

## PRELIM 3

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# Zambia: LATAZ (Language Teachers Association of Zambia)

with

## Hilderstone College

August 2024

## Project background

Partnership overview		
Partners	ETA partner	LATAZ, Zambia
	UKI partner	Hilderstone College, UK
User Profile	Context overview	Zambia has 7 official languages; school subjects are taught through English (EMI); many learners have low levels of literacy
	Learner age group(s)	Primary, Grades 2-4
	Curriculum overview	The Zambia National Education Curriculum Framework of 2023 prescribes English as a medium of communication and instruction across all levels of the education system except from early childhood to Grade 4. Presently, the national literacy policy provides for the teaching of literacy in local languages from Grades 1 – 4. English is taught alongside a local language
Teacher support resource package	Resource format and organisation	PDF/Microsoft PPT/MP3 audio file
	Resource content	Phonics Flashcards set (approx. 70 cards), Phonics Flashcards activities booklet, Common Sounds and Spellings booklet, Vowel Sound Worksheet Pack (x5), Teacher’s Notes, Training PPT (x2), MP3 recordings of word list, short stories (x5)
	Resource sustainability	To sustain the PRELIM 3 spirit, the association is engaging some businesses to possibly fund the printing of more materials for distribution to teachers who will not fall within the current project scope. The association has also formed a Community of Practice for primary school teachers, which it sustains, to continue conversations about all aspects of the materials. So far, the feedback points to the continued and more expanded distribution of the materials

<b>Dissemination</b>	<b>Methods</b>	Materials distributed in print form and copies sent electronically via WhatsApp
	<b>Timeframe</b>	Batch 1 resources piloted July 2023, feedback collected October 2023. Batch 2 disseminated November 2023, feedback collected March 2024 (delayed by pandemic). Final copies sent April 2024
	<b>Number of teachers reached</b>	At the time of writing: 240 teachers. Once disseminated: 1,000 teachers minimum in print form and more electronically

## Description of the partners

**The Language Teachers’ Association of Zambia – LATAZ** was established in 1976 by British expatriates to provide professional development opportunities for English Language Teachers. Over the years, the association has expanded its scope to include teachers of local and other international languages taught in Zambian schools.

**Hilderstone College** is a not-for-profit institution with over 50 years’ experience of teaching English to foreign students. Originally it was a state-funded institution but was incorporated in 1993 to its current charitable status. All bar one of the PRELIM trainers were TEFL-Q.

## Key features of the context

Zambia is a former British colony. After attaining political independence in October 1964, the country adopted English as its medium of communication and instruction. English is taught as a compulsory subject to all students whose first language may be one of the seven official languages or the extended 72 dialects from pre-school to university. There is a significant difference in phonetics between English and all the local languages causing a serious challenge in pronunciation and reading of English words from Grade 5 and above. Students find it difficult to switch to English pronunciation when the lower primary literacy programme ends in Grade 4. It is this gap the PRELIM 3 materials were designed to fill by introducing English phonemic awareness in the early grades.

## Outline of the teacher support resource package and rationale

The LATAZ team’s needs analysis (conducted prior to the start of the project) suggested that the main issue facing the Zambian education system is the overall level of literacy. It was decided to tackle the issue at its root and focus on boosting literacy skills in the primary sector, with a focus on the youngest Grades 2-4. English is introduced at Grade 2 and taught using a phonics system but there is no official literature to suggest an order in which sounds are introduced. The resource developers also had no experience of teaching/working with phonics and instead approaching pronunciation from a phonemic standpoint; adding further complications to the research/materials development phase.

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For the resources themselves, a context setting questionnaire and needs analysis proved invaluable. Developers were able to quickly ascertain class size (often upwards of 80 students), meaning activities for the flashcards were grouped by 'high' and 'low' energy (i.e. how much movement was required for the particular activity). At all times, developers kept in mind the management aspect of classes of this size and how the teacher could involve students of various levels of ability and confidence.

