11 Governance of government middle schools in urban China and India

Comparative analysis of supportive accountability and teacher perceptions

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Introduction

Effective governance that ensures proper management and utilization of various resources is increasingly emphasized as a key to achieving quality and inclusiveness in the basic education sector. This chapter contributes to the understanding of education governance in urban settings of two of the largest – yet still relatively under-explored – public education systems in the world, namely China and India, with a particular focus on their arrangement of teachers' in-service training and career advancement as supportive accountability mechanisms. While in rural areas and less advanced regions the main priority may still lie with ensuring adequate resources, in urban areas issues of governance and accountability are more relevant and urgent: better resources and capacity levels make it imperative that their effective management and utilization be guaranteed so as to achieve desirable education outcomes. Government middle schools in the two capital cities thus serve as good starting points from which to meaningfully explore the role of supportive accountability practices.

Using a unique teacher survey as its main tool of exploration, this chapter reveals that Beijing's frequent "low-stake" training centered at the school level, as well as a horizontal career advancement path, are more likely to match stakeholder incentives and promote professionalism compared to measures undertaken in Delhi. While a deeper understanding of how and to what extent this affects education outcomes still awaits further research, insights generated by this chapter can nevertheless shed some preliminary light on the role of supportive mechanisms as essential complements to the more traditional accountability measures of discipline and control.

Governance matters in a changing context

The importance of basic education in economic and human development has been widely recognized in policy research and practice across the globe. Behind this imperative, the universally agreed goal of basic education has undergone

several changes in the last few decades. Whereas earlier education policy put more emphasis on expanding school access and enrollment, the current focus has shifted toward ensuring quality and inclusiveness of education. This is aptly illustrated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specified in the United Nations 2030 agenda, among which SDG 4 commits nations to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all".[1]

This updated goal in turn requires a change in policy instruments to achieve it. Whereas finance and infrastructure played a key role in the universalization efforts of many developing countries to expand access, existing evidence shows that input-based interventions *alone* are inadequate in improving education quality and inclusiveness in both developing and developed countries (e.g., Elmore and Fuhrman, 2001; Evans and Popova, 2016; Mbiti, 2016). India's Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Right to Education (RTE) Act, for instance, have codified various input-related aspects from the number of classrooms and toilets per school to student–teacher ratios, which are duly monitored by administrators. However, despite the progress in enrollment, levels of learning remain poor (Aiyar and Bhattacharya, 2015).

In addition to the input-based approach, another policy instrument increasingly summoned for use in the basic education sector, as in many other sectors, is privatization and marketization: paying from their own pockets offers a strong incentive for education service recipients (students and their parents) to monitor and demand value for the money they pay. A closer pay–performance link and more autonomy and ownership of teaching may also drive teachers and principals to be more motivated. However, from the perspective of society overall, such effectiveness is at best partial: private basic education is still largely unaffordable to the have-nots of society. Hence in most developing countries, including India and China, government schools remain the predominant provider of basic education (Bhatty and Saraf, 2016: 5; Hao and Yu, 2015). Put differently, while private basic education serves as a healthy supplement to the public education system, it would be dangerous to view the former as a substitute for the latter.

While recognizing the limits of input-based interventions, it is increasingly acknowledged that the proper use and channeling of various fiscal, physical, and human resources – that is, the effective governance of the education sector – matters in improving the learning outcomes of all students. And contrary to the implicit assumptions made by advocates of privatization that government is no longer relevant and can even be harmful, effective education governance still needs government to play a pivotal role in providing stewardship (Yan, 2019).

Governance, accountability, and support

Within the emerging literature on governance from bodies such as the World Health Organization, the World Bank, UNDP, etc., the notion of accountability is increasingly highlighted as a key to achieving good governance (see also Erkkila, 2007). While this observation also applies to basic education, much of the recent empirical literature in the field has left this central term undefined (Bruns

et al., 2011). A basic definition can nevertheless be retrieved from early education studies or public administration literature (e.g., Ranson, 1986; Romzek and Dubnick, 1987), both of which recognize accountability as a social relationship between the "accountors" and the "accountees". Within this relationship, the accountors need to be answerable to the accountees for certain actions (or inaction) in exchange for the latter's sanctioning of their performance.

