

The Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa programme: preparing for implementation

Ann Floyd, The Open University (UKOU)

Abstract

The Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa programme (TESSA) is developing a bank of innovative open content materials to support school-based teacher education at primary/basic level. It therefore contributes to the MDG of universal primary education. It is a consortium of nine African universities, together with the Commonwealth of Learning, the African Virtual University, the BBC World Service Trust, and the OU UK.

Preparing good materials is not enough of itself. There are many examples of good ODL materials being prepared and then not being used. TESSA is therefore paying particular attention to implementation issues. The consortium's ambition is that TESSA materials will be used by many thousands of teachers in large-scale school-based professional development programmes.

This session will outline the ways in which the consortium and its individual African members are preparing for large-scale implementation, and some of the issues that are arising. These include ownership and academic approval, versioning materials to local contexts, the fit of the materials with others in the same programmes, planning learner support, and assessment strategies.

The session will have a substantial interactive component, so that some of these issues can be explored by participants and experiences and insights shared.

Overview

The Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa programme (TESSA) is researching and developing a bank of innovative open content materials to support school-based teacher education. It is focussed on the basic education sector, and so on the MDG of universal primary education. It is a consortium of nine African universities, together with the Commonwealth of Learning, the African Virtual University, the BBC World Service Trust, and the OU UK.

Preparing good materials is not enough of itself. There are too many examples of good ODL materials being prepared and then not being used, and there are many good reasons for this. TESSA is therefore paying particular attention to implementation issues. The ambition the consortium has is that TESSA materials will be used by many thousands of teachers in large-scale school-based professional development programmes so as to make a real difference to the many children in their classrooms. TESSA also anticipates that some institutions will incorporate the materials in pre-service programmes, and expects that because they will be open content, and therefore freely available, many individual teachers will eventually use them directly.

This paper outlines the ways in which the consortium and its individual African members are preparing for large-scale implementation, and some of the issues that have to be dealt with. These include ownership and academic approval, the scope for versioning the materials to local contexts, the fit of the materials with others in the same programmes, planning learner support, and assessment strategies. This paper therefore fits well into the conference theme of collaboration, though it also relates to each of the other themes.

Other papers in this conference deal with the materials development and open content aspects of the TESSA programme (Devereux, 2006, and Wolfenden 2006) so these are only covered in this paper to the extent necessary to explain the implementation issues.

This paper has three principal sections. The first describes the TESSA consortium itself, and the second summarises the TESSA programme. The third and most substantial section outlines the key implementation issues and the approach the consortium is taking to collaborate on these.

1. The TESSA consortium

The consortium includes universities in 9 Sub-Saharan countries, namely:

- Ghana : Cape Coast and Winneba universities.
- Kenya: Egerton University.
- Nigeria: National Teachers Institute, Kaduna.
- Rwanda : Kigali Institute of Education
- Sudan : Open University of Sudan
- South Africa : University of Fort Hare, UNISA and the University of Pretoria.
- Tanzania: Open University of Tanzania
- Uganda: Kyambogo University, Makerere University.
- Zambia: University of Zambia

The other consortium members are the Commonwealth of Learning, the BBC World Service Trust, the African Virtual University (AVU) and the OU UK.

2. The TESSA programme

The consortium is working together to produce a bank of resources which will eventually be available to any individual or organisation, free of charge, on an open content basis. The resources are designed for teachers and teacher educators to use. In the longer term the intention is that individuals will be able to use them as they see fit, but the priority at this stage is for the consortium partners to incorporate them in programmes that suit teacher education needs in their countries. The challenges associated with this are the focus of this paper.

The materials are modular and fall into five subject groups, which between them sample the typical primary curriculum. There will be modules in literacy, life-skills, mathematics, science and social studies/arts. They will be available in print and Web-based formats. All of them are school-based, i.e. they are built around activities that practising teachers can undertake in their own classroom settings. These resources will be complemented by modules covering significant classroom issues, such as managing large classes, monitoring individual students and so on.

The materials are being designed so that they can be readily versioned into different contexts. Many aspects of the materials will be suitable without change in classrooms across many parts of Africa, but not all. There will also be a need to translate the materials into appropriate languages. As the development progresses, different versions of the materials will be created as a consequence.

A Web environment is being created to host these materials in all their different versions, and this is a particular input on the part of the AVU.

Alongside the development of materials and the Web environment the consortium is collaborating on a research and evaluation strategy.

