

# Exploring the implementation of the TIME Home Learning programme and learning trajectories of 5- to 7-year-olds

## Introduction to the TIME study

This brief was written for Wordworks by Magali von Blottnitz, with input from colleagues. It can be referenced as follows: von Blottnitz, M. (2024). Exploring the implementation of the TIME Home Learning programme and learning trajectories of 5- to 7-year-olds, Brief 1, Wordworks: Cape Town.

Together In My Education (TIME) is a low-cost Home Learning programme, which is primarily designed for Grade R and Grade 1 children and their families.

This is the first in a series of learning briefs that explore the implementation of the TIME Home Learning programme and the learning trajectories of 5- to 7-year-olds. This brief focuses on key elements of the programme, and also on the design of a study to explore how it is embedded in the ecosystem and lived in practice.

### Presenting TIME and its components

Parents and caregivers<sup>1</sup> have a critical role to play in the learning of the young children in their care. As teachers have known for many years, children who are well supported by their families at home do much better at school than those whose caregivers are absent or disengaged. There is a need for initiatives that encourage and support more and better involvement of families in the learning of their children.

The TIME programme was developed in 2020–2021 and has been implemented collaboratively since 2021 by a group of NGOs in the Western Cape, with Wordworks as the lead NGO. In 2021, the programme was implemented in partnership with over 300 schools, mostly in the Western Cape, with more than 50 000 homes receiving the materials.

The TIME programme is based on termly activity packs, which:

- are designed for distribution to a large number of families
- have been versioned in the 11 official South African languages, with bilingual resources available



- come with a guide for caregivers to help establish interactive learning routines at home
- include early literacy content from Wordworks, early mathematics content from RED INK, and stories adapted from Nal'ibali, African Storybook and Book Dash
- can be downloaded for free or ordered from Wordworks as colour-printed materials subject to a contribution to printing costs
- were endorsed by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED).

At the core of the TIME programme are its attractive printed learning materials. These resources are CAPS-aligned and designed to offer a range of concrete apparatus appropriate for the learning requirements of young children. In addition to the paper-based materials, there are multimedia motivational and support messages that serve as supplementary programme mediation tools. These messages comprise tips and demonstrations that take the form of written and audio messages, videos and images that show caregivers (or other users) how to make the best use of resources.



### Two main implementation models

TIME materials were initially designed to be used in the home (Model 1), with schools acting as mediators between the NGO and the families.

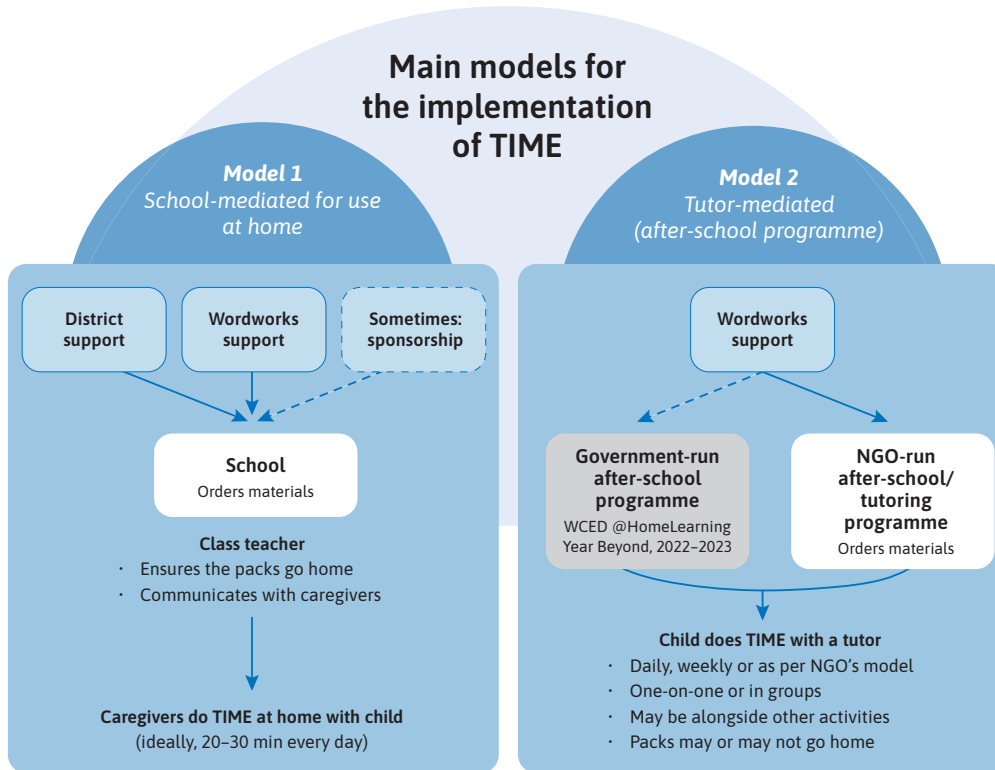
Over time, a second model of implementation emerged, taking into consideration that for some children, a community environment may be a more conducive or more easily-accessible learning space than the home itself.

