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Qualitative research findings from Zambia: What drives teachers to change their behaviour?¹



Objective: This study aims to understand the current drivers of change that shift teaching behaviour, and the existing tools that can be leveraged to further sustain pedagogical shifts in Zambia.



Methods: We conducted a qualitative descriptive study in which we sampled teachers and support staff (at the school to provincial levels) involved in managing 12 randomly selected schools in two provinces (Eastern and Southern Province). We conducted 78 telephonic interviews during February-March 2021. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis.²

Findings

1) How have teachers changed over the past two years?

We asked respondents how teachers had changed their instruction before COVID-19.³ Specifically, our leading question was: *“In the year before the Covid-19 crisis: Do you think you changed the way you / your school’s teachers went about their day-to-day teaching in the classroom? If so, how?”*

We present the responses we received in three main steps. The great majority of respondents reported that teachers had indeed changed their instruction in some way (64 out of 78 respondents, or 82%). For these 64 individuals, we identified themes of *how* teachers changed their instruction. More specifically, we calculated the proportion of various types of change as of the total number of responses related to changes in teaching practices. Secondly, we asked our respondents about what had led to these changes. Finally, we explored how these drivers of change relate to teacher professional development and other inputs commonly used to support teachers. Box 1 shows the number of related responses.

Most frequently, our respondents reported that teachers had **increased their use of differentiated instruction based on learners’ individual needs** (19% of responses related to changes in teaching) and that they had increased their use of teaching and learning materials (15%).⁴ A sizeable proportion of respondents also mentioned how teachers applied **the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) methodology** (locally known as “Catch Up”) to learners not targeted by the program and/or to regular classes conducted during school hours (14%). Other notable changes include a change in attitude towards teaching (9%), and a change in intrinsic motivation that focuses more on teachers’ commitment to learners (8%).

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² We closely followed the strategy proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology.” *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2): 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>.

³ Some respondents mentioned changes as a result of COVID-19, such as social distancing. We omit these responses from the report.

⁴ In 15% of the responses related to changes in teaching practices, respondents did not further specify *how* they had changed their instruction.

We then look at teachers' changes in instruction as they relate to various programs. Catch Up (CU) accounts for 64% of the reported teacher change. Change related to CU is most commonly noted as an increased understanding of learners' needs, adoption of the CU methodology, increased interaction with learners, and increased use of materials. Change that is attributed to CU seems to strictly dominate change that is related to other programs, except for where other programs have led to improved intonation and pronunciation, and improved lesson flow (e.g., because of the Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills program, THRASS).

Box 1: Proportion of responses related to teachers' change in instruction

Total number of meaningful responses:	3,357
Number of meaningful responses related to how teachers have changed:	236
Number of meaningful responses related to what drives teacher change:	825
Remaining meaningful responses	2,896

Notes: Meaningful responses (or "excerpts") are defined as a response that was relevant to our coding framework. These are usually 1-3 sentences long.

2) What drives teacher change?

Through our interview data, we identified the three most commonly mentioned reasons for why teachers had changed their teaching behaviours.



I) Team-based problem solving. The most frequently mentioned driver of change is the sharing of challenges and group discussions. These activities usually occur at the school level and were mentioned by 51 out of 78 respondents as a driver. For example, one teacher stated that it is *"because teachers are able to come together to find solutions and support each other. You know when you face a challenge but if you do not talk to people, you can do nothing. So, working together during these meetings help"*.



II) Verbal encouragement and discussions. The second most frequently mentioned driver is individual mentoring in the form of verbal encouragement and discussion in a 1:1 setting. These discussions mainly consist of identifying areas of weakness particular to a teacher and sharing solutions, ideas, or new approaches they could adopt to improve. Such discussions could be provided through a teacher on-site visit, a roving mentor visit to the school, as well as during off-site training at the zonal centre. This driver was mentioned by 36 out of 78 respondents. One teacher simply puts it as *"I know my weaknesses, that's why it helped me"*.



III) Learning about new methods at trainings. Respondents mentioned that the acquisition of new skills at workshop training is another common, though less frequently mentioned, driver of change. Workshop training is usually organised at the zonal or district level with the aim of helping teachers recall certain methods, or instilling new ones. In our sample, 34 respondents mentioned that it is learning new methods at training sessions in particular. One teacher says that *"Knowledge is not like that, it is not static, it changes every now and then"*, and it is through training that current best practices are learned. Respondents also say that practical demonstrations are most helpful for training.

