Science of Teaching

Middle Tier Research: Lead Consultant for Central Team

Call for Expressions of Interest (EOI)

Date: August 18, 2023

Summary

RTI International is seeking 2-3 consultants to support the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF)-funded Science of Teaching (SoT) Middle Tier Leadership Research Agenda. Science of Teaching—a 4.5 year program focused on improving foundational literacy and numeracy in sub-Saharan Africa—has a research agenda focusing on how to strengthen the role of mid-level education officials. Education managers at the district or middle level can and should play important roles in reinforcing what school leaders, teachers, and school-communities are expected to do to improve FLN outcomes.

Science of Teaching (SoT) will examine ‘where the system meets the school’ and will address the gap in data on mid-level leadership within the system (district leadership). The sector has a lot of information about what needs to happen within a system—and what’s necessary to take place at schools—in order for structured pedagogy to succeed, i.e., in improving the quality of teaching, and for children to be able to learn effectively and progress to the next level in their learning. For example, schools should prioritize helping all children learn, which involves enabling teachers to support each child at his/her level, including providing “catch-up” support for those who are struggling, rather than focusing only on “completing” an overambitious curriculum. Such priorities must be driven and reinforced by district/mid-level leaders.

Science of Teaching will support a series of research activities that will generate and compile evidence on what is needed for “middle-level” officials (district, sub-district education and/or government officials) in this role.

The research activity will involve:

- **Research Team**: which will oversee and coordinate the effort and contribute technically across tasks – including RTI/SoT staff and consulting experts;
- **Technical advisory committee**: which will assist in identifying existing research data and in identifying implementer and research partners; provide technical advising as relevant throughout; and contribute to planning for and carrying out dissemination activities;
- **Implementer and researcher partners**: which will be identified and enlisted to partner on the case study research (see Part 2 below).

Science of Teaching Grant Background

Improving foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) is essential for low- and middle-income countries to provide basic education of adequate quality for their citizenry. Learning outcomes are presently so low in primary education that business as usual investments will not be sufficient to ensure needed gains in achievement. The World Bank, DFID, and UNICEF are among the donors developing new initiatives to respond to this learning crisis. Low- and middle-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are at the forefront of this learning crisis, and the World Bank’s Learning Poverty Accelerator countries are particularly in need. Education officers and counterpart education policymakers developing,
implementing, and managing programs focused on FLN must have vastly improved technical understanding of how to design and manage these interventions. Governments and their funding partners have recently increased their investments in improving FLN, with many pilot interventions as well as several large-scale initiatives. Of paramount concern is how to help decision-makers allocate the resources being funneled into such initiatives into evidence-based approaches.

RTI International is currently implementing the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation-funded grant to improve knowledge of best FLN practices at-scale and access to this body of research. The Science of Teaching grant is focused on the following activities:

1. **Synthesize** existing research on FLN at-scale by developing user-friendly materials on six to-be-determined topics (one topic, Structured Pedagogy, is already determined).
2. **Generate** new research to expand the evidence-base of FLN.
3. **Disseminate** research and synthesis documents through a variety of mediums including through provision of technical assistance to ministries of education, donors and implementing partners.

**Scope of Work**

The research activity will include four parts – though parts 2 and 3 will have an overlapping timeline (i.e., preparatory phase of part 3 will begin while part 2 is still being carried out).

**Part 1: Recruit Research Team**

The first task the Lead Consultant will undertake is to recruit her/his research team (likely 2-3 additional researchers). The Lead Consultant will consider the scope of work, map out the tasks to be accomplished, the skillsets required within the team, and then develop an RFP to recruit for the rest of the research team. Once the team has been recruited, the Lead Consultant will onboard the rest of the team.

