2019

Quality management of Ceibal en Inglés

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Recommended Citation

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- The quality management system of *Ceibal en Inglés* in Uruguay is currently the largest in the British Council network.

- In the five-year period extending from 2013 to 2017, quality managers based in Uruguay, Argentina and the Philippines conducted over 1,000 observations of English lessons delivered remotely to Uruguayan primary state school children.

- During this same period, the *Ceibal en Inglés* quality managers carried out over 50 evaluations of remote teaching centre operations.

- The effort to improve the quality of teaching and learning in *Ceibal en Inglés* has clearly had an influence on the improvement of student performance since the programme started.

Introduction

This chapter examines the role of quality management in *Ceibal en Inglés*, which has grown in scope from the small-scale observations of teachers undertaken during the pilot phase of the project in 2012 (Banegas, 2013:181) into a complex quality management system, involving approximately 300 teachers, which is "coherent and comprehensive and the largest teacher observation, development and evaluation system the British Council has globally … in which every remote teacher is observed and evaluated, as well as trained according to needs" (Knagg and Searle, 2016). The need for quality management in *Ceibal en Inglés* can be understood within the broader context of quality management, of managing teaching quality in education in general, and language education in particular. The challenges of establishing reliable quality criteria for lessons taught via videoconferencing will be outlined and data presented that shows how teaching quality has improved during the course of the project. Finally, recommendations will be shared for anyone interested in implementing a similar quality manag ement system in other countries and contexts.

Quality management methodology

Quality management has been defined as a "set of concepts, strategies, tools and beliefs, etc., which are aimed at improving the quality of products and services, reducing the waste and saving costs" (Navaratnam and O'Connor, 1993). Quality management in language teaching, according to White and Hockley et al. (2008) should "inform course planning and development, assessment and placement, and the teaching and learning which occurs in and out of the classroom." They state that quality outcomes will be achieved "through organising and managing integrated systems and processes" and they stress the importance to effective academic management of "devising agreed-upon key performance indicators (KPIs), which establish measurable goals."

There exist a number of terms related to quality management that are worth examining. *Quality control* is a term that was coined by and which refers to a range of managerial methods designed to maintain quality of products or services (Feigenbaum, 1983). Quality control takes place after the event.

Quality assurance (QA), on the other hand, as described by Tovey (1994), is an alternative form of ensuring quality in education, which "involves designing systems to deliver quality before the event" (Fidler and Edwards, 1996). In educational projects, establishing a quality assurance system "or integrating local QA practices are important strategies for external accountability and sustainability" (Kiely, 2012).

Most relevant to *Ceibal en Inglés* is *total quality management* (TQM), which Mukhopadhyay states "is an extension of the quality assurance approach" with an emphasis on "not only on managing quality … but in developing a 'quality culture' amongst all employees," (2005:28) and which takes time to implement in order to "reach a level where quality becomes culture," the challenge being to create "the passion and sense of worth about teaching among the teachers, giving them independence and encouragement and, of course, mentoring leadership among colleagues." (2005:194).

An important issue when TQM is applied to education is that of customer focus, and Mukhopadhyay (2005:43) asks "who is the customer: student or parent or employer or provider (government) or all?" stating that "assessment of quality in education cannot be restricted to needs of the students; it must take into account the perceived needs of other constituents, namely parents, community, government and employers."

Quality management and teacher observations

Malderez mentions four main purposes of classroom observations: for professional development, for training, for evaluation, and for research. In *Ceibal en Inglés* lesson observation is used mainly as a means of monitoring teaching quality.

Observation has long been a popular way of monitoring teaching quality. Ellis (1994:55) states that "observation is the most suitable method used for measuring the performance of teachers" and Murphy (2013) believes that "classroom observation offers an opportunity for supervisors to assess teachers' styles, their classroom management skills and various aspects of teaching that are hard to obtain through other forms of evaluation."

Although observation of teachers by quality managers in *Ceibal en Inglés* is principally an evaluation tool, lesson observations also provide information about this relatively new way of teaching. Care is also taken to provide constructive feedback on teaching techniques and methods with an eye to helping remote teachers evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, so they can improve their practice. As Farrell (2011) writes, observation is one of the most common ways to help teachers reflect on pedagogical practices.

