Overview of the innovation:
This project aimed to address the issue of quality and inclusion in primary schools. Teachers were trained and supported on an ongoing basis to use learner-centred methods in their classrooms. Selected teachers mentored others through the transition to using such new techniques in the classroom. There was also a significant school leadership element to this project as Head Teachers were trained in innovative methods for supporting effective teaching and learning.

The project was implemented nationwide within 9 different districts (Ngoma, Karongi, Nyamasheke, Muhanga, Burera, Nyamagabe, Gisagara, Bugesera and Rulindo).

A total of 245 head teacher and 1,682 teachers were supported, reaching 113,678 primary students. The total budget was GBP 645,976.

Grant Recipient:
The project was implemented by Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO).

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What makes it innovative?
The approach was innovative in that it provided extensive training for in-service teachers in learner-centred methods, with a specific focus on using teacher peer support mechanisms, something which was new to Rwandan context. It was also developing an evidence base for the new model for improving quality of education by exploring how the relationship between the use of learner centred methods in teaching, improved school leadership and inclusive teaching practices could lead to improved learning outcomes.

Relevance to education priorities:
Main Theme: Effective teaching and learning;
Sub-theme: Inclusive education, accountability and empowerment
The dual purposes of strengthening school leadership and promoting learner centred methods to improve quality of basic education of this project are closely aligned to core priorities within the 2013-2017 ESSP.

Project learning (activity/output to outcomes level)
- Teachers clearly tried to bring active learning into practice: Fund Manager visits to classrooms confirmed that active participation of pupils in class, different classroom arrangements, focus on the needs of individual children, working in groups, use of low cost or no cost teaching & learning materials, improvement of relations between teachers and students indeed take place.
- Although the basics of classroom change are visible, teachers are still struggling and trying to implement their learning in slightly mechanical ways, which can be seen as an expression of the stage teachers are at in a longer process of professional development. The process of changing teaching practices needs time. While there are immediate changes happening, more profound changes will take longer and will need to be systemic rather than through a project mode of implementation.
- Over time, the project has moved towards the conceptualisation of a school-based approach to Teachers’ Continuous Professional Development (CPD) that is tightly connected to the existing REB CPD strategy of which the School Based Mentor programme of the GoR is part. This link to the existing system is a strong part of the VSO project.
The role of the volunteers in the pilot is very important, and even seems too critical for the success of the model. VSO has taken this into account in designing its proposed scale up model, which is less dependent on the inputs of VSO volunteers at the field level.

**Project outcomes and reflection on monitoring and evaluation:**

The evaluation is a quasi-experimental design (control and treatment groups compared at baseline and end-line) using Early Grade Reading/Mathematics Assessment tools for student learning outcomes, and classroom observations of teacher practice (but with different instruments at baseline and end-line). Interviews and Focus Group Discussions across the stakeholder groups included head teachers and teachers (on school leadership and support from teachers who mentored).

The project saw very positive student English learning outcomes: a 30% improvement (31-72%) in English reading test results achieved by P5 pupils in treatment schools (almost no improvement in control schools; 7%). However, there were poor results for mathematics with the treatment group scoring less at end-line than at baseline (control increased slightly for P3 but reduced for P5). Head teacher self-reported leadership skills are high. The results of classrooms observations is more mixed with teachers scoring highly for the use of some learner centred methods but low in others (e.g. for group and pair work), with lack of comparability of baseline and end-line leading to inconclusive results. Qualitative data indicate that focus teachers are key to sustaining learner-centred methodology.

In general the study is well designed, but with too few schools and inconsistent basis for analysis (sometimes control and treatment groups compared in absolute terms at end-line, sometimes the change in score from baseline to end-line was compared). There are issues with the reliability of the learning outcomes and classroom observation, which also undermine the results to some extent.
Conditions for success:
This project relied on a number of different stakeholders (teachers, head teachers and SEOs) to engage and commit to different ways of working which were often at odds with the government’s focus on quality education through competence based curriculum, improved monitoring and evaluation practices that look at progress and retention. For example, it was noted that the district level focus on access to education presented a challenge. Similarly, there was a reliance on SEOs taking on additional new roles to support and facilitate training for teachers and head teachers when SEOs were often otherwise engaged. Head Teachers also had to get used to their role of supporting their teachers to realise change in their classroom practices. At the same time linking with the roles of existing actors from within the system it is seen as an important condition for success in terms of scale up and sustainability of the model.

