

Using Videos to Support Facilitators in Teacher Learning Circles

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Abbreviations and acronyms

DBIR	Design-based implementation research
NNP	National Numeracy Programme, Malawi
PEAs	Primary Education Advisors
TLC	Teacher Learning Circle

1. Background to the research

This report outlines EdTech Hub's third phase of continued support to the National Numeracy Programme (NNP) in Malawi through design-based implementation research (DBIR) and technical assistance. Specifically, it focuses on findings from testing approaches to continued tech-enabled support for peer facilitators in Teacher Learning Circles (TLCs), to ensure they can effectively and sustainably implement these sessions.

Since August 2022, EdTech Hub has collaborated with Malawi's National Numeracy Programme (NNP) to refine its approach to teacher continuous professional development. During **Term 1 of the 2022–2023** school year ([↑Correa de Oliveira et al., 2024a](#)), EdTech Hub conducted in-depth qualitative research in four schools to gather feedback on core components of the NNP model from teachers, head teachers, and primary education advisors (also known as PEAs). Our findings revealed that, while there is a general perception that the NNP represents an improvement compared to the previous curriculum, some components, particularly the TLCs and the learner workbooks, need to be revised and refined to enhance the intervention's effectiveness.

Building on these findings, EdTech Hub proposed a new phase of DBIR for **Term 2 of the 2022–2023** school year ([↑Correa de Oliveira et al., 2024b](#)) to refine the NNP's school-based teacher continuous professional development model. As part of the research, EdTech Hub developed TLC guides for testing in schools. The TLC format developed in this research has since been tested in depth in 20 schools, yielding some encouraging results and increased teacher engagement.

Consequently, the approach was integrated into the expanded pilot phase of the NNP during the 2023–2024 academic year. Training conducted in August and September 2023 for Term 1 included coverage of the new approach to TLCs. As part of the rollout, TLCs were expected to be implemented across more than 1,100 schools adopting the NNP curriculum. This report outlines the research activities conducted in a third phase of DBIR, during **Term 2 of the 2023–2024** academic year.

1.1. Why focus on TLC facilitator support?

In preparation for the programme's planned scale-up to an additional 1,100 schools in Malawi the following year, the team identified a need to test sustainable solutions to support effective implementation of the TLCs.

Specifically, it was recognised that providing peer facilitators with targeted support was essential to ensure successful implementation. Peer facilitators play a pivotal role in helping teachers effectively engage with the NNP curriculum materials through the TLCs. Peer facilitator responsibilities included modelling practice activities focused on key numeracy topics, leading discussions and reflections on implications for classroom instruction, and supporting teachers in lesson planning.

This emphasis aligned with findings from the second phase of design-based implementation research, which underscored the importance of such **“technology-based solutions to ensure ongoing support to facilitators”**, and the following recommendation:

“Considering the key role played by facilitators in guiding effective TLCs, we recommend a continued focus on coaching and capacity-building for this group. To achieve this, we suggest exploring innovative approaches, such as utilising messaging platforms like WhatsApp to provide timely tips and leveraging existing technology resources from the NNP and other relevant programmes to disseminate instructional videos tailored to facilitators’ needs. Such a tech-enabled strategy aligns with the evolving landscape of teacher professional development and offers a practical means to enhance facilitator skills and TLC Effectiveness” (↑Correa de Oliveira et al., 2024b, p. 54).

Support for these facilitators had already been partially provided. Training sessions were conducted at the beginning of Term 1, and six TLC guides were distributed to offer structured guidance on facilitating TLCs throughout the term. However, training observations and discussions with facilitators indicated that additional sustainable support was needed. The observations indicated that training events were frequently shorter and less practical than initially intended, with a stronger emphasis on theoretical content. It also became clear that future NNP training would deprioritise TLCs: for instance, a refresher training originally scheduled for December 2023 shifted its focus to updates in the Standard 1 curriculum, and subsequent training planned for 2024 followed a similar pattern. In response to these shifts in focus, the Hub and NNP teams collaborated to user test a short video designed for TLC facilitators. This video was well-received, earning positive feedback from the facilitators.

