IDP Schools Resource Centre Project
Debark, 2017

Meet some of the Student and Teachers
from Debark Primary Schools

Prepared by Heidi Cutts
English language improvement: teacher training in Debark

English Language Teacher’s workshop

Habtamu Molla (Supervisor of the Debark Primary Cluster) & Solomon Tezera (Manager, Education Office) arranged a meeting of School Principals to discuss the proposed English Language training for teachers.

All English language teachers would be invited for training. To accommodate their teaching commitments and examination preparation the training was split into two sessions per day over three days.

The teachers were divided by the grades they taught, session one being for grade 5-8 teachers and session 2 for grade 1-4 teachers.

Workshop outline

Day1

Session 1: introduction to phonics

- Power-point presentation giving an overview of phonics and introducing the first two phases of letters & sounds
- Interactive letter sounding, segmenting and blending and word recognition games

Session 2: practical phonics

In this session the workshop divided into two smaller groups for practical activity. After 30 minutes the groups swapped activities

- Group 1: basic introduction to computers, how to switch-on, use a mouse and general introduction to ‘sonic phonics’
- Group 2: introduction to new library resources and phonics books
Day 2

**Session 1: introduction to phonics**

- Power-point presentation introducing phase 3 – 6 letters and sounds
- Interactive letter sounding, segmenting and blending and word recognition games

**Session 2: practical phonics**

In this session the workshop divided into smaller two groups for practical activity. After 30 minutes the groups swapped activities

- Group 1: more practice with basic computers and practice with ‘sonic phonics’
- Group 2: introduction to English language resources, making a simple paper phonics game
Day 3

**Session 1: introduction to ‘sonic phonics’**

In this session the sonic phonics programme was presented through the digital projector so that everyone could explore this resource together.

The group did lots of letter sounding, blending and segmenting together. We looked at ‘tricky’ words and more complex sounds

**Session 2: practical phonics**

This session was partly teacher led & responded to their request for revision in certain areas. Working together as a group we revised some tricky sounds

We did some dictation based on phase 3 – 5 words and included some ‘tricky’ words. The session ended with a feedback and discussion led by Habtamu.
Workshop evaluation

What worked?

Theory and practical work
Teachers enjoyed the combination of theory and practical elements in the workshop. They were engaged and participated fully in each activity. They were supportive of each other and were attentive and patient when listening to each other sounding, segmenting and blending letters.

Everyone appreciated having the opportunity to learn some basic computer skills. This was very necessary before teachers could begin to use the sonic phonics programme. Having a chance to repeat this activity each day and consolidate learning was very beneficial. For many teachers this was the first time they had used a PC.

Looking at the new English language books together, especially the phonics books, helped the teachers to better understand how they could be used to support learning both inside & outside the classroom.

Letter sounding
Teachers need help with pronunciation of letter sounds, especially vowels and some of the less familiar sounds such as ‘th’. Practising in small groups and as a larger group gave them more confidence. By the end of the workshop there was a noticeable improvement in teacher’s pronunciation and in their confidence in sounding letters.
Length of sessions
Having relatively short sessions that are reviewed & built on each day works well for this type of learning. It takes time for people to gain confidence with language and it is important not to work too quickly.

Challenges

Computer virus
A very virulent virus was picked up through one of the PC’s which infected both my laptop and several flash drives and an external hard drive. The PC’s don’t appear to have an up-to-date virus protection. This is something that needs further investigation and action to prevent similar problems in the future.

No laptop
As reported last time the laptop is not working. Without a laptop it is not possible to use the digital projector easily in the resource centre. A laptop is absolutely necessary if the phonics programme is to be used on outreach to other schools such as Kulech Meda. For the workshop, a laptop was borrowed from a private individual, but this cannot be a long-term arrangement.

Power outage
Power outage is a very regular occurrence making digital presentations and learning problematic. For each workshop session I prepared non-digital resources so that training could continue without power. Alternative methods of teaching need to be carefully thought through. Planning digital teaching is problematic due to the erratic power supply.

Recommendations

Hard copy resources
Teachers requested a hard copy resource for phonics. Not everyone can easily access the PCs and not all teachers have the confidence to search for files and resources due to their limited computer skills.

A resource, using simple language would be very beneficial to teachers. It is something they could use in teaching, in improving their own practice and to refer to when planning.

As a response to the teachers’ request I made a simple hard copy resource based on the presentation given during the workshop. Lack of time (and power) means this hand-out is very basic.

