



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION COUNTRY PROFILE

Malawi

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1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20523

PREPARED BY

Dexis Consulting Group

1412 Eye Street NW, Washington, DC 20005

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ABBREVIATIONS

CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CPEA	Coordinating Primary Education Advisor
EGIDS	Expanded Intergenerational Disruption Scale
EGR	Early Grade Reading
ESIP	Education Sector Implementation Plan
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
INSET	In-Service Training
IPTE	Initial Primary Teacher Education
JCE	Junior Certificate of Education
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
L1	First Language
L2	Second (or additional) Language
LOI	Language of Instruction
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology
MSCE	Malawi School Certificate of Education
NESP	National Education Sector Plan
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NRS	National Reading Strategy
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
PCAR	Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform
PEA	Primary Education Advisor
REFAM	Reading for All Malawi
TDC	Teacher Development Center
TTC	Teacher Training College
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

INTRODUCTION

Enhancing reading skills in the early grades is a key education priority for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Despite some improvements in access and learning in sub-Saharan Africa, literacy levels in the early grades remain low, and progress has been slow. Efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the early grades have led to an increased focus on the role of the language of instruction (LOI). Recent research has demonstrated that mismatches between the LOI and the language that students and teachers speak and understand best, can hamper effective teaching and learning (University Research Co., 2019). Thus, it is critical to understand the LOI policy and linguistic context of a country when trying to design programs to improve literacy and learning outcomes.

Currently, USAID supports **Early Grade Reading (EGR) initiatives in 19 countries across sub-Saharan Africa**. Many policies in these countries have recently shifted toward adopting the mother tongue as the language for initial literacy acquisition, and then transitioning to a second or additional language, such as a regional, national, or international language, as the subsequent LOI.

Government policies and strategies related to teachers and LOI reflect country priorities, approaches, and objectives for early grade literacy. During the design-phase of donor-funded reading programs, decisions are made regarding the manner and extent to which national policies are incorporated into project design, and when alternative approaches or additional elements need to be considered. However, government policies on LOI, and other information relevant for informing design, are often difficult to find and are not easily accessible.

The LOI country profiles aim to address this need. The profiles will allow the USAID Africa Bureau, USAID Missions, and partner organizations to quickly understand the country's linguistic and policy context in order to design



an approach that most effectively helps improve EGR outcomes. These profiles, designed for each of the 19 countries with current or upcoming USAID EGR initiatives, aim to clearly and succinctly describe and illustrate the country's linguistic landscape and official LOI policy. This country profile in particular provides information on language policy and practice in Malawi.

LINGUISTIC CONTEXT

According to SIL International's *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, there are 17 languages in Malawi. All are currently in use. Of these, 13 are indigenous and four are non-indigenous. Furthermore, three are institutional, seven are developing, six are vigorous, and one is in trouble (Eberhard, Simons & Fennig, 2020). For more information on how languages are categorized on the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS), please see Table 1.

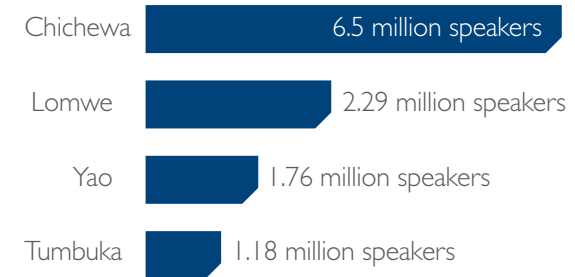
Chichewa is the most widely spoken indigenous language in Malawi, with 6.5 million speakers out of a total population of 17.56 million. Spoken in the west central and southwest regions of the country, Chichewa is considered the language of national identity (Eberhard et al., 2020). The second most widely spoken language is Lomwe, an indigenous language that is spoken by 2.29 million people in Malawi. Yao and Tumbuka, both indigenous languages, are spoken by 1.76 million and 1.18 million speakers, respectively. Meanwhile, English, the official language, is spoken by 880,000 Malawians. English is spoken only in major cities, and most people speak it as a second language (L2) (Beaton Galafa, 2018). Other less widely spoken languages are Nyakyusa-Ngonde (149,000 speakers), Sena (468,000 speakers), and Tonga (271,000

Table 1. Assessing Language Vitality: EGIDS Scale

Institutional	The language is used by institutions beyond the home and community
Developing	The language is in vigorous use and with literature in a standardized form
Vigorous	The language is not standardized but it is used among all generations
In Trouble	Intergenerational transmission is breaking down
Dying	Only fluent users, if any, are middle-aged or older
Extinct	The language is not used

Source: SIL International, n.d. For more information, please see: www.ethnologue.com/about/language-info

