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## **THRASS SYNTHETIC PHONICS PROGRAMME ACHIEVES DRAMATIC IMPROVEMENTS IN LITERACY IN NIGERIA**

The widely acclaimed THRASS synthetic phonics programme has only been used in pilot schools in Nigeria since January but already it has brought about dramatic improvements in the teaching and learning of English. These improvements are so significant that the Oyo State Government, Nigeria, and THRASS UK are now looking to secure funds to enable the use of THRASS to be extended to schools across the state.

The THRASS (Teaching Handwriting Reading And Spelling Skills) synthetic phonics programme pioneered by British Educational Psychologist and Executive Director of THRASS UK, Alan Davies, helps learners to develop sound literacy skills from an early age by teaching them about the 44 phonemes (speech sounds) of spoken English and 120 graphemes (spelling choices) of written English. It has been heralded as a revolutionary approach to teaching English that provides learners not just with handwriting, reading and spelling skills but also with valuable life skills training, and wherever it is used it surpasses all expectations.

Between January and July 2009, THRASS UK funded a pilot literacy project in a number of city and rural schools in Oyo State. The project was approved by the Ministry of Education and the State Universal Basic Education Board, and was supervised by Dr Nkechi Christopher and other lecturers from the University of Ibadan and Ladoko University of Technology.

THRASS was introduced into the schools using the innovative SING-A-LONG resources that include the most fantastic interactive software and are considered to be the best way of introducing THRASS where resources are limited. The SING-A-LONG resources use 44 songs that teachers and parents can sing with children to explain the 44 sounds and 120 main spelling choices of English, and the songs have really memorable tunes in different musical styles and dance rhythms from around the world, and wonderful imaginative titles such as "The moon fell out of the sky" and "You don't get pandas in Africa". They are real fun, give everyone a lift and really motivate children to learn.

THRASS was an immediate success with both children and parents because of the SING-A-LONG songs. These proved so popular that in some schools there were soon over 70 children in some THRASS classes because parents whose children were not originally in the classes doing THRASS insisted that their children were also included. But even in such large classes the children learned to recognise words and spell them remarkably quickly.

Subuola Nursery and Primary School in Ibadan was the only private school in the project and the children in the experimental group there performed beyond expectation. They were taught using THRASS for just two hours a week for 16 weeks but even in this short space of time they quickly developed a remarkable perception of sound and their reading and spelling ability improved so much that it became far greater than that of the children in the control group who were initially more advanced. By the end of the pilot some six-year-olds there were even presenting demonstration SING-A-LONG lessons!

But it wasn't just the parents and children who were so enthusiastic, the teachers in the pilot schools were too and they were really envied by other teachers. Their enthusiasm for THRASS and confidence in the programme were demonstrated by their comments following the workshops held as part of the pilot: "I love this THRASS and want the Government to take it up because it is giving children the opportunity to learn fast and understand things around them, to be fluent in expressing themselves and to be able to pronounce and read English." "The missing link in the teaching and learning of English in Nigeria." "If used in Nigeria, students learning English would find it easy, and both written and spoken English in the country would greatly improve."

It is an indication of the significance of THRASS that in South Africa it is being sponsored by Absa Bank, a member of the Barclays Group, through the THRASS Absa TalkTogether Literacy Project, and the THRASS Accredited Certificate is already a compulsory module for Foundation Phase student teachers at six universities.

The progress made by teachers and children was particularly remarkable considering the government schools did not have electricity and had to use 12-volt batteries that they had to recharge using local generators to drive the CD players and, although the SING-A-LONG Interactive Book software was used to train the teachers at the University of Ibadan, they could not subsequently use it in their schools, as they did not have any computers or electricity.

Because of the dramatic improvements in the teaching and learning of English the Oyo State Government, Nigeria, and THRASS UK are now looking to secure funds to enable the use of THRASS to be extended to schools across the state. The expanded initiative would include the promotion of the latest Version 6.1 of the THRASS Phoneme Machine, a groundbreaking computer programme that uses moving human lips to demonstrate the pronunciation of the sounds in hundreds of frequently used English words and is particularly helpful for teaching children for whom English is not their first language. The Phoneme Machine also includes an interactive version of a Yoruba Calendar Chart that uses local children's voices.

Shell Nigeria have expressed interest in the THRASS SING-A-LONG pilot project and its possible extension to the Niger Delta Region.

The THRASS extensive picture-based training website for schools and parents is at [www.thrass.co.uk/teaching.htm](http://www.thrass.co.uk/teaching.htm)

For videos of children in the Nigeria pilot using SING-A-LONG and other THRASS resources, and for comments from the teachers involved, visit [www.thrass.co.uk/nigeriaparto.htm](http://www.thrass.co.uk/nigeriaparto.htm), [www.thrass.co.uk/nigeria\\_videostream.htm](http://www.thrass.co.uk/nigeria_videostream.htm), [www.thrass.co.uk/nigeriapart2.htm](http://www.thrass.co.uk/nigeriapart2.htm) and [www.thrass.co.uk/nigeriapart3.htm](http://www.thrass.co.uk/nigeriapart3.htm)

For other videos that demonstrate what can be achieved using SING-A-LONG and THRASS resources, visit [www.thrass.co.uk/holyrosary\\_limpopo.htm](http://www.thrass.co.uk/holyrosary_limpopo.htm) and [www.thrass.co.uk/hr09.htm](http://www.thrass.co.uk/hr09.htm) (South Africa), [www.thrass.co.uk/wps08.htm](http://www.thrass.co.uk/wps08.htm) (UK) and [www.thrass.co.uk/zimbabwe0309.htm](http://www.thrass.co.uk/zimbabwe0309.htm) (Zimbabwe).

For information about THRASS SING-A-LONG, including a demonstration of the interactive book, visit [www.thrass.co.uk/sing-a-long.htm](http://www.thrass.co.uk/sing-a-long.htm)

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Mike Meade, Media Director, +44 1829 741413 Mob: +44 7970 151 738

[mikemeade@thrass.co.uk](mailto:mikemeade@thrass.co.uk)

Chris Griffiths, International Development, +30 266 203 1723 [chrisgriffiths@thrass.co.uk](mailto:chrisgriffiths@thrass.co.uk)