Scale up and sustainability considerations
The model presented by VSO outlines an ongoing teacher continuous professional development (CPD) model that is embedded within the existing CPD strategy of REB by using the school as the main location of CPD support. This comprehensive CPD programme uses actors from within the system (SBMs, key teachers, SEOs, HTs, and TTCs) to support (i) the implementation of the new competence based curriculum, (ii) long-term improvement in the use of English language and (iii) competency-enhancing Learner Centred Methodology (LCM). The model includes all aspects of the ALOA pilot project, except the pupil-testing using early grade reading and mathematics assessment (EGRA and EGMA) tests or similar tests, which would be very costly on a larger scale. Additional non-pilot elements are: quality support for teachers to use English effectively in the classroom; and the delivery by Teacher Training Colleges of in-service training to selected teachers who are currently excluded from the SBM programme.

The VSO volunteers (6) will no longer be based in the Districts, which would not be sustainable, but instead at provincial/central level. The package has been reduced and become cheaper but the scale-up document makes a convincing case that this is not expected to lead to a decrease in quality/impact. This model has the potential to go nationwide and be a comprehensive CPD model for the GoR to adopt and roll out in all Districts.

The following observations from the Fund Manager will need to be kept in mind when further reflections and decisions are taken with regard to scale up and sustainability:

- Although the emphasis on the use of English as a medium of instruction is appropriate, there is a need to further clarify the specific support methodologies to be applied with regard to the use of English as a medium of instruction within the wider CPD model. This isn’t fully clear from the VSO documents. Experience in the pilot was on general methodology only, and there may be an underestimation of the investment required for support to teachers to teach in English. Further discussions with British Council - STEM are encouraged.

- A bigger emphasis on the blended approach would be welcome - promoting peer learning alongside self-learning, with the use of ICT-enabled self-study materials focusing on improving classroom practice. This use of technology-enabled self-study could be a very cost-effective addition to the model, although VSO emphasises the fact that its model of peer learning only would be cheaper and sustainable for the Ministry of Education to scale up and maintain. The experience of English in Action (EIA) in Bangladesh and STEM in Rwanda show this is possible in cost-effective ways.
The scale up proposal emphasises the roles of SEOs and Head Teachers in monitoring and School Leadership. Clarity about the roles of SEOs and head teachers is required to ensure these roles are clearly acknowledged to be within the realm of support of ‘changing classroom practices’. All aspects of the model need to be placed in the context of CPD while the role of SEOs should be related to supporting HTs, and not supporting teachers directly. HT engagement is critical for any in-service Teacher Training. The role of SEOs and HTs in the competence based curriculum includes supporting school level teacher training, monitoring learning and teaching. The VSO model of using existing people in the system aligns with the government priorities and its approaches to new ways of teaching using learner centred methodologies and monitoring. The change will work well if it is supported at sector level and school level.

The model may work even better if it supported at least one key teacher in each school (with each SBM covering more than 2 schools) thus increasing the potential of ensuring each school to have a mentor. This also makes the model less dependent on the future of the SBM programme. This decision will need to be taken by REB.

With regard to institutionalisation, the proposed model uses the existing system and already paid for systems actors in potentially effective ways by adjusting their roles and tasks in such a way that they become more effective and empowered. This intervention also provides a response to the current needs of the GoR by implementing the new curriculum and TDM policy, and the need for TTCs to play a bigger role in in-service teacher training.

Although there is a strong focus on the system, there is still a very strongly identified need for continued VSO (or other NGO) involvement. The cost-effective case for this has been convincingly made, but more emphasis could have been given beyond the next 3 years, with GoR taking over implementation and an NGO role in terms of working on system readiness.

Cost considerations

The per teacher unit cost decreases from GBP 410 in the pilot phase to GBP 43 in the scale up phase. This significant decrease is much welcomed but there is a need to consider student unit costs as well. A very strong argument for the proposed model is that this support package will be a replacement of residential trainings, which are less cost-effective in terms of change in the classroom.

The proposed model is more cost-effective and also makes good use of systems actors who are paid by the GoR already. Additional analysis is required of what the budgetary implications are for the GoR if it were to introduce the proposed model as its CPD package embedded within the SBM programme. The cost of capacity building of REB will also need to be included in the calculations.

Immediate next steps

- Influence REB to further optimise the functioning of the SBM programme, finding ways to have each school covered by an SBM.
- Further improve the economic analysis by focussing on this being a GoR-led programme and calculating the implications for the GoR budget. Also, quantify the need for capacity building costs and estimate external financing requirements to make it clearer what alternative options GoR could pursue. Critically, understand what these costs would be set against the anticipated impact of the alternative options (i.e. a fuller VfM analysis).
- Discuss the feasibility and appetite to use the VSO scale up plan as a model for a comprehensive GoR-led ongoing CPD programme through interactions with the TPD Technical Working Group and the SBM Task Force.
- DFID may want to consider funding a comprehensive TPD initiative, such as the one presented in the VSO scale up and sustainability plan, as part of the TA component of its next sector programme.
- VSO to play a central role in facilitating discussions with other IfE Grant Recipients working in the area of TPD and assessing opportunities for collaboration, especially with regard to the emphasis on supporting teachers in using English as a medium of instruction.