



## Making lessons more effective

# Practice Paper

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## Introduction

ESSPIN's goal is to improve pupil learning. In 2008, when the programme began, it would be fair to say that classrooms in Nigeria, like the schools themselves and the institutions that were supposed to support them, were failing.

Teachers' classroom skills and content knowledge were weak; they understood neither how to teach effectively, nor what to teach. A study of classroom practice undertaken as part of ESSPIN's baseline described lessons where teachers organised learners as a whole class for 97% of the time, all but one minute of a lesson, and spent more than half their time standing at the blackboard.

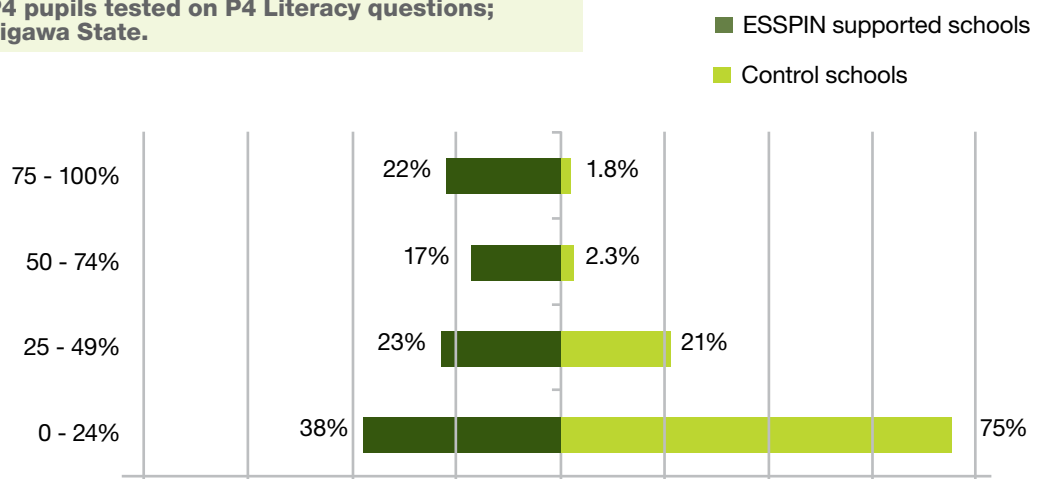
Mostly learners were passive. For half the time they were listening to the teacher, while for another 10% of their time they did nothing at all. A second baseline study looked at the degree to which teachers had sufficient working knowledge to teach the Primary 4- 6 curriculum. Out of 20,000 teachers in Kwara State, only 75 teachers reached this standard whilst there were no teachers at all reaching it in either Jigawa or Kano States.

It was therefore not surprising that pupils were not achieving. Pupils lacked the foundation skills they require by the end of Primary 2 and so could not cope with the curriculum in Primary 3 and above; lacking even basic reading or number skills, they had little chance of accessing subjects such as science.

So, after six years, what success does ESSPIN have to report?

This tornado diagram compares assessment results for randomly selected Primary 4 pupils from ESSPIN supported schools and control schools. A shocking 96% of pupils in schools not supported by ESSPIN scored less than half marks on the P4 literacy assessment, compared with 61% in ESSPIN supported schools.

**P4 pupils tested on P4 Literacy questions; Jigawa State.**



## Challenges

Although achievement is still low, the teachers in ESSPIN supported schools had had little direct work on literacy by the time of the assessment and pupils in P4 had not had the benefit of working through the foundations in P1-3.

The improvement of learning outcomes requires wide-ranging change throughout the entire education system, including at LGEA, SUBEB and State government level. However this paper focuses only on those actors within the school itself and those who have a direct responsibility for building teacher capacity, interacting professionally with them on a regular basis.

ESSPIN and the States it supports have developed a theory of change, shown below, which describes what has to be in place at different levels of the education system if ESSPIN and the States are to reach their goal of improved pupil learning.

ESSPIN's early documentation of education in Nigeria described a system in crisis, without an overall sense of direction and whose staff lacked, at all levels, the confidence in their own ability to change. From day 1, as it began to develop its school and classroom level work, ESSPIN tried to engage with these fundamental problems. By working through these underlying issues with the States ESSPIN developed a sound platform from which to identify and address the more visible issues involving classrooms, schools and the provision of training and support.

Pupils achieve Learning Outcome Benchmarks in literacy and numeracy

if

Class teachers teach literacy and numeracy competently

if

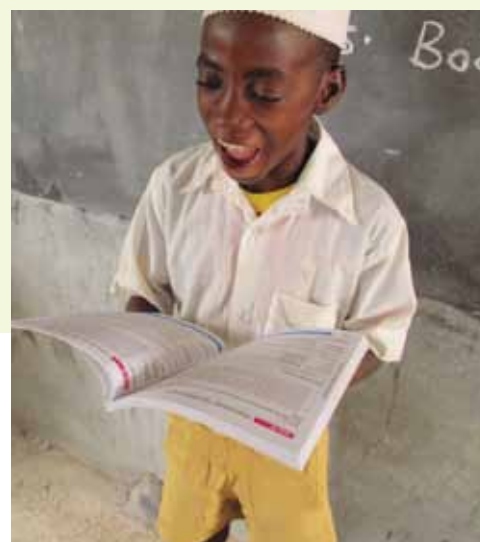
Head teachers lead teaching in the schools  
Schools spend an hour a day on literacy and numeracy

if

School Support Officers train and support Head teachers and class teachers, and monitor progress towards improvement

if

State School Improvement Teams lead the improvement of practice, training and supporting SSOs



'Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope.'  
Kofi Annan



### Helping people do their jobs better: 'reculturing, not reorganising'

From the beginning, ESSPIN planned to ensure that results are replicable, scalable and sustainable long after the end of the programme. For this to happen all activities need to become embedded as integral, routine parts of the systems and processes (including budgetary allocations) within the education sector. This in turn requires changing the behaviour, and improving the performance, of people who work within those systems, largely through including staff who will be affected by change in the development of the new strategies.

A conscious decision was taken not to work through a Project Implementation Unit, Desk Officers or similar.

Instead, time was taken to analyse the structure of SUBEBs and LGEAs, identifying the appropriate place within the system where responsibility for the decisions and activities which make up school improvement should lie, and then to build the capacity of the staff.

One such example is the reoriented role of the School Support Officers (SSOs), the large number of field office staff that are located at LGEA level. Previous programmes have identified and utilised these officers as trainers or mentors. But possibly because these responsibilities have been seen as additional to their 'real' State job, and with their activities funded by programmes, once the programme has withdrawn the additional activities cease.

ESSPIN's approach has been a long term one, working with SUBEB and LGEA management and building on existing systems and processes to redefine SSO roles (placing responsibility for school and classroom improvement at the centre), agree performance standards and secure State funding allocations to enable this changed role to become established.



Teaching basic literacy and numeracy effectively is at the heart of our work

## Developing a shared understanding about learner centred education

ESSPIN's approach to teacher development centres around what goes on inside the school; its leadership and management, the quality of its teaching and learning, and with the relationships with the community it serves and the LGEA officers who should support it. The approach is grounded in a sound understanding of the situation in schools based on evidence from the suite of baseline, and subsequent, studies and on lengthy discussions with key actors within SUBEBs, LGEAs and schools. Considerable time was (and continues to be) invested in helping

**States** to rethink the vision they have for their schools, and how they can plan to achieve this vision

**LGEAs**, including the SSOs, to reorient their priorities and practices towards support for schools

**Head teachers** to understand that they are responsible for raising standards in their schools and know how to do this through better leadership

**Teachers** to understand that they are responsible for teaching children, not the curriculum, and to make some improvements to their teaching.

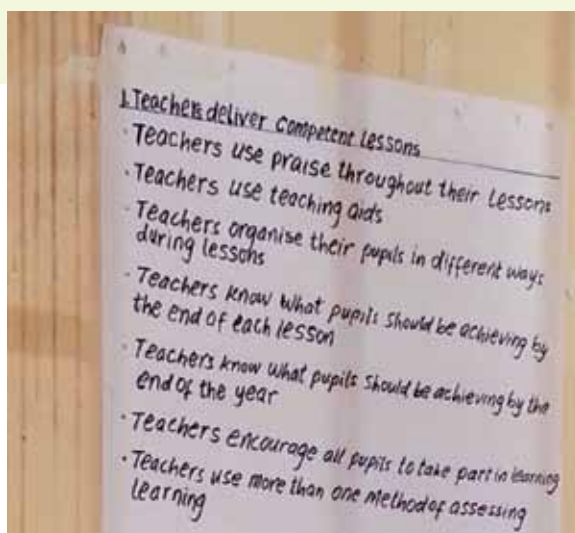
Agreement with State partners on sets of standards has helped strengthen States' understanding of school and quality issues, by developing a shared picture of what success in the venture of improving schools and classrooms might look like.

States' responsibility for monitoring progress against these standards (the School Reporting system) and their involvement in the evaluation process (the Composite Surveys) have further increased their engagement with school quality issues.

These agreed, and widely disseminated, standards include a set of competencies for effective lesson delivery and Head Teacher effectiveness, plus an agreed overall standard for school quality. These standards inform the content framework of the training and support programme.

In addition, States have established a set of learning outcome benchmarks for literacy and numeracy (and in Kano for Hausa), which clarify what pupils should be able to achieve in each of the primary grades.

Everyone understands what makes a good lesson: competencies displayed in a Kaduna school



A competency in action - using teaching aids



## Believing in change

ESSPIN's work has a clear change agenda and this, critically, includes changing what happens in classrooms. To this end it locates the activities of its training and support package as close to the school as possible, much of it within the school itself. 'Learning in the setting in which you work.... changes the individual and the context simultaneously.' (Fullan, 2001.) Understanding and applying change theory forms a part of the training of SSOs and Head teachers, who are supported to understand and work through the processes involved in introducing what might appear to be straight forward pieces of school level reform, such as introducing lesson observations.

However ESSPIN is not just attempting to improve what happens in individual classrooms or even schools, but to change what happens in school systems. For example, essential to improving classroom practice has been the linking of training with support at school level.

This has involved not only the refocusing of the role of the Head teacher and the SSO but also helping SUBEB reorient their teacher development activities, away from training a series of groups of individual teachers on a diverse range of topics towards a more joined up approach guided by a State teacher development policy, such as those developed by Kaduna and Kwara SUBEBs.