Building on this experience and recognising the critical role of TLC facilitators in sustaining the NNP’s teacher continuous professional development, the Hub recommended expanding this approach, proposing the production of additional videos and testing their dissemination and use in a select number of schools.

2. Research activities and findings

This third research phase, conducted in the first half of 2024, examined the role of digital content in enhancing the effectiveness of TLCs within the NNP. It focused on understanding whether modelling videos, combined with structured support for peer facilitators, could enhance their effectiveness and impact. The study also aimed to identify the most effective and sustainable ways to deliver digital support to facilitators, with a particular interest in scalable approaches.

EdTech Hub outlined a three-stage approach to providing targeted support for the facilitators, including:

1. Producing relevant video content tailored to the needs of peer facilitators.
2. User testing of videos in schools with TLC peer facilitators.
3. Assessing the impact of the videos and delivery modalities on facilitators' experiences and their capacity to implement the TLCs.

The three distinct research stages or 'sprints' are detailed below.

Sprint 1: Video production

There is evidence to suggest that using multimedia materials, such as videos, to demonstrate teaching activities is effective in promoting interactive teaching practices ([↑Haßler et al., 2020](#)).

Based on this understanding, an earlier version of the NNP teacher continuous professional development model included videos designed to engage teachers during TLCs. However, distributing the videos to a broader audience of teachers proved challenging and inconsistent, and playing them during TLC sessions was not possible at scale due to a lack of screening devices. As a result, peer facilitators switched to modelling activities directly using the TLC guides provided (which include detailed descriptions of each TLC section and activity for the peer facilitators, for each TLC topic). While effective, it became apparent that the peer facilitators themselves needed coaching in modelling teaching practices ([↑Correa de Oliveira et al., 2024b](#)). To address this challenge, the EdTech Hub team in Malawi, in collaboration with the NNP implementation team and with approval from the Ministry Directorate of Quality Assurance Services (DQAS) developed a short series of videos to support TLC peer facilitators in leading their sessions. Two kinds of videos were developed.

1. **Videos covering ‘TLC Basics’.** These videos describe the objectives and model the implementation of core sections of TLCs (such as the ‘welcome’ and ‘stimulus discussion’ sections). These videos define what these sections seek to accomplish and provide examples of them being facilitated.
2. **Videos covering ‘TLC Topics’.** These illustrate the ‘stimulus and discussion’ and ‘practice and feedback’ sections of *specific* TLC guides, providing facilitators with practical examples of how to introduce numeracy topics and facilitate related activities as outlined in the weekly TLC guides.

The production of these videos took place in Zomba during November and December 2023.

Sprint 2: Video testing in a handful of schools

Sprint 1 was conducted across four primary schools: Nswaswa Primary School, Nsambaisa Primary School, Mulunguzi Primary School and Nsamba Primary School. These schools, located in Zomba, were chosen for their semi-urban and rural settings, which provided a diverse context for the study. Facilitators from each school participated in preliminary semi-structured interviews. Schools were provided with sample TLC videos for that week’s sessions in advance. During the interviews, facilitators viewed sample videos, including ones which demonstrated the structure and content specific to the TLCs they would soon be leading. Following the preliminary interviews, researchers observed a TLC session at each school. This observation was then followed by another round of interviews with the facilitators.

This sprint concentrated on three main research questions. Two questions focused on the extent to which facilitators had been previously coached and how well they understood the basics of their role and topics:

1. **What support have Teacher Learning Circle facilitators received to perform this role?**
2. **How well do Teacher Learning Circle (TLC) facilitators understand the TLC format, its topics, and its intended purpose?**

The third question focused on understanding the facilitators’ experience with the TLC videos:

3. **How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of video-based feedback and support around Teacher Learning Circles?**

Key findings from Sprint 1

Key Finding 1. Most TLC facilitators had attended at least one TLC-specific training session and received TLC guides. However, many were using outdated versions of these guides.

The NNP held various training sessions for teachers. Apart from the usual curriculum training, some sessions focused on peer facilitator training. In this study, most peer facilitators attended at least one session, with a majority participating in sessions focused on TLC facilitation. The interviewed peer facilitators were selected from their existing roles within the schools to ensure that those in specific positions, such as heads of infant or junior sections or key NNP programme teachers, became peer facilitators for the TLCs.

