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A Study on the Quality of Primary School Curriculum Materials for Standards 3 and 4

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This report was prepared for review by United States Agency for International Development. It was submitted to the COTR, Malawi Teacher Professional Development Support Program implemented by Creative Associates International, Inc., RTI International and Seward Inc.

Malawi Teacher Professional Development Support (MTPDS)

STUDY ON THE QUALITY OF PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM MATERIALS FOR STANDARDS 3 AND 4

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CD	Compact Disk
ECD	Early Childhood Development
MIE	Malawi Institute of Education
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MoEVT	Ministry of Education and Vocational Training
MTPDS	Malawi Teacher Professional Development Support
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
PCAR	Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform
PEA	Primary Education Adviser
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
TDC	Teacher Development Centre
TV	Television
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In 2001, Malawi adopted an outcomes based-education curriculum for primary schools. The implementation of this curriculum was done in four phases beginning with Standard 1 in January 2007. In 2008 Standards 2, 5 and 6 followed. In 2009 the implementation was rolled out to Standards 3 and 7, and ended with Standards 4 and 8 in 2010. This implementation was done in all public schools and some private schools that follow the national curriculum. In these first few years of implementation, it was agreed that all schools would act as pilot schools and later on the curriculum and associated materials would be revised based on their relevance and usability. Each learning area or subject has a syllabus, a teachers' guide and a learners' book. By the time of data collection, Standard 3 materials had been used for three years and Standard 4 materials for two years.

The purpose of this study was to collect and analyze data from primary school teachers which would inform the review of Standards 1 to 4 instructional materials. The study sought teachers' views on the curriculum especially the quality of the instructional materials and how they could be improved. This report focuses on the findings for Standards 3 and 4 because the data for Standards 1 and 2 were already analyzed and presented to the MoEST in a separate report¹.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. explore strengths of Standards 1, 2, 3 and 4 instructional materials;
2. explore weaknesses of Standards 1, 2, 3 and 4 instructional materials;
3. solicit Standards 1, 2, 3 and 4 teachers' views on how the instructional materials could be improved.

¹ MTPDS & MIE, (May 2011), Study on the quality of primary school curriculum materials for standard 1 & 2.

In order to achieve the stated objectives, the study drew information from Standards 1 to 4 teachers across the country. Data was collected from all the six education divisions. In each division, five districts participated in the study. In each district, one zone was sampled and four schools sampled from the zone participated in the study. From each school, four teachers, one from each Standard (1 to 4) formed part of the sample. This means that a total of 480 teachers from 120 schools, and 30 zones from 30 districts participated in the study. This second report covers results for standards 3 and 4.

Two instruments were used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. These were teachers' questionnaire and focus group discussion guide. The teachers' questionnaire was completed by a pair of teachers teaching the same Standard while the focus group discussion was facilitated by a researcher, and consisted of four teachers teaching the same Standard.

Standard 3 major findings

1. Strengths of Standard 3 instructional materials

The teachers said that the

- i. Syllabuses provide them with guidelines on the work to be covered and suggested teaching, learning and assessment resources.
- ii. Syllabuses and their corresponding teachers' guides and learners' books are well aligned to each other in relation to content, suggested teaching, learning and assessment methodologies and resources.
- iii. Teachers' guides have clear instructions for activities, which make planning easy.
- iv. Stories in learners' books are related to real life situations.
- v. Illustrations are clear, attractive and complement text.
- vi. Activities in the learners' books are enjoyable and involve learners e.g., through role plays and group work.
- vii. The font size, used in the books, is suitable and appropriate for Standard 3 learners.

2. Weaknesses of Standard 3 instructional materials

The weaknesses of the instructional materials as reported by the teachers were that:

- a. Lack of *maphatikizo (syllables)*, in the Chichewa materials, makes it difficult for learners to learn how to read.
- b. It is difficult to put into practice the teaching and learning methodology where learners are put into learning stations and engaged in different activities due to large classes and lack of prerequisite skills among learners.
- c. Most of the instructional materials are not transcribed into Braille. This makes teaching and learning difficult for those that are Braille users.
- d. Many teachers do not have access to syllabuses since there are either very few copies available at their school or their schools do not have a copy.
- e. Syllabuses are bulky because all Standard 3 learning areas are in one document.
- f. Some instructional materials e.g., syllabuses and teachers' guides are written in English while lessons are delivered in Chichewa.
- g. Some of the resources suggested in the syllabuses are not readily available. Consequently, teachers find it difficult to teach topics that require such resources.
- h. Page references in some teachers' guides do not match those in the learners' books.
- i. Suggested assessment methodologies are difficult to implement due to large classes.
- j. The background information for a unit or an activity, in some learning areas is shallow.
- k. Some activities do not tally with period allocation, and in other cases, time for an activity is not indicated.
- l. Model answers for the review exercises are not provided.
- m. Some pages in the teachers' guides do not match those of the learners' books.
- n. The font type used in the learners' book is not suitable for punctuation marks such as question mark and some letters and numbers, e.g., 't' and '9'.

- o. Some of the content in Chichewa does not match with the entry behavior of the learners. Most learners, for example, have problems in making sentences from illustrations; and getting involved in letter writing as they are not able to write.

3. Suggestions for improving Standard 3 instructional materials

Teachers made the following suggestions to improve the instructional materials:

- i. Syllables (*maphatikizo*) should be included in the syllabus rather than emphasizing on the whole word approach alone.
- ii. Instructional materials should be transcribed into Braille.
- iii. Primary schools should be provided with adequate number of instructional materials e.g., syllabus.
- iv. Suitable font should be used in all learners' books.
- v. The background information in the teachers' guide should be improved to strengthen teachers' knowledge in areas in which they are weak. Add more activities and examples.

Standard 4 major findings

1. Strengths of Standard 4 instructional materials

The teachers indicated that:

- a. Both English and Chichewa syllabuses have all the six skills of language included.
- b. Work in the syllabuses is well distributed: topics are broken into teachable units and they are well arranged and divided according to terms.
- c. Syllabuses have suggested teaching, learning and assessment resources and methodologies
- d. Units/topics in the syllabus correspond with those in the teachers' guides and learners' books
- e. Activities are suggested in the syllabus, which helps the teacher to focus on what learners should be doing under each topic.

- f. There is good connection between the teachers' guides and their corresponding learners' books.
- g. Instructions for activities are clear and well explained.
- h. Assessment items are provided and teachers are encouraged to assess learners.
- i. Teachers' guides provide teachers with background information, which helps them to know the content and could also be translated into notes in class.
- j. Most of the teachers' guides have a glossary in which difficult words have been explained.
- k. Font size used in the learners' books is good as learners are able to read without problems.
- l. Learners' books have illustrations that are attractive and complement text.

2. Weaknesses of Standard 4 instructional materials

The weaknesses of the instructional materials as reported by the teachers were:

- a. Group work proposed in the teachers' guide is difficult for large classes. Group work is said to be time consuming and therefore not practical for a 35 minute lesson.
- b. Most of the teachers' guides do not provide model answers to the exercises given.
- c. In English, new words are not indicated at the start of the unit and some of the passages are too long for the level of learners.
- d. Background information provided in the teachers' guides is not adequate in some of the learning areas e.g., Expressive arts.
- e. Some illustrations in the learners' books are not clear.
- f. There are wrong references between the teachers' guide and learners' book.
- g. Schools do not have Bibles for use during Bible knowledge lessons.
- h. Some activities are allocated a lesser amount of time than required.

3. Suggestions for improving Standard 4 instructional materials

The teachers made the following suggestions to improve Standard 4 instructional materials:

- i. Strategies of teaching should be for the teacher to choose which one to use and not dictate what to use.
- ii. Answers to assessment items should be provided in the teachers' guides.
- iii. New words should be highlighted before a reading passage
- iv. Teachers should be provided with adequate information for smooth delivery of lessons.
- v. Schools should be provided with Bibles.
- vi. Activities should be allocated time in relation to their complexity.

4. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this study:

- i. The whole word approach of teaching Chichewa should be reviewed and more effective approaches that help learners to learn how to read and write at the earliest stage be adopted.
- ii. The teaching of learners in small groups should be revisited to ensure that the materials are well utilized for instruction.
- iii. An attempt should be made to have instructional materials transcribed into Braille and distributed to teachers with visual impairment.
- iv. A deliberate attempt should be made to beef up background information in learning areas of concern
- v. A deliberate attempt should be made to provide teachers with model answers on assessment items to guide them
- vi. Teachers need further training on the use of the method of teaching in small groups as a participatory method of teaching in both Standards 3 and 4. It may also be necessary to explore other teaching and learning methods that could be more appropriate than the small group method.
- vii. MoEST should provide schools with Bibles to facilitate teaching and learning of Bible knowledge. Subject panels should agree on the version that is supposed to be used.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Malawi government through the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) introduced a new primary school curriculum in all primary schools starting with Standard 1 in 2007. This is in line with the policy requirement that the primary school curriculum be reviewed after every 8 years (Livuza, 2007). The rollout of the new curriculum followed a phased approach; it started with Standard 1 in 2007 followed by standards 2, 5 and 6 in 2008. In 2009, Standards 3 and 7 were implemented, and implementation of Standards 4 and 8 started in 2010.

As part of the implementation, the Ministry of Education, through the Malawi Institute of Education (MIE), developed instructional materials for the current primary school curriculum. The instructional materials include syllabuses, teachers' guides and learners' books for different learning areas. Table 1 below presents learning areas by Standard and their corresponding instructional materials.

Table 1: Learning areas by Standard and their corresponding instructional materials

Std	Learning areas/subjects	Instructional materials
1	English, Numeracy and Mathematics, Chichewa, Expressive Arts, Bible Knowledge, Religious Education, Introduction to School Life and Learning	7 teachers' guides, 7 learners' books plus corresponding syllabuses and 10 posters
2	English, Numeracy and Mathematics, Chichewa, Expressive Arts, Bible Knowledge, Religious Education, Life Skills	7 teachers' guides, 7 learners' books plus corresponding syllabuses
3	English, Numeracy and Mathematics, Chichewa, Expressive Arts, Bible Knowledge, Religious Education, Life Skills, Social and Environmental Sciences	8 teachers' guides, 8 learners' books plus corresponding syllabuses
4	English, Numeracy and Mathematics, Chichewa, Expressive Arts, Bible Knowledge, Religious Education, Life Skills, Social and Environmental Sciences, Agriculture, Science and Technology	9 teachers' guides, 9 learners' books plus corresponding syllabuses

5	English, Mathematics, Chichewa, Expressive Arts, Bible Knowledge, Religious Education, Life Skills, Social and Environmental Sciences, Agriculture, Science and Technology	10 teachers' guides, 10 learners' books plus corresponding syllabuses
6	English, Mathematics, Chichewa, Expressive Arts, Bible Knowledge, Religious Education, Life Skills, Social and Environmental Sciences, Agriculture, Science and Technology	10 teachers' guides, 10 learners' books plus corresponding syllabuses
7	English, Mathematics, Chichewa, Expressive Arts, Bible Knowledge, Religious Education, Life Skills, Social and Environmental Sciences, Agriculture, Science and Technology	10 teachers' guides, 10 learners' books plus corresponding syllabuses
8	English, Mathematics, Chichewa, Expressive Arts, Bible Knowledge, Religious Education, Life Skills, Social and Environmental Sciences, Agriculture, Science and Technology	10 teachers' guides, 10 learners' books plus corresponding syllabuses

By design, these instructional materials were not field-tested as is normally the case in curriculum development. It was agreed that the instructional materials would be developed and sent into schools where they would be implemented for two years as part of nationwide field-testing and later be revised. Unfortunately, the arrangement did not go according to plan. Consequently, instructional materials for some classes have been used for more than two years without reviewing them. For example:

- Standard 3 instructional materials have been used for 3 full years (since 2009).
- Standard 4 instructional materials have been used for 2 years (since 2010).

1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to collect and analyze data from primary school teachers, which would inform the review of Standards 1, 2, 3 and 4 instructional materials. This report covers standards 3 and 4. The report for 1 and 2 is already complete.

1.2 Objectives of the study

The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. explore strengths of Standards 1, 2, 3 and 4 instructional materials
2. explore weaknesses of Standards 1, 2, 3 and 4 instructional materials
3. solicit Standards 1, 2, 3 and 4 teachers' views on how the instructional materials could be improved

1.3 Rationale

Field-testing and revision of new instructional materials are part and parcel of the entire process of curriculum development. The current primary school instructional materials went into schools without any field-testing. This development has compromised the implementation of the current primary school curriculum. During the monitoring of the implementation of the current primary school curriculum, teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the way some books were written. This study has, therefore, been designed to solicit Standards 1 to 4 teachers' views in relation to Standards 1 to 4 instructional materials after using them for some time. The findings of this study will inform curriculum developers, educationists and policy makers on areas that need to be worked on during the revision process of the instructional materials. This will facilitate provision of scientifically and pedagogically sound instructional materials to primary schools in Malawi.

1.4 Study methodology

The design of the study was based on the premise that understanding functioning of the primary school instructional materials requires listening to primary school teachers' opinions as the implementers of the curriculum. The focus of the study was, therefore, teachers' views which were collected by means of a focus group discussion and a teacher questionnaire. Both the teacher questionnaire and the focus group discussion guide solicited information on strengths and weaknesses of Standards 1, 2, 3 and 4 instructional materials and suggestions on how to improve them.

The study was designed in such a way that its sample was drawn from all the six education divisions of the country namely: Northern Division, Central East Division, Central West Division, South East Division, South West Division and Shire Highlands. Data were collected from one zone within sampled districts in each Division. In each division, five educational districts were targeted except for Shire Highlands Education Division which has only four education districts (see table 2).

Table 2: Districts sampled for the study by education division

Education divisions	Districts where data was collected
Northern	Karonga, Nkhata Bay, Rumphu, Mzuzu and Mzimba South
Central East	Kasungu, Dowa, Ntchisi, Salima and Nkhota-kota
Central West	Lilongwe urban, Ntcheu, Lilongwe Rural East and Lilongwe Rural West
South East	Mangochi, Machinga, Balaka, Zomba Rural and Zomba urban
South West	Nsanje, Chikhwawa, Blantyre Rural, Blantyre Urban, Neno and Mwanza
Shire Highlands	Phalombe, Chiradzulu, Thyolo and Mulanje

In each district, four schools within a sampled zone were selected for the study. In each of the selected schools, four teachers were invited to a Teacher Development Centre (TDC) to form part of the sample. The four teachers included one teacher from each Standard (Standards 1 to 4). In total 16 teachers participated in the study from each zone.

1.5 Data collection and instruments

1.5.1 Data Collection

Researchers were divided into six teams (see Appendix 1). Each team visited five districts and in each district they visited 1 zone. The researchers spent one full day at each TDC. In total, each team visited five zones in one week. Each team interacted with 80 teachers. The six teams in total visited 30 zones and interacted with a total of 480 teachers drawn from Standards 1 to 4.

