

KHULISA MANAGEMENT SERVICES

FINAL FIELDWORK REPORT

EARLY GRADE READING STUDY I

PHASE 1 AND PHASE 2 DATA COLLECTION
AND ANALYSIS SUPPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Khulisa Management Services Pty Ltd. (Khulisa) is pleased to present this **Final Fieldwork Report** to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the South African Department of Basic Education (DBE), for the Early Grade Reading Study I (EGRS I) Phase 1 and Phase 2 Data Collection and Analysis¹.

This report:

- Briefly presents the background to the EGRS I program
- Describes the training and fieldwork activities
- Highlights the key Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) activities undertaken
- Reports on the learning questions set out in the MEL plan
- Concludes with challenges, successes and lessons learned, which may be used to streamline and improve the quality of future fieldwork.

BACKGROUND

From 2015, the DBE, in collaboration with the University of Witwatersrand and other researchers, have conducted ongoing research on the acquisition of reading in the early grades in the North-West province of South Africa – Dr. Kenneth Kaunda and Ngaka Modiri Molema districts. The first phase of the EGRS I project evaluated three Setswana Home Language interventions aimed at improving reading in the early grades. These three interventions were implemented with the teachers of a cohort of learners in Grade 1 in 2015, the teachers of the same cohort of learners in Grade 2 in 2016, and the first two interventions were extended to the teachers of the same learners again in Grade 3 in 2017 – covering the Foundation Phase. In 2018, the DBE is wrapping up phase one of the EGRS I by collecting a final round of data from the same sample of learners who are now in Grade 4.

The EGRS I was primarily designed as a Randomized Control Trial (RCT), which aimed to isolate the effects of each of the interventions and compare it to the situation among a control group of learners. Each intervention consisted of 50 schools and there was a comparison group that consisted of 80 schools, making a total of 230 schools in the study. Early findings revealed, "...small to moderate impacts of both the Training and Coaching interventions on Setswana reading outcomes at the end of Grade 1" (Department of Basic Education, 2017). This finding raised a question around whether these models of teacher support could be implemented more widely in South Africa, and whether the findings would hold when the interventions are implemented at a larger scale.

In 2019 and 2020, the DBE intends to proceed with a second phase to the EGRS I in which they will implement the successful on-site coaching program in 164 of the original 230 schools as well as provide all schools in the districts of Ngaka Modiri Molema and Dr. Kenneth Kaunda with the basic learning program of lesson plans and additional reading materials. To evaluate

¹ This study is the first Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS I) in the North West Province of South Africa. A second iteration of the study, EGRS II, is currently underway in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa

this second phase of implementation, a random sample of the Grade 1 learners in the 164 intervention schools and a further 50 control schools will be tested (for a total of 214 schools).

The results of the Grade 4 learner assessments will be used to examine the sustainability of the EGRS I Phase One interventions on learner outcomes, by evaluating the long term benefits of learners having received a higher quality of teaching in their home language from Grade 1 to Grade 3. The Grade 3 learner assessments will provide information on the sustainability of EGRS I interventions on teacher instructional practice, by evaluating whether the impact of the interventions can be seen on learner outcomes one year after the teachers received additional training and support. The Grade 1 learner assessments will be used as a baseline for phase two of the EGRS I.

Given the early findings of the EGRS I, the impact envisaged by this project is in line with the DBE Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realization of Schooling 2025; with Goal 1 of USAID's Global Education Strategy to 2015, "to improve the reading skills for 100 million children in primary grades, worldwide" (United States Agency for International Development, 2011); and with USAID's new Education Policy², which emphasizes the importance of reading and literacy for success in school and life.



Photo: Fieldworker Training and Simulation; Credit: Khulisa Management Services

² The Education Policy is in draft form. Khulisa refers to the Draft Policy, 5 October 2018

The Theory of Change (TOC) for the EGRS I Phase 1 intervention³ is:

IF teachers receive lesson plans, **AND** they receive quality training materials and support, **THEN** they will be sufficiently prepared and motivated to teach according to lesson plans and use Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM) in their lessons, **AND THEN** they will more effectively cover the curriculum, promote individualized reading and adopt more effective teaching strategies.

IF teachers also attend centralized training sessions twice a year, **THEN** their knowledge will be updated, **AND** they will change their practices, **AND THEN** teachers will provide more effective instruction.

OR IF teachers also receive monthly coaching support and attend occasional group meetings with a coach and a small cluster of teachers, **THEN** a trusting relationship will develop with coaches who will effectively correct and support the teachers, **THEN** teachers will be motivated to implement more effective teaching strategies, **AND THEN** teachers will provide more effective instruction.

AND IF parents attend weekly meetings, **THEN** parent knowledge and attitudes will change, **AND THEN** parents will change their support practices towards their children.

The TOC is such that teachers and parents receive the intervention, but that the effects of this should be seen on the language and literacy abilities of their learners/children. One of the key assumptions of the intervention is that providing teachers across the Foundation Phase with support will improve reading outcomes for learners. Another key assumption is that involving parents will capacitate and motivate them to support their children in learning to read. A final assumption is that the effects of the intervention, if any, on learners would be retained and built on as the learners moved out of the foundation phase.

The TOC of the EGRS I Phase Two intervention removes the parental involvement element of the original EGRS I Phase One TOC. However, it adds two elements:

1. **IF** schools receive a classroom library, **THEN** learners in those classrooms will be exposed to better quality reading resources **AND THEN** this will have a further impact on learner reading proficiency.
2. **IF** schools receive principal and head of department (HOD) training, **THEN** those schools will have a more conducive support environment for teachers, **THEN** teachers will improve their teaching practices, **AND THEN** this will have a further impact on learner reading proficiency.

The TOC for Phase Two of the EGRS I will not be tested as part of this assignment. However, this assignment will collect the baseline data against which the TOC will be tested in the future.

