

# High-Impact Teaching Strategies (HITS) for Foundational Learning

## Teacher-Facilitator User Guide



This user guide is written for education professionals who support teachers in their professional growth (a group that we refer to throughout the document as “teacher-facilitators”). It accompanies the suite of high-impact teaching strategies (HITS) documents (see <https://scienceofteaching.site/high-impact-teaching-strategies>), which includes an overview document and eight mini-guides (listed below in step 1).

This guide explains the four primary steps needed to begin using the HITS mini-guides as part of any existing teacher professional development (TPD) model—that is, within the established set of training and support activities currently provided to teachers within a particular country context.

### STEP 1: Preparing



A. Schedule time to read and become familiar with the [HITS suite of documents](#):

- Overview
- Assessment-Informed Instruction mini-guides (literacy and math)
- Instructional Approach mini-guides (literacy and math)
- Knowledge Progression and Connections mini-guides (literacy and math)
- Student Engagement mini-guide
- Learning Environment mini-guide

B. Organize a technical team consisting of individuals with pedagogical knowledge and experience developing TPD materials; this could include representatives from the Ministry of Education, teacher training college instructors, technical staff from implementing organizations, and teachers. Schedule time for this team to review the education system’s priorities and existing TPD materials and to consider how the HITS content aligns with them. Specifically, look for ways in which any one or more of the five HITS domains—Assessment-Informed Instruction, Instructional Approach, Knowledge Progression, Student Engagement, and Learning Environment—align with the current TPD model. Next, for the domains where the team finds alignment, determine which domain represents the area of greatest need; this will be the HITS guide to begin working with.

#### STEP 1 IN ACTION: Democratic Republic of the Congo

Prior to learning about the HITS materials, the Justice Rising team had equipped school support officers and school directors with the skills and knowledge to train and support teachers in assessment-informed instruction during literacy and math lessons. Routine lesson observations showed that teachers typically circulated around the classroom during the “You Do” part of a lesson. However, while teachers recorded student performance using simple tick marks, an effective teaching practice, the feedback they provided to students—typically a score from 1 to 10—was not meaningful or actionable for learning. After familiarizing themselves with the HITS suite of documents, the Justice Rising team decided to use content from the Assessment-Informed Instruction mini-guides to enrich existing TPD materials.



### STEP 1 IN ACTION: Sierra Leone

EducAid conducted a systemic analysis to compare existing TPD materials, specifically EducAid’s Top Ten Strategies for Teaching and Learning, against the HITS domains (see Figure 1). After the team’s careful review, they determined that the Student Engagement domain most closely aligned with current TPD content and was also an area of pressing need among teachers. This simple comparison of the TPD content with the HITS domains resulted in a relevant starting point for enriching their TPD materials.



Figure 1. EducAid’s comparison of existing TPD materials and the HITS domains

Select strategies from EducAid’s existing TPD materials		HITS domain alignment
STRATEGY <b>6</b>	Teachers continuously track their students’ skill levels.	ASSESSMENT-INFORMED INSTRUCTION
STRATEGY <b>7</b>	Teachers consider how to best provide opportunities for skills development: heterogeneous or homogeneous pairing or grouping.	STUDENT ENGAGEMENT
STRATEGY <b>8</b>	Requires teachers to move from a content to a skills focus.	STUDENT ENGAGEMENT
STRATEGY <b>9</b>	Teachers teach skills through fun games and activities.	STUDENT ENGAGEMENT
STRATEGY <b>10</b>	Teachers train students in orderly behaviors for activity-based group-work lessons.	LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Source: Adapted from EducAid, *Science of Teaching HITS field-testing: Case study report of adaptation and use by EducAid Sierra Leone of high-impact teaching strategy guide for student engagement tier 1 (2025)*.

