



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

EARLY GRADE READING ACTIVITY

Benchmarking Workshop
JANUARY 21–22, 2016

MAY 2016

Contract No.: AID-612-C-13-00002

This report was prepared for review by the United States Agency for International Development.

Early Grade Reading Activity

Benchmarking Workshop Report

Prepared by **Joseph DeStefano, Senior Technical Advisor**

Submitted under

Contract No.: AID-612-C-13-00002

By

Joseph DeStefano

RTI International

3040 Cornwallis Road

Research Triangle Park, NC 27709-2194

Date Submitted: May 2016

Table of Contents

List of Tables	iii
List of Figures	iii
Abbreviations	v
Introduction	1
Background.....	1
Chichewa Reading Benchmarks	3
Confirmation of Draft Benchmarks and Targets.....	4
Chichewa Reading Benchmarks for Standard 4	6
Aligning Reading Benchmarks to the National Education Standards.....	8
English Reading Benchmarks	9
Conclusions and Next Steps	13
Annex A. List of Workshop Participants.....	15
Annex B. Information on SACMEQ Evaluation of Reading Proficiency.....	16

List of Tables

Table 1. Benchmarks for Chichewa Reading Proposed at the Culmination of the Workshop in November 2014	2
Table 2. Targets for the Proportion of Learners Meeting the Chichewa Reading Benchmarks in Each Skill Area for Standards 1–3.....	2
Table 3. Alignment of Specific Literacy Skill Areas of Development to the SACMEQ-Defined Levels of Reading Ability.....	6
Table 4. Benchmarks in Each Reading Skill Area for Standard 4 Chichewa.....	7
Table 5. Proposed Chichewa Reading Benchmarks for Syllable Reading, Familiar Word Reading, Oral Reading Fluency (Text Reading), and Comprehension.....	8
Table 6. Levels of Performance in Student Outcomes for Syllable Reading	8
Table 7. Time Allocation in Chichewa and English in Standards 1–5	12
Table 8. Recommended Benchmarks for English Reading Skill Development	12

List of Figures

Figure 1. Average fluency scores of Standard 1-3 students in EGRA-supported schools at the beginning and end of the 2014-15 school year	4
Figure 2. Percentages of learners meeting the benchmark in each skill area in Standards 1-3 at the end of school year 2014-15.	5
Figure 3. Progress toward 2020 targets for Standard 2 students meeting Chichewa	

reading skill benchmarks	5
Figure 4. Estimation of average student performance (in items correct per minute) in each skill area beyond Standard 3.....	7
Figure 5. Number of schools in the Malawi EGRA LAT sample in each NES level of performance based on the benchmarks for each Chichewa reading skill area.....	9
Figure 6. Scatter plots relating learners' fluency of Chichewa syllable and text reading to their accuracy in reading English words (EGRA LAT data from end of 2014-15)	11
Figure 7. Scatter plot relating Chichewa reading fluency to English reading fluency	13
Figure B-1. Distribution of Malawian Standard 6 students' reading performance across eight levels of reading ability (data from SACMEQ, 2002 and 2007)	16

Abbreviations

DBE	Directorate of Basic Education
DIAS	Directorate of Inspection and Advisory Services
DTED	Department of Teacher Education and Development
EdData	Education Data for Decision Making
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Activity
ESIP II	Education Sector Implementation Plan
L1	first language
L2	second language
LAT	Learner Assessment Test
MERIT	Malawi Early Grade Reading Improvement Activity
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MIE	Malawi Institute of Education
MTPDS	Malawi Teacher Professional Development Support
NES	National Education Standards
NRS	National Reading Strategy
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Introduction

Following work accomplished in 2014, the Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA) is continuing to support the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) as it defines and refines standards and benchmarks for learning achievement in Malawi. At a workshop held in November 2014, EGRA collaborated with MoEST, the Malawi Institute of Education (MIE), and the Education Data for Decision Making II (EdData II) Project to examine the available data on student performance in reading and to use those data to propose an initial set of benchmarks for reading performance in Standards 1–3. Subsequent to that workshop, several developments in the education sector provided additional information and guidance that could inform a revisiting of those draft benchmarks. EGRA organized a workshop on January 21 and 22, 2016, to bring together 27 participants (listed in **Annex A**) to conduct that review and make recommendations for official benchmarks in reading performance for Standards 1–4. Specifically, the workshop had the following objectives:

- Review the Chichewa reading benchmarks for Standards 1–3 drafted in 2014 in light of additional data on student performance and in light of the most recent developments in the sector
- Review the targets developed for those Chichewa benchmarks and evaluate progress towards achieving those targets using available data
- Consider options for restructuring or redefining the Chichewa reading benchmarks for Standards 1–3 and develop benchmarks for Standard 4
- Make a final recommendation for the benchmarks for Standards 1–4
- Examine research on literacy and language transition (first language [L1] to second language [L2]) and consider the available data on English reading performance among Malawian learners to make an initial recommendation for benchmarks for English reading

This report provides some background on the most relevant recent developments in the education sector in Malawi, summarizes the results of the January 2016 workshop, and provides commentary and makes recommendations for benchmarks based on those results.

