



IEQ/Malawi Project

A partnership between the Malawi Institute of Education and
Save the Children USA/Malawi Field Office

Research Utilization and Sustainable Development: IEQ II/Malawi Experience

by

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RESEARCH UTILIZATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: IEQ/MALAWI EXPERIENCE

1.0 Introduction

Malawi is a landlocked country in East-Central Africa with a population of about 9.8 million and a growth rate of 1.9% per annum. Over 86% of the population lives in the rural area.

Like other countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa, Malawi recognizes the importance of ‘Basic Education’ since it is seen as major catalyst for development, cultural identity and national cohesion. Primary education has been the main means of providing basic education, particularly the skills of literacy, numeracy and life skills that are necessary for productive life and integration into one’s own community.

Malawi presents her view of basic education in a Country Paper that was prepared for the World Conference on **Education for All** as follows:

In general terms basic education can be seen as the imparting of literacy and numeracy and the provision of the essential knowledge, attitudes and skills that help people to become self-reliant to make a living, to continue learning, and to contribute to the development of their families, villages, and countries. Despite economic constraints, and rapid population growth, Malawi recognized the urgent need to meet the basic learning needs of children, youths and adults. These needs cannot be met by monosectoral approaches. What is needed is inter-sectoral cooperation and a strategic combination of all available resources to ensure and facilitate learning. (MALAWI GOVERNMENT, 1990)

In this view of basic education, considerable emphasis is on the skills of literacy and numeracy. In terms of practice, Malawi believes in a basic education system which is multi-sectoral so as to allow optimum utilization of resources available. The Education Development Plan for the period 1985-1995 also emphasized the need to provide the opportunity for the present generation of children to achieve permanent literacy, numeracy, ethical and socio-economic knowledge and skills

The introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 1994 by the newly elected democratic Government caused pupil enrolment to rise from 1.9 to 3.2 million children overnight. This tremendous increase in enrolment resulted in shortages of classrooms, teachers, and learning materials. In addition, the overcrowding posed serious problems for effective teaching and learning.

Sustainable Development is impossible without widespread opportunity for Basic Education. Malawi, in collaboration with donor agencies such as USAID, has embarked on formidable challenges of improving the quality of education in the country while meeting the tremendous demand.

2.0 IEQ/Malawi Research Agenda

2.1 What is IEQ/Malawi Project?

IEQ/Malawi Project is a partnership between the Malawi Institute of Education and Save the Children USA/Malawi Field Office. It is funded by USAID, and is implementing a longitudinal research study of pupils, teachers, and communities participating in the QUEST programme. The goal is to examine the factors affecting teaching and learning in language and mathematics in Standards 2 – 6. A multi-methodological approach (e.g. performance measures; classroom observations; textbook surveys) is being implemented by local researchers and educators. Unexpected findings (e.g. system instability through unexpectedly high teacher mobility, series of mismatches in language among teachers, pupils, and materials) are followed up and new insights

have deepened policy dialogues because of the concreteness of the evidence. The mutual benefits of the local partnership are also being highlighted.

2.2 The Purpose

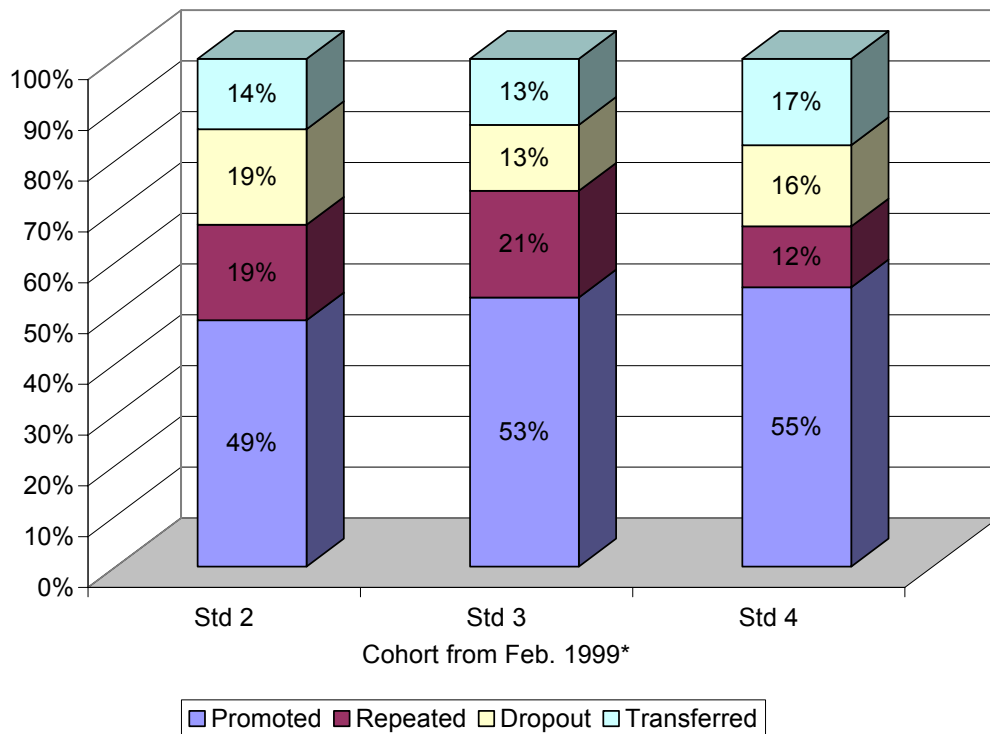
The Improving Educational Quality Project (IEQ):