In addition to TLC facilitation training, these peer facilitators receive TLC guides for further support. However, nearly every school involved in this third phase of the research could not provide a new copy of the TLC guide. In some cases, schools discovered their copies had been discarded in the head teacher's office, and peer facilitators had been using an outdated version of the TLC guide instead. This indicated a significant gap in the distribution and communication of updated TLC resources by the NNP.¹ Tablets were also supplied to a number of schools, which included some NNP curriculum-related videos as well as WhatsApp for various communications and file sharing.

Key Finding 2. TLC facilitators understood the importance of TLCs, but most lacked understanding of their structure and objectives.

When asked about their understanding of TLCs, facilitators emphasised that these sessions were crucial in helping teachers support each other in overcoming challenges and discussing achievements. However, most were unfamiliar with the current TLC structure and its sections. The following are the sections of the new TLC guide.

- Welcome, opening prayers, and setting of learning objectives
- Stimulus and discussion
- Practice and feedback
- Planning for progression
- Closing remarks

¹ Notably, the NNP team very quickly addressed this challenge within the identified schools, sending officers to deliver the new guides to these schools and reconsidering their dissemination methods more broadly.

When asked to identify these sections, the facilitators had difficulty recalling them, and instead mentioned sections from the previous (outdated) TLC structure, 'Just for Fun' and 'Teacher Reminder'. Despite the new TLC guides having been distributed to schools for over a year, many schools remained unaware of the new model. This underscored the need for videos that could clearly explain the TLC structure, making it easier for facilitators, especially those encountering it for the first time.

Key Finding 3. TLC facilitators gave positive feedback on the videos, particularly citing how they modelled effective facilitation approaches.

Participants provided concrete feedback on the newly produced TLC facilitation videos, appreciating that they offered facilitators with guidance. They found the videos beneficial, especially the modelling of specific sections, which facilitators found easy to replicate. For example, a facilitator from Mulunguzi Primary School noted:

"I enjoyed watching the videos because of the way the facilitator flowed with the presentation. That's something I would imitate."

Key Finding 4. Applying the videos as models for effective TLC facilitation required more guidance.