Most widely-spoken languages in Malawi

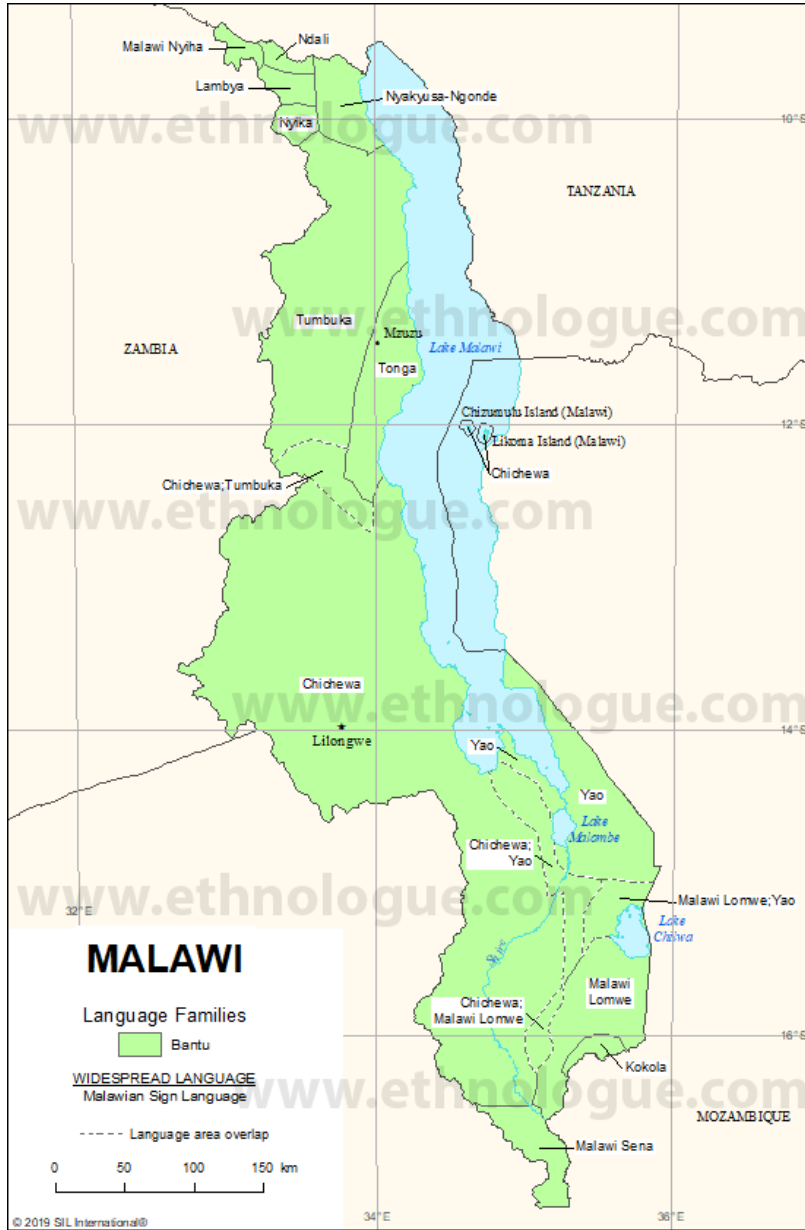


Source: Eberhard et al., 2020

Figure 1. Map of Malawi



Figure 2. Linguistic Mapping



Source: Eberhard, David M., Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (eds.). (2020). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. Twenty-third edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>.

speakers). Vigorous indigenous languages with less than 100,000 speakers include Kacci, Kokola, Lamyā, Ndali, and Nyika (Eberhard et al., 2020).

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION POLICY

In 1996, a directive from the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) stated that the language of instruction for Grades 1-4 should be the mother tongue, and Chichewa and English were to be taught as subjects. Starting in Grade 5, instruction would take place in English.

However, the Education Act of 2013 reversed this policy, stating that the medium of instruction in all public schools and colleges should be English (Malawi Government, 2013). This policy has not been implemented widely, as most students have no exposure to English before their first day of school, and thus are not equipped to begin learning in English (Kamwendo, 2016). Further barriers to the policy's implementation include teachers' low levels of proficiency in English and a lack of teaching materials in English (Galafa, 2018). The Minister of Education has since acknowledged that the conditions are not in place for implementation of the policy and expressed that full implementation should wait until these conditions were cultivated (School-to-School International, 2017).

The National Reading Strategy (NRS), developed by a taskforce that included representatives from the MoEST, USAID, implementing partners, and NGOs, offered further guidance on the language of instruction. The strategy proposed a sole focus on English, Chichewa, and mathematics in Grades 1 and 2, and developed reading standards for teaching Chichewa as well as English as a second language in Grades 1 to 4 (UNICEF, 2016). Thus, the current general practice is instruction in Chichewa, with English taught as a second language for Grades 1 to 4, and instruction in English from Grade 5 onward. In schools where students have not been exposed to Chichewa, teachers may use the students' mother tongue language, if they are able. However, this is often not the case since teacher deployment decisions do not account for teachers' language proficiencies (Galafa, 2018).

