Teacher Workload and the Expanding Demands of Modern Education: A UAE Context

Jessica-Leigh Arnold
British University College

Abstract - Teachers in the United Arab Emirates are currently operating in a high-pressure educational environment. Teachers' responsibilities have expanded considerably, from simply giving high- quality instruction to also adapting for different learners, addressing Additional Learning Needs, participating in Professional Learning Communities, meeting numerous professional development requirements, and engaging in extremely regular interaction with parents. While many of these initiatives seem well-intentioned and align with the UAE's goals of inclusion and future-proofing education, they collectively contribute to an overburdened outlook that can be detrimental to teaching outcomes and teacher health. Research on teacher pressure in this area has included secondary sources and other materials, such as local studies on teacher stress and attrition, as well as global research on work intensity. The elements of teacher pressure and the gap between official expectations and institutional functioning in the UAE are extensive. According to the study, some of the pressures identified include differentiated teaching for ALN students, the accumulation of responsibilities, and frequent, sometimes time-consuming PLC and PD structures. This paper would thus conclude by proposing a school-level remedy, with the top priority of ensuring that teacher exhaustion or energy use is directed only toward the most essential aspects of learning.

I. Introduction

Teaching has always been a people-centered profession, but in many schools today it has also become a "many-hats" profession. Teachers are not only planning lessons and delivering instruction; they are differentiating for students with very different readiness levels, documenting progress, updating learning platforms, attending PLC meetings, completing PD requirements, responding to parents, and managing increasingly complex classroom behavior. International research has been calling this trend workload intensification. The idea that teachers are doing more kinds of work, more often, and with higher expectations than before (Ballet, Kelchtermans, & Loughran, 2006; OECD, 2016). In the UAE, where education is a national priority and where regulators such as the Ministry of Education (MoE), the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), and the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) set ambitious standards, this intensification can be felt even more strongly.

In the last decade or so, UAE schools have moved toward policies that make inclusion and access for students with Additional Learning Needs more feasible. While this is a good and necessary development, and in line with the UAE policy literature's emphasis on opportunity and equity for all children, the reality of inclusion exists in the teacher's daily schedule. Task differentiation, exam adjustment, co-planning with inclusion aides, and monitoring of IEPs all consume time and they can take even more time if the teacher is still acquiring experience or if the inclusion assistant is split across multiple classes (Ahsan, Shaukat, & Islam, 202; Florian & Spratt, 2013). When a teacher is already educating several subjects or grade levels, the cumulative impact may be a subtle sense of always being slower than every teacher striving for inclusive education.

Collaborative professionalism is another pious statement in high-performing systems, including the UAE. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are intended to help educators share, examine student data, ensure consistency, and, based on a magnitude of evidence, raise student efficacy and confidence (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2013; Stoll et al., 2006). However, instructors appear to be complaining that PLCs, data conferences, and standards-related meetings are in addition to their normal tasks rather than part of their work schedule. When collaboration is "yet another meeting," its intentions are supportive, but its reality as pressure becomes divided.

Several assessments of teacher work in the Gulf and overseas have demonstrated this measure of strain divergence in both Gulf and international studies (Ahmad & Shah, 2022; Day, 2019).

Besides inclusion and collaboration, there is a third widening of the teacher's role: PD on steroids. UAE schools have workshops on new curriculum frameworks, new assessment tools, digital platforms, and classroom management all the time. It is laudable that the UAE is ready to invest in our growth. Most teachers want to get better. The problem is timing and alignment. When PD is weekly, mandatory, and not directly applicable to what you are teaching now or to the needs of your ALN students, it is considered not support but an additional task that takes away from your planning time (Kennedy, 2016).

The other thing happening is that teachers are also working while other UAE schools use digital communication platforms, which makes it easier for parents to access teachers. This is excellent as it builds trust and transparency. It also means that every teacher is expected to respond to parents' replies and document whether this was before or after hours. Some teachers also deal with sensitive incidents or delicate academic responses to children or parents. The international literature describes emotional labor and parent interaction as invisible workload, it is not counted as work hours but is directly vital to your job (Hargreaves, 1998; Yin, 2015).