To further extend the understanding and theorization of accountability, one part of the literature has come up with several typologies of accountability (see World Bank, 2003). Another approach that is particularly common to the study of educational accountability is to treat accountability as a set of distinctive *mechanisms*, from school-based management (SBM) and exit exams to information disclosure and so on, each with its own theoretical predictions of how it will lead to strengthened accountability and ultimately improved student learning.

Nevertheless, whether and to what extent these mechanisms are effective remains largely inconclusive even amongst systematic reviews (Evans and Popova, 2016), depending, among others factors, on their design and implementation specifics. More fundamentally, current research on accountability mechanisms emphasizes discipline and control, either from societal actors (SBM, information disclosure) or upper-level government activities (inspections, exit exams). The equally important aspect of support and recognition is relatively under-explored, although the definition of the accountability relationship has never excluded it as an element of the "sanctions". Where supportive measures are studied in the literature, this tends to be limited to short-term supportive measures (such as year-end bonuses, one-off material inputs) rather than long-term supportive interventions such as more institutionalized[2] training and career development including promotion, awards, and recognition.

Methodology notes on case selection, sampling, and fieldwork

This chapter complements and extends the literature by zooming in on two supportive accountability mechanisms, namely teachers' in-service training and their career development, with the rationales justified in the previous section. It aims to compare the governance arrangements and manifestations of these two mechanisms within the contexts of government middle schools in China and India in the urban settings of Delhi and Beijing. These locations are considered suitable for the exploratory goal of the study not only because they are both capital cities and have similar administrative status and set-up. More importantly, existing studies on various accountability mechanisms in the two countries have largely focused on either rural areas or remote and least-advanced regions (e.g., for China, see Loyalka et al., 2013, 2016, 2017; Zhang et al., 2013; for India, see Banerjee et al., 2010; Muralidharan and Sundararaman, 2010, 2011, 2013; PROBE Team, 1999).[3] Although these areas with less optimistic education outcomes certainly deserve serious academic and practical attention, their top priority may still lie in filling the gaps of inadequate resources, rendering the governance

issue, albeit important, a lower priority. In contrast, the actual layout of governance and accountability is a much more relevant topic for basic education in urban settings where demand for and aspirations of education are higher and resource constraints relatively low. Furthermore, single-teacher schools (where the mechanisms studied here can hardly apply) and enrollment in these schools are negligible in Delhi, whereas in other states the practice could still be common given lack of resources (e.g., Batra, 2013). It is very difficult to find such schools even in least-advanced regions in China nowadays.

The public middle schools of Beijing and the roughly equivalent government upper-primary/secondary schools in Delhi are compared in this study because they cover the last stage of basic education in the two countries.[4] Given the lack of comparable outcome criteria on which random sampling can be performed (and also the time and budget constraints for the doctoral dissertation on which this chapter is based),[5] the selection of sample districts follows a purposive sampling approach. Fengtai (Beijing) and North Delhi (Delhi) are chosen as two "average" districts (as contrasted to New Delhi/Xicheng on one hand and northeast/suburban districts on the other), which are varied enough for the study to explore whether, in what manner, and to what extent their accountability practices differ. In total, 150 teachers from 33 government middle schools in Delhi and 80 teachers from 22 schools in Beijing were surveyed to better understand the effectiveness of supportive arrangements, especially from the perspectives of teachers as their direct recipients. A breakdown of the sample is presented in Table 11.1. The survey is complemented with on-the-spot follow-up interviews as well as semi-structured interviews with education officials, experts, and NGO workers. All fieldwork was done between September 2016 and December 2017.