CLASS TIME

Class time for lower primary students in Malawi is divided between learning Chichewa, English, mathematics, and other subjects. Prior to the Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform (PCAR), initiated in 2001, there were 14 subjects taught in Grades 1-4 (Chirwa & Naidoo, 2014). Subjects were divided across 30 periods each week, with an average time per period of 30 minutes in Grade 1 and 35 minutes in Grades 2-4, for a total of 15 hours of instructional time in Grade 1 and 17.5 in Grades 2 to 4 (UNESCO, 2010).

With PCAR, the curriculum shifted from being content-based to outcomes-based. The number of subjects taught was reduced to nine, and the focus shifted to the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills at the earliest stage of a learner's education (Chirwa & Naidoo, 2014). In fact, 40% of class time was to be spent developing students' literacy in Chichewa and English, while 35% of class time was dedicated to numeracy. Other subjects include Social and Environmental Sciences, Religious Education, Expressive Arts, and Life Skills. For all grades, each period lasts 30 minutes. See Table 2 for a list of the lower primary content areas as of 2011.

With the Malawian government's establishment of the NRS in 2014, the literacy curriculum and instructional approach shifted from a whole-word approach to reading to a phonics-based approach (School-to-School International, 2017). The NRS guidelines also stated that content areas in Grades 1 and 2 should be limited to Chichewa, English, and mathematics, with the full range of content areas being introduced in Grade 3. The NRS also advised that instructional time for reading be increased to 60 minutes per day.

PRE-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING CURRICULUM FOR LITERACY

To be eligible for training as a primary school teacher, candidates must have earned a Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE), which is awarded upon passing the final examination at the secondary school level (JICA, 2012). However, not all teachers have obtained an MSCE. In 2011, 75% of primary school teachers held an MSCE, and 25% had a Junior Certificate of Education (JCE), meaning they completed lower secondary but not upper secondary schooling (JICA, 2012).

Pre-service training is offered at 12 teacher training colleges (TTCs) across Malawi through the Initial Primary Teacher Education (IPTE) and Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programs. The most common form of teacher preparation is the IPTE, which entails one year of training in a TTC, which focuses on how to teach all subjects covered in the primary curriculum, followed by a year of school-based training with

Table 2. Lower primary curricular subjects and number of periods for literacy

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4
Chichewa (7 periods)	Chichewa (9 periods)	Chichewa (7 periods)	Chichewa
English (3 periods)	English (five periods)	English (6 periods)	English
Mathematics/ Numeracy	Mathematics/ Numeracy	Mathematics/ Numeracy	Mathematics/ Numeracy
Expressive Arts	Expressive Arts	Expressive Arts	Expressive Arts
Bible Knowledge	Bible Knowledge	Bible Knowledge	Bible Knowledge
Religious Education	Religious Education	Religious Education	Religious Education
Introduction to School Life and Learning	Life Skills	Life Skills	Life Skills
—	—	Social and Environmental Sciences	Social and Environmental Sciences
—	—	—	Agriculture
—	—	—	Science and Technology

Source: Creative Associate International, Inc., RTI International & Seward Inc, 2011.

the support of a tutor. The ODL program was initiated in 2009 in response to teacher shortages across the country and traditional trainings at TTCs not producing enough trained teachers to meet the demand (Salagi, 2018). As such, the ODL program entails two to three weeks of training at a TTC, followed by school-based training for two to three years. Both the IPTe and ODL programs have been revised to align with the new outcomes-based curriculum and include training on the subjects covered by curriculum as well as teaching methods and principles of outcomes-based education.

The German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) is supporting pre-service teacher training and the implementation of the outcomes-based curriculum through a four-year (2018 - 2022) initiative called **Improving Basic Education in Malawi.**¹ In particular, the project aims to improve the capacities of lecturers in TTCs to support the implementation of the new primary curriculum and increase mentoring and support for student teachers.

TEACHER LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY/LANGUAGE SPECIFIC TRAINING

The language policy stipulates that English should be used as the LOI in TTCs. Thus, local language skills are not developed as part of the pre-service teacher training outside of subject-based training in Chichewa (Chitera, 2010). Further, teachers' local language skills are not currently considered in deployment decisions so mismatches may occur between teachers' language skills and the LI of their students (Galafa, 2018).

At the same time, challenges remain around teachers' English language proficiency. Primary school teachers' low levels of proficiency in English has remained an impediment to implementing English as the LOI for all grades, as prescribed by the 2013 language policy (School-to-School International, 2017).