These layers amount to a simple reality: the same teachers are asked to do more and feel themselves failing to meet the demands of students, PD, PLCs, technology, and accountability reform and they're encouraged to accept these demands as part of working "for the kids." The results of this belief system, rather self-evidently, are not better health; one can see stress and early signs of burnout emerging in those same "well-managed" schools that, like the Paideia Triangle, have put in place substantial

formal consideration towards teacher wellness (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). This is not a matter of teacher resistance; it is a matter of structuring change.

This paper responds by taking a closer look at the existing research and policy documents: what do we know about teacher workload, what are we concerned with, and how fast are we expected to develop solutions, particularly in rapidly developing schooling systems such as those in the UAE? Many schools in the Gulf nation teach a "hybrid curriculum," locally defined as

"international," meaning British, American, or IB, but tied to local sustainability and national obligations.

The paper is guided by three questions:
- What are the main factors contributing to increasing teacher workload in UAE schools?
- How do inclusion/ALN requirements, differentiation, and participation in PLCs and PDs specifically add to this workload?
- What strategies are suggested in the literature to protect teacher time and wellbeing without compromising the UAE's educational ambitions?

Answering these questions matters for two reasons. First, countries that set high expectations for schooling must also set high expectations for teacher support, otherwise quality and retention begin to decline (OECD, 2016). Second, in inclusive systems, the teacher is the final link between policy and the child. If the teacher is too stretched to plan meaningfully for ALN students, then the promise of inclusion remains a document, not a lived experience. By surfacing what the literature already says and by framing it through the actual day-to-day of UAE classrooms. This paper aims to support school leaders and policymakers in designing workload-smart initiatives that honor both teacher wellbeing and student learning.

II. Literature Review

International Perspectives on Teacher Workload
Internationally, teacher workload emerges as the problem of intensification, educators are provided with "more work of more kinds" in the same or fewer hours (Ballet, Kelchtermans, & Loughran, 2006). This has been labelled the silent crisis, as planning, administrative reporting, and professional learning incrementally stretch and gather. Recent cross-country comparisons cited in the OECD (2016) demonstrate that teachers spend an average of 46 hours a week, of which more than one-third is actual teaching, and the rest includes tasks such as documenting and communicating.

In Asian settings, schools and teacher colleges have been deliberately overburdened with constant improvement, accountability, and digital skilling reforms (Lee and Kennedy, 2024). Empirical findings fit the consequential framework, which links workload to emotional burnout and turnover (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Indeed, workload was the strongest predictor of quitting among teachers in a global-level meta-analysis conducted by Farahmandpour and Voelkel (2025). This provides a wider viewpoint: educators and specialists globally

recognize that teaching is currently a multifaceted profession involving pedagogical, psychological, and administrative aspects

Differentiation, ALN, and Inclusive Practice

Inclusion has turned into a question of international education policy, and teachers are leading this process as well as differentiation, which is a key component of inclusive teaching which introduces the idea that every pupil ought to be heard (Tomlinson, 2014). However, it has been extensively documented that differentiation can be cognitively and emotionally demanding. The study by Pozas et al. (2020) confirmed that teachers utilizing more comprehensive models of differentiation experienced greater workload and stress due to insufficient systemic support.

Since the School for All Framework (2010) and the Inclusive Education Policy Framework (2017), inclusion has spread rapidly in the UAE. The reform makes learning for special education and additional learning needs students compulsory and calls for learning to be structured around the individual learner. Nevertheless, research by Abdallah, Abdat, and Hill (2021) discovered that although the philosophy of inclusion is willingly embraced by UAE teachers, time, resource, and expertise constraints remain continuing obstacles.

A research study of Microcredit Learning Communities Collaboration on Common Aspects of Inclusive Teaching in Special Education Centers in the United Arab Emirates identified that the use of microfinance learning communities to interact on these common learning concerns greatly increased recognition but also generated more work (Abdallah et al., 2021). Globally, the same complicated discussions are growing. Florian and Spratt (2013) argue that moving beyond differentiation is only feasible once schools view inclusivity as a shared exercise rather than as an individual teacher's responsibility.