Table 11.1 Sample breakdown

Type	Delhi (N=150) (%)	Beijing (N=80) (%)
By Gender		
Male	84 (56)	23 (28.8)
Female	66 (44)	57 (71.3)
By Professional Ranking and Years of Experience		
TGT/Middle School 1–3	20 (13.3)	18 (22.5)
TGT/Middle School 4–10	30 (20)	25 (31.3)
TGT/Middle School 11+	47 (31.3)	27 (33.8)
PGT/High school	21 (14)	10 (12.5)
Guest Teachers	32 (21.3)	0
By Education Level		
Bachelor's/Undergrad	19 (12.7)	62 (77.5)
Master's/Post-grad	120 (80)	18 (22.5)
PhD	5 (3.3)	0
Other or Unspecified	6 (4)	0

Note: TGT = trained graduate teacher; PGT = post-graduate teacher

Supportive accountability and teacher perceptions: a comparative analysis

Analyzing the results from the survey and complementary methods, this section systematically compares supportive accountability as practiced in government middle schools in Beijing and Delhi along three dimensions: coverage, format, and teacher perception.

Coverage and exclusion

In terms of overall training coverage, results of the teacher survey in Delhi reveal that in-service training is almost completely lacking for guest teachers (also known as contract teachers). More than 60% of the 32 surveyed guest teachers had not received training of any type during the survey period. Even among regular teachers, 30 (more than 25%) had not received any training during the same period. Among these 30, 11 had joined the school within the previous year. For the rest, reasons cited for the lack of training included "no trainings ever happened" and "training was planned but later canceled". There are also those who cited personal reasons, such as the need to take another exam or go back to their hometown or simply not feeling well. In contrast, there was near-universal training coverage in Beijing although, as will be shown later, training on different topics can vary substantially in terms of frequency and duration. Overall, 79 of the 80 teacher respondents in Beijing had participated in in-service training during the survey period.

As well as facing neglect in in-service training, guest teachers in Delhi are not eligible for promotion. Overall, 43.3% of the respondents in Delhi have received at least one promotion in their career so far; the figure for Beijing is 52.5%. But none of the guest teachers in the Delhi sample has been promoted, as the career system is exclusively open to regular teachers.

These differences in terms of capacity-building coverage between regular and guest teachers contrast sharply with the lack of substantial differences when it comes to performing teaching and other tasks (Table 11.2). This does not go unnoticed by the guest teachers: not only do they have fewer opportunities for training and career advancement, but they also reported significantly more negative feelings toward such (lack of) support.

Table 11.2 Summary of teaching and non-teaching burdens, Delhi

	No. of subjects taught	No. of standards taught	No. of sections taught	% being class teachers	Average teaching hours spent weekly
GT	1.4	3.2	4.2	62.5	22.4
Regular TGT	1.2	3.4	4.3	73.2	23.8
Regular PGT	1.5	2.6	3.9	57.1	21

Note: TGT = trained graduate teacher; PGT = post-graduate teacher; GT = guest teacher

There is no such dualism in the training and career advancement system in Beijing, as all teachers within the sample schools are regular teachers. Furthermore, differences along other dimensions (such as teaching middle school versus teaching high school, higher versus lower professional ranking) did not seem to have any significant impact on receiving capacity-building support on the one hand and the teachers' feelings toward these arrangements on the other.[6]

Differing formats of provision

Frequency, duration, and providers of in-service training

For those who have participated in in-service training, the total duration of training for recipients in Delhi was estimated at nearly 33 hours on average over the survey period. The training received by respondents in Beijing was estimated at an average of 60 hours. Bearing in mind the inaccuracies of self-reporting, these figures are indicative at best. Yet potential recall bias cannot entirely account for such a stark contrast between Beijing and Delhi, as it is hard to justify why biased estimations from the two groups of teachers would not move in the same direction.