When observation is carried out, the observer needs to be careful that it does not, as O'Leary (2012) describes, become simply a "box-ticking exercise" or rely on "subjective judgements, rather than ... developing the teacher's ability to assess his or her own practices" (Williams,1989:85).

In addition to this, there is another difficulty present in observing teachers in *Ceibal en Inglés* because of the remote nature of the teaching. When teachers are observed from the *teaching point* (i.e. the place where the remote teacher (RT) teaches from, the information available to the observer is less than when the observer is in the classroom, where the children and the effect of the teacher's interventions can be better observed. Gabriela Kaplan, Plan Ceibal Co-ordinator of *Ceibal en Inglés*, has said of this that "everything looks well organised from the teaching point, and the observer can tell if the lesson plan has been implemented, but there is a danger the observer can miss out on the rich information from

the students. For example, it is more difficult to see how the children feel about the lesson, to gauge their reaction to what is being taught."

Plan Ceibal's Quality Controller, Isabel Longres also believes this: "You see a lesson completely differently when you are observing from the school. You have to be a very good observer to see what is really happening from the screen and you tend to pay too much attention to what the RT is doing rather than the impact on the learners."

Because of this, in order for observers to be able to observe objectively and effectively, they require ongoing training. In *Ceibal en Inglés*, regular observation standardisation sessions are held, so that observers have the opportunity to reflect, and this is in line with Gebhard's assertion that observers need to be "qualified trainers who know what to look for, how to provide effective feedback and how to keep the subjectivity factor to a minimum" (1999:35).

The feedback given to the teacher following the observation should be "objective, systematic, supportive and motivating" rather than "subjective, threatening, frustrating and impressionistic" (Sheal, 1989), which Shah and Harthi (2014) have noted can lead to "teacher burn-out and less effective performance in classrooms." Bailey (2006) and Cranston (2009) have both mentioned that the observer–observee relationship is key to successful observation, and Wajnryb (1992) mentions that "a positive learning attitude" is required for observation "to capture the classroom events precisely and objectively and go beyond the recording of mere impressions."

In *Ceibal en Inglés*, it is considered important that the teacher has a pre-observation discussion with the quality manager. Pari has found that "while the pre-observation discussion seemed to be helpful for some, it was stressful for others" (2015), but also mentions that this discussion "helps the observer have a better understanding of the lesson" and gives "the opportunity to discuss the lesson plan from the teacher's perspective" as well as helping "to make the teacher relaxed and comfortable ... creating a supportive atmosphere" (Pari, 2005).

Observation, above all, is "a powerful tool that enables participants to gather data and gain insights into the classroom teaching and learning" (Mackey and Gass, 2005), and which, when it is effective, can be beneficial to the teachers taking part and can lead to improvement in teaching quality.

Managing quality in *Ceibal en Inglés*

Quality management of *Ceibal en Inglés* has the *Teaching Quality Review* (TQR) at its core. This is an inspection scheme, which includes pre-inspection visits to the remote teaching provider (usually

referred to as *Institute*), the inspection itself and subsequent reports. Inspection reports include recommendations for improvement. As Pickering (1999) mentions: "Inspection schemes have the advantage of offering an expert, external viewpoint of a school's operations". Disadvantages, according to Pickering (1999), include the following:

- "The findings are not automatically owned by staff."

- "Quality initiatives can remain externally driven rather than becoming internally driven."

- Sometimes there is "a trade-off or tension between ensuring that minimum standards are maintained and helping schools to improve their quality standards."

- "They can become cumbersome and too dependent on documentation."

Ceibal en Inglés **quality management processes**

The TQR is a process that happens at least once a year (usually split into two visits: TQR part 1 and TQR part 2, depending on the size of the Institute). Remote teachers are observed and there is a review of the Institute's procedures and performance, henceforth referred to as *Institute Assessment*.