Engaging with the States in the collection of a strong evidence base about teaching and learning has helped develop a genuine and exciting sense that change is possible, at micro and macro level.

The routine termly school reporting system shows to an SSO the results of their work within 'their' cluster, whilst the Composite Survey powerfully demonstrates the impact on learning achievements of sustained and focused effort at system level.



The school reporting system shows how many teachers are teaching competently. This includes using group work



## ESSPIN's response: training and support for school improvement

ESSPIN's training and support package for school improvement developed and changed in conjunction with the discussions outlined above. Technical issues around content and delivery systems were shaped by States' financial and organisational realities.

At the same time, the imperative to improve learning outcomes, which gained impetus from the dialogue around the Baseline and Composite Surveys, began to shape changes in processes within the States, and even at Federal level.

The proven success of ESSPIN's training and support model encouraged States to commit their UBEC Teacher Professional Development intervention funds to implement its scale up, whilst UBEC themselves adapted their guidelines to encourage more school and cluster based work.

Turning now to the technical challenges to improving classroom practice that ESSPIN faced, the table on the next page summarises the key strategies which were developed to address them.



Engaging, pupil-  
focused teaching  
of literacy

	Challenges	Responses
Class teachers	<p>Ineffective lesson delivery caused by</p> <hr/> <p>poor subject knowledge</p> <hr/> <p>weak generic teaching skills</p> <hr/> <p>poor teacher attendance and punctuality</p>	<p>Agree with States a standard for the delivery of an effective lesson</p> <p>Locate teacher capacity development activities within the school itself or as close to it as possible; encouraging appropriateness of content and delivery, collegiality and peer support</p> <p>Provide and support the use of structured materials (lesson plans) which ensure teachers can deliver two hours of quality instruction daily; whilst strengthening teachers' own understanding of key basic literacy (and numeracy) concepts</p>
Head teachers	<p>Stagnating schools caused by weak school leadership, with Head teachers lacking authority and spending little time on purposeful activity</p>	<p>Agree with States a standard for effective school leadership</p> <p>Strengthen two key aspects of the role of the Head teacher, through training and support</p> <hr/> <p>academic leadership</p> <hr/> <p>strengthens own understanding of pedagogy and lesson plans, to enable them to encourage good practice</p> <hr/> <p>supports Head teachers to introduce two key school level systems to improve the effectiveness of lesson delivery</p> <hr/> <p>supports Head teachers to lead school processes to increase learning time</p> <hr/> <p>school improvement planning</p>
School Support Officers	<p>Large cadres of supervisory officers exist, but they have an 'inspectorial' orientation and lack the direction and skills to improve schools</p> <p>Their work lacks coherent and systematic management</p>	<p>Agree with the States a reoriented role for the SSOs towards improving schools, and strengthen their skills in</p> <hr/> <p>training (on leadership and using the lesson plans)</p> <hr/> <p>delivering school based support</p> <hr/> <p>reporting on progress with school improvement</p> <p>Support LGEAs and SUBEB to reconceptualise the relationship between support staff and 'their' schools, ensuring that each officer has responsibility for the improvement of between five and eight schools.</p> <p>Strengthen the quality of school visits</p>
State School Improvement Teams	<p>Existing extensive, but uncoordinated, ad hoc and often inappropriate, workshop programmes are failing to impact on teacher performance</p> <p>In-service workshops are delivered by CoEs who have little engagement with State staff responsible for schools /teachers, and whose staff are divorced from the reality of teaching</p>	<p>Develop full time dedicated teams of respected practitioner-educators to lead school improvement; delivering training and support as well as needs assessment, monitoring and impact evaluation</p> <p>Ensure these teams become a State resource, appropriately located within School Service Directorates and are managed and funded by SUBEB</p>



## Lessons learned during the life of the main programme

### How the provision of high quality lesson plans improves lesson delivery

ESSPIN has developed two sets of lesson plans, for literacy and numeracy, beginning with plans for P1-3. The lesson plans provide teachers with two, daily, well-planned and structured lessons which cover what, when and how the children should be learning. These plans lead the teachers through each lesson, week, term and year, giving them step by step direct instructions. As well as ensuring pupils' receive a quality lesson, the plans improve teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical skills.

They provide a solid base from which teachers can develop their understanding of classroom practice, including areas such as behaviour management, inclusion and supporting pupil learning through a good use of learning materials and questioning skills. The lesson plans are therefore tied, like the training and support framework and the monitoring and evaluation system, to the teacher standards. Both the instructions and the actual language used have been kept as simple as possible, to help teachers develop their English language skills, thus positioning the lesson plans as a context driven tool for learning English.

### How were the plans developed?

Literacy and numeracy lesson plans were first developed in Kwara at the request of the Honourable Commissioner for Education in response to the first Teacher Development Needs Assessment conducted there in 2009, and which first identified weak teacher content knowledge as a major problem. The plans were developed by the Kwara State School Improvement Team (see below for a description of the role of a SSIT as educator practitioners and drivers of school improvement) with guidance from a long term international member of staff.