A more plausible explanation for the difference may come from the format in which the training sessions are organized. In Delhi, training programs are mainly concentrated during the (summer) break, with four to six days of six to eight hours each being typical. Training during the vacations was also mentioned by the respondents in Beijing, but this is far from being the main format. The most common types of training in Beijing are instead embedded throughout the semesters. Training sessions on academic content and pedagogy, in particular, are held on a regular basis at a fixed and designated time each week. Even the less frequent training on student management would normally still happen on a monthly basis.

This higher frequency and regularity of training in Beijing is closely related to its "decentralized style of provision". In the comprehensive provision structure in Beijing, the municipal government plays a major role in teacher in-service training primarily for expert teachers at the high end and those from "weak schools" at the low end. Most other training programs are organized instead by the district and the schools themselves. This decentralized pattern is also reflected in the teacher survey. Whereas most training programs mentioned by respondents in Beijing are provided by the district and the schools, the major provider in Delhi is still the state education authorities. There, the role of district-level training providers and the schools is negligible.

Timing and types of promotion

In terms of career advancement, the survey records the time of the latest promotion (month and year) for those respondents who have received a promotion in their career so far. The interval between the promotion time and the time of filling in the questionnaire can therefore be calculated.

The "promotion interval" for respondents in Beijing is around 33 months. In other words, for those who have been promoted, the last promotion happened fewer than three years before the survey. Yet for their counterparts in Delhi, the interval is more than 79 months for current TGTs (trained graduate teachers) and 49 months for current PGTs (post-graduate teachers). In other words, the average PGT has not received any promotion for more than four years, and the average TGT for approximately six and a half years.

There are also differences between the two sample cities in terms of the types of promotion awarded. In Beijing, the survey found 19 instances of teachers being promoted to a higher professional ranking, 17 within-ranking promotions, and 14 promotions to intermediate management positions such as grade head, director of the political education department, etc. In Delhi, among the 65 teachers who have been promoted at least once, only nine (13.8%) have been promoted "to higher professional ranking within the same subject". There are 24 respondents (36.9%) whose latest promotions are "to same ranking but with higher pay scale (grade pay of Modified Assured Career Promotion, or MACP)". Yet the most common type of promotion, experienced by 32 (or nearly 50%) of the promoted respondents, is "to higher professional ranking in a different subject".

The last type can be divided into two scenarios, both of which are closely related to Delhi's (or for that matter India's) teacher promotion structure, which can be described as "the vertical path" (Figure 11.1, left panel). The first possibility is the promotion from PRT (primary teacher), who needs to teach all subjects to primary-level students, to TGT, who mostly teaches a main subject. The second and trickier possibility is to be promoted from TGT of one subject to PGT of another. The survey results uncovered six such cases – for example, teachers promoted from TGT math to PGT English, from TGT science to PGT economics or PGT English, or from TGT English to PGT commerce or political science. Follow-up interviews with these teachers as well as discussions with principals and other teachers suggest that this is sometimes an opportunistic move as the subjects they are promoted into (i.e., promotion-destination subjects) have a better chance of promotion than others, including the subjects in which they were originally teaching. Meanwhile, the possibility of getting a master's degree in the promotion-destination subject may also be made easier by, for instance, the wide availability of correspondence courses. Although the number of instances may not seem substantial so far as the survey is concerned, the repercussions of this type of promotion for current training and career advancement schemes are nevertheless worth attention, which will be further elaborated in the discussion on teacher perceptions later.

