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REPORT ON HORNBY-FUNDED TEACHER ASSOCIATION PROJECT

Title: Project to establish communities of practice (CoPs) for primary and secondary school teachers of English in southern Zambia

Country: Zambia

Dates: August 2019–December 2020

1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The Language Teachers Association of Zambia with the support of the Hornby Educational Trust embarked on a project to establish Communities of Practice (CoPs) in Choma District of Southern Province. Generally, the project aimed at growing the membership of the association by grouping primary school teachers of language into professional clusters based on proximity, shared professional interests and practice, and common local challenges. The association then provided capacity building for teachers to mitigate and ultimately overcome local challenges using localised solutions.

A CoP is a group of individuals within an organisation who band together to share their knowledge and expertise, to learn from each other, and to build their capabilities. Teachers, as professionals, need to form communities of practice as a means of continuing professional development in the wake of funding and distance challenges. This project aimed to introduce the concept of COPs in the Language Teachers' Association of Zambia (LATAZ) as an alternative to conferences, which reduce teacher-learner contact time, require a lot of resources and cover a substantial distance. The establishment of COPs would assist primary school teachers in particular since they are most hindered by the aforementioned challenges.

LATAZ has been instrumental in providing continuing professional development among secondary school language teachers in the country, but the same could not be said about its impact on primary school language teachers. It was the desire to bridge this gap between the two sets of teachers in the association that influenced the planning of the project. The association considers the contribution of primary school language teachers crucial to its expansion and growth because they introduce elementary literacy skills to learners whom secondary school teachers build into competent English language users. Establishing a professional link between primary and secondary school teachers would provide a proper continuation of skills acquisition for learners. The secondary school teachers would have knowledge of where to begin building a learner.

2. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Specific objectives were to:

- develop a COP handbook;
- establish COPs in pilot districts;
- train COP leaders;
- provide capacity building for leaders.



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3. PROJECT MEMBERS AND THEIR ROLES

Name: Kanyama George

Institution: Choma Secondary School

Responsibilities: Supervise the project team and report to partners and funders

Name: Lungu Christine

Institution: Njase Girls' Secondary School

Responsibilities: Project Financial Officer

Name: Mweene Buumba S.

Institution: Choma Day Secondary School

Responsibilities: Secretariat

Name: Haninga Mwaka

Institution: District Resource Centre

Responsibilities: Lead Trainer and Content Developer

Name: Sikanyiti Mwiimbi Saint

Institution: Provincial Education Office

Responsibilities: Project Advisor

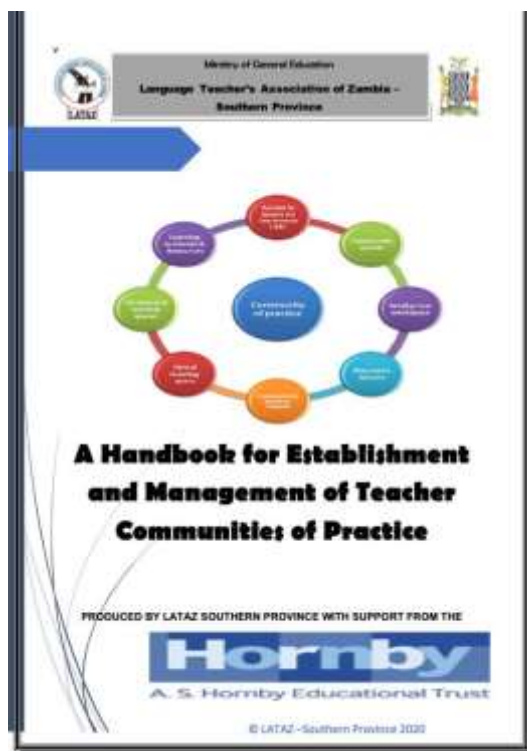
The team was selected by the Provincial Executive based on the role each member plays in the association and the Ministry of Education. While the team leader and project financial officer came from the association Executive Committee, the other team members were selected for their strategic positions in the target community.

4. DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

Dates	Description of activities	Duration	Status
August–September 2019	Development of training materials	2 months	Completed on schedule
October–November 2019	Mapping and delimitation of zones into COPs	2 months	Completed in December 2019
January 2020	Orientation workshop for district leaders	3 days	Completed in February 2020
January–March 2020	Establishment of formal COP structures	3 months	Members registered and structures set up but operationalisation was disturbed by Covid-19. Effort being made to use technology where available
April 2020	Training for COP leaders in pilot districts	1 month	Due to Covid-19, the training was conducted online for a month with only one face-to-face meeting.
June 2020	First evaluation	1 week	Conducted in August 2020
September 2020	Second evaluation	1 week	Conducted in October/November 2020



