accessible materials—that enable educators to implement them effectively. Crucially, widespread uptake is more likely when changes occur incrementally (Weiss, 1995), minimizing disruption to established practices and allowing educators to integrate new approaches gradually rather than overhauling routines or systems abruptly.

### Future Directions

While the articles in this issue sought to provide a detailed account of reforms aimed at achieving greater educational equity, such initiatives are typically the result of top-down policy changes driven by global and local political pressures. Although these reforms may also reflect educators' concerns and align with prevailing societal values—conditions that Cohen and Mehta (2017) suggest are essential for successful reform—they often demand substantial changes to existing practices. These changes are frequently introduced without sufficient coordination, collaboration, and support, raising questions about the feasibility of achieving success at the system level.

A common strategy is to implement curriculum reforms at the national level to promote equity, often targeting specific groups of learners. Teacher education programs—both initial preparation and ongoing professional development—are then expected to adjust accordingly to meet new requirements. The underlying assumption is that these adaptations will adequately prepare teachers to deliver the revised curriculum. However, this assumption requires further scrutiny. The example of the Wales reform illustrates that successful reforms must be a carefully planned, coordinated effort directed at transforming the curriculum, teacher education, and development in collaboration with curriculum reformers and in continuous conversation with teacher educators, development reformers, and the education community. Such a coordinated effort not only builds ownership and trust but also coherence and impactful systemic change.

Nevertheless, further research across diverse contexts is essential to identify the factors that facilitate successful equity-focused reforms and the barriers that impede them at different levels of the education system. Without such understanding, even well-intentioned reforms aligned with dominant values may fall short of achieving their transformative potential. Implementation

challenges often stem from the complex interplay of epistemological, ideological, axiological, and practical considerations. Additionally, strategies that prove effective in one context may not be transferable to another (Burdett & O'Donnell, 2016), underscoring the need for policies that are closely aligned with practice and tailored to local conditions. For policymakers, this means prioritizing context-sensitive approaches, investing in capacity-building for educators, and ensuring mechanisms for continuous feedback and adaptation. Such measures can help bridge the gap between policy design and education systems realities, increasing the likelihood of sustainable and equitable reform.

## Conclusion

The articles in this special issue showcase international efforts across diverse policy contexts to advance equitable access to quality education. They focus on reform initiatives within the interconnected domains of school curriculum, teacher education, and professional development (SCTEPD). Importantly, these contributions illustrate how reforms have been integrated at the regional and national levels, reflecting a variety of approaches to systemic and local change. Successful implementation of such reforms depends on the alignment of shared values, political commitment, careful planning, coordination, collaboration, and the allocation of adequate resources among key actors where change must take place. However, achieving equitable outcomes for all learners remains a complex challenge, often hindered by organizational, structural, and contextual barriers. The articles in this collection acknowledge these difficulties while also demonstrating the possibilities that emerge when there is a clear vision and collective will to drive improvement across the education system.

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**Advancing Equity Globally: Innovations in Curriculum, Teaching,  
Teacher Education and Professional Development**

education policy analysis archives

Volume 34 Number 1

January 13, 2026

ISSN 1068-2341



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