During the Institute Assessment, quality managers (QMs) carry out a formal review, which includes:

- Review of the remote teaching provider's administrative processes and systems

- How cancellations, substitutions and rescheduling of classes are managed

- How issues (i.e. formal complaints, concerns, etc.) are managed

- What provision has been made for orientation of new remote teachers (RTs)

- Continuous professional development (CPD) scheme for RTs

- Institute facilities and teaching/technical resources

- Review of any previous action plans resulting from a prior TQR

The *Institute Assessment* as outlined above and the *Remote Teaching Observations* constitute the TQR.

In the following section, the observation process will be described in more detail.

Remote teaching quality observation process

The aim of the remote teaching quality observation process (figure 1) is to ensure *Ceibal en Inglés* students receive quality instruction according to project standards.
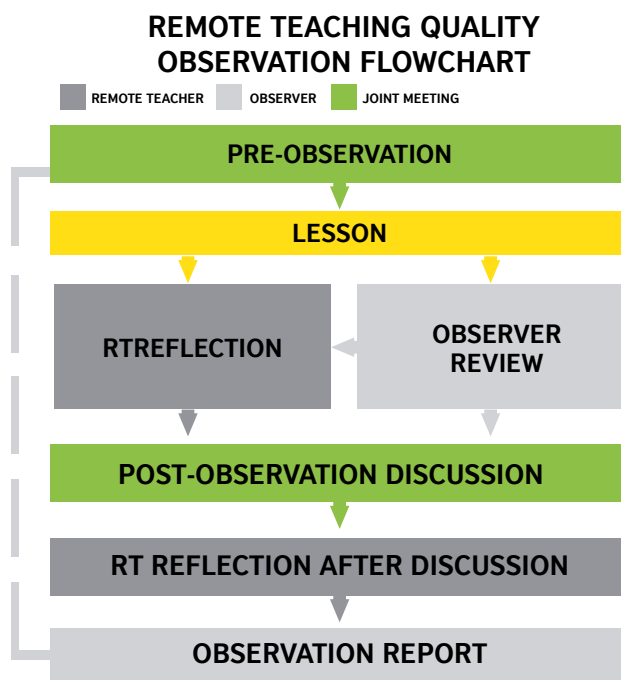

Figure 1: Remote teaching quality observation flowchart

During observations, QMs complete an observation form in order to have a record to provide RTs and Institutes with constructive developmental feedback.

Prior to the TQR, the QM requests the RTs' availability in order to arrange a meeting with all the RTs to be observed, discuss the process and to hear from the team of teachers at the Institute about how they perceive the specifics of teaching on the project; for example, co-ordination with classroom teachers (CTs), use of *Crea2* (the learning management system), lesson plans and materials, training needs, etc. The QM takes notes and answers questions the RTs may have. A summary of this meeting will be included in the Institute Assessment report.

Together, information from all TQRs are used to assess how the British Council and Plan Ceibal can provide RTs with support during the academic year in question, and to inform improvements for the following year.

Observations then take place, preceded by a pre-observation discussion with the RT to be observed, and followed by an observation feedback session. After the observation, but before the feedback session, the RT completes a post-observation form, reflecting on what happened during the lesson. When this meeting finishes, the RT records the agreed

action points and is invited to add a comment about the observation process in the post-feedback form.

Observation form

An observation form is the main instrument QMs use when observing the lesson. Each descriptor in the form is rated: for instance, an *Exceed* is awarded when there is evidence that the RT goes beyond what is expected in the standard; *met* is given when the standard is mostly and consistently met overall; a *partly met* means that the standard was met to an extent, but there are some weaknesses; while a *not met* indicates that there was no evidence during the lesson to reach the standard. Finally, a *not applicable* is given when circumstances beyond the control of the RT prevent accurate assessment.

These teaching standards have been adapted from the British Council teaching standards (2011) and include the specific criteria required by *Ceibal en Inglés* on the following:

1. **Course and lesson planning**. The descriptors in this standard would be rated as *exceed* or *met* if the RT, for example, shows evidence of successfully adapting, differentiating, scaffolding or selecting activities to suit the students' needs while meeting the learning outcomes of the lesson; has clear opening and closing routines; checks homework, etc. A *partly met* or *not met* would be given if the adaptations do not follow the syllabus; if there is something unrelated to learning outcomes; or if there is a lack of consistency, etc.