Lesson plans help teachers try new ways of teaching

The DFID guidance note 'Learning and teaching materials: policy and practice for provision' (2011) identified three key areas to be considered when developing quality learning and teaching materials and it is clear that ESSPIN's processes reflected best practice.

Key area	ESSPIN's development process
Conformity to curriculum	<p>The SSIT were supported to analyse the NERDC curriculum</p> <p>The SSIT broke down the NERDC P1-3 curriculum into yearly work plans</p>
Suitability of content to the needs of the teachers and students	<p>Teachers were observed as they taught the draft lessons and feedback sessions held with teachers and pupils for their comments</p> <p>Comments were reviewed and plans revised by the SSIT</p>
Methodologies (the use of exercises, activities and practical work, to encourage the development of skills and competencies)	<p>The SSIT developed activities and pre-tested them in primary schools</p> <p>The SSIT developed a simple lesson structure and trained teachers to understand it</p> <p>Activities were mapped onto blocks of five week periods (half a term) to ensure proper coverage and progression for teacher competencies as well as for pupil learning outcomes</p>

Working through this time-consuming process of development gave opportunities to the Kwara SSIT to investigate comprehensively early primary education provision; exploring the NERDC curriculum, how it was being implemented in the State and how this could be improved. The resulting lesson plans are firmly rooted in the reality of class teacher capability and circumstances.

Lesson activities were written with the close involvement of Nigerian teachers themselves, and at least some of the activities were within reach of their current capabilities. This gives teachers the confidence to try something less familiar within the plan, and incrementally builds their generic teaching skills.



Teachers involved in the design process: discussing images for the lesson plans

This grounded-in-practice approach to materials and training development has been followed when developing all ESSPIN's training so all stakeholders are encouraged to understand their existing practice and to try to improve upon it, step by achievable step.

DFID's final two recommendations on best practice concern the writing, editing and design stages. Considerable technical support has gone into the production of high quality materials, rooted in recommended design practice.

This makes the lesson plans as easy to use as possible but also, by putting these quality materials into the hands of teachers, ESSPIN is demonstrating its belief in teachers' ability to use them well and its conviction that classrooms can change.

Initially P1-3 plans were introduced to other States in a staged way, starting with 'lesson plan light', part-plans which focussed on the letter/sound sections (literacy) and number concepts, bonds and calculations sections (numeracy).

Word building skills are key for early reading, whilst developing an understanding of number is key for any further mathematical development. In addition the 2010 MLA report identified phonics work as particularly weak, with less than a quarter of pupils able to name letters or match the first letter to a word. Further, as part of the lesson plan development process Kwara teachers identified this section of the plan as being particularly difficult to teach, so 'lesson plan light' enabled teachers in the other states to benefit from some intensive phonics training.



Discussing the layout and assessing readability of the text



### How are teachers supported to use the lesson plans? linkages with the Leadership programme

There are three mechanisms for the delivery of training to teachers:

direct workshops delivered by SSOs for three teachers per school accompanied by their Head teacher, to enable them to deliver literacy and numeracy lessons using the lesson plans. Because not all teachers are able to attend the workshops the Head teacher is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that all teachers who use the lesson plans work together to plan the delivery of the lessons from the plans, based on the workshop learning.

three, one hour, professional development meetings per term for all teachers in the school led by the Head teacher, supported by the SSO. These meetings address areas of lesson delivery identified in the criteria for an effective lesson. Head teachers are given, during their Leadership training, explicit guidance and considerable support from the SSOs to hold these meetings.

regular supportive observation and feedback sessions conducted by the Head teacher, which focus on helping the teacher to achieve the standard for delivering an effective lesson.

### What difference are the plans making?

A record both of the opinions of teachers and observations of their practice as they learn to engage with the lesson plans has been kept, principally in order to feed back into the development process. But this record also documents changing teacher practice. Classroom observations and informal discussions with teachers show that teachers really enjoy using the lesson plans and that they are generally trying to teach even the 'difficult' phonics sections in their classrooms.



Teachers are encouraged to plan lessons together

A teacher explores the content of a lesson plan



Sounds are taught in many classrooms through word displays and enjoyable activities such as writing in the sand, writing on each other's backs, the 'What's in the box' game and word building games with letter cards. Teachers are enthusiastic, asking questions when they don't understand and supporting each other to learn how to teach the activities.

Many teachers admit that at first they find the techniques difficult to implement even though they have been kept as simple as possible. However they have generally not been discouraged and in many schools have risen to the challenge, requesting support where necessary and finding ways to support each other.

### From the notes of a teachers meeting in Doka school Kaduna 2014

The teachers identified the following as their challenges in teaching the Literacy and Numeracy plans..... They picked the 3rd challenge as the most crucial and the one they wished to resolve first.

#### **3. Teachers' inability to say some of the sounds.**

In an attempt to resolve it, the teachers brainstormed and had the following suggestions adopted. Thereafter, the teachers will be supporting each other by:

.....saying the right sounds to each other.

.....observing other teachers teach the sounds they are good at and;

.....help others to teach sounds others find difficult to teach where they are not confident enough.

The HT and the SSO will help the teachers to support each other. The SSIT will visit after two weeks for further support.