Differentiation without practical teacher support through either planning period release or regular structures for co-teaching is, in Westwood's (2020) opinion, "an ideal unreachable without adequate infrastructure." Another primary element of modern teacher learning should be PLCs and PD. Initiated by DuFour et al. (2013), PLCs were defined as the primary systems that support a strong school. When systematically bolstered, PLCs influence educational quality and job satisfaction (Stoll et al., 2006). However, PLCs have also contributed to increased teacher load in numerous UAE and global studies.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and Professional Development (PD)
Abdallah et al. (2021) discovered that UAE teachers appreciate PLCs for self-development but frequently struggle with their routine frequency and administration Al-Mahdy & Sywelem (2016) and Ahmad & Shah (2022) found similar issues with fidelity sessions in Oman and Qatar. Aldabbous & Aldabbous (2025) emphasize that the most successful PD is incorporated into work, not placed beside it, and stated that to gain the most advantages, six sessions are typical.

According to Kennedy (2016), PD models are a traditional phenomenon to be critiqued for their compliance-oriented and top-down nature. For the UAE, this may apply directly, as inspection frameworks often mandate the content of in-service training. Day (2017) argues that this mismatch between PD and what happens in the classroom diminishes perceived salience and relevance, leading to teacher exhaustion.

Technology, Parental Communication, and Behavioral Demands

The digitalization of schools has its pros and cons. According to Hargreaves, Boyle, & Harris, (2014), teachers in digitized schools face a new phenomenon, the "tyranny of immediacy," or the need to be available and present 24/7. Hulme, Beauchamp, Wood, and Bignell (2024) have found that teachers now respond to parental messages and upload evidence on digital platforms for an additional five hours per week. ICT and inclusion are often interrelated, as teachers must master assistive technologies. According to a study by Nguyen (2021), school administrator efficacy depends more on their ICT "smart school leadership." Acknowledging the huge importance of accessible technologies, I confirmed in my summary of the UAE review that while school leaders support ICT, many report that their staff are still not sufficiently comfortable using it. There also remains the issue of quality access due to socio-economic reasons.

Finally, behavioral management and parental involvement elevate this load once more. Indeed, teachers of ALN students often experience both front-stage and back-stage communication with parents and specialists, creating looped conversations (Florian & Spratt, 2013). This "emotional labor," while crucial to the success of inclusivity, is rarely accounted for in existing models of workload (Hargreaves, 1998; Yin, 2015).

The UAE Context

Supported by the MoE, KHDA, and ADEK, the educational reform plan of the UAE views teaching as a very skillful and forward-looking career. Policies highlight inclusion, digital competence, and reflective cooperation. Still, several studies show a split between actual classroom ability and political aspiration.

The combination of policy objectives, digital directives, and leadership expectations can result in the formation of "smart schools" based on the findings of Abdallah et al. (2021) and Nguyen (2021) on the flexibility of the instructors and their ongoing dedication. Teacher load has been redefined as both difficult and continuous by the overlapping responsibilities of differentiation for ALN, engagement in PLC, PD adherence, behavioral documentation, and parent communication.

Literature makes clear that if not adjusted, the reform process could lead to burnout. To guarantee that teacher capacity fits system goals, sustainable innovation requires organizational support— protected collaboration time, resource provisioning, and leader compassion (OECD, 2016; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

III. Methodology

Research Design

Using a qualitative secondary research approach, this study gathers ideas from prior peer-reviewed publications, policy briefs, and institutional reports on instructor burden, inclusiveness, and professional development growth in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Instead of obtaining fresh empirical data, it harmonizes current knowledge by examining patterns and conflicts, as well as their impact on policy-related matters across various academic disciplines.

The secondary research is especially suitable in this study as the empirical background on teacher workload and inclusion in the United Arab Emirates is rather thin even though the research base has begun to grow significantly. Representing one of the central sources like Status of Teaching and Teacher Professional Satisfaction in the UAE (2017) by Buckner and Teaching in the UAE: Advantages and Challenges from the Perspective of Irish Transnational Teachers (2025) by Dillon et al., this paper places the experiences of the teachers in the context of the socio-political and institutional context of the UAE educational system.

The chosen methodology will help to understand interdependence between variables, such as differentiation, inclusion of learners with additional needs (ALN), professional learning communities (PLCs), and professional development (PD) in the context of UAE education through the prism of the local, regional, and global scholarship.

Data Sources and Selection Criteria
The review draws upon:
- Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar academic journal articles.
- UAE-based institutions, including the Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation and the UAE Ministry of Education produced policy and working papers.
- Empirical research based on teacher satisfaction, the experience of expatriate teachers as well as inclusive education systems in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Inclusion criteria were given priority:
- Articles that were published between 2015 and 2025 on the basis of relevance in the policy in the last ten years.
- Emphasis on teacher work load, inclusion, differentiation, professional development (PD), and professional learning communities (PLCs) in either the UAE or any alike education system.
- Articles that are published in peer-reviewed academic journals or reputable education policy foundations.

