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BEFORE & AFTER

Teaching how to read: now easier and more effective than before

...as USAID program drills teachers on new instructional practices



PHOTOS: Gemini Kamteme, courtesy of Mponda Primary School -Zomba

BEFORE: *“Surely, for a long time the approaches of getting our infant and junior class learners to know how to read have not been very effective. Everybody seems to be doing it his or her own way despite going through numerous trainings on literacy development programs.”*

Mrs Annie Phiri, a standard 3 teacher at Mponda Primary School in Zomba, Malawi.



AFTER: *A learner now engaged in ‘word wall’ formation question. She easily points out to a word in response to the teacher*

Telling Our Story

U.S. Agency for International Development

VERY OFTEN FACTS and figures have it that today’s learners are slow to muster reading and writing skills in many primary schools of Malawi due to inadequate books. Given enough books, still their content is criticized by some as poorly presented material. On the other hand teachers have also been blamed on the same for their somewhat old and ineffective teaching techniques acquired either from college or on-service. But for how long and how far should this blame game go? This is the question at which the minds of many Malawian parents and guardians have reeled for a long time that needs a prompt and thoughtful answer. Thanks to USAID who seems to provide the answer! “Surely, for a long time the approaches of getting our infant and junior class learners to know how to read have not been very effective. Everybody seems to be doing it his or her own way despite going through numerous trainings on literacy development programs,” lamented Mrs Annie Phiri, a Standard 3 teacher at Mponda Primary School in Zomba. Phiri also cited lack of sharing notes among teachers after trainings. The situation on the ground is that there are a good number of methodologies on literacy development as evidenced from Mponda and the surrounding schools. But still the learners struggled to achieve better results in reading until recently.

However, Phiri now cherishes her long awaited dream –to see learners acquire accelerated reading skills. She owes it all to a 3-year USAID-funded program which targeted a few schools including hers, aiming at improving reading and teaching skills in learners and teachers respectively. The program also provided over 2,000 story-based books of different titles for learners along with their instructional materials for teachers. Initially the USAID program mounted a 2-day Training of Trainers workshop at Malawi Institute of Education in Zomba for 7 teachers drawn from each targeted school. The aim of the training was to drill and equip these teachers with new teaching methodologies and thereafter train their colleagues. For example, teachers learnt how to quickly get a learner to read and understand a story from a book cover and how to effectively deliver a 110-minute reading lesson without boring the learners getting.

Mrs Phiri and some teachers from Mponda School attended the training. Describing her daily routine she said, “Every Tuesday we have a guided reading during which I read aloud a story from a book to the learners. And on the next day –Wednesday I ask them questions from the previous reading for assessment.” The approach which starts with alphabet letters; word wall formation through writing the word and sentence making among others, enables learners to get more involved leaving them with an imprint of the words on their minds. An aspect also critically enhanced by the story illustrations.

The program’s trainings continue to bear fruits on both parties: teachers can teach effectively using the acquired instructions and liaise amongst themselves unlike before; while among the learners, the books are establishing a reading culture through their interesting stories. Phiri now has a cohort of 89 learners: previously 1 in 3 could not read but now everyone can read. Unlike any other reigning instructional practices on the ground, the read aloud approach is by