In contrast, career development in Beijing's school system is essentially a "horizontal path" (Figure 11.1, right panel). For government teachers in Beijing, promotion occurs independently within each level of teaching (i.e., within primary school from level III to senior; within secondary school from level III to senior). To the extent that both the teaching content and the psychology of students differ substantially across grades and levels of teaching, the horizontal path seems better suited to retaining teachers' expertise within their levels.
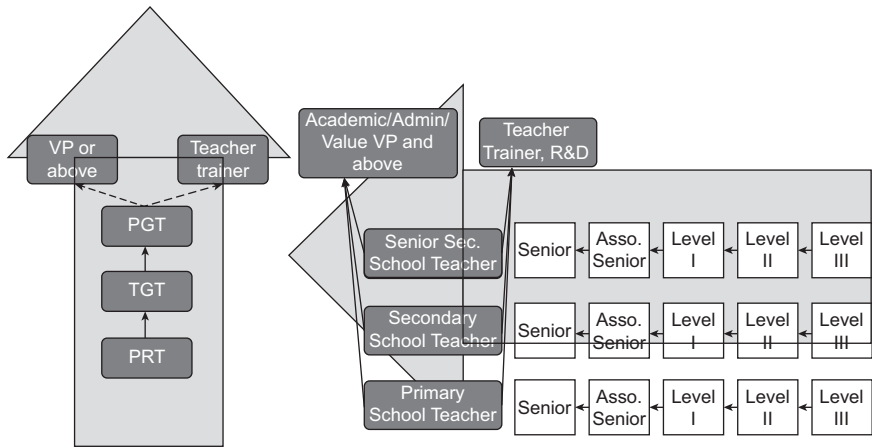
VP or above — Teacher trainer

Academic/Admin/Value VP and above

Teacher Trainer, R&D

PGT

TGT

PRT

Senior Sec. School Teacher | Senior | Asso. Senior | Level I | Level II | Level III

Secondary School Teacher | Senior | Asso. Senior | Level I | Level II | Level III

Primary School Teacher | Senior | Asso. Senior | Level I | Level II | Level III

Figure 11.1 Career path of government school teachers in Delhi (left panel) and Beijing (right panel)

Teacher perceptions

On in-service training

According to the teacher survey in Delhi, 144 respondents (96%) indicated that current training arrangements do not match their needs or expectations. This is less surprising when one considers that only 14.9% of respondents who received training confirmed that they were consulted in advance regarding training needs and expectations.

Using a scale from 1 (least satisfied) to 5 (most satisfied), the overall satisfaction with teacher in-service training in the Delhi sample averaged 3.2, with no single item exceeding a score of 4. Training that roughly matched with teacher needs, i.e., on subject content and on teaching methods, enjoyed relatively high satisfaction levels of 3.53 and 3.44 respectively. In both cases, the three common reasons for dissatisfaction among those who were dissatisfied were "quality too low", "content does not match expectation", and "is not useful for solving real-world problems" (Figure 11.2).