³ This is the original Theory of Change for EGRS I Phase One

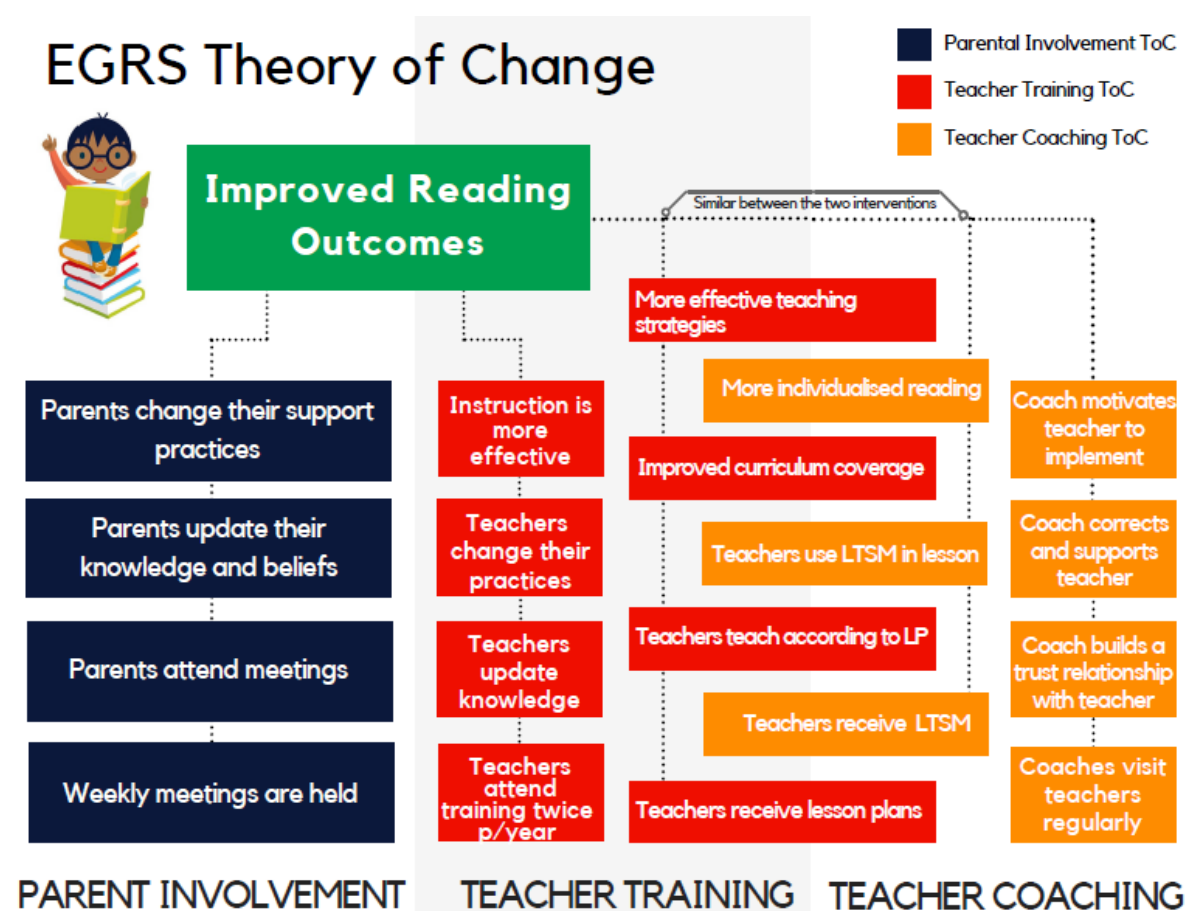


Figure 1: EGRS 1 Phase 1 Theory of Change

TRAINING AND FIELDWORK ACTIVITIES

SUPERVISOR TRAINING AND TOOL PILOT TESTING

Supervisor training / tool pilot testing took place from August 02 to 08, 2018. Five Fieldwork Supervisors were trained on the protocols for fieldwork and each of the assessment instruments.

During training, the Fieldwork Supervisors were provided an overview of the EGRS I program and were introduced to the research tools and data collection software. A substantial part of the training was dedicated to tool orientation and protocols for assessing learners.

The tool pilot testing was carried out at four schools, selected by the DBE, in Dr. Kenneth Kaunda district in the North-West province from August 06 to 08, 2018. On the first day, all Supervisors and the Khulisa team piloted the instruments in one school. On the second and third days, the Supervisors were separated into groups and they administered all the tools over a two-day period. The purpose of splitting the teams was to test whether all tools could be reasonably administered by two people within a two-day timeframe.

Lessons from the pilot test were carried forward into the next phase of the assignment. These included lessons for tool administration (tool items that needed to be changed), sequencing (what order of administration made the most sense), and lessons to take forward into Fieldworker training (which tools Fieldworkers should be trained on first, when to introduce the tablet-based data collection instruments, et cetera).

Following the pilot, Khulisa met with the DBE and USAID on the August 13, 2018 to discuss the pilot results and determine what changes needed to be made to the tools. Khulisa consultants Maxine Schaeffer, and Professor Elizabeth Pretorius, provided expert advice and input. The tools were reviewed on an item-by-item basis, using the results to determine which questions needed to be dropped or adjusted. Khulisa staff and consultants subsequently amended the tools prior to Fieldworker training.



Photo: Fieldworker Training; Credit: Khulisa Management Services

FIELDWORKER TRAINING

Fieldworker training took place from August 20 to 24, 2018. The five-day training workshop in the North-West province was attended by 56 Fieldworkers, of which 46 were selected for fieldwork and ten were appointed as reserves.

Two days of the training were dedicated to the tools, while the third and fourth day entailed in-venue and school-based Fieldworker role play and fieldwork simulation, and the fifth focused on administration and logistical arrangements.

On the first day of training, Fieldworkers received a manual detailing the background of the project, the roles and responsibilities of the Fieldworker, ethical standards for data collection, and the schedule for administering tools at each school. The manual practically describes the protocols for selecting learners and teachers and provides detailed instructions on each tool and its administration. The manual also contains instructions on how to operate the electronic data collection software/applications, information on logistics and operations instructions, and general guidelines for fieldwork.

Trainees were introduced to the electronic data collection tools and applications/software for fieldwork. These comprised Tangerine®⁴ and the Open Data Kit (ODK)⁵, administered on android tablets. The trainees were given time to explore using the tablets and applications/software by themselves and to apply the tools in collaboration with fellow Fieldworkers.

