

THE DIGNITAS EFFECT

A RAPID IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP TRAINING & COACHING ON STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Executive Summary

In Kenya, passionate teachers and school leaders in Nairobi's low-cost private community schools do not always have access to the professional development that supports high impact teaching. Dignitas, a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering educators to transform their schools through leadership development and instructional coaching, was specifically developed to support the advancement of teacher quality in Nairobi's communities.

“Dignitas has taught me that just because I am the teacher doesn't mean I'm the boss of everybody. They taught me leadership.”

-Teacher Paul, Director of LICREC

Dignitas runs a series of Leadership Training & Coaching Academies and Professional Development workshops, which have shown to positively affect the teaching practices of the attendees. Now, Dignitas seeks to explore how their teacher and school leader coaching and development have affected student learning outcomes.

Literature suggests that teacher quality is a powerful and positive predictor of student learning. (Nilsen, Trude However., and Jan-Eric. Gustafsson) The correlation is difficult to quantify. There are varying external factors beyond teacher quality that also impact student learning. These factors include household income, parental involvement, school environment and social and emotional learning support availability, which left Dignitas with the question of how to measure student outcomes.



American University-Dignitas Partnership

To address this question, a team of American University graduate students, in partnership with Dignitas, conducted a rapid impact assessment to explore the relationship between Dignitas's work with teachers and school leaders and student learning outcomes.

The Approach

After three weeks of planning and collaboration, the team co-designed a rapid impact assessment study to explore whether there were differences between the math performance of students in new Dignitas partner schools and students in longstanding Dignitas partner schools.

The team visited:

- 34 classrooms
- 17 different schools
- 5 different communities:
 - Kawangware
 - Kangemi
 - Ngando
 - Riruta
 - Uthiru
- Assessing Grades 3, 4, and 5

The schools were divided into two groups: the 'treatment' group, comprised of Dignitas partner schools that had teachers who had attended Dignitas' workshops and Stawisha Leadership Academies since 2017 and the 'control' group, comprised of schools that had very little exposure to Dignitas professional development and began partnership in 2019. It is important to note that, whilst all of the communities visited were under-resourced, informal settlements, there were

varying levels of household income. Further, due to feasibility constraints there was a smaller number of students in control schools than in treatment schools.

Indicators

The indicators used to test student learning outcomes consisted of two assessments administered in a week-long field collection in the community schools:

- **Math Literacy:** The first indicator was a numeracy assessment designed by Twaweza, called the UWEZO test. The test was chosen because it was created specifically based upon the Kenyan curriculum, and assessed both basic numeracy skills and advanced numeracy skills at the Grade 2 and Grade 4 levels.¹
- **Math Content Recall:** The second indicator tested student recall through the creation of mathematics questions by the classroom teachers and the American University team.



Figure 1

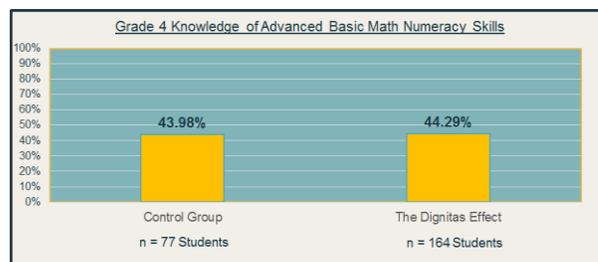


Figure 2

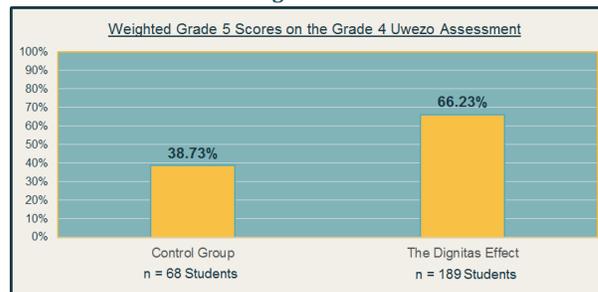


Figure 3

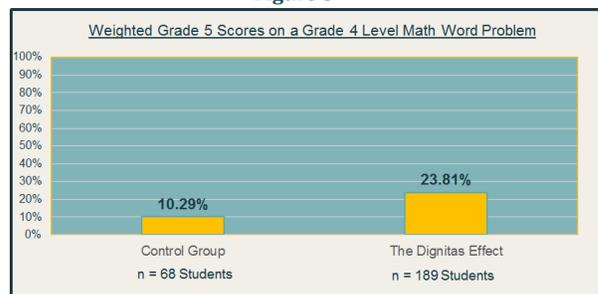
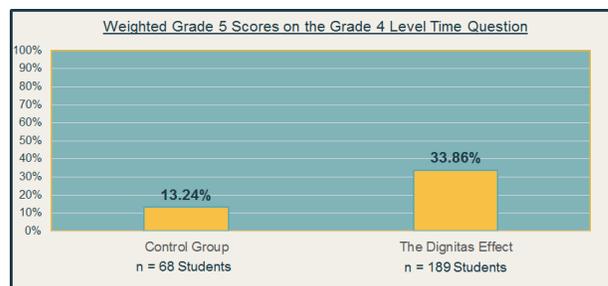


Figure 4



Results

The results of the rapid impact assessment reflect the challenges with quantifying the impact of teacher training on student learning outcomes, especially in the Kenyan low-cost private school context where student and teacher mobility is very high (Stern, J. M., & Heyneman, S). While the results do not show clear relationships between Dignitas trained teachers and increased student learning across grade levels, they do show early indications that there may be a discernible positive Dignitas effect on student learning outcomes when it comes to math content recall. Figure 1 shows no difference between the math literacy of Dignitas and non-Dignitas trained teachers in Grade 4, which the American University team attributed to “the ceiling effect”. This effect occurs within standardized testing, “when the highest possible score or close to the highest score on a test or measurement instrument is reached, thereby decreasing the likelihood that the testing instrument has accurately measured the intended domain” (*Encyclopedia of Research Design*). That being said, as seen in Figures 3, 4 and 5, the results do show an early indication that Grade 5 Dignitas Effect classrooms outperformed non-Dignitas trained Grade 5 classrooms in math literacy, Grade 4 level math word questions, and Grade 4 level telling-time questions.

¹ http://www.uwezo.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/KE_2012_Tests.pdf

What Do These Results Mean?

It is key to note that the results, although statistically untested, indicate that the Grade 5 students in the Dignitas schools tested better on content within the Grade 4 Kenyan curriculum. As lesson planning is a crucial part of Dignitas training, the results show a possible early indication that the Dignitas trained staff are better equipped to keep up with the Kenyan curriculum. Students in classrooms with teachers who are not trained in lesson planning may not have their learning tied to a curriculum. It is important to note that these results must be seen as a starting point for future evaluation, especially as there was a difference in 'n' values between the treatment and control group students and the differences were not tested for statistical significance.

But they do speak to the power of the Dignitas model on teacher practice, especially when it comes to effectively delivering curriculum in a way that advances student learning. Dignitas trained teacher, Alex Mugaisi, is an example of this; Alex said that he used to walk into the classroom and just start teaching, but at the LTI he learnt about lesson planning and has found it incredibly useful ever since. ("Dignitas Partner School Profile: Umoja Primary School.")



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