2. **Classroom management 1**. This is about creating a positive learning environment and encouraging participation. Questions asked include:

- Has the RT built a rapport with the CT and the students?

- Is there a balance of teacher and learner talking time?

- Is there evidence of a variety of interaction patterns, such as pair and group work?

Here the descriptors would be rated as *exceed* or *met* if the RT arranges the furniture to match the interactions of the lesson; shows positive, personable and appreciative interactions with the CT when requesting help with groupings; uses the students' names; responds positively and actively to students' contributions; pays attention to quiet individuals or groups and encourages them to participate; and maximises the opportunities for pair work and group work. A *partly met* or *not met* would be given when there is space to better adapt the seating arrangement to the lesson and this is not done; if the RT reads names off a list to nominate (i.e. not knowing the students); not addressing the CT or

students by name; favouring some students over others, or focusing on the strongest students; or not creating opportunities for students to use the language independently.

3. **Classroom management 2**. This is related to delivering the lesson and managing activities. Questions to help the observer include:

- Does the RT deliver the class in English, supported by non-verbal strategies to convey meaning?

- Does the teacher give clear instructions, models and demonstrate activities, as well as checking for understanding?

- Is there evidence of applying appropriate strategies for giving feedback and correcting learners' language?

- Does the RT show flexibility in delivering the lesson?

In this section, an *exceed* or a *met* would be given if the RT employs pictures, gestures, expressions; uses examples and concept/instruction-checking questions to convey and check meaning and understanding; demonstrates teaching presence on screen; has natural rhythm and intonation when talking; uses full-screen mode when a whiteboard or presentation is not being used; uses body language when appropriate to convey information; generates interest and enhances his/her presence; and addresses learner errors by showing that the error exists, isolating the error, indicating the type of error and then encouraging self or peer correction. A *partly met* or a *not met* would be given if the RT uses too much translation to convey meaning; overuses Spanish, or code-switches in a sentence (e.g. "Children, did you do your *deberes* (i.e. homework)?"); uses Spanish for instructions; shouts or speaks too fast; doesn't make eye contact; does not vary positioning (e.g. students only ever see a talking head on the screen); ignores or doesn't hear students' errors; or overpraises or doesn't respond to what is happening in the class and proceeds regardless with the lesson plan.

4. **ELT subject knowledge**. This includes the RTs' ability to grade their own language; to provide accurate and appropriate oral and written examples for the learners; to demonstrate awareness of learner difficulties; and to use techniques and procedures for developing receptive and productive skills. An RT would receive an *exceed* or a *met* if he/she uses simple language appropriate for the level of the class; tries to use words closely related to Spanish; speaks accurately in English; is able to identify and anticipate problems and their solutions (in the pre-observation form); listens to and responds to what students say; accommodates students with special educational needs; supports students and

scaffolds speaking and writing tasks; and effectively manages reading and listening comprehension tasks. A *partly met* or a *not met* would be given if the RT uses unnecessary metalanguage; misspells words on the board or in a presentation; makes mistakes and does not correct them; and does not take into consideration other possible answers to questions or activities.

5. **Understanding the learners**. This is mainly about raising learner awareness; helping learners monitor their own learning process; encouraging learning habits and learner training activities; differentiating activities according to individual learner needs; and demonstrating an understanding of the culture and context of the school and the learners. A RT would get an *exceed* or a *met* if he/she takes the time to help students become better aware of how language works; encourages self-correction; and checks and praises homework. The RT would receive a *partly met* or a *not met* if the students find the tasks too easy, difficult or boring; the RT teaches each level in the same way; or ignores special educational needs students, expects them to achieve the same or does not adapt activities.

6. **Learning technologies**. This includes using presentations, websites, etc. in the lesson; good use of the video camera and the remote control to aid learning and exploit the RTs role and presence; and the RTs' ability to troubleshoot basic technology problems during the lesson. Here an *exceed* or a *met* would be given if the RT incorporates attractive and motivating images to his/her presentation; effectively uses the camera to zoom or pans on both cameras when appropriate; always has a plan B in case the technology malfunctions. A *partly met* or a *not met* would be given if the RT uses copyright-protected images without permission; overcrowds a presentation with text or images; uses fancy fonts the students (particularly those with special educational needs) will find difficult to read; or wastes too much time trying to figure something out (without calling tech support and/or moving on).

