

Native English Speakers in Every Village and Town
Education for Life: How NGO's and NDOE Can Work Together

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1. Native English Speakers in Every Village and Town

The best way for someone to learn another language is to hear native speakers speaking the language in an immersed environment.¹ The second best way to learn a language is to be able to hear native speaker repeatedly (Foster, 2015). The person must listen first, then speak. It is an impossibility to move every Papua New Guinean child to Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom or the United States, but it is not impossible for all Papua New Guinean children to hear native English speakers in their village. Once children have learned to read and write in the vernacular, the transition to English language learning, or any other language, is easier.

The idea seems ludicrous. Where are all of these native English speakers coming from? Who is going to pay all the money that it would take to get them to Papua New Guinea and who will pay their salary? Why would these people even want to come? What is their motivation? Are they taking over the entire educational system in Papua New Guinea? The answer to those questions is found in Education for Life.

2. Education for Life

Education for Life is a series of Android apps being developed by the Summer Institute of Linguistics-Papua New Guinea (hereafter referred to as SIL-PNG) in conjunction with the Papua New Guinea Bible Translation Association (hereafter referred to as BTA) and National Department of Education E-Learning division (hereafter referred to as NDOE). These apps will be developed for Android devices. Android devices include smart phones and tablets. Android devices make up 82.8 percent of the smart phone (IDC Corporate USA, 2015), 67.3 percent of the tablet market (Shah, 2015) and are the least expensive devices (Amazon.com, 2015)². In September 2015, Digicel PNG's website lists an Alcatel OT Pixie 2 for K159 and B-Mobile lists an Avvio 750 for K149.

Smart phones and tablets do not need to have access to a cell phone tower or Wi-Fi network to work. In remote parts of Papua New Guinea, places without access to Digicel or B-Mobile or the internet, can still get these apps by using a portable 3G/4G wireless router. The portable wireless router creates a Wi-Fi hotspot that allows smart phones and tablets to connect and download anything that is on the thumb drive. Documents, apps, government tok saves, movies, music, and curriculum can be placed on the thumb drive and people can download what they want for free, no data required. When new information is available, a new thumb drive is brought out and replaces the old thumb drive. Any device that is capable of connecting wirelessly to the internet can connect to the portable wireless router. Teachers who have computers could download the latest resources while their students are getting the newest books and games that help their learning.

Electronic books (e-books) are gaining popularity (Zickuhr & Rainie, 2014)³. For people who love to read and cannot get to the bookstores, e-books are a great way to purchase

¹ This is the way that SIL uses to help new missionaries learn the language of the country that they will live and work in.

² A search on Amazon.com revealed that the latest iPhone 6 cost approximately 680 US Dollars while the latest Samsung Galaxy S5 is approximately 400 US Dollars. Digicel PNG's website lists an Alcatel OT Pixie 2 for K159.

³ Pew Research Center reports an increase of nine percent from 2011 to 2014 (17 to 28 percent). If the person has a tablet or e-reader, the percentage increases dramatically. Tablet readers increased from 23 percent to 55 percent.

books. Often e-books can be purchased cheaper than their counterparts.⁴ E-books are downloaded over the internet and are usually less than three megabytes. A person can have thousands of e-books and the total weight of the books is the weight of the device. E-books do not get eaten by cockroaches, the pages cannot be torn and rats do not make nests out of the pages.

“My Talking Library” will be a series of e-books that will have a native English speaker reading the stories. A section of the sentence, or the entire sentence, is highlighted as the text is read. SIL International developed this technology to assist oral cultures in hearing their tok ples Scriptures, but SIL-PNG has adapted it to teach literacy. It can also make apps from any kind of texts, such as literacy materials, local stories or educational texts. Audio recordings made in any vernacular language can be included. The books are going to be essentially digital shell books that can be used in vernacular language learning. The combination highlighted text and the audio recording of the native speaker reading the text provides a model for reading fluency. This app is an essential tool for every elementary teacher teaching their vernacular in their local school.



Figure 1

Multiple books are planned to be produced and different readers will be used for books so that Papua New Guineans will be able to hear the variety of English accents that exist in the world.

English is a complex language. We have words that follow phonetic patterns and words that are “sight” words (meaning you need to memorize how the word is spelled and pronounced because it does not fit the phonetic patterns). “Enough” should be spelled inuf (like it sounds), but because of the historical spelling of the word, it remains spelled as it

⁴ Amazon.com has books available in all formats. Some books are more expensive as ebooks, but most are significantly cheaper.

presently is.⁵ Because of all of the words in English that do not sound as they are spelled, non-native English speakers struggle with pronouncing unfamiliar English words. By highlighting the sentences, “My Talking Library” will help children learn to speak English and know the words better.

“A Teacher in Every Hand” will be a series of educational games designed to engage students in learning. Discussion with the NDOE e-learning has this part being broad in scope. The educational games will cover most subjects with our initial focus being on English and Maths.

