

# Subject Advisor Study:

Can instructional coaching be integrated into South Africa's Education System? A study of External Coaches, Subject Advisors, and Department Heads



**Presentation by:** KHOLOSA NONKENGE & KAITLIN ALSOFROM

**Organisation:** DBE

**Date:** 04 July 2024



**basic education**

Department:  
Basic Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



**HEMPEL  
FOUNDATION**



**education**

Lefapha la Thuto la Bokone Bophirima  
Noord-Wes Departement van Onderwys  
North West Department of Education  
**NORTH WEST PROVINCE**

**Introduction**

**Main Research Questions**

**Overview of themes**

**Classroom and pedagogical  
support**

**Training and support  
Standardised tools  
Time and resources  
Power and authority**

**Recommendations  
& Conclusion**



# Subject Advisor Study

## Introduction

EARLY GRADE READING PROGRAMME NORTH WEST



The Subject Advisor study builds on the Early Grade Reading Studies led by the DBE.

Instructional coaching has been shown to positively impact classroom practice and learning outcomes in South Africa.

But external coaching is expensive – are there more cost-effective alternatives to support teachers?

- Virtual coaching?
- Department Heads?
- Subject Advisors?

## Main research questions

What is the relationship between Subject Advisors, Coaches, Department Heads and teachers?



What is the nature of SAs support to schools & teachers when a coach is external? When a coach is a DH?

What is the nature of DHs support to teachers?

What are the perceptions of teachers, coaches, DHs and SAs around mechanism of support?

Can SAs be effective instructional coaches? (If so, what would need to change for SAs to take on this role?)

## Subject Advisor Study

### Policy considerations

#### ELRC Collective Agreement 4

- State that Senior Education Specialists (SAs) must “conduct regular on-site support visits to teachers in schools “- the number of expected or required visits to schools and teachers is not specified.

#### Personnel Administrative Measures

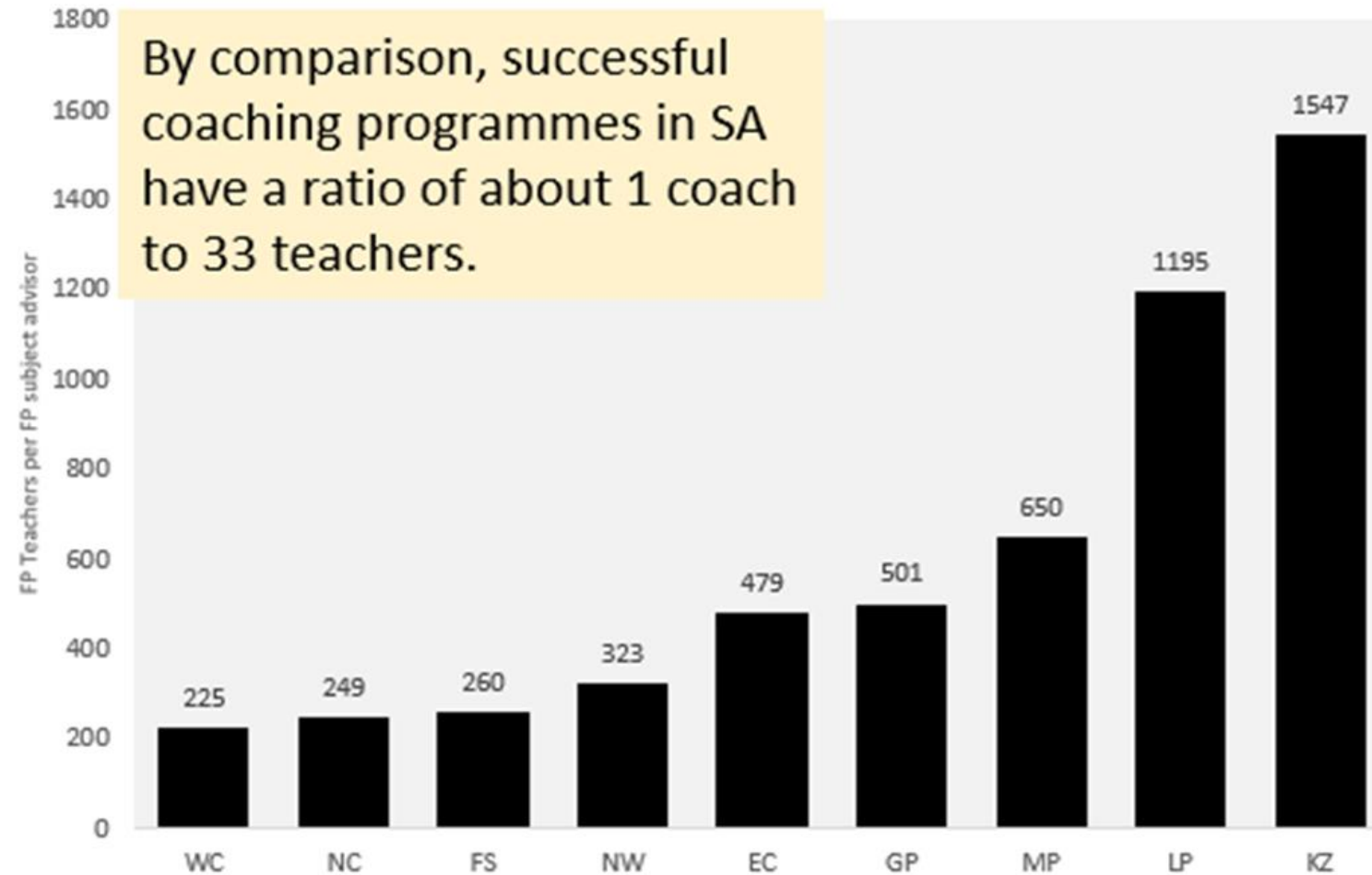
- SMT members (including DHs) and circuit managers can conduct classroom observations but does not specify whether SA's can conduct these observations.
- Specifies 2-3 visits per year.
- Includes protocols for both pre and post observations
- The emphasis of classroom observations is on evaluation for QMS performance appraisal, rather than on providing ongoing support to teachers.



