



Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all

Malawi: Fact Sheet

Monitoring global education targets after 2015

The pace of progress towards universal primary education, lower secondary education and youth literacy is too slow, particularly for the disadvantaged. Fewer than 5% of rural poor girls were completing lower secondary school in Malawi in 2010. The richest boys are expected to all be completing primary education in 2018 but the poorest girls will not catch up for another half a century - until 2073. The projections for lower secondary education are worse. The richest boys will all be completing lower secondary education in 2045 but the poorest girls won't do so until well into the next century –2114.

The gap in the amount of time spent in school between the poorest rural females (3.8 years) and the richest urban males (10.5 years) barely changed between 2000 and 2010. Post-2015 goals need to include a commitment to make sure the most disadvantaged groups achieve benchmarks set for goals. Failure to do so could mean that measurement of progress continues to mask the fact that the advantaged benefit the most.

Trends in financing Education for All

New EFA goals after 2015 should set a target for all countries to allocate at least 6% of GNP to education and at least 20% of total government expenditure on education. Malawi spent on average 5.5% of GNP on education in 2011 and 15% of total government expenditure on education. If Malawi could increase the share of the budget allocated to education to 20%, then, by 2015, it could be spending US\$58 instead of US\$30 per primary school child.

An increase in public spending needs to take into account how the cost of education is currently shared so that the poorest can benefit. Adopting a national accounts approach to education, new analysis for this Report shows that of the total primary education expenditure in Malawi, households covered 16%; they cover 32% of the costs of lower secondary education. On the other hand, aid accounts for 29% of total spending in primary education. These calculations show that, first, education is far from free and, second, external assistance continues to be very important for certain countries in the region.

To achieve Education for All it is necessary not only to increase domestic resources for education but also to ensure that they are spent on improving education opportunities for the most marginalized. One such successful programme is Malawi's Social Cash Transfer Scheme, which provides US\$14 per month to more than 26,000 households to fight poverty and hunger and help families send their children to school

Changes in the donor landscape have dramatically affected the amount of resources available for education in the country: aid to basic education almost halved over the space of one year, largely due to a political impasse between the donor community and the government at that time. EU institutions, for example, reduced their overall aid to basic education by 31%, which resulted in a reduction of 36% for low income countries, with Malawi one of the worst affected by the change.

The global learning crisis: action is urgent

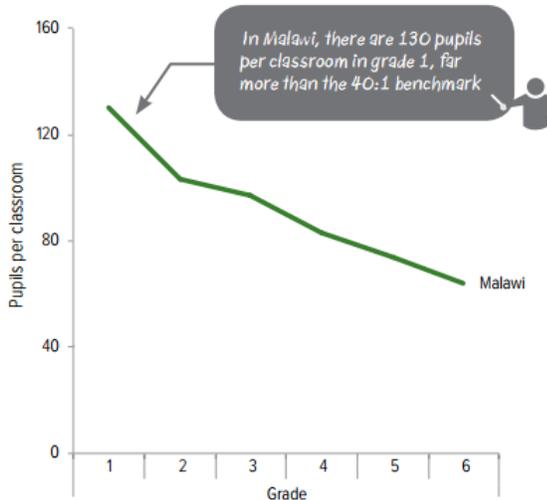
Globally, 250 million children of primary school age are not learning the basics in reading, whether they are in school or not. In Malawi, very few children are learning the basics. A quarter of children are spending at least four years in school and not learning anything. Around a third of children do not even manage to reach Grade 4.

There is a huge teacher shortage in Malawi

Malawi has one of the world's most dramatic teacher shortages, equivalent to 2% of the global teacher posts standing empty. This means children are often squeezed into overcrowded classrooms, with those in early grades particularly disadvantaged. Education quality must be improved by reducing class size.

Children in early grades often learn in overcrowded classrooms

Pupil/classroom ratio in public primary schools by grade, selected sub-Saharan African countries, 2011



Source: UIS database.

