

Using Mobile Technology for Teacher Training – Nigeria

The challenge

How to provide in-service training to over 60,000 teachers in 5 northern states in Nigeria with no or limited access to materials, internet, CPD opportunities and textbooks?

The context

Primary teachers in northern Nigeria are largely untrained and become teachers after leaving primary school themselves. TNAs conducted with samples of teachers



revealed that their own subject knowledge (of Maths, English and Science) was very poor and a



significant percentage failed tests designed for their own primary school pupils. Many teachers are not only illiterate in English but also in their mother tongue, Hausa. Class sizes range from 20 to 200 which clearly present enormous challenges to teachers in terms of management and achievement of learning outcomes. Textbooks are either unavailable in most schools or lucky teachers can borrow a class set from the principal's office. As there is no teacher's guide for these textbooks they are difficult to use in class and so teachers tend to avoid using them.

Classroom resources tend to be limited to a blackboard and chalk; teachers' techniques lack variety and focus mainly on reading, copying from the blackboard and rote memorisation. Lesson content is generally decontextualised and unrelated to pupils' everyday lives.



The project approach

4 teachers from each school are paired up according to their main subject area. Schools are grouped into clusters. Each cluster meets every 6 weeks to discuss the training topics covered and share experiences of lessons delivered. Training and support is organised in a cascade: members of the Teacher Development Team (TDT) train Teacher Facilitators (TFs). TFs train teachers, mentor them in schools through observation and feedback and facilitate cluster meetings. Teachers are encouraged to work with their partner to plan lessons, work through the training materials together, observe each other and provide mutual support in their daily teaching lives.



The training materials

Each teacher is given the following materials:

- copies of ready-made lesson plans (developed by another DfID-funded education project in Nigeria – ESSPIN) which they can use in place of a textbook with each of their classes
- a mobile phone with clips of good ELT classroom practice loaded onto it. The clips depict techniques such as teaching sounds, teaching songs and chants, reading a short text, setting up pair work, giving feedback etc

- a Teacher's Guide which includes activities (based on a think/watch/reflect model – see sample attached) that help them to engage with the clips and understand the techniques being demonstrated. The Teacher's Guide explains the rationale behind the techniques and suggests steps for lessons with the same techniques to try out in class
- a Teacher's Journal in which they are expected to regularly record their thoughts and opinions about the training materials and the experiences in their classrooms when trying out new techniques. This is then brought to the cluster meetings for sharing with other teachers
- Sets of flashcards and posters have been produced and distributed to schools together with audio stories and speakers that connect to the mobile phones for use in class

Lessons learnt from the primary training programme

There have been successes and set-backs, as with all things! Here's a summary of our conclusions:

Successes:

- Pupils are using a greater variety of materials in their lessons (flashcards, realia) produced or brought in by their teacher
- More pupils are interested in the lesson and learning (many hands up)
- The classroom is organised differently to reflect a more learner-centred approach (pupils sitting in groups at tables or on the floor)
- Enthusiasm and support of many stakeholders – local government, training teams, TFs, head teachers and the MoE
- Great appeal of the mobile technology to teachers and its potential ease of use
- Joined up nature and on-going support of the project model – face-to-face training through clusters, TF and TDT involvement together with the digital input. Teachers feel supported between training events and cluster meetings, not left high and dry
- 2,578 teachers have been trained
- Teachers are making their own low-cost/no-cost materials and attempting to implement group work in class
- Lessons are more varied and provide greater opportunities for engagement amongst pupils



Set-backs:

Capacity building of project staff -

- National and international consultants deliver training to TDT members who deliver training to TFs who then deliver the same materials to teachers. It has been difficult to ensure quality at every level of the cascade and the danger that the message gets diluted is a real one.

- Only one state is familiar with the lesson plans. Little training has been provided on how to use lesson plans and this needs to be rectified if teachers are to use them effectively. Similarly all levels of personnel involved in the project need to know more about how to use the materials: Teacher's Guide, Teacher's Journal, mobile phone and clips, etc

Materials -

- Literacy levels of teachers in rural areas is low and some struggle to read and write in Hausa, let alone English. Discussions early on in the project were held as to which language would be most appropriate for the Teacher's Guide and the general consensus was that English with key terms in Hausa would be a good way forward. However, it has become clear from the feedback received that many teachers are finding it difficult to read so much text in English and appreciate the Hausa translations. Though rejected by our local colleagues, in retrospect it would have been better to produce the Teacher's Guide completely in Hausa and with a lot more visual support as well
- Many teachers have never been trained and struggle with a reflective approach to professional development (e.g. the Teacher's Journal was largely neglected by trainers and teachers alike since its purpose was unclear as a tool for development)
- The materials are designed for self-study (in itself a completely unfamiliar way of working for our teachers) and for teachers to work with their partner in school but this has proved difficult due to time issues and the demands made on teachers by the Teacher's Guide tasks. However, feedback on use of the Teacher's Guide suggests that teachers like the 'think' and 'watch' sections but don't see the point of the 'reflect' section
- Video clip outlines were scripted at the same time as the activities to accompany them were written for the Teacher's Guide. Clips were filmed quickly due to time pressure and budgetary constraints so some of them did not model the sort of best practice we had hoped for and had to be rejected. Because we had drafted the clips at the same time as the Teacher's Guide, if the clip was changed during filming then the tasks in the Teacher's Guide also had to be changed which was very time-consuming and proved to be quite an inefficient way of working. On reflection we should have just filmed lessons from the lesson plans but we were – for reasons unclear – strongly encouraged to develop video clip outlines from scratch
- The Teacher's Guide cannot work independently of the video materials so it is necessary for them to be used together. Unforeseen delays in distribution of the clips have meant that teachers were forced to wait for the full set of materials to arrive in their states. Or trainers had to run workshops without the clips which also lessened the impact of the content

Training and teaching -

- Cluster meetings are overloaded with content and have become more like training workshops than a true 'meeting' i.e. a chance to review and discuss the concerns of classroom life
- Many teachers have enthusiastically organised their pupils in groups in class but then don't know what sort of activities they can do to encourage interaction. For example

I observed several lessons where pupils were given flashcards but then didn't have anything to do with them

Conclusions

We are now in the process of developing training materials for Junior Secondary School teachers and are determined to avoid repeating the mistakes we made at Primary level! So far we still favour using mobile phones and clips as the basis of our training but we hope there will be far more emphasis on rooting the training in what teachers do every day through their schemes of work. There are no lesson plans to incorporate as these were in the primary phase of the project which means trainers and teachers can have more input into and control of the content of the training.

Even though JSS teachers are qualified and will have undergone pre-service training we're going to keep textual materials to a minimum and plan to focus more on using the clips as a basis for micro-teaching practice and lesson planning in training sessions. Back in schools teachers will be encouraged to try out their lesson plans and discuss demonstration lessons given by their mentors. We want to help teachers develop their critical awareness of what they do and be in a position to evaluate their classroom practice in order to bring insights and ideas to the next training session. We have captured all of these initial ideas in a cycle which is a draft copy only and by no means final!

