DIGNITAS
dignity through education

Overview

Dignitas is a leading education development organization. We use an innovative training and coaching approach to empower schools and educators in marginalized communities to improve educational quality, and transform students' opportunities.

We imagine a world where schools are a vibrant place for all children to develop the skills and strength of character to thrive and succeed.

Between 2011 and 2017, Dignitas implemented its flagship 'Leadership Institute' in non-formal schools across seven sites: Mathare, Kawangware, Satellite, Kangemi, Kariobangi, Huruma and Thika. The purpose of the Dignitas Leadership Institute (DLI) was to empower and equip educators to transform education in their communities. The intervention focused on five principal elements:
- Leadership
- Coaching
- Professional development
- Professional peer collaboration and learning
- Infrastructure support.

In October 2017, Dignitas engaged ziziAfrique to assess the impact of the Dignitas Leadership Institute on the schools, teachers, and learners. This was an *ex-post* evaluation intended to provide evidence of Dignitas' program impact in order to inform and support scaling, adjustment, and replication strategies. In addition, findings from this study seek to provide grounds for continuous dialogue between Dignitas and stakeholders who have interest in providing high-quality education to children in developing countries through teacher education and school leadership development programs.

The initial terms of reference for the evaluation included four critical questions:

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What impact does the DLI have on student academic and self-efficacy outcomes?	To what degree did the DLI impact instructional delivery in the classroom?
To what degree did the DLI improve teacher - student interactions and the overall learning environment?	What is the impact of the DLI on teachers' self-efficacy, mindset, and leadership?

Through consultation between ziziAfrique and Dignitas, the four questions were expanded to a broader inquiry framework derived from the Project Rubric[1]. New dimensions were included into the framework, drawing a roadmap for:

1. Documenting the intervention – what happened, when and how
2. Determining the contribution of the intervention to the various aspects of school governance and management, including the improvement of learning outcomes
3. Exploring the dispersal effects of the project on non-project schools
4. Determining the residual effects on schools where the program had lapsed.

The final evaluation framework agreed upon between the evaluators and Dignitas consisted of five key indicators (a-e) and three subsidiary indicators (f-h):

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[1] This was a blueprint that was developed by Dignitas over the time, and which formed the basis for implementation and assessment.
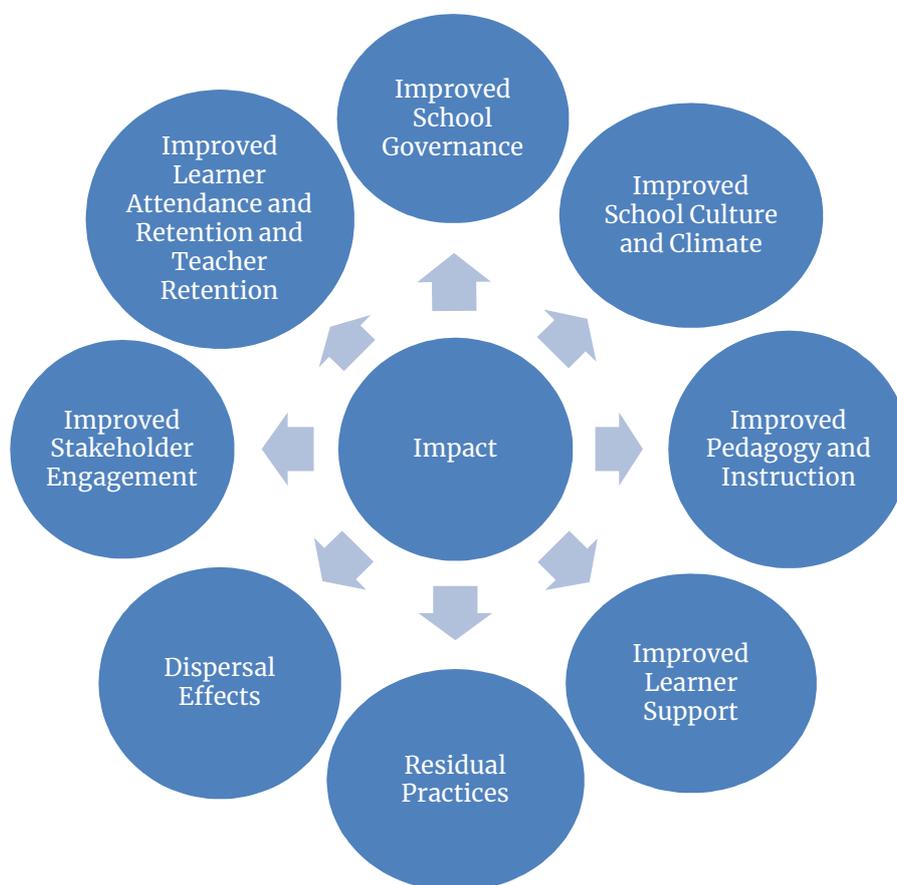
a	Improved school governance	Systems and operations, records, financial management, policies/systems for accountability, improved infrastructure, and capacities for resource mobilization, and removal of barriers for SNE
b	Improved school culture and climate	Ownership of school goals, professional learning structures, inspired and transformative leadership, development of SIPs, reflective practice, and collective teacher efficacy
c	Improved pedagogy and instruction	Improved teaching skills, development and use of learning materials, reflective