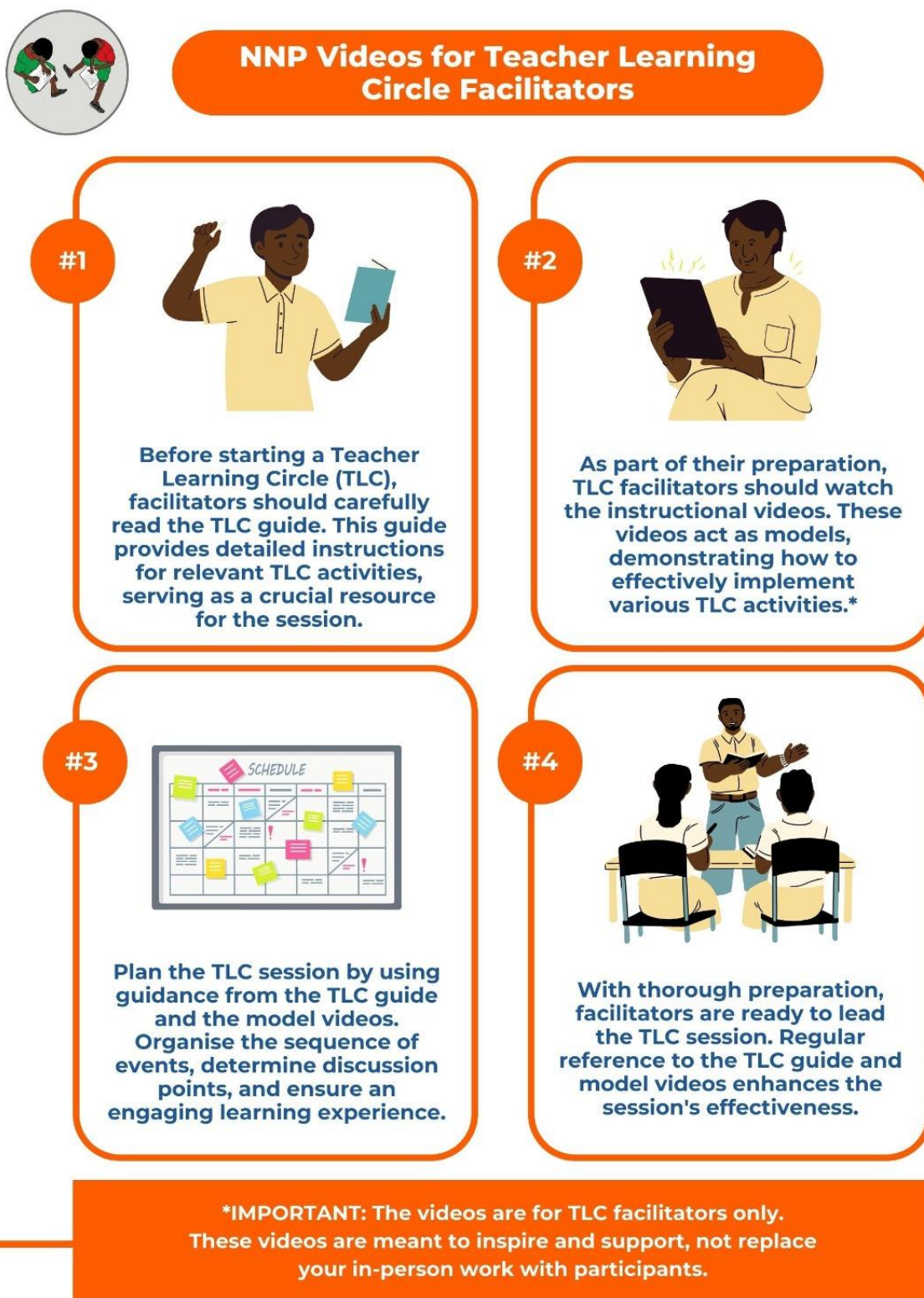
Despite this approach, some schools still struggled with understanding the purpose of the videos. One school copied the presenter's words from the videos verbatim and read them out during the TLC sessions. Some TLC facilitators followed the presentations step by step without adding their own insights. However, one school stood out: the facilitator conducted their own session and used the video merely as a reference point, which was the intended purpose of the videos.

Implications of the findings

Our experience in Sprint 2 provided valuable lessons that informed our research approach in Sprint 3 and led to important insights for the NNP team.

The use of outdated TLC guides across several schools in our small sample raised significant concerns for the NNP. As a result, additional monitoring was implemented to ensure accurate communication and dissemination of TLC information. This included improving communication and introducing the TLC videos to clarify the misunderstandings about their purpose that we had observed. In response, we collaborated with the NNP to create clear, visual instructions for using the videos effectively (see [Figure 1](#) below) and to improve communication channels to distribute

them more efficiently. We also made sure that all experimental schools had the latest TLC guides. These changes aimed to help facilitators better understand and carry out TLC sessions, making them more effective and aligned with the intended goals.

Figure 1. Malawi National Numeracy Programme video infographicSupported by **EdTech** Hub
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Sprint 3: Video dissemination and assessment

For Sprint 3 in this phase of research, we focused on the following research questions:

- 1. Can digital content (modelling videos) and support provided to TLC facilitators enhance the effectiveness of the National Numeracy Programme’s Teacher Learning Circles?**
- 2. What is the most effective and sustainable way for the National Numeracy Programme to provide its Teacher Learning Circle facilitators with supportive digital content, including at scale?**

In order to investigate these questions, we expanded our sample size and data collection. Both ‘TLC Basics’ and ‘TLC Topics’ videos were shared with a sample of 30 schools in total, spread across the Mwanza and Lilongwe districts, with 15 schools in each.² These districts were chosen for several reasons, including the number of teachers per school and the balance of urban and rural environments. Three video delivery modalities — USB flash drives and school tablets, WhatsApp, and a ‘control’ — were tested within this sample, with each approach piloted in five schools per district (10 schools per delivery modality). [Table 1](#) below provides details of the different delivery modalities.

