

Lesson study

Impact on pupils	Impact on teachers	Strength of evidence
Promising	Promising	Weak

What is it?

Lesson Study is a structured form of professional learning (PL), originating in Japan, where school staff work together to explore how teaching affects pupil learning. It involves a continuing cycle: teachers plan a research lesson around a shared learning goal, one teacher teaches while others observe pupils' responses, and then the group reflects on the evidence to improve practice. Instead of being passive learners, teachers act as researchers of their own teaching. Over time, this approach helps teachers deepen subject knowledge, refine strategies, and build shared responsibility for improving learning.

For broader context and related reviews on collaboration, refer to the [Teacher Collaboration](#) strand.

Key findings

Impact on teachers

Evidence suggests that Lesson Study can benefit teachers in several ways, particularly when it is integrated within wider professional learning and focused on subject expertise. Reported benefits include:

- **Stronger subject knowledge:** Teachers build deeper understanding of content and pedagogy through focused inquiry.
- **Refined instructional practice:** -Cycles of planning, observation, and reflection support teachers to test and adapt strategies.
- **Positive beliefs and motivation:** Lesson Study is linked to increased self-efficacy, and professional identity.

Leadership is key to sustaining these benefits. Lesson Study is most effective when leaders create time for collaboration, foster a culture of trust, and draw on external expertise to strengthen professional learning. However, when treated as a compliance task, its developmental value is easily lost.

Impact on pupils

The evidence on how Lesson Study affects pupil outcomes is mixed, limited and uneven. Most studies focus on teacher learning, with fewer measuring direct effects on pupils. Where pupil outcomes are considered, findings can be grouped as follows:

- **Collaborative PL link:** Reviews of high-quality collaborative professional learning, including Lesson Study, suggest it may be associated with small gains in pupil progress.
- **Short-term benefits:** Some studies indicate improvements in pupil knowledge and understanding following Lesson Study cycles.
- **Mixed findings:** Other evidence points to challenges in embedding new practices, with inconsistent effects on learning.
- **Lack of long-term data:** Few studies track sustained impact, leaving the overall effect on pupil outcomes uncertain.

How effective is the approach?

The evidence suggests that Lesson Study offers real promise for teacher development, though the picture is less clear when it comes to pupil outcomes. Much of the research has focused on short-term projects and descriptive accounts, with relatively few robust studies that track long-term impact.

For teachers, the benefits are easier to see. Reviews highlight that participation in Lesson Study can lead to stronger subject knowledge, greater confidence, and deeper reflective practice. Many teachers report that the structured process of planning, observing, and reviewing lessons together helps them to sharpen their thinking and improve their classroom strategies.

The picture for pupils is more mixed. Some studies suggest that Lesson Study can contribute to better learning outcomes, but the findings are inconsistent and rarely tracked over longer periods of time. This makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions about its sustained impact on pupil progress.

What does seem clear is that design and leadership matter. Lesson Study is most effective when it is given enough time, follow-up, and resources to make the learning stick. Leaders also play an important role. Where they foster trust, set a shared vision, and frame the process as developmental rather than managerial, Lesson Study is more likely to take root and flourish.

Overall, Lesson Study appears to be a promising, though uneven, approach. Its strongest and most consistent impact lies in teacher growth, while the evidence base for pupil outcomes remains limited and underdeveloped.

How to implement it well

Lesson Study is a structured, collaborative process. Its strength lies in depth rather than speed, and in the quality of professional dialogue. Evidence suggests a range of factors that support effective implementation of Lesson Study.

Behaviours

- **Focusing on learning, not performance:** Leaders can help frame Lesson Study as a space for curiosity, rather than evaluation.
- **Embedding reflective structures:** Tools such as shared journals or structured debriefs help normalise deeper professional dialogue and consistency.
- **Encouraging teacher-led inquiry:** Lesson Study is shown to be most powerful when teachers pursue their own questions as active investigators.

Contextual factors

Lesson Study is most effective when it is part of a school's overall improvement journey, rather than an add-on initiative. Key conditions that support success include:

- **Alignment with priorities:** Linking Lesson Study to whole-school goals, such as curriculum or pedagogy development, can make it more relevant and impactful.
- **Protected time:** Building Lesson Study into scheduled PL, with space for planning, observation, and reflection, ensures meaningful engagement and sustainability.
- **Trusted facilitators:** Involving respected staff or subject leads to guide discussion can support inquiry without directing decisions.
- **Developmental leadership:** Leaders who model inquiry, build trust, and foster partnerships create the conditions for Lesson Study to embed successfully.

Lesson Study gains momentum when it is integrated into school improvement systems and supported by engaged, development-focused leadership.

Structured but flexible

Lesson Study works best when it combines clear structures with flexibility to suit local context. Leaders can support this by:

- **Using guiding tools:** Templates for planning, observation, and reflection can help focus learning, while still allowing for local variation.
- **Building in re-teaching opportunities:** Time to replan and reteach lessons can strengthen understanding of how teaching decisions affect pupil learning.
- **Starting small:** Piloting Lesson Study with one team or subject allows the approach to embed culturally before scaling more widely.

In practice, Lesson Study sustainability requires a balance of consistency and adaptability.

Barriers to effective implementation

Lesson Study can face challenges that affect its impact or sustainability. Common elements to consider include:

- **Fear of judgement:** If framed as performance evaluation rather than inquiry, teachers may be less open and reflective.
- **Weak facilitation:** Poorly supported Lesson Study can become procedural, with limited professional depth.
- **Lack of shared understanding:** Without a common language or clear purpose, teams may not be effectively focused on what the intended outcome.
- **Unclear inquiry questions:** Vague or unfocused questions are less likely to generate useful insights.
- **Limited integration:** If not embedded in the wider PL, staff may view Lesson Study as optional or peripheral.