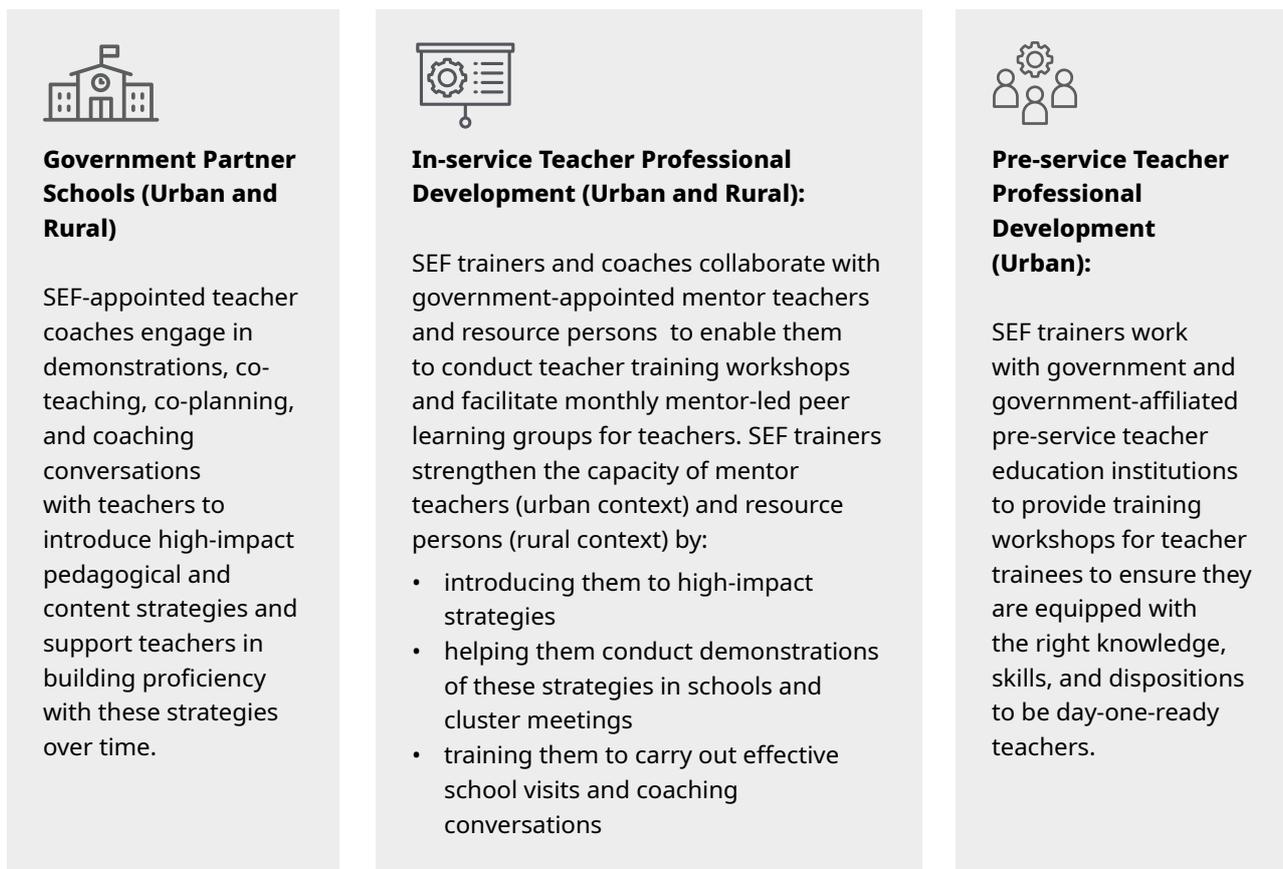
## STEP 2: Initial Planning and Decision-Making



The technical group should then discuss key points and make decisions relevant to the local context and TPD model. Use the questions that follow to guide the discussion and decision-making process. This will also help ensure the long-term outcome of improved learning outcomes for students.

- A. Who will use the HITS mini-guides?** The HITS mini-guides are meant to be used to improve teaching and learning in early grade classrooms. For that reason, the target audience includes anyone who supports teachers in their professional development: instructional coaches, school-based peer coaches, teacher trainers, head teachers, and TPD material developers. This group of people is referred to as “teacher-facilitators” in this guide and other HITS documents.
- B. How will the mini-guides be used and in what context?** The HITS mini-guides are designed to be used in a variety of professional development contexts. This might be through training workshops, monthly community-of-practice meetings, or school-based coaching support. Use this question to determine how the mini-guides can best fit into the existing TPD model in the local context. (See Figure 2 for an example of how questions A and B were addressed by the Simple Education Foundation in India.)

