

8. NIGERIA
A PRIMARY EDUCATION
IMPROVEMENT PROJECT
BEGUN 1969

Background

In recent years Nigeria has been much concerned to improve the quality of the education offered in its schools, and more especially in its primary schools where, as an observer has put it: "what is now taught ... is often poor by any educational standards; at its best formal and unimaginative; at its worst inefficient, irrelevant and dull."

To this end a National Curriculum Conference met in 1969 and produced an agreed statement of national educational objectives, with specific objectives for each level of education. This was followed by the convening of workshops to translate these general objectives into detailed specific objectives for each subject and class, and also to produce outline syllabuses.

The primary workshop took place in 1971 and produced syllabus guidelines in six subject areas, as the basis for curricula to be devised and used experimentally at State level.

In the case of the northern states in Nigeria, work had, in fact, already begun in 1969, centred on the Institute of Education, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Aims

The overall aim was to produce a full experimental, child-centred primary school curriculum for pilot use in all the northern states and eventual large-scale adoption. But as "curriculum change depends on people, not paper" a major in-service programme was developed to ensure the effective implementation of the new curriculum materials in the schools.

In the earlier years of the project, this was concentrated on 66 project schools, 11 in each of the then six northern states, with a Teachers College acting as the local centre in each case.

Needs and priorities

First priority in this in-service programme was given to maintaining close and sympathetic supervision of the teachers in the project schools. The key people in this process were a group of "mobile teacher trainers", one based at each of the centres and responsible for the experimental schools in his area.

Resources

The main agencies involved were the six State Ministries of Education who were responsible for the payment of teachers and supervisors; the Institute of Education who undertook the preparation and trial of materials and their distribution together with in-service training; and UNICEF who provided the financial support for the Institute's work and for the transport of field supervisors.

The full-time staff employed consisted of one mobile teacher trainer for each centre and sometimes a full-time assistant as well. In addition, there were part-time-project co-ordinators at the Institute of Education, subject panel members, college tutors and inspectors.

Participants

The key to the project was the selected group of mobile teacher trainers entrusted with the task of implementing the new curricula and teaching materials with the teachers in the 66 project schools.

Content of the course

The courses, both central and local, were very closely geared to the curriculum materials - that is to the schemes of work, teachers' notes and pupils' materials including locally purchased materials such as cassava paste, market dyes etc. - for language, mathematics, social studies, science and health education. Clearly all concerned, trainers and project

teachers alike, had to be familiar with the nature and purpose of these materials. The courses, therefore, provided opportunities for study, discussion, demonstration and practice in such a way that, on their return to their schools, the project teachers were prepared to apply what they had learned in their own classrooms. Even so, it was felt that these short courses had attempted to do too much in covering the whole curriculum for any one school year and, consequently, local supplementary courses had sometimes to be run to remedy weaknesses.

The programme was so arranged that the new curricula were introduced experimentally year by year i.e. Class 1 in 1971; Class 2 in 1972 etc., with materials for each year prepared in advance and distributed to the schools in time for the new school year.

Modes and methods of training

In-service course work was carried out at two levels; first at the Institute, for the trainers i.e. college tutors, mobile teacher trainers and inspectors; then at the 11 local centres for the teachers in the project schools. These short courses were held each year during the school holidays in December and January and were followed immediately by the trial use of the new materials in the schools. During each year a workshop was held for the mobile teacher trainers who reported back on the use and suitability of the project materials in the schools.

Follow-up and evaluation

A report on the Project, said that it was when the experimental material got into the classroom that the most crucial work took place and the most unpredictable problems were encountered. This was where the work of the "mobile teacher trainers" who were mostly Nigerians, though there were some British teachers, was so important. With some partial assistance from local college tutors or inspectors, they had the task not only of supervising the new material, but of

distributing it, explaining it, and sometimes translating it; of running local courses for teachers, demonstrating in the classroom and proving informal evaluation of its effectiveness.

The mobile teacher trainers in other words, provided the constant help and reassurance in the field that was essential if the teachers were to be able to revise their whole outlook towards primary teaching in the manner that the new curriculum materials required. Teachers needed much help and confidence to forsake the safety of the formal routines which had been their whole experience of education and to embark on the uncertain waters of creative activities, group work, environmental studies and discovery science.

As already indicated, a process of continuous evaluation of the project was carried out, very largely by the mobile teacher trainers during their visits to the project schools. This informal evaluation sought to assess the suitability and effectiveness of the experimental curriculum materials. At the same time it was necessarily concerned with the in-service training programme mounted to prepare the teachers for their work.

The feed-back came during the annual workshops for the field staff and as a result of which the experimental materials were revised in the light of experience in the schools.

Special features

The Project was an example of the way in which centralized initiative (often the only practicable one) can gradually be devolved and modified to suit local conditions while retaining its fundamental character.

It provided a good example of working partnership between a University Institute of Education, Ministries of Education, schools and an international agency.

The mobile teacher trainers had a key role in ensuring close follow-up and supervision of the

project teachers in their schools. In a similar project in Tanzania, such staff based at teachers' colleges, had a limited pre-service as well as an in-service training role. Such an arrangement does much to keep the colleges in close touch with the realities of the school situation.

A matter for continuing concern is the adequacy of the administrative and financial support which a developing programme of this kind requires if it is to be fully effective, as also is the question of whether the rate of diffusion of the new curriculum materials to larger numbers of schools may not prove to be too fast in relation to in-service training capacity.

Reference

1. HAWES, H.W.R. - New Curricula for Nigerian Primary Schools. Overseas Challenge, No. 23, 1972.