Background

As mentioned above, in November 2014 MoEST, MIE, EGRA, and EdData II collaborated to use data from the 2010, 2011, and 2012 national early grade reading assessments and from the Malawi Teacher Professional Development Support (MTPDS) Project pilot reading intervention to determine the levels of reading-related skill that learners in Malawi should be developing in the first three years of primary school. The underlying relationships between students' abilities to accurately and automatically demonstrate reading-related skills guided the workshop participants' efforts to identify benchmarks for performance in each of the four skill areas indicated in **Table 1**.¹

¹ A summary of that workshop and the methodology used to derive this initial set of benchmarks, as well as a list of workshop participants, is available in "Proposing Benchmarks for Early Grade Reading in Malawi," Education Data for Decision Making Project II, USAID: Washington, DC. A copy of the report can be downloaded from www.eddataglobal.org/countries/index.cfm?fuseaction=showdir&pubcountry=MW&statusID=3&showtypes=0

Table 1. Benchmarks for Chichewa Reading Proposed at the Culmination of the Workshop in November 2014

Reading Skill	Standard 1	Standard 2	Standard 3
Reading Comprehension (% correct)	60%	80%	80%
Oral Reading Fluency (correct words of text per minute [cwpm])	30	40	50
Familiar Word Reading (correct words per minute [cwpm])	30	40	45
Syllable Reading (correct syllables per minute [cspm])	50	60	65

In practical terms, the above benchmarks indicate, for example, that to be considered to be performing at the appropriate level for Standard 2, a learner in that standard should be able to read 60 correct syllables per minute, 40 correct familiar words per minute, and 40 correct words per minute in a short grade-level text, and be able to answer four out of five questions correctly (for a comprehension score of 80 percent).

In addition to establishing the above benchmarks, the workshop participants set targets for the percentage of students being able to meet those benchmarks in the future. Data from the national assessment conducted in 2012 showed that very few students were meeting the benchmarks. For example, in Standard 2 only 1 percent of students met the benchmark of 60 syllables per minute, 1 percent met the benchmark of 40 familiar words per minute, and no students met the benchmarks for oral reading fluency or comprehension. Beginning at these extremely low starting points, participants made estimates of the proportion of students that would be able to meet the benchmarks in each of the reading skill areas by 2020. Those targets are summarized in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Targets for the Proportion of Learners Meeting the Chichewa Reading Benchmarks in Each Skill Area for Standards 1–3

Reading Skill Area	% Estimated to Meet the Benchmark by 2020		
	Standard 1	Standard 2	Standard 3
Reading Comprehension	35%	40%	50%
Oral Reading Fluency	40%	50%	50%
Familiar Word Reading	40%	50%	50%
Syllable Reading	50%	55%	60%

Participants recognized that the above targets are ambitious. However they had reasons to believe that developments taking place in the education sector would lead to improvements in learner's performance in reading. For example, at the time of the drafting of the above benchmarks, MoEST had recently officially announced its National Reading Strategy (NRS). This strategy is seen as an important step to ensuring that the outcomes of the Education Sector Implementation Plan (ESIP II) for 2013–2017 are realized.

The NRS² has in part been informed by the reading improvement efforts initially piloted under the MTPDS project and then implemented in 11 districts under EGRA. This activity is providing data that show how students' reading skills are developing within and across Standards 1–3. Building on the experience of EGRA, the NRS is being translated into a National Reading Program intended to provide the supports necessary for successful development of learner's reading skills during the early grades of primary school in both Chichewa and English throughout the country.

To support the implementation of the National Reading Program, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is funding the Malawi Early Grade Reading Improvement Activity (MERIT). MERIT is working in conjunction with MoEST to ensure the materials, training, and ongoing in-school and community-based supports are available to all schools, teachers, and learners in early primary grades.

Furthermore, MoEST has officially adopted its National Education Standards (NES).³ These standards define the educational experiences and outcomes that stakeholders can expect their schools to deliver. The standards articulate the features of effective school leadership, management, and teaching and set out expected outcomes for students. MoEST will use these standards to monitor the quality of service provision at the school level and to ensure that the necessary resources and support are provided where they are needed to ensure improved performance and effective practice.

The National Education Standards are presented at four levels of achievement, namely:

- Level 4: Effective practice
- Level 3: Exceeds minimum standards
- Level 2: Meets minimum standards
- Level 1: Below minimum standards

There are 26 Education Standards in total that cover outcomes for students (6 standards), the teaching process (8), leadership (4), and management (8). The determination of benchmarks for reading performance is meant to reinforce and further define the standards for student outcomes, in particular to lend measurable precision for “Standard 2: Students' outcomes in the curriculum.”

Chichewa Reading Benchmarks

The review of the benchmarks drafted in November 2014 proceeded in two ways. First, participants evaluated whether currently available data indicate a need to reexamine the expected level of skill development required to meet the benchmarks. Second, they considered whether the benchmarks should be restructured to show different levels of skill development. Recounted below are the results of the examination of data and discussion, debate, and agreement reached among the workshop participants.