In Malawi, there are 130 children per class in grade 1, on average, compared with 64 in the last grade. The pupil/teacher ratio in primary school has increased from 63:1 in 1999 to is 76:1 in 2011.

The teaching force is growing at just 1% per year, far from sufficient to reduce the pupil/teacher ratio from 76:1 to 40:1.

For Malawi to achieve Universal primary education by 2015, it would need to increase its teaching force by 15% annually between 2011 and 2015. The capacity of its teacher education programmes is currently far from sufficient to meet this need. Unless urgent action is taken, the country is unlikely to close the teacher gap by 2030.

Shortages are particularly problematic for rural areas, where teachers, especially women, are often unwilling to teach. These circumstances contribute to some of the lowest learning outcomes in the world.

The expansion in Malawi's education system has yet to improve literacy among young people because of the poor quality of schooling.

Many young people who have spent just a few years in school do not develop literacy skills – and in some cases even completing primary school is not always a guarantee for literacy. In Malawi, after completing up to four years of school, over 70% emerge illiterate. After 5-6 years in school, around 30% still emerge illiterate.

In Malawi, literacy rates among those aged 15-24 years increased slowly from a high starting point: from 72% in 2000 to only 77% in 2010.

Youth literacy is improving, but not always fast enough for most disadvantaged groups: Young people from poorer households are far less likely to be able to read. Around 90% of the richest young people are literate,

compared to 60% of the poorest. The poorest young women in the country are not expected to be universally literate until 2064.

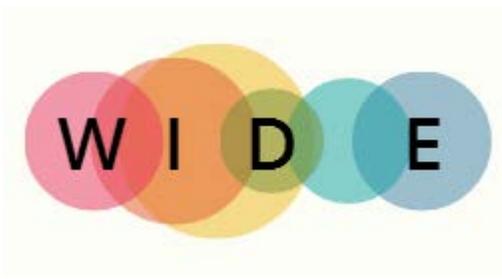
Making teaching quality a national priority

Strong national policies that make teaching quality and learning a high priority are essential to ensure that all children in school actually obtain the skills and knowledge they are meant to acquire.

In some countries, the engagement of teacher unions has improved policies aimed at helping disadvantaged groups. Sometimes teachers' union activities may harm student learning opportunities, however. Teachers campaigning for their rights should ensure that they also tackle issues holding back progress in learning, but do not always do so.

Wide inequalities in learning

World Inequality Database on Education: www.education-inequalities.org



The World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE) highlights the powerful influence of circumstances, such as wealth, gender, ethnicity and location, over which people have little control but which play an important role in shaping their opportunities for education. It draws attention to unacceptable levels of inequality in access and learning across countries and within countries, with the aim of helping to inform policy design and public debate.

In Malawi, 63% of grade 6 children who took part in a regional assessment in 2007 achieved the minimum learning standard in reading. While 73% of the richest reached this standard only 58% of the poorest did so. However, not all children, in particular the poorest, reached grade 6 and so did not participate in the test. As a result, only 40% of all children of primary school age achieved the minimum learning standard – and the gap between the poorest and the richest more than doubles.

