



A. S. Hornby Educational Trust

REPORT ON HORNBY-FUNDED TEACHER ASSOCIATION PROJECT

Title: Developing CoPs (communities of practice) to support secondary English teachers with the new curriculum

Country: Guinea-Bissau

Dates: July 2019–August 2021

1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

We had our first project funded by the Hornby Trust in 2018–19, and we make reference to this in our report as it provides context and background to this, our second, related project.

In Guinea-Bissau, there is an almost total lack of government support for and supervision of English teachers after they achieve their degree and start teaching. Before the completion of our 2018–19 project, there was no national curriculum and there were no national tests, so ELTA-GB decided to take responsibility for creating a national curriculum and national tests, and then supervising and providing in-service training for teachers to support and develop them. We have been trying to work with the Ministry of Education for several years. This was a very good opportunity for us to make key decisions about what curriculum goals would be feasible and what materials would be appropriate for our teaching context. We know the students and the schools, so we are the best people to make these decisions.

As mentioned above, this is our second project – Developing CoPs (communities of practice) to support secondary English teachers with the new curriculum, which started in 2019 but continued until 2021 because of the many difficulties in the country.

The new secondary English curriculum introduced many big changes in ELT in Guinea-Bissau. Teachers were used to teaching only grammar, with very little vocabulary, skills work, functional language or topics. The curriculum, soon to be approved by the Ministry of Education, now includes all this, with materials to help teachers teach the new areas. Teaching in 2019, however, was interrupted by several months of strikes, leaving teachers little opportunity to put the curriculum and materials into action.

From September 2019, all English teachers needed support, and the best way was for them to hold regular meetings in their own schools to discuss English classes, problems in class, materials and resources, and how to cover the curriculum. However, we realised that teachers would be much more likely to give up their valuable time if there was funding for a meal during the meeting. Moreover, teachers would also need a means of comparing their ideas – e.g. asking questions and sharing the materials and ideas from these meetings with others. The ideal way would be via the ELTA-GB WhatsApp group which had already been running successfully for over a year. For this, teachers needed a contribution towards Internet costs since these are very expensive in relation to teacher salaries.



A. S. Hornby Educational Trust

2. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

While our main objectives for the previous 2018–19 project had centred on the new national secondary English curriculum, our main objective for this project centred on supporting teachers in using it. Specific objectives were:

- to support ELTA-GB teachers in Bissau and the regions with the new curriculum;
- for teachers to regularly share materials and lesson ideas;
- to develop English teachers' confidence in their own expertise and knowledge;
- for teachers to be able to find and share solutions to many of their difficulties in teaching English;
- to value and raise the profile of several women in ELTA-GB by getting them to lead groups;
- to share knowledge and expertise on teaching English to students with disabilities (speech and hearing difficulties).

3. PROJECT MEMBERS AND THEIR ROLES

Overall responsibility for liaising with others, managing WhatsApp groups and orienting teams:

- Ali Djau (ELTA-GB Secretary General)

CoP group leaders, selected by ELTA-GB as a result of their engagement in TA activities:

- Venancio Vaz (Gabu); Braima Embalo, (Hafia School, Bissau); Belmira Oliveira, (Rui Barcelo School, Bissau); Fatima Latina, (Bissau); Lassana Biai, (Bissau); Abulai Seide, (Mansaba); Suleimane Embalo, (Bafata); Umaro Cante, (Canchungo); Mariza Mendes Cabral, (Bissau); Sidu Ie (School for hearing and speech impaired, Bissau).

4. DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

Some teachers started to use the curriculum in classes after the first presentation and training in April 2019, but, unfortunately, most teachers were on strike for months so could not start using it.