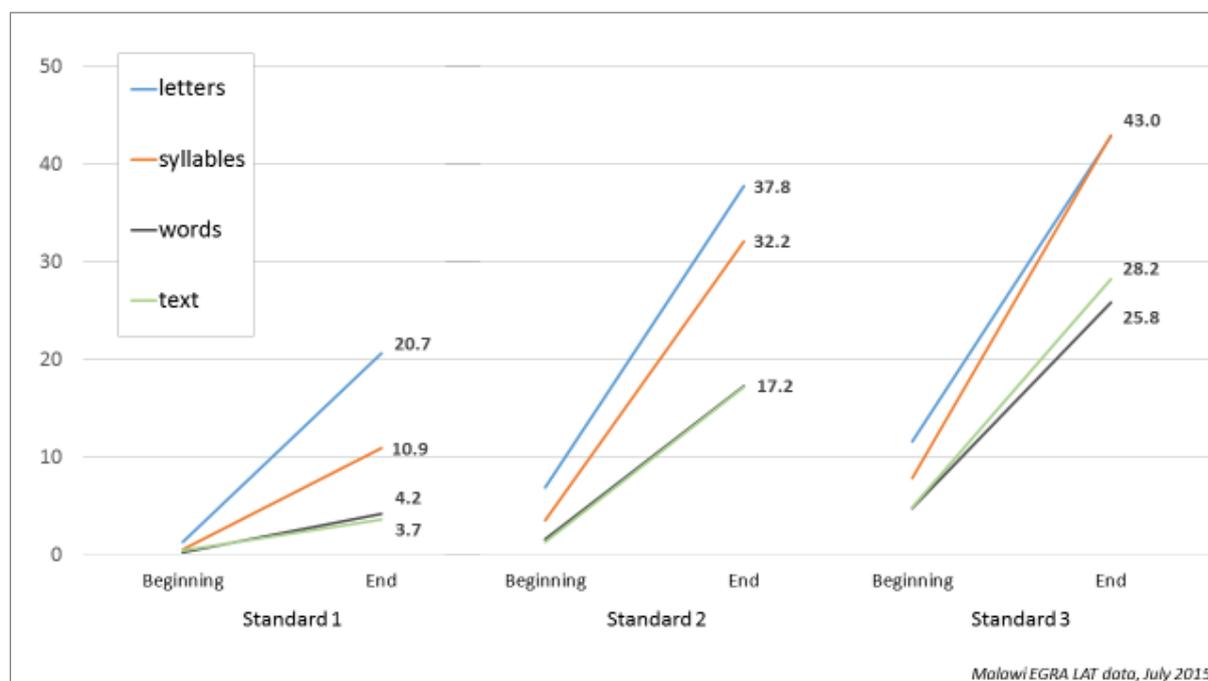
² See “Malawi National Reading Strategy (2014–2019),” published by MoEST with support from USAID in December 2014.

³ Information regarding the National Education Standards is drawn from “National Education Standards: Primary and Secondary Education” published by the Directorate of Inspection and Advisory Services (DIAS) of MoEST, May 2015. The benchmarking workshop in January 2016 began with a presentation of these National Education Standards by DIAS.

Confirmation of Draft Benchmarks and Targets

As mentioned earlier, data from a 2012 national early grade reading assessment show very low levels of performance of students in Standards 2 and 4. Performance across the country at present in the early grades of primary school does appear to continue to be well below the benchmarks developed in 2014.⁴ However, data from the Learner Assessment Test (LAT)⁵ administered under Malawi EGRA do show learners improving their reading skills in Standards 1–3, as illustrated in **Figure 1**. This chart shows that in each standard there is improvement in average performance across the four skill areas of recognizing letters, reading syllables, reading familiar words, and reading text (oral reading fluency). Improvement in Standard 1 is more pronounced for the lower order skills (letters and syllables). In Standard 2, and especially Standard 3, the rate of improvement increases (steeper lines) in all skill areas, and in Standard 3 we see more improvement in the higher order skills of familiar word reading and oral reading fluency. Despite these improvements, the average performance in all cases remains below what would be considered grade-level performance.

Figure 1. Average Fluency Scores of Standard 1–3 Students in EGRA-Supported Schools at the Beginning and End of the 2014–2015 School Year

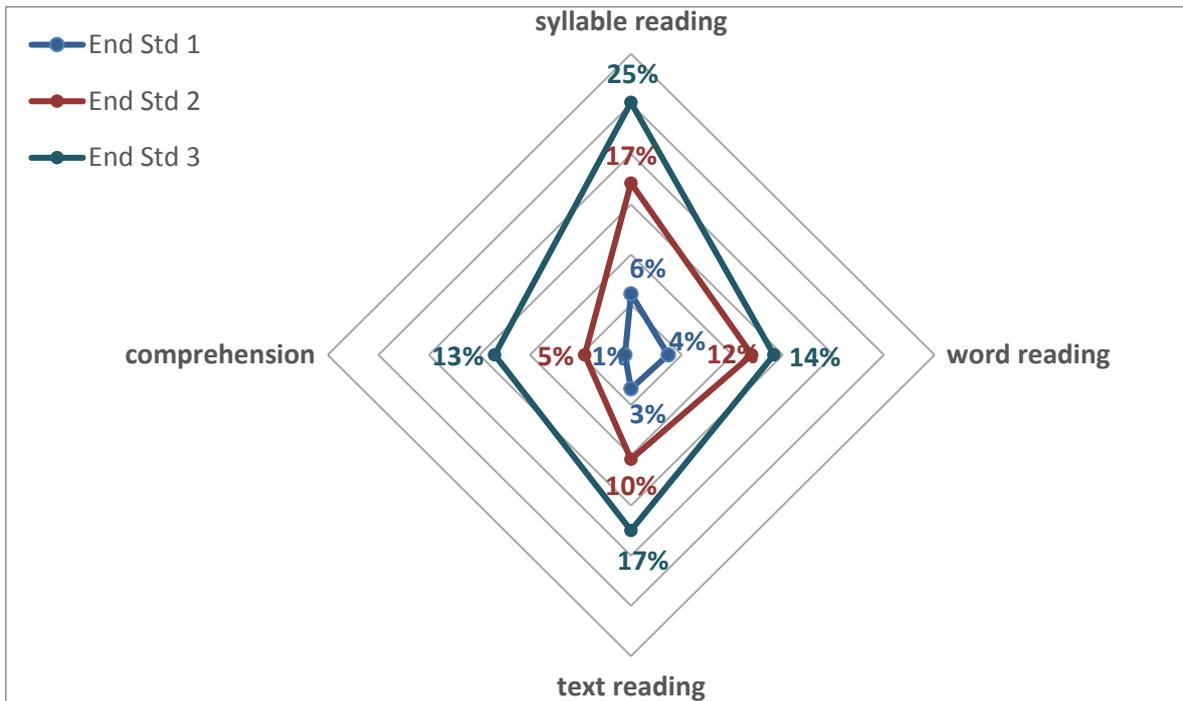


Comparing learner performance at the end of the 2014–2015 school year to the benchmarks shown in Table 1 reveals that the vast majority of students are below the benchmarks in each skill area and in each Standard. **Figure 2** shows that there is improvement in the percentages meeting the benchmarks in all four benchmark skill areas—reading syllables, reading familiar words, reading text, and comprehension.