Complaints about the low quality of training mainly focused on the lack of experience and expertise of the trainers (known as "resource persons"), who were seen, for example, as "not well qualified". A more serious consequence of this qualification and experience deficit is perhaps reflected in the ineffectiveness of training in solving real-world issues – a problem that occurred most often when the resource persons came from universities and colleges not associated with schools and with little experience of school-level teaching. Respondents commented that conceptualizations by external trainers of curricula and of how a class should be may not be entirely convincing and relevant.
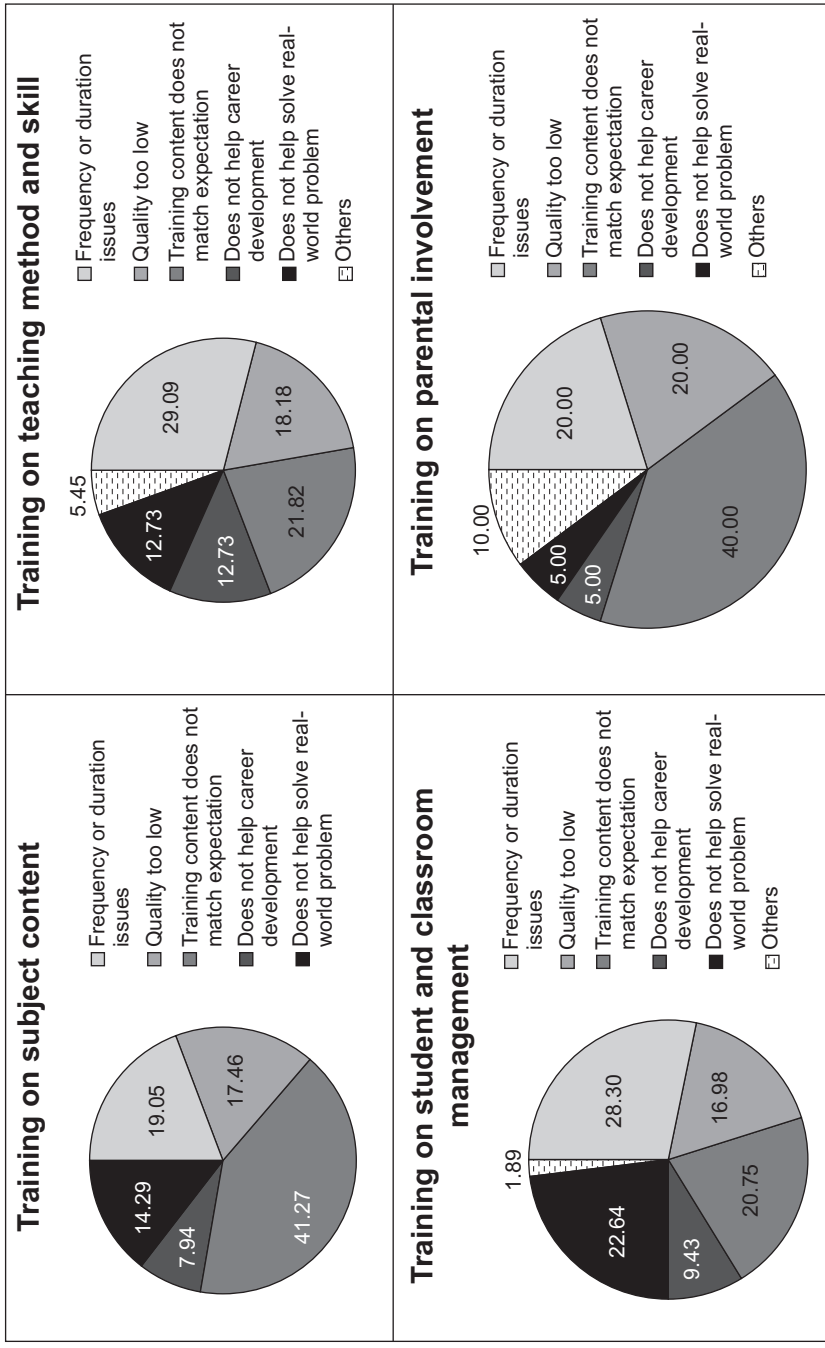
Training on subject content

☐ Frequency or duration issues
☐ Quality too low
▨ Training content does not match expectation
▨ Does not help career development
▮ Does not help solve real-world problem

19.05
17.46
14.29
7.94
41.27

Training on teaching method and skill

☐ Frequency or duration issues
☐ Quality too low
▨ Training content does not match expectation
▨ Does not help career development
▮ Does not help solve real-world problem
▨ Others

5.45
29.09
18.18
12.73
12.73
21.82

Training on student and classroom management

☐ Frequency or duration issues
☐ Quality too low
▨ Training content does not match expectation
▨ Does not help career development
▮ Does not help solve real-world problem
▨ Others

1.89
28.30
16.98
20.75
9.43
22.64

Training on parental involvement

☐ Frequency or duration issues
☐ Quality too low
▨ Training content does not match expectation
▨ Does not help career development
▮ Does not help solve real-world problem
▨ Others

10.00
20.00
20.00
40.00
5.00
5.00

Figure 11.2 Detailed reasons for dissatisfaction with different training types in Delhi