To ensure that trainees had sufficient exposure to the tools and their application, the training included opportunities for role-play and school simulation. The DBE identified five schools, which were not part of the EGRS I sample, for school simulation visits on August 22, 2018. Minibus taxis collected groups of Fieldworkers from the training venue, transported them to their assigned schools, and returned them to the training venue after all school-based simulation activities were completed.

The main objective of the school simulation was for Fieldworkers to administer the learner assessments to actual learners using the tools that they had been trained on earlier in the week. A second objective was for the DBE, in collaboration with the Fieldwork Supervisors and Khulisa, to evaluate the Fieldworkers and assure the DBE that every Fieldworker was able to adhere to the required data collection standards.

The simulation process revealed that some Fieldworkers needed additional training support. Supervisors were tasked to provide these Fieldworkers with extra support and guidance. Following the simulation day, the Project Manager, Evaluation Coordinator, Supervisors, and DBE representatives convened to review the Fieldworkers' performance. The final 46 Fieldworkers were selected at this point.

The last day of training was primarily dedicated to contracting and logistics. Part of the day was set aside for Fieldworker questions, answers, and feedback. Fieldwork Supervisors were assigned to Fieldworker teams⁶ and each Supervisor set up their own WhatsApp group to coordinate feedback and flag issues. Lines of reporting and communication were established.

⁴ Tangerine® is an open source data collection application in which data is collected, and from which data is sent to a server and then accessed via the web-based environment. Tangerine® is built on the Android platform and can collect a variety of data types: text, location, photos, video, audio, and barcodes.

⁵ ODK is free and open-source data collection software that we have used across the African continent. ODK allows the user to convert paper-based instruments into electronic forms which are uploaded to smart devices (tablets or phones).

⁶ There were 23 Fieldworker teams and five Supervisors. Three Supervisors were assigned to five teams each and two Supervisors were assigned to four teams each.

The table below provides an overview of the training activities by day:

Table 1: Fieldworker Training Activities

Day	Activity
Day 1: 20 August 2018	Project background and research approach
	Overview of Fieldworker roles and responsibilities
	Overview of learner assessment tools
	Paired practice – learner assessment tools
	Recap of learner assessments, Question and Answer
Day 2: 21 August 2018	Role play - individual oral learner assessments
	Administration and marking of written learner assessments
	Introduction to Principal and Teacher Questionnaires, and School Functionality Tool
	Planning for in-school simulations
Day 3: 22 August 2018	In-school simulations
	Simulation debrief
	Role play – all tools
Day 4: 23 August 2018	Role play – all tools
	Fieldworker performance assessments and selection
Day 5: 24 August 2018	Parent Questionnaire overview and logistics
	Role play – learner assessments
	Fieldwork logistics, contracting, materials distribution

FIELDWORK LOGISTICS

Khulisa had one week between Supervisor training/pilot testing and Fieldworker training to coordinate the logistics for training. This included revising the tools (paper based and electronic), branding and marking, finalizing the Fieldworker Training Manual, labelling devices (tablets and power banks), and printing materials for training.

During the Fieldworker training week, Khulisa branded, marked, and printed all the materials for fieldwork and sorted the printed materials into 229 numbered and labelled boxes – one per school. Each box was quality assured for completeness before being packed for delivery to the training venue.

Fieldwork started immediately after training (the following week). Once the final list of Fieldworkers was selected, Khulisa finalized the fieldwork schedule and assigned Fieldworker teams to schools. The schools were contacted to remind them of the visit, provide the names and details of the Fieldworkers, and ensure they were ready for the Fieldworkers to arrive.



Photo: Fieldwork Preparation, credit: Khulisa Management Services

FIELDWORK

Fieldwork began on Monday August 27, 2018, in Dr. Kenneth Kaunda and Ngaka Modiri Molema districts in the North-West province.

The Fieldworker Training Manual included an illustrative two-day school schedule, mapping out the timing and sequencing of assessments. The first day of each school visit was dedicated to learner selection, and the Grade 4 and Grade 1 learner assessments. Day Two was dedicated to the Grade 3 learner assessments and administration of the contextual tools.

The first week of fieldwork was supervised closely by the Project Manager, Evaluation Coordinator, Fieldwork Supervisors, and DBE representatives. Some teams encountered

minor issues at first, most noteworthy of which was the high attrition of Grade 4 learners from the sample. These learners had either transferred to different schools or moved to different schools within or outside the province. This issue was flagged up to the DBE and USAID at the end of the first week.

In addition, two teams were affected by service strikes in the Ventersdorp area. In response, Khulisa accommodated the two teams in an alternative location to ensure their safety. The fieldwork schedule was unaffected. Inputs provided by the DBE representatives assisted Khulisa in addressing issues observed during their site visits.

In the second week of fieldwork, the attrition rate showed an initial improvement. However, by the end of the week the attrition rate was similar to week one. Khulisa discussed the issue with the DBE who confirmed that Khulisa was not required to track the Grade 4 learners that had moved to other schools.

Also in the second week, Khulisa reported the results of a quality control meeting held between the Supervisors, Evaluation Coordinator, and Project Manager at the end of the first week. The meeting confirmed that sampling protocols were being followed correctly and that Fieldworkers were generally applying the correct marking protocols for the learner written assessments. However, issues with capturing learner linking information were raised, particularly regarding the transfer of learner linking information across all learner assessment material. In response, Khulisa worked hand in hand with the Supervisors to place extra emphasis on quality control from the second week onwards.

Following the Supervisors' increased support to Fieldworkers, and improved quality control measures, the Fieldworker Teams improved in the third and fourth weeks of data collection. Quality protocols were followed on a daily basis. Some teams experienced technical difficulties in terms of data submissions but were readily assisted by their Supervisors and the Evaluation Coordinator. Fieldworkers collaborated with their designated Supervisors to coordinate the collection of the Parent/Guardian Questionnaires, calculated at a return rate of 62 percent at the end of the fourth week.

The fieldwork schedules of five Fieldwork Teams were disrupted during the fourth week of data collection due to a memorial service for a well-known teacher in the area. Four schools could not accommodate the Fieldworkers due to exams. Visits to these schools had to be rescheduled. Apart from the service strikes, two additional schools could not be visited at all during the data collection period:

- One Primary School was closed due to a lack of functionality and learners were moved to neighboring schools;
- Another school had issues with their sewage system which affected learner accommodation and disrupted the school term program towards the end of the fourth term in 2018. Exams were moved earlier and the principal decided to discontinue schooling a whole week before the actual school calendar ended.