**Anticipated Deliverables**

- SoW for additional researchers
- Evaluation and scoring criteria for recruitment of researchers

**Part 2: Review existing literature and data**

The Research Team will review existing relevant research studies and reports on school and mid-level leadership. Included in this review will be recent data from implementing partners. For example, Global School Leaders (GSL), funded by BMGF, and Dignitas have ongoing research concerning school leaders and their role in reinforcing expectations around FLN. Such research seeks to better understand what school leaders perceive their job expectations to be (particularly with regards to supporting FLN) and how the system supports them to meet these expectations. The findings from this review, and the studies mentioned, will both provide a grounding for part 2 and will inform the tools and refinement of questions to be used. For example, this review will inform questions around the role the local government level (such as zone, block, county or district) and wider system has in reinforcing the expectations and roles that previous research has found school leaders to have.

**Anticipated Deliverables (all deliverables will be reviewed and approved by the Technical Advisory Committee)**

- Complete Literature Review on Middle Tier Leadership
- Landscape Review of potential tools to be used in data collection for Part 2
Part 3: Case Studies on Mid-Level Leadership

SoT will then solicit case study “sites”, where efforts have been made to address mid-level leadership (through an RFP). These “sites” will consist of programs/projects that have been implemented in LMIC (preferably SSA + India) that have demonstrated success in shifting both stated roles/expectations and actions/behaviors of mid-level managers, correlated with improved teaching and learning outcomes. Because it is unlikely that many implementers will have robust data to prove such relationships, SoT will work with the Technical Advisory Committee to develop a set of criteria/guidelines for determining “success” – which could include M&E data demonstrating such things as: revised job descriptions and increase in district officials mentioning improved learning as part of their responsibility; increased visits to schools; Teachers/Head teachers identifying district officials as a key resource for improving teaching and learning; etc.

The Central Team, with advising from the Advisory Committee, will purposely select a set of four case studies which represent a range of contextual factors – allowing for examining what “successful” changes in mid-level leadership may look like across quite different contexts. Contextual factors that may be considered – and targeted for heterogeneity in the case study sample - include such things as level of decentralization of the system; government vs. external implementation; availability of resources; etc. Sites that offer both examples of success as well as examples of things not working, or comparison school/districts, might also be considered.

SoT will support small mixed-method research studies for each of these cases. Once the sites have been identified, SoT will solicit local researchers or research firms to partner in carrying out these case studies, under the oversight of the central team – this will allow for capacity building of local researchers if/as necessary, as well as to ensure some uniformity in research methodology and tools across sites.

While the research questions will be refined and finalized in collaboration with the Technical Advisory Committee, the following represent the first draft of these questions.

1. What role can and should mid-level officials play to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to ensure agreed priorities are understood and adhered to across the system?
2. What mechanisms are needed to shift expectations and official processes/procedures so that they align with and support these roles and priorities? For example
3. What elements of the existing system allowed for, or worked against, this alignment and shifting or roles and expectations? For example: Incentive structures; mindset of officials;
4. What supports/interventions led to shifts in behavior/action of middle-level managers, leading to improved school leadership and improved instruction and learning outcomes?

The Central team will synthesize findings from across the case studies to identify patterns, and differences, under each of the final research questions.

Anticipated Deliverables (all deliverables will be reviewed and approved by the Technical Advisory Committee)

- A developed set of criteria/guidelines for determining “success”
- Four case study sites selected
- Solicitation for local researchers or research firms to partner in carrying out these case studies
- Finalized set of research questions
- Raw findings from each case study site
• Analyzed and synthesized findings from each case study site

**Part 4: Dissemination & How-To Guide**

The dissemination plan will be developed jointly with the Technical Advisory Committee, as well as selected implementing/research partners, but is expected to include the following:

- Sharing of findings within each case-study country-context – involving relevant government officials, donors, and partners;
- An overall report, accessible brief, and one or more blogs summarizing learnings from across Part 1 & 2 + across the case studies.
- Targeting opportunities for presenting findings during conferences and other external events, with potential of a focused webinar as one option.