For the future it is important to consider seriously this request for hard copy support material. A resource that is locally relevant, using simple English language would be very beneficial.
A lot of phonics teaching guidance and material is designed for a UK teaching environment which is very different from the day to day reality of teaching in Ethiopia. In the UK child centred education is the norm with learning through play and activity common. In Ethiopia there is not the experience or resources currently for this type of teaching. Creating some ‘bridging’ material that uses the principle of phonics teaching but made relevant for local teaching practice would be very useful.

“I have been an English teacher for 5 years. It is an important job because English is a world language and needed in so many professions.

I love to teach and see children learning.

Without learning there is no life. English is not easy, the sounds are difficult. Before, we didn’t have any way of getting good pronunciation. Now after the training I feel more confident and the video [sonic phonics] makes it clearer.”

Ethun Bizu
English teacher
Walia primary School

“I have been teaching English for 2 years, teaching grade 1-4.

As a child I wanted to be a teacher and now I really enjoy my job.

Learning phonics has really helped me and it will be a good way to teach in the future. It makes the pronunciation easier to understand. I will need a lot more practice and it would be good to have more training to help us more.

Yissaw Mohamed
English teacher
Walia primary School
“I have been the Principal of Debark Primary School for 3 years. My job is rewarding and gives me the freedom to interact in all areas of society. Discussing with the community about cultural and religious values I learn more and am able to support students more fully.

In the future I would like to eradicate illiteracy in Debark and ensure equality of education for everyone.

In the past two years I have worked hard to double the school’s revenue. This I have achieved through farming, grazing and firewood. This helps me to improve the school environment.

This year I plan to improve the classrooms by putting down concrete floors. If the environment is more conducive for students they will be happy to learn.”

**Shagaw Adan**  
**Principal**  
**Debark primary School**

“Teaching is the most important job; it is the foundation and learning for every other profession.

The English teacher’s role is vital for the progress of all students. They need more support and better training. The phonics and the new resources will really help them.

Without good English language children cannot hope to progress well. A good foundation in English gives them the chance to achieve their full potential in life.

**Habtamu Molla**  
**Supervisor**  
**Debark Primary Cluster**
Libraries

Primary Schools Libraries

Out of the seven primary schools in the Debark Primary Cluster, four schools; Walia, Debark, Kuletch Meda and Mikael have a dedicated library space and a full-time librarian. The other three schools are in the process of planning a library for the next school year. Currently they are making use of temporary classroom spaces.

All libraries in Debark keep accurate, detailed, daily records of readers’ names, gender, age, grade and books looked at. The libraries have a common manual setting out the way the library should be run and what information should be recorded.

Walia Primary School

The library is plastered, block-built building with a corrugated tin roof and glazed windows. The floor is tiled and internal walls are plastered and painted. The building is in good condition.

The library space is in a large open room, with lots of natural light and plenty of tables and chairs.

An area to the left is set up for younger children with lower tables and smaller chairs. The library is divided into two areas: the main borrowing & reference library and the new English Language reference library.

The library is very well used by staff and children and very accurate and detailed records are kept by the librarian Tefere, to record who is using the library. His daily records give an accurate picture of reader numbers and choices.

The English language library books donated by IDP are reference only, other books from the main library can be borrowed for up to two days.

The library is a quiet, calm space where children come to read or to do homework. I saw many children revising for exams. Past exam papers are available in the library as well as notes from teachers. I saw many children making use of this valuable resource.

Children take responsibility for library security, checking each other as they leave and always returning books to shelves or to the librarian.
The IDP English language books have proved especially popular with young readers. This is largely due to the attractiveness of the books and the bright illustrations. It is also down to the diverse subjects covered by the books. The librarian, Tefere said the most popular books were ‘information’ books about science, animals and space.

“I am waiting for the library to open. Me and my friend are going to read the new books. We don’t have class this afternoon so we are going to the library.”

Photo: Heidi Cutts / IDP
“Before I became the librarian at Walia Primary School I worked as a records and documentation officer in the Education Office.

I started this job two and a half years ago and I love it. I am so lucky to work in the library.

I love working with children, encouraging them to learn more and improve their reading.

I am so lucky to have the chance to read while I am in the library, to change my life for the better.

I like to read history books. I’ve learnt so much more about my history and I can then help the students with their questions.

My life is truly blessed by this knowledge and working in this library.”