The process led to a total of twenty-two primary sources, such as Abdallah et al. (2021), Nguyen (2021), and OECD (2016) reports, which collectively comprise a balanced picture of the global literature on educational reforms and UAE-specific literature.

Analytical Framework

A thematic synthesis method was used. The review was implemented according to the model of Thomas and Harden, (2008), which consisted of three steps:

- Coding the most significant findings in all studies referring to the topic of teacher workload, differentiation, inclusion, professional development, and professional learning communities.
- Formation of descriptive themes, including the administrative intensification and inclusion-oriented planning and collaborative fatigue.
- Touching analytical themes, which include the integration of local and international results to clarify the general trends in the systems.

The theoretical framework that informed this iterative analysis process was workload intensification (Ballet, Kelchtermans, and Loughran, 2006) and professional capital (Hargreaves, Boyle, & Harris, 2014). The two paradigms note that the growing complexity of the teaching profession requires structural and cultural support to avert burnout and maintain teacher agency.

Reliability, Validity, and Ethical Considerations

Even though secondary research does not engage any participants, rigor and integrity are also required.

- To achieve some form of reliability, triangulation of results of various independent studies was performed; as an illustration, Buckner (2017) and Abdallah et al. (2021) independently found that perceived professional status and workload balance correlate closely with teacher satisfaction in the UAE.
- The diversity of perspectives Emirati, expatriate, and institutional ones helped to enhance the validity of the study, as the synthesized results reflected both the school reality, the image of which should be formed, and the private one.
- Sources were used ethically by correctly citing the source, being true to the findings, and honoring the integrity of authors.

Since the study was based on published and publicly available resources, there was no need to obtain any ethical permission. However, the analysis does not falsify or manipulate the findings, which may disfigure the intention of the original authors.

Limitations

This research has limitations brought about by the secondary nature of the research. To begin with, the UAE data on teacher workload is not available, so a lot of information is extracted on the GCC or OECD levels. Second, the experiences of teachers can be quite different in terms of emirates, school systems, and curriculum models (e.g., British, American, IB), which makes generalization more difficult. Third, a lot of the literature is on expatriate teachers, including Dillon et al. (2025), thus not representing the views of Emirati teachers. Despite the limitations, an extensive literature review can help to provide insightful cross-sectional data regarding the systemic pressures and opportunities of reform.

Summary

On the whole, this method would be a combination of a strict literature analysis and a sensitivity to the context. The systematic synthesis of secondary data is used to create a comprehensive representation of how differentiation, inclusion, professional

development, and collaborative structures add knowledge to teacher workload in the United Arab Emirates. The synthesized results and discussion follow thereafter whereby themes identified in the review literature are incorporated to explain structural and human aspects on the workload of teachers.

Findings and Discussion
The Expanding Scope of Teacher Workload

In the literature reviewed, there is a similar pattern, namely the role of the teacher in UAE has expanded significantly within the last ten years. Educators no longer are only charged with the task of instruction but with an intricate set of responsibilities such as administration paperwork, record keeping, pastoral care, technology adoption, pedagogical learning and parental communication.

According to Buckner (2017) in his article, Status of Teaching and Teacher Professional Satisfaction in the UAE, almost three-quarters of the surveyed teachers rated their workload as heavy or very heavy. Most of the time-consuming activities included planning to accommodate various types of learners and the administration of mandatory reports. Likewise, in the case of Dillon, Gallagher and McDaid (2025) with their research of the Irish teachers in Ras Al Khaimah, they noted that the latter tend to feel the extra burdens of culture adaptation, expectations of accountability, and perceived underestimation by the school administration.

The acceleration of teacher workload in the UAE is an indication of what Apple (2012) calls the process of responsibilisation: teachers have been held personally responsible when it comes to systemic performance, including inclusion and innovation. The consequence of the latter is that the national reform agendas, though forward-looking, are being transformed into individualized orders on the time and the emotional resources of teachers.