# Subject Advisor Study

EARLY GRADE READING PROGRAMME NORTH WEST

## Subject Advisor ratios



# Subject Advisor Study

EARLY GRADE READING PROGRAMME NORTH WEST

## Subject Advisors: roles and responsibilities

Classroom observation



Observation of teacher files:  
Adherence to lesson plans



Accountability and  
compliance



Workshops with teachers



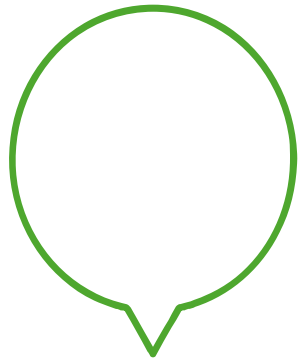
Monitoring and  
support



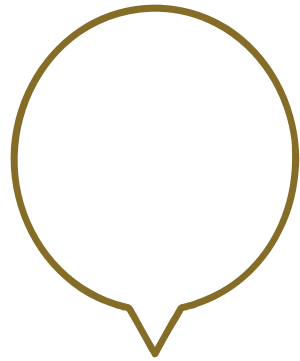
# Subject Advisor Study

EARLY GRADE READING PROGRAMME NORTH WEST

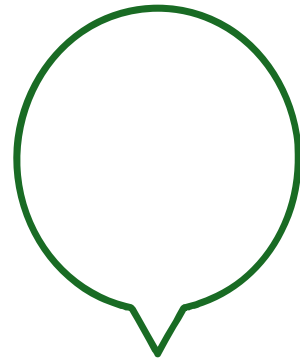
## Overview of themes



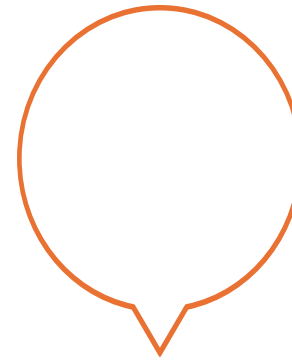
**Training  
and  
Support**



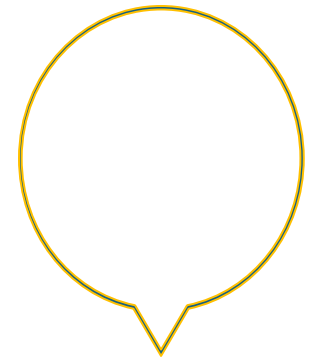
**Classroom  
and  
Pedagogical  
Support**