		teaching, classroom management and alternative discipline practice, special needs/inclusive practice, capacities for learning assessment, and improved learning and self-improvement culture among teachers
d	Improved learner support	Inclusion of non-academic activities, skills training in clubs, guidance and counselling programs, referral network for complex cases, refresher training for teachers, use of teaching aids, student collaboration through group work and peer learning, students' participation in class, and balanced teacher and student talk
e	Improved stakeholder engagement	BOMs, teacher-parent communication, support of parents to learning of their children, and engagement of external partners
f	Improved learner attendance and retention, and teacher retention	School enrolment, attendance and retention of learners, reduced teacher attrition;
g	Residual practices	Continuation of DLI practices after the intervention had ceased in the 2011-2014 school cohort
h	Dispersal effects	Spread of DLI practices to non-intervention schools, either through DLI Teachers' transfer to new schools, or DLI Teachers starting new schools.

The evaluation tools and evaluation questions were aligned to this framework of indicators, and formed a logical sequence of inquiry to arrive at conclusions on the four project outcomes.

KENYA
+254 (0)738 244 670

31 School Lane, #2
PO Box 20024-00200 GPO
Nairobi, Kenya

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Analysis of Findings

It is worth noting that concurrent to the evaluation process, Dignitas was undergoing a thorough review of program design, as the team sought to address key strategic questions raised in late 2017. This process of questioning was intended to respond to the strategic plan developed in late 2017. This questioning led the team to investigate many of the issues concurrently raised by the evaluation report. This was extremely valuable as the report, and related discussions, informed the team's investigations.

The insights noted in this section are largely related to this process of strategic investigation.

Five Contexts

The report highlights 'five contexts' that raise five important questions (pages 14, 15).

The first of these addresses the homogeneity, or lack thereof, when referring to 'low-cost private schools'. ziziAfrique identified the challenge of treating these schools as one homogenous group, and pointed to the potential value of segregating the group to better identify potential points of impact. The Dignitas team subsequently worked on School Personas that are intended to help categorize schools in the low-cost private school bracket, and identified three groupings; struggling, surviving, and thriving. A study of past and current school partners, which referenced school leader and school assessments, pointed to the conclusion that schools in the 'surviving' category were perhaps the point of most potential impact. In brief, these schools can be described as having a level of financial stability, and some indication of leadership strength.

The second and third questions, examining the role of the church in operating low-cost private schools, and gender disparity at management level respectively, speak to deeply engrained cultural realities.

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The fourth question speaks to the widely felt challenge of having such high numbers of untrained and unregistered 'teachers' in the low-cost private schools. There are a number of drivers of this reality, the most prominent of which is likely financial. Young people entering the teaching force, particularly in Nairobi's urban informal settlements, where the majority of these low-cost private schools exist, do not often have the opportunity to access adequate training. This is indeed one of the realities on which Dignitas was founded – recognizing the important role that these individuals play in the delivery of education to children typically excluded from government provision, whilst acknowledging their lack of professional training and capacity. Dignitas is currently seeking mechanisms by which these individuals (where they have the necessary foundational qualifications) can undergo recognized training, and be registered with the Teachers' Service Commission (TSC). Of course, the Dignitas team does foresee this increasing the risk of teacher attrition, which is already a challenge in the low-cost private schools. This risk speaks to the need to see broader systemic change that will address the need to see all children enjoy their right to a quality education.