Source: For upper-left sub-figure, n=63; for upper-right, n=56; lower-left, n=53; lower-right, n=20; numbers inside the figures are percentages.
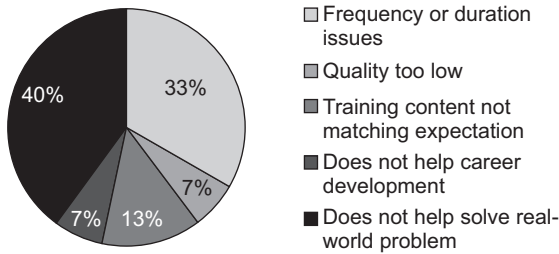
In Beijing, 31.6% of respondents who had received training reported that they were consulted in advance regarding their training needs and preferences. Consultation was mentioned for both school-level and district-level training programs, in the format of survey questionnaires, seminars, or focus-group discussions. The rest of the sample, i.e., nearly 70%, had received no prior consultation as such. One teacher commented that "[training providers] still regard themselves as superior upper-level organizations rather than service providers. Even when they did design some questionnaires [for consultation], they were too complicated and cumbersome to fill in". One respondent used the term "consultative imposition" (征询式安排) to mock the fact that training is still largely imposed top-down despite the intention to look more consultative. Even among those who said they had been consulted, it may still be the case that "school leadership is just consulting us regarding the very broad directions of the training at the very initial stage, without touching upon more detailed aspects" or that implementation was still not satisfactory despite the consultation. Interestingly, there are also teachers who regard consultation with teachers as unnecessary and feel that "only notification would suffice". Despite this, more than 50% of the respondents in Beijing felt that the existing training arrangements matched their needs and preferences.

Teachers' overall satisfaction with in-service training programs in Beijing averaged 4.2 out of 5, one full point higher than the score given by their counterparts in Delhi. Given the generally low incidences of dissatisfaction, reasons cannot be mapped out in as much detail as was done for the responses from Delhi in Figure 11.2. Responses from Beijing are aggregated along two categories of training: those on textbook, academic content, and teaching skills; and the rest, which includes student and classroom management, parental involvement, action research, and so forth (Figure 11.3). Even so, the sub-sample of reasons of dissatisfaction is still very small for training on academic and pedagogical matters (n=15). That for training on "the rest" is larger (n=50). As shown in Figure 11.3, dissatisfaction over either category of training is rarely about the quality, nor is it concerned with training not being helpful for career development. A slightly higher percentage of respondents (13%) felt dissatisfied because the training did not match expectations, while the two major concerns were that training sessions are too infrequent or too short – especially those on student management and parental involvement – and that training is sometimes unhelpful in resolving real-world issues.

On career advancement

According to the teacher survey, measuring satisfaction on the same scale from 1 (least satisfied) to 5 (most satisfied), the average level for respondents in Delhi toward the promotion system is 3. The principal reason for feeling satisfied with the promotion system is the same both for those who have been promoted and those who have not and concerns the "transparency of promotion criteria", rather than fairness or effectiveness in rewarding teaching performance. In fact, the latter only ranks as the third most common reason for satisfaction for both

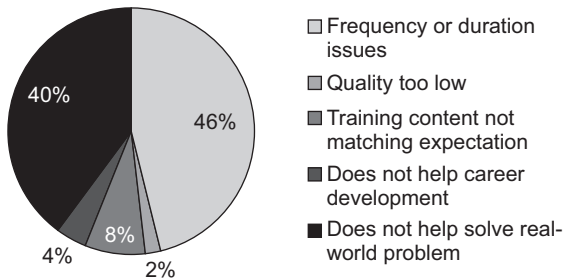**Training on academic content and teaching skills (n=15)**

- Frequency or duration issues
- Quality too low
- Training content not matching expectation
- Does not help career development
- Does not help solve real-world problem

Training on rest of contents (n=50)

- Frequency or duration issues
- Quality too low
- Training content not matching expectation
- Does not help career development
- Does not help solve real-world problem

Figure 11.3 Detailed reasons for dissatisfaction with different training types in Beijing

groups of respondents. In between these two, the second most common reason for satisfaction is different between the two groups: 19% of those not promoted but feeling satisfied with the career system attribute their satisfaction to "optimism about next promotion". Among the 65 respondents who have been promoted, "time to get promoted being reasonable" is the second most picked reason for satisfaction.