Table 1. *Details of video delivery modalities used*

Video delivery modality	Description
1. USB Flash Drives and School Tablets	Videos were delivered to schools on USB flash drives by District Education Coordinators (DECs) and Monitoring and Support Officers (MTSOs). This approach aimed to make use of existing school technology, including tablets provided through other government initiatives, such as NextGen (a literacy program).
2. WhatsApp	Videos were shared with facilitators via WhatsApp messages. School MTSOs sent these messages directly to TLC facilitators a week before their scheduled TLCs.
3. Control	No additional video dissemination efforts were undertaken. This control group allowed for an assessment of whether the additional video-delivery efforts made a significant difference in TLC facilitation practices.

² While this research was ongoing, ‘TLC Basics’ videos were also distributed to as many schools as possible that were implementing the NNP. This was undertaken during school visits by District Education Coordinators (DECs) and Monitoring and Support Officers (MTSOs) to ensure TLC facilitators had access to these resources.

Sprint data collection activities included TLC observations and focus group discussions (among a small sample of participating schools) and a brief digital survey (submitted by facilitators from all schools).

Table 2. *Data collection methods*

Method	Description
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	Our team held focus group discussions with the facilitator and teacher participants from six TLCs (one FGD per dissemination method in each district).
Teacher Learning Circle (TLC) observations	Our team observed TLCs and filled out the TLC monitoring tool (developed in our DBIR process) to assess the effectiveness of these sessions. Originally designed to include schools across dissemination methods and districts, we unfortunately have limited our analysis to only three school observations. ³
Digital Survey	A brief digital survey gauging TLC facilitators' perspectives and experiences with NNP TLC resources (both their content and dissemination) was conducted through Google Forms.

Key findings from Sprint 2

Key Finding 1. Facilitators felt (and were observed to be) better equipped and self-assured about TLC facilitation after using the videos for preparation.

During the focus group discussions, most facilitators claimed they prepared for their TLC sessions by watching the videos and then discussing their insights with a colleague. They noted that the videos were a key resource, providing valuable guidance for session planning. This claim seemed supported by our small sample of observation data: TLC facilitators who had received 'TLC Basics' and 'TLC Topics' videos (either through

³ Due to weather conditions and scheduling challenges with schools, what was originally designed as an even sample of observations across video and control schools ultimately resulted in just one TLC observation in a control school. This unfortunately limits our ability to meaningfully compare TLC facilitation in schools that received the video with those who did not. Given this limitation, we have narrowed our analysis to only focus on observation data from three schools (one observation per method of video delivery modality). For consistency, these three observations were undertaken in the same district and on the same TLC topic, and observed by the same research team member.

WhatsApp or USB Flash Drives) were more prepared than those in the control TLC.

Focus group participants also noted that the seamless connection between the videos and the NNP teachers' guides was particularly helpful. Some noted the value of combining this digital tool with traditional resources (teacher guides, TLC guides) to enhance their preparation, noting that this combination equipped them to lead their sessions with confidence and clarity.

While feedback provided in focus group discussions was positive, data from the digital survey (which was responded to by participants from all three schools) was less clear on the added value of videos, with control participants noting they were just as (and in some cases more) confident as facilitators as those who received the videos.

Key Finding 2. Facilitators felt videos enhanced learning for teachers — boosting understanding

Most facilitators who participated in FGDs found the videos to be highly effective because they visually demonstrated concepts, making them easier to understand and remember. Compared to text-based materials, the videos offered a clear, visual representation that enhanced comprehension. By complementing traditional resources like the TLC guide, the videos clarified and reinforced key content, resulting in a deeper, more comprehensive learning experience.

In addition to aiding comprehension, the videos seemed to help facilitators communicate and share insights during TLCs. Facilitators noted that through visual cues and modelling, they were able to recall information more effectively, making these videos valuable even at the classroom level. In our small observation sample, we found that TLC facilitators who received the videos were more likely to explain the TLC's learning objectives to participants effectively. Another significant benefit of the videos that facilitators emphasised was their ability to foster uniformity in the delivery of TLCs. Many believed that this consistency helped ensure standardised facilitation approaches across sessions.

Key Finding 3. TLC participants noted that videos enhanced the modelling and presentation skills of TLC facilitators; some suggested this would lead to a positive impact on their classroom practice.

