

*‘With a **gun**, you can kill a terrorist...*

*With **EDUCATION**, you can kill terrorism’*



Ayo celebrating with students after concluding an orientation session

Malala’s words, which echo the importance of education in securing global safety and growth, were plastered on a large billboard in the middle of the only road leading to the North East Children’s Trust (NECT) TLC, Maiduguri Borno State, Nigeria.

What first struck me was the warm, genuine love emanating from the children at the center. Before I even set a foot on ground, a group of about 20 boys who were playing soccer rushed the



Mrs. Dupe-Killa warmly welcomed by children on arrival

parked car to welcome Mrs. Dupe-Killa and Mr. Ajibola, NECT facilitators and our contact-persons.

They all hurried to tell stories of how their Sallah day celebrations went and jittered with curiosity and excitement when they spotted a stranger in their midst – me.

Things quickly accelerated from there: over the first few days, I met several of the 321 kids currently catered for at the center. From those that spoke some English, I heard a bit of their stories, their interests and their passions – and they held nothing back as they beat me in strategy games they recently learned to play!



Mrs. Dupe-Killa introduces Ayo to the staff

I was later introduced to all the staff and teachers that are responsible for the equipping the children with basic literacy and arithmetic skills, as well as providing all types of emotional and moral support when the need arises. I was quickly impressed by how committed the teachers were towards ensuring the safety, comfort and personal growth of every child under their tutelage.



Musa takes Ayo on tour of NECT Learning Center, Maiduguri

Our first goal was getting a comprehensive understanding of the facilities and infrastructure available at the center – this would help the team decide where best to place the Intel NUC server(s) for maximum coverage in learning spaces and classrooms.

Courtesy of Mr. Musa, a teacher at the center, I took an interesting and extensive tour of the center – spending ample time in the library, multimedia room and classrooms



NECT Children's Library



NECT Multimedia room

The next activity was getting a first-hand experience of how a typical class is conducted. I had the pleasure of attending a couple classes and observed the unique approaches to teaching each educator had. I witnessed teacher go the lengths of initiating one-on-one interactions with kids that seemed troubled or lagged behind and was impressed by them constantly challenging the educational norms I experienced in a typical Nigerian learning institution.

This first-hand experience of classes would help the team plan more appropriate orientation sessions and formulate more concrete case studies of where tech-aided learning (supported by the offline classroom server) would be applicable.



Phonics class for younger children



Baba Liman and classmates in English Class

The week concluded with a couple test runs of the beta NUC classroom server and a fun preliminary orientation session for NECT facilitators, Mrs. DK & Mr. Ajibola. As they eagerly jumped from KhanAcademy to PhET Simulations and flipped through the opensource textbooks, I heard one of them murmur: ‘Wow! I didn’t expect to see these many resources here...this is amazing!’ I couldn’t help but blush as they spent the next few hours exploring the classroom server, and I was so excited when Mrs. DK immediately decided to name the server: **‘The Fountain of Knowledge’** – ‘if you are thirsty for knowledge, come and drink’, she said gleefully.



Ayo & Ajibola after preliminary session

They didn’t hold back any immediate feedback regarding possible future improvements and how best to orient the teachers and children towards the helpful technology. The following conclusions were drawn:

- 1) **There is demand for more ‘fountains’ this summer** – even in it’s beta stage, the facilitators see a lot of teaching and learning potential from the server and would love at least one more NUC so that classes using the server can be simultaneously held in different locations. Furthermore, it would allow the teachers to properly orient themselves to the technology before the next iteration of the project (which we hope would have an upgraded and more useful version of the server)
- 2) We should explore the possibility of including additional resource engagements (either by licensing or using open source material), especially in terms of **interactive English Language learning courses**, middle years level content and Audiobooks.
- 3) Need to explore **integrating the NUC/learning Servers into the future Network Infrastructure at TLC** – NECT hopes to have center-wide Internet Access by the end of this year, which would hopefully enable the execution of the above possible/easier.

Goals for following week: Video call with project team; Get to know more of the kids and the staff; Organize and conduct at least 3 orientation sessions for teachers and kids; Collect feedback