Interestingly, the most cited reason for dissatisfaction is the same regardless of whether the respondent has been promoted or not. Taken together, among the 79 respondents who expressed dissatisfaction, 78.5% think that the time to getting promoted is too long. The exclusion of guest teachers from the career scheme is understandably the second most frequently mentioned source of dissatisfaction, applying to 43.4% of those who have never been promoted and feel dissatisfied. In the same subcategory, 39.6% feel dissatisfied because they think promotion is based on factors other than teaching performance, although, among those who have been promoted but are dissatisfied, only 34.6% attribute their dissatisfaction to this reason.

For respondents from Beijing, the average satisfaction level with the promotion system is 3.8. Regarding reasons for satisfaction, "promotion criteria rewarding

teacher performance" ranks equally with the time taken to get promoted being reasonable. Close behind these two reasons is satisfaction about "promotion criteria being transparent". Even for those who feel dissatisfied with the promotion system, "promotion criteria not [being] transparent" is rarely the major concern. The most frequently mentioned reason for dissatisfaction is the time to get promoted being too long. The second major concern raised by those feeling dissatisfied, whether they have been promoted or not, is that the "promotion process [is] too competitive and stressful". Several respondents further commented that, even when criteria are transparent and have been fulfilled, promotion might still not happen as there are many other eligible candidates, and the quota – the maximum number of teachers that can be promoted – is limited. Nor is the ultimate decision as transparent to teachers as the criteria per se.

Discussion and concluding remarks

Supportive accountability, especially in the institutionalized formats of teacher in-service training and career advancement, has been relatively less studied, as the education governance and accountability literature is primarily interested in disciplinary and control measures. This chapter constitutes an original attempt to see how support is actually provided in the relatively advanced urban settings of two of the world's largest basic education systems, especially from the viewpoints of teachers who are meant to be the recipients of such support.

While the purpose of the comparison is not to judge which system is superior in this largely exploratory study of how supportive accountability mechanisms are being practiced, it seems clear that some lessons could be learned from the different experiences highlighted in the survey. In terms of Delhi's vertical career development path, for instance, while those who are promoted can still opt for "business as usual", those who are more comfortable retaining their expertise and teaching at the same standard(s) should also be allowed to choose this path, while still getting a salary raise and all the other benefits of promotion. Such flexibility of promotion could be an interim approach toward the full development of separate and independent expertise.

Apart from illuminating potential reform directions, the chapter has also highlighted several common problems that plague the two systems, neither of which is perfect. The two cities sharing information on ongoing reform initiatives designed to make training more relevant or the promotion process less stressful could provide both with timely material for reflection and inspiration for strengthening supportive accountability and, ultimately, promoting high-quality and inclusive student learning.

Notes

1 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld; https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4 (accessed 5 October 2019)
2 Institutionalization is slightly different from standardization. In fact, for training as an accountability mechanism to work, it should cater in a systematic manner to different teachers with different needs related to their existing experience.

3 Shanghai is an important exception here, whose top performance in PISA 2009 and 2012 has attracted much international attention. See, e.g., OECD (2011).
4 Hereafter, schools are referred to collectively as middle schools.
5 The dissertation is available online: https://scholarbank.nus.edu.sg/handle/10635/156058 accessed 4 November 2019.
6 Tables of teaching burden and significance tests for the Beijing sample are omitted here to save space but are available from the author upon request (yifei.yan@u.nus.edu).

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