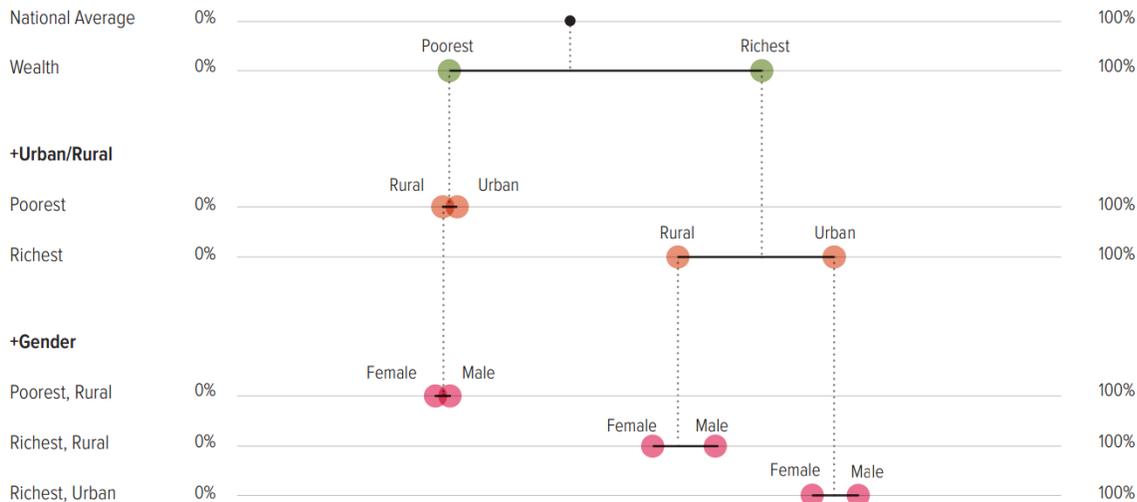
Learned basics in reading ⓘ

Primary, SACMEQ, 2007, all children

Primary, SACMEQ, 2007, only children in school



The interaction between geography, gender and poverty is a potent source of exclusion. For example, 75% of rich boys living in urban areas achieved the minimum standard compared to 24% of poor girls living in rural areas.



A four-part strategy for providing the best teachers

1. Attract the best teachers

The quality of an education system is only as good as the quality of its teachers. It is not enough just to want to teach. People should enter the profession having received a good education themselves. They need to have completed at least secondary schooling of appropriate quality and relevance, so that they have a sound knowledge of the subjects they will be teaching and the ability to acquire the skills needed to teach. Almost 6% of Malawi's upper secondary school graduates would need to become primary school teachers if the country is to reach universal primary education by 2020.

Policy-makers need to focus their attention also on achieving the right mix of teachers, including recruiting teachers from under-represented groups. Flexible policies for entry qualifications may be required to increase the number of female teachers and improve the diversity of the teaching force.

Recruiting teachers from ethnic minorities to work in their own communities ensures that children are taught by teachers familiar with their culture and language.

2. Improve teacher education so all children can learn

Initial teacher education should make up for weak subject knowledge. Prospective teachers should ideally enter teacher education programmes knowing enough about the subjects they are going to teach. In some income countries, however, teachers often enter the profession lacking core subject knowledge because their own education has been poor. In such circumstances, initial teacher education programmes need to ensure that all trainees acquire a good understanding of the subjects they will be teaching.

Teachers need to be trained to teach, particularly in early grades. Teacher education programmes need to support teachers in being able to teach early reading skills in more than one language and to use local language materials effectively.

Preparing teachers to support learners from diverse backgrounds is essential. As a result of inadequate training, many newly qualified teachers are not confident that they have the skills necessary to support children with more challenging learning needs.

Pre-service education is vital to provide teachers with the skills to teach multiple grades, ages and abilities in one classroom.

Initial teacher education needs to provide classroom experience. To address this need, an NGO teacher education programme in Malawi established teacher training colleges in Malawi that offer pre-service education designed to equip new teachers with the skills necessary for rural schools. Some 72% of the participants said the school practice component was the area of study that most prepared them for teaching in rural areas. In addition, 80% of them gained experience in providing remedial support to students, compared with 14% in government colleges.

Teachers' skills need to be improved through ongoing education. Regular supervision and ongoing training have the potential to address knowledge gaps and upgrade and reinforce acquired skills. In Malawi, community teachers recruited into the government's second-chance basic education programme participate in weekly training and planning sessions run by supervisors and receive more intensive training in both content and teaching methods during holidays, led by tutors from government teacher training colleges.

Mentoring new teachers once they are in the classroom is vital, particularly in poorer countries where teachers have limited prior practical experience.

Trainers need training too. The key role that teacher educators play in shaping teachers' skills is often the most neglected aspect of teacher preparation systems. Curriculum reform requires teacher educators to be adequately prepared to orient teachers in curriculum changes.