⁴ A survey conducted by Social Impact in 2015 does show low levels of performance (similar to those seen in 2012); however, the data from that study are being reviewed to ensure their accuracy and quality. Pending that review, the report from that survey is not available.

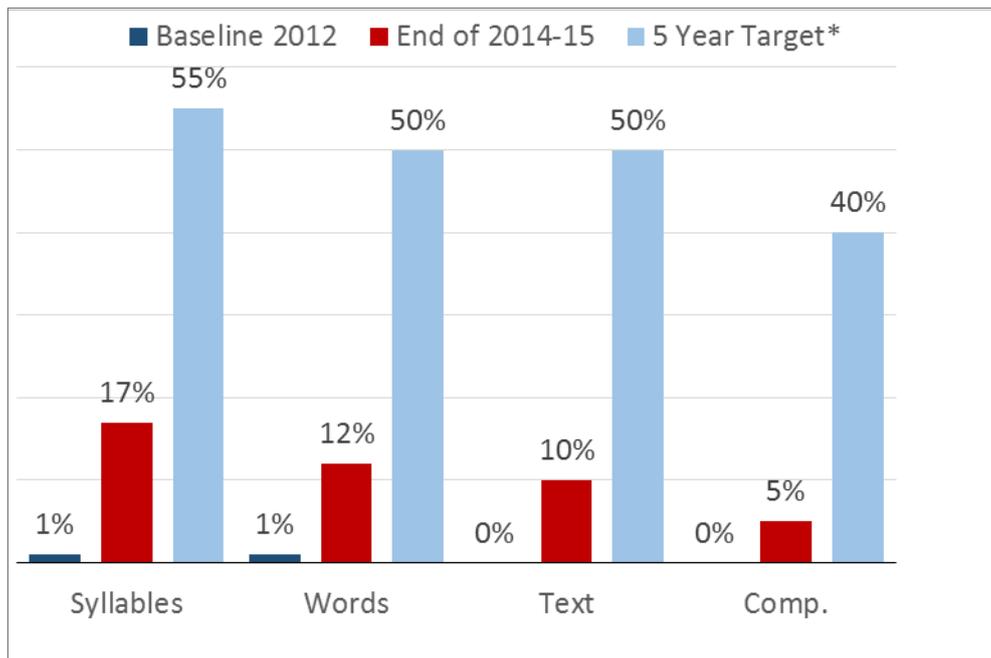
⁵ The LAT is implemented in a sample of schools four times during the school year by EGRA program staff. At the start of the school year, 33 schools are selected randomly in EGRA supported zones. Different sets of 10 learners per standard are then randomly selected in each school during each LAT implementation.

Figure 2. Percentages of Learners Meeting the Benchmark in Each Skill Area in Standards 1–3 at the End of School Year 2014–2015



Are students making adequate progress towards the targets proposed during the 2014 workshop (Table 2)? **Figure 3** shows the increase in the percentage meeting the benchmark in EGRA-supported schools in comparison to the 2012 national figures for Standard 2.

Figure 3. Progress toward 2020 Targets for Standard 2 Students Meeting Chichewa Reading Skill Benchmarks



For syllable, word, and text reading, the gains in the percentage of students meeting

the benchmark are on track to meeting the targets proposed for 2020. For comprehension, the highest order skill, progress has been slower, and if it continues to increase at the same rate, the target for 2020 would not be met. It is important to note that the achieved gains are for students in schools being supported by Malawi EGRA, and it remains to be seen if the same kinds of improvements can be obtained when MoEST implements the National Reading Program in all primary schools beginning in Standard 1 in the 2016–2017 school year.

After reviewing the available data, workshop participants discussed whether the benchmarks for Standards 1–3 proposed in 2014 should be adjusted. Most participants thought the benchmarks should stay the same—averring that even though performance is currently below those levels, it is necessary and important for students to achieve that degree of skill development to reach the level of literacy needed as they progress in their education.

Some participants thought the standards should be raised and advanced two arguments to that effect. One argument indicated that the lower order skills, such as syllable reading, should develop more quickly and therefore the benchmark for Standard 1 for that skill area should be higher. The other argument was that the benchmarks for oral reading fluency and word reading should be set at the highest desirable level, not at what would be minimally acceptable (this point of view will be further elaborated when discussing the levels of performance put forth at the conclusion of the workshop).

Another point of view was that reading benchmarks in Malawi should be aligned with those being used by the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ). SACMEQ evaluates the reading performance of grade 6 students across 15 countries using a scale score standardized to a mean of 500 and standard deviation of 100. In addition it categorizes reading performance into eight levels.⁶ The first four SACMEQ-defined levels of reading correspond to pre-reading, emergent reading, basic reading, and reading for meaning. The skill development envisaged in the benchmarks for specific reading skills can be mapped to the four SACMEQ levels as shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Alignment of Specific Literacy Skill Areas of Development to the SACMEQ-Defined Levels of Reading Ability

Levels		Specific Skills Associated with Each Level
SACMEQ Level 1	Pre-Reading	Recognizing letters and reading syllables, limited word reading
SACMEQ Level 2	Emergent Reading	Increasing word reading and text reading ability
SACMEQ Level 3	Basic Reading	Reading text fluently and demonstrating basic comprehension
SACMEQ Level 4	Reading for Meaning	Reading text fluently with full comprehension

This implies that students who meet the benchmarks for Standards 2 and 3 as previously drafted could be said to be attaining SACMEQ Level 4, reading for meaning.