## Project findings

### Working in partnership

The project consisted of a team of three from Hilderstone College and three LATAZ members. George Kanyama became the main point of contact and project coordinator on the Zambian side. He recruited a focus group of 18 primary school teachers and established a WhatsApp group chat for all. The UK side comprised two teachers and a materials writer to help develop the resource package.

The focus group sent details through the WhatsApp chat regarding existing materials and pages from coursebooks. Two teachers of particular note (CM, BW) were especially helpful in providing wider context information for the order in which English sounds are introduced to students and how lessons are delivered.

The research phase took substantially longer than expected as there were time delays in receiving scans of coursebooks. There were also issues pertaining to the feedback results from the focus group, which ultimately stemmed from a lack of digital literacy using Google Suite.

In terms of frequency of communication, there was momentum in the WhatsApp group at the beginning and around the dissemination of both batches of resources. During the cholera pandemic lockdown, Hilderstone College made sure to reach out and maintain supportive communication.

#### Learning points

- For future projects in this context, establishing WhatsApp as the primary method of communication would be essential. It became clear early on that Zoom was not stable enough and not all participants were familiar with Google tools such as Google Forms.
- Maintaining consistent communication with participants was key to the success of the project. Keeping clear, considerate, and specific communication was essential.
- We found that any evaluation questionnaires are best sent as hard copies to be printed and then photographed and sent back via WhatsApp.
- To better understand the context, gaining access to existing materials as soon as possible, in addition to video clips or photographic material to give insight into lessons (either by video clips or photographs) is extremely helpful. Hilderstone College asked to observe lessons via Zoom but this was unfortunately not possible. Video clips of lessons were sent via WhatsApp after the dissemination of Batch 1.

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## Working within the CoP

Given the scale of PRELIM 3, the CoP felt somewhat disconnected this time around. The length of the project meant that members were rarely in the same project phases at the same time, and that the range of individual projects was very broad, making comparisons and collaboration more challenging. However, there was a sense of comradeship in that when someone encountered an issue, others were quick to reassure and share their solutions as to how they got around similar problems. There appeared to be an understanding from the beginning that given the timescale attached to this iteration of PRELIM, there would be ebbs and flows in the project given national holidays in the various ETA's and UK peak summer season.

The support from the NILE team was exemplary and played a key role in identifying next steps in the project and suggesting ideas and solutions.

## Designing the teacher support resources

The decision was made to devise two batches of materials. The first was a set of phonics flashcards designed in line with the *Jolly Phonics* system, with an accompanying activities booklet for teachers. Additionally, an information booklet for teachers about common sounds and spellings in English digraphs was also produced (also with audio recordings to aid in the understanding of pronunciation). The aim of such was to empower teachers in their knowledge of English pronunciation and spelling patterns. These were sent with a training PowerPoint video to the focus group.

Batch 2 were sets of worksheets and short stories based on identifying the differences between sound and spelling. These were divided into five individual packs, one for each vowel sound, and each focused on the long and short vowel sounds and spellings. In addition to this, a teacher's booklet was produced alongside a second training PowerPoint video and audio recordings of short stories (included in the worksheet packs). A video based specifically on pronunciation was also created highlighting the differences in Zambian and English accents so teachers could be reassured that there is no one 'correct' way to pronounce particular sounds. The entire teaching staff at Hilderstone College, and CM and BW from the focus group, contributed to the creation of the short stories and audio recordings, giving students and teachers access to a wide variety of authentic British English accents and pronunciation.

### Learning points

- Given the differences in experience of teaching pronunciation (phonics vs phonemics), finding an area with more shared knowledge may have been simpler. There was a strong focus on pronunciation in this project where perhaps focusing on reading skills and techniques would have allowed for more common ground between teachers and resource developers.
- Resources were divided into two batches in an effort to expand the resource life cycle for as long as possible. As developers were unsure of when individual sounds are introduced, the decision was made to cover as many as possible so that the resources could have as broad a range of users as possible. This way teachers and students from Grades 2-4+ would have access to the resources produced as and when needed.