Distance education can boost countries' capacity to train teachers. In Malawi, the introduction of the current distance education programme doubled the government's capacity to supply teachers. In one USAID-funded programme, battery-powered DVD players and interactive instructional DVDs were used to assist with training. Distance teacher education programmes have the potential to reach more future teachers at lower cost than programmes in teacher education institutions. Costs per student graduating from distance programmes have been estimated at between one-third and two-thirds of conventional programmes.

3. Get teachers where they are most needed

Inequality in deployment leads not only to fewer teachers in deprived areas but also to disadvantaged students being taught by teachers with weaker subject knowledge, exacerbating inequality in learning outcomes. Unequal distribution of teachers is one reason some children leave school before learning the basics. Malawi has one of the world's most severe teacher shortages but also allocates teachers inefficiently, deploying them based on aggregate district enrolment rather than according to individual school requirements. As a result, there are surpluses in urban schools and severe shortages in rural areas, aggravating poor learning outcomes

Financial incentives and good housing can promote deployment to remote or rural areas. Teachers in Malawi are offered a rural hardship allowance which can raise the basic pay of a newly recruited teacher by as much as a quarter.

Local recruitment of teachers to serve in their own communities can also address teacher shortages in remote or disadvantaged areas and can result in lower teacher attrition. However, some of the most disadvantaged communities lack competent applicants where access to primary schooling is low.

Women are also less likely than men to work in disadvantaged areas. In Malawi, a female teacher can request a posting to another district to follow her husband and cannot be denied the opportunity to join him, no matter where he is.

4. Provide incentives to retain the best teachers

Governments should ensure that teachers earn at least enough to lift their families above the poverty line and make their pay competitive with comparable professions. Those entering the profession in Malawi, however, barely have enough to live on: in 2007/2008 their salary was equivalent to just US\$4 per day, which will do little to keep the best teachers in the profession.

Teachers' salaries – and the rates at which they increase – are conventionally determined by formal qualifications, the amount of training and years of experience. But pay structures based on these criteria do not necessarily lead to better learning outcomes. Using multiple evaluators is one way of producing fair and successful teacher appraisals, but requires considerable time and resources on the part of the evaluators and those being evaluated.

Relating teachers' pay to the performance of their students is an alternative approach that has intuitive appeal. But it is difficult to find reliable ways to evaluate which teachers are the best and add the most value. Performance-related pay can also have unintended side effects on teaching and learning and may reward only those schools and teachers whose students are already performing well, rather than those that have helped children improve the most, to the detriment of disadvantaged learners.

However, a more appropriate way of motivating teachers to improve education quality is to offer an attractive career path, with promotion criteria that take into account initiatives by teachers in addressing diversity and supporting weak students. Many teachers have limited prospects of promotion, however. Those teaching in remote areas may be especially affected.

Strengthening teacher governance

If days are lost because teachers are absent or devote more attention to private tuition than classroom teaching, the learning of the poorest children can be harmed. Absenteeism can also reinforce gender disparities.

Understanding the reasons behind these problems is crucial for the design of effective strategies to solve them. Strong school leadership is required to ensure that teachers show up on time, work a full week and provide equal support to all. In some countries, high levels of absenteeism are due to many teachers missing more school days than can be explained by non-teaching duties or illness, rather than extreme absenteeism by a minority of teachers who might be easily identified. In high HIV prevalence districts in Malawi, the three main reasons primary teachers gave for absence from school were personal sickness, attending funerals and caring for sick family members. Malawi helps improve living conditions for HIV-positive teachers, including greater access to treatment, provision of nutritional supplements and monthly allowances or loans.

Even though teacher absenteeism is widespread in some countries, it is not inevitable, which suggests it is a response to working conditions. In Malawi, for instance, where teachers' pay is low and payment often erratic, 1 in 10 teachers stated that they were frequently absent from school in connection with financial

concerns, such as travelling to collect salaries or dealing with loan payments.