The teachers participated in two major activities during the data collection exercise. They completed a questionnaire in pairs by Standard and later the four teachers per Standard participated in a focus group discussion. A purposefully designed matrix of subjects was used to identify learning areas to be discussed per Standard each day (see Appendix 2). Each Standard was scheduled to discuss two learning areas per day.

1.5.2 Data collection instruments and procedures

Two instruments were used to collect data from the teachers. These were a questionnaire and a focus group discussion guide (See appendix 3 and 4).

1.5.2.1 The questionnaire

This tool was administered to teachers of each Standard. The questionnaire was completed by teachers in pairs. Each pair completed a questionnaire focusing on one learning area. Using the questionnaires, the teachers provided data pertaining to the following issues:

- a. content in terms of adequacy and relevance;
- b. user-friendliness of the instructional materials in terms of clarity of instructions for activities and correspondence of instructional materials;
- c. appropriateness of level of language in relation to learners' ability;
- d. appropriateness of suggested teaching, learning and assessment methodologies and resources; and,
- e. clarity of illustrations and their ability to support text.

1.5.2.2 The focus group discussion guide

The focus group discussion guide was used to collect data from the 16 teachers at each TDC. Four teachers from each Standard discussed two learning areas they were assigned to discuss. The tool was aimed at enabling the teachers to openly discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the syllabuses, teachers' guides and learners' books of the two learning areas assigned to each Standard at a particular TDC. In addition, Standard 1 teachers were also asked to discuss strengths and weaknesses of the 10

posters. After discussing the strengths and weaknesses of each of the instructional materials, teachers were also requested to suggest ways on how the instructional materials could be improved.

1.6 Data analysis

The qualitative data which were collected from both the focus group discussions and the questionnaire was clustered and categorized into themes. The emergent themes have been presented in this report as findings.

1.7 Limitations of the study

There are three factors which may have affected the validity and reliability of the results of this study. The first factor relates to the length of the period a teacher has interacted with the three instructional materials, that is, the syllabus, teachers' guide and learners' book. The assumption was that the respondents would be teachers who have interacted with the materials for more than one year. What was observed on the ground, however, was that some of the teachers who provided the data were fairly new as teachers of the respective classes. Some of them were Open and Distance Learning (ODL) students, others were new recruits from college, and others were on teaching practice while some had just been assigned the class. To this effect these teachers did not interact with the materials for a long period. As such they did not have sufficient information in relation to challenges they faced when using these materials.

Secondly, very little data were collected on Religious Education. This was because most of the zones which were visited were offering Bible Knowledge. Only one zone provided information on Religious Education.

Finally, it was difficult to collect tangible information on syllabuses for different learning areas as teachers seemed not to be familiar with the syllabuses. In fact some teachers confessed that they had never seen the syllabi and that they relied on teachers' guides for developing schemes of work.

1.8 Structure of the report

The report has been organized as follows:

- Chapter 1 is the introduction to the study. It presents the background, purpose and objectives, and rationale for the study, and the study methodology. It also presents limitations for the study.
- Chapter 2 presents findings on the quality of Standard 3 instructional materials.
- Chapter 3 presents findings on the quality of Standard 4 instructional materials.
- Chapter 4 presents conclusion and recommendations of the study.

It should be noted that Chapters 2 and 3 have only presented findings from Standards 3 and 4 data respectively despite that data were collected from Standards 1 to 4. This has been done deliberately, since data on Standards 1 and 2 instructional materials were already analyzed and a report had been written (MIE and MTPDS 2011).

CHAPTER 2: STANDARD 3 FINDINGS BY LEARNING AREA

This chapter presents and discusses findings from Standard three who participated in the study. It presents findings from the following learning areas in Standard 3: Chichewa, English, Numeracy and mathematics, Expressive arts, Life skills, Social and environmental sciences and Bible knowledge. The following are Standard 3 learning areas presented in the chapter: Chichewa, English, Numeracy and mathematics, Expressive arts, Bible knowledge, Social and environmental sciences, Agriculture, science and technology and Life skills.

Each sub-section of this chapter provides a comprehensive review of comments relating to a given learning area. This information is intended as a thorough brief that will inform the work of the writers in the forthcoming text-book revision exercise. As the executive summary shows, many of these strengths and weaknesses are common across all or most of the materials.

2.1.1 Chichewa

(a) Syllabus

Strengths

The teachers said that the syllabus, teachers' guide and learners' books are well aligned in relation to content, suggested teaching, learning and assessment methodologies and resources. They also indicated that the syllabus provides them with suggested teaching, learning and assessment resources. On content, they said that the syllabus outlines clearly the four language skills learners are expected to acquire by the end of the academic year, these are: listening, speaking, writing and reading. Content is clear in terms of teaching and learning activities. Success criteria are shown, and the work planned matches with the success criteria and the term's work (*Ntchito ya pa Chigawo*) is clearly indicated.

Weaknesses

On weaknesses, the teachers said that the syllabus does not include *maphatikizo* (syllables) as a topic and that makes it difficult for learners to learn how to read. The teachers said that the whole word approach which is emphasized in the teaching and learning of Chichewa is a difficult way of teaching and learning the language. The teachers also indicated that it is difficult to put into practice the teaching and learning methodology where learners are put into learning stations and engaged in different activities due to large classes and lack of prerequisite skills among learners.

Another weakness was on alignment among the instructional resources. Teachers noticed that although the three instructional materials (syllabus, teachers' guides and learners' books) correspond, some of the topics in the syllabus are not reflected in the other two books. Another weakness of the syllabus relates to special needs education. The teachers said that the syllabus is not transcribed into Braille. This makes lesson planning difficult for teachers that are visually impaired. On the same, teachers also said that they do not have knowledge on how to use some of the suggested teaching, learning and assessment resources meant for learners with special educational needs e.g. feathers, mirrors. In general, teachers indicated that the syllabus has a weak cover and is not well bound. Some teachers pointed out that they do not have access to the syllabus since there are either very few copies available at their school or their school does not have a copy.

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers made the following suggestions to improve the Chichewa syllabus:

- a. All the topics in the syllabus should be reflected in the teachers' guide and learners' book.
- b. Syllables (*maphatikizo*) should be included in the syllabus rather than emphasizing on the whole word approach.
- c. Suggested teaching, learning and assessment resources should be relevant to the teaching and learning milieu in Malawi.
- d. Provide adequate copies of syllabuses for every teacher.
- e. The syllabus should be transcribed into Braille.

- f. Regular teachers should be provided with basic skills on how to handle learners with special educational needs.

(b) Teachers' guide

Strengths

The teachers viewed the provision of suggested teaching, learning and assessment resources, glossary of difficult words, and suggested time allocation as some of the strengths of the Standard 3 Chichewa teachers' guide. They also said that the teachers' guide has clear instructions for activities, which make planning easy. Furthermore, teachers felt that the integration of learning areas is manifested in Chichewa where, among other issues, concepts of mathematics have been included. In addition, the teachers said that the provision of revision lessons in the teachers' guide and alignment of the teachers' guide are also strengths of the book.

Weaknesses

Most of the weaknesses which the teachers mentioned under the syllabus were also pointed out on the teachers' guide. For instance, they mentioned that group work is a problem when working with large classes; lack of *maphatikizo* and emphasis on whole word approach makes teaching and learning of Chichewa difficult; and teachers' lack of orientation on how to use some of the suggested teaching and learning resources, e.g., feathers, and mirror glass. The teachers also pointed out that discussion in groups does not work well especially when the situation is new to most learners. In addition, they indicated that the teachers' guide does not have page referencing to guide teachers on the exact page in the learners' book.

Proposed means of assessment was also identified as a weakness of the book as continuous assessment proves to be difficult in large classes. On assessment, the teachers also said that some of the assessment items on a particular unit are not valid (asked out of context) e.g., mutu 16, page 78, lesson 5 has no grammar component which has been asked.

Some of the teachers noted that the idea of starting each lesson with a story makes Chichewa lessons dull as it does not provide for variety on the part of students. They said that silent reading which has been suggested in some parts of the teachers' guide is difficult for learners who cannot read.

Suggestions for improvement

The following suggestions were made to improve the teachers' guide:

- a. Suggested activities should relate with the available time.
- b. All groups in a class should work on the same activity for easy guidance.
- c. Avoid use of short stories at the beginning of every lesson. Teachers can also use riddles. However, teachers should be guided.
- d. Success criteria for each activity should be clearly written.
- e. Pages in the learners' book should be referred to in the teachers' guide.
- f. Assessment tools should be classified to indicate their suitability with large classes or small classes.
- g. The teachers' guide should be transcribed into Braille.
- h. Avoid discussion of unfamiliar issues by learners.
- i. Silent reading should be replaced with read aloud.

(c) Learners' book

Strengths

The strengths of the learners' book as reported by the teachers include suitable length of stories for learners that are just learning how to read; stories that depict real life situations and those that encourage morals among learners (*e.g., za edzi (about HIV/AIDS), za pamsewu (about road safety), za chikhalidwe (about culture)*). Most of the words used in the book have few syllables. In addition, the font size used is large enough for young learners. Teachers also noted that most of the activities in the book match with the level of learners. This is probably because instructions in the activities are clear. This also applies to most of the assessment tasks. Some of the teachers also said that activities in the learners' book are interesting, *e.g., zilapi (riddles) and ndagi (brainteaser)*. Teachers also said that illustrations in the book are clear and relevant, such that they complement text. They commended the book for

being gender sensitive. Furthermore, teachers observed that the use of different colors on illustrations and topics makes the book look attractive. They also indicated that the learners' book is good because it has been designed in such a way that learners are introduced to new and difficult words before each of the reading passages. They also feel that revision work reinforces learning.

Weaknesses

The teachers noted that the font type used in the learners' book is not suitable for punctuation marks such a question mark as well as some letters and numbers, e.g., 't' and '9'. They also said that most of the illustrations in the book are not clear, especially those that have a black background, e.g., the Illustration on page 46. The teachers also observed that the book is not transcribed in Braille. Additionally, some teachers observed that the reading passages are not long enough for Standard 3 learners; other teachers indicated that the passages are too long and that the emphasis on whole word approach is not working. Some of the teachers, for example, said the following:

There are many difficult words in the stories which need preparation through exposure to syllables.

It was also said that content does not match with the entry behavior of the learners. Most learners, for example, have problems in making sentences from illustrations; and getting involved in letter writing as they are not able to write. They also noted that the station method/teaching corner is not working for large classes.

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers made the following suggestions to improve the Standard 3 Chichewa learners' book:

- i. Use appropriate font type.
- ii. Emphasis should be on syllables and not whole word approach. Under '*Dziwani mawu awa*' ('*Know these words*'), for example, syllables should be introduced first. Other teachers suggested that '*Maphatikizo*' '*syllables*' on pages 50-51 should be introduced in term 1.

- iii. Illustrations should be clear.
- iv. The book should be transcribed into Braille.
- v. Reading passages should be short.
- vi. Provide teaching and learning resources, e.g., posters.

2.1.2 English

(a) Syllabus

Strengths

The Teachers pointed out several strengths of the Standard 3 syllabus: it provides guidelines on the work to be covered, e.g., topics and activities. It suggests methods and resources of teaching, learning and assessment. Content/themes in the syllabus match with that of the teachers' guide. All 6 skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, critical thinking and reasoning) have been taken care of and match with those in the Teachers' guide.

Weaknesses

The teachers pointed out the following weaknesses of the Standard 3 syllabus: it is bulky and as a result it is difficult to locate the English syllabus. It is not easy to follow or trace out topics from the syllabus with those topics in the teachers' guide as is the case with other subjects. Core elements are fragmented and appear in separate pages which make it difficult for use when preparing schemes of work.

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers made the following suggestions for improving the syllabus:

- a. Integrate core elements for a particular unit for easy reference.
- b. Each topic/content area should have references to assist the teacher.
- c. There is a need for thorough orientation on how to use the syllabus, especially the language syllabus.

(b) Teachers' guide

Strengths

The teachers pointed out some strengths of the English teachers' guide. In terms of content, they mentioned that the teachers' guide covers the syllabus thoroughly and that activities are clear. On presentation and organization of the book, they reported that instructions are clear and scheming from the teachers' guide is easy. They also said that suggested lessons are useful for planning; success criteria match with suggested activities and suggested resources are specified and very useful. They also reported that the book also encourages fairness in the treatment of boys and girls.

Weaknesses

The teachers reported several weaknesses of the Standard 3 teachers' guide. On content, they pointed out that some work in the teachers' guide is not available in the learners' book. There are too many success criteria in some units (see unit 3, page 18). Again, there are too many activities in a lesson. In some cases the teachers' guide does not match with the syllabus. They also pointed out that reading lessons are too few – only once a week.

On presentation and organization of the book, the teachers mentioned that page references in the teachers' guide do not match those in the learner's book. Suggested assessment is difficult, such as the one on page 18 due to large classes. Some of the activities such as listening to a story are problematic because passages are too long for learners to remember and answer questions.

Suggestions for improvements

The teachers made the following suggestions for improving the teachers' guide:

- a. Passages for dictation and listening should be made shorter.
- b. The tasks given to groups during revision should be the same – not different tasks given to different groups at a time.
- c. Activities should have suggested answers.
- d. All work in the teachers' guide should also appear in the learners' book.
- e. Modify or reduce activities to fit the time.
- f. Model answers to exercises should be provided.
- g. The number of assessment items should be reduced.

- h. Reduce the number of success criteria in some units.
- i. Short passages should be read by the teacher for the listening exercise.

(c) Learners' book

Strengths

The teachers reported several strengths of the Standard 3 English learners' book. They reported strengths relating to content, presentation of work, illustrations and organization of the book. On content, the teachers reported that it is relevant to the topics and that stories are related to real life situations. The book contains interesting dialogues. On presentation of work, they pointed out that there is a clear demarcation and highlighting of different sections of a unit. There is good layout of activities and a variety of topics to be learnt by learners. The teachers also reported that illustrations are clear, attractive and relevant to the stories. On organization of the book, they reported that the book has appropriate text font size, some appropriate exercises, especially on pages 4, 8 and 66 and colored headings and titles.

Weaknesses

The teachers reported several weaknesses of the Standard 3 English learners' book. They reported weaknesses concerning content, presentation of work, illustrations and organization of the book. On content, they mentioned that there is too much work to be covered for one academic year and that some words are difficult for Standard 3 learners. They gave examples of words such as stump on page 99, presided on page 17, and apologized, informed, advised. There are long and difficult passages such as pages 16, 23, 32, 63, 70 and 92. Exercises are too many per unit and they do not match with learners' ability. They gave examples of exercises such as making sentences, solving a crossword puzzle on page 77, solving riddles on pages 10, 20 and 21, guessing meaning of words on pages 60 and 61, letter writing, letter box on page 102 and comprehension questions on page 12.