Strong leadership is key to overcoming these barriers, providing clarity of purpose, effective facilitation, and alignment with school priorities.

Other considerations

Wider factors can influence how Lesson Study is introduced and sustained within a school's PL:

- **Preserving active ingredients:** While flexibility can help adaptation, features such as expert input and structured reflection are central to effectiveness.
- **Evaluating carefully:** Teacher learning and collaboration may be more useful indicators than short-term pupil outcomes, which rarely capture lasting impact.
- **Integrating with PL systems:** Lesson Study tends to be most effective when connected to existing professional learning structures rather than operating in isolation.
- **Promoting teacher agency:** Teachers are more likely to sustain Lesson Study when it offers purposeful and engaging experiences.
- **Accounting for costs:** Time, cover, and in some cases financial incentives may be needed to embed Lesson Study fully.

Lesson Study can be demanding but rewarding, with its long-term success depending as much on school culture and resources as on how it is designed.

Summary

Lesson Study can support teacher development by deepening content knowledge, promoting collaboration, and strengthening self-efficacy. Its impact on pupils, however, is less clear, with limited and often short-term evidence.

Key takeaways for PL leaders include:

- **Teacher benefits are more secure:** Reported improvements include stronger subject knowledge, more reflective practice, and greater motivation.
- **Pupil outcomes remain uncertain:** While some short-term gains are noted, robust evidence of lasting impact on learning is lacking.
- **Leadership is pivotal:** Lesson Study is more likely to embed when leaders provide time, trust, and a clear vision.
- **Sustainability requires integration:** Embedding Lesson Study within wider PL structures supports ongoing impact.

Lesson Study is promising but resource intensive. While its greatest value may lie in fostering rich professional dialogue, more robust, long-term evidence is needed to understand its full impact on pupils.

When citing this strand, please use the following reference:

National Institute of Teaching (2026). NIoT Evidence Toolkit: Lesson study strand

References

	Review	Years	Focus	# studies	Countries	Impact on pupils	Impact on teachers	Reporting quality
1	Benedict et al. (2023) Using lesson study to change teacher knowledge and practice: The role of knowledge sources in teacher change	2000 - 2021	CPD only	13	USA, England, Singapore	Not reported	Positive	High
2	Cheung & Wong (2014) Does Lesson Study work? : A systematic review on the effects of Lesson Study and Learning Study on teachers and students	2000 - 2010	CPD only	9	US, Hong Kong, Japan	Positive	Positive	Medium
3	Ding et al. (2024) A review of lesson study in mathematics education from 2015 to 2022: implementation and impact	2015 - 2022	ITE & CPD	75	USA, other countries not reported	Mixed	Positive	Medium
4	Fluminhan et al. (2022) The potential of lesson study and self-efficacy to enhance teacher professional development: A systematic literature review	2006 - 2021	ITE & CPD	8	US, Singapore, Netherlands, Serbia	Not reported	Positive	Medium
5	Seleznyov (2019) Lesson study beyond Japan: evaluating impact	2006 - 2016	CPD only	56	Australia, Canada, China, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, UK, USA	Mixed	Positive	Medium
6	Sims et al. (2021) What Are the Characteristics of Effective Teacher Professional Development? A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis	2002 - 2020	CPD only	119 (not all lesson study)	USA, UK, Italy, Australia, Netherlands, Canada,	Positive	Mixed	Excellent
7	Borg & Finne (2024) A scoping review of school	2011 - 2022	CPD (Leadership)	15	Hong Kong, Netherlands, USA,	Positive	Mixed	Medium

leadership practices in Lesson Study				Singapore, Indonesia, Japan, Taiwan, UK			
--------------------------------------	--	--	--	---	--	--	--

Review citations

- Benedict, A. E., Williams, J., Brownell, M. T., Chapman, L., Sweers, A., & Sohn, H. (2023). Using lesson study to change teacher knowledge and practice: The role of knowledge sources in teacher change. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *122*, 103951. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103951>
- Borg, E., & Finne, J. (2024). A scoping review of school leadership practices in Lesson Study. *Cogent Education*, *11*(1), Article 2353470. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2353470>
- Ding, M., Huang, R., Pressimone Beckowski, C., Li, X., & Li, Y. (2024). A review of lesson study in mathematics education from 2015 to 2022: implementation and impact. *ZDM – Mathematics Education*, *56*(1), 87–99. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11858-023-01538-8>
- Fluminhan, C. S. L., Marques, A. P. A. Z., & Schlünzen Junior, K. (2022). The potential of lesson study and self-efficacy to enhance teacher professional development: A systematic literature review. *TICs & EaD Em Foco*, *8*(2), 66–84. <https://doi.org/10.18817/ticseademfoco.v8i2.628>
- Ming Cheung, W., & Yee Wong, W. (2014). Does Lesson Study work? *International Journal for Lesson and Learning Studies*, *3*(2), 137–149. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJLLS-05-2013-0024>
- Seleznyov, S. (2019). Lesson study beyond Japan: evaluating impact. *International Journal for Lesson and Learning Studies*, *8*(1), 2–18. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJLLS-09-2018-0061>
- Sims, S., Fletcher-Wood, H., O'Mara-Eves, A., Cottingham, S., Stansfield, C., van Herwegen, J., & Anders, J. (2021). *What Are the Characteristics of Effective Teacher Professional Development? A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis*. London: Education Endowment Foundation. The report is available from: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/evidence-reviews/teacher-professional-development-characteristics>