7. **Co-ordination**. The RT should show evidence of co-ordinating the whole cycle of lessons (A, B and C); being supportive to CTs' concerns, taking into consideration the CTs' knowledge and experience. An *exceed* or a *met* would be given if there is evidence of co-ordination with the CT in the form of emails, text messages, screenshots, etc. A *partly met* or a *not met* would be given if the RT does not keep in touch during the week with the CT or fails to show evidence of teamwork or support to the CT.

8. **Crea**. This is the learning management system (LMS) that RTs and CTs use to interact with learners between classes and to complement and support the weekly lesson cycle. QMs focus on the use of the platform in terms of the effective use of its functions and features (messaging, interactive activities,

correction of homework, discussions and forums, among others). An RT would receive an *exceed* or a *met* if he/she guides the CT and learners to work in the platform; promotes online learning tools in *Crea* and the internet in general; or corrects homework in the platform and gives feedback on a regular basis. However, a *partly met* or *not met* would be given if the RT and the students do not work on the platform without a valid reason; the RT does not teach the students and CT how to work on *Crea*; or the RT does not correct the students' homework regularly.

9. **Professionalism**. The RT should show evidence of having a professional approach to teaching, including interest in continuing professional development (CPD). RTs would receive an *exceed* or *met* if they complete the pre- and post-observation and post-feedback forms in full and in a timely manner; reflect on own performance; show evidence of completing required training courses and of seeking to develop their own teaching skills by engaging in CPD. On the other hand, they would receive a *partly met* or a *not met* if the RT does not complete the pre- and post-forms with the information required; if they do not show evidence of completion of required training; or if they do not show any interest in CPD, or by not showing improvement in any action points they might have been given after their last observation.

Underperformance

Managing underperformance is necessary in order to ensure improvement in teaching quality throughout the project. Concerns may be detected during observations, or feedback may be given to the Institute or a QM if received via another channel (e.g. a complaint by a CT, etc.). When this happens, teacher performance issues will be investigated and resolved by the QM and the Institute Co-ordinator/Director working collaboratively. In order to ensure that the protocol is objective, fair and transparent, all reported issues undergo the following three-stage process:

Stage 1 – Receipt

The issue may have been raised by a CT, *Plan Ceibal* or other source, and reported directly to *Plan Ceibal,* a QM or Institute Co-ordinator/Director. Once this happens, the British Council or *Plan Ceibal* will acknowledge receipt of the negative feedback to the person reporting it. Details of the issue will be recorded in the issue management system and assigned to a QM for investigation (stage 2) and follow-up (stage 3). The Institute Co-ordinator may ask for updates on the status of the issue at any time. Quality Managers will also keep *Plan Ceibal*'s *Quality Controller* informed about any issues relating to RTs.

Stage 2 – Investigation

The issue will be fully investigated within two weeks and a decision taken on action to be implemented.

Until then the issue will remain 'unverified'. Investigation may include talking to the Institute Co-ordinator, the RT, and formal observation of two classes (one of these will be with a different class to the one reported). If the issue concerns the team-teaching relationship between the RT and CT and this cannot be resolved, Plan Ceibal usually ask to change the RT for a different one at the same Institute, if there is one available. If negative feedback is 'verified' to constitute underperformance, the Institute Co-ordinator will be informed so that a follow-up action plan is put into practice within a month. If the negative feedback is decided to be 'unverified', the issue will become 'resolved'.

Stage 3 – Follow up

Assuming an underperformance is non-critical but continues to be problematic, the Institute Co-ordinator, QM and RT will agree on a new action plan. The action plan will detail specific points to be worked on and a timeframe of up to one month for improvement and review. If the performance does not improve as stated in the action plan, Plan Ceibal reserve the right to ask that the RT does not continue with the project.