**Anticipated Deliverables (all deliverables will be reviewed and approved by the Technical Advisory Committee)**

- Dissemination Plan
- Final Report
- How-To Guide (based on Final Report)
- Blog
- Participating in dissemination webinar

**Estimated Level of Effort and Timeline*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area #1 Consultant Activities &amp; Relevant Deliverables</th>
<th>Estimated Level of Effort</th>
<th>Anticipated Timeline (Dates are subject to change)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part 1: Recruit Research Team</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Deliverable 1.1 - SOW for Additional Researchers</td>
<td>1 – 1.5 days</td>
<td>By mid-September 2023</td>
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<td>Deliverable 1.2 - Evaluation &amp; Scoring Criteria</td>
<td>1 – 1.5 days</td>
<td>By end of September 2023</td>
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<td><strong>Part 2: Review Existing Literature &amp; Data</strong></td>
<td>17 days</td>
<td>October – December 2023</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deliverable 2.1 - Literature Review Outline</td>
<td>4 – 5 days</td>
<td>By third week of October</td>
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<td>Deliverable 2.2 - Literature Review</td>
<td>5 – 6 days</td>
<td>By mid-November (before Thanksgiving)</td>
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<td>Deliverable 2.3 - Landscape Review of Tools for Part 3</td>
<td>1 – 2 days</td>
<td>By mid-December (before Christmas)</td>
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<td>Deliverable 2.4 - Research Questions Finalized</td>
<td>1 – 2 days</td>
<td>By mid-December (before Christmas)</td>
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<td>Deliverable 2.5 - Case Study RFP</td>
<td>1 – 2 days</td>
<td>By mid-December (before Christmas)</td>
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<td><strong>Part 3: Case Studies on Mid-Level Leadership</strong></td>
<td>30 days</td>
<td>January – April 2024</td>
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<td>Deliverable 3.1 - “Success” Criteria/Guidelines</td>
<td>2 - 3 days</td>
<td>By mid-January</td>
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<td>Deliverable 3.2 - Four Case Study Sites Identified</td>
<td>4 - 5 days</td>
<td>By mid-January</td>
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<td>Deliverable 3.3 - Raw Data Sets</td>
<td>6 - 7 days</td>
<td>By mid-April</td>
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<td>Deliverable 3.4 - Analyzed and Synthesized Data</td>
<td>10 – 15 days</td>
<td>By end of April</td>
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<td><strong>Part 4: Dissemination &amp; How-To Guide</strong></td>
<td>10 days</td>
<td>May – July 2024</td>
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<td>Deliverable 4.1 - Dissemination Plan</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>By mid-May</td>
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<td>Deliverable 4.2 - Final Report</td>
<td>4 days</td>
<td>By mid-June</td>
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**Deliverable 4.3 - How-To Guide**  
1 – 2 days  
**By end of June**

**Deliverable 4.4 - Blog**  
1 day  
**By mid-July**

**Deliverable 4.5 - Dissemination Workshop**  
1 – 2 days  
**TBD**

*The deliverables, LOE and timeline are illustrative. SoT will work with the Lead Consultant to map out a concrete set of deliverables and dates associated with them upon award.*

**Period of Performance**

September 2023 – July 2024

**Qualifications**

- Master’s degree in related field
- Minimum of 10 years’ experience leading research and evaluation in foundational literacy and numeracy

**Submission and Evaluation Process**

Please submit all questions to **FLN@rti.org** no later than **August 25th, 2023**.

Please submit a current CV, proposed daily rate, and cover letter which clearly describes relevant early grade numeracy experience, states which area(s) of technical assistance you wish to be considered for, and the general period of availability for this work via email to **FLN@rti.org** no later than **September 1st, 2023**.

The Science of Teaching evaluation committee will review submissions on an on-going basis. As specific tasks related to the numeracy scope are identified, the Science of Teaching team will reach out to candidates with relevant expertise for further interviews and discussions to move forward with consultant engagement. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for contracting without regard to race, colour, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability status, protected veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law.