Chichewa Reading Benchmarks for Standard 4

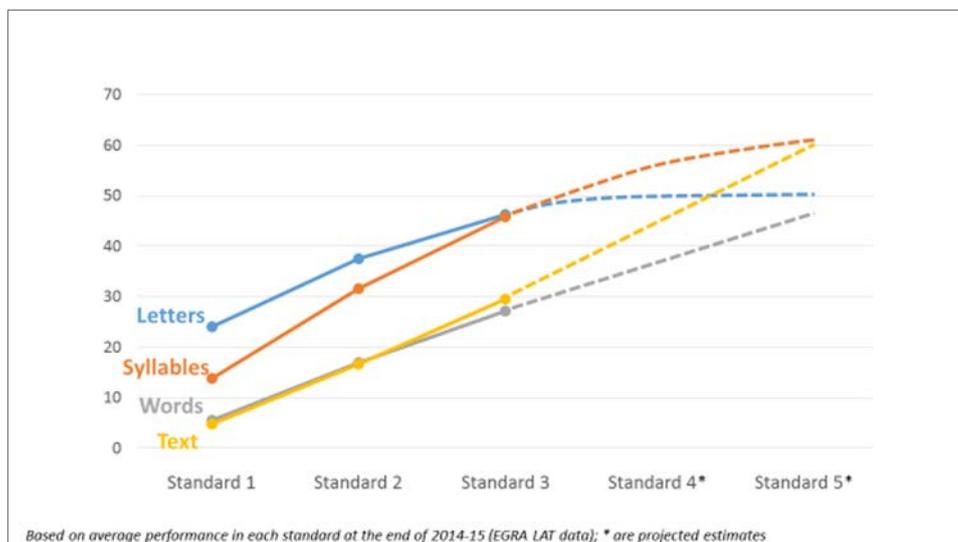
In addition to reconfirming the benchmarks for Standards 1–3, the workshop participants also proposed benchmarks for Standard 4. Lacking detailed data on

⁶ A description of the SACMEQ reading levels is provided in **Annex B** to this report.

Standard 4 performance, the existing trends of increased average performance across Standards 1–3 were used to project what could be expected in Standard 4.

Figure 4 shows these trends and the projection for Standard 4.

Figure 4. Estimation of Average Student Performance (in Items Correct Per Minute) in Each Skill Area beyond Standard 3



Participants discussed how as students advance through the first years of primary school, skill development shifts from letters, syllables, and familiar word reading to increasing development of their fluency reading connected text. This is evident in the flattening out of the curves for letters and syllables beyond Standard 2 or 3, and the steeper progress in text reading compared to word reading beyond Standard 2. These patterns are consistent with the changing emphasis in the NRS, which calls for more time devoted to text reading and comprehension, and no additional time devoted to letter recognition and syllable or word reading beyond Standard 2. Based on these trends, participants proposed the benchmarks in **Table 4** for Standard 4.

Table 4. Benchmarks in Each Reading Skill Area for Standard 4 Chichewa

Skill Area	Standard 4 Benchmark	Comments
Syllable Reading	65 cspm	Most participants felt that the benchmark for syllable reading should remain at the same level as for Standard 3, contending that the skill is no longer emphasized and students would be developing text reading skills, rather than syllable reading in isolation. ⁷ Some participants did argue for continued improvement in syllable reading and wanted to set the benchmark at 70 cspm.
Familiar Word Reading	50 cwpm	The discussion of familiar word reading was similar to that for syllable reading. Most participants argued for a slight increase in the benchmark for Standard 4 (up from 45 cwpm in Standard 3), though some wanted to see the benchmark set at 55 to indicate larger growth in this skill between Standards 3 and 4.
Oral Reading Fluency	60 cwpm	All participants agreed that the benchmark for text reading should be 10 cwpm greater than the benchmark for Standard 3 (which is 50 cwpm).

⁷ According to the MoEST National Reading Strategy, beginning in Standard 2, emphasis should shift from phonemic awareness and phonics to fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, reinforcing the point of view that skills like syllable reading and word reading should be de-emphasized in later standards.

Skill Area	Standard 4 Benchmark	Comments
Reading Comprehension	80% correct	Almost all participants wanted to see the benchmark for comprehension continue at 80% correct. Some wished to see a higher benchmark—90% correct—but the current measure of comprehension, which uses five questions, cannot produce a score of 90%.

Table 5 summarizes the benchmarks for each Chichewa reading skill area across the first four standards of primary school.

Table 5. Proposed Chichewa Reading Benchmarks for Syllable Reading, Familiar Word Reading, Oral Reading Fluency (Text Reading), and Comprehension

Reading Skill	Standard 1	Standard 2	Standard 3	Standard 4
Reading Comprehension (% correct)	60% correct	80% correct	80% correct	80% correct
Oral Reading Fluency (correct words of text per minute)	30 cwpm	40 cwpm	50 cwpm	60 cwpm
Familiar Word Reading (correct words per minute)	30 cwpm	40 cwpm	45 cwpm	50 cwpm
Syllable Reading (correct syllables per minute)	50 cspm	60 cspm	65 cspm	65 cspm

Aligning Reading Benchmarks to the National Education Standards

After setting the absolute levels of performance that are acceptable for demonstrating grade-appropriate skill development in each of the four reading skill areas, workshop participants chose to structure the benchmarks to align with the National Education Standards. This meant defining the four levels of school (or classroom, district, or system) performance according to the four levels around which all the Education Standards are organized. Therefore, the workshop participants propose the means in **Table 6** to gauge school performance in terms of the student outcomes being achieved in early grade reading.