Children practising letter formation in the sand, indoors and out

Many of the ideas and methods still remain outside of teachers' experience, even with the training and support package in place, as the Head teachers' and even the SSOs' experience of quality teaching is limited. Away of addressing this challenge has been the production of DVDs showing teachers teaching example lessons from the plans. The informal record of change has been confirmed by the first Composite Survey which evaluated teacher behaviour (although not their content knowledge), and reported that, 'Across five ESSPIN states, an estimated 67% of teachers demonstrate competence based on agreed criteria'.

'Within this group of teachers, the proportion who met the overall standard is significantly higher in ESSPIN supported schools (80%) compared with teachers in control schools (63%).

Using a more rigorous teacher proficiency standard, again across the five states, teachers in ESSPIN supported schools significantly outperform teachers in control schools.'

The introduction of lesson plans is bringing about a change in teaching methodology and many teachers are starting to use a less didactic style, with classrooms becoming more open and participatory.

As with any change, some teachers have embraced it and used it as a vehicle to transform their teaching whilst others have not taken up the ideas at all. Over the long term, teachers need a great deal of support in different ways, to help them access the plans and improve teaching and learning. This will be looked at further in the section on Future Challenges and Plans.

By the end of the main programme, some schools in all States were using at least 'lesson plan light', whilst some States, particularly Lagos and Kano, have gone much further. In Kano, for example, all schools are using the full lesson plans for P1. Development work is well advanced for the P4-6 lesson plans.



Lesson plans encourage teachers to use role play, making lessons both enjoyable and effective





### How head teachers can become leaders of learning in their schools

ESSPIN's work places a great importance on the social dimension of teacher development, stressing the importance of the whole school working together to raise learning outcomes. The role of the Head teacher in our model of change is to be an academic leader for the school, supporting his or her teachers to deliver better lessons and ensuring that the lesson plans are used well.

This vision of Headship represents a major change from the situation reported in the Baseline Survey which described a general lack of understanding and recognition of the role of Headship, weak pedagogical skills and subject knowledge amongst the Head teachers themselves, together with weak 'role' authority and a poor sense of Head teacher agency. How have we tried to realise the change and what success have we had?

ESSPIN began by leading discussions, using the evidence from the Baselines, within the States around a vision of achievable improvements in school leadership. These were captured in the criteria which comprise the standard for a competent Head teacher and which in turn informed the content of the training and support framework for Head teachers.

Some of the issues which contribute to poor school leadership are deeply entrenched and are beyond the scope of even a determined and skilled individual to change. The academic leadership strand of the Head teacher programme concentrates on developing the Head teachers' sense of agency, encouraging them to think about what they **can** change.

Head teachers are supported to develop the kind of authority that comes from being demonstrably competent and fair, rather than relying on the authority conferred by their post (weak in the context of Nigerian headship).



In effective lessons, both teachers and pupils use the chalkboard



It introduces them to a set of understandings about their role as the Head teacher of an effective school; how adults learn, team working and consensus building, which underpins how they work with their teachers; and accountability, which underpins all the work they will do with their SBMCs

a set of simple management skills which will improve the quality of teaching and learning in their schools: conducting a lesson observation and giving useful feedback, together with establishing, recording and using a school system for lesson observations; promoting better teaching by leading three teacher professional development meetings per term; establishing and using systems to monitor and improve pupil attendance and teacher punctuality

a body of core knowledge about the structure of the lesson plans, the foundations of literacy and numeracy, and what constitutes a well taught lesson.

This content is delivered as part of a series of short workshops led by the SSOs. However the routine school visits by the SSO who is responsible for the improvement of between five and eight schools, and who therefore knows his or her schools well, are arguably more important than the workshop element of the programme. The school visits help ensure that learning from the workshops is translated into action within the school.

Is our work making a difference? The first Composite Survey evaluated Head teacher effectiveness using the agreed standard. Their finding was that 'across five ESSPIN states, an estimated 13% of all public primary schools meet the Head teacher effectiveness standard'.

Within this group of schools, the proportion who met the standard is significantly higher in ESSPIN supported states schools (24%) compared with control schools (11%).



Head teachers explore activities from a lesson plan during a workshop session



They can then help their teachers in the classroom

The report also showed that although ESSPIN supported Head teachers performed slightly better than control Head teachers on all criteria, the difference between the two groups was largely due to a single criterion - whether the Headteacher carries out at least one lesson observation each week (in 34% of ESSPIN supported schools compared to just 5% of control schools).

Given the importance of conducting routine, supportive lesson plans as a tool for improving lesson delivery this is encouraging.

### How School Support Officers can reinvent their roles

It was clear from the very beginning of the programme that schools needed to improve but equally clear that they needed considerable and regular support in order to do so. An early study of staffing in LGEAs showed that a large cadre of supervisory officers existed in generously staffed School Service Directorates and sections (at LGEA level) who could provide this support, but they were not doing so. The most frequently cited reason for this was the lack of resources which kept officers deskbound.

There were however additional issues – notably the lack of a clear role definition so officers regarded themselves as ‘Inspectors’, pointing out shortcomings in school performance rather than helping do anything to raise it.

There were no standards for ratios of schools to support staff, and no person specification or selection criteria for these jobs, which did not appear to form part of a rational career progression for education staff.

A major challenge was therefore to help States develop functional advisory services at LGEA level, charged with school support duties rather than an administrative compliance model, to support schools as they began the daunting process of improvement.