Combining monitoring with incentives could be more beneficial than penalties for tackling absenteeism. Other interventions aimed at enhancing teacher accountability are often expected to reduce teacher absenteeism, but do not necessarily do so. Greater involvement of parents and the community in school management, for example, had limited impact on teacher attendance in India and no impact on student achievement.

Governments should work more closely with teacher unions and teachers to formulate policies and adopt codes of conduct to tackle unprofessional behaviour such as persistent absenteeism and gender-based violence. Codes of practice should be consistent with legal frameworks for child rights and protection and a range of penalties, such as suspension and interdiction, clearly stipulated.

Private tutoring by teachers reinforces disparities between students whose parents can afford to pay the fees and those who cannot.

Private schools that charge low fees are seen by some as one way of expanding access to better quality education for disadvantaged children in areas where government schools are failing. Such schools are also seen as a less expensive way of achieving quality, because they can recruit teachers at lower cost than government schools. Advocates of low fee private schools argue that students in these schools achieve better learning outcomes than students in government schools, but such differences arise partly because teachers in government schools often face more difficult conditions, teaching larger classes and children with a wider diversity of learning needs.

Gender-based violence in schools is a major barrier to quality and equality in education. A survey in Malawi found that around one-fifth of teachers said they were aware of teachers coercing or forcing girls into sexual relationships. Of those who reported awareness of such incidents, almost three-quarters knew of cases happening at their own school.

Programmes and policies addressing gender discrimination and gender-based violence need to protect and empower girls, challenge entrenched practices, bring perpetrators to light and take action against them. Legal and policy frameworks that provide general protection for children need to be strengthened and publicized, and teachers need to be made aware of their own roles and responsibilities.

Advocacy and lobbying constitute an important first step in seeing that policies tackling gender-based violence are in place and enforced. In Malawi, a project lobbied successfully for revisions to codes of conduct and stronger reporting mechanisms. When it ran an awareness campaign, the number of teachers who said they knew how to report a code violation rose by over one-third

Curriculum and assessment strategies that improve learning

Policy-makers should ensure the curriculum focuses on securing strong foundation skills for all, is delivered at an appropriate pace and in a language children understand.

Governments should ensure that adequate and relevant resources are in place to support learning from the earliest years and build a culture of reading. One example is the Save the Children Literacy Boost programme, first implemented in a small selection of countries including Malawi. The programme aims to improve early grade reading skills in government schools through teacher- and community-focused interventions. Evaluations showed greater learning gains by children in Literacy Boost schools than by their peers, including a reduction in the number of children whose scores were zero, suggesting that the programme benefited low achievers.

The quality of pre-school education makes a crucial difference to children's learning in early primary grades. Support outside school hours can help. In Malawi, pupils whose parents had received training to support their children's reading made greater vocabulary gains than those whose parents had not.

Curricula that do not acknowledge and address issues of inclusion can alienate disadvantaged groups within the classroom, and so limit their chances to learn effectively. In some countries, curricula reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. Where gender-responsive curricula have been developed, test scores measuring attitudes on several gender-related issues improved.

Getting out-of-school children back into school and learning is vital. Governments and donor agencies should support accelerated learning programmes to achieve this goal. Teachers are generally recruited from surrounding communities, ensuring a common cultural and linguistic background and enhancing accountability to community members, as is the case in Malawi. Of learners aged 14 to 17 who completed Malawi's Complementary Basic Education programme, 35% achieved numeracy skills equivalent to grade 5 in formal schools.

Teachers' ability to use ICT as an educational resource plays a critical role in improving learning. Simply introducing computers in schools is not enough to improve learning, nor can they replace teachers as the primary source of classroom instruction.

Some countries have made great strides in using national assessments to identify children who need extra attention. Classroom-based learning assessments help teachers identify students who are struggling to learn, diagnose their learning difficulties and choose strategies to support them. Students can also make considerable gains if they are offered more opportunities to monitor their own learning.

Targeted additional support via trained teaching assistants or community volunteers is another key way of improving learning for students at risk of falling behind.