Differentiation and ALN Inclusion: The Time-Pressure Paradox
Inclusion and differentiated instruction are the priorities of the UAE policy which are based on the Inclusive Education Policy Framework (2017) and the vision of "School for All". Abdallah, Abdat, and Hill (2021) discovered that special education teachers at UAE centers appreciated inclusion but could not adjust to the high administrative and planning burden that came with the individualized learning plan. According to the teachers, differentiated resources to serve students with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) demanded after- hours planning, and consultation with experts, which were frequently not factored in the workload evaluation.

These results are in line with international studies. In line with the argument that differentiation can only be sustainable when approached as a community effort, Florian and Spratt (2013) proposed that such an undertaking should be achieved by: team planning, sharing of resources, and support of leaders. In the absence of these constructions, it will turn into, as Westwood (2020) puts it, an ideal without infrastructure. Similarly, Pozas, Letzel, and Schneider (2020) likewise established that differentiation also raises the amount of work of a teacher when introduced without systemic support, which leads to fatigue and loss of instructional creativity.

The tension is sharp in the UAE, where the inclusion has not only become moral but also a policy requirement. The schools boast of inclusive practice, but teachers are left with the responsibility of turning policy into practical classroom plans- the same trend that Abdallah et al. (2021) concurred with that inclusion only works within the goodwill of teachers than systems.

PLCs and Professional Development: Collaboration or Compounding Load?
Professional development (PD) and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are designed to empower teachers thanks to collective inquiry and continuous development. Nonetheless, literature indicates that, in reality, they may reduce and intensify workload stresses.

Abdallah et al. (2021) discovered that, although PLCs enhanced collaboration and reflection among teachers in the UAE, they also involved a lot of preparation, documentation, and meeting time, which was usually at an inconvenient time. On the same note, according to Dillon et al. (2025), expatriate teachers in the UAE often said that PDs and PLCs were very useful yet exhausting as they had to have weekly sessions, and some of them memorized the material or were compelled to adhere to the rules instead of the relevance.

This duality can be explained by the analysis of PD efficacy provided by Kennedy (2016) to us: PD can be useful in the development of teachers only in cases in which it is sustained, contextually relevant, and reflective and not in cases when it turns into a tick-box exercise. This worry was also reflected by UAE teachers in a study conducted by Buckner (2017), who claimed PD that was introduced ex post facto rarely corresponded to the conditions in the classroom, which supports the sense of time pressure and agency deprivation.

Overall, even with these difficulties, PLCs continue to be one of the limited platforms in which teachers can share their inclusion, differentiation, and classroom management strategies. In a way that is clearly outlined by Stoll et al. (2006), collaboration has been shown to increase job satisfaction and decrease isolation when schools do not consider PLC time as an addition to regular school time. The education system in the UAE is also at an advantage of reworking the PLCs into integrated professional time rather than extra-curriculum requirement.

Technology Integration and Administrative Intensification
UAE technology is an innovation source and a source of new labour. The Smart Learning Initiative (2012) of the government strived to make education digital by means of e-learning platforms and data-driven instruction. Nguyen (2021) studied management of similar transitions to smart school by principals in Vietnam and concluded that leadership competency and policy coherence both played a significant role in defining whether technology decreased or increased teacher workload.

The same claims the UAE teachers who state that digital platforms foster communication and accuracy of data but also develop a system of constant parent messaging, various reporting portals, and nonstop monitoring using digital tools (Dillon

et al., 2025). According to the words of one of the teachers in the study of Dillon, we are on-line at all times even when we are not on duty. This is in line with the idea presented by Hargreaves and Fullan (2015) that tyranny of immediacy is the situation when technology erases the professional boundaries and increases the working time of a teacher. The emotional burden of this interconnectivity, especially when combined with behavioral control and parental expectations, is one of the factors that Maslach et al. (2001) describe as role overload, which is a cause of burnout.

Cultural and Professional Identity Pressures

Expatriate teachers working in the UAE have to deal with the dual identity issue, balancing the requirements of the home training and the localized requirements of the UAE education. Dillon et al. (2025) observed that the experience was both unpleasant and rewarding to Irish teachers: The experience was pleasant in terms of exposing them to cultural variety, enriching in terms of professional diversity; however, was tiresome in terms of administrative burdens, and perceived marginalization in terms of decision-making. This is congruent to transnational educator findings in the world. According to Dickson (2025),, the Gulf region expatriate teachers usually feel like non-participants in the school leadership and policy development processes, which supports the perception of professional incompleteness. These are some of the factors of high turnover, which Aljanahi, Aljanahi, and Alzarouni (2023) discover as problematic specifically in the UAE in the context of the private education sector.