An effective  
Primary 4 lesson  
in writing a letter





Processes varied across states but major tasks included

gaining State interest in the idea of school support (not easy as the dominant 'Inspectoral' paradigm was a very strong one). Evidence from the baselines was very useful, as was engaging key staff with the situations in their schools through structured school visits

discussing and agreeing what the core responsibilities of the staff should be. Broad agreement on three key responsibilities (training, support and reporting on progress) was agreed. This was reflected in a name change for these staff in all States; for example from Area Supervisor to School Support Officer (Kano), or to School Improvement Officer (Lagos). It was important to retain the focus on a change to an existing role as a State public servant, not to view changes as a set of temporary additional tasks

engaging with and implementing functional reviews of SUBEB and LGEA structures

helping SUBEB plan, budget and finally release funds to enable SSOs to carry out their reoriented roles.

As their new roles were being discussed there was a lot of scepticism expressed about the capacity of SSOs, however there is now widespread faith in their capacity to deliver effectively. As their role has evolved, their training has developed to enable them to meet the new demands.

Every term for the first two years of the programme SSOs attend a one week workshop led by the SSIT. Three days of this are spent on mastering the content of that term's Leadership Workshop for Head teachers which they then have to deliver. The remaining days cover specific content for SSOs including

On this page and the next: a well structured lesson on fractions



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basic training skills

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their role in the School Reporting system

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making school visits effective

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the specific support they will offer to schools during their three routine school visits for that term

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preparing to lead continuing school improvement once the initial programme of workshops has been completed.

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### How State School Improvement Teams can drive change

Commitment and leadership at State level are vital elements in the change process. Strong and accountable State systems matter; not only to manage successful programme roll-out and sustain improvements long after the initial inputs have ceased, but most importantly to determine the direction of educational change in accordance with their State's priorities. ESSPIN's overall engagement with States' leadership is documented elsewhere. The focus here will be ESSPIN's efforts to raise the level of discourse around education by demonstrating good practice to decision makers and supporting them to develop systems to build on this practice.

One key element in this has been the development of State School Improvement Teams (SSITs) in each of the ESSPIN States. SSIT members are

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skilled practitioner-educators, receiving intensive personal and professional development. This has given them fresh perspectives on school and teacher development and is enabling them to overcome entrenched barriers to improvement

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proven to be effective. Documented feedback from schools, LGEAs and communities is providing evidence of impact of their work



respected and acknowledged as professional leaders. Each SSIT has a clear sense of purpose, works as a team, and supports each other to achieve. In each State the SSITs have gained the respect of senior staff in the SUBEB and Ministry and are seen as an essential resource for future school and teacher development.

Although they have been trained and supported by ESSPIN, the SSIT are State entities. Although their responsibilities and influence stretch beyond this, one of their main roles is to act as master trainers, coaches and mentors for the SSOs.

The modalities that existed at the beginning of the ESSPIN programme for delivering in-service training gave the State only limited control over managing training; it was regarded as a purely administrative function, with the Training Officer being a relatively lowly placed officer usually within the Directorate of Human Resources. The professional decisions were made by tertiary education institutions to which training was outsourced. These institutions - and their staff – had (and still have) variable understandings of the needs of State primary schools and may have taken decisions with the operational needs of the institution, rather than the State, uppermost.

Developing the SSITs has given control to the State. They can ensure that training addresses State needs and is responsive to the situation in their schools. They can manage the delivery of training by a skilled team of practitioner-educators who 'belong' to the State, and who are trained in interventions which are likely to make a difference.

There are a few minor differences between different SSITs but overall their selection and conditions of work send key messages about the changes ESSPIN hoped to see. SSIT members are

selected on merit against transparent criteria, rather than being appointed. This has given them enormous credibility and self-belief



In Primary 1, children use number lines to learn about number sequences



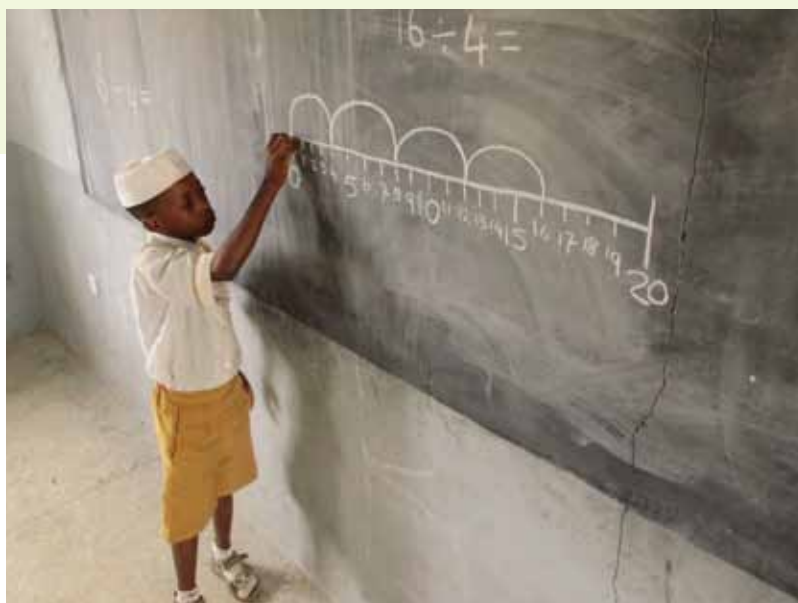


redeployed on a full time basis to the SSIT, continuing to receive their normal salary. The message is that they are carrying out State work in a professional manner rather than fitting in additional tasks at the behest of a transient project. When they speak of school improvement matters, they speak with the authority of the State

managed by SUBEB. Modalities differ by State, but broadly SSIT's are now institutionalized within Advisory Service Units, usually led by a Deputy Director and sitting within the Directorate of School Services, SUBEB.