Tefere
Librarian
Walia Primary School

Tefere’s love of his job really shines through, his library is a safe place for children to read and study. The space is clean and bright and well cared for. The books are well organised and can be easily accessed by everyone. Children study on their own or quietly in small groups. Their respect for each other, the books and the library space has been learnt from their committed librarian.
Debark Primary School

The library space is in one of the oldest buildings in the compound and is about 50 years old. It is a wood and mud construction plastered on the outside, with a corrugated roof and glazed ‘sky-lights’. The internal walls are painted and lime-washed. The floor is unsealed but has a vinyl covering. The space is quite dark on dull days and has no power for electric lighting.

The library has both reference material and books that can be borrowed for a maximum of three days. It is well used by children for reading and as a place to do homework and revise for tests and exams.

After classes have finished, Ermiyas Tadas Yigziw uses the library as a quiet place to do his biology homework. He makes use of biology textbooks from the library to help improve his grades.

Many children come to the library to further their study and the new IDP English language books have proved a hit with young scientists!
“I have been the librarian at Debark Primary School for the past seven years, before that I was a farmer and then spent three years in the army.

I enjoy my job, because I like to help the students. They come here to gain knowledge and I can help them.

I like to read while I am working. It is a good job.

My hope for the future is that we will get a better, new library with more space and more light. It is difficult because there are only some good places to read when it is a dark day. We need more light and more windows. If it is attractive and light, children will spend longer here reading and learning. I hope soon we will get a new building.”

Mesfin Alem Agidew
Librarian
Debark Primary School
In Debark Primary School the English Language books donated by IDP are kept in the Language Resource Centre. The books are reference only and are mainly used during programmed lessons. While I was in Debark many children requested access to the books and this was always accommodated. On one occasion about twenty-five children came in to read. They sat quietly reading or read together in small groups. The most popular books are ‘information’ books about science, nature, animals and space. The co-ordinator of the resource centre, Teshager Fentie is keeping records of the English language books used and details of the readers (name, age, gender, grade). He said that the new books are very popular with readers because they are more attractive and cover many topics.

The books have been arranged so that all the phonics books are together, making it easy for teachers & pupils to access relevant material. Teshager has also tried to ‘highlight’ some books to make the library more attractive. The centre has recently been painted and further work is planned including making repairs to the roof.

These three girls asked to read the English language books after their classes finished in the morning. They spent time reading quietly before going home.
Kuletch Meda Primary School

Kuletch Meda Primary School is in a very rural setting on the way to the Simien Mountains, just outside the main town of Debark. The settlement is newly built by the government to re-house people evicted from the Simien National Park. The population is made up largely of Muslim farmers who previously lived close to Ras Dashen. The settlement is about 40 minutes walk from Debark city centre, but feels more isolated from the city.

Kuletch Meda Primary School has three small classroom blocks, an office and a small, well-run library. The light room has tables & chairs and locally made shelves displaying the new books donated by IDP. This is a new library and has been hugely helped by the recent donation.

Atala Bazie has made a lovely welcoming library in a small space. The books are well cared for and beautifully arranged, making the library very attractive for readers. Despite being new to the job she has great ambitions for a larger community library that local adults can make use.

Kuletch Meda is isolated from the main town of Debark so a local library for the community would be a great asset.

The new library will be part of a four-roomed block-built building with glazed windows. The construction has already started and should be complete by the New Year. The school is very fortunate to also have extensive lands that are used for agriculture and for grazing.
“I am very new, just a baby. I have only been here for eight months. Before, I worked at the Education Office. I am very happy with this job. I enjoy helping the children and seeing them improve with their reading.

I keep records of who comes to the library each day. On average about forty children come every day to read or to do homework. Grade 4-8 students use the library most and there are more girls, this makes me happy.

It is good we now have books for the younger children. They like the new books because they are bright with nice pictures and are easy to read.

We are planning a new library for next year, a bigger, with more light. I am looking forward to our new building opening. We will have a better library that I hope will be for the whole community, so everyone can enjoy reading and learning together.”

Atala Bazie
Librarian
Kulech Meda Primary School
Mikael Primary School

Mikael Primary School is small, with four blocks of classrooms, an office and library, built on high land above Debark town, close to Qeddus Mikael church. The library is in a building of wood and mud construction, with a corrugated roof and un-sealed floor. The books are arranged on wooden shelves and divided into reference, borrowing and English language books.