**Figure 2. Example of who will use the mini-guides and how** (*Simple Education Foundation (SEF), India*)



*Source: Simple Education Foundation, Evidence-based resources for high impact teaching: Learnings from testing RTI's instructional guides with public schools in India (2025).*

- C. Who is best positioned to adapt the HITS strategies?** The specific high-impact teaching strategies in each domain and tier are intended to support teacher-facilitators in various countries and different educational contexts. Because of this versatility, the strategies will need to be adapted to fit within existing TPD models and materials—in other words, the technical team will need to modify, adjust, and tailor the HITS strategies to suit the teachers in the local context. (See step 4 for more details about adaptation.) Forming a team that has relevant skills and experience to review the strategies and adjust them to fit local classrooms and teacher abilities will be key. For example, the technical team may need to modify specific terminology and the local teaching materials used, or tailor the HITS strategies to match teachers' curricular skills and knowledge. Consider including experienced and well-trained teachers in the technical team because they know best how different strategies will work in a classroom.
- D. What orientation or training is best for your context?** Before incorporating the mini-guides into any TPD model, it is a good idea to provide the teacher-facilitators with a thorough orientation to the adapted mini-guides and the high-impact teaching strategies themselves. How this orientation is delivered will, of course, depend on the local system in which the teacher-facilitators work, the available budget, the school calendar, and other external factors. In addition to an initial orientation session or workshop, it is important to provide ongoing follow-up for the teacher-facilitators as they embark on their work.

## STEP 3: Determining the Starting Point – Using Data from Decision Trees and Tier Progressions



### Decision Trees

Teachers bring different levels of training and experience to their classrooms, and each teacher’s journey through their professional development is unique. Taking this into account, each HITS mini-guide includes a set of questions—called a “decision tree”—to guide teacher-facilitators in determining the best starting point (i.e., tier) for individual teachers and groups of teachers within a given domain.

The decision trees are most effective when used under the following conditions:

- TPD activities are focused on small groups of teachers, such as school-based communities of practice, which are supported on a regular basis by a coach or head teacher who can use their knowledge of the needs of the groups to identify the appropriate tier(s) at which teachers should start.
- Ongoing instructional coaching allows both the coach and the teacher to identify a focus on specific professional development needs. This can then inform the identification of the tier(s) in which to begin working.
- Teachers meet weekly or monthly in communities of practice to develop their skills and knowledge together. These meetings are conducive to using the decision trees for reflection and identification of tiers for TPD focus.

If the TPD model in your context does not permit these conditions, alternative data sources such as the ones below can help shed light on the professional development needs of teachers and identify the tier(s) at which they should start:

- Head teacher or teacher reflections (e.g., in journals)
- Teacher needs analysis surveys (representative of a larger TPD group, such as a training or workshop)
- Sampling of classroom observations (representative of a larger TPD group)
- Data from coaching conversations (consolidated at the school or district level)
- Data from classroom observations (consolidated at the school or district level)

It might also be the case that the teacher-facilitators in a local context simply “know”—based on their on-the-ground knowledge, informal data, and expertise—which tier(s) are the most appropriate starting point for their teachers.

“Reflection” in teacher professional development refers to the intentional and structured process used by educators to critically examine their own teaching practices, beliefs, and learning experiences to deepen understanding, improve instruction, and foster continuous professional growth.

Key elements of reflection in TPD:

- **Self-awareness:** Understanding one’s own teaching style, decisions, and classroom interactions
- **Critical thinking:** Analyzing what worked, what didn’t, and why
- **Goal-setting:** Using insights to set professional learning or instructional goals
- **Action-oriented:** Applying what is learned from reflection to improve future practice

“Decision tree questions served as an anchor to deepen conversations, move from observation to reflection and identify specific areas of support for the teacher. Whether it was understanding a teacher’s current tier, unpacking the depth of modeling in a numeracy lesson, or selecting a student engagement strategy that aligned with classroom realities, the [HITS] guide was consistently used to build capacity.”

— Simple Education Foundation

## Progression of Tiers

Over time (as measured in years, as opposed to weeks or months), a professional development program that follows a tiered approach can help teachers move toward deeper instructional mastery (i.e., higher tiers) and significantly improve the quality of their teaching. The strategies in each HITS mini-guide are organized as follows: Tier 1 strategies are the most fundamental strategies in the domain, while Tiers 2 and 3 encompass more comprehensive techniques.