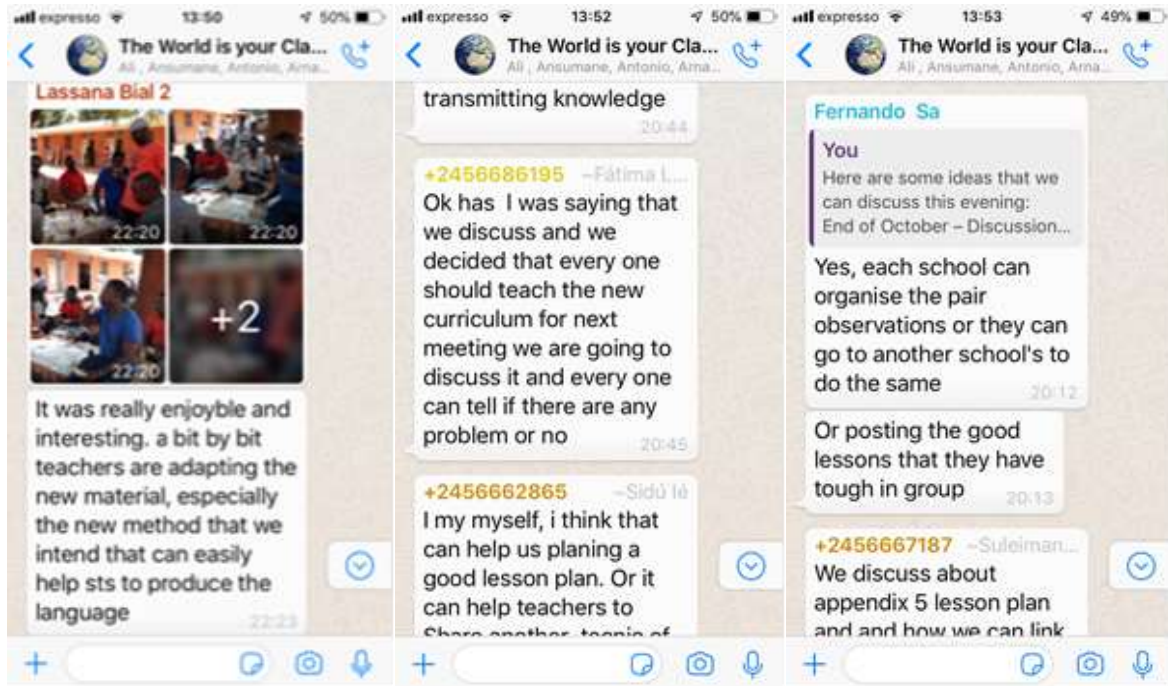
At the National Convention in July 2019, we held an introduction session for 50 teachers who had not attended the first presentation in April. Bill Little, the RELO (Regional English Language Officer), US Embassy, Dakar, also came to this and he was impressed with the new curriculum and the introduction. Then, when the new academic year started in October, teachers needed a lot of help and support using the new curriculum and Ali Djau trained 10 group leaders, making sure they knew how to use the curriculum and the sample materials at a meeting in Bissau. The WhatsApp group was also very important in introducing the ideas to all the English teachers in Guinea-Bissau. There were weekly discussions to support the group leaders and groups, and this is where each group would post their report of their monthly meetings. These groups started holding meetings in September 2019, in regions and in secondary schools in Bissau, and each group also decided on how to use the money allocated to them for transport, Internet credit and meals.

We were all surprised at how many photos and even short videos some groups posted. All teachers were very interested in the curriculum and materials and wanted more copies to



A. S. Hornby Educational Trust

use. All questions and comments were reported in the next WhatsApp discussions and there was a lot of flexibility and creativity in the meetings – some teachers did a little teaching or demonstrated new ideas to others; some showed short videos to discuss; some created materials together.



Screenshots from WhatsApp discussions about the curriculum and the CoP groups

Then, during the first half of 2020, Education in Guinea-Bissau had a terrible time. Due to the national election the previous November and the unstable political situation with a new President, who was not approved for many months, it was a very unsettled time. Schools were closed for most of November and did not re-open because of the political instability. Then there was lockdown due to Covid-19 – people were beaten by the police if they ventured out, and transport and food costs went up dramatically. English teachers had a very hard time with very little money. No-one could teach online as they were doing in many other countries because hardly any students have laptops or smart phones. Besides, teachers cannot afford Internet and most couldn't even participate in our WhatsApp group discussions. Because of all this, we decided to suspend the monthly group meetings. All groups had had four monthly meetings and wanted to continue, but because schools remained closed the discussions would not be related to practical teaching. Finally, many schools re-opened in September 2020, so we planned the three remaining meetings for September, October and November.