TLC participants agreed that introducing videos into TLCs had a positive effect on how sessions were conducted. Facilitators who previously relied heavily on manuals found that videos were a more engaging and effective

way to present content. Participants noted that videos likely helped facilitators deliver TLC sessions with greater clarity and enthusiasm. The school heads also concurred, noting that integrating videos with traditional teaching materials significantly improved the delivery of TLC sessions.

Although initially intended only for TLC facilitators, the videos often made their way to teachers as well, who also reported feeling more confident and better prepared after watching the videos. Some claimed they now had new tools and techniques to assist learners, having seen them used in the videos.

According to one teacher:

“Recently, when we were working on fractions, I was able to use something I picked up from a TLC session and the videos we watched. It gave me a few new ideas, and as a result, I felt more confident in my teaching. The learners really understood the concept well.”

Key Finding 4. WhatsApp was the preferred delivery modality for sharing videos; however, data usage accessibility was noted as an issue.

Participants in focus group discussions were most positive about the WhatsApp video delivery modality, citing convenience and ease of access. However, some limits to this approach remain: not every facilitator has a smartphone, so sending videos directly to teachers or facilitators could result in some schools being missed. Additionally, the data costs incurred by teachers for downloading videos were noted as a limitation.

Direct distribution of videos via USB Flash Drives and storage on local tablets was also seen as a positive approach, particularly in low-resource, low-connectivity settings. It was advised that the NNP consider ways to make those videos easier to search for when added to tablets (often, direct uploads from Flash Drives led to disorganisation, or files with complex names that were challenging to find).

Key Finding 5. Each video delivery modality had its pros and cons, and suggestions for a diverse approach were common.

TLC participants and NNP implementers suggested that the success of each delivery modality depended on various factors. For instance, while many liked the WhatsApp approach, some schools suggested that an online video-sharing platform would be preferable. Leveraging one of the Ministry of Education’s learning management systems could make it easier for teachers to search for and access TLC videos.

In areas with poor internet connectivity, schools suggested that teachers and headteachers could meet at teacher resource centres to collect the videos on their school flash drives. Alternatively, videos could be transferred manually to tablets using on-the-go connections or sharing tools like Share It or Bluetooth. Distributing videos for direct download onto the tablets was also seen as a practical option. NNP implementers suggested that manually loading the videos onto the school tablets also provided an opportunity to monitor the project's implementation on the ground.

Ultimately, an approach that leveraged different (and, in some cases, multiple) delivery modalities (if possible at low cost) could be conducted in an adaptive manner, determined by NNP implementers on a district-by-district basis, to ensure reach of all schools.

3. Recommendations

Our final round of DBIR, in partnership with the NNP, focused on low-tech solutions to support the effective implementation of TLCs by their facilitators. Ultimately, we came to the following conclusions and recommendations.

1. Short practical videos, focused on modelling, can make a difference in enhancing teacher-led TPD

Videos geared to TLC facilitators can be a helpful resource in their preparation (especially when linked to specific TLCs and teachers' guides). Modelling both the structural components of TLCs and content-area activities was deemed helpful. Focus group discussions and observations indicated that TLC videos enabled facilitators to better prepare for TLCs, feel more confident conducting them, and ultimately achieve a better understanding of key pedagogical and numeracy content by teachers.

2. Modelling how to use TPD videos is also important!

One of the key findings from Sprint 1 is that TLC facilitators needed more specific instructions on how they should use the TLC videos. This is especially true given the logistical complexity of conducting teacher professional development at scale: often, key messages are lost along the way, and resources that have been thoughtfully designed by implementers to support teachers may miss the mark due to user error. Testing TLC videos early on with a small subset of facilitators led to the realisation that an infographic modelling their use would be helpful.

3. Delivery modalities should aim to fit the needs of TPD recipients.

Trialling different delivery modalities for the TLC videos identified one favourite (WhatsApp). But the limitations that came with this model (accessibility, data costs) also underscored the importance of adapting dissemination approaches to the needs of TLC facilitators as needed. Ultimately, the NNP recognised the need to be nimble and leverage their extensive team of implementers to ensure TLC facilitators across the programme received adequate resources.

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These references are available digitally in our evidence library at <https://docs.edtechhub.org/lib/N3DEUW9N>

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