Institute assessment

After observations have been carried out, the QM writes a report, analyses the data collected during the observations and agrees on a date for an interview with the Institute Co-ordinator. The QM presents the first draft of the Institute Assessment report for discussion. Apart from a summary of the results of the observations and of the meetings with teachers and Institute Co-ordinator, the report includes an action plan with clear deadlines for the Co-ordinator to implement in order to improve the quality of teaching in the Institute.

Quality management in practice 2015–16

When the data collected during TQRs is analysed, improvements in teaching quality can be detected. The following table (figure 2) shows the percentage of *met* standards in 2015 and 2016 by the six British Council-managed Institutes. All Institutes *met* 70 per cent of the *Ceibal en Inglés* quality standards two years in a row, which translates into a noteworthy number of high-quality lessons delivered by these providers.

Overall, the quality of the teaching of the six British Council-managed Institutes in *Ceibal en Inglés* increased by 2.5 per cent in 2016 compared to the previous year (figure 3). This indicates that the action plans resulting from the TQR and included in each Institute Assessment Report to solve the challenges and difficulties have had an impact on improvement and on the increase in the quality of the teaching and on the Institutes' processes and systems.

2015–16 Analysis per Institute

More specific analysis of data is also undertaken. For instance, we can see from the data above and below (*Figure 3*) that the performance of Institute 3 declined from 2015 to 2016. There was a drop of five per cent in the *exceeds* and *mets* received while the *partly mets* and *not mets* increased by one per cent. In this case, the drop in performance was due to communications problems and underperformance in operational procedures, and led to a major restructure of the Institute.

This was of course evident to all working in project operations, but it is useful to be able to quantify this through the data h ere, and it also shows that the quality management indicators have a bearing on what actually happens in an Institute.
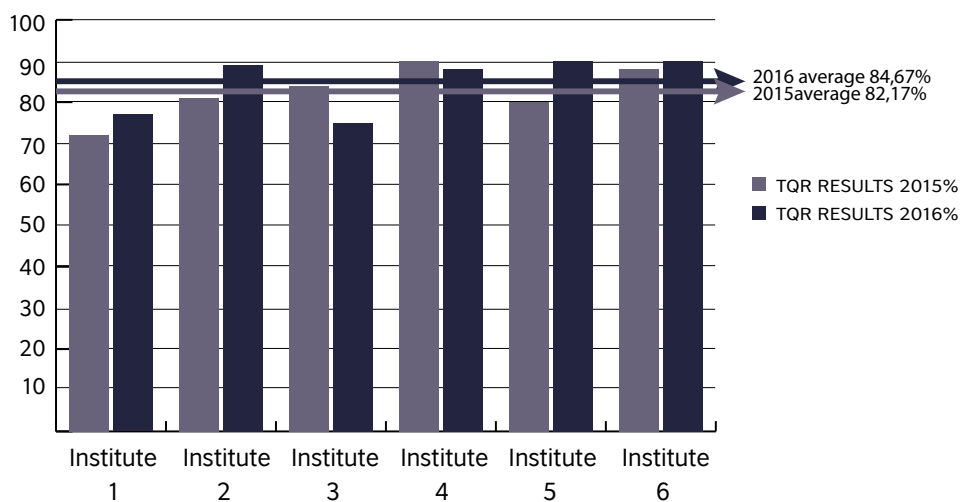