Some of the teachers actually said that *'some exercises are pitched too high for the level of Standard 3 learners in an ordinary Malawian primary school. Maybe the work*

is suitable for St. Andrews and Bishop Mackenzie learner,' they said. They pointed out that the level of difficulty of work frustrates learners. Most learners cannot role-play since they have problems even to construct a sentence. They cannot answer oral questions after reading a passage. The activities do not match time allocation; there are too many activities in a lesson. Time allocation for the learning area is not enough because learners need more time for them to learn English as a second language.

The teachers pointed out that some work in the learners' book is not suitable for learners in remote areas unless the work is accompanied by appropriate illustrations. Some work is difficult for teachers as well. The work on pages 111 to 117 and parts of speech on page 55 is difficult for the teacher.

On presentation and organization of the book, the teachers bemoaned the use of reading in small groups, saying that it is confusing to rotate in small groups. They also pointed out that some information is not written in detail, some information is missing, and e.g., under phonics on page 56, there is no definition. New words are not clarified at the beginning of a passage before reading the passage. There is a lack of balance between group work and individual work.

On illustrations, the teachers reported that some illustrations do not match text, e.g. on page 78. Some illustrations are not clear and do not send correct messages (see pages 2, 20 to 21).

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers made the following suggestions for improving the learners' book:

- a. Level of language used should be appropriate to the Standard 3 learners.
- b. Work given should match with time allocated.
- c. Introduction of new words and their meanings should be done before every reading.
- d. Glossary should be available

- e. The timetable allocation for reading lessons should be increased from one to three.
- f. Difficult words should be highlighted for the teacher to study in advance.
- g. Stories should be made short, e.g., the story on page 52.
- h. Poems should be short, e.g., the one on page 36
- i. Vocabulary should be toned down. Minimize the use of difficult words.
- j. Short passages of 1 to 2 paragraphs should be used.
- k. Activities should be reduced in a lesson.
- l. There should be one core-element at a time, e.g., a lesson can focus on reading only.
- m. Vocabulary should take into account the current situation in a Malawian ordinary primary school.
- n. Methodology should match the level of learners, e.g., role play should be simple and familiar to the learners' daily life
- o. Cross word puzzles should be simplified. Demand short words. Alternatively, supply a list of the words/ answer from which learners can choose.
- p. Produce clear and suitable illustrations for prohibition signs to help learners appreciate them.
- q. Letter – writing should involve filling in the blank spaces.
- r. Letter boxes should be short and include an example.
- s. Writing sentences should make use of simple words.
- t. Spelling practice should include writing the word on chalkboard, reading, erasing and asking learners to spell it after the drill.
- u. Parts of speech should be taught in a more systematic way.
- v. Balance individual and group work.
- w. Pictures should be clear.

2.1.3 Numeracy and mathematics

(a) Syllabus

Strengths

The teachers indicated the following strengths of the syllabus: it provides guidelines on the work to be covered, e.g., core elements, topics and success criteria; it suggests methods of teaching, learning assessment; and it indicates the work to be covered in each term. Learning activities are simplified. The syllabus and teachers' guide tally very well. The syllabus indicates success criteria which are also found in the teachers guide. References have also been provided in both the syllabuses and teachers' guide so that teachers can use them effectively.

Weaknesses

On the weakness of the syllabus, the teachers pointed out that it is bulky because syllabuses for all the Standard 3 learning areas are in one document as a result it is difficult to locate Numeracy and mathematics. Some of the success criteria in the syllabus do not tally with those in the teachers' guide e.g. unit 20, the syllabus shows the following success criteria:

- respond to instructions
- locate positions.

But the teachers' guide has an additional success criterion on 'locating places in the school environment.'

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers came up with the following suggestions for improving the Numeracy and mathematics syllabus:

- a. Success criteria in the syllabus should tally with those in the teachers' guide.
- b. Success criteria should be broken into more specific ones.
- c. Reduce the content in the syllabus because it is not possible to go through the syllabus in a term because learners take a while to understand the concepts.

(b) Teachers' guide

Strengths

The teachers highlighted several strengths of the Numeracy and mathematics teachers' guide. On content and presentation of the book, they mentioned that suggested time for activities is good for the teacher as it guides the teacher on how to plan the work. Teaching and learning resources help the teacher to prepare in advance. Examples are clearly explained and that where necessary, arrows are used to explain mathematical processes.

Weaknesses

The teachers pointed out that in some cases it is not easy to use the teachers' guide when drawing up schemes of work. It does not break down the activities into lessons. They also mentioned that there is too much work to be taught and learned under one topic, for example, the unit on counting has 17 lessons. On content, the teachers pointed out that topics on mass, capacity and lengths are difficult for learners. Activities on fractions are not adequate and are not presented clearly for the teacher to follow.

Suggestions for improvements

The teachers pointed out the following suggestions for improving the Standard 3 Numeracy and mathematics teachers' guide:

- i. Numeracy and mathematics should follow the format and presentation of the English teachers guide
- ii. Success criteria should be specific and not too general, e.g., "addition comes with modeling addition," this too needs its own success criteria.
- iii. The success criteria should tally with the assessment tasks that are given.
- iv. Topics such as mass, capacity and length need to be simplified.
- v. Add more exercises on fractions.
- vi. Add methods of solving various problems in the teachers' guide.
- vii. Reduce number of assessment records to be used after every topic, e.g., remove checklist, etc.
- viii. Remove checklist and put only rubric because checklist is difficult to use in a large class.

(c) Learners' book

Strengths

The teachers pointed out several strengths of the learners' book. They reported that activities are arranged from known to unknown and are generally interactive because of their participatory nature. Instructions for the activities are clear for both teachers and learners. Activities including exercises are also pegged at the level of children.

On the size and arrangement of the book, the teachers reported that the size is appropriate for learners. This includes the font size of letters and numbers. The book is arranged in such a way that before every exercise, examples are given. Suggested time allocated for the activities is appropriate in most cases. In terms of illustrations, the teachers reported that the book has colorful and clear illustrations that attract learners' attention. They also said that some illustrations are useful in simplifying concepts, e.g., the use of abacus and place value box. The book is also reported to be gender sensitive.

Weaknesses

The teachers reported several weaknesses of the Standard 3 Numeracy and mathematics learners' book. On content, they mentioned that some topics are written in Chichewa instead of English, e.g., fulakishoni for "fractions," mapatani for "patterns," magalafu for "graphs." These concepts are difficult even for the teacher to explain to the learners in Chichewa. The content of fractions is not adequate and some exercises do not have examples on how to solve the problems. The teachers also bemoaned the use of Chichewa in teaching mathematics, that in some instances it does not work well. They gave an example of shapes, which have no direct Chichewa names, that is, triangles, squares, rectangles, etc.

On presentation of work, the teachers pointed out some pages on which information has been wrongly presented. These include pages 1, 3, 19 and 20. They also pointed out that on page 55 horizontal and vertical problems on division have been mixed up

and not appropriate. They also pointed out that work on re-arranging numbers in descending order is difficult for learners.

Other teachers also pointed out that the message at the back of the book on HIV and AIDS is not relevant for Standard 3 learners. They said that a simple message in Chichewa would be suitable for the page.

Suggestions for improvements

The teachers made the following suggestions for improving the learners' book:

- i. Vary the presentation of exercises, e.g., $3 \times \square = 12$.
- ii. Provide more examples and exercises on fractions for learners to practice.
- iii. Present some concepts in English like fractions, graphs, patterns
- iv. Ensure that information in the learners' book is correct.
- v. The message on HIV and AIDS at the back of the book should be suitable for learners.

2.1.4 Expressive arts

(a) Syllabus

Strengths

Standard 3 teachers said that the Expressive arts syllabus is good in that it provides them with a variety of teaching, learning and assessment methodologies. The topics are arranged in order and are guided by the success criteria, assessment standard and the core element. It is very easy to scheme using the syllabus because it is very clear. Success criteria and suggested activities are related. The syllabus relates well with the teachers' guide. Most of the suggested teaching, learning and assessment resources are locally found.

Weaknesses and suggestions for improvement

The teachers indicated one major weakness of the Expressive arts syllabus. They said that it is written in English while the subject is taught in Chichewa. The teachers, therefore, suggested that the syllabus should also be written in Chichewa.

(b) Teachers' guide

Strengths

The teachers said that the Standard 3 teachers' guide is good because it has suggested time allocation for each activity, and the work is adequate for one academic year. They are also provided with different teaching, learning and assessment methods. They also said that activities are arranged in a logical order and instructions for the activities are clear. In addition, the teachers' guide relates well with the learners' book. Furthermore the teachers said that content in Expressive arts promote culture, e.g., traditional dances.

Weaknesses

The teachers said that delivery of Expressive arts is sometimes difficult due to a lack of expertise in some components that make the learning area. Although it has been suggested to use resource persons in some lessons, these are difficult to find and sometimes they demand to be paid. The background information is also shallow and there is no glossary for new words.

Some of the teachers feel that Expressive arts topics are too many for a practical subject. Again, they indicated that the teachers' guide is in English though the medium of instruction is Chichewa. On assessment, they said that suggested assessment methodologies are difficult to implement due to large classes.

Suggestions for improvement

Suggestions to improve the teachers' guide included the following:

- a. The background information in the teachers' guide should be improved to strengthen teachers' knowledge in areas in which they are weak. Add more activities and examples.

- b. Add glossary to explain new words at the end of each topic.
- c. The teachers' guide should be written in Chichewa to match with the learners' book.

(c) Learners' book

Strengths

The strengths of the Expressive arts learner's book include its relevance to learners' needs. The teachers noted that Expressive arts content is based on real life situations and learners' background experiences. They also observed that the integration of cross-cutting issues such as HIV/AIDS messages is good. They also indicated that instructions in the learners' book are easy to follow and relate well with the teachers' guide. In addition, illustrations are clear and complement text. Illustrations are also balanced in terms of gender. Lastly font size is good for learners.

Weaknesses

The teachers observed that some of the suggested activities in the learners' book are not suitable for learners' ability, e.g., dramatization; page 28 *Ntchito* 7. Furthermore, it is difficult to engage learners into group discussions. The learners' book was also found weak in that it does not provide learners with background information on a topic. Use of black and white pictures was also mentioned as one of the weaknesses of the learners' book. Furthermore, teachers said that some illustrations in the learners' book are small and not clear.

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers made the following suggestions to improve the Standard 3 Expressive arts learners' book:

- a. Dramatization should be replaced with role playing.
- b. More content should be given in the book.
- c. Illustrations should be clear and colored.
- d. Remove small group discussion activities and replace with whole class discussion.
- e. Emphasize improvisation or use of TALULAR.

2.1.5 Bible knowledge/Religious education

a) Syllabuses

Strengths

Like in other learning areas, the teachers reported that both the Bible knowledge and Religious education syllabuses are good because they include suggested teaching, learning and assessment methods and resources. Success criteria are clearly shown, and activities are relevant for addressing success criteria. Further, activities are based on real life situations. The syllabuses are easy to use because topics are well arranged and work is indicated by term. Work in the syllabuses corresponds well with that in the teachers' guides.

Weaknesses

The teachers observed that both the Bible knowledge and Religious education syllabuses are not transcribed into Braille to help teachers who are blind, activities are very few for an academic year, some instructions for activities are not clear e.g., role playing HIV and AIDS in Bible knowledge. The teachers also said that some topics are not fit for Bible Knowledge e.g., Units 15 and 18. Further, the teachers reported that schools do not have Qur'an for reference.

Suggestions for improvement

To deal with the weaknesses mentioned, the teachers suggested that the syllabuses should be transcribed into Braille to help teachers who are blind. They also said that activities in the teachers' guides should be beefed-up to match with the time allocation. In addition, the teachers proposed that schools should be provided with Qur'an and Bibles as reference materials.

b) Teachers' guides

Strengths

Teachers said that both Bible knowledge and Religious education teachers' guides have glossaries where difficult words are explained. They also said that activities in both teachers' guides are logically sequenced and instructions for activities are clear. The teachers also said that content in both learning areas enforce moral values among learners. Further, the teachers noted that success criteria in both teachers' guides are clear. It was also observed that both teachers' guides have background information for each activity. The teaching, learning and assessment resources are also provided in each of the teachers' guides.

Weaknesses

The teachers pointed out that lack of Braille version of the Standard 3 Bible knowledge teachers' guide makes the delivery of Bible knowledge lessons difficult for teachers that are visually impaired. The teachers also noted that they find it tough to compose songs about bible characters on their own, as indicated in the syllabus. In addition, the teachers reported that Human rights topic is reflected in the syllabus but not reflected in the teachers' guide while the topic 'Roles and responsibilities of family members' is not indicated in the syllabus but appears in the teachers' guide.

Teachers also feel that the amount of background information in the teachers' guide is too little.

On Religious education, the teachers said that Page 19 of the teachers' guide asks them to read the Qur'an 5:6. Yet, the teacher cannot read the Qur'an since it is in Arabic.

Suggestions for improvement

The following suggestions were made to improve delivery of Religious education and Bible knowledge:

- a. Songs should be provided through radio programmes.
- b. The topics should focus on the Bible lessons.

- c. Background information should be beefed up.
- d. Schools should be provided with Qur'an versions that are either in Chichewa or English.

c) Learners' book

Strengths

On strengths of the Standard 3 Bible Knowledge and Religious education learners' books, the teachers said that the books, among other things, correspond with their respective teachers' guide and syllabus. Stories and references to the Bible are helpful and relevant. Some stories relate to real life situations. Topics are logically arranged based on the learners' prerequisite knowledge. Instructions for activities are clear and to the level of learners. Illustrations are clear, relevant and complement text. Further, the font type used is suitable for learners. The learners' book includes relevant songs.

Weaknesses

The teachers indicated that the learners' book has not been transcribed into Braille for Braille users. In addition, the teachers also said that there are too many activities which require role playing such that with time learners become bored.

Suggestions for improvement

The following suggestions were made to improve the Standard 3 Bible knowledge and Religious education learners' books:

- a. The books should be transcribed into Braille
- b. Reduce activities that require role playing

2.1.6 Life skills

a) Syllabus

Strengths

The teachers pointed out the following strengths of the syllabus. The content is up to date, themes and topics are relevant and easy to use. Appropriate teaching and

learning resources and methodologies are provided. The topics and activities in the syllabus relate well with those in the teachers' guide. It is easy to use and draw up lessons from the syllabus for schemes of work.

Weaknesses

The teachers came up with the following weaknesses of the syllabus: topics are not numbered like in the teachers' guide. There is a word omission on success criteria, e.g., on pages 122 to 123 (safe). In some cases, there are no success criteria in the syllabus to match with the activities in the teachers' guide. Again, there is more work in the syllabus than in the teachers guide. Some of the resources suggested in the syllabus are not readily available.