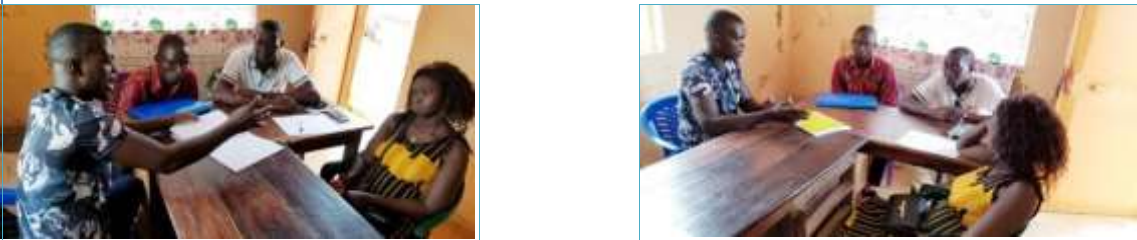
Another setback was that Linda Ruas was planning to come to help us in April 2020, but couldn't because of Covid-19. Instead, she helped us organise lots of discussions via our WhatsApp group, and we all wrote simple texts about topics that are important in GB, such as teenage pregnancy, getting married very young, Covid-19, migration, etc. Linda helped us edit these short texts and created booklets for students to use in class. In GB teachers need



A. S. Hornby Educational Trust

to pay for all the photocopies that they make for students (and as we have no materials, we need to photocopy) but teachers can't afford this. Some teachers even ask the students to buy the photocopies, but they have no money for this either. Thankfully, Linda managed to get 70,000 cfa (£100) from the IATEFL GISIG to help us with the photocopying of these booklets, and we have used these with our students during this academic year.

From September 2020, many schools re-opened for short periods so our ELTA-GB WhatsApp group became quite active again and we were able to post photos and short reports of our remaining meetings. Each group leader posts a report via the WhatsApp group of each meeting, and then others make comments or discuss the questions. Often these reports include photos and even short videos. Here is one example:

Monthly Meeting Minute		
Sunday, 22 September 2019	12:00–13:00	Háfia Secondary School
Group Leader	Braima Embaló	
Participant	Arnaldo Umuã Mendes	
Participant	Roberto Lirna Sanha	
Participant	Carla Rosa da Silva Sá	
Participant	Viriato Malam Cassama	
Introduction about the use and practice to teach the new curriculum		
		
Introducing the new curriculum to the teachers in the first group meeting at Háfia High School		
		
Explaining the use and how to teach with the new curriculum to the teachers		



Listening and taking notes of some questions and suggestions which are detailed below about teaching with the new curriculum.

Questions & Suggestions

Viriato Malam Cassama: *It is better to introduce both **English** and **French** from 7th to 12th grades to avoid multilevel classes for students who studied only French in previous grades as an option.*

Arnaldo Umuã Mendes: *Has the new curriculum been approved by the Ministry of Education and INDE yet? If not, then we should work hard for its approval.*

Carla Rosa da Silva Sá: *There should be pages and index for a quick access of the curriculum. It saves time to always have to flip forward and backward. The short texts also should be in a sequential order with the topics for a better use and understanding.*

Roberto Lirna Sanha: *this is a very rich curriculum indeed. It will certainly make my work easier than it used to be. Thank you very much!*

By: Braima Embaló – Group Leader **Obs:** all 5 teachers agreed that we split the money given for lunch equally. So, from 17.300 xof, each teacher received 3.400 xof. And the remaining 3.00 xof, I used it for transportation to get the money from Ali.

In addition, ELTA-GB won a PRELIM course award from the British Council and IATEFL (Jan–March 2021), which included money for Internet credit as the course was on WhatsApp. So, we have been able to discuss and share via our ELTA-GB WhatsApp groups. We have also had two mini-conferences on WhatsApp – in April and July, 2021. Finally, Ali Djau is now Director of Hafia Secondary School and has had several meetings with the Ministry of Education.

