

School Improvement and Teacher Professional Development

Introduction

The scope for improving the quality of education in Nigeria is enormous. Better school administration, good buildings and facilities, first-rate teaching standards, appropriate teacher training, fair salaries and clear career paths for education professionals would all contribute to giving Nigerian children better opportunities – to become literate, numerate and equipped with the skills to fully take part in Nigerian society.

What is ESSPIN's approach?

ESSPIN, recognising that there are no quick fixes, takes a radical approach that puts schools and teachers centre stage. This approach simultaneously supports change inside schools – by improving school management and the teaching and learning taking place in the classroom – and outside schools, by working with communities, state and local governments.

ESSPIN focuses on schools because schools are where children learn. ESSPIN's approach to school improvement takes into account all the factors affecting schools, both within and outside schools. Within schools this covers management, teaching and learning and the school environment. Outside schools it means helping decision-makers provide schools with the resources and services for schools to work better.

Strategy

ESSPIN starts by arranging meetings, workshops and seminars for key education policy and decision-makers in each state to discuss their particular needs and what can be done within the directions set by their Medium-Term Sector Strategies (MTSSs) (see also ESSPIN briefing note 1: Planning and Medium-Term Sector Strategy). These discussions give senior staff opportunities to seek support from ESSPIN in particular areas of need.

Improving learning outcomes means providing teachers with specific training focusing on literacy and numeracy and, at the same time, providing training for head teachers in school management. School improvement schemes may also build on existing initiatives, such as in Lagos where school improvement activities are being linked to a state school renovation programme.

In schools

School improvement is about supporting schools in order to improve student learning outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity to manage change. Support for school improvement at state level is the responsibility of a school advisory services unit within the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) School Services Directorate, newly created as a result of the organisational reform of SUBEBs. The advisory units are assisted by State School Improvement Teams (SSITs) who channel support to School Support Officers (SSOs) working directly with schools.

State Quality Teams

Senior people from across state education systems come together in State Quality Teams (SQTs) that give direction and oversight to school improvement. ESSPIN helps these teams sharpen the skills they need to drive school improvement forward.

State School Improvement Teams

The SSITs are a resource for school improvement within the state. They are made up of 20 to 30 people seconded from across the education sector, for example lecturers from teacher training colleges and universities, head teachers and inspectors. Once trained themselves, the SSITs begin guiding and supporting SSOs to deliver training on school leadership and school improvement to head teachers. They also offer a modular programme for head teachers and class teachers to improve generic teaching skills with a focus on literacy and numeracy.

The SSITs, with the SSOs, also provide an advisory service that both head teachers and classroom teachers can call on (see also ESSPIN briefing note 5: Quality Assurance).

School Support Officers

SSOs are located in each Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) and provide advisory support to schools. This work involves leading cluster and school-based workshops together with regular follow-up visits. The SSOs are also responsible for monitoring and reporting on progress. Close links between the SSOs and the quality assurance services in the LGEAs ensure that advice to schools is related to the school inspection process, and addresses specific needs and deficiencies.

Outside schools

Teacher training

To address the external factors that affect school improvement, ESSPIN helps states to review teacher training colleges, develop plans to improve teacher training and integrate these plans into MTSSs.

Political will to translate plans into action, reform colleges and curricula, and match college intakes to demand for teachers, varies between states. ESSPIN helps prompt dialogue on career paths and salary scales, and how they link to professional development.

School environment

Children need a school environment that encourages learning. This means appropriate school buildings and facilities. ESSPIN involves SUBEBs and communities in pilot school construction projects, in planning and constructing cost-effective classrooms, safe water supplies and toilets. These pilots serve as models for other schools to follow.

ESSPIN also involves SUBEBs and School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs) in managing ESSPIN grants and in leveraging other resources to support and implement school development plans.

Future challenges

High level political support for translating plans into action is vital for transforming schools. Where state commissioners drive change, progress is rapid and states implement and fund changes. Where political support is weaker, ESSPIN takes a two-pronged approach, encouraging change champions in middle and senior management to drive change from within, as well as directly approaching political leaders.

School improvement process

