



Inside Story

Vol. I, No. 2

An IEQ Research Brief

November 2000

Discussion Questions

Does learning in mother tongue enhance pupil performance?

Are there enough teachers who speak pupils' home language in this area?

How can education administrators ensure that pupils in grades 1 to 4 learn in mother tongue?

Teachers' Home Language and Performance of Chiyao Pupils in Mathematics, English and Chichewa

In March 1996, Malawi introduced a major reform in her school language policy. Through a letter that was circulated to all Education stakeholders, the government directed that all pupils in grades 1 to 4 should, with immediate effect, learn in mother tongue. This directive was followed by another release in which the government directed that all teachers should be posted to schools according to the needs of a region or district and not necessarily because they speak the language of the area in which the school is located.

What impact do these two policies have on the quality of education which all children receive at classroom level?

Improving Education Quality (IEQ) researchers from the Malawi Institute of Education and Save the Children Federation (Mangochi Office) investigated the role which teachers' home language plays in the implementation of mother tongue instruction policy in Mangochi and Balaka districts. The following questions were of particular interest during this investigation.

- What language do pupils in this area speak at home?
- What language do teachers in this area speak at home?
- What medium of instruction is used in schools of this area?
- How many Chiyao pupils have teachers whose home language is Chiyao?
- How do Chiyao pupils who are taught by Chiyao teachers and teachers of other languages perform in Mathematics, English and Chiyao?

(more)



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(more)

Findings

- 64% of the pupils in this area speak Chiyao, 35% speak Chichewa and 1% speaks other languages.
- 67% of the teachers in this area do not speak Chiyao.
- 32% of the headteachers interviewed indicated that they use Chiyao as a medium of instruction in their schools, whereas 85% mentioned Chichewa as a medium of instruction. (Note: Headteachers could give more than one language as a medium of instruction used in their schools).
- Only 29% of Yao pupils had teachers whose home language was Chiyao (30% for standard 2, 17% for standard 3, and 29% for standard 4).
- Chiyao pupils whose teachers used mother tongue during English lessons to help them grasp a point performed better in reading English than Chiyao pupils whose teachers were weak in using or never used mother tongue to help learners grasp a point. This pattern was also observed in Standard 4 for English reading comprehension.
- Chiyao pupils whose teachers were observed to use mother tongue to help them grasp a point performed better in Mathematics in standard 2 than those pupils whose teachers were weak in using or failed to use mother tongue during instruction. In standards 3 and 4 their difference in performance was not quite significant.
- Chiyao pupils whose teachers used mother tongue (i.e., Chiyao) during Chichewa lessons performed less well in Chichewa reading and comprehension than those pupils whose teachers did not use mother tongue for Chichewa instruction.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Mother tongue instruction policy for pupils in standards 1 to 4 should be given support.
2. Teacher posting policy should be reviewed. Teachers in standards 1 to 4 should be those that can speak the pupils' home language so that they implement the school language policy successfully.
3. Instructional materials for standards 1 to 4 should be in the pupils' home language.
4. In-service courses should be organized for serving teachers on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction.
5. Teacher training colleges should begin preparing teachers for mother tongue instruction in standards 1 to 4.

"Inside Story" is part of the IEQ Research Study series, sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development. The complete report may be obtained from on Docks Jere at the Malawi Institute of Education (265-536242). The report also is available on the Internet at www.ieq.org. Contract Number: HNE-I-00-97-00029-00



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