EQUIP-Tanzania aims to improve the quality of learning for primary children in Tanzania. It has focused on early grades literacy and numeracy, in line with recent Government of Tanzania priorities. The programme has developed a large-scale continuous professional development process for teachers to enhance their skills and motivation and, ultimately, improve the learning outcomes of their pupils, particularly for girls.

Low literacy and numeracy learning outcomes in early grades and absent in-service teacher professional development systems

At programme inception in 2013 it was clear improvements were needed in early primary literacy and numeracy. The 2012 Uwezo household assessment of children’s literacy and numeracy skills concluded that 74% of Standard 3 pupils are at least one grade behind performance expectations in Kiswahili. This figure was 60% for Mathematics. These findings are consistent with the EQUIP-Tanzania baseline impact evaluation survey in 2014, which found that 38% of Standard 3 pupils had not yet acquired even emerging Standard 1 level skills in Kiswahili.

EQUIP-Tanzania aligned itself to the new government priorities of 2013 on the 3Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) to maximise improvements in early primary learning outcomes.

The development of a system-led, cost-effective, high-quality teacher professional development process

Working in partnership with national government institutions, regional and local government authorities (LGAs), universities and teacher training colleges (TTC), EQUIP-Tanzania developed a system-led, decentralised, school-based INSET model that enables continuous professional development for all teachers (fig. 1).

Approximately 19,000 teachers, head teachers and ward education coordinators have received direct training from tutors, and 36,000 teachers (95% of early primary teachers and 74% of all teachers) have attended the school-based INSET sessions.

The training model emphasises practical skill development and provides teachers with pupil-centred tools and activities to use in their classrooms. High-quality written materials, dynamic instructional videos and starter teaching toolkits support the training.

EQUIP-Tanzania has dispersed over 400,000 books to enable more reading practice in classrooms.
Positive impact on teachers and classroom practice

Improvements in classroom practice between 2014 and 2016

The midline review notes that teachers consider learning new teaching methods one of the main benefits of the school-based training. Although specific EQUIP-Tanzania support for teachers in relation to pupils with disabilities is planned for later in the programme, teachers are already reporting greater awareness of disability inclusion issues as a result of the training. Several classroom practices that saw minimal or no progress remain and require further improvement, such as teachers’ probing pupil’s answers, using regular pupil assessment or drawing the whole class together to summarise learning.

The evaluation concluded that EQUIP-Tanzania support has had a positive effect on early grade teachers’ motivation, as they feel more confident. This, in turn, has contributed to a 21% reduction in classroom absenteeism which has helped increase available instructional hours.

Positive impact on literacy and numeracy skills, particularly for girls

Pupil learning outcomes in Kiswahili and Mathematics has improved since 2014, particularly for girls.

Progress in Kiswahili for the worst performing pupils was described as “remarkable” while gains made seen as “over and above the positive national trend” by the 2016 midline review.

There has been a 16% reduction in the number of pupils in the lowest performance band for Kiswahili and a 10% increase in those in the highest performance band. There have also been improvements in numeracy, despite the programme only starting to focus on this in 2016, with a 10% reduction of pupils in the lowest two performance bands and a 9% increase in the top two (fig. 2). The impact on girls’ learning has been particularly impressive – with girls widening their performance lead in Kiswahili and narrowing the gap with boys in Mathematics. Although learning outcomes have improved, they are still behind expectations, particularly for children marginalised by language or poverty.

EQUIP-Tanzania is influencing the national approach to teacher professional development

A new national continuous professional development (CPD) framework is currently in development and has been influenced by the decentralised, school-based delivery model of EQUIP-Tanzania. Teacher training materials for literacy and numeracy are being embraced by both Government and the USAID reading programme, and are forming the basis of national modules. Furthermore, teacher training colleges and universities involved in EQUIP-Tanzania have been adapting their programmes based on what they have learnt.

What next? Sustainability, institutionalisation and expanding beyond numeracy and literacy

The challenge for EQUIP-Tanzania now is to transform school-based INSET sessions into sustainable school-level communities of learning that can enable contextualised, autonomous professional development for teachers after the programme ends. EQUIP-Tanzania is already moving beyond a focus on numeracy and literacy to gender-responsive pedagogy. In the future providing additional support to teachers around disability inclusion, managing large class sizes and alternatives to corporal punishment must be addressed. At a national level the focus is to build on the CPD framework and ensure the lessons learnt from EQUIP-Tanzania can support country-wide improvements.