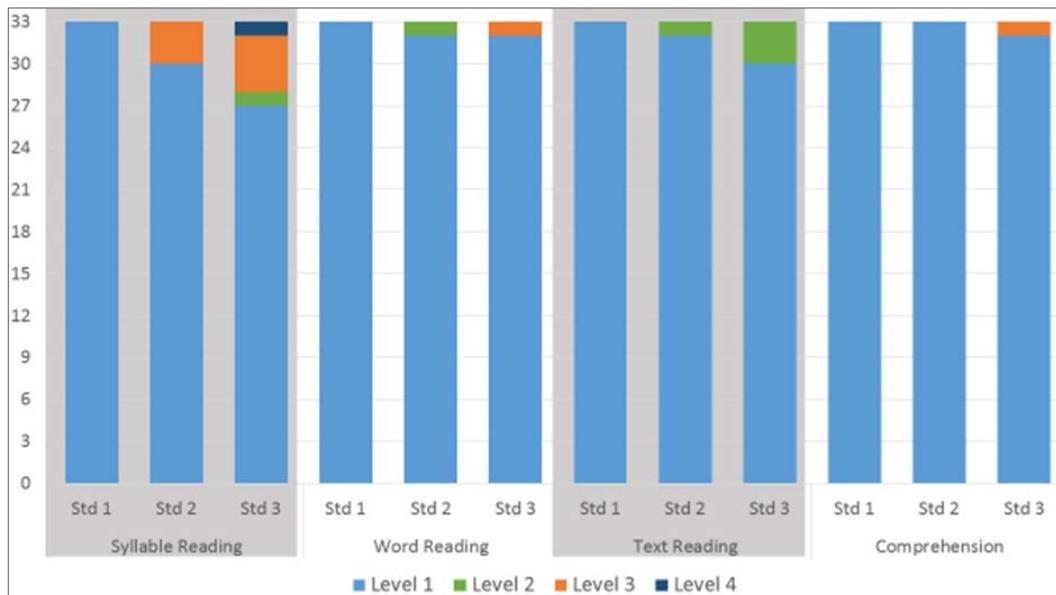
Table 6. Levels of Performance in Student Outcomes for Syllable Reading

National Education Standard Levels		
Effective Practice	Level 4	More than 75% of learners achieve the benchmark
Exceeds Minimum Standards	Level 3	60% to 75% of learners achieve the benchmark
Meets Minimum Standards	Level 2	50% or more of learners achieve the benchmark
Below Minimum Standards	Level 1	Less than 50% of learners achieve the benchmark

To demonstrate how the National Education Standards can be used to evaluate the performance of schools, **Figure 5** shows the number of schools attaining each level of performance across the four skill areas of Chichewa reading—syllable reading,

familiar word reading, text reading, and comprehension.⁸ Based on the percentage of the samples of students tested in each school in Standards 1–3, the school can be classified as Level 1, 2, 3, or 4 according to the criteria indicated above. Only a handful of the 33 schools used in the EGRA sample are above Level 1. For example, regarding syllable reading in Standard 3, 27 schools are at Level 1, (below minimum standards), 1 school is at Level 2 (meeting minimum standards), 4 schools are at Level 3 (exceeding minimum standards), and 1 school is at Level 4 (effective practice).

Figure 5. Number of Schools in the Malawi EGRA LAT Sample in Each National Education Standard Level of Performance Based on the Benchmarks for Each Chichewa Reading Skill Area



Oral reading fluency (text reading) best captures the development of the necessary skill that best reflects students' ability to read to learn—noting that as learners reach and exceed the benchmark for reading fluency, they will become better able to comprehend the text they are reading. It is therefore suggested that when evaluating performance on National Education Standard 2, Students' outcomes in the curriculum, that the oral reading fluency (text reading) benchmarks be used to determine the level of performance of a classroom, school, district, or system. For classrooms or schools performing at Level 1, the outcomes obtained in the other skill areas—syllable and familiar word reading—provide further insight into what skills students are developing on their way to being able to meet the benchmarks for text reading in Standards 1–4.

English Reading Benchmarks

The work developing benchmarks for English reading in Malawi should be informed by the recent research on how students develop literacy skills in one language and then transfer them to a second language. The reading performance of students in an L2 depends on their development of reading skills in their L1 and their building of oral language skills in the L2.^{9,10} Strong bodies of evidence from around the world

⁸ Based on LAT data from the end of the 2014–15 school year.

⁹ Heugh, K, et al. (2007). Final report study on medium of instruction in primary schools in Ethiopia.

¹⁰ For many Malawian students, Chichewa is not their first language, but for simplification of the discussion here, Chichewa is treated as L1.

indicate that before transitioning to a second language, learners must:

- Achieve a secure level of skill development in the first language
- Build up enough vocabulary in the second language to ensure accurate reading and understanding of words

Vocabulary size is one measure of whether students have reached the threshold for literacy acquisition in the second language. For example, research on English as a second language indicates that learners must have vocabularies of about 3,000 to 5,000 words to “read authentic English text.”¹¹ Additionally, when reading in any language, students should know (or read accurately) over 95 percent of the words encountered to ensure “unassisted comprehension.”¹²