In reviewing the Fieldworker submissions during the fourth week, the Project Manager and Evaluation Coordinator also picked up some issues with Fieldworker marking of learner workbooks.

In response, Khulisa used the contingency week (week five) to address these issues. The affected fieldwork teams negotiated with the schools to move the school visits into the contingency week. The Project Manager and Evaluation Coordinator ensured that parent questionnaires were collected, that Fieldworkers returned to schools where they were unable to conduct Teacher or Principal Questionnaires during the two-day visit, where possible, and that workbooks were re-marked in cases where the information was captured incorrectly by the Fieldworkers. They also carried out learner assessments, where possible, in cases where learners could not be assessed due to school disruptions.

DATA COLLECTED

The table below provides a summary of the return rates per research tool.

Instrument Name	Number collected	Number expected	Percentage
Grade 1 Learner Assessment	4188	4280	98%
Grade 3 Learner Assessment	2113	2140	99%
Grade 3 Written Assessment	2105	2116	99%
Grade 4 Learner Assessment	3304	4519	73%
Grade 4 Written Assessment	3372 (had duplicates which we didn't want to remove)	4519	75%
Principal Questionnaire	221	228	97%
Teacher Questionnaire	631	NA	NA
School Functionality Observation Tool	217	228	95%
Parent /Guardian Questionnaire (Grade 1 parents)	3459	4202	82%

DATA QUALITY

Khulisa put in place procedures to ensure that data quality standards were maintained. Using Tangerine® and ODK for the collection of data played a significant role in ensuring rapid, reliable, precise, and timely data collection and rigorous data quality. Khulisa extracted data regularly throughout fieldwork to ensure that data quality was maintained and that Fieldworkers were using the forms correctly. Using this rapid feedback, Khulisa was able to troubleshoot issues in real time to improve data entry, data management, and data quality.

To spot check whether learners were appropriately selected according to the random sampling rule, Supervisors and DBE representatives observed the application of random sampling procedures while in the field. To ensure accurate transfer of learner and school identifying information as well as the quality of captured learner written assessments, Khulisa trained Fieldworkers thoroughly on the DBE guidelines for marking written learner assessments and the DBE provided oversight and supervision during training. Supervisors conducted daily spot checks of the transfer of learner identifying information across learner documentation, learner oral assessments and learner written assessments. For the written learner assessments, Supervisors were tasked to re-mark some of these assessments, and compare the entries to those captured by the relevant fieldworker. The Supervisors dealt with individual issues as they arose in the field. Supervisors also met with the project management team at the end of the first week to compare issues and devise an appropriate response.

To review the quality of parent/guardian questionnaire manual data entry, Khulisa conducted spot checks to ensure that the data was entered correctly. This was done on a daily basis for the first week and was done weekly thereafter. Khulisa checked a selection of filled-in questionnaires against the Excel entries.

After the conclusion of fieldwork, Khulisa engaged in the data cleaning phase. This process revealed the following challenges:

- Learner and teacher identifying information was not always captured accurately
- Linking forms were not always accurately completed
- Approximately eight Grade 4 linking forms were misplaced
- The number of completed assessments and surveys reported from the field did not correlate with the actual submitted data.
- Teacher and principal interview were not completed for all relevant subjects. These incomplete interviews can mainly be attributed to unavailability of relevant interviewees.

DATA STORAGE AND DATA SECURITY

Khulisa assumed primary responsibility for securing and verifying data that was collected and compiled during fieldwork. Khulisa has strict data security and storage policies and procedures in place, which are described below.

All data collected via mobile devices are transmitted via industry standard Hypertext Transfer Protocol Secure (HTTPS) protocol to Khulisa servers. All collected data and project related files are stored on Khulisa servers in a limited access secure vault that is monitored for smoke, changes in temperature and via CCTV 24/7. No collected data is stored on any public cloud service, and to access data, users need to be connected to Khulisa's network, either physically or via virtual private network (VPN). Khulisa is not obliged to allow anyone to use Khulisa computers, electronic networks, or internet access for reasons other than Khulisa business. Khulisa firewalls, gateways and network systems records the websites and email addresses that every computer within the company contacts.

Once stored on Khulisa servers, data access is restricted via Microsoft's Active Directory Best Practice or other Group/User security mechanisms. User access to data needs to follow Khulisa's approval workflow to ensure confidentiality. Data are backed up with the Grandfather-Father-Son (GFS) Tape Rotation method with Veritas (formerly Symantec)

Backup Exec Software. The two most recent tapes are kept off site. Data not included in daily backups are archived or deleted according to policy governing each data set.

To clean all data of Personally Identifiable Information (PII), all learner, teacher, principal, and Head of Department (HOD), names will be removed and replaced with Identification (ID) numbers prior to submission of data to the USAID Development Data Library (DDL).

DATA CLEANING PROCESS

Tangerine®, while inherently offering basic data cleanliness, does not offer the functionality to pre-populate information such as learner unique IDs and school unique IDs in the assessment tools. This would have been valuable for tracking electronic data submissions linked to each learner. Although the project manager extracted all submitted data on a daily basis and reviewed it for completion, in many cases Khulisa could not accurately determine the precise return rates due to erroneous capturing of school and learner identifying information. As such, Khulisa was only able to link the information across the datasets after the fieldwork was complete, and thus did not pick up anomalies within the linked data until that point.

The data cleaning process commenced immediately after concluding fieldwork. This process involved:

- Extracting all datasets from the Khulisa server
- Cleaning and correcting learner identifying information across all related datasets
- Cleaning and correcting school identifying information across all related datasets
- Removing duplicates in cases where obvious duplicates were observed
- Editing general and obvious data entry errors in the datasets

All datasets were submitted to the DBE and USAID on Monday 05 November, 2018. This data will undergo further cleaning for analysis purposes.

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING (MEL)

Khulisa's approach to Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning is embedded in the principles of USAID's Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) methodology, which advocates for reflection and for improving our approach in response to learning and feedback.