All these activities are intended to enable consortium institutions (and ultimately many other institutions and individuals) to create and deliver high quality programmes in their countries which will make a major contribution to their teacher education needs. Effective realisation of the MDG of universal primary education depends very much on expanding the numbers of qualified teachers and upgrading many of those already in the classroom. The school-based approach fundamental to TESSA is designed to facilitate

this. It is also an approach that can support large numbers of teachers and would be teachers at the same time, using ODL methodologies.

However realisation of this goal is not a trivial exercise. Maximising the benefit from these resources entails thinking through many issues in each university and country. At the same time, many of these issues are common across the consortium, so there is advantage in thinking them through together. This paper is about some of those issues and the process the consortium is using to work on them together. This is very much work in progress, and it is hoped that the discussions at this conference and in this session will shed new light on this work to the ultimate benefit of Africa's children, their teachers and their teacher educators.

The timescale of the project will result in materials gradually becoming available during 2007, and programmes using them will begin in 2007 and 2008.

3. Collaborating on key Implementation issues

Seven of these are discussed below.

The first three are all about macro level planning. The first is to do with determining what the priority teacher education needs are to which TESSA resources might be relevant. The second is concerned with planning programmes to meet these needs, incorporating TESSA resources alongside others. The third is about securing ownership by the host university, so that the programme can be offered in its name and supported by its systems.

The fourth and fifth are about selecting and adapting resources. TESSA resources may need to be versioned, and other resources may need to be identified or created, so that the programme is complete.

The sixth and seventh are about planning support systems and assessment strategies, which of course make all the difference to success and quality.

All of these are areas where collaboration and cross-fertilisation are proving to be valuable at this stage.

Identifying key teacher education needs at the basic/primary level

The first implementation challenge is to clarify what the priority needs are, and this will vary between countries. It may be that the priority is to educate teachers who have minimal or no qualifications beyond a partial or complete secondary education. It may be that the most compelling need is to upgrade teachers with a basic teaching qualification to something higher, typically taking them from a certificate to a diploma. Or it may be that the key goal is to create an all-graduate profession, and bring diploma teachers to B.Ed level. Alternatively it may not be a whole programme that is needed at all, but rather an initiative that aims to introduce all teachers at whatever level to a more interactive pedagogy, or to the use of ICT etc. through an ongoing professional development scheme of some description.

The above are all in-service options for existing teachers. There are pre-service needs too, and it may be that the key challenge is to increase teacher numbers through a significantly school based programme, or to enhance the teaching practice component of a campus based programme.

In addition to the teachers themselves, teacher educators in teachers colleges or in education faculties may also have professional development needs. In many countries significant numbers of teacher educators in colleges only have diplomas themselves, and so an important need in some cases may be a programme that will enable them to upgrade to bachelors level.

All these needs exist in one or more TESSA countries, and most of them in more than one. The process of sharing these needs has already resulted in some refining of priorities on the part of consortium members, and has laid the ground for collaboration on the issues below.

Planning the programme in which TESSA resources will be used

Several countries share the need to upgrade certificate teachers to diploma level, and this section will focus on this example, though there are several others. One issue that became apparent very quickly was that 'diploma' is a rather vague term that could be interpreted in many different ways. There was much more agreement about what a bachelor's degree might mean. Hence consortium members are beginning to work together on some kind of shared definition, or at least a set of overlapping definitions.

This has taken the discussion into the area of learning outcomes, or competences. What should a diploma teacher know? What should a diploma teacher be able to do? Some consortium members' analyses of this have gone further than others, but the act of endeavouring to express what a diploma means in these terms and to share this with others is potentially very valuable to all involved.

For example, it brings out into the open the pedagogic style that is wanted. How much interactivity are teachers expected to be able to handle? Should they be able to handle large classes? How is this conditioned by the examinations that they are expected to prepare their pupils for?

It also brings out into the open the subject knowledge assumptions. What mathematics should we expect a primary school teacher to know? What science? What do we expect them to understand with regard to history, geography, culture, politics, HIV/AIDS?

One consortium member has a well-developed framework of learning outcomes/competences which has enabled others to draft their own frameworks more quickly. The intention is to create as common a framework as possible for defining learning outcomes/competences for teachers at this level. Later on the research agenda of TESSA will explore the effectiveness of this, and the consortium will collaborate on this too. The shared understanding also lays the foundation for mutual recognition of qualifications between countries, which would be a very positive outcome as well.

This sharing of definitions of qualifications in terms of learning outcomes across the consortium is intended to cover more than the Diploma in Primary Education qualification described above. The consortium will therefore be working on others such as the B.Ed Primary which many partners also wish to develop.