Suggestions for improvement

The following are the suggestions made by the teachers on how to improve the Life skills Standard 3 syllabus:

- a. Topic numbers should be indicated.
- b. Success criteria in the syllabus should match with those in the teachers' guide.

(b) Teachers' guide

Strengths

The teachers pointed out several strengths of the teachers' guide. In terms of content, they mentioned that topics match with activities. Stories are relevant to real life situations, tell about morals, values and promote health and hygiene. Case studies appear in both teachers' guide and learners' book. Case studies motivate learners/teachers. The glossary helps teachers to know the meanings/concepts of some words. The language used is clear. The teachers' guide has good background information.

In terms of arrangement of content and activities, they pointed out that the sequence of topics is good. Assessment is provided for at the end of each unit.

Activities are orderly arranged. Illustrations are relevant to the topics of the stories. Success criteria are relevant.

Weaknesses

The teachers pointed out the following weaknesses of the teachers' guide. The activities do not tally with period allocation, e.g., on page 8. There is too much time given to activities. Model answers for the review exercises are not provided. In some books, illustrations are misplaced (that is put on different pages, e.g., page 45.)

The teachers also pointed out that in Unit 7; activities 1 and 2 are not well arranged. Some pages in the teachers' guide do not match those of the learners' book.

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers made the following suggestions for improvement:

- a. Additional activities should be included to match with the suggested time allocation.
- b. Ensure that all pages in the learners' book tally with those given in the teachers' guide.
- c. Provide model answers for activities.

(c) Learners' book

Strengths

The teachers pointed out several strengths of the learners' book. In terms of content, they mentioned that the activities are suitable and easy for learners to understand. The content depicts Malawian culture in most cases. Instructions for the activities are straight forward and the book is gender sensitive.

In terms of presentation of content, the teachers explained that the activities are enjoyable and involve learners, e.g., role plays and group work. Case studies are clear and easily understood by learners. They also said that the font size of letters and the size of the book are suitable for Standard 3 learners. Illustrations are clear, well drawn and they help simplify concepts and attract learners' attention.

Weaknesses

The teachers mentioned the following as the weaknesses of the standard 3 Life skills learners' book: content to be covered within a period is not adequate – so a lot of time is left after a lesson. Some content is too sensitive for Standard 3 learners, e.g., *kugwiririra (rape)* on page 21. Teachers fail to explain that to learners. Some learners are shy to role play sensitive activities. Teachers mentioned that some learners are not able to read, therefore, they cannot read case studies on their own. Some illustrations such as those on pages 27 and 33 do not match with text. Some pages do not match with those stipulated in the teachers' guide. Teachers also pointed out that some words such as stress and anxiety do not have specific Chichewa meanings; this becomes difficult for them to explain.

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers pointed out the following as suggestions for improving the learners' book:

- a. Additional activities should be included to match with the suggested time allocation.
- b. Some sensitive activities such as *zogwiririra (rape)* should be removed.
- c. Illustrations should be clear and should match text, e.g., see pages 27 and 33.
- d. Pages of teachers' guide and learners' book should be matching.

2.1.7 Social and environmental sciences

(c) Syllabus

Strengths

According to the teachers, the following are some of the strengths of the syllabus:

- provision of suggested teaching, learning and assessment methodologies
- suggestions for resources,
- a clear relationship between the success criteria and topics,
- clear alignment between the syllabus and teachers' guide, and
- provision of a list reference materials.

Weaknesses and suggestion for improvement

The teachers said that some of the teaching and learning resources, e.g., films and audio tapes are not locally available. Consequently, teachers find it difficult to teach topics that require such resources. The teachers, therefore, suggested that they should be provided with alternative resources in case the other resources are not locally found.

(a) Teachers' guide

Strengths

The teachers feel that the teachers' guide is strong because it provides them with adequate information under the background. This helps them to prepare thoroughly for lessons. They also said that activities are based on the success criteria. Furthermore, they indicated that activities are logically sequenced and it is easy to develop schemes of work and lesson plans. In addition, teachers mentioned that illustrations in the teachers' guide are clear and complement text.

The teachers are also happy that the teachers' guide has a section on references after each unit.

Weaknesses

The teachers mentioned lack of time allocation on activities, less content on some units, e.g., units 7, 9, 10 and 13, and unavailability of some suggested teaching and learning resources as weaknesses of the teachers' guide. They also said that some activities, such as unit 11, activity 3, are difficult to do. They also said that unit 10 is difficult to teach at places where there are few cars. In addition, the teachers indicated that asking them to sing a song to learners without suggesting the song to them is a problem.

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers made the following suggestions to improve the teachers' guide:

- i. Indicate time allocation on each activity.

- ii. Provide examples/illustrations known to learners, e.g., local fire place instead of a cooker.
- iii. Activities should be adequate and in line with time allocation.
- iv. Songs should be suggested in the book.

(C) Learners' book

Strengths

Strengths of the Standard 3 Social and environmental sciences learners' book, as reported by teachers, include: good font size, clear and attractive illustrations that complement content, logically sequenced content – known to unknown, clear instructions for learners' activities; availability of background information and summaries for each unit, and availability of case studies that are educative. Teachers also noted that the work in the learners' book matches with learners' age.

Weaknesses

Teachers indicated that illustrations in the learners' book favor urban/town settings. Teachers also indicated that inappropriate font for punctuation marks such as question marks were used and that does confuse learners. Teachers also feel that work in the book is not adequate for 3 terms. In addition, teachers feel that learners have problems to study Social and environmental sciences at home because much of the work in the book demands group work.

Suggestions for improvement

The following are the suggestions which teachers made to improve the Standard 3 Social and environmental sciences learners' book:

- i. Proper font type should be used to avoid strange-looking punctuation marks
- ii. More information should be provided so that learners can use the books easily at home.
- iii. Illustrations should consider both rural and urban learners' background characteristics.

- iv. Learners should be provided with enough work to cater for the whole academic year.

CHAPTER 3: STANDARD 4 FINDINGS BY LEARNING AREA

In this chapter, findings from Standard 4 teachers are presented and discussed. Themes that emerged from the data are used in the presentation.

3.1.1 Chichewa

The analysis focused on the syllabus, the teachers' guide and the learners' book. Emphasis was placed on the strengths, weaknesses and suggestions for improvement.

(a) Syllabus

Strengths

The teachers pointed out that content outlined in the syllabus match well with what is presented in the teachers' guide and learners' book. As a result of this good alignment, one can use the syllabus to develop a scheme of work and lesson plan easily. Sequencing of topics is very logical. It was commented that all the six elements of language have been well incorporated in the syllabus. The syllabus is also commended for providing the suggested resources which assist teachers when writing schemes of work and lesson plans.

The Chichewa syllabus was commended by respondents for having clearly outlining topics to be taught. The syllabus also outlines what is expected from the learners through the success criteria. Additionally, the syllabus presents the suggested teaching and learning methodologies.

Weaknesses

The teachers identified several weaknesses with the Chichewa syllabus. Some of them cited the absence of reading skills activities in the syllabus as a weakness. They pointed out that in some cases; success criteria were different from those in the teachers guide. An example for this was cited for unit 1 for term 1. In some instances, pages of reference work are not shown.

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers made some suggestions to improve the relevance and quality of the teachers' guide for Chichewa. There was need to align proper alignment of the syllabus and the teachers guide. The syllabus should show details of topics covered and the reference pages should also be indicated.

(b) Teachers' guide

Strengths

Some of the strengths noted by the teachers about the Chichewa teachers' guide are that there are demonstration lessons. Suggested teaching and learning resources are given and the guide also provides guidance on how to assist learners to use the learners' book. The teachers noted that there is good connection between the teachers' guide and the learners' book. The guide provides responses to questions raised in the learners' book. The teachers' guide helps the teacher to plan a lesson. The font type and size in the teachers' guide is good.

The instructions for various activities in the teachers' guide are clear. The topics/units match those in the learners' book. The layout of topics in the teachers' guide matches with those in the learners' book. It is noted that pagination of the teachers' guide is correct - there are no errors. The respondents commended the idea of including answers or responses to the activities. The glossary which is provided in the teachers' guide helps teachers when they are stranded. Finally, some of the respondents commended the size of the book which they said is good.

Weaknesses

The teachers noted and cited several weaknesses of the teachers' guide. There is an over-emphasis of group work which has proved to be impractical in some instances. Some of them noted that teaching and learning resources that are included in the teachers' guide are irrelevant, such as, a mirror and feather which are to be used for learners with hearing impairments which are not relevant for mainstream students. Some of the strategies used in the activities do not encourage learners to learn how

to read, specifically with regard to the use of the whole word approach to literacy. Suggested teaching and learning resources are just the same throughout but in some instances they are not even relevant to the topic being taught (e.g., mirror and feather). Group work proposed in the teachers' guide is difficult for large classes. Group work is said to be time consuming and therefore not practical for a 35 minute lesson.

Some of the teachers indicated that the teachers' guide does not indicate corresponding pages in the learners' book. On page 76, mutu 14 about 'Kalata ya mchezo' ('Friendly letter'), the address is in English. There is no reference to pages in the learners' book for exercises. Some suggested teaching, learning and assessment resources are not relevant for the unit or lesson teachers' guide does not correspond with the syllabus in some cases, e.g., the page 3 of the syllabus does not match with page 1 in the teachers' guide on *nthano (story) vs moni (greeting)*. *Phunziro (Lesson)* on page 33 says *kuwerenga nkhani (reading a passage)* but there is a lot more than what the title suggests. The teachers' guide does not explain where or how to use some of the suggested teaching and learning resources e.g., how to use zithunzi zotukudza (raised pictures) for learners with special educational needs. There is frequent repetition of work, e.g., *Chiyambi chilichonse ndi nthano (Opening everything with a story)*. Some of the teaching and learning resources that are suggested are not familiar to teachers, e.g., *galasi (mirror) / kalilole (mirror), nthenga (feather)*. Finally, some of the respondents indicated that the book has too many activities which do not match with the time allocation.

Suggestions for improvement

The following are some of the suggestions which the teachers made towards the improvement of the Chichewa teachers' guide:

- a. Some of the suggested resources must be provided, e.g., charts and markers.
- b. Illustrations should be included in the teachers' guide.
- c. Strategies of teaching should be for the teacher to choose which one to use and not dictate what to use.
- d. The teachers' guide should have stories.

- e. The activities in the teachers' guide should also be included in the learners' book.
- f. The exercises in the teachers' guide should show pages in the learners' book to guide the teachers.
- g. Improve on the layout of lessons in the book – lessons have been repeated, although for a purpose.
- h. Let the teacher introduce difficult words first by pronouncing the word and give its meaning.

(c) Learners' book

Strengths

In terms of content, the teachers made the following observations: words that have been highlighted in the learners' book help the learners to understand the passages better. There is good introduction since the book introduces "*mawu ovuta*" (*difficult words*) before tackling sentences in which the difficult words are found. Illustrations match with the stories. Colored pictures inspire learners to read and understand the story in question. Pictures assist learners to predict the content of the story. The vocabulary in the book is alright.

The teachers noted that the activities are relevant for learners of Standard 4 age group. The illustrations in the book are clear and gender sensitive. The stories depict Malawian culture. The Illustrations complement the content that is written in the text and match with what is happening in the stories. Units for revision provide remediation and enrichment activities.

Weaknesses

Some of the weaknesses of the learners' book were in its content. Some of the questions on the passages are difficult for the learners. Some passages have punctuations that are not clear. Due to the font style, some of the letters are not clearly visible such as Y, G, and P. Learners regard Y as V because that is how the book presents it. G looks like a, and P looks like a. Letter "L" is written like 1 (one) in the book (the learners write these wrongly because they take after what they see in

the book). *Lembetso (Dictation)* activity seems to be difficult for Standard 4 learners. An observation was made that some comprehension questions are hard for learners as the questions are long and there are too many of them, especially at the end of each topic.

Some of the words in the book have multiple and compound syllables, and pupils have low literacy levels in Standard 3 to read compound syllables like 'zyo', 'phwa'. There is too much repetition of exercises such as '*mawu oimira maina*' (nouns) on pages 6, 12, 13 and 18. The quality of some illustrations is poor. In general, the book has too much use of group work. Some teachers observed that it is too ambitious to ask a Standard 4 learner to write a composition as required on page 21. Most of the learners' book of the work is repeated many times, e.g., mutu 5, 10, 15, 25 and 30. It was observed that some illustrations are difficult to interpret, e.g., mutu 1, 3, and 18. Some illustrations disturb the teaching and learning process, e.g., mutu 29.

Binding of some learners' books is poor as the pages in the books fall off easily. Some of the words used in the learners' book are too advanced for learners of Standard 4, e.g. *kakhutagona*, *myambayamphepo* (mutu 8): *Mangolomera*, *chipondanthengo* and *kamberembere* (all of these words are combination words that require an understanding of Malawian culture and context to understand the true meanings). Some colors of the illustrations are faint. There are some stories that are too long for learners of this grade.

Some of the teachers noted that many learners cannot engage properly with the tasks because they still lack basic reading and writing skills. Content which the teacher needs to use to help learners is absent - no extra resources available. Too much was assumed for the learners' abilities.

Suggestions for improvement

The following are some of the suggestions that were made by the teachers on how to improve the Chichewa learners' book:

- a. Questions on the passages should not be too many and should be suitable for the level of Standard 4 learners.
- b. *Lembetso* or spellings should be after every reading passage
- c. Make sure the page numbers are correct.
- d. Different spellings for the same word should be corrected, e.g., teachers are confused between *tsekula* and *tsegula* on page 22 mutu 8: and the same book has the word *tsegula* (open)
- e. Reduce the number and length of questions for '*ntchito*' (*exercise*)
- f. Pre-reading activities should start with '*maphatikizo*' (syllables) then progress to '*mawu*' (*noun*) then sentences.
- g. Font type and size should be like that in Social and environmental sciences learners' book.
- h. Minimize unnecessary repetition of exercises.
- i. The focus should be on sentence construction (*kupanga ziganizo*) as a step towards *chimangirizo* (*composition*).
- j. Improve on the illustrations – use pictures where possible.
- k. Select simple words to be used in the passage.
- l. Make sure the passages are not too long.
- m. Grammar concepts should clearly stand out to prepare our learners for the senior level.
- n. Vary activities and approaches to avoid repetitions.
- o. Illustrations should be easy to interpret.
- p. Reduce revision lessons.
- q. Sosa book should be brought back so that by the time students reach Standard 4 they are able to read and write.
- r. Include motivating stories, e.g., old stories which used animals as characters.
- s. Use user - friendly words, suitable for the age of learners.
- t. Add content in teachers' guide for the teacher.
- u. Pictures used for '*chimangirizo*' need improvement, e.g., showing actions in the picture that tell a story.

3.1.2 English

(a) Syllabus

Strengths

The teachers explained that the Standard 4 English syllabus was alright because all the six skills of language were included. Furthermore, they stated that the topics in the syllabus were well arranged and split into terms. Teachers noted that the English syllabus provides useful suggestions to be used by teachers in terms of resources and methods.