TEACHER IN-SERVICE

Since 2008, the MoEST has promoted Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for primary school teachers at the district and zonal levels in order to improve teaching methods, identify areas where teachers can benefit from further training, and create spaces to share challenges and successes (JICA, 2012). CPD has also played an important role in helping teachers adapt to the PCAR and its outcomes-based, learner-centered approach (Creatives Associates International et al., 2011).

CPD activities are carried out both within schools and off-site. Off-site CPD programs are organized by Primary Education Advisors (PEAs) and Coordinating Primary Education Advisors (CPEAs), who select the teachers that will attend the trainings and recommend monitoring plans to schools based on the skills and knowledge acquired from the training (JICA, 2012). These off-site activities take place at one of the 315 Teacher Development Centers (TDCs) located across Malawi and usually take the form of workshops or seminars (Meke, 2013). School-based CPD activities are organized by head teachers or the teachers themselves, depending on the particular needs to be addressed (Meke, 2013). However, according to the National Education Sector Plan (NESP), qualified teachers rarely attend such professional development courses, with one study explaining that a lack of incentives for pursuing CPD leads to a lack of participation (JICA, 2012).

In addition, in-service training is often provided through donor support. For example, the 2013/14-2017/18 Education Sector Implementation Plan (ESIP) reports that 33,437 Grade 1 to 4 teachers were trained in the teaching of reading and instructional leadership through USAID's Malawi Teacher Professional Development Support activity.

¹ For more information, see: <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/20110.html>

USAID READING PROGRAM APPROACH AND ONGOING PROGRAMS

In alignment with the U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education, USAID's programming in Malawi aims to support the needs and priorities of the partner country in order to ensure that gains from the programming are sustained.

As such, USAID launched the **Malawi Early Grade Reading Improvement Activity (MERIT)**, a \$65 million, five-year intervention (2015 – 2020) implemented by RTI International. MERIT was implemented in all primary schools in Malawi and aimed to improve the reading performance of students in Grades 1 to 4. In particular, MERIT interventions targeted improving reading instruction in the classroom, increasing parental and community engagement to support reading, and creating safer learning environments.

The Textbook Procurement Activity was a \$5 million, five-year (2015 – 2020) partnership between USAID and the MoEST to procure Grade 1 to 8 textbooks from local Malawian firms for every student in Malawi. The activity also worked to procure and replenish Grades 1-4 textbooks in support of the National Reading Program.

Reading for All Malawi (REFAM) is a \$3 million, three-year (2018 – 2021) inclusive education activity funded by USAID and implemented by Juarez & Associates. REFAM aims to improve the reading skills of children with disabilities in Grades 1-4 by identifying their learning needs, connecting them with resources, monitoring and evaluating their progress, and cultivating community and familial support for their success.

The Yesani Ophunzira Activity (YESA) is an \$18.5 million, four-year (2018 – 2022) intervention aimed at strengthening the Malawian education system's capacity to measure students' reading acquisition and to create citizen demand for improved reading instruction. Funded by USAID, YESA is implemented by Abt Associates as well as local partner organizations.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITHIN USAID PROJECTS

The USAID-funded MERIT project aimed to strengthen community engagement for local language literacy improvement. To achieve this objective, MERIT established and supported NRP Reading Centers, which provided students with community-based venues to build and sustain their reading skills. Further, MERIT utilized social and behavior change messaging campaigns to support family and community members in becoming involved in students' reading. Likewise, USAID's REFAM and YESA projects are intentionally working to cultivate community engagement to support literacy development for children with disabilities and the understanding and use of reading assessment data, respectively.

OTHER DONOR FUNDED READING PROGRAMS

Alongside USAID, other organizations are involved in implementing projects to address literacy and language issues across Malawi, which are described below.

Save the Children's Literacy Boost Program²

Since 2011, Save the Children and World Vision have partnered to implement the Literacy Boost program, which aims to improve children's literacy by creating a culture of reading within and outside of schools. Literacy Boost employs a three-pronged approach that includes: 1) Use of assessments to identify gaps and measure improvements in the five core reading skills, 2) Training of teachers to implement the national curriculum with an emphasis on core reading skills, and 3) Mobilizing parents and communities to support children as they learn to read through fun out-of-school literacy activities and through the creation of locally relevant reading materials. Literacy Boost also includes the establishment of Reading Camps, which bring books to villages to help generate both learner and community interest in reading. The initiative is implemented in Zomba District (Southern Malawi) targeting over 235 community-based child care centers and 57 primary schools.

2. For more information, see: https://malawi.savethechildren.net/sites/malawi.savethechildren.net/files/library/Brochure_Literacy%20Boost.pdf

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