During the pilot phase – the first two years when ESSPIN was developing its model and establishing proof of concept with the States, funding work in a limited number of schools per State – the role of the SSIT was to work directly with Head Teachers and teachers. One result of this was that the SSIT developed a sound practical understanding of what was happening in schools, and what worked in terms of school improvement. They were able to improve their training skills, and established their credibility both with schools and with the State.

As the programme began to scale up the role of the SSIT of necessity changed, to one where they now largely work through the SSOs, whose role began to come into clearer focus. A SSIT member is expected to observe each of their SSOs as they deliver training (using the same principles and documentation as for lesson observations) and as they conduct a school visit, once a term. Monitoring of SSIT performance should be the responsibility of the Advisory Service Unit, Directorate of School Services. However they are neither sufficient in number or in technical understanding to fulfil this role well and this is an area that needs further work.



By Primary 4, they use number lines to learn division

## Future challenges and plans

ESSPIN's challenge until 2016 is twofold; extending its reach and deepening its effectiveness.

### Extending ESSPIN's reach

Over the past six years ESSPIN's reach, in terms of numbers of teachers and Head teachers worked with, has expanded dramatically and will continue to do so. There are plans which, if realised, will ensure that from September 2014 ESSPIN will be working in all schools in all the focus States, a potential total of 15,500 schools. This scale up has happened largely at the States' expense. Broadly, figures in the first column show the number of schools where school improvement activities were funded largely by ESSPIN, and the rest largely by the States.

Because States take the major share of financial responsibility for the programme the model has evolved in different ways and at different paces in each State. This has demanded great flexibility from ESSPIN as we struggle to respond to the differing contexts and aspirations of the States. Kano exemplifies this, having developed its own distinctive Teaching Skills Programme. All primary schools in the State began working through a modified programme one year ago; there are strengths and risks to this. It is a simple model with very strong State backing and has engendered enthusiasm and pride, although in its first year the SSOs are only developing their skills alongside the schools.

**Table 3: ESSPIN's increasing reach**

	No of schools/ HTs initially worked with	Target for schools 2014(16)	No of school/ HTs worked with by Aug 2014	Target for effective HTs 2014(16)	No of effective HTs 2014	% HTs worked with meeting standard 2014	Target for effective CTs 2014(16)	No of effective CTs 2014
Enugu	91		405		297	73%		1,050
Jigawa	198		1,002		752	75%		5,308
Kaduna	168		691		521	75%		3,195
Kano	317		5,520		2,304	42%		11,622
Kwara	1,448		1,468		1,359	93%		7,313
Lagos	100		1,105		875	87%		7,658
Total	2,322	10,266 (11,308)	10,091	5,646 (6,7020)	6,257		19,992 (25,040)	

Perhaps one reason that States are prepared to invest their own funds is that they are involved in measuring the results of their investment, not just the training inputs or processes; it is clear how their training budget translates into improved Head teacher and teacher performance and pupil learning. As well as the increase in raw numbers, Table 3 shows progress against targets for effective Head teachers and teachers. Overall both targets have been exceeded, that for teachers more than comfortably (possibly because of the extremely rapid expansion of the programme in Kano). In all States (apart from Kano) at least 73% of the participating Head teachers are assessed as effective.

This is not the place to explore the complexities of the information coming from the reporting system. It is however worth suggesting a second possible contributory factor to the very large number of teachers already assessed as competent, again involving rapid programme expansion. The assessment of competence is done by Head teachers and SSOs, who are as new to the programme as the teachers, and who may lack the more nuanced understanding of some of the criteria which comprise the teaching standard and which will come with greater exposure to training, with reflection and with experience. This brings us to ESSPIN's second challenge.

### **Increasing ESSPIN's effectiveness: deepening understanding and strengthening practice**

The standards and criteria on which the Head teacher and teacher's training and support package is based are apparently very simple, the criteria reflecting the stage that teachers are at in their understanding and practice. However they can be 'unpacked', so that for example a teacher operating at a basic, competent, level might meet the standard for 'organising their pupils in different ways during lessons' if he or she attempts to use group or pair work as well as whole class teaching; whereas to meet an advanced teacher standard the teacher would need to be able to explain the reasons why a particular form of classroom organisation is appropriate.



Games like 'bingo' help children learn to read commonly used words



This example illustrates the ongoing and iterative nature of the training and support programme, summarised in Figure 3. The programme begins with a modular series of workshops and structured school visits, originally designed to kick start improvements within two years in leadership and classroom practice, as well as introducing the use of the lesson plans. By the end of the initial workshop programme it is anticipated that most schools, teachers and Head Teachers would have attained the basic competencies.