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## Disseminating the teacher support resources

All resources were disseminated in PDF/PPT/MP3 formats both through WhatsApp (directly to the Focus Group) and through a shared Google Folder (for the ETA to make hard copies). This was successful in that resources reached the participants immediately and the focus group had the chance to ask for/receive any clarifications right away.

Dissemination and evaluation of Batch 2 was hindered by a cholera outbreak at the beginning of 2024, during which time schools were ordered to remain closed. The focus group had been expected to trial materials during January with evaluations to be fed back in mid-February. Unfortunately, schools did not open until 12 February and so the project timeline had to be adjusted. There was further delay in dissemination due to a miscommunication as to how teachers in Zambia might print the resources. This specific issue was identified on 11 March 2024 and rectified 13-15th March 2024.

In terms of scaling up the project to national level, at the time of writing, the resources are currently awaiting approval from the Zambian Ministry of Education. Approval is expected to be granted at the end of May/June 2024, with an official launch expected at the LATAZ national conference in August.

### Learning points

- WhatsApp proved the simplest and quickest form of dissemination in terms of teachers being able to see the materials. However, communication between LATAZ members and project participants needed to be clearer when it came to printing the resources. To this end, WhatsApp would be the best form of communication and clear instructions should be given with any batch of resources sent.
- Projects such as this can face unexpected delays in the overall project timeline. Timeline goals can be adjusted to allow teachers adequate time to acquaint themselves with resources and to complete feedback evaluations.

## Monitoring and Evaluation resource use

The initial research phase saw the development of both a needs analysis and a context-setting questionnaire to aid developers in the creation of the resources. There was relatively low input from the focus group due to technology restrictions/digital literacy. The use of Zoom was simply not possible for the focus group given the location and connection problems. Similarly, a lack of printing equipment and access to online sources such as Google Forms meant that feedback evaluations were changed from digital to hard copies for ease of completion. Participants were then able to print and complete forms and return via WhatsApp/email to the ETA directly. These were then sent to Hilderstone College in an organised and timely manner, ensuring feedback was not lost in the WhatsApp focus group chat. Evaluation of both batches of resources saw relatively poor results despite encouragement within the focus group WhatsApp chat from both LATAZ and Hilderstone College.

### Learning points

- Seek to find solutions to issues of digital literacy and communication promptly, and in more accessible ways.
- Asking more direct questions in the needs analysis provides more useful data for resource development.

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- Incentivising participants to return evaluations may yield a greater response on future projects.

## Project outcomes

### Engagement

At the time of writing, the hopes for PRELIM 3 LATAZ and Hilderstone College are that the resources developed will be given the approval of the Ministry of Education and sent for publishing in the summer of 2024. These resources will be disseminated among upwards of 5,000 primary school teachers, meaning they will be used by tens of thousands of students across all regions of Zambia. It is hoped that these resources will go some way to improving the quality of literacy education in Zambia, and that they will allow teachers to broaden their experience and understanding of pronunciation and how it can be taught.

### Emergent learning

A key takeaway from PRELIM 3 has been communication and collaboration. George expressed how prior to this project, LATAZ had very little involvement with the primary sector but they have now forged a strong relationship which they hope will continue.

From an in-house perspective, Hilderstone College recognised the challenges in managing a project of this length and that staffing/time spent on the project would fluctuate throughout the year. Busy summer months and teaching commitments meant that the majority of the project work was done in the spring and autumn. It would have been preferable to dedicate one member of staff to the project for the duration but unfortunately, due to staffing requirements, this wasn't possible.

The partnership between coordinators on both sides was extremely positive and fruitful, we hope this will be a continuing friendship and professional partnership.

From LATAZ:

*'As an association, through this project, we have learnt how to navigate government bureaucratic red tape. The project has also enhanced our capacity to handle grant-funded projects under uncertain circumstances. There is equally a significant improvement in the project team's capacity to collaborate with people of different professional orientations to achieve project goals. Most importantly, the project has significantly enhanced the integration and professional connection between primary school teachers and secondary school teachers who normally prefer working in isolation from each other.'*