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The CoP Handbook

COP leaders workshop programme

Topic	Learning activity	Date	Presenter
Training objectives, expectations and ground rules	Presentation	05 June 2020	Kanyama George (online)
Defining COPs	Presentation	05 June 2020	Mwaka Haninga (online)
Why COPs for teachers	Plenary	05 June 2020	Lungu Christine (online)
COPs Development cycles	Presentation	12 June 2020	Dautiate Walubita (online)
Defining purpose	Presentation	12 June 2020	Kanyama George (online)
Canvassing for membership	Presentation/practical	19 June 2020	Mukuwa Saviour (online)
Defining practice	Presentation	19 June 2020	Mweene Buumba (online)
Designing activity	Practical session	26 June 2020	Mwaka Haninga (online)
Designing a communication strategy	Presentation and plenary	26 June 2020	Mukuwa Saviour (face-to-face)
Using social media to grow Cops	Group activity and plenary	03 July 2020	Kanyama George (online)



Mr. Haninga presenting the COP leaders workshop at Choma District Resource Centre, 26 June 2020



Participants follow proceedings



The presenter and participants follow as Mr. Kanyama explains a point

5. EVALUATION

As an association, the project opened a lot of avenues for growth and expansion. Before the project, there was little, and in some cases, no professional interaction between primary and secondary school teachers. The association membership was mainly composed of secondary school teachers, and as a result, most of the activities, plans and engagements involved only the secondary side of the education system. As one teacher from Kabimba Primary School commented:

'I always thought LATAZ was only an association for secondary school teachers of English because they are the ones who travel to national conferences. Besides, our rural schools can never sponsor anyone to attend a conference or seminar unless directed by the Minister of Education.'



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This view was held by most teachers reached by the project. WhatsApp groups were therefore created to continue the conversation around the matter.

COPs have helped bridge this gap between primary and secondary school teachers. Before the project, primary school teachers would only participate in activities that involved learners such as debates, quizzes and essay writing competitions, and these were the only collaborative platforms between primary and secondary school language teachers. The gap between English teachers and those of other local languages was wider. With this project, the association has been able to create awareness and appreciation of local teaching environments and existing professional links among language teachers, and increase association membership. In fact, a notable increase in association membership has been recorded in selected zones:

No	Zone	Membership 2018/19	Membership 2020/21	Percentage Increase
1.	Batoka Zone	17	26	21%
2.	Chilalantambo Zone	0	2	100%
3.	Choma A Zone	68	73	4%
4.	Choma B Zone	53	70	14%
5.	Kabimba Zone	0	3	100%
6.	Kachenje Zone	2	3	20%
7.	Macha Zone	10	14	17%
8.	Mang'unza Zone	2	4	33%
9.	Mapanza Zone	2	3	20%
10.	Masuku A Zone	5	7	17%
11.	Masuku B Zone	3	5	25%
12.	Mbabala Zone	4	9	38%
13.	Nakeempa Zone	0	4	100%
14.	Namuswa Zone	0	0	0%
15.	Siamambo Zone	1	2	33%
16.	Sikalongo Zone	5	9	29%
17.	Simaubi Zone	0	3	100%
18.	Singani Zone	1	3	50%
	Totals	173	240	16%

Association membership rose at an average rate of 16% between January 2020 and February 2021.

Furthermore, teachers are more aware of their context and the need to tailor English language teaching to their local needs. One such need is cooperation and social cohesion. During interactions with teachers, it was evident that competition for awards and recognition drove their teaching agenda:

'I cannot teach my colleague's class when she's around and make her learners perform better than mine. Similarly, I do not expect another teacher to teach my class for whatever reason', said one teacher.



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The trend was similar in many zones. Collaborative teaching of seemingly unfamiliar topics was unheard of as most teachers would not ask their peers for help for fear of being considered incompetent. The project therefore helped foster cooperation and peer teaching.

Teachers were also made aware of the need to appreciate and innovatively use materials within their own surroundings. Zambia is a developing country whose education system is underfunded due to low incomes at both household and national level. However, primary education in all public schools is free – that is the government is the sole provider of human, financial and material resources needed for teaching and learning to take place. Due to the nature of their training, most English teachers rely heavily on textbooks to teach. These textbooks are either inadequate or non-existent in some schools. Through this project, the association endeavoured to orient teachers on how to teach without textbooks, and in few cases, through cooperating partners, the association was able to provide some textbooks to seven schools.

Finally, it is encouraging to see that other subject associations have taken a leaf from the lessons of the CoP project and have introduced Subject Association Coordinating Teams at the academic zone* level. For example, the Business Studies Teachers Association of Zambia (BUSTAZ), whose membership is dominated by teachers from urban secondary schools (despite their subjects being compulsory in all schools), have begun designing a model project to help them reach out to rural teachers.

*The administrative structure of the Ministry of Education in Zambia has three levels in each district: school, zone, and district. An academic zone is a group schools (five to eight) in a particular area. They are clustered purely on their proximity to each other, often within a 10 km radius for urban zones and 30km for rural zones.

