

TICZA IMPLEMENTATION COMPENDIUM

Overview of the District Based Teacher Recruitment Strategy^{1,2}

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Compiled by Freda Walters³

fwalters@savethechildren.org.za

Background

Teachers are potential key levers to enable positive change in learner outcomes. Teachers with sound content and pedagogical knowledge can impact the quality of education (Ball, Thames, & Phelps, 2008; Baumert & Kunter, 2013; Guerriero, n.d.). In 2015, various stakeholders joined efforts to design a pilot project that aimed to improve the quality of newly qualified teachers who studied through distance education.

Save the Children South Africa (SCSA), in partnership with key stakeholders, designed and implemented the District Based Teacher Recruitment Strategy (DBTRS) project in the Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District (TMED) of the Free State. The project's aim was to develop a new Extended Student Teacher Internship (ESTI) programme that would produce teachers who have mastered both subject content and the ability to teach that content in the classroom.

An overview of the DBTRS project piloted in the Eastern Free State by SCSA together with the Department of Basic Education (DBE), Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), Free State Department of Education (FSDoE), TMED, North West University (NWU) and University of South Africa (UNISA) is presented here.



"This is a good method. Student teachers who are trained while attending school are more knowledgeable because they go to work knowing how to teach. They already know what is really happening at schools."

DBTRS Mentor Teacher



1 Shortened for publication in the TICZA Implementation Compendium. Further detail can be obtained from the author. A [short film](#) that won an award can be [viewed](#).
2 A special thank you to everyone who gave of their time and expertise to make this project a success: The steering committee (DBE, DHET, FSDoE, TMED, funders, NWU, UNISA, student leadership); the District DoE team, SCSA project team; and mostly to the students and qualified teachers.
3 Education Advocacy Manager, SCSA.



The pilot project supported student teachers from a rural district to study towards a B.Ed. degree, specialising in the Foundation Phase or Intermediate Phase through distance learning by:

1. Assisting them with a Funza Lushaka bursary;
2. Placing them in classrooms with experienced and passionate teachers who serve as mentors in classroom practice for the duration of their studies;
3. Provide them with mentorship support from SCSA to overcome various challenges as they work to attain their degrees.

The DBTRS project implemented an ESTI programme comprising four critical domains of teacher development: psychosocial support, academic support, teaching practice development, and financial support. Collectively, these domains of support work to achieve two objectives of the DBTRS project:

1. Improve knowledge and skills in delivering quality teaching;
2. Prepare student teachers for the teaching profession.

In the DBTRS project, throughout the year, the student teachers attend school four days a week and have one day a week to focus on academic requirements, throughout the year. Mentor teachers received mentorship training as part of the project.

Psychosocial support was important in helping students to develop holistically. Retired teachers were employed as SCSA mentors to provide both academic and psychosocial support for the duration of the project. Academic support was meant to provide the student teachers with guidance that would assist them to have a thorough understanding of the curriculum content.



“This project has been useful from day 1 till the last day, without the support I got from the project I don’t think I will have been able to achieve what I have achieved up to so far. I spent 8 years without doing nothing and this project has rescue me from many things. I can now say I am university graduates with working experience because of this project. I will forever be grateful.”

DBTRS graduate

Selection and recruitment

The TMED was selected as the site for the DBTRS pilot project. The district is situated in a rural setting and was also the top performing public school district in the Free State province at the inception stage of the project. Student teachers would attend local schools for teaching practice throughout the year while studying through a distance learning programme.

Student teachers were recruited from this context with the aim of employing them as newly qualified teachers in the same district once they graduate. During the planning phase, the District Director indicated the phases and subject areas in which there was a need for teachers. The project aligned itself to this need, and this informed the selection of specialisation and phase.

From July 2015, SCSA recruited two cohorts of young people from TMED for distance learning programmes. Recruitment was done through local advertising.

The first intake of 49 student teachers started in January 2016. They were enrolled at UNISA for the B.Ed. degree with specialisation in the Foundation Phase. In 2017, a second cohort of 45 student teachers enrolled at NWU for the B.Ed. degree with specialisation in Intermediate Phase (with Mathematics and Science as subjects).

“It has been one of the most amazing journeys I had and to be honest it was challenging to study while at home but by the Gods grace, hard work and dedication, I must say I’m glad that I have finally completed my studies. I am also very thankful to have had SCSA which really made everything work out so well and so smooth through the years no matter the challenges and difficulties, the support was amazing and I believe without it some of us would have gave up long ago. So this was really the best four years filled with a lot of learning and personal growth.”

DBTRS graduate

Project successes

1. High retention rates in both cohorts – 84% and 80%, respectively.
2. 78% of students in the UNISA cohort have graduated, while 76% of the NWU cohort have graduated.
3. These retention and completion rates were achieved amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. Students acquired new technology skills in the process. This allowed for a pivot to blended learning approaches.
5. The supportive partnership with the TMED was key to the success of the project.
6. The project followed a needs-based approach by including student teachers’ voices during implementation.
7. Good school mentors, who provided support in the classroom and broader school environment, were important to the students’ development.

Challenges

1. Some student teachers struggled to balance academic and teaching practice demands.
2. At times, student teachers were given additional responsibilities, beyond the scope of practice teaching.
3. Some student teachers needed assistance to resolve challenges in administration processes (e.g., registration or bursary processes).
4. In general, stipend payments were on time but at certain times of the year, they were delayed.

Lessons learnt



Programme considerations

ESTI programmes should be sensitive to *demographic* (e.g., race, age, gender, background, qualifications, district supply and demand) and *contextual factors* (e.g. student needs, load shedding, service delivery challenges and associated protests) during design and implementation phases.



Balanced student support

Psychosocial support to students must be balanced with features that foster the development of work preparedness, independence, confidence and problem solving. Once student teachers graduate, they should be empowered, self-efficient and resilient in the absence of support from the project as they transition to being newly qualified teachers.



Value of partnership

Strategic collaboration and relationship building are key to helping the education sector move forward to create change. Underpinning each model component was a strong partnership with the government departments and university partners as well as student representatives.



Evidence generation

Monitoring, evaluation and research was a key part of this project. Good monitoring and evaluation practices allowed for learning while the project was being implemented and improved its quality.

SCSA is currently an implementing partner of the Teacher Internship Collaboration South Africa (TICZA). This is a multi-stakeholder effort to support effective, efficient and scalable extended student teacher internship programmes with the goal of improving the number of quality teachers. The future focus will be on using the lessons learnt to date to drive further innovation in this field through key partnerships.

References

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