It is not simply the amount of work, however, but its quality that matters, whether teachers consider their job to be appreciated and valued. As the conclusions by Buckner (2017) prove, perceived professional respect is a more accurate predictor of teacher retention in the UAE, compared to salary or housing benefits.

Synthesis: The UAE's Balancing Act

Combined, all this shows a profession that is quite pressured but highly motivated. The teaching profession in the United Arab Emirates is one that is resilient and committed to the constant change. However, there is an imbalance in the structure of aspirational breadth of policy and the practical abilities of the classroom, which is easily visible.

Differentiation, incorporation of students with other learning requirements, professional growth, professional learning communities, technology integration, and parent communication are some of the critical aspects of modern-day educational systems. However, all these factors may be applied together to increase the workload to the unsustainable levels unless the implementation of systemic calibration takes place. Empirical studies drive to the conclusion that the workload of teachers in the UAE does not primarily contravene the innovation but is a demonstration of the need to have sufficient time, confidence, and specific assistance.

IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Teaching in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) can be said to be a meeting point of both hope and intricacy. The education system in the country has achieved a lot of ground in terms of policy development, including inclusivity, differentiated instruction, digital

innovation, and sustained professional development. However, as seen in this review, these progressive virtues often become a daily overextension of teachers.

Five common themes have been identified across the literature and they include differentiation and special needs inclusion, imperative of professional learning communities (PLCs) and professional development (PD), incorporation of technology, administrative intensification, and emotional labor based on parent and student engagement. All these elements possess their own value but when combined together, they form a system of expectations that teachers have to deal with day by day.

Buckner (2017) and Dillon et al. (2025) give an outline of the lives of the teachers who are highly devoted to their students but are being pulled in different directions by the conflicting requirements. The same case is presented by Abdallah et al. (2021), who prove that the UAE initiative aimed at the promotion of inclusive practice, though ethically and pedagogically viable, puts a heavy burden on teachers unless the systemic scaffolding works properly.

The sentiment expressed by teachers in these studies is the same: they do not oppose reform, but they oppose fatigue. They are professionals whose nature is based on care, knowledge, and pride; they need a recalibration that will join policy ambition to the sustainability of humans. The task is not the ability of teachers to fulfill the new expectations but the possibility of the system to meet half-way.

Recommendations
Based on this synthesis, the subsequent recommendations contain some realistic yet evidence- based steps to assist UAE teachers and maintain the momentum of the reform.

Protect Planning and Collaboration Time.
The most useful resource in teaching is time. Buckner (2017) and Stoll et al. (2006) show that effective collaboration planning time results in better student outcomes and fewer burnout incidents. The schools in the UAE have to make weekly release time a part of the schedule of PLCs, differentiation planning, and collaboration with special needs. Leadership should ensure that this time is not used up to hold meetings or administration.

Redefine Professional Learning Communities
PLCs in the UAE should not be seen as a mechanism of compliance but a type of collaboration hub. Abdallah et al. (2021) note that teachers consider PLCs to be most useful as genuine forums where strategies can be shared and classroom problems can be solved than inspection checklists. Schools can enhance influence by swapping leadership in PLCs, facilitating co-leadership, and connecting the discussion with the actual classroom evidence rather than general policy themes.

Streamline Professional Development
According to Kennedy (2016), PD can only work when it concentrates on the needs of the classroom as of the moment. The PD sessions must be contextual, teacher driven whenever feasible and separated to prevent cognitive and logistical overloads. Instead

of full-after-hours workshops, school leaders could implement micro PD models small, practice-oriented practice-based sessions, incorporated into current schedules.

Looking Forward

The UAE is considered to be one of the most vibrant education systems in the world-young, ambitious, and globally connected. This evolution is centered on its teachers. However, reform must succeed and in this case, sustainability should be hand in hand with innovation. The results of this review highlight an important fact, which is that teachers cannot refill an empty cup.

Investment in teacher wellbeing, time and professional agency does not cost anything, it is the keystone to educational quality. The UAE has the potential to become the first in academic excellence and, by balancing the distribution of the working process and giving the teachers a voice, it can also provide an example of a humane and progressive education in the 21st century.