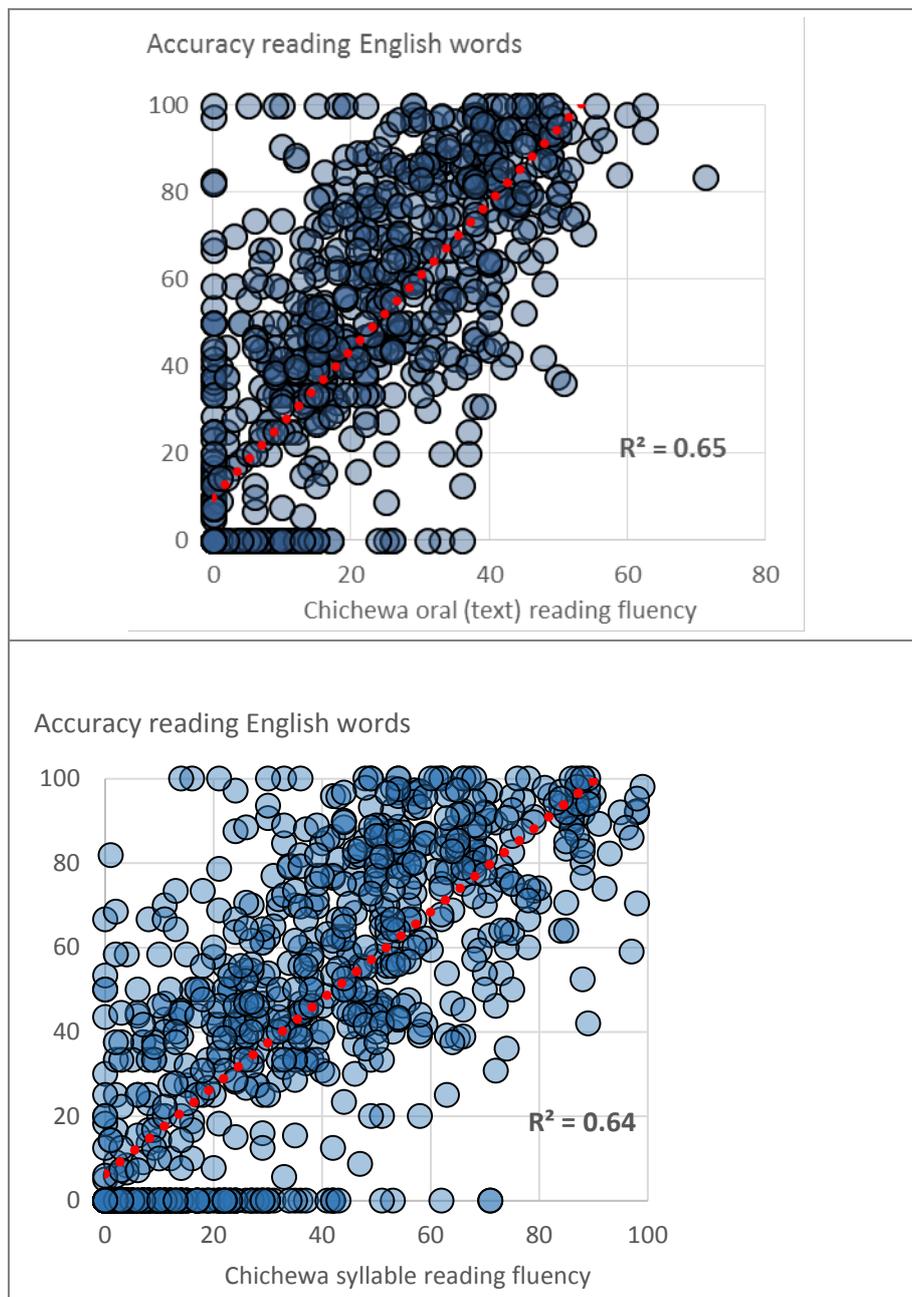
This kind of research provides a basis for analyzing the relationships between reading skill development in Chichewa and student performance in reading in English. Limited data are available on the performance of Malawi learners in English. However, the LAT from 2014–2015 tested students in both Chichewa and English in March and July of that year. This provides some data from which the development of Chichewa literacy skills can be related to the emergence of learners’ ability to apply those skills in English.

The two graphs in **Figure 6** show the strong correlations Chichewa syllable reading and text reading have with students’ ability to read English words accurately.

11 van Ginkel, A. (2014), “Additive Language Learning for Multilingual Settings,” prepared for USAID by JBS International.

12 Nation, I.S.P. (2006), How Large a Vocabulary Is Needed for Reading and Listening? *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, Vol. 63 (1), 59–82.

Figure 6. Scatter Plots Relating Learners' Fluency of Chichewa Syllable and Text Reading to Their Accuracy in Reading English words (EGRA LAT Data from End of 2014–2015)



Students' fluency in reading Chichewa syllables by itself accounts for 64 percent of the variation in their ability to accurately read English words. Similarly, fluency in reading Chichewa text (oral reading fluency) explains 65 percent of the variation in accuracy in reading English words. Students reading English words with 90 percent accuracy or better (a level approaching what the research says is required for unassisted comprehension), on average are correctly reading just under 80 Chichewa syllables per minute and are correctly reading 50 words per minute of Chichewa text. Both of these are well above the average for students currently attaining Standards 1–3. For example, only 13 percent of Standard 3, 6 percent of Standard 2, and no Standard 1 learners are correctly reading 80 or more syllables per minute. And only 16 percent of Standard 3, 5 percent of Standard 2, and no

Standard 1 learners are reaching 50 or more correct words per minute of oral reading fluency.

The strong relationship between Chichewa and English skills in reading implies that any benchmarks for English must in part align with the expectation for how students will be developing their foundational literacy skills in Chichewa, and as important, building their working understanding of English vocabulary.

The NRS calls for a gradual introduction of English during the first years of primary school—with a strong focus on building basic language skills across Standards 1–4. Only in Standard 5 does the amount of time devoted to English language come into balance with the time spent on English literacy as shown in **Table 7**.