Sisay Setegn Nega is the new librarian at Mikael Primary School. He was previously a security guard and sees this job as a great opportunity. His job is not only providing an income, supporting him and his wider family, but is also an opportunity to improve his own education by reading and practicing English. He is keen to learn and make improvements in the library and was very happy with the new posters.

Sisay says more girls than boys use the library for reading and doing homework. Asked what would help to improve his library, Sisay requested a concrete floor and more windows so the library is lighter.

Students at Mikael Primary School show their favourite books.
“I am very new to the library; I have only been here for two weeks!

I am very happy with my job. I am responsible for my whole family; my mother, brothers and sisters and this library job helps me to support them.

The children love the new books too much because of the colours and the pictures. We have to look after them and keep them very well. I clean the books every day because of the dust. The library is very important to me.

I am so happy when I see the children reading because I know it will help them in life and will give them better opportunities. Myself, I am reading the English language books to improve my reading and speaking, then I can help the children and my family more.”

Sisay Setegn Nega
Librarian
Mikael Primary School
School libraries: general observations

The libraries are well run and very well used by children and staff. The librarians keep excellent records of their readers and this data will be invaluable in assessing which books are most relevant and which appeal to particular readers.

The libraries serve two main roles, as a place for reading and as a place for studying. The libraries are essentially homework clubs and also centres for informal exam revision. It is important that this key role is recognised within the school and that librarians are duly credited for their work and dedication. None of the librarians in Debark have had any formal training and rely on the guidance in the library manual.

Most libraries would benefit from more light. This is particularly noticeable during the rainy season when days are dull.

All libraries should aim to have concrete floors. This will reduce dust levels and provide an improved environment for readers.

Many of the library books are slim and are better displayed flat so that the range of titles can be clearly seen. This means additional shelf space is needed.

Books arranged at Debark Primary School English Language Resource Centre.

The books are displayed flat on lower shelves, facing the reader and stacked in a traditional way.

These different techniques allow easier access to the books and make the library an attractive place for readers.

Photo: Heidi Cutts / IDP
English language club

English language clubs exist in all schools and are part of the school offer. It is a mandatory requirement that each school in the Debark Primary Cluster has an English Language club.

Each school also has a dedicated ‘English day’ when both staff and students are encouraged to only speak in English. In Walia Primary School English day is on a Wednesday each week, in Debark Primary School it is on a Friday.

Walia Primary School English language club is typically divided into two groups; grade 1-4 and grade 5-8. The club runs outside class hours. Activities include learning greetings, songs, preparing presentations and watching English language films.

All English language teachers are expected to take an active role within the club. They are responsible for preparing a yearly plan of activities that is presented to the Principal each September. The club is held in school classrooms and sometimes the club members present what they have been learning to the wider school.

In Debark Primary School the English Language Club (grade 1-8) gives regular presentations at the daily flag ceremony. They sing songs and give presentations in English.

The Principal of Walia Primary School aims to modernise and improve the current language clubs. The introduction to phonics and the IDP English language resources will help improve the quality of the English club provision. The recent training of English language teachers across the Debark Primary Cluster has given teachers a greater confidence in good pronunciation and delivery of language teaching.

Observations

Debark City Department of Tourism and Culture has a remit for adult education. It would be a great asset if an English language resource could be established in the town. This could be in the form of an English language club, showing English language films, a young children’s reading club, short courses.

To achieve this the library needs new books, shelves, access to a laptop/computer & digital projector and educators. They have also requested a toilet & shower as a priority.

Habtamu Molla has a responsibility to deliver some aspects of the adult education programme and is familiar with the current programmes, resources and remits of the Department of Tourism and Culture.
Solomon Tezera, Manager of Debark City Education Office, works with local university students each year to complete end of term community projects. This year PHD students from Gondar University built a nursery schoolroom, and a toilet block in Walia Primary School.

Perhaps next year the students could also be encouraged to share their English language skills. The students generally pronounced English well.

**Homework club**

Although no formal homework clubs exist, the school libraries act as a space for quiet study after classes have finished. Most students make use of the library for homework, either working alone or quietly in small groups. I have seen small groups of 5-6 students working together on the same topic, using textbooks, and helping each other to work through answers. Teachers help by supplying the library with teaching notes, past exam and test papers for students to use.

The Debark Primary Cluster works on a two-shift system. When classes have finished children make use of the library. They also use the library in between classes. All the students I saw using the libraries were actively engaged in reading or studying. They are quiet and well behaved and show respect for the books and the library space.