- 1) learns about school and classroom experiences of educators and pupils;
- 2) works as partners with host country colleague/educators;
- 3) gathers and shares information useful to improve national policy and local practice.

For example, the data on pupil tracking shown in Figure 1 below shows that there are high repetition and dropout rate in the lower classes of primary school education.

This is very critical to policymakers and other stakeholders since the problem of repetition is a serious one because it contributes to overcrowding in the lower grades which has an adverse effect on the teaching and learning process.

Figure 1: Where were the February 1999 pupils in October, 2000?



2.3 The Process

The IEQ process is dynamic and flexible. IEQ applies a central core of values and principles which permit opportunities for redefining the research effort so as to be useful. **Education systems are not static.** Politics, policies and people change. These changes may require shifts in project focus. For example, *in Malawi IEQ responded to a request to examine Teacher Mobility caused by shortage of teachers especially in rural schools.* In Guatemala, IEQ shifted from measuring second languages to creative instruments to measure indigenous language in primary grades. In Ghana, IEQ responded to a request to examine English Language learning in P2 – P5 because Criterion Reference Posts in P6 revealed low mastery of English.

IEQ recognizes that learning occurs in context and it is this contextual knowledge which opens the doors to understanding how teachers teach, and how and what pupils learn. Dialogue centred on national issues linked to quality lead to country-specific interventions.

2.4 The Partners

IEQ partnerships feature in-country teams sometimes housed in host country institutions, e.g., Malawi Institute of Education. This is a new way for many participants to work with international colleagues. In some instances, IEQ has helped to form new units and new relationships. For example, people accustomed to working as individual researchers are now a part of a team (university researchers and local educators). Learning communities can disagree constructively. There are no winners or losers. IEQ brings together groups of people who share a common interest in improving teaching and learning. Reciprocity characterizes the relationship and positive chemistry must be present in the team.

3.0 The IEQ Interactive Framework

3.1 Assessment

IEQ assesses instructional practice, pupil performance and the classroom environment, using a variety of qualitative and quantitative instruments.

3.2 Analysis

IEQ analyzes data, then facilitates dialogue across vertical lines of the education system and the community. IEQ II teams use diverse *formats and fora* to penetrate the system and present research findings in user-friendly formats. We share our findings. Teachers, regional and national educators come together to discuss educational issues of common concern.

3.3 Action

Research findings are used by educators throughout the system to improve policy and practice. The research findings are not converted to a set of recommendations but rather presented in ways to be shared and discussed. Data may suggest a re-examination of existing policies, further examination of some surprises (the level of teacher absenteeism in some targeted intervention schools), and a more in-depth look at successes and failures such as household influences on high and low achieving girls and boys. IEQ teams join (and often create) the national dialogue on quality reform. The data gathered by IEQ teams have resulted in the re-examination of some national initiatives.

Figure 2 below illustrates the Malawi/IEQ 11 Project's Cycle of Improvement for Sustainable Development of Basic Education in Malawi.

Figure 2

The Malawi/IEQ Project – Cycle of Improvement

Assessment

Analysis & Action

Phase 1 February 1999
Baseline Study

- ↗ Observation-based information used to inform QUEST teacher trainers and support intervention development.
- ↗ Teacher subject knowledge test performance in English and Mathematics used to identify:
 - > highly skilled teacher mentors;
 - > teacher weaknesses that warrant attention
- ↗ Pupil achievement data in English, Chichewa, and Mathematics established baseline of literacy and numeracy skills.
- ↗ Findings shared and discussed with local stakeholders to build consensus on needed actions.