5. EVALUATION

The new curriculum has benefited both students and teachers. Students now have English lessons that are more meaningful, including skills work and vocabulary and topics, not just grammar as before. The teachers find it more enjoyable and easier to teach with the new materials and curriculum and they are teaching real language use, not just grammar rules. The teachers have also benefited a lot from the CoPs because these are making them more interested in teaching English with new techniques, materials and ideas.

This second project is really a continuation of the evaluation of the first 'Curriculum' project. We can now see through the problems and questions of how teachers are using the curriculum and what difficulties they have.

- We have seen a lot more participation from the women group leaders because the men teachers respect them more and can see that they know what they are doing. The



A. S. Hornby Educational Trust

women have become a lot more confident and often participate in discussions more than the men. One woman, Mariza, is planning to deliver a training session on gender awareness as soon as they can meet face-to-face. Another woman group leader, Sidu Le, who teaches at the Escola para Surdos e Mudos (for students with hearing and speech impairment), gave a presentation at the July WhatsApp mini-conference on how to work with sign language. She made a short video to teach some signs and told everyone in the group how she taught herself sign language because there are no courses in Guinea-Bissau, even for teachers. Everyone now respects Sidu and asks her questions about teaching students with these disabilities.

- These CoPs have changed ideas about teaching e.g. from reading aloud to silent reading; from whole class work to pair tasks. We can see this in many comments in the WhatsApp discussions. For example, Idrissa: 'Now I can see that silent reading can work in class – I didn't think it would work with my students.' Lassana Biai: 'I tried pairwork and it was difficult at first, but now it works really well and students can participate a lot more.'
- The CoPs have made teachers happy to ask questions and to share weaknesses, to ask others how to teach a topic and to admit that they do not know many things. This is the first time they have been encouraged to talk about their teaching. In Guinea-Bissau, people who are teachers are expected to know all the answers about everything because they are teachers. But this is not always true, so it is very good that they can say what they don't know.
- The discussions have had a good effect on students. Students are now enjoying the English lessons more because teachers don't just explain grammar. They try to involve students more in interesting activities. Some students have learnt about how to organise and learn vocabulary with spidergrams. Some have learnt how to be more independent and to use dictionaries on their mobile phones to help them with research.
- We conducted a survey in July 2021 using Google Forms in the ELTA-GB WhatsApp group which included 10 questions. Here are some of the responses from a total of 57 teachers:
 1. How much did the ELTA-GB Hornby CoP Project help English teachers in Guinea-Bissau? (Everyone answered *a lot*)
 2. How easy was it to organise the monthly meetings? (Everyone answered *sometimes easy or sometimes difficult*)
 3. What difficulties or problems did you have in organising and attending the meetings? (Many answered *transport, time, Covid-19, making some teachers interested, etc.*)
 4. What did you discuss? (Tick all that apply) (*the new secondary English curriculum, materials to use for teaching English, new ideas for teaching English, how to teach English, our own lessons, other*)
 5. What did you learn at the monthly meetings? (Many answered *new ideas of teaching, using new curriculum, some teachers difficulties, how to prepare easier ESA lesson plan, using pair and group work, spidergrams, etc.*)
 6. What was the best thing about the monthly meetings? (Many answered *new ideas of teaching, new curriculum, sharing stuff with mates, adapting materials, talk and discuss teaching, etc.*)



A. S. Hornby Educational Trust

7. Did you have any problems or difficulties? Please describe them here. (Many answered *arriving on time, school strikes, getting teachers to join together, internet, mixed level in schools, finding stages of lessons*)
8. How has English teaching in Guinea-Bissau changed with these monthly group meetings? (Many answered *we talk about many things, starting a ESA lesson plan, opportunity to ask question about difficulties, better preparation to face students, etc.*)
9. What are the effects of the CoP groups? (Tick all that apply). (*English teachers talk to each other more, it is easier to use the new English secondary curriculum, groups would like to continue but they don't have money for transport and internet, other subject teachers are jealous, teachers are not so afraid to ask questions, teachers continue to meet sometimes*)
10. If you would like to say anything else about the ELTA-GB CoP Hornby Project, please write it here. (Many answered *thanks to Hornby and ELTA-GB for the project, we would like to have more projects like this, we want to do our next project on organising materials, it helps improve English teaching in our country, etc.*)

To sum up, we achieved all our objectives.