Khulisa's emphasis on building learning that facilitates adaptive management into fieldwork has allowed the assignment to become more effective and efficient than would occur without such learning. Accordingly, our learning approach targets all levels of stakeholders and implementers to ensure that learning is bi-directional and can be fully integrated into an adaptive management approach.

At the highest level, USAID and the DBE were invited to engage at various points in the fieldwork assignment to debrief on progress and provide feedback. This feedback has been integrated into processes and products in real time, allowing forward planning for the next steps in the assignment.

At the implementer level, Khulisa built in monitoring and evaluation checks and balances to ensure that the assignment was implemented as planned and to flag logistical, human resources, financial, contextual, and other issues. Issues were resolved using an adaptive

management approach and logged to ensure that lessons were captured and reported. Although significant effort has been made to ensure high data quality, certain anomalies still crept through the system. A comprehensive quality assurance surveillance plan is required for large-scale data collection assignments alike.

At the field assignment level, Khulisa built in systems and processes to allow Fieldwork Supervisors and Fieldworkers to monitor and flag logistical, data entry, and contextual constraints in real time. These constraints were either dealt with immediately by the Fieldwork Supervisors, and reported weekly, or flagged up for Khulisa's response.

COLLABORATING

The **major collaboration activities** undertaken in the fieldwork assignment include:

Major Collaboration Activities	Timing
1. Consultation with USAID and the DBE to refine the approach	Inception Meeting, August 7, 2018
2. Meeting between Khulisa, USAID and the DBE to discuss tool pre-testing	Tool Review Meeting, August 13, 2018
3. Conducting fieldwork training, together with the DBE	Fieldwork Training, August 20 to 24, 2018
4. Reporting to the DBE	Weekly Email and/or Telephonic Reports and Meetings over the period of fieldwork
5. Reporting to USAID	Weekly Email Reports forwarded to USAID over the period of fieldwork
6. DBE interactions with the fieldwork team	Various, including site inspections
7. Presentation of the Draft Fieldwork Report to USAID and the DBE	Meeting between USAID, the DBE, ReSEP, and Khulisa, October 25, 2018

In each of these meetings, reports, and interactions, there was space for reflection and for improving our approach in response to learning and feedback. The feedback generated through these activities was integrated into the fieldwork processes and products, facilitating forward-planning for the next steps in the assignment.

The **Inception Meeting** was used as an opportunity to refine the objectives of the task and to allow stakeholders an opportunity to provide feedback on the approach. Khulisa documented the outcomes of this meeting in an action plan, which was communicated to all stakeholders who attended the meeting.

Khulisa convened a **Tool Review Meeting** to refine the data collection methods, sampling strategy, data collection instruments, site visit plan, timeline, and roles for fieldwork. Khulisa presented the findings of the tool piloting exercise and representatives from the DBE and USAID had an opportunity to reflect on the strategy, engage with the tools, and provide input. Changes to the data collection instruments, site visit plans, etc., were incorporated and Khulisa submitted the relevant revised documents to USAID and the DBE.

During the **Fieldwork Training**, Khulisa integrated feedback from DBE representatives into the training program in real-time. Khulisa made small changes to the instruments based on this feedback and submitted the revised instruments to USAID and the DBE.

In terms of **collaborating with USAID**, the weekly reports to the DBE were forwarded on to USAID, who were provided an opportunity to respond. In week one, USAID requested that Khulisa keep a close watch on the learner attrition rate, and asked that Khulisa liaise with the DBE to ensure that the sample was protected. In response, Khulisa reached out to the DBE to inform them of the attrition rate.

The DBE engaged in various **interactions with the fieldwork team**, mainly in the first and second weeks of fieldwork. The DBE provided feedback to Khulisa, which was responded to in real-time. For example, the DBE noted that some teams started late in the morning. These teams and their Supervisors were identified and Khulisa followed up with them to ensure timely entry at the schools.

Post the completion of data collection, Khulisa convened a half-day **Presentation of the Draft Fieldwork Report**. This collaborative meeting, held at the DBE, was used to discuss the feedback from the data collection process as well as to discuss lessons learned and recommendations for similar future assignments.



Photo: Fieldworker Training; Credit: Khulisa Management Services

LEARNING

At the **client level**, Khulisa collaborated with the DBE and USAID to integrate feedback and learning into the assignment in real time (see section above). The monthly progress reports constituted the second step in the learning process whereby the lessons learned from implementation were captured and reflected back to USAID.

At the **implementer level**, Khulisa built in checks and balances to ensure that the fieldwork assignment was implemented as planned and to flag logistical, human resources, financial, contextual, and other issues during data collection. All tasks were uploaded into Zoho Projects (an online project management system), allowing daily tracking of the assignment's status. Khulisa held weekly check-in meetings with all involved staff to review the progress of the fieldwork assignment, to learn from implementation, and respond where relevant.

At the **field assignment level**, Khulisa built in systems and processes to ensure Fieldwork Supervisors and Fieldworkers monitored and flagged logistical, data entry, and contextual constraints. Fieldworkers reported daily to their assigned Supervisors using a daily reporting template. The Supervisors aggregated the daily reports into a weekly report, which was sent to the Project Manager and Evaluation Coordinator. Fieldworkers, and their Supervisors, were instructed to resolve issues directly where possible and to capture this in their reports. Issues that needed to be addressed by Khulisa were sent from the Supervisors directly to the fieldwork management team. The Fieldwork Supervisors used the WhatsApp groups established with their teams to share lessons and issues as they arose. Lessons from the field assignment were routinely brought forward into planning as fieldwork progressed.

ADAPTING

Khulisa worked internally with our staff to find solutions to issues as they arose, and to adapt our approach in response. Examples of solutions generated include:

Table 2: Proposed Solutions to Issues Identified During Fieldwork

Issue Identified	Solution
The fieldwork schedule needed to be used simultaneously by the logistics team (to coordinate accommodation and travel), the technical team (to confirm visits and to adapt the schedule in response to changing circumstances), and the finance team (to pay venues etc.).	Develop a database with a user interface for better coordination and management of the fieldwork schedule. Although it was not possible to develop the database in time for fieldwork, this is being reviewed as an option for future assignments. As an alternative, the team coordinated internally to ensure the integrity of the fieldwork schedule.
Different team members were responsible for different aspects of reporting. Given the branding and marking requirements of the contract, it was important that all team members followed the USAID approved Branding and Marking Plan.	Develop pre-marked and branded templates for reporting, presentations, meetings, and action plans.