Figure 2: Comparison of TQR results for British Council-managed Institutes 2015–16
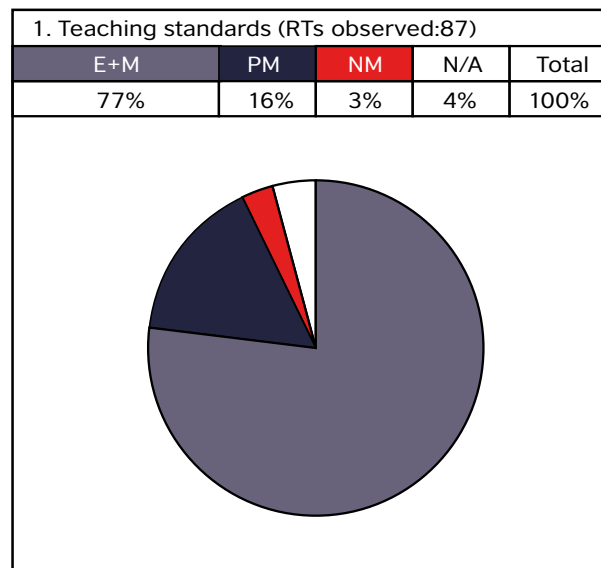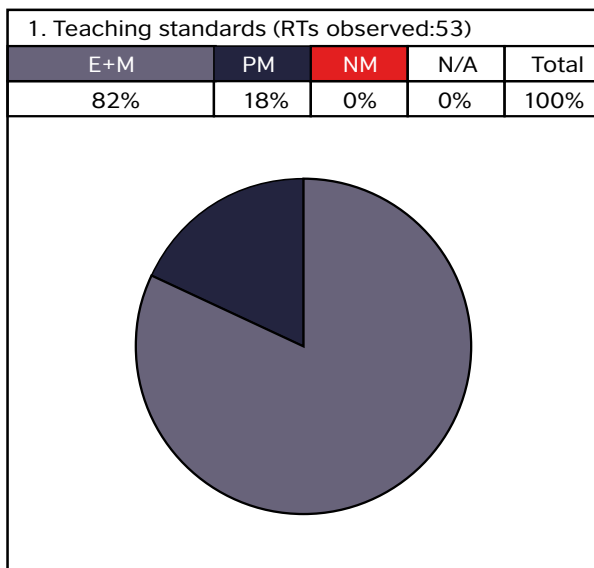
1. Teaching standards (RTs observed:53)					
Exceed*	Met	Partly Met	Not Met	N/A	Total
13%	69%	18%	0%	0%	100%

1. Teaching standards (RTs observed:87)					
Exceed*	Met	Partly Met	Not Met	N/A	Total
1%	76%	16%	3%	4%	100%

1. Teaching standards (RTs observed:53)

1. Teaching standards (RTs observed:87)

1. Teaching standards (RTs observed:53)				
E+M	PM	NM	N/A	Total
82%	18%	0%	0%	100%

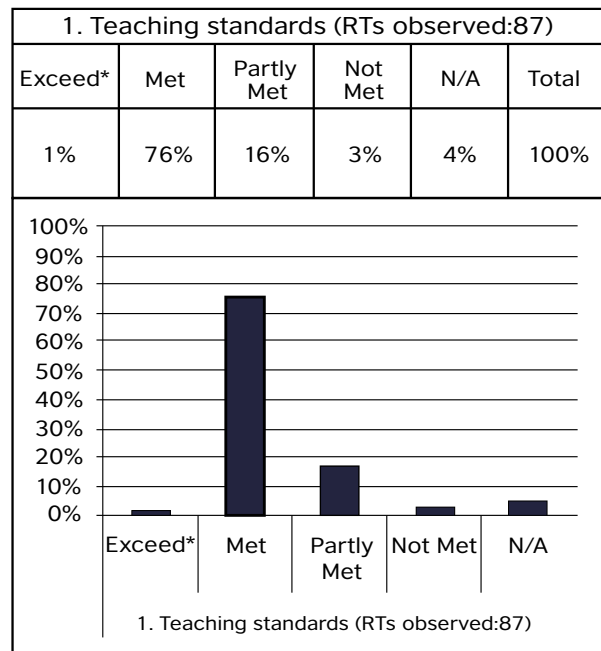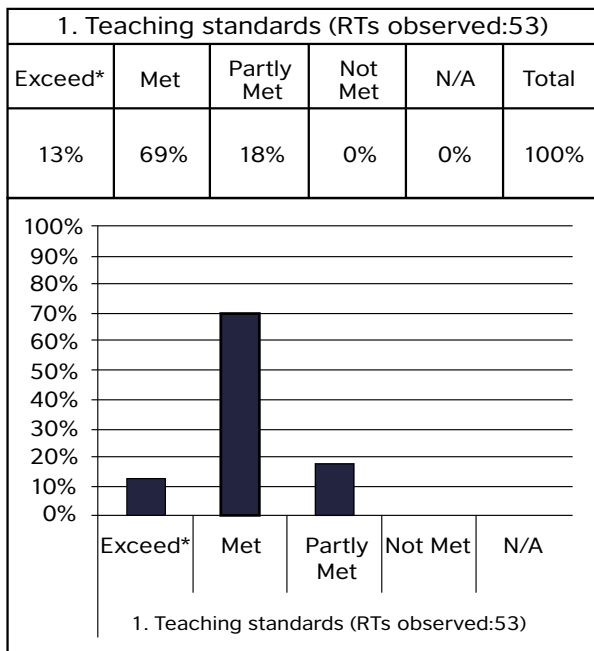| 1. Teaching standards (RTs observed:87)				
E+M	PM	NM	N/A	Total
77%	16%	3%	4%	100%