Finally, the fifth question queried the strength and potential impact of Dignitas' cascade model. While the study is not conclusive on the current strengths of this programming element, it is clear that Dignitas should be more intentional about the cascade of training and coaching within schools in future cohorts.

Report Findings

It was encouraging to see that report highlight the impact of coaching (page 19, page 49), with particular reference to improved student learning. 92% of Head Teachers, and 63% of Class Teachers attributed improved learning directly to the coaching. This resonates with the findings of the recent World Development Report; "For effective teacher training, design it to be individually targeted and repeated, with follow-up coaching—often around a specific pedagogical technique. Focus school management and governance

KENYA

31 School Lane, #2
PO Box 20024-00200 GPO
Nairobi, Kenya

+254 (0)738 244 670

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reforms on improving teacher-learner interaction, by providing feedback to teachers on lesson plans, (and) action plans to improve student performance, and classroom behavior."

Section 3.3.1 speaks to the impact of Dignitas' Leadership Institute on school governance. Whilst broader research seems to suggest that instructional leadership is what impacts most on student learning, the Dignitas head teachers identified four directions of the DLI impact on school governance that are more aligned with organizational management, except for the learning around teacher evaluation. Dignitas is currently developing Leadership Institute curriculum that focuses on Instructional Leadership as the core of school leadership that impacts on student learning outcomes.

Section 3.2.3 speaks to the impact of Dignitas Leadership Institute on pedagogy and instruction. It was positive to realize that the study found evidence of professionalism in the teachers' practice, despite the fact that large percentages of them were untrained. Teachers, parents and children all reported positive improvements in teacher practice, teacher-learner interaction, and classroom management as a result of the Dignitas Leadership Institute.

This section also highlighted the issue of corporal punishment in schools, and whilst some training on alternative methods of discipline sought to equip teachers to respond differently to indiscipline, it seems that anecdotal evidence points to the practice of corporal punishment having crept back into some classrooms. However, the report also notes that the practice of corporal punishment in schools is deeply engrained within cultural norms, practices and expectations. As such, the Dignitas Leadership Institute was not designed to address this, but simply to educate teachers as to what some alternatives might be.

Section 3.2.4 speaks to the impact of Dignitas Leadership Institute on learner support, with a focus on Guidance and Counselling, and Co-curricular activities. This was an intriguing element of the study, as the

design of the Leadership Institute did not drive significant resource in either of these areas, and so the impact was minimal. It was definitely a valuable learning point for the Dignitas team; that we should be fully cognizant of what the evaluation framework implies, and how the program design should be intentional about delivering impact in accordance with that. Further, it was a lesson in understanding the niche that a program like the Leadership Institute seeks to address, and a realisation that we should only seek to implement what we know will drive impact. Both Guidance and Counselling, and Co-curricular activities would have required significant additional, and different, resource to fully implement.

Section 3.2.6 speaks to the impact of Dignitas Leadership Institute on learning outcomes, both academic and student self-efficacy. The evaluation determined that 68% of schools demonstrate high learning levels, with 80%, or more, of learners scoring above 75%. In addition to these impressive academic test scores, pupils gave high appraisals of their teachers, and attributed their scores to the teacher's role in class. However, the report also speaks to the challenges of effecting education quality improvements in the urban informal settlements (pages 22,62), with numerous and complex environmental and systemic challenges.

Section 3.2.7 speaks to the impact of Dignitas Leadership Institute on learner and teacher attendance and retention. This is another complex issue, with many influencing environmental and systemic factors. Teachers in low-cost private schools are not generally well or consistently remunerated, nor do they typically enjoy all of the employment rights they are entitled to by law. Teacher attrition is a frequent, and common challenge across low-cost private schools. Student retention is likewise affected by many complex environmental challenges accented by poverty such as; access to school feeding programs, inability to pay school fees, unstable household livelihoods and family migration. With such complex community challenges, it would be difficult for a program like the Dignitas Leadership Institute to effect significant change.