At the end of this period schools move into the Continuing School Improvement phase. During this phase, support to schools is largely supplied through structured school visits by SSOs and cluster meetings.

As these visits form one of SSOs' main routine duties, funding for which is included in the States' budgets, this part of the programme can be open-ended. School support visit have always been important; but as schools enter this phase of their development the quality of these visits becomes crucial, and much work throughout the extension phase will focus on strengthening their quality and effectiveness.

During the Continuing School Improvement phase, SSOs begin to differentiate the support that schools, Head teachers and teachers receive so that the ones that have not yet reached the quality standard are given further help to reach this standard, whilst the competence bar is steadily raised for those that have already attained the standard.

At the beginning of this phase, SSOs are given considerable guidance when planning their visits and meetings. By the second year of this phase (year 4) Head teacher, teacher and school support is increasingly tailored to meet specific needs.



School Support Officers help teachers prepare to use the plans



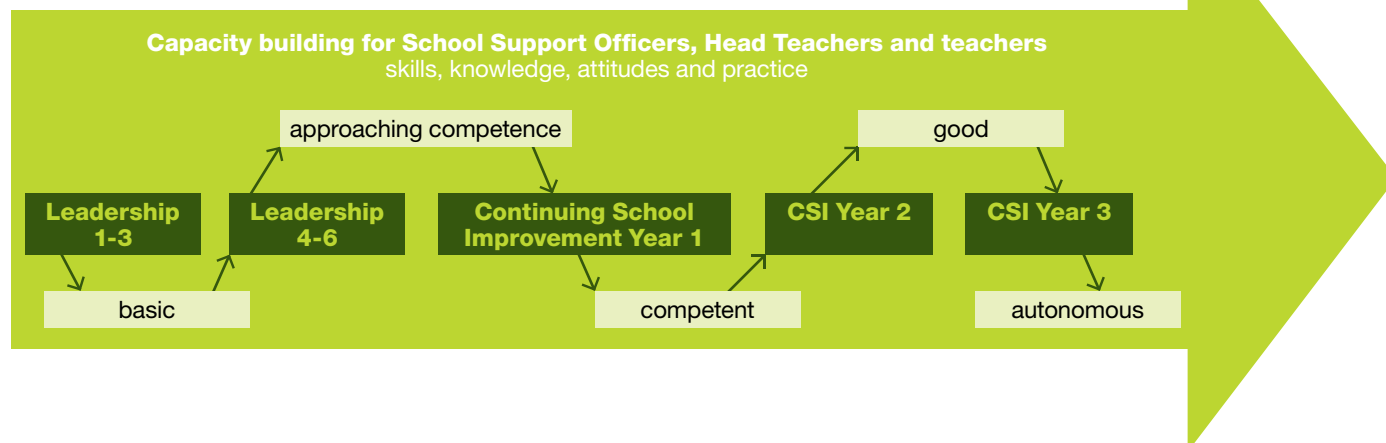
At the same time, teachers are supported to deepen their understanding of classroom practice. This takes them on the first steps along a continuum from being competent towards being 'good' or 'advanced' practitioners, deepening their understanding of pupil learning and strengthening their core generic teaching skills.

Work with the lesson plans is interwoven through the programme. At all stages of the Leadership programme there are linkages to the better use of the lesson plans. The Head teacher's role in ensuring they are well used forms part of their first year's programme.

More complex sessions, for example on pupil assessment which demonstrate and give opportunities to practice assessing whether pupils have attained the learning outcomes for specific lessons from the plans, are included towards the end of the second year.

Decisions on how to pace the introduction of the plans is one for each State to make, and short workshops on teaching specific content can begin in year one and will continue as P4-5 plans are introduced, and beyond into P6 and JSS (supported by ESSPIN's sister programme, the Teacher Development Programme).

**Figure 3: An open-ended model for a school improvement programme**



## Conclusion

Although there is a long way to go, ESSPIN and the States it partners have come a long way towards improving school quality, establishing schools as places in which teaching and learning can flourish. The challenge to improve lessons is great. In terms of the level from which we began and the numbers involved. The target of helping teachers achieve 'competence' is an ambitious one, the achievement of which all concerned can be justly proud, but it needs to be acknowledged that it is also narrow.

If we regard improvement as a journey towards the ideal of being reflective practitioners, who possess the 'sympathetic engagement with the way children think, feel and act which informs every single aspect of a teacher's work, from task preparation to interaction and assessment', then to be assessed as competent as defined by our standards is clearly only to have taken the first few steps on the journey. During the extension period, based on the sound platform of competence we hope to support teachers to begin to move along this continuum.

Important as working with teachers is, ultimately our work is all about pupil achievement. Within each school in which ESSPIN works the number of children on whose learning we impact will increase year on year. Over the next academic year there will be full coverage of P1-3 plans and from September 2014 P4-5 lesson plans will be introduced into schools, beginning to change teaching in upper, as well as lower, primary.



Group story work.  
This is teaching  
of a high order

Steady improvement in learning outcomes across the whole primary age range should continue to be realised, as pupils who are taught from P1 onwards by a succession of teachers using year appropriate plans with increasing confidence, flair and understanding, progress upwards through the school and towards their futures.





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