<sup>1</sup> In the rest of the briefs, we use the word “caregiver” or “family” to refer to either parents, or any other person (grandparent, sibling, neighbour or someone else) who is part of the child’s private environment and holds a share of responsibility in the child’s education.

In this second model (Model 2), the activities take place in an after-school facility and are mediated by tutors, usually community members contracted and trained to provide targeted support to children.

The two main models of implementation are represented in Diagram 1 below.

**Diagram 1: The two main models for the implementation of TIME<sup>2</sup>**



This series of learning briefs is based on a study that focused on home implementation, mediated by schools. Therefore, unless otherwise specified, the remainder of this brief refers to Model 1.

## The TIME longitudinal study (2022–2023)

At the beginning of 2022, Wordworks embarked on a study to track a group of children, their teachers and families over two years, with the objectives of finding out more about:

- how TIME functions within the larger education ecosystem: the education department (LB2) and the schools (LB3)
- how the families' contexts may influence the uptake and implementation of the programme at home (LB4)
- the role of teacher mediation in supporting the uptake of TIME in the home (LB5)
- the views of teachers and caregivers on the effectiveness of TIME (LB6).

One specific aspect of the study was to develop appropriate assessment tools to track the learning of children in literacy and mathematics. In this process we had to reflect on the following:

- How do we develop, pilot and refine assessment tools for Grade R and Grade 1 children? (LB7)
- What do the assessments tell us about the learning trajectories of children? (LB8)
- Can we see a causal relationship between the use of TIME and the child's progress in literacy and mathematics? (LB9)

## Study participants

The study interviewed the following stakeholders:

- Six WCED officials (two from Head Office, and four subject advisors from three education districts, namely: Cape Winelands, Metro North, Metro South)
- Ten school principals, fifteen Foundation Phase Department Heads (DHs) and/or TIME liaison teachers, three school governing body members of eleven participating schools from five districts
- Grade R and Grade 1 teachers of the eleven participating schools
- Caregivers of the participating children.

Between 2022 and 2023 we had a slight attrition in participating schools and families, from 11 schools and 36 families in 2022, to 9 schools and 26 families in 2023. Such attrition is not uncommon in studies like this. In this study it was worsened by the increase of cost in the TIME printed packs, which caused two schools to decline the opportunity to stay on the TIME programme in 2023.



<sup>2</sup> Note that Model 2 (tutor-mediated) was widely used in 2022 and 2023 by a WCED-led after-school programme called the @Home Learning Year Beyond Programme. For 2024 the WCED programme is only using selected TIME activities. Nevertheless, Model 2 is still the preferred model for a number of NGOs.

## Participants' profile

The participating schools were predominantly no-fee schools from five different districts in the Cape Metro and Cape Winelands. The schools had either isiXhosa, Afrikaans or English as their LOLT in Foundation Phase.

Profile of participating schools (figures in brackets represent the numbers in 2023, after attrition)		
By district	CWED: 4 (3) schools MNED: 3 (2) schools MSED: 2 (2) schools	MCED: 1 (0) school MEED: 1 (1) school
By quintile	NQ1: 2 (2) schools NQ2: 2 (2) schools	NQ4: 5 (3) schools NQ5: 2 (2) schools
By fee status	No-fee schools: 11 (9)	Low-fee schools: 2 (2)
By Language of Learning and Teaching	Afrikaans: 4 (3) schools English: 3 (2) schools isiXhosa: 4 (4) schools	
Profile of participating children (figures in brackets represent the numbers in 2023, after attrition)		
By district	CWED: 15 (9) MNED: 10 (8) MSED: 7 (6)	MCED: 2 (0) MEED: 3 (3)
By age when entering Grade R	5 years: 24 (19)	6 years: 12 (7) 7 years: 1 (0)
By gender	Boys: 22 (18)	Girls: 15 (8)
By learning barrier	Has a learning barrier: 8 (4)	No learning barrier: 29 (22)

## Data collection

The fieldwork took place in successive “data sprints”, each focusing on one or two key stakeholder groups (mostly children, teachers, caregivers). The data mostly took the form of interview notes, however, it also included written questionnaires, observation notes and child assessments. Interviews were held in the language corresponding to the child’s LOLT. However, where a caregiver was not fluent in that language, the fieldworkers used another language, where possible.

The table below summarises the data sprints.

Sprint	Timeframe	Stakeholder group and type of data collection
Sprint 1	February to March 2022	• School management, teachers and school governing body members
Sprint 2	March to April 2022	• Initial interview of caregivers (at school)
Sprint 3	July to August 2022	• Second interview of caregivers (at home, where possible) • TIME observation and mid-Grade R assessments
Sprint 4	August to September 2022	• Interviews of WCED officials • Teacher survey • Written questionnaires
Sprint 5	March 2023 March to May 2023	• Midline child assessments • Focus group discussion with teachers
Sprint 6	May to July 2023	• Final interview of caregivers (at home, where possible) • TIME observation
Sprint 7	October to November 2023	• Teacher questionnaires • Final child assessments