KENYA

+254 (0)738 244 670

31 School Lane, #2
PO Box 20024-00200 GPO
Nairobi, Kenya

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Interestingly, the evaluation found mixed results when analyzing the impact of the Leadership Institute on teacher retention; "Improving retention happened when teachers enjoyed the environment more, and derived motivation from experiencing better results and improved working environment. To the contrary, some teachers became more marketable after the training, and moved on to other schools where they could earn more." (Page 56)

A common theme throughout the report is the lack of documentation in schools. This reflects two challenges. First, the informal nature of low-cost private schools, in fact often referred to as 'informal schools'. With little regulatory presence, and minimal oversight from the government and other authorities, there is no mandatory reporting mechanisms that drive documentation of key records with the schools. Secondly, it was noted that although Dignitas trained participants to conduct coaching conversations, the training did not include documentation of the same, hence the records of such could not be found in the schools. This speaks to a broader challenge to the evaluation process, where the ziziAfrique team repeatedly sought documented evidence to reinforce quantitative findings, yet were unable to obtain it.

Finally, the conclusion notes that; "Although all the schools received relatively uniform treatment, there was no uniformity in the effects. Whereas professional development workshops, teacher coaching and infrastructure support were mentioned as part of the projects interventions, professional learning communities were hardly mentioned. This is explained by the fact that PLCs were implemented in the 2014 – 2017 cohort only." (Page 61) In a recent program design review process, the Dignitas team have worked to identify specific teacher attributes and practices that should be observable as a result of the Leadership Institute. This is intended to address the seeming lack of uniformity in the effects, as it contributes to a more robust evaluation method. In the same process, the decision was also taken to ensure Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are

KENYA
+254 (0)738 244 670

31 School Lane, #2
PO Box 20024-00200 GPO
Nairobi, Kenya

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implemented across all cohorts, and from the beginning of school partnerships, to ensure that the practice of sharing, reflecting and collaborating for schoolwide improvement is well developed by the end of a school's partnership with Dignitas.

Incorporating Key Takeaways

The evaluation highlights numerous areas for future action. Eight recommendations are given (Page 63), many of which Dignitas' program review have already addressed. Below is progress made on each of these recommendations.

1) *DLI should explicitly target to improve learning, while prioritizing what works in improving learning in informal settlements.*

   Early in 2018, Dignitas began a rigorous review exercise with the intent of making and measuring impact at the learner level. This resulted in the redesign of the program with a focus on which teacher and school leader practices drive improved learning at the student level, particularly students from vulnerable learning and living environments.

2) *DLI should consider teacher motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) in any future teacher interventions.*

   Dignitas, in recognizing the limits of the DLI to address this systemic challenge, is actively pursuing strategic partnerships with other organizations who can help to address the need for more holistic school support.

3) *DLI should elevate every head teacher to the position of instructional leader and focus on selected instructional practices, including*

KENYA

+254 (0)738 244 670

31 School Lane, #2
PO Box 20024-00200 GPO
Nairobi, Kenya

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holding teachers accountable for lesson preparation and delivery [by modelling this first, themselves].

Dignitas' program design for 2019 focusses almost entirely on instructional leadership, with a strong intent to impact classroom culture, and learner engagement, for the improved learning outcomes of students. Dignitas will recruit teachers and school leaders and empower them with the tools, techniques and mindsets they need to be excellent instructional leaders.

4) *Rather than addressing various topics, DLI should consider focusing the intervention on select skills that have the greatest potential to improve student learning.*

As has been stated above, Dignitas has worked to identify the areas of the DLI curriculum that drive the most impact on student learning, to a large extent informed by this evaluation. This informed the focus on instructional leadership and the resulting curriculum scope and sequence, which is currently being finalized.

5) *While the low-fee private schools are needy, trying the interventions in a few public schools may add value. Combining private and public schools will complicate the equation, but may have benefits in introducing conversations with government, learning from government, and increasing program prospects for scale.*

This has been an area of interest for Dignitas throughout 2018, highlighted, in part, by the introduction of the new national curriculum. DLI was implemented with two small pilot cohorts of teachers in rural, public schools (Nyeri and Kinangop), with the partnership of the government. The team has already gained significant learning regarding the necessary adjustments in

KENYA

+254 (0)738 244 670

31 School Lane, #2
PO Box 20024-00200 GPO
Nairobi, Kenya

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engagement and program delivery, which will significantly inform future programming. Dignitas hopes to implement more extensive programming in partnership with the government in 2019 and beyond.