6. EXPENDITURE

The budget was adjusted to keep the project going amid public health restrictions brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. When it became unattainable to hold training as planned, the team decided to turn to technology as the most feasible ways to reach the trainees. To this effect, a Zoom account was purchased alongside internet gadgets to enable it to run. Furthermore, it became imperative to channel some of the lodging funds into purchasing data bundles so that trainees could attend sessions.

Description	Breakdown	Total costs	Remarks
Lodging	£10 x 15	£150	12 District leaders + 3 Project team members
Data bundle	£3 x 36	£108	36 participants
Zoom licence	£143	£143	One year Zoom Pro licence
Transport costs	£16 x 20	£320	For participants travelling 60km or more to the training venue
Wi-Fi modem	£38	£38	Wi-Fi modem and router for online training



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Technical equipment and stationary	£84	£84	Printing services, writing pads, pens, projector (hiring), folders, certification
Catering	£12 x 20	£240	For 20 participants and project team
COP Handbooks	£5.50 x 150	£825	Flash drives with training materials
Total Cost		£1,908.00	

7. DISSEMINATION TO A WIDER AUDIENCE

Ministry of General Education, Provincial Education Office: to keep them in the loop as employers of the teachers.

The Provincial Education Office was supportive of the project – sanctioning it and communicating to the supervising officers of the project team and participants. A report was filed with the office of Senior Education Standards Officer for future reference and they were impressed with the contents of the report. The standards officer indicated that once Covid restrictions are relaxed, she will table the contents for discussion at the standards and evaluation meeting. It is at that meeting where ideas from the report will be possibly be incorporated into strategies for the Continuing Professional Development of teachers.

Subject Associations Coordinating Team, Southern Province: to inspire other subject associations to consider introducing COPs as a vehicle for reaching primary school teachers based in rural areas and grow associations.

The SACT team appreciated the project by its leadership occasionally attending the online sessions. After reviewing the report, the chairperson of the team said:

‘This is a very good initiative from LATAZ. It is the surest way of not only recruiting members into our respective associations, but also retaining them through continuous engagements.’

A number of associations under this umbrella have since begun brainstorming ideas through online meetings and LATAZ is on hand to help when called upon. One such association is BUSTAZ (Business Studies Teachers Association of Zambia).

LATAZ National Council: to inspire other provincial leaders to consider using the model for the growth of the association in other provinces.

The project inspired a similar one in the Eastern Province, which targeted issues of nutrition in the ELT primary classroom. The council also bought in the use of technology to conduct activities that keep the association active.

LATAZ Provincial Council: to enable other districts to understand, appreciate and plan to conduct similar projects of their own.

The district leaders attended the training and one of them was among the presenters. A weekly webinar series was born from the project. It mainly involves bringing in local ELT experts to help teachers deal with contentious topics through presentations and plenary



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discussions. The programme has now attracted a nationwide audience. It can be accessed here: [LATAZ SOUTHERN - YouTube](#)

English Language Teaching Community: to foster unity of purpose, bridge professional gaps and give all teachers the sense of belonging to one big family.

The participation in the online activities that came after the closure of the project was an indication that the teaching community warmed up to the project.

8. OVERALL REFLECTIONS

Project planning and execution skills

This was the first funded project the association has undertaken in recent years. Accordingly, it provided a lot of learning opportunities for both the project team and the participants. Cardinal among the lessons was risk management in project management. The Covid pandemic emerged at a key point of the project when serious interaction was planned to take place. Consequently, the project had to navigate through this particular setback in order to keep project goals in sight. In addition, as unfamiliar as the technology was to many project team members and participants, it was used successfully. The team opted to use Zoom Cloud meetings after conducting tutorials on WhatsApp, and using the two sets of technology, it was possible to conduct the majority of the training online.

Strengths

The following strengths were identified:

1. teachers are naturally willing to learn together;
2. the association has the potential to grow and expand using the COP model;
3. technology remains the future for how TAs conduct their business.

Weaknesses

The two main weaknesses identified were:

1. the quality of technology in rural areas, which needs upgrading;
2. some TA leaders and members still need to adjust to new times when face-to-face meetings are no longer feasible.

The association could have done better in the following area:

- mobilising more participants when training was moved online.

Suggestions to other TAs:

- anticipate risks and make plans to manage these;
- budget for extensive use of technology to achieve project goals.

9. GOING FORWARD/LOOKING AHEAD

Since the last day of the project the association has:

- ✓ created a Facebook group and page for continued interaction which now has close to 1,000 members;
- ✓ opened a YouTube Channel where teaching tips and online discussions are streamed live;



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- ✓ launched a weekly Webinar Series (started in March 2021) that helps teachers on how to teach difficult topics, use technology to develop resilience, and continue teaching during lockdown (closure of schools). The sessions are conducted on Zoom and streamed on both YouTube and Facebook.

The association also plans to:

- expand the project to all ten provinces
- use the established COPs and context for research and tailored material development
- intensify virtual activities to keep the association alive in the wake of restrictions imposed on public gatherings due to escalating Covid-19 cases and deaths.