The teachers also observed that the syllabus relates well with the teachers' guide. Some of them noted that the packaging of learning areas by Standard is excellent in that it reduces a scramble for the syllabuses across classes as was the case in the past. The syllabus for English is said to be user-friendly and it helps teachers very well in developing schemes of work and lesson plans.

Weaknesses

The teachers commented that there was too much work planned per activity which did not match with the work indicated in the teachers' guide. The covers for the syllabus are weak and it tears off easily. They also noted that some topics included in the English syllabus are not relevant for Standard, for example, 'Project and Research', 'Writing Journals'. Finally, some of the respondents noted that suggested resources in the syllabus keep on repeating.

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers made the following suggestions for improvement of the syllabus for English:

- a. It would be better to have ready-made schemes of work templates provided by government.
- b. Teachers' guide and the syllabus should mirror each other.
- c. Improve the binding of the covers and use stronger and durable paper.
- d. Re-look at the suggested resources and reduce repetition.

b) Teachers' guide

Strengths

The teachers noted the following strengths for the teachers' guide: All the work is divided into activities and the activities are well broken into lessons. This helps teachers to plan lessons easily. Most of the instructions that have been provided in the teachers' guide are useful to teachers. Illustrations which are included at the beginning of the unit help learners to predict the content. The teachers' guide was commended for having letters that are legible. The vocabulary used in the book is relevant to the level of the learners.

Further comments were made on the book layout. For example, variation of titles/sub-title by color is helpful and makes the book attractive. The teachers noted that there was good correspondence between the learners' book and the teachers' guide. The teachers' guide offers stories that are easy to read and are interesting as they relate to the learners' experiences/ real life context.

Weaknesses

The teachers identified the following weaknesses: There were too many activities in a single lesson. The teachers' guide does not provide expected answers to the exercises given. Concern was raised over the emphasis on silent reading which prevents the teacher from checking pronunciation. It is difficult to assess all learners using the checklist at the end of the unit. There is little time for reading activities.

The teachers observed that some of the activities are not realistic. For example, learners fail to come up with their own folktales. Some assessment tools suggested in the teachers' guides, e.g., the checklist is time consuming due to large classes. There is no glossary for the vocabulary of the book. The book has no references at the end of the book. Some activities have suggested answers while others do not have.

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers suggested the following to improve the teachers' guide:

- a. All exercises should have expected answers provided.
- b. Read aloud activities needed to allow teachers check on pronunciation of words.
- c. Reduce work for each period and reduce activities so that they tally with 35 minute period allocated.
- d. There is need to add a glossary of vocabulary.
- e. Remedial activities must be devised to match with large classes.
- f. Scale down on activities to match with time and level of learners.

(b) Learners' book

Strengths

The teachers stated that illustrations in the book were very clear. There was enough written work for the learners. Pictures in the book are colorful and support the text. Children are able to get meaning from the illustrations and this helps them to understand what each story is all about. Comprehension exercises are clear.

The teachers noted that most exercises support learning of spellings. It has some short and simple stories. There is enough work for children to be learning to make sentences (orally and written). There are parts of speech which promote spoken English. Letter grids that have been used in the book are very affective. The substitution and matching tables are also effective. The size of letters is good.

Weaknesses

The teachers noted several weaknesses about the English learners' book. They noted that new words are not indicated at the start of the unit. Some of the passages are too long and time for the exercises is limited. Some of the words used are too high for learners of Standard 4 level. Some of the stories used are too long for the level of learners. The book has no glossary to explain the meanings of difficult words. The book is not well bound, which leads to some pages falling out.

There are some factual errors. For example, page 84, exercise 8: solving a cross word puzzle, answer for 4 across, i.e., “village” does not fit in the boxes (there are six boxes instead of seven). Time for practicing reading is very little. In some instances, there is less time compared to the work given in the learners’ book. Less time is allocated to reading and poems.

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers suggested the following to improve the book:

- a. Some of the passages require shortening. They are too long.
- b. Substitution table are needed when making sentences.
- c. Some of the exercises should be simplified because they are too difficult and are too hard for learners to do, e.g., pages 65, 70 and 105.
- d. Correct the cross-word puzzle on page 84.
- e. Vocabulary – use simple words.
- f. Reduce the number of activities.
- g. More time should be allocated to the activities
- h. Increase time allocation for reading.

3.1.3 Numeracy and mathematics

(a) Syllabus

Strengths

The teachers explained that the syllabus has adequate suggested teaching, learning and assessment resources for the lessons. They also said that they have good suggested teaching, learning and assessment methods. The methods and resources were said to tally with activities outlined in the syllabus.

The teachers looked at the relationship between the syllabus and the teachers' guide and they noted that the activities in the syllabus and teachers' guide tally in that there is connection among core element, units and topics.

A study of the content by teachers made them to point out that the content matches with the learners' level because the activities are suitable for Standard 4 learners.

In terms of presentation, the teachers pointed out that the work is well distributed, topics are broken into teachable units and they are well arranged and divided according to terms. The time allotted to the subject was said to be adequate and the activities are manageable. There is a logical presentation of topics (from known to unknown). The language used was said to be user friendly. Consequently, the teachers found the syllabus easy to follow.

Weaknesses

Much as the teachers pointed out a lot of strengths of the syllabus, the following were said to be the weaknesses of the Numeracy and mathematics syllabus. Some of the teachers pointed out that they have problems relating the syllabus to the teachers' guide. Some of the teachers noted that there are too many activities for the learners. As such, some topics are not taught due to overloading of the content.

Duplication of work was said to be another weakness of the syllabus. It was, however, not clear as to what it entails. Related to this weakness, was the segmented presentation of concepts where the spiral approach is used, e.g., addition of numbers on page 117 and addition of money on page 123.

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers made the following suggestions for improving the Numeracy and mathematics syllabus:

- a. Present concepts in a series of instructions without interruptions, e.g. deal with additions of all types before going to subtraction.
- b. The number of activities should be in line with the level of learning.

- c. The topic progression from term 1 to 3 should be checked.

(c) Teachers' guide

Strengths

The teachers mentioned that the teachers' guides adequately guide teachers. They pointed out that most instructions are clear and well explained. The teachers said that they make lesson plans easily. The teachers' guide was further said to assist in encouraging teachers to assess learners as they have assessment at the end of each topic. The assessment items placed at the end were said to be good.

The teachers also mentioned that the suggested learning resources in the teachers' guide are good. Some of the teachers pointed out that the suggested teaching and learning resources are locally found and some can be improvised simply by looking at the illustrations since some illustrations are well drawn

Some of the teachers noted that the suggested methods included in the teachers' guide are clear and feasible.

The teachers also explored the relationship between the teachers' guide and the learners' book. They pointed out that the teachers' guide and learners' book tally. The topics in the teachers' guide match with those in the learners' book.

On presentation of the teachers' guide, the teachers mentioned that the topics/units are well arranged (that is, from known to unknown). The background information provided was also considered to be strength for the teachers. Language used is user-friendly.

The teachers noted that most content in the teachers' guide is suitable for the learners. Most of the success criteria match with the activities. The topics and activities were said to have been arranged logically. It was also pointed out that most activities are suitable for the level of learners.

Weaknesses

With reference to the content of the teachers' guide, some of the teachers pointed out that the topic of fractions was not thoroughly introduced and the examples are not adequate. The topic is new in Standard 4. It was also pointed out that time allocation for division and multiplication is not adequate and there is need to give more examples on regrouping and division items.

On the presentation, the teachers pointed out that time allocation was not given in all the activities. The teachers said that they find it difficult to divide the activities into periods as a result it is possible for some of the teachers to finish the book in one term. The answers have not been provided at the end of the units. It was also noted that there is no variety of teaching and learning methods and the teachers' guide does not provide proper instructions and assumes a lot about the learners' capability.

On content, teachers pointed out that multiplication is hard to understand. Some of the activities, e.g., activity 2, unit 1 ask learners to have dummy money, but it is difficult for the teachers to get the dummy money. There is wrong arrangement of **K t** on page 87, unit 14. There is wrong shading on page 82, unit 13 about fractions. Some of the activities in unit 9 do not match with the success criteria (see activities 3 and 4). The books were said to provide unfamiliar experience, e.g., unit 23 on watches.

On binding, teachers noted that there was poor binding of some of the textbooks. For example, some books had missing pages, e.g., from pages 18 to 35 or topics 3 to 7 are missing (for some copies of the teachers' guide).

Suggestions for improvement

The following suggestions were made to improve the teachers' guide:

- a. Time allocation of division and multiplication should be increased.
- b. Other methods of introducing multiplication should be explored.

- c. Resources for the teaching and learning should be those that are found everywhere.
- d. Illustrations should be bold/clear enough.
- e. Arrange **K t** properly on page 87, they should not be put together.
- f. Correct shading should be done in the illustrations on page 82.
- g. Include suggested answers for activities/exercises in the teachers' guide.
- h. Binding needs to be done properly.
- i. Indicate the number of periods for each unit and activity.
- j. Match success criteria with activities in unit 9, that is, activities 3 and 4
- k. Scale down on the number of topics.
- l. There should be more examples, especially on division.
- m. There should be more and varied modeling on division.
- n. Provide a variety of methods for revising numbers.
- o. Provide step-by-step instructions for lessons, give instructions to learners, then resources, explain and then allow learners to work in groups.
- p. Add digital clocks in unit 23, page 105ff in the learners' book and page 126 in the teachers' guide.

(a) Learners' book

Strengths

The following were said to be the strengths of the learners' books. The books were said to be easy to use because the work was split properly.

The content of the learners' book has been arranged from known to unknown. The steps within a lesson are also logically presented.

On the presentation of content, the size of letters is suitable for level of learners. Use of colored pictures and shades is fine, attracts users and enhances understanding of concepts. The front picture is gender-balanced. Illustrations are clear, the colors attract children and the pictures support text.

The teachers pointed out that the language used in the books matches with learners level of ability. Appropriate language is used in terms of suitability and gender sensitivity.

The learners' book has review exercises after each topic which were said to be enough. The examples guide learners. The learners' book is easy to use, instructions are clear and the book promotes learners to learn multiplication without using tables.

In terms of content, the learners' book has enough content for learners to master the concepts. The topics are relevant to learners. The textbook provides examples that help learners to work out problems on their own.

Weaknesses

The following were said to be the weaknesses of the Numeracy and mathematics learners' book. The picture on the front cover has "Fractions" which is not suitable as they use Chichewa in this book.

On presentation of content, the teachers noted that the learners' book has inadequate activities compared to what is in the teachers' guide, e.g., refer to teachers' guide on page 74, learners' book on pages 62, and page 63. Multiplication and division is allocated inadequate time and division has not been modeled. The activity on names of the months of the year is absent in the learners' book (unit 23.) There is poor ordering of numbers on page 47, e.g.:

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{TH} \quad \text{H} \quad \text{T} \quad \text{O} \\ \quad \quad 4 \quad 7 \quad 1 \\ \text{X} \quad \underline{10} \\ \hline \end{array}$$

Some of the units were said to be difficult, e.g., Mutu 26 and in unit 27, where an example requires more than one operation to be carried out. Volume as a concept has not been introduced properly on page 115. The learners' book was also said to

lack content that learners can read/refer to for standard knowledge. Teachers said that there is too much content in some of the topics/units, e.g., too many activities are suggested. Examples are 'addition' and 'multiplication' topics. Too many items (sums) have been suggested and teachers only select items to do. Some items (multiplication) involve big numbers, e.g., page 48, activity 5. Arranging of fractions in ascending and descending order was said to be hard for Standard 4 learners, e.g., unit 13, activity 5 (especially where there are no illustrations).

The teachers noted that there is no example given on page 99. While there was no example on some work, the teachers noted that the examples given on page 9 do not tally with the exercise for learners.

On presentation, the teachers noted that some illustrations are small, e.g., page 94. And captions on illustrations were said to be too small, e.g., pages 13, 15, 22 and 24. Some pictures are not clear, e.g., page 123 and *mpunga (rice)* on page 102 to balance with a kg. Some of the pictures were said to bring dilemma, e.g., page 24. There is need to provide context to aid clarity. Some of the pictures look like cartoons.

The use of weighing instruments shown on page 101 was said to be overdue. Mutu 28, example on P 123 is misleading. In unit 24, the example is not clear "which one has more space, Page 114. Introduction of the table on page 121 needs a corresponding activity before that. The teachers noted that the symbol for division is absent on page 56, numbers 57 to 9.

The teachers noted that some Standard 4 Numeracy and mathematics learners' books have confused pages, e.g., page 40 is followed by page 49, some units, e.g. units 9 and 10 are missing in some books, and page 103, Unit 17.

The teachers noted the mismatch between activity 5 (with illustrations) and assessment (without illustrations) and the work on page 72 work is mixed up.

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers made the following suggestions for improving the learners' book:

- a. Use Chichewa on front cover picture not "Fraction".
- b. Increase size of picture on Page 24.
- c. Measurement using non-standard units needs more refining to ensure that teachers understand what should be learnt.
- d. Introduce seconds in last activities in unit 23.
- e. Numbers such as g for 9 are confusing.
- f. Topics should not be too long to exceed two weeks.
- g. Pictures need improvement, that is, people should not look like cartoons.
- h. Add content for standard knowledge.
- i. Case studies should come before an activity
- j. Avoid pictures that bring dilemma for students, e.g., page 24.
- k. Reduce content where it is too much.
- l. Use smaller numbers for multiplication.
- m. Use illustrations for arranging fractions.
- n. Match activity with assessment in terms of presentation.
- o. Include at least two examples of any activity.
- p. Arrange activities in the learners' book as they appear in the teachers' guide.
- q. Vertical and horizontal problems should be dealt with separately.
- r. Give many examples, especially on multiplication and division.
- s. Mutu 26 to go to Standard 5.
- t. Page 120, Mutu 27, No 4 should be relocated to 7 due to its demands.
- u. Page 103, the example needs to show that the answer 23 g is as a result of addition, that is, $3g + 20g = 23g$.
- v. There should be a relationship between the work in the teachers' guide and the learners' book. For example, examples of patterns given in teachers' guide should be reflected in the learners' book.
- w. Increase the time allocation for the work on multiplication and division.
- x. Exercise under unit 2, (1) needs to be the last one. It is the most complex.
- y. Exercise on unit 26, page 117, example given should aid understanding of the work that follows number 1.

- z. It would be better if Numeracy and mathematics books were in English from Standard 3.
- aa. Multiplication, fractions and divisions are problematic to learners. There is need for learners to have practice in reciting multiplication tables.

3.1.4 Expressive arts

(a) Syllabus

Strengths

The teachers identified several strengths of the Expressive arts syllabus. Many of them suggested and appreciated that teaching and learning resources are many and varied. There are clear measurable success criteria in the syllabus. Each topic is accompanied by a core element. The topics and activities are well sequenced. It is easy to use the syllabus when scheming.