- A. Schedule time for the technical team, including teacher-facilitators, to study and discuss the following key ideas for the domain chosen:
  - Each teacher is unique in the levels of skills, experience, and knowledge they bring to a school, and professional development falls along a continuum, as reflected by the progression across the three tiers. Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 strategies are intended to address the challenge of tailoring TPD activities to meet teachers in different places along this continuum.
  - The strategies mentioned in the tier progressions of each domain have a high impact on learning outcomes.
  - Each tier's strategies build on the previous tier in the progression. As teachers practice, apply, and master the basic strategies of Tier 1 and move toward the more "advanced" Tiers 2 and 3 in each domain, they will be empowered with a full set of strategies to reach and support more students.
  - Real-time teaching may show that a teacher is using strategies from multiple tiers in a domain; likewise, teachers in the same TPD group may be working in different tiers. This is to be expected given that progression along a continuum is a dynamic process. Discuss ways to differentiate TPD support for these teachers.
- B. Include time to discuss and practice using the tier progression into teacher-facilitator orientation content to ensure clear and consistent understanding of the tier progressions across a given domain and how to use them to target TPD.
- C. In general, the decision tree in a given domain provides a helpful tool for determining which tier is the best starting point for teachers. However, making a decision for a very large group of teachers (such as those in an entire district) can be challenging. In such cases, data from school-based coaching and community-of-practice meetings, and even reflections collected in larger training contexts, can be used in place of the decision tree to identify the tier(s) at which teachers should start.
- D. Use the relevant mini-guide and tier strategies to inform the existing TPD activities.

### STEP 3 IN ACTION: Democratic Republic of the Congo

As part of its effort to integrate the Assessment-Informed Instruction mini-guide into the existing TPD structure, the Justice Rising team used classroom observation and school visit data from the previous year to identify the tier at which teachers should start. The team chose to use only the Tier 1 strategies, with no references to Tier 2 or Tier 3, because the data indicated that teachers had not yet mastered the basic strategies in assessment-informed instruction. The team took care to ensure that the strategies in the tier progression were not used to assign "quality" to teachers.



## Step 4: Adapting and Using the Strategies



Each HITS mini-guide offers two sample strategies within a given tier. As mentioned in step 2C above, strategies should be adapted to fit the local context; this includes adapting them to the specific grade level and the skill levels of teacher-facilitators, teachers, and students. Examples of adaptations include:

- Simplifying the language
- Defining technical terms for teacher-facilitators and teachers
- Adding explanations and local examples to clarify content
- Breaking strategies into micro-steps to ease teacher-facilitators' or teachers' understanding
- Aligning strategies with specific grade-level skills and content
- Using local vocabulary (e.g., for naming groups of students, games, etc.)
- Modifying strategies to accommodate multigrade classrooms
- Translating the HITS mini-guides into the language of instruction or coaching

### STEP 4 IN ACTION: South Africa

Teach the Nation's experience field-testing the Learning Environment mini-guide revealed the need to adapt the strategies in the HITS mini-guide to the South African context—specifically, a context where students and teachers alike spend their days in stressful environments. The organization thus incorporated trauma-informed coaching support and trauma-informed classroom teaching practices (including emotional regulation techniques) into both the mini-guide and the organization's TPD model.



“Strategies were not imposed in strict order but introduced based on the readiness and classroom needs of each fellow [new teacher].”

— Teach the Nation

“Adoption is not only about fidelity but also about resonance. A strategy only comes alive when it feels purposeful, doable, and contextual.”

— Simple Education Foundation

## Conclusion

The four steps detailed in this teacher-facilitator user guide, along with the “Steps in Action” from the field-testing of selected guides, can be used to support teacher professional development teams in initial planning, making decisions about enriching an existing TPD model, and adapting the high-impact teaching strategies offered in the suite of mini-guides to fit the local context. Training of the teacher-facilitators (whether teacher trainers, school-based peer coaches, instructional coaches, developers of TPD materials, head teachers, or school directors)—who will be the primary users of the mini-guides—should be robust and ongoing to best prepare them for their work with teachers and schools. Finally, this user guide provides support to teams as they adapt the HITS materials to fit identified teacher needs and the local context in which they deliver instruction to young learners.

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AUTHORED BY: Elizabeth Long