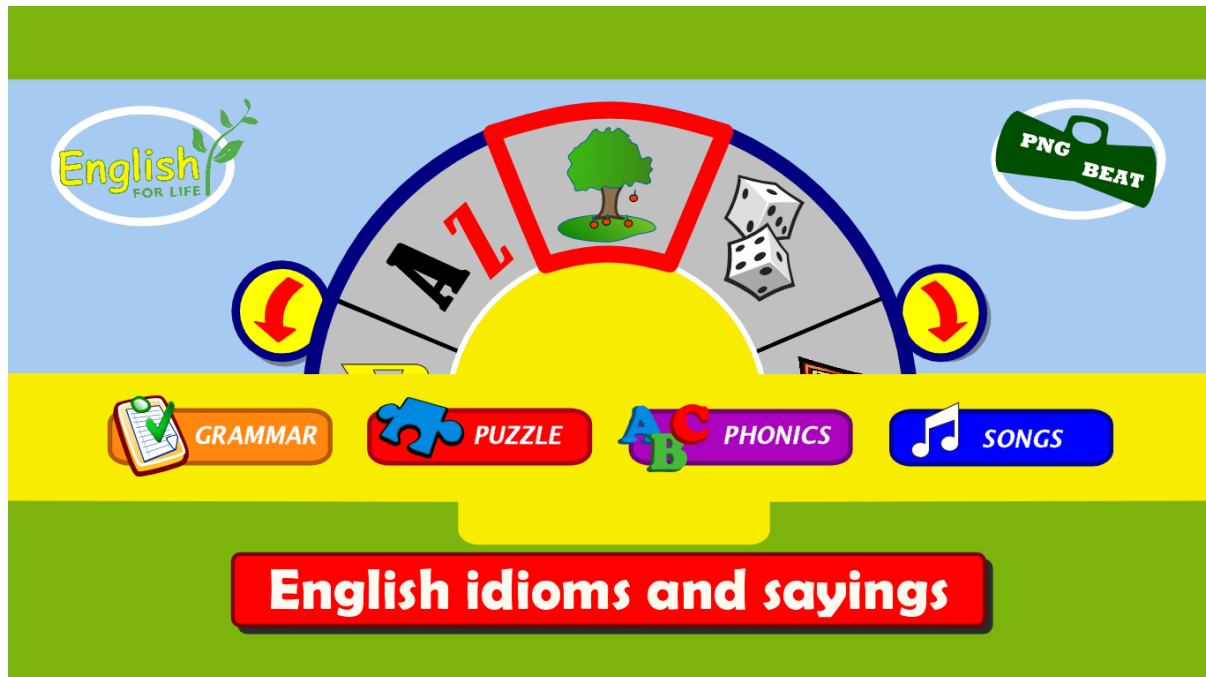


Figure 2

3. Unique Partnership

In Google Play Store, there are thousands of apps available for free that will help students with English⁶ and Maths⁷. What makes Education for Life special is the unique partnership that is being built between NDOE e-learning, BTA and SIL-PNG. Each partner brings resources that the other two partners lack. SIL-PNG is bringing technical expertise in Android programming and capacity building. BTA is bringing a large network of contacts throughout Papua New Guinea in churches and other service organizations. NDOE e-learning is bringing the need to reach the remotest parts of Papua New Guinea with quality education and the financial resources.

The uniqueness of this partnership will serve as an example for how non-government organizations, community based organizations and the national government can work together to solve the problems that face Papua New Guinea. Sustainability is critical in Education for Life. The partnership is intentionally designed with sustainability in mind. Android based phones are cheaper than Apple iPhones and are more popular. SIL and BTA

⁵ The root is Old English *genog* (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2015).

⁶ About 137,000 as of 9 September 2015.

⁷ About 661,000 as of 9 September 2015.

have experience in operating in remote regions in Papua New Guinea. SIL and BTA use solar power to run computers, charge phones, power high frequency radios, and provide light in the evenings.

By sharing this knowledge with NDOE, remote schools will benefit by having reliable power. Schools could have recharging stations for phones and tablets. PNG Power may not reach everywhere, but the sun shines everywhere in Papua New Guinea. The community would benefit as the government is able to bring current information into the remote communities by providing regular updates via thumb drives. The schools would benefit as NDOE would be able to bring current curriculum to remote regions.

SIL-PNG intends to hire five Papua New Guineans with a university degree in computer science and train them in Android programming. Our intention is to build the capacity of Papua New Guineans to do the work themselves instead of looking outside the country. BTA will assist SIL-PNG by using their connections in remote villages to promote the apps. BTA understands the sustainability issues in remote villages better than SIL-PNG or NDOE.

NDOE will provide the funding for the development of the apps and will provide much of the content. Discussions between NDOE and SIL-PNG are ongoing at this time as to how this will work. The goal is that parents will purchase an Android device and NDOE will provide all of the apps for free. It has been recommended that NDOE approach Digicel and B-Mobile to help fund this program since they will see increased sales in Android phones.

4. Summary

In order to improve education in Papua New Guinea, unique approaches need to be tried. No other country in the world is like Papua New Guinea. Challenges can be overcome when NGO's and CBO's partner with the government to solve the problems. Business can invest in education especially in areas where they will benefit the most.

Learning English as a second language is difficult when there are no native English speakers to hear, but through Education for Life, every child in Papua New Guinea can hear native English speakers read to them. Fun, interactive games can help teach children English and Maths. Education for Life is not meant to replace the teachers, but to supplement what is being taught in the classroom and to make learning fun.

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