The topics are well laid down and they are clear. Teaching, learning and assessment resources have been clearly outlined. The font size is big enough.

Weaknesses

The teachers observed several weaknesses of the Expressive arts syllabus. They noted that there is too much work outlined in the syllabus. Some of the suggested teaching and learning resources suggested are difficult to get, such as volley ball. The success criteria between the syllabus and the teachers' guide are not related in some cases, e.g., on page 147 of the syllabus and page 7 in the teachers' guide.

Suggestions for improvement

The following were suggestions for improving the syllabus for Expressive arts:

- a. Reduce the amount of content.
- b. Provide information on some of the resources suggested for the learning area.
- c. Consider appropriate skills for the age level of learners.

- d. There should be appropriate alignment and correspondence between the teachers' guide and the learners' book.

(a). Teachers' guide

Strengths

The teachers made the following observations about the strengths of the Expressive arts teachers' guide. The content is enough for one academic year. Instructions are presented in a clear manner. The teachers' guide and the learners' book tally in most of the things. There is variety of teaching and learning resources that have been suggested for the lessons. The teachers' guide contains up-to-date and relevant skills and activities. The activities that have been suggested are adequate and clear.

In terms of usability, the teachers noted that they are able to use the teachers' guide without difficulties when writing a lesson plan and schemes of work. There is strength in having boys to be involved in needlework. The suggested teaching resources are adequate. The activities match with those in learners' book.

Weaknesses

The teachers identified several weaknesses in the teachers' guide for Expressive arts. Some of them are as follows. Some background information needs improvement. For example, on knitting of a belt activity, the teacher is asked to bring a knitted belt and then show the basic stitches which are not given. There are a lot of activities to be covered in a single period, e.g., activity 5, unit 4. Some activities are not allocated adequate time such as the activities on sewing and knitting.

The teachers noted that the teachers' guide does not have any glossary to explain the difficult words. Some of the illustrations that have been included in the teachers' guide are not clear, e.g., pages 58 to 59 under needlework topic. It was observed that the topic on creativity lacks information. The teachers observed that the teaching and learning methods provided are not varied (only one is used). Some of the illustrations used are too small for meaningful use. The book also has letter font size which is very small.

Some of the background information is not clear as to what message is being transmitted e.g., page 62. Some of the concepts such as knitting have been introduced too early (Standard 4) because the learners have not yet learnt how to coordinate the fingers. Some units have too much information such as unit 5 on making items, on pages 37 to 39. The teachers observed that some resources are difficult to find, e.g., clothing material. Some activities required more time to teach, e.g., unit 3, activity 3, page 29. The teachers noted that some of the activities were not supported by any success criteria, e.g., page 5 activity, 2 which talks about 'learners must be able to use attire.' The book does not give variety of assessment tools. Finally, the teachers observed that some of the suggested teaching and learning resources are expensive and difficult to find, e.g., unit 6, pages 58 to 59.

Suggestions for improvement

The following are some of the suggestions given by the teachers:

- a. More illustrations should be included in the teachers' guide.
- b. Give enough background information where it has been indicated that there is need to beef up information.
- c. The teachers' guide should have glossary at the end of the book.
- d. Allocate more time to other activities such as sewing, knitting and crocheting
- e. The illustrations that are put in the book should be clear.
- f. More information is needed on creativity.
- g. Concepts should be introduced in small amounts from simple to complex before a pattern is introduced, first teach the stitches in singles.
- h. There is need to provide a variety of assessment tools.
- i. Some activities need to have success criteria page, e.g., 5 activity 2
- j. Each activity must be allocated adequate time.

(b) Learners' book

Strengths

The teachers identified several strengths of the learners' book: Some of them observed that the book helps learners to be creative. The book has very good

illustrations which are interesting. The activities in the book are clear in terms of the instructions that are given. Most of the illustrations are clear. The activities are suitable for learners. Learners acquire different skills of producing items to be used in their life, such as sewing and drawing. The information in the books assists learners to acquire different traditional skills and practices that have cultural and moral values e.g. dances, songs and games. The size of the font is big enough for learners to read without difficulties. The illustrations are clear. It is learner - centered. The activities are relevant.

Weaknesses

The following are some of the weaknesses concerning the learners' book for Expressive arts. There are some wrong references between the teachers' guide and learners' book, e.g., on page 21 of the teachers' guide where reference is made to the learners' book on page 21. The actual page should be 16. There are some activities that require learners to collect materials to make some items such as the activities on page 40 of the learners' book but the materials are either scarce or they encourage deforestation.

There are some activities that are allocated little time, e.g., activity 5, unit 4. Some activities have been allocated too much time. Some dances require attire that is not available in other parts, e.g., Ingoma which is done in Mzimba and not in other parts of the country as a result the teacher teaches without giving a true picture. In some topics, English vocabulary is used, e.g., 'dabulo, thirebo'. Some of the illustrations are not clear; they are exaggerated in some cases such as on page 20.

Some of the teachers noted that although the learning area of Expressive arts has six subject components, the book does not give enough information for the learners on all the six components. As a result, it was felt that learners are being deprived of enough concepts, yet there is plenty of time. Only one method has been used in the activities (group work).

Suggestions for improvement

The following are the suggestions made to improve the learners' book of Expressive arts:

- a. There is need to consider time allocated, it has to tally with the amount of work.
- b. Activities that encourage learners to collect natural materials should be removed and be replaced with environmentally friendly ones.
- c. The teachers should be given the freedom to teach some of the dances using books that have illustrations of such dances and attire.
- d. MIE should produce a book with illustrations of various traditional dances.
- e. Where there is no Chichewa term just leave the English term, e.g., 'double, treble'
- f. Consider relevant activities/skills that are fitting for children's ages.
- g. Illustrations should be big enough and clear for learners to see what is being depicted.
- h. More information should be given on each component of the subject element of Expressive arts.
- i. A variety of teaching and learning methods should be used so that learners with different abilities are targeted.

3.1.5 Bible knowledge

(a) Syllabus

Strengths

The teachers made several observations on the strengths of the Bible knowledge syllabus as follows. The syllabus highlights core elements which guide the teacher on what will be done in class. It has well planned sections that are relevant for teaching. Topics are orderly and correspond with the teachers' guides. It is easy to identify and plan topics according to the duration given (that is, assists in planning lessons).

The activities in a theme are well sequenced. Suggested teaching, learning and assessment resources and activities have been included. The letter font size is big

enough. It is easy to use when scheming. Its content corresponds well with that in the teachers' guide and the learners' book. The core elements match well with activities. The content is adequate. The topics are relevant to learners. The structure of the syllabus is well arranged and easy to follow. Friendly language is used in the syllabus.

Weaknesses

The teachers identified several weaknesses of the syllabus for Bible knowledge. Some of them are as follows. The syllabus presents theme/topic but these ought to be presented as different, not as one and the same thing, e.g., on pages 236 to 237. The teachers noted with concern that there are no Bibles provided in schools. As a result, teachers use different versions of the Bible and this brings in confusion.

The success criteria in the syllabus and the teachers' guide are not relating in some cases, e.g., page 147 of the syllabus and page 77 of the teachers' guide. Some teaching methodologies like role playing cannot be done in a single period.

Suggestions for improvement

The following are some of the suggestions on how to improve the syllabus for Bible knowledge:

- i. There is need to delineate themes from other topics, e.g., on pages 236 to 237
- ii. Consider appropriate skills for the age level of learners.
- iii. There is need for good supply of Bibles in schools of the same version.
- iv. Develop picture scrolls or posters for complementing the text/activities in the learners' books.
- v. There should be a closer relationship between the teachers' guide and the syllabus.
- vi. Reduce the amount of content, especially for those topics that also appear in other learning areas, e.g., HIV/AIDS which is also in Life skills; 'Environment' is also in Social and environmental science (SES); 'Peaceful living' in Life skills, and 'Human rights and responsibilities' is also in SES.

(b) Teachers' guide

Strengths

The teachers' guide for Bible knowledge had the following as strengths identified by the teachers. Content is enough for one academic year. The instructions are clear to teachers. The teachers' guide and learners' book tally in most cases. Assessment of topics is well done, covering most important issues. The teachers' guide portrays real life situations, better explanations are also given of everyday situations. Instructions in the teachers' guide are clear. There is variety of teaching and learning resources suggested for the lessons. The book contains up-to-date/ relevant skills and activities. Verses and chapters are shown. A summary is available for each unit to help the teachers in making conclusions. The meanings of difficult words are provided. Review exercises are also suggested.

The teachers are able to use the teachers' guide without difficulties when writing a lesson plan, and schemes of work – it is appropriately divided for teachers. Because of the appropriate division of work, it is possible that all teachers can move at the same pace when teaching. Instructions are clear. Suggested teaching and learning resources are adequate.

Weaknesses

The following are some of the weaknesses identified by the teachers. There is too much time allocated to too little work. There are no illustrations given in the teachers' guide. Some suggested teaching, learning and assessment resources are difficult to find, e.g., those that cannot be improvised such as sign language interpreter, Braille, videos, stylus, hand frames. The letter font is very small.

Suggestions for improvement

The following are the suggestions proposed by the teachers:

- i. More content should be added to match with the time allocation.
- ii. Activities should be rich enough for 35 minute periods.
- iii. Illustrations should be included in the teachers' guide.

- iv. There is need to have teachers who are specialized, especially in special needs education.
- v. Indicate time for each activity rather than putting number of periods at the beginning of the unit/topic only (e.g., unit 6).
- vi. Put glossary at the end of the book.
- vii. Some teachers suggested that Bible knowledge needs more time, at least 3 periods per week rather than two as it is at the moment.
- viii. There is need to supply Bibles in schools.
- ix. There is need to agree on a Bible version to be used in schools.

(c) Learners' book

Strengths

The Bible knowledge learners' book had the following as its strengths. The font size is good for learners. Colored letters and illustrations are good. In most cases, the illustrations support the text. The content supports good morals and is relevant to the learners. The activities in the book are well arranged and logically presented. The learners' book encourages participation of learners due to the way activities are planned. Success criteria correspond with assessment items at the end of each topic. Topics relate to everyday life of learners, e.g., Judges (Bible) rulers of the community, nation, etc. Cross-cutting issues are well captured, e.g., HIV and AIDS and environment.

The content in the learners' book assists learners in behavioral change, e.g., stories on love for one another. The content also complements what they learn in church. The content assists learners to learn values and skills for life, e.g., rights and responsibilities. Pictures are clear and colorful thereby motivating/or capturing the learners' attention. Pictures help them to predict, interpret and comprehend more easily the content/subject matter. Introduction of a learners' book is a good development because learners can read the stories on their own. There are very good illustrations and interesting. Chapters and verses are clearly provided for learners to read on their own. Good summaries are provided at the end of each topic. Topics in the Bible knowledge incorporate church and home connections.

Learners acquire different traditional practices and morals, e.g., dances, songs and games.

Weaknesses

The teachers identified the following weaknesses about the learners' book. Some of the verses proposed are boring to the learners. The book has inadequate content to last for three terms. In some instances, there are wrong references between teachers guide and learners book, e.g., in the teachers' guide, page 21 refers to page 21 of the learners' book, while the actual page is in the learners' book is 16.

Unavailability of copies of the acceptable version of Bible at school hinders learners to interact with the Bible. In some cases, difficult words are brought in without context such as on page 1, *perekani tanthauzo la mau oti 'pangano'* (give the meaning of the word 'covenant'). Some Bible chapters referred to for *kumvetsera nkhani* (comprehension) are too long, such as, Genesis chapter 17: 1 to 17. Explanations in some instances are too brief. Some questions are difficult for learners, e.g., duties of *mfumu ya mpando* (traditional authority). There is too much time with little content. Some of the illustrations are not clear; use of pictures would be appropriate. Most of the activities do not match with time allocated to them. Some of the illustrations are not clear and exaggerated.

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers made the following suggestions for improving the learners' book for Bible knowledge:

- a. More content should be added to match with the time allocation for the learning area and age of learners.
- b. Provide sufficient information for the learners to study.
- c. Develop activities that are adequate for three terms.
- d. Illustrations should be big enough and clear for learners so that they are able to see what is being depicted.
- e. A variety of teaching and learning methods should be used so that learners with different abilities are targeted.

- f. Reduce repeating of the work
- g. There is need to provide Bibles to schools

3.1.6. Agriculture, science and technology

a) Syllabus

Strengths

The teachers mentioned that the syllabus has core elements and are provided under each topic. The syllabus has suggested teaching methodologies and learning resources. The syllabus guides the teacher well because it tallies with the teachers' guide. The teachers also pointed out that the syllabus has clear and appropriate language. It can be used for teaching in the absence of a Teachers' Guide and it is easy to make schemes of work from the syllabus.

Weaknesses

The teachers pointed out that the time allocated to Agriculture, science and technology is not realistic because little work is given too much time e.g. unit 1 activity 1, 2 and 3. Some of the teachers said that the syllabus is not easy to use because topics are not well arranged.

The teachers pointed out that the syllabus suggests more field trips which need transport money. The teachers however said that it is difficult to raise money for the trips. The syllabus suggested the raising of livestock, but some teachers pointed out that they cannot afford to raise them because they have no place.

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers made the following suggestions for improving the syllabus:

- a. Topics should be relevant to the weather e.g. topics about harvesting should come when it is time for harvesting
- b. Topics should be arranged in logical order
- c. Less trips should be suggested in the syllabus

b) Teachers' guide

Strengths

The teachers said that the teachers' guide guides them very well. The following were reasons supporting this assertion; the teaching, learning and assessment methodologies are appropriate and relevant. The book is well summarized, adequate, accurate and up to date. The teachers said that assessment methods are good. The content in the book is adequate. They find it easy to use the teachers' guide when writing lesson plan. The background information helps the teacher when preparing and teaching a lesson and it is enough.

Some of the teachers noted that the success criteria have corresponding activities, content and assessment tasks have instructions that are clear. The book has appropriate language. The green color of the book reflects agriculture.

Weaknesses

The teachers noted that some topics in the teachers' guide are not arranged as in Syllabus e.g. sources of food in the teachers' guide versus indigenous technologies in the community in syllabus. Some units are not drawn from the syllabus e.g. unit 10. Some activities are not realistic e.g. to show learners people with diseases who live around the school community.