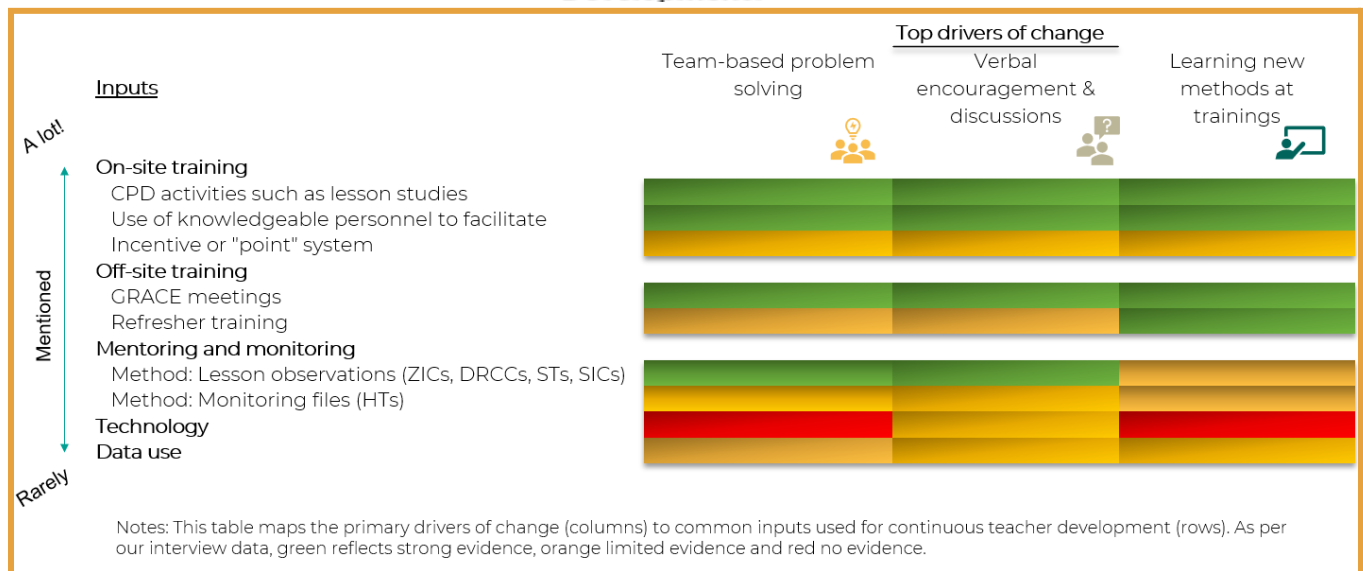
3) What Continuous Professional Development inputs enable these drivers of change?

In this section, we delve deeper into how these drivers of change are enabled by various Continuous Professional Development inputs. Box 2 shows the primary drivers we identified above (in the columns), mapping them to common inputs used for teachers' Continuous Professional Development (in the rows). On the left-hand side, we illustrate how often the various inputs were mentioned as those factors that had triggered changes in teaching. On-site training is mentioned a lot, for example, whereas data use is mentioned rarely.

1) On-site training is the input most frequently reported to enable teacher change. On-site training usually forms part of the SPRINT⁵ system. It consists of biweekly group meetings of all staff who work at a school. It is the School-Inset-Coordinator's (SICs) responsibility to schedule and organise these meetings. These meetings also use knowledgeable teachers to facilitate who can offer valuable input into solving problems. These meetings cover all teachers, across grade levels. In community schools, they may also be used to train unlicensed volunteers from the community.

Training content is guided by an "action plan" that is developed by the headteachers and SICs. CU-related topics have been included in the action plan for some cadre (27 of 78 respondents). At these trainings, teachers may also demonstrate to their peers what they have learnt during off-site training events (at the zone or district levels). On-site training may also engage in "lesson studies", where teachers develop a lesson plan together. One teacher then implements this lesson plan in class while others observe, and teachers come together to improve the lesson plan, solving problems they have observed together.

Box 2: How do the top-3 drivers of change relate to Continuous Professional Development?



Through the use of content targeted at current challenges such as "lesson studies" and knowledgeable facilitators, on-site school training offers a platform for all teachers to engage in problem-solving discussions, encourage each other, and share skills through practical demonstrations.

⁵ The SPRINT (School Programme of In-Service Training for the Term) system is a school-based CPD programme provided to teachers under the Zambian Ministry of General Education.

Meetings are expected to happen twice a month. However, some schools are unable to meet the fortnightly meeting target and tend to conduct meetings once a month. One way to incentivize meeting occurrence has been through the use of the “point system”. Respondents have shared this as motivating to teachers, leading to increased performance and promotions (11/16 respondents) when it was implemented. In recent years, however, this system has been largely inactive.

II) Offsite training was mentioned as the next largest enabler of change. These trainings usually take the form of GRACE meetings or (refresher) training courses.

“Grade meetings at Resource Centre” (**GRACE**) meetings are mentioned as an input that impacts all three primary drivers of change. This form of off-site training also falls under the SPRINT system wherein teachers meet by grade at the zonal level (across 5-8 schools) to solve challenges that they are facing particular to their grade, and encourage one another in addition to acquiring skills through lesson demonstrations.