Phase 2 October 1999
Follow-up Survey

- ↗ High teacher mobility uncovered at follow up led to further exploration into the challenges of providing quality education with continuity.
- ↗ Information on the quality and appropriateness of instructional materials:
 - Used to help teachers recognize and adapt materials that are too difficult for children
 - Used to investigate the role of textbook ratios on pupil usage and learning.

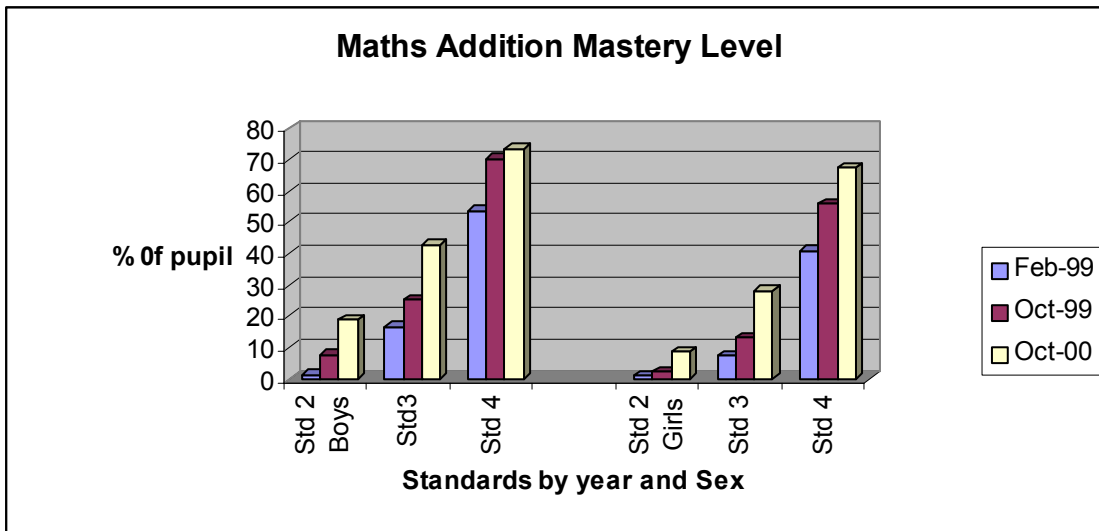
Phase 3 October 2000
Second Follow-up

- ↗ Achievement data – to inform deliberations about revamping the primary curriculum
- ↗ Language use and instructional information – to help teachers devise mother-tongue lesson plans and materials effective for pupils at each grade level

The testing of basic skills is an important issue in modern educational policymaking and research. Interest in testing basic skills appears to be linked to the widespread concern regarding the quality of education. Anxiety about a reduction in quality leads to questions like: What are the ultimate results of education? Have standards fallen compared with education in the past? Do students at the end of compulsory education have sufficient skills to take their place in society?

From IEQ/Malawi research findings, Figure 1 provides a summary of children’s mastery of basic addition from the baseline through follow-up

Figure 3: Mathematics: Mastery of Addition



Each bar in the graph represents the percentage of children in the sample who achieved mastery (defined as 80% correct). As is evident very few pupils who were in standard 2

at baseline had mastered basic addition. At the end of standard 2 (October 1999) the percentage was still very small, particularly for girls. The following year, October 2000 when most of these pupils were finishing standard 3, the percentage had increased but was still less than 30%.

By contrast, following the pupils who were in standard 4 at baseline, over half of the pupils demonstrated mastery. By the October 2000 follow-up, over 80% of the pupils had mastered basic addition. It is curious however that some children reach standard 5 without mastering of basic addition even when they are probed in mother tongue.

4.0 Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the IEQ/Malawi experience in fostering the dialogue on educational quality, It has also shown how this dialogue is influencing the improvement of educational quality at school and classroom levels. The paper has also highlighted how IEQ research teams and findings facilitate national dialogues and offer leverage for change.

Finally, the paper has discussed how IEQ pinpoints the reality of conditions, outcomes and the process of teaching and learning that takes place at classroom level. In other words, data collected, not only highlights the conditions under which children learn, but also many of the disconnects which exist within the education system.

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APPENDIX



Map of Malawi