CASE STUDY

Classmate computers excite pupils

Real life-changing machines for a modern learner!

Above (L): Chisomo Mwazozo, (standard 8) doing what he knows best during one of their computer lessons

"Technology like computers is a must in today's life. They must be made available at all schools and not only in town so that we grow with technology. Our teacher says it is helpful in research as you can use internet. The sooner we learn the computer at young age, the better …we will get used to it and be at the same pace with our peers in the developed world."

Praise Gogoda, a 12-year old standard 8 girl at Lilongwe TTC Demonstration School explains how the computers have changed her life

DESPITE MAKING PRIMARY education in Malawi free over a decade and a half ago in an effort to make basic literacy education accessible to all, the initiative has continued to suffer setbacks. There are too few qualified teachers, inadequate classrooms, and writing materials. For a nation whose national budget struggles to source basic exercise books for its children, it goes without saying that making technologies such as computers available to learners is a farfetched dream. And yet, how life-changing such a development would be to Malawian children!

One just has to visit Lilongwe Demonstration Primary School (LDPS) which is under Lilongwe Teachers Training College and see for herself how introducing children to modern technologies can impact their learning. USAID through the Read Malawi Project in Malawi, supplied laptop computers to the two demonstration schools and the benefits are crystal clear for all to see:

"I now know how a computer works. I can write notes using it and save my documents. The computer is a very interesting machine, when I write my composition, it alerts me when my spelling is wrong by underlining the word with a red line. The computer lessons also help us to learn in groups and teach one another. At times the computer makes you think critically when drawing shapes, coloring," says Chisomo Mwazozo, a standard 8 learner at LDPS.

The 15 year-old standard eight boy had never used a computer until two years ago when USAID introduced the classmates. He now sets in his chair, flaps the machine open and in no time he is punching on the keyboard.

"I want to be a surgeon so I can help my own people," he says busy on his computer.

Lilongwe Teachers College has a computer lab where the learner laptops are stored. The learners have the chance to visit the lab every Friday for two hours of lessons. They started with functions of a computer, components, writing and now they can almost do everything on their own. While in standard six they had ICT lessons under Social Studies, those lessons were only in theory. With the laptops, learners are doing the practical aspect, thanks to the US government. His classmate, 12 year-old Praise Gogoda, explained how the computers have changed her life:

"It is a fantastic machine. It is faster than a pen. It has helped me quite a lot in English and I score 90-100% during exercises. I want to become an accountant like my father and the teacher tells me it can calculate figures as well."

Praise has become an instant computer. Recently, under the supervision of her teacher, she used the computer to type standard five examinations for the school and print them. The laptops were provided to two demonstration schools in Malawi, Lilongwe in the central region of Malawi and Blantyre Teachers Training College in the south. Praise has a message to all:

"Technology like computers is a must in today's life. They must be made available at all schools and not only in town so that we grow with technology. Our teacher says it is helpful in research as you can use internet. The sooner we learn the computer at young age, the better …we will get used to it and be at the same pace with our peers in the developed world."