6) *Greater parental involvement may create direct connections and new pathways to improving learning and reveal new frontiers for impact.*

Again, this is something that Dignitas will seek to address in strategic partnerships with other organizations who can help to address the need for more holistic school support.

7) *In designing the new program, methods of impact evaluation, and capacity for the same, should be considered from the onset. To tell a complete story, a comprehensive independent baseline and a system of tracking important indicators for the duration of the implementation is necessary. Even then, this program should be monitored for some time, to extend the learning and use the many years of experience to inform the future of Dignitas.*

The evaluation process undertaken by ziziAfrique has helped Dignitas to understand the need for thorough evaluation, as an integral element of program design, even alongside rigorous internal collection and analysis of impact data. All programs in 2019 and beyond will have external review and audit as part of the evaluation framework.

8) *The informal learning settlements in Nairobi present an extremely dynamic and noisy environment, driven by a multiplicity of systemic factors in and out of the school. In addition, there are interventions from many other sources. Thus, interventions need to be*

KENYA
+254 (0)738 244 670

31 School Lane, #2
PO Box 20024-00200 GPO
Nairobi, Kenya

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accompanied by robust evaluation designs that enable close monitoring and documentation to isolate the project's impact.

Dignitas has begun discussion about how to counter this challenge in its school recruitment process, although it will be almost impossible to eliminate the 'noise' entirely, as this is simply characteristic of urban informal settlements. There is hope that a robust evaluation design, as part of future program implementation, will be able to isolate the program's impact.

Evaluation Challenges

Perhaps the biggest challenge to the evaluation was the lack of correlating baseline data, which led to the evaluation team being forced to draw conclusions based on one point of data. While Dignitas had collected a wealth of impact data (page 11), it did not correlate directly to the data points for this particular evaluation. There was a noteworthy attempt to explore alternative sources of data that could speak to the evaluation, but little was found that corresponded to the precise data points. An important area of growth for the Dignitas team through the process of this evaluation, has been the recognition that program design (identification of outcomes) must speak to program delivery (realization of those outcomes), which in turn must speak to a comprehensive evaluation framework (to appropriately measure those outcomes).

Conclusion

The process of the evaluation, in addition to the final report, have been of significant value to Dignitas.

The review discussions between the Dignitas and ziziAfrique teams at various stages of the evaluation offered valuable insight, and helped to guide both teams towards a final report that would have integrity, yet speak to the sound development of educational programming that drives improved learning outcomes for the most vulnerable.

KENYA

+254 (0)738 244 670

31 School Lane, #2
PO Box 20024-00200 GPO
Nairobi, Kenya

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Concurrent to the launch of this evaluation process, Dignitas hired a new Executive Director, Deborah Kimathi, who proceeded to lead the team in a clear strategic direction. By the end of December 2017, the team had determined four clear strategic goals for 2018. These are *Grow* – Preparing for growth, testing the waters, and shaping a strategy towards scale, *Influence* – Build a brand that clearly shouts student impact, *Value* – Our impact is only sustainable and scalable if it is affordable, and *Engage* – Who, why, how do we engage and to what end? This evaluation spoke to each one of these strategic goals, and helped to answer probing questions that had been raised in each area, questions that were intended to drive the team in the direction of robust, efficient and effective program design.

As part of this strategic process, Dignitas initially launched into a review of its MEL framework, with the intention of simply reviewing its measures of student impact. However, this process led the team to a full program review, which resulted in the reconciliation of almost all the recommendations made in ziziAfrique's final report.

Dignitas are extremely grateful to the ziziAfrique team for the skill and expertise they brought to the evaluation exercise. Numerous consultations with the ziziAfrique team gave the Dignitas team confidence in the final report, and a deep appreciation for their support in the successful completion of the evaluation.

Dignitas are also extremely grateful for the support of the donor who helped to cover the cost of the evaluation. The desire of the donor to invest in the evaluation of the impact of Dignitas' Leadership Institute has proven extremely valuable. As a result, future programming should be more intentional, effective and efficient in driving impact at the student level.