Issue Identified	Solution
<p>During fieldwork, two Fieldworkers dropped out. Another three Fieldworkers left fieldwork to tend to personal family issues but returned to fieldwork after these issues were resolved. Suitable back-up Fieldworkers were no longer available for data collection, as they took up other offers of employment. The quality of work of the remaining back-up Fieldworkers was inadequate to replace the dropouts with these candidates.</p>	<p>Substitute dropouts with Fieldwork Supervisors for the remainder of fieldwork.</p>
<p>More Fieldworkers needed to be accommodated than expected and predicted in the budget. This was caused by two factors:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Large distances between schools in the province meant that Fieldworkers who lived in the province often could not be accommodated at their homes. 2. Fieldworkers were not allowed to work in schools where they had a conflict of interest. These Fieldworkers had to work in other areas further away from their homes – requiring accommodation. 	<p>Accommodate more Fieldworkers (90% rather than 75% predicted) for more nights, but keep within budget by negotiating with hotels and B&Bs to improve accommodation rates.</p>
<p>Quality Assurance measures needed to be more stringent.</p>	<p>A comprehensive Fieldwork Quality Assurance Surveillance Plan is required for intricate large-scale data collection assignments. Quality protocols must clearly defined and implemented accordingly.</p>

FIELDWORK MONITORING AND REPORTING

To facilitate high-quality and timely fieldwork supervision, monitoring, and logistics support, Khulisa used Zoho Projects – an online project management system. Zoho Projects is designed to enhance project monitoring, by enabling the implementing team to set up and track tasks and milestones. Working backwards from deadlines, the team scheduled tasks and set sub-tasks and dependencies. The project calendar allowed the implementing team to identify upcoming tasks, review status, set meetings, and plan appropriately.

Zoho Projects' bug tracking module (Issue Tracker), typically used to identify and fix software bugs, was repurposed to enable the project management team to submit, track, and fix critical issues as they arose. An integrated mobile phone application allowed the team members to review the project status at all times.

Fieldwork Supervisors played an important role in the ongoing monitoring and rapid evaluation of fieldwork. Khulisa trained and supported the Supervisors to provide high quality management and oversight to their respective Fieldwork Teams. The Supervisors provided on-site support to teams, where necessary. By creating constant, open lines of communication between project staff, Supervisors, and Fieldworkers, the team was able to address challenges in the field quickly and effectively.

The reporting structure for fieldwork monitoring and coordination, as described above, is graphically represented below.

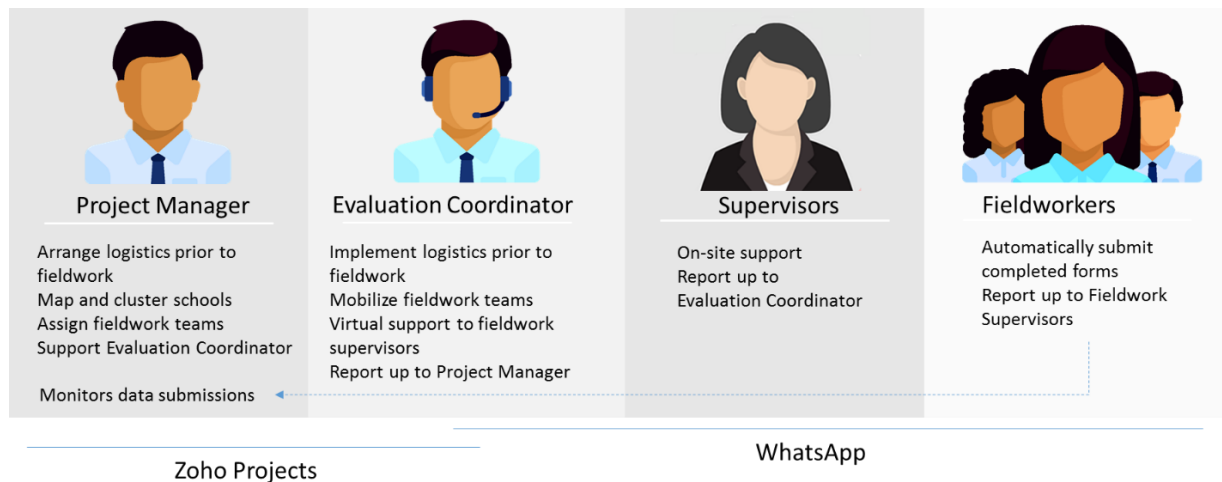


Figure 2: Fieldwork Monitoring & Reporting Structure

RAPID EVALUATION

Khulisa used an informal evaluative approach to (1) evaluate the effectiveness of chosen methods and approaches (to, for example, Fieldworker recruitment, and training) and (2) ensure that the appropriate adaptive management response was undertaken. This involved evaluating Fieldworker performance, triangulated with observation by the DBE, Fieldwork Supervisors and the Khulisa Management Team, to select high-quality Fieldworkers for data collection. It also involved checking whether the random selection protocol was followed for learner selection, applying mentorship and oversight of Fieldworkers, spot checking and assessing data quality, flagging issues via WhatsApp groups (Fieldworkers to Supervisors and vice versa), and ticketing issues via Zoho projects.

The following lessons were learned:

1. Application of random selection protocols improve with practice and with feedback from Supervisors.
2. Mentoring and overseeing Fieldworkers requires significant time and effort on the part of Supervisors. A ratio of one Supervisor to three Fieldworker teams is ideal for Supervisors to apply adequate oversight and mentorship.
3. Quality control processes are necessary to ensure the proper implementation and effective application of tools. They are also crucial for identifying problematic Fieldworkers and flagging those that require additional oversight and supervision as fieldwork progresses.