Figure 3: Results of observations Institute 3 2015–16

General analysis of results

Four of the Institutes increased the quality of their teaching in 2016, while two of them underperformed in the same year. The impact of quality management can best be seen in the following example:

- Institute 3, the biggest and most complex Institute delivering *Ceibal en Inglés* lessons, did not meet the standards required by *Ceibal en Inglés* and the action plan designed by the QM. This led to a complete restructuring during the second semester of the year, as mentioned above.

- In the case of Institute 4, the RTs are non-native Spanish speakers and they found it challenging to effectively communicate with the CTs during the class and in co-ordination. Some of the strategies designed by the QM included RTs receiving Spanish lessons and having two *Spanish-speaking co-ordinators* to monitor and provide support to the RTs when communicating with their CTs either via email or through videoconferencing. These actions have resulted in visible improvements.

Summary and conclusions

Quality management in *Ceibal en Inglés* provides RTs with a full and formal observation cycle, with evaluative and developmental feedback on the teaching through videoconferencing, alongside associated co-ordination, professionalism and other related aspects. Quality management also provides the Institutes with feedback about how far they are meeting or failing to meet standards in relation to what is expected. This is achieved through assessment of their processes and systems in order to guarantee the quality of remote teaching.

The teaching standards in the observation form are descriptors that reflect the RT's performance during the delivery of their lessons. The teaching standards are the key indicators that guide the QM to help suggest corrective strategies in those cases where the quality of the teaching is below standard.

The eight areas of the Institute Assessment allow evaluation of the quality and productivity of the Institute, which helps the design and implementation of an action plan to overcome any challenges and difficulties detected. The Institute Assessment analyses the practices and methods that are reasonable to consider regarding the operational and pedagogical aspects of the Institute, the service they provide and the internal actions that control and guarantee that the operations comply with the expectations of *Ceibal en Inglés*.

How effective is quality management in *Ceibal en Inglés* on student learning outcomes? It is difficult to measure the impact on learning, but it is not unreasonable to state that quality management is one of the reasons for the improvement in results in the annual end-of-year student assessment (see Marconi and Brovetto in this volume). Ultimately, this is the reason for pursuing a strategy aimed at improving teaching quality – i.e. its expected positive effect on student learning outcomes.

The large scale and complexity of *Ceibal en Inglés* calls for an ambitious quality management system – one with sufficient scope to accommodate the geographically dispersed remote teaching network, but also carefully fine-tuned in order to determine whether the many interdependent variables effectively come together to enable learning. In this chapter we have sought to give the reader a glimpse of how QM processes are working towards this goal. The *Ceibal en Inglés* quality management system draws on best practice of English language teaching, based on British Council Teaching Skills (British Council, 2011) then adapted to the local Uruguayan context and the context of remote teaching. This should be useful not only to *Ceibal en Inglés* remote teaching practitioners, but to a growing number of teachers worldwide who teach synchronously via videoconferencing.

Navigating a course for the *Ceibal en Inglés* RT, who must interact not only with students, but also with classroom teachers, has been an ongoing process of discovery for all those involved on the academic side of the project. Quality management is at the centre of this endeavour, and has aimed to accommodate the complex interplay of human relationships present in remote lessons, which in many ways are different to the teacher–student dynamics of the traditional face-to-face primary learner classroom setting. At the outset, there were few documented precedents for the *Ceibal en Inglés* project management team to refer to. This chapter has aimed to add to the emerging body of literature that has grown around remote teaching, examples of which are referenced in this volume.

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