

Prototyping a Standardised Approach for Extended Teacher Internships in South Africa

Testing whether a standardised, well-supported internship model produces more competent teachers at a cost government can sustain

Introduction

The quality of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) has a direct bearing on the quality of teaching in South African classrooms, and school-based internships are one of the most important ways student teachers develop the practical skills they need. Yet internship provision across the country has historically been fragmented, with different universities and organisations running their own models, of varying quality and cost, with little coordination or shared evidence of what actually works.

The Teacher Internship Collaboration South Africa (TICZA) was established to bring coherence to this landscape. It unites non-governmental organisations (NGOs), higher education institutions (HEIs), government and funders around a shared goal: developing and testing a standardised approach to teacher internships that is both effective and affordable for government to sustain.

Project Overview

In its first phase (2021–2025), TICZA brought stakeholders together to map the internship ecosystem, build a Common Competency Framework, and reach consensus on the core components and cost of a standardised Extended Student Teacher Internship (ESTI) referred to as the “prototype.” Based on these achievements, the partners agreed to implement the second phase to put the prototype into practice.

Phase 2 (2026–2028) tests the prototype through real implementation. Four partnerships, each pairing a distance-education university with an NGO, will deliver the model to 200 distance-learning BEd student teachers in their third or fourth year, specialising in South African indigenous languages, placed in Quintile 1–3 primary schools. Universities provide the academic programme while NGOs deliver wrap-around support in the form of classroom observation, professional development workshops and on-site mentoring, within a standardised budget per student.

For the first time, the Department of Basic Education has agreed to extend Funza Lushaka bursaries to cover tuition and stipends for these distance-education students. The project is managed by JET Education Services, which also served as Programme Management Office for Phase 1, and is overseen by a multi-stakeholder Project Steering Committee. An independent evaluator will run a rigorous, mixed-methods evaluation comparing intervention and control groups throughout the two years.

Objectives

Phase 2 of the project sets out to:

- Implement the standardised Extended Student Teacher Internship model across four HEI–NGO partnerships, placing 200 student teachers in Quintile 1–3 primary schools with structured academic and wrap-around support.

- Determine, through baseline and endline assessments and classroom observations, whether the model produces better-prepared and more competent teachers than current practice.
- Assess whether the model can be delivered at a cost that is affordable within existing government funding mechanisms, such as NSFAS, Funza Lushaka and SETA learnerships.
- Produce a robust cost–benefit analysis of the model to inform decisions about future adoption and scale.

Outcomes

Through this project, it is anticipated that:

- Credible, comparative evidence drawn from pedagogical content knowledge assessments, classroom observations, interviews and focus groups will show whether standardised, well-supported internships lead to measurably stronger teaching practice.
- A tested and costed internship model will be available for government and the sector to consider adopting or scaling nationally, supported by the DBE's first-time extension of Funza Lushaka bursaries to distance-education students.
- Collaboration between universities, NGOs, government and funders around a shared, evidence-based approach to teacher internships will be deepened and sustained.
- The project will build a foundation for policy influence and systemic embedding of quality practice-teaching approaches within ITE, in line with Zenex's strategy to strengthen ITE and improve instructional quality.