4. A comprehensive Fieldwork Quality Assurance Surveillance Plan (FQASP) with real-time data management is needed to assure data quality at this scale of data collection.
5. Setting up WhatsApp groups between the Fieldwork Supervisors and Fieldworker teams is a key strategy to manage two-way feedback. This makes Fieldworkers feel that their concerns are being addressed, and ensures that Supervisors respond in time.
6. Ticketing issues via Zoho projects is not as valuable as initially expected. It adds another layer of responsibility to the Evaluation Coordinator and Fieldwork Supervisors and does not increase the speed of the response.
7. The assumption that retired teachers would be ideal candidates for fieldwork, given their experience, is not entirely accurate. Fieldwork requires physical and mental stamina to ensure that assessments are administered in a standardized way and to ensure that all learners are assessed⁷.
8. There is no guarantee that Fieldworkers who undergo training will stay on to conduct fieldwork or that back-up Fieldworkers will be available for the duration of data collection.
9. Tangerine does not offer the functionality to pre-populate information such as learner unique IDs and school unique IDs in the assessment tools. This would have been valuable for tracking electronic data submissions.
10. Although Khulisa required each fieldwork team to report the completion of all research tools on a daily basis, it was clear when the data was linked that some teams reported these numbers inconsistently.



Photo: School Playground; Credit: Khulisa Management Services

⁷ In some schools, there are large distances between the assessment room and learner classrooms. Given that Fieldworkers are expected to accompany learners to and from the classroom, the Fieldworker is often required to exert him/herself physically to ensure that all learners are assessed within the school day.

LEARNING QUESTIONS

Khulisa addressed a number of learning questions in this assignment as follows:

Table 3: Learning Questions

Learning Question	Activities	Learning
How can data collection be done more effectively, efficiently and cost-effectively?	<p>The project management team undertook the following activities to address this learning question:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Experiential - as we resolved problems, the project management team brainstormed solutions using collaborative problem solving. Forward planning – as we built on lessons learned from previous weeks (for example, better logistics support or resolving common issues with data entry). Reflective – after fieldwork, Khulisa will meet with USAID and the DBE at a debriefing meeting to reflect on and document lessons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A Fieldwork Supervisor to Fieldworker team ratio of 1 to 3 would improve effectiveness. – Using e-wallet to pay advances to Fieldworkers would improve payment efficiency. – Acquiring client sign-off on tools a few weeks ahead of fieldwork would improve printing cost-effectiveness and efficiency. – Allowing sufficient time to conduct pilot testing, incorporate feedback and plan for fieldworker training is essential to improving the quality of fieldwork – A minimum of one week between fieldworker training and data collection is required. The length of time required between these activities will need to consider the size of the project and the amount of time allotted for fieldwork. – The maximum period for fieldwork should be four weeks (three weeks of data collection and one week for contingency) to prevent fieldworker burnout and school fatigue.
What were the key constraints experienced during data collection?	<p>The project management team undertook the following activities to address this learning question:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Used Fieldworker observations at schools to gauge key constraints and to channel feedback to Supervisors. Utilized Fieldwork Supervisor observations to channel feedback to the Evaluation Coordinator. Reviewed work plan assumptions, and updated risks and the MEL plan accordingly, during weekly meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Assessing 50 learners per school was difficult for the Fieldwork Team to accomplish and spending two days per site was taxing on the schools. – Some back-up Fieldworkers were not available when called upon. – Due to the wide geographical spread of schools, most Fieldworkers had to be accommodated during fieldwork; even those who originated from the province. – Collecting data at the end of the school term will always be a challenge. Fieldworkers experienced a lack of cooperation from schools during the last two weeks of the term.

Learning Question	Activities	Learning
How did the team adapt its approach in responding to these constraints?	<p>The project management team undertook the following activities to address this learning question:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Documented dependencies among tasks. Flagged when milestones were threatened through issue tracking. Conducted mitigation planning based on identified risks at weekly meetings. Used Zoho Projects to document cancelled and revised tasks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Motivational tactics helped keep Fieldworkers on schedule and communication with schools improved buy-in. Supervisors are critical to effective fieldwork. In addition to providing quality control, they were able to replace Fieldworkers where necessary. Although fairly successfully implemented, Supervisors should receive extensive FQASP training in future. Khulisa negotiated better accommodation rates in cases where multiple teams were located at the same accommodation over the course of fieldwork.

CHALLENGES, SUCCESSES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As with any assignment of this nature, there were a number of challenges but also successes and valuable lessons learned. Khulisa will take these learnings forward into future fieldwork, and we hope that the DBE and USAID will also take something away from this experience.

CHALLENGES

There were a number of challenges in this fieldwork assignment – some anticipated and some unanticipated. None of these challenges were insurmountable. Having good monitoring systems in place, and streamlining communications between the Fieldworkers, Supervisors, and the Project Management Team was critical to addressing many of these challenges. Some of the challenges listed below have been discussed earlier in this report.

The main challenges experienced during the fieldwork assignment include:

1. Delayed award of the Task Order affected the initial project timeline. Planning for and implementation of pilot testing, fieldworker training, and data collection was carried out under severe time constraints.
2. Packing almost 200,000 pieces of paper, quality assuring each fieldwork pack, and marking the packs, took a significant amount of time and required a team of packers to accomplish within a short timeframe. Khulisa mobilized its staff and hired additional personnel to ensure that the materials were packaged correctly and quality controlled. In future assignments, the team requires sufficient time to accomplish this activity.
3. Collecting data at the end of the school term was challenging. Cooperation from school principals diminished towards the end of the term. Fieldworkers, and the management team, had to conduct extensive lobbying with the schools to address this problem.
4. Collecting data over a five week period, especially given the high workload, was challenging for Fieldworkers. The management team observed moderate levels of fatigue among various Fieldworker teams.