References

1. Abdallah, R., Abdat, R. M., & Hill, C. (2021). Extent of implementing the characteristics of professional learning communities at the UAE Special Education Centers. International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research, 20(4), 265–282.
2. Ahmad, H., & Shah, S. R. (2022). Teacher agency and professional development: A study on Cambridge English teacher program in the Arabian Gulf. Cogent Education, 9(1), 2080352.
3. Ahsan, M. T., Shaukat, S., & Islam, T. (2025). Teacher educators' intentions, concerns and the perceived efficacy to teach students with diverse needs in the context of United Arab Emirates. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 1-20.
4. Aldabbous, F., & Aldabbous, A. F. (2025). The effectiveness of professional development programs in providing English language teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge, 91(1), 59-79.
5. Aljanahi, M. H., Aljanahi, M. H., & Alzarouni, A. (2023). Leadership and Turnover Intention in UAE Public Schools: To Stay or Not?. In Restructuring Leadership for School Improvement and Reform (pp. 159-180). IGI Global.
6. Al-Mahdy, Y. F. H., & Sywelem, M. M. G. (2016). Teachers' perspectives on professional learning communities in some Arab countries. International Journal of Research Studies in Education, 5(4), 45-57.
7. Apple, M. W. (2012). Can education change society? Routledge.
8. Ballet, K., Kelchtermans, G., & Loughran, J. (2006). Beyond intensification towards a scholarship of practice: Analyzing changes in teachers' work lives. Teachers and Teaching, 12(2), 209–229.
9. Buckner, E. (2017). The status of teaching and teacher professional satisfaction in the UAE. Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research.
10. Day, C. (2017). Teachers' worlds and work: Understanding complexity, building quality.
11. Routledge.

12. Dickson, M. (Ed.). (2025). Exploring Gender in Education in Arabian Gulf Countries: Toward Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education. Taylor & Francis.

13. Dillon, A., Gallagher, K., & McDaid, R. (2025). Teaching in the UAE: Advantages and challenges from the perspective of Irish transnational teachers. Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research.

14. DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Many, T. (2013). Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work (2nd ed.). Solution Tree.

15. Farahmandpour, Z., & Voelkel, R. (2025). Teacher Turnover Factors and School-Level Influences: A Meta-Analysis of the Literature. Education Sciences, 15(2), 219.

16. Florian, L., & Spratt, J. (2013). Enacting inclusion: A framework for reinforcing teacher agency. Teaching and Teacher Education, 33, 119–125.

17. Hargreaves, A. (1998). The emotional practice of teaching. Teaching and Teacher Education, 14(8), 835–854.

18. Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2015). Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school. Teachers College Press.

19. Hargreaves, A., Boyle, A., & Harris, A. (2014). Uplifting leadership: How organizations, teams, and communities raise performance. John Wiley & Sons..

20. Hulme, M., Beauchamp, G., Wood, J., & Bignell, C. (2024). Teacher workload research report 2024. University of the West of Scotland.

21. Kennedy, M. M. (2016). How does professional development improve teaching? Review of Educational Research, 86(4), 945–980.

22. Lee, J. C. K., & Kennedy, K. J. (Eds.). (2024). The Routledge international handbook of life and values education in Asia. Taylor & Francis.

23. Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W., & Leiter, M. (2001). Job burnout. Annual Review of Psychology, 52, 397–422.

24. Nguyen, T. (2021). Factors affecting smart school leadership competencies of high school principals in Vietnam. International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research, 20(4), 1-17.

25. OECD. (2016). Supporting teacher professionalism: Insights from TALIS 2018. OECD Publishing.

26. Pozas, M., Letzel, V., & Schneider, C. (2020). Teachers and differentiated instruction: exploring differentiation practices to address student diversity. Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 20(3), 217-230.

27. Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2017). Dimensions of teacher burnout: Relations with potential stressors at school. Social Psychology of Education, 20(4), 775-790.

28. Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional learning communities: A review of the literature. Journal of educational change, 7(4), 221-258.

29. Thomas, J., & Harden, A. (2008). Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews. BMC Medical Research Methodology, 8, 45.

30. Tomlinson, C. A. (2014). The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners (2nd ed.). ASCD.

31. Westwood, P. (2020). Commonsense methods for children with special needs and disabilities. Routledge.

32. Yin, H. (2015). The effect of teachers' emotional labour on teaching satisfaction: Moderation of emotional intelligence. Teachers and Teaching, 21(7), 789-810.