In terms of the content, the teachers pointed out that few questions are provided for assessment at the end of some topics. The background information and activities do not tally. The core elements are not provided in each topic/unit in teachers' guide e.g. unit 5 page 29 (all units). This was said to be making the teachers have difficulties in scheming. Some of the teachers noted that there are some cases where there are too many periods per activity e.g. activity 1 page 26, activity 4 page 33

Some of the teachers pointed out that some topics are difficult to teach e.g. unit 5 – Scientific Investigation on page 29. It was pointed out that its content is not easy to do and not suitable as a result,

“aphunzitsi ambiri amakana kuphunzitsa agriculture science and technology” (many teachers refuse to teach agriculture science and technology”) standard 4 teacher

Teachers pointed out that some illustrations are not clear e.g. pages 17 and 42. Some suggested resources are difficult to find. Some activities do not have time allocation e.g. activity 3 page 60. There are no answers for the learners’ activities

Suggestions for improvement

The following suggestions were made to improve the teachers’ guide:

- a. Answers should be provided for the activities in the learners’ book
- b. Colored illustrations should be provided.
- c. Relevant illustrations should be provided and many for the teacher to choose from.
- d. Learners’ activities should tally with background information.
- e. Activities should be sensitive to today’s problems. For example it is not possible to show the learners people in the community suffering from diseases like AIDS and others. This affects those learners that are infected with HIV and AIDS in their classes.
- f. Review exercise should be both in the teachers’ guide and the learners’ book. The answers to the review exercises should also be written in the teachers’ guide.
- g. Remove the checklist in the teachers’ guide.
- h. Core elements to accompany each topic/unit.
- i. All activities should have time allocation.
- j. Teachers should be thoroughly oriented on new topics like scientific investigation.
- k. Activities should tally with time
- l. Topics have to be drawn from the syllabus
- m. Topics should be arranged in logical order (with continuity and coherence)
- n. Develop clear illustrations e.g. page 71 and page 42
- o. Increase or add adequate questions for each topic e.g. 5 questions

- p. Change illustrations on the teachers' guide and learners' book e.g. put a teacher on teachers' guide and learners on learners' book

c) Learners' book

Strengths

On illustrations, some of the teachers noted that illustrations are clear and colorful such that they attract learners. It was further noted that the illustrations are easy to interpret, clear and gender sensitive.

The teachers said that the content in the learners' book match with that in the teachers' guide. Further, the teachers said that the content is gender appropriate, it is correct, updated, and adequate and its activities are properly arranged and clear. The language and size of letter are appropriate. The content was said enough to be covered in one school calendar.

The teachers also said that the learners' book helps the teacher when writing lesson plans because instructions in learners' book are clear and the topics are logically arranged.

Weaknesses

The teachers pointed out that there are repetition of topics e.g. 2, 3, 4 and 8, 9, 10 and 11 this was reported to be making it difficult for the learners to differentiate that they are learning different topics.

Some of the teachers noted that there are similar/same activities in some topics in Agriculture and Social and environmental sciences e.g. Agriculture – mutu 11 and Social and environmental sciences - mutu 8. Another example is 'Crops and livestock' this was said to appear in both Agriculture Science and technology and Social and environmental sciences. With this situation, some of the teachers pointed out that learners can go home without learning new things because it might be a topic they already learnt in another learning area.

The introduction of a topic was said to be inadequate. This, some teachers said, fail to help learners learn on their own. In every activity, learners are asked to be in groups. In most cases, learners just make noise.

On illustrations, some illustrations were reported to be small. An example was however not given. It was also pointed out that there was a mismatch on illustration in terms of color e.g. page 26.

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers made the following suggestions for improving the learners' book:

- a. Topics should not be repeated very much to arouse interest of the learners.
- b. Learners lose interest
- c. The activities should not be too simple, but rather push for critical thinking
- d. Illustrations should tally with the topic e.g. mutu 1 page 3 the illustration is not giving a clear message about diseases
- e. Group work should not be used too much and should be mixed with other appropriate methodologies
- f. The learners' books should have passages for the learners to read at home because it only contains activities to be done in groups.
- g. Add more content on the introduction of a topic
- h. Illustrations should be big enough to be easily seen by learners
- i. Illustrations should have proper color e.g. cattle black/white page 26
- j. Learners should start by knowing the soil, what animals they keep at home, crops they grow. Topic 1 should come later and should focus people, crops and animals.

3.1.7 Life skills

(a) Syllabus

Strengths

The syllabus has suggested teaching, learning and assessment resources and methodologies. It also has suggested activities.

The compilation of the syllabus into a single document per standards has reduced inconveniences experienced before, when it was based on a single learning area across standards.

The units/topics in the syllabus correspond with those in the teachers' guide and the success criteria are tallying with those of the teachers' guide. The content is well laid down. The syllabus has core element needed when planning lessons. The topics are broken down into teachable units.

It was also pointed out that the syllabus has good font. The font of the letters is big enough.

Weaknesses

The teachers said that the topic/theme, "Planning my future", should have come in term 1. The way some topics were broken down, does not match the order in which material is presented in the learners book. Teachers noted that suggested activities in the syllabus are more than those in the teachers' guide.

It was also revealed that the number of periods per week in Life skills do not tally with the activities in the syllabus. Some teachers also noted that unit 1 has good health habits only and no bad health habits.

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers made the following suggestions for improving the Life skills syllabus:

- a. The syllabus should be broken down into topics in a manner that avoids moving back and forth when using the learners' book for this was said to confuse learners.
- b. Suggested activities should tally with the number of periods.
- c. Unit 1 should also include examples of bad health habits.
- d. Activities in the syllabus should tally with those in the teachers' guide

(b) Teachers' guide

Strengths

The teachers said that the activities suggested in the teachers' guide and case studies are reflected in the learners' book and the teachers' guide is well aligned to the syllabus. The activities were said to be relevant.

The teachers' guide was said to have guided the teachers what to do in that it provides them with suggested teaching and learning resources and background information which helps them to know the content and could also be translated into notes in class. The teachers' guide also provides them with areas for assessment.

On content, the teachers noted that there is enough content. The activities are properly arranged and there is a glossary provided for difficult words. The illustrations are clear. The instructions given are clear and contemporary issues are addressed.

Weaknesses

Though there are a lot of strengths of the teachers' guide, a number of weaknesses were also revealed by the teachers. The planned work is too little for the time which has been allocated to some of the activities, e.g., unit 11, page 52 and unit 4 page 20. Some teachers noted that there are few topics in the teachers' guide. Some activities were, however, said to be hard to complete within the learning time (periods), e.g., visiting communities.

On content, the teachers pointed out that some information is too advanced for Standard 4 learners, e.g., content on pages 18 to 20.

On the presentation of the book, the teachers noted that the book has small font for letters and dull pictures. The given summary and background was not enough and the glossary did not adequately address the new words in the book.

Some of the teachers pointed out that the assessment tools, that is, checklist, has many questions thereby taking too much time from the teacher. Some teachers pointed out that it is difficult to use the suggested assessment methods in overcrowded classes.

Suggestions for improvement

The following suggestions were made to improve the teachers' guide:

- a. A summary should be added at the end of each unit.
- b. Add glossary at the back of the book.
- c. The activities should be re-evaluated to ensure that they tally with the time allocation.
- d. Teachers should be allowed the flexibility to decide the assessment methods relevant to the situation at their school/class.
- e. The information provided should be relevant to the age level of learners.
- f. There is need to provide adequate content to support teachers.
- g. There should be a variety of assessment tools.
- h. The activities should not be overloaded.
- i. Include teaching and learning methodologies in the teachers' guide

(c) Learners' book

Strengths

Commenting on the illustrations, the teachers pointed out that pictures were attractive and complement text. The illustrations are well drawn and make learners understand what they are learning. Real situations are depicted in the pictures. The color on the pictures adds beauty to the book. The illustrations were noted to be gender sensitive.

The learners' book was said to complement the teachers' guide, pages correspond with those in teachers' guide.

The size of the book was said to be good. The font of the text was said to be big enough for learners to read with little difficulties.

The book has case studies. This was said to be very interesting to learners and making the work of the teacher easy as the stories are given which can be dramatized.

Weaknesses

On content, it was said that it is inadequate in some of the units, e.g., unit 10, pages 34 to 36. The learners' book lacks content for independent reading at home; it is rich in activities only.

There is too much time allocated to some topics, e.g., page 37. In some topics, the language used should be reviewed, e.g., unit 4, page 12. The learners' book is not aligned with syllabus. This results in teachers teaching topics/units without following a logical order. Some of the concepts and lessons were said to be too advanced for Standard 4 learners, e.g., page 12.

The teachers said that some illustrations are not gender sensitive, for example, some of the illustrations in units 3 and 16 picture on page 41 should depict a bigger boy and girl and the girl should not be in mini-dress and the hair should not be plaited. On pages 38 and 39, the pictures are depicting only boys as playful and not girls. Pages 29 and 32 depict only girls having problems, but this can happen to both boys and girls.

The teachers observed that the learners' book has very long reading passages and some vocabulary is too advanced for the learners, e.g., 'assigned'.

On methodology, the introduction in the learners' book was said not to be enough. Furthermore, the activities only ask learners to discuss in their groups and this is difficult for them, but should also allow them to ask parents some information to be shared the following day.

On the book development, the teachers noted that the quality of the book is low; easy to wear out. It was also pointed out that the question mark used in some pages is strange.

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers made the following suggestions for improving the learners' book:

- a. Adopt the same question mark as in other learning areas
- b. Materials should be revised to reflect better gender sensitivity, e.g., pages 38 and 39.
- c. Include what learners should do when they are involved in rape cases, e.g., unit 4
- d. The content should be aligned with syllabus.
- e. The topics should be dealt with in one unit rather than splitting them up.
- f. More content is needed in the learners' book.
- g. Tables with blank spaces should be avoided.
- h. A longer introduction should be given to each topic.
- i. Not all activities should involve group work. A balance of other methodologies should be presented
- j. Both boys and girls should be shown to have problems, e.g., pages 29 and 32
- k. There should be short passages for reading and they should have simple vocabulary.
- l. Some reviewers felt that children in standard 4 are too young to tackle the topic of sexual harassment (unit 4) in the manner that it is presented.
- m. Topics should have just enough time allocated to it.
- n. More content should be added that is suitable for independent reading.

3.1.8 Social and environmental sciences

(a) Syllabus

Strengths

The teachers said that it is easy to identify units for each core element. The topics are broken into teachable units and well sequenced. Each topic has success criteria.

Success criteria, teaching resources and methodologies tally with the activities. Furthermore, the success criteria are clear and correspond to the teachers' guide.

The methods and resources for each topic are indicated. Assessment standards are shown to guide teachers. The assessment tools are suggested in the syllabus. The activities are also suggested in the syllabus, which help the teacher to focus on what learners should be doing under each topic.

Weaknesses

The syllabus is not properly aligned with the teachers' guide. The pages are not indicated to show correspondence with the teachers' guide.

On organization of the content, the teachers noted that there is too much repetition of activities. There is also too much fragmentation of activities into different lessons, e.g., discussing the uses of water is in a different lesson from the uses of water pages 187 in syllabus. In some cases, the topics were said to be too long compared to the given time.

Suggestions for improvement

The teachers made the following suggestions for improving the book:

- a. Align the syllabus with the teachers' guide.
- b. Each learning area should have its own syllabus because the present one is too heavy to carry.
- c. Possible assessment items should be indicated.
- d. Integrate/combine activities in some lessons wherever possible.

(b) Teachers' guide

Strengths

The teachers' guide has success criteria which guide what is to be learnt. The success criteria match with content. The teachers' guide has background information, which is enough to guide teachers. The teachers' guide is easy to use when writing lesson plans. The content is adequate in the teachers' guide. The

activities are given adequate time. The topics are relevant to the learners' needs and age.

Suggested teaching, learning and assessment activities are indicated and are relevant. The teachers' guide has assessment items on which the teacher is to base his/her assessment. This enables them to assess learners at the end of each topic. The teachers pointed out that instructions in the teachers' guide are clear and easy to follow. They also noted that difficult words are well defined.

The illustrations were said to be good except for the map showing Traditional Authorities. Most pictures included in the teachers' guide are helpful to the teacher.

The teachers noted that the use of the teachers' guide promotes learners' participation in class.

Weaknesses

The teachers noted that the sequencing of some activities is poor, e.g., unit 7 on water conservation, uses of water should be covered before caring of water sources project because learners need to appreciate the value of water before investing their time in caring for it.

The Teachers noted that success criteria are limited in number, sometimes just one success criteria is given which makes scheming difficult. The teachers' guide does not contain the methods that are identified in the syllabus. The teachers noted that there are no possible answers/responses to the exercises.

The summaries are not rich in information. The teachers also pointed out that role play is not successful with children.

On illustrations, the teachers pointed out that pictures are not clear; some are too faint to give details. The maps were said to have very small words that are difficult to read. It was noted that some TAs do not appear on the Traditional Authorities

map. It was reported that some illustrations do not correspond with the text, e.g. page 70.

The teacher noted that the background information was not adequate. They also noted that the glossary does not include all difficult words.

On the book production, the teachers pointed out that the book is not of durable quality. The letter size (font size) is too small even for teachers. Some page references in the teachers guide do not tally with that in the learners' book, e.g., on page 12 do not tally with those in the learners' book, e.g., on page 10.

Most activities demand the use of a resource person which is tiresome and not always feasible. Educational visits suggested in the book do not match with time allocation for Social and environmental sciences. There are unrealistic expectations from Traditional Authorities (TAs), e.g., they cannot have current information on their population.

Suggestions for improvement

The following suggestions were made to improve the teachers' guide:

- a. Summaries should have adequate content/information.
- b. Quality of pictures should be improved.
- c. Improve binding and quality of paper used.
- d. The pictures should be colored.
- e. Enough background information should be provided.
- f. More difficult words should be defined in the glossary.
- g. There should be large print on maps.
- h. Page references should be checked for correctness.
- i. Update the Traditional Authority (TA) map with appropriate names.
- j. Only on TAs it could be better if children learnt on TAs in their district.
- k. There should be responses to the exercises in order to guide the teachers.
- l. Illustrations should match the corresponding text.

- m. A variety of methodologies should be used rather than over-using resource persons.
- n. The teachers guide should show the methods that are specified in syllabus.
- o. The letter size should be increased.
- p. The activities should be properly sequenced.
- q. Visits should be suggested only where necessary.
- r. Role play may be useful in later classes otherwise a lot of time is wasted on organization.

(c) Learners' book

Strengths

The book has colored pictures. This was said to be good for learners. The font size of the learners' book was good. Illustrations are relevant to content and they are interesting. The pictures are attractive. Illustrations clearly depict what is expected.

The teachers said that the content was enough for one academic year and it concerns things the learners are familiar with. The content equips the learners with skills that they need in everyday life. The content is said to be empowering and action oriented. The topics are well sequenced and relevant to the learners' age level.

Assessment items are pitched at the correct level of the learners' ability. They are based on the topic and are relevant to the work provided in the unit. Some of the stories used in the book are educative. Learners are given some short notes.

Weaknesses

The teachers pointed out that some pages in the learners' book do not correspond to the teachers' guide, e.g., pages 81 to 82 in the learners' book do not correspond to what is in the teachers' guide.