6. EXPENDITURE

Description	Breakdown	Total costs
Lunch funding – monthly lunch/dinner for group of teachers – in school canteen if possible/ available	7 months x 10 schools/regions x £21 (about 15,000 cfa)	£1,470
Internet contribution – for leader of each group (leader could change in different months) to discuss, report back, share ideas and solutions, etc. on WhatsApp group	7 months x 10 schools/regions x £7 (about 5,000 cfa)	£490
	Total	£1,960

The funding was flexible: we discussed it with the group leaders and different groups wanted to organise the money in different ways, so we agreed that this was OK. Some groups split the money equally between all members who attended the meeting; some cooked lunch at the house of one teacher and divided the money; some bought lunch for the group and divided the rest. The group leader always reported back via the WhatsApp group what they had done with the money each month when they reported what they had discussed. All the groups had four group meetings before Covid. The remaining three meetings took place in September, October and November 2020, when the schools re-opened, to support teachers with using the new curriculum and discuss their teaching and materials.

7. DISSEMINATION TO A WIDER AUDIENCE

- Braima Embalo wrote a short article about the first project (curriculum) for the IATEFL GISIG Joint Newsletter, September 2019 to show what ELTA-GB are working on.



A. S. Hornby Educational Trust

- Ali Djau and Mariza Mendes Cabral shared information about the projects at the British Council/ Hornby Regional Training event for West African TAs in Dakar, November 2019 to help other teaching associations with ideas on how they can apply too.
- Ali Djau and Mariza Mendes Cabral submitted a proposal to present on both Hornby projects at AfricaTESOL in Abidjan, August 2020 to share good practice and encourage other teaching associations to do similar projects. AfricaTESOL accepted this proposal, but the AfricaTESOL conference was cancelled because of Covid and will now be in August 2021, but it will be remote. Ali Djau does not have a strong enough Internet connection to be able to present remotely so he cannot present.

8. OVERALL REFLECTIONS

We have learned a lot about what has to go into a curriculum and how to balance teaching and not just teach grammar as we did before. We have learned to organise material and plan lessons that all teachers can teach. We have also learned to work together and take responsibility for explaining and helping other teachers with the curriculum.

We had to get help from some people with more experience in curriculum planning, and we have learned a lot from Linda Ruas and also from Jenny Kinnear, Maria Brown and Julia Stanton. Sometimes it is difficult to understand exactly what other people mean and we have improved our language skills interacting with these people who have supported us.

We have learnt how to be more focused in reporting on our WhatsApp group meetings, not just giving very general answers to questions. We have also become more energetic and independent, not relying on outsiders but relying on ourselves to work out and discuss our teaching.

9. GOING FORWARD/LOOKING AHEAD

We are so grateful for this support because these two projects were exactly what our teachers needed to get motivated again and feel that they can impact teaching and learning. We have had a very difficult three years in Guinea-Bissau, with political instability and many months of strikes. Teachers lost motivation but now with the WhatsApp group, they are more enthusiastic again about teaching. The teacher training is very basic in Guinea-Bissau, but with these two projects, and the many discussions, teachers are now developing a lot and even writing materials. Teachers now know that they don't need people from outside to train us, but we can do this ourselves, in groups. We still need people to correct our English often, but we can produce and discuss the ideas.

Although we had a break from the project from November 2019 to September 2020 because of the political situation and the Covid lockdown, we continued when the schools re-opened and this CoP project has proved a huge support to English teachers to help them teach with the new curriculum.

What we plan to work on next is producing materials for use in public schools based on our national curriculum. These materials will be based on the ESA (Engage, Study, Activate) lesson plan format and will greatly help our teachers and students. We have already submitted a proposal to Hornby for this project.