5. Learner mobility was higher than expected in the Grade 4 sample. Khulisa kept a close eye on the attrition rate and reported regularly back to the DBE. Reasons provided for learner transfers include:
 - a. Learners who were to repeat Grade 3 in 2018 were moved to neighboring schools by their parents.
 - b. Some parents were migrant workers and had to move to different locations within the province.
 - c. Proximity to schools and other socio-economic circumstances.
6. Two Fieldwork Teams were affected by service strikes in the Ventersdorp area. As a result, the two teams had to be accommodated in an alternative location to ensure their safety. The fieldwork schedule was unaffected.
7. Assessing 50 learners per school was difficult for the Fieldworker teams to accomplish. The teams required constant motivation and support to ensure that the standard of data collection remained high over the period of fieldwork. The burden was felt by schools too, as the two-day site visit was disruptive.
8. Tracking fieldworker completion rates was difficult for supervisors due to delayed submission. However, Supervisors were not diligent enough to limit data management issues.
9. The physical fitness levels and health of some Fieldworkers affected their performance (linked to quality of work).
10. Some back-up Fieldworkers were not available when called upon to replace Fieldworkers. The reasons varied – from drop-outs to Fieldworkers obtaining other work over the fieldwork period. Khulisa mobilized the Fieldwork Supervisors to replace these Fieldworkers.
11. Due to the wide geographical spread of schools, most Fieldworkers needed to be accommodated during fieldwork – even those who originated from the province. Another reason for the 90 percent accommodation requirement was that where Fieldworkers reported conflicts of interest (either their child had attended the school or they worked at the school at some point), they were assigned to other schools further away and could no longer be accommodated at home.
12. The workbook analysis instrument was challenging for Fieldworkers to implement. The fact that two different review periods were used for the DBE workbooks (approximately one term) versus other materials (from the beginning of the year), and that the instructions were not well understood, led to data quality issues. Where the Project Management Team picked up discrepancies in scoring, Fieldwork Supervisors were required to return to the schools and to re-mark the same workbooks.

SUCSESSES

Despite the limited timeframes for the assignment, Khulisa was able to successfully carry out the fieldwork assignment. This included mobilizing the fieldwork team and conducting pilot testing, tool revision, Fieldworker training, and all associated logistics. Other successes include the following:

1. The DBE commended Khulisa for the “thorough planning and care” put into the assignment.
2. A quality control check-in session was held with Supervisors and the management team at the end of the first week of Fieldwork. The results of the quality control session revealed that sampling protocols were being followed correctly and that Fieldworkers were generally applying the correct marking protocols for the learner written assessments.
3. Despite the tight timeframes, which put pressure on the fieldwork, project management, and finance teams, data collection was completed in time and without any major unresolvable issues.
4. According to the Fieldwork Supervisors, the School Functionality tool worked well. Fieldworkers understood the instructions and were able to carry out the assessment within the two-day time-period at each school.
5. The e-wallet payment system worked well to advance funds to Fieldworkers.
6. The “box system” used to collect and store school-level data worked well. This ensured that data was allocated to the correct boxes and that all data was accounted for prior to handover to the project management team.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Khulisa learned many lessons during this assignment. Rather than waiting until the end of the assignment, we documented the lessons as fieldwork progressed and implemented an adaptive management approach where possible. Some of the lessons learned are valuable for future data collection. As such, Khulisa have compiled a number of recommendations that could be considered for future assignments:

1. Data collection should be completed at least three weeks before the end of the school term. No activities should be scheduled in the last two weeks of a school term.
2. The maximum period for fieldwork should be four weeks (three weeks of data collection and one week for contingency) to prevent fieldworker burnout and school fatigue.
3. Data collection assignments that involve learner assessments require sufficient time to plan and implement. There needs to be a minimum of two weeks between pilot testing and fieldworker training, and a minimum of one week between fieldworker training and data collection.
4. The fieldwork management team should be provided sufficient time to finalize contracts, pay advances, allocate the correct Fieldworkers to the correct teams, and finalize the fieldwork schedule.
5. Fieldworkers should go through the tools in detail before the tools are finalized. Pilot testing was insufficient for this purpose, particularly given the fact that the changes made to the tools after piloting were not re-piloted. Fieldworker review is particularly important in the case of translated tools, where the language used in the province may differ slightly from the translation.
6. If a week or more between Fieldworker training and fieldwork is provided, a refresher session between fieldwork teams and their allocated Supervisors is necessary. This can

be done the weekend before fieldwork to mitigate the problem of Fieldworkers forgetting how to implement the instruments between training and fieldwork.

7. Service providers carrying out fieldwork should consider the physical fitness and health of potential Fieldworkers during the Fieldworker screening process.
8. Service providers carrying out fieldwork should spend sufficient time training Fieldworkers on how to transfer learner linking information across all associated learner assessment material. In the field, Supervisors should be instructed to pay close attention to quality indicators and to report on these daily to the management team.
9. When the service provider is required to modify tools, but the responsibility for these tools lies with a third party (in this case, the DBE), this takes time and effort to coordinate. Future data collection-type assignments should consider this factor when planning Level of Effort budgets.
7. Service providers should allocate sufficient time and resources to driving to and from the province to collect completed school boxes and bring them back to the office on a weekly basis. Alternately, a central, secure location should be identified for storage of data until the end of fieldwork.
8. Service providers should conduct quality control at three levels – the Fieldworker (ensuring all data is captured); the Fieldwork Supervisor (checking all school boxes to ensure that all data is captured and spot checking data entry); and the project management team (double-checking data capture and identifying problems across teams).
9. Service providers should consider the geographical spread of schools to assist them with the selection of Fieldworkers. Most Fieldworkers needed to be accommodated during fieldwork – even those who originated from the province.
10. Service providers should screen Fieldworkers for conflicts of interest (for example, whether they have taught at a school, their child attends the school, or they have any other connection) during the Fieldworker screening phase as this may have budget implications.
11. Future fieldwork needs to factor in the time required to capture all linking forms in electronic format. Additional data quality processes are required to assure that this information is captured accurately across all fieldwork teams.
12. The Fieldwork Quality Assurance Surveillance Plan must be developed and incorporated into Khulisa’s fieldworker training manual for future data collection assignments.

WAY FORWARD

Khulisa, together with the University of Stellenbosch Research on Socio Economic Policy Unit (ReSEP) will bring complex statistical analysis skills to the analysis of the Grade 4 end line data. Our team members will work collaboratively with USAID and the DBE to facilitate transparency and ensure that data are interpreted in context.

Stakeholder engagement through facilitated debriefings are a critical means to maximizing utilization. At these sessions, we will work with stakeholders including the DBE and USAID to validate our findings, lessons, and best practice. In our experience, this process builds ownership of the findings and deepens the learning process.

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Khulisa would like to thank USAID and the DBE for the opportunity to be part of the EGRS I journey. The fieldwork assignment has been an enriching experience and it was a pleasure to work with such a motivated and inspiring team.