Other trainings and **refresher trainings**, usually held at the zone level and facilitated by Zonal Inset Coordinators (ZICs) or District Resource Centre Coordinators (DRCCs), are further highlighted inputs with their greatest value added being promoting skill acquisition through the sharing of current best practices through demonstrations. Yet, these trainings are less frequently related to team-based problem solving, verbal encouragement, and discussions among teachers.

GRACE meetings are expected to happen once per term. Other off-site training usually occurs at the zonal level, and frequency is dependent on available resources and needs within a given region. Logistical challenges such as geography and the lack of attendance incentives such as transport allowances / food were reported to inhibit attendance of off-site training in general.

III) Mentoring and monitoring, particularly in the form of lesson observations, were mentioned less frequently as inputs that enable changes in teaching practices. When they occur, however, they are considered helpful in terms of verbal encouragement and practical demonstration.

The most frequent activities reported for the **lesson observations** aspect of mentor-monitoring were the follow-up discussion that is done afterward, and the completion of the lesson observation form. This is predominantly done by DRCCs, ZICs, Senior Teachers (STs), and SICs who may also use a peer mentoring approach (to include multiple teachers). This encompasses team problem solving and encouragement discussions. Respondents mentioned that the most useful aspect of lesson observations is to identify areas of weakness observed during lesson observations. Additionally, through mentor lesson demonstrations, teachers are able to acquire skills through practical demonstrations.

An additional form of monitoring is **file monitoring**. There is some evidence that suggests the monitoring of files may drive teachers to change through lesson planning support and encouragement, but it does not impact the other two drivers. This type of monitoring, support, and encouragement is predominantly done by headteachers (HTs).

At the school level, the deputy HTs and HTs usually serve as the school-based mentor-monitors. For non-CU-related programs such as SPRINT, the SIC is the main mentor; for CU-related practices, the ST is the go-to individual who is also responsible for ensuring that CU is taking place. Headteachers report that they ensure that assessments are done correctly, but they do not tend to receive CU training and are not typically considered to be mentors.

There is large variation in the frequency of mentor-monitoring, due to challenges concerning transport options for offsite mentors. As a way to overcome this, respondents (20/24) mentioned that they integrate visits across programs, whilst only 4/24 respondents keep them separate. Due to the

infrequent nature of higher-level cadre visits, school and zonal monitoring at the school level are essential. For zonal cadre, those that do mentor and monitor frequently, tend to do so with schools that are within close proximity.



IV) Technology was rarely mentioned as an input that drives change. Since technology *might* be harnessed to drive different types of change if applied appropriately in the context, we explored access and use. The majority of respondents (65%) reported good network access, and for areas with inconsistent or no network the main method of communication is phone calls or text messages. Some respondents have to walk to a “network area” to receive messages. Additionally, when asked whether the majority of the respondent’s mentees / colleagues have smartphone access, 54% reported that the majority of their colleagues have smartphone access.

The main method of communication reported was WhatsApp, with 86% of respondents in our sample having WhatsApp themselves. The main form of information communicated on WhatsApp groups is logistical information such as deadlines. Technology’s only relation to the drivers of change is through verbal encouragement. Yet, just under a third (29%) of respondents mentioned that giving advice or mentorship occurs over WhatsApp.

V) Data collection and use is the final input mentioned sufficiently to consider; however, they were very rarely mentioned as inputs that enabled change in teaching practices. The main data collected includes learning outcome data and data kept in the SPRINT records book detailing teacher group meetings (TGM) minutes and teacher contributions/credit forms. Other than the implied direct use of CU assessment data by teachers to regroup learners every term, there are very few reports of data use at the school level. Despite having prior knowledge of monthly CU meetings, only 2 respondents referred to these meetings.

In the very few cases in which data collection and use were related to changes in teaching practices, there was some evidence of its intersection across the three main drivers of change. In these cases, data is mainly used at termly review meetings to problem solve as a team (at the district or zonal levels). In such cases, monitoring data is used to identify schools that require more frequent capacity building through on-site mentor visits and/or to identify zones that might require off-site refresher training facilitated by the DRCC or ZIC.



Summary

In this study, we find that changes in teachers’ instructional practices—such as adopting new procedures within a classroom, understanding their learners’ needs more clearly, or increasing the use of teaching aids—is primarily driven by the following three factors: team-based problem solving, verbal encouragement and discussion, and learning about new teaching methods through practical demonstration. Lastly, we find that these drivers are most frequently enabled by inputs that are conducive to group discussions within schools.

Next steps

The next stage of our KIX-supported research in Zambia involves engaging the broader TaRL community, the Zambian Ministry of General Education, and experts in the field in discussions on how we can leverage these drivers of change in an innovative way to sustain cost-effective pedagogical shifts. Based on the study findings and these engagements, we plan to develop a pilot intervention for Catch Up and to rigorously test its efficacy.