Getting the programmes and any policy changes approved

There are too many examples of materials being prepared and then not being used as fully as had been hoped. Sometimes this is attributable to internal processes, and the consortium is explicitly supporting each other in relation to these.

Every institution has its own processes for academic approval, and they all take time. The goal is to bring this process to fruition in all the consortium partners over the next year, so that agreement is secured in plenty of time for the resources to be used as soon as they are ready. In many institutions there will be debates to be had about what school-based means, and how the teachers are to be supported and assessed. There will also be debates about learning outcomes, such as the level of subject knowledge needed.

The consortium partners will help and support each other in this process. They will challenge each other's thinking in debates about all the issues described here, and will collectively develop robust arguments for whatever it is they decide to implement. They will also be able to refer to other consortium partners' plans in their own internal debates, which may also help.

The process of approval will also be facilitated in each institution by developing a sense of ownership as the project progresses. Early involvement of Vice-Chancellors has been secured, and most institutions are involved as authors and/or critical readers of the materials.

Versioning TESSA materials to fit

The TESSA materials are being designed to make it possible to version them into country contexts. At one extreme this could mean that all the examples/case studies etc. in a country version were drawn from that country. It has been very interesting that the consortium partners do not want to go to this extreme, but rather to draw on each other to give an international as well as a local flavour to the materials. It seems likely that whilst a country version will have some country specific elements, it will also have some examples/case studies from other countries to demonstrate similarities and differences, and to show teachers and their pupils something of the world beyond their locality.

This blend of the local and the international would be hard to achieve without the consortium process, and it appears that the very act of collaborating on materials development and sharing versions will enable the enriching of all the individual programmes. This too will be a research topic as TESSA progresses.

Identifying any other materials needed as well as TESSA

The TESSA resources of themselves will not provide enough material for a whole programme in most instances, so other materials will need to be identified by most partners to ensure that the learning outcomes are covered. One obvious area will be subject matter content - some science or mathematics, for example.

Many of the partners have such resources themselves, and there will be some sharing of what they have, subject to any intellectual property issues that there might be.

Several of them are also involved in related initiatives which may provide relevant resources on an open content basis. An obvious example of this is the AVU Teacher Education initiative, funded by the African Development Bank. The AVU is a TESSA partner, which makes it straightforward to draw on this, and four consortium countries are directly involved - Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. The resources coming out of this initiative will also be open content and will focus on subject matter content in maths and science, as well as ICT skills. The focus of the AVU project is on secondary teachers, but some of the content knowledge they require is also appropriate for primary teachers.

The consortium partners will therefore be sharing ideas for materials to use alongside TESSA as it goes forward.

Planning and implementing good support systems

It is well understood that resources, however good, are insufficient for effective implementation. Appropriate learner support systems are vital too. Many consortium members have systems in place, though they all see scope for enhancement, especially in relation to the support needs for the school based approach that TESSA embodies.

Thinking about this is at an early stage, but it is evident that this is another area where shared experiences and proposals across the consortium should be beneficial. One area in which this will be actively explored is the TESSA materials for teacher educators. Together the consortium will be thinking through the roles that lecturers in teachers' colleges or education faculties might play in supporting teachers using TESSA materials, and how these teacher educators might be prepared to undertake these roles.

There are also many quality assurance issues such as ensuring consistency of support from one teacher to another, and some of these will also be explored as time and resources allow.

Assessing the learning outcomes aimed for

One key aspect of the support system is undertaking assessment of performance. That assessment should clearly be in relation to the learning outcomes of the programme in question. If possession of a Diploma in Primary Education entails specific subject knowledge and specific pedagogic skills, then the assessment system has to provide evidence that these learning outcomes have been attained.

However, creating such an assessment strategy is not easy. Pedagogic skills are not readily measured by examinations, though aspects can of course feature in examination questions. So the fundamental challenge is to find manageable and cost-effective ways of obtaining evidence of pedagogic skills, because if this challenge is avoided, busy teachers will focus on what is being assessed and give less priority to non-assessed outcomes.

The consortium partners plan to wrestle with this challenge together.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined some of the key ways in which the TESSA consortium plans to collaborate on implementation so as to maximise the chances that the TESSA materials will be used effectively and on a substantial scale.

We cannot tell how effective this will be in terms of uptake and quality, but efforts will be made to evaluate this.. TESSA's aim is to touch as many teachers as possible and through them to reach many more children. The ambition is to create learning opportunities for these children that will not only contribute to meeting the MDG of universal primary education but also ensure that the educational experience the children have is a good one.

[Back to Papers](#)