The teachers pointed out that some of the materials in the book are too difficult for learners, e.g., location of a place on a map (unit 1), unit 7 – drawing graphs based on

given population figures, reasons why it is important to know the population the learners find problems with. The learning area starts with very difficult work, e.g., map work is tough for learners who just graduated from Standard 3. Some questions are too difficult for learners, e.g., duties of *mfumu ya mpando* (traditional authority).

It was pointed out that some of the methodologies are inappropriate, e.g., visiting an AIDS patient. There are too many instances for learners to ask their parents questions/surveys, home work, tasks, investigations). It was pointed out that there are too many excursions with learners and these demands more time. The teachers also pointed out that too much group work is enforced.

Some of the topics are not appropriate, e.g., seasons/*nyengo*. This is because the topic has not started with weather in order to progress to seasons. Weather is not even covered in Standard 2 or 3. The picture of companies polluting water on page 40 is not suitable for Standard 4 learners.

Some of the information in Social and environmental science is agricultural in nature. The use of the word "science" in the title of the learning area (Social and environmental science) is confusing.

The teachers pointed out that some information is missing on some pages, e.g., on pages 3 and 4, there are some TAs like those of Machinga and Nkhotakota which have not been included on the map. Some illustrations are not clear, e.g., page 27.

Ways of finding money should depict others who are working in offices, e.g., on page 50, unit 8. The pictures should not include children selling things.

The teachers pointed out that the learners' book has too little information for the learners. Explanations are too brief and there are just few questions.

Suggestions for improvement

Teachers made the following suggestions for improving the learners' book:

- a. The content and activities should be balanced.

- b. Page 52, sentence '*kafalidikwe ka ntchito zopezera ndalama*' ('the spreading of ways of finding money'). alternative could be '*Njira zopezera ndalama*' ('ways of finding money').
- c. Material should be reviewed to ensure an appropriate level of difficulty
- d. Pictures should include various ways of earning money, e.g., a teacher teaching on page 50, unit 8.
- e. Children should not be involved in things like selling *mandasi* (see page 50).
- f. Pictures on pollution should include items that are suitable for the learners' age level
- g. Minimize the use of group work instead and use class discussion.
- h. Increase the number of review questions.
- i. Provide sufficient information for the learners to study on their own.
- j. On the topic on seasons, it would be better to start with an introduction to 'weather'.
- k. On the map showing TAs, there is need to update the information as other TAs were promoted to senior chiefs, sub TAs, etc.
- l. Some English terms have been used in the learners' book, e.g., '*gulupu*' please translate these if possible.
- m. Page 1 of the learners' book should match with those referred to in the teachers' guide.
- n. Repetitions should be minimized. A topic should have 4 lessons which should be covered in one week, rather than having one topic running for 2 weeks which is too long to sustain learners' interest.
- o. Streamline topics so that each aspect is covered at the right time of the year.
- p. Minimize the number of excursions and make lessons interesting by using a variety of teaching and learning methods.
- q. Methods which require learners to interact with people in disadvantaged condition may create embarrassing situations unnecessarily and thus should be avoided.
- r. The learners' book should be enriched by beefing up the information that is suitable for independent reading.

- s. The work in the learners' book should develop from simple to complex, rather than frightening the learners' with an impossible task such as drawing a map at the beginning.
- t. Illustrations should be reviewed to improve their clarity
- u. The picture of a letter on page 91 should include an address.
- v. The picture of a road on page 91 should indicate a road sign or a car on it.
- w. Some copies of the learners' books have missing pages.
- x. On page 1, the flag should depict the new Malawi flag.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

High quality instructional materials promote quality education. The importance of research to provide scientifically and pedagogically sound instructional materials cannot, therefore, be overstated. This study was, therefore, designed to solicit Standards 3 to 4 teachers' views in relation to the instructional materials they have been using over the years since the introduction of the Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform (PCAR). Teachers who formed the study sample were drawn from all six education divisions of the country. Data were collected from the teachers through focus group discussions and questionnaires. The findings of the study in this report have revealed many strengths and weaknesses of Standards 3 and 4 instructional materials. This section summarizes some of the most notable findings of the study.

In general, the findings are very similar to those on instructional materials for Standards 1 and 2, which were reported in an earlier report. Both reports, for example, indicate the following strengths in relation to the instructional materials: Content in most syllabuses corresponded with those in teachers' guides and learners' books; Syllabuses provided enough suggestions for teaching, learning and assessment resources and methodologies; Instructions for activities were clear; Illustrations were clear and complemented text. On weaknesses, both reports indicate that teachers have problems with the approaches for English and Chichewa on the use of groups during the teaching and learning process. Teachers also observed that Bible knowledge books did not have enough content to be covered in three terms in all four classes. Further, teachers alleged that learners had problems with reading because the whole word approach is less effective than the syllabic approach. In addition, teachers for all four classes noted that most of the instructional materials are not transcribed into Braille for use by Braille users.

Bearing in mind that teachers are the implementers of the curriculum, their views on the functioning of the instructional materials are critical if we are to promote the quality of education. This is also crucial considering the fact that the instructional materials were not field-tested before their implementation in the classroom.

4.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made against the key findings presented in this report:

Teachers alleged that lack of *maphatikizo*, in Chichewa, makes it difficult for learners to learn how to read.

- *The whole word approach of teaching Chichewa should be reviewed and more effective approaches that help learners to learn how to read and write at the earliest stage be adopted.*

The study has shown that teachers have problems with teaching and learning approaches proposed in English and Chichewa on the use of groups (learning stations).

- *The approach should be revisited to ensure that the materials are well utilized for instruction.*
- *Alternative approaches for large classroom sizes should be included.*

The study has revealed that most of the instructional materials are not transcribed into Braille.

- *An attempt should be made to have instructional materials transcribed into Braille and distributed to teachers with visual impairment.*

The study has shown that the background information for a unit or an activity, in some learning areas, is shallow.

- *A deliberate attempt should be made to 'beef up' background information in learning areas of concern*

It has been revealed that teachers are not provided with model answers on assessment items.

- *A deliberate attempt should be made to provide teachers with model answers on assessment items to guide them*

The study has shown that the teachers had problems using the method of teaching in small groups in most lessons.

- *Teachers need further training on the use of the method of teaching in small groups as a participatory method of teaching in both Standards 3 and 4. It may also be necessary to explore other teaching and learning methods that could be more appropriate than the small group method.*

The study has revealed that Schools were not provided with Bibles for use in teaching Bible knowledge.

- *MoEST should provide schools with Bibles to facilitate teaching and learning of Bible knowledge. Subject panels should agree on the version that is supposed to be used.*

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Researchers

The following are teams of researchers that were involved in data collection.

Team A

1. Tionge W Saka
2. Dr Fritz Kadyoma
3. Edward G Mtonga
4. Nairet Molande

Team B

1. Aaron Mapondera
2. Mercy Ching'ani Phiri
3. Foster Gama
4. Peter Ngunga

Team C

1. Liveness M Phiri
2. Max J Iphani
3. Evelyn Chinguwo
4. Grammes Chirwa
5. Alex Chiumia

Team D

1. Davie Kaambankadzanja
2. Mirriam Katundulu
3. Joyce Kasambara
4. Billy Kanjala
5. Evelyn Iemani

Team E

1. Austin Kalambo
2. Niffa Chikonje
3. Michael Chilemba
4. Enia Mataya

Team F

1. John Maganga
2. Margret Chilimanjira
3. Cecilia Kamlongera
4. Jackson Yekha

Appendix 2: Data collection by division by learning areas

	Day 1								Day 2							
Teams	Std 1		Std 2		Std 3		Std 4		Std 1		Std 2		Std 3		Std 4	
SHED	Ch	Int	Ch	Eng	Ch	Eng	Eng	Nm	Ch	Eng	Ch	BR	Eng	Ls	Ls	Ses
SEED	Ch	Eng	Ch	Nm	Ch	Nm	Ea	Ls	Ch	Nm	Ch	Ea	Nm	Ea	Eng	Ea
SWED	Ch	Nm	Ch	Ea	Ea	Eng	Ch	Ses	Ch	Ea	Ch	Nm	Ch	Eng	Ast	BR
CWED	Ch	Ea	Ch	Ls	Ls	Nm	Ch	Ast	Ch	BR	Ch	Eng	Ch	BR	Nm	Eng
CEED	Ch	BR	Ch	BR	Ses	Ls	BR	Eng	Ch	Int	Ch	Ls	Ea	Nm	Ch	Nm
NED	Ch	Int	Ch	Eng	BR	Ea	BR	Nm	Ch	Eng	Ch	Nm	BR	Ses	Ch	Eng

	Day 3								Day 4							
Teams	Std 1		Std 2		Std 3		Std 4		Std 1		Std 2		Std 3		Std 4	
SHED	Ch	Nm	Ch	Ea	Nm	Ses	Ch	Ls	Ch	Ea	Ch	Nm	Ch	Ls	Eng	Nm
SEED	Ch	Ea	Ch	Ls	Eng	Ea	Ch	Ses	Ch	BR	Ch	BR	Ch	Eng	Ses	BR
SWED	Ch	BR	Ch	Eng	Ea	Nm	Ls	Eng	Ch	Int	Ch	Ls	Ses	BR	Ea	Ast
CWED	Ch	Int	Ch	Nm	Ls	Eng	Ast	BR	Ch	Eng	Ch	Eng	Eng	Ses	Ch	Nm
CEED	Ch	Eng	Ch	BR	Ch	BR	Ea	Ses	Ch	Nm	Ch	Ea	Eng	Nm	Ea	Ls
NED	Ch	Nm	Ch	Ea	Ch	Ls	Nm	Ea	Ch	Ea	Ch	Ls	Nm	Ea	Ses	Ls

Day 5								
Teams	Std 1		Std 2		Std 3		Std 4	
SHED	Ch	BR	Ch	Eng	Ea	BR	Ast	BR
SEED	Ch	Int	Ch	Ls	Ls	Ses	Ast	Eng
SWED	Ch	Eng	Ch	BR	Ses	Ls	Nm	Ses
CWED	Ch	Nm	Ch	Ea	Ch	Eng	Ea	Ls
CEED	Ch	Ea	Ch	Nm	Ch	Nm	Ch	BR
NED	Ch	BR	Ch	BR	BR	Nm	Ch	Ast

Key

1. Int – Introduction to school life and learning
2. Ch – Chichewa
3. Eng – English
4. Nm – Numeracy and Mathematics
5. Ea – Expressive Arts
6. Ls – Life Skills
7. Ses – Social and Environmental Sciences
8. Ast – Agriculture, Science and Technology
9. BR – Bible Knowledge or Religious Education

Appendix3: Teacher Questionnaire

Data collection for review of PCAR instructional materials Teachers' Questionnaire

Introduction

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology through the Malawi Institute of Education is carrying out an evaluation of the primary school instructional materials in Standards 1, 2, 3 and 4. This questionnaire is intended to help the Ministry of Education collect information on how teachers are using the instructional materials. The information will be used to review standard 1 to 4 materials. We would like to assure you of strict confidentiality for all the information you are going to provide.

A. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Number of respondents by sex: Male _____ Female _____

Zone _____ District _____ Division _____

Standard _____ Learning Area _____

B. SYLLABUS

1. Is the content in the syllabus adequate:

Yes () No ()

If *No*, please explain.

2. Which topics/themes in the syllabus are **not** relevant?

Topic	Explain why

3. Is the syllabus easy to use?

Yes () No ()

If *No*, please explain.

C. TEACHERS' GUIDE

4. Is all the content in the Teachers' guide:

	Yes	No	If No, explain
4.1 drawn from the syllabus?			
4.2 adequate?			

4.3 accurate?			
4.4 up to date?			

5. Are the activities in the Teachers' guide:

	Yes	No	If No, explain
5.1 properly arranged?			
5.2 easy to do?			
5.3 adequate?			
5.4 suitable?			

6. Are the instructions for the activities clear?

Yes () No ()

If *No*, please explain.

7. Do page references in the teachers' guide correspond with the Learners' book?

Yes () No ().

If *No*, please give any specific examples:

8. Are all the illustrations in the teachers' guide (if any):

	Yes	No	If No, please explain
8.1 clear?			
8.2 Correct?			
8.3 properly complementing			

the text?			
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9 Is the language in the Teachers' guide appropriate?

Yes () No ()

If No, please explain

10. Do all success criteria:

	Yes	No	If No, explain
10.1 have corresponding content?			
10.2 have corresponding activities?			
10.3 have corresponding assessment tasks?			

11. Are the teaching and learning methodologies suggested in the Teachers' guide appropriate?

Yes () No ().

If No, please give any specific examples:

12. Are the assessment methodologies suggested in the Teachers guide appropriate?

Yes () No ().

If No, please give any specific examples:

13. Are the teaching and learning resources suggested in the Teachers' guide appropriate?

Yes () No ().

If No, please give any specific examples:

14. Are the assessment resources suggested in the Teachers guide appropriate?

Yes () No ().

If *No*, please give any specific examples:

D. LEARNERS' BOOK

15. Is the content in the Learners' book:

	Yes	No	If No, explain
15.1 matching with the teachers' guide?			
15.2 correct?			
15.3 up to date?			
15.4 gender appropriate?			
15.5 adequate?			

16. Are the activities in the Learners' book properly arranged? Yes () No ()

If *No*, please explain: _____

17. Are the instructions for the activities in the Learners' book clear?

Yes () No ()

Give reason(s) for your answer:

18. Are the illustrations in the Learners' book:

	Yes	No	If No, explain

18.1 clear?			
18.2 supporting the text?			
18.3 relevant?			
18.4 gender balanced?			
18.5 easy to interpret?			

19. Is the language in the learners' book:

	Yes	No	If No, explain
19.1 appropriate?			
19.2 gender sensitive?			

20. Is the size of letters appropriate to the level of the learners?

21. Is the size of the learners' book appropriate for the learners?

22. Are the shapes of the letters and punctuation marks appropriate to the level of the learners?

Thank you

Appendix 4: Focus Group Discussion Guide

Data collection for review of PCAR instructional materials FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION FOR TEACHERS

1. What are the strengths of the Learners' book? *(Note: facilitator should probe for each Learning Area)*
2. What are the weaknesses of the Learners' book? *(Note: facilitator should probe for each Learning Area)*
3. What suggestions do you have for improving the Learners' book?
4. What are the strengths of the Teachers' guide? *(Note: facilitator should probe for each Learning Area)*
5. What are the weaknesses of the Teachers' guide? *(Note: facilitator should probe for each Learning Area)*
6. What suggestions do you have for improving the Teachers' guide?
7. What are the strengths of the Syllabus? *(Note: facilitator should probe for each Learning Area)*
8. What are the weaknesses of the Syllabus? *(Note: facilitator should probe for each Learning Area)*
9. What suggestions do you have for improving the Syllabus?
10. What are the strengths of the Posters?
11. What are the weaknesses of the Posters?
12. What suggestions do you have for improving the Posters?
13. Any other comment?