**Standardised  
support**



**Time and  
Resource  
Barriers**



**Power and  
Authority**





# SUBJECT ADVISOR STUDY

EARLY GRADE READING PROGRAMME NORTH WEST

## Observation themes

### **Training and support**

Coaches receive intensive and targeted training demonstrating lessons and confidently helping teachers, showing technical expertise compared to Subject Advisors and Department Heads.

### **Classroom and pedagogical support**

While Subject Advisors and Department Heads access schools often, they did not typically spend time in the classroom modelling and observing lessons.

Subject Advisor visits constituted of monitoring and compliance.

### **Standardised tools**

Subject Advisors do not have standardised tools for monitoring and oversight. This limits comparability across different districts.



## Time and Resource Barriers



Both SAs and DHs face significant limitations to their time and resources. External coaches can focus exclusively on their work with teachers, but SAs and DHs have many other duties to fulfill.

For example: Seven of nine SAs interviewed (77%) referenced challenges in their work—compared to only three (12%) of external coaches. This is largely related to resources challenges.

Coaching requires a significant time commitment. Currently, neither DHs nor SAs have the time needed to build effective coaching relationships. Workloads need to be significantly reduced in for effective coaching to be possible.

[It is] interesting because we meet different teachers. The challenges: 1 - transport, 2 - communication, because we communicate with our cell phones and we don't receive data. If I do not have data and I have communication from different levels, I cannot receive the information on time. That is the main challenges. We report through our cell phones. We don't have data, sometimes transport, we can go almost three weeks sitting in the office.

# Power and Authority

EARLY GRADE READING PROGRAMME NORTH WEST

## Earned versus assumed authority: What lessons can be learned?

SAs, DHs, and external coaches have different relationships to authority

External coaches must earn authority by demonstrating their competence and confidence (e.g., by showing their pedagogical expertise through lesson demonstrations)

While SAs have the advantage of automatically holding a position of authority, the fear that often accompanies their visits may inhibit the relationship building necessary in the coaching processes...

For example:  
‘If a teacher is not complying, [the SA] can just say, “I’m going to give the written warning, or a final written warning.” We don’t have authority over teachers ... All we do is just to motivate them to work better and to perform well.’

External coaches must motivate and inspire teachers through emotional connections and relationship building – they cannot force compliance

The authority inherent to the SA position potentially has a large impact on how others (especially teachers) perceive support from SAs.

**This barrier is likely to be one of the more difficult to address quickly.  
(Even even if SAs behave differently, they may still face barriers due to teachers’ perceptions of them as inspectors and evaluators.)**

# Subject Advisor Study

EARLY GRADE READING PROGRAMME NORTH WEST

## Recommendations

1

The DBE to ensure Subject Advisor transport needs are considered a fundamental part of the job and budgeted for accordingly.

2

Standardised job descriptions for Subject Advisors and Department Heads

Fill Subject Advisor posts and consider more posts.

3

Dedicated coach training for Subject Advisors (UJ course on instructional coaching).



# Subject Advisor Study

EARLY GRADE READING PROGRAMME NORTH WEST

## Conclusion

**The study provides evidence that there is a gap in the South African education system when it comes to providing teachers with effective instructional support in the classroom.**

**There are not enough Subject Advisors, a lack of role clarity, and lack of Home Language and Literacy expertise.**

**External coaches are currently the only actors equipped to provide effective instructional coaching in classrooms – there is a need for more coaches beyond small projects.**



# Thank you



**basic education**  
Department:  
Basic Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



**HEMPEL  
FOUNDATION**



**education**  
Lefapha la Thuto la Bokone Bophirima  
Noord-Wes Departement van Onderwys  
North West Department of Education  
**NORTH WEST PROVINCE**