

Making coaching work at scale: How middle-tier actors can enable school-based teacher support

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Problem Statement

Fundamentally about how to design for:

- 1) What is feasible at scale
- 2) Three layers of actors looking to improve teaching and learning
- 3) Existing system resources

Context

The study: Iterative, multi-phase **implementation research study** (2024-2026) embedded in **PLANE**, a large-scale foundational learning program in Northern Nigeria

PLANE: Funded by FCDO (2021-2027) reaching over 1.5 million pupils; engaged 11,900 teachers; 400 school support officers and staff at 24 LGAs

Key actors: LGA Staff (Middle Tier)
SSOs (*middle* Middle Tier)
School staff

Research Question

The problem: It is **not feasible** for SSOs to deliver professional development to all teachers within system resources

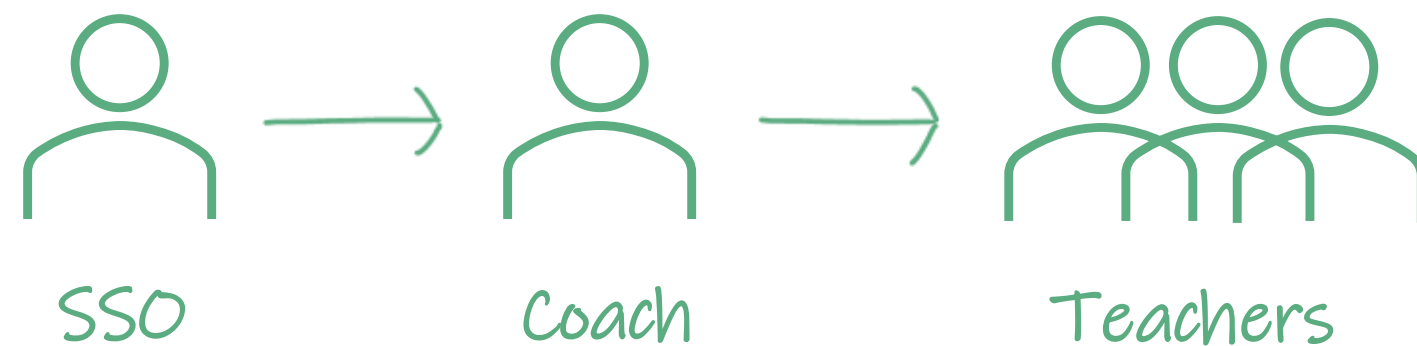
The question: How can the Nigerian education system enable **more frequent, more supportive professional development** for primary school teachers?

The method: Surveys and repeated interviews, observations, and reflection workshops with school and middle-tier actors

Approach: Shifting the support model

Previously, SSOs supported teachers directly.

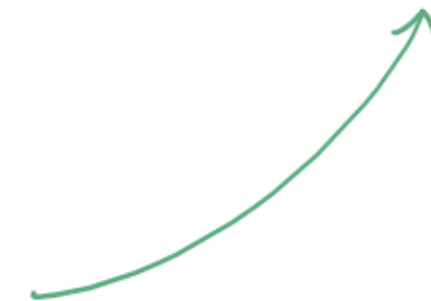
Alternative model: SSOs enable school-based coaching



- **Role revision:** SSOs help schools set up their school-based coaching system, check that coaching is happening, and support coaches
- **Bounded choice** on *who* coaches and *how* gives schools more **flexibility** to adapt the coaching system to their context and needs

Schools choose:

- **Who** coaches (head teacher, teacher, or other staff)
- **How** coaching happens (lesson preparation, co-teaching, lesson observation)



What We Have Learned

Feasibility depends on flexibility: in our study, bounded choice helped schools adapt support to their own contexts and teachers' needs.

Findings

- **School-based coaching (SBC) appears more feasible under existing system constraints.** Coaching was more frequent in SBC schools, including across quite different school contexts.
- Schools experienced SBC as more **immediate, supportive, and localized.**
- **Middle-tier actors also saw SBC as more feasible**, and the study helped them **identify important questions for scale-up**, including how to balance school autonomy with accountability and to adapt the SSO role.

Implications

- **Giving middle-tier actors meaningful opportunities to compare models can surface tensions**, helping to address misalignments before scaling.
- **Bounded choice may help schools localize and build ownership.**
- **Design for what can routinely happen at scale.** Our working assumption is that regular, feasible support may provide a stronger foundation for sustainability than a more ambitious model that happens inconsistently.

More about school-based
coaching research:



More about PLANE:



Thank You

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