Table 7. Time Allocation in Chichewa and English in Standards 1–5¹³

	Standard 1	Standard 2	Standard 3	Standard 4	Standard 5
Chichewa	90% literacy 10% language	85% literacy 15% language	85% literacy 15% language	90% literacy 10% language	100% literacy
English	10% literacy 90% language	20% literacy 80% language	30% literacy 70% language	40% literacy 60% language	50% literacy 50% language

Also as stipulated in the NRS, the focus of instruction in Standard 1 is on oral language development, and only knowledge of the English alphabet and some attention to phonemic awareness (letter sounds) are introduced that year. It is in Standard 2 that students begin to work on reading English words and sentences. In Standards 3 and 4 students are expected to read English text.

Following the framework of the NRS, it is recommended that benchmarks for English reading skill development only begin in Standard 2, focusing on learners' knowledge of English letter sounds and their development of accuracy in reading English words. In Standards 3 and 4, benchmarks could be proposed for text reading (oral reading fluency).

The benchmark for word reading should aim for a high degree of accuracy, as per the research referenced above. Those for letter sound identification and for oral reading fluency should be based on what the data are showing in terms of how students' achieving certain levels of Chichewa reading skill are currently transferring those skills to English. A recommended set of English benchmarks therefore is presented in **Table 8**.

Table 8. Recommended Benchmarks for English Reading Skill Development

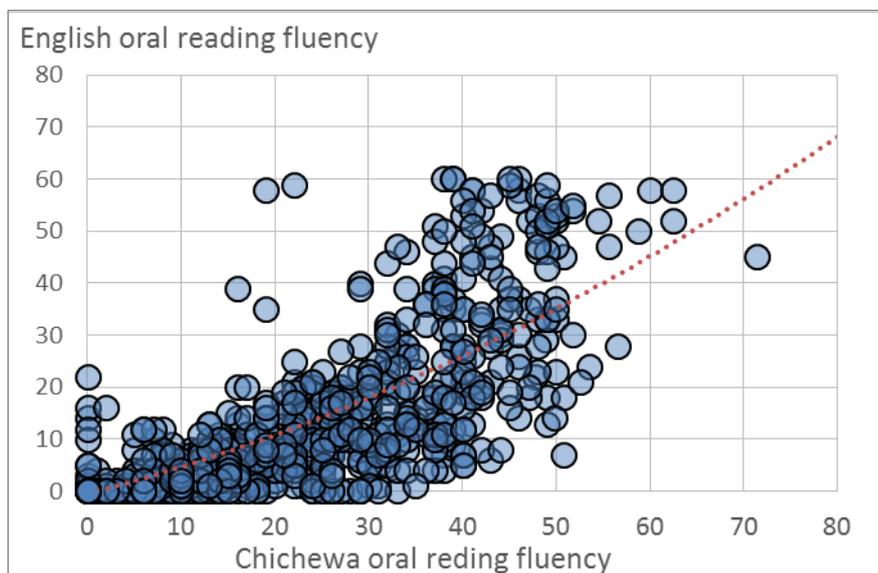
Reading Skill	Standard 1	Standard 2	Standard 3	Standard 4
Accuracy in Letter Sound Identification (% correct)		90% correct		
Accuracy in Word Reading (% correct)		90% correct	90% correct	
Oral Reading Fluency			35 cwpm	45 cwpm

Oral reading fluency in English is not expected until Standard 3. The level of fluency proposed as a benchmark for that grade—35 cwpm—is what students who achieve

¹³ MoEST, National Reading Strategy, p. 13.

the Chichewa oral reading fluency benchmark (50 cwpm) should be able to achieve in English. Similarly, the proposed English text reading benchmark of 45 cwpm is based on what students' achieving the Standard 4 Chichewa benchmark of 60 cwpm should be able to achieve in English. The graph in **Figure 7**, which relates the Chichewa and English reading fluency scores of the same students (at the end of 2014–2015) is the basis for the above determination.

Figure 7. Scatter Plot Relating Chichewa Reading Fluency to English Reading Fluency



As indicated in **Table 8**, it is recommended that no English oral reading fluency benchmark be defined for Standards 1 and 2. Learners' progress in developing English literacy skills in those standards should be judged on their increasing knowledge of the sounds of English letters and their ability to recognize and read words in English correctly.

Conclusions and Next Steps

At the conclusion of the workshop held at Domasi on January 21 and 22, 2016, the assembled participants agreed that EGRA would write up the results of the workshop. The present report fulfills that responsibility. The report attempts to capture the process employed in the workshop and to accurately convey the conclusions reached. The benchmarks for Chichewa reading (with the notes explaining any differing points of view) represent the participants' recommended approach. The benchmarks for English are based solely on the analysis by the author of this report. They are being offered as a recommended set of benchmarks for the concerned stakeholders to consider.

Based on the results as conveyed in this report, the participants agreed to:

- Review the contents of the report and verify that it accurately reflects the discussions and conclusions of the workshop.
- Provide feedback and additional input or corrections to this report where deemed necessary or appropriate.
- Based on the final version of the report, reconvene a set of stakeholders to confirm the recommended benchmarks for Chichewa and English reading skills in Standards 1–4.

- Following confirmation of the benchmarks, submit them to the appropriate authorities within MoEST for official adoption.

Annex A. List of Workshop Participants

N	Surname	First Name In Full	Institution
1	Mswayo	John	MoEST - DIAS
2	Gama	Foster	MIE
3	Soko	Chrissie	MoEST - DIAS
4	Nthengwe	Rodrick	EGRA
5	Giles	Terey	MERIT
6	Chiuye	Grace	MERIT
7	Slade	Timothy	EGRA
8	Green	Paula	EGRA
9	DeStefano	Joseph	RTI
10	Chimombo	Joseph	MoEST - Basic
11	Afoso	Laurent	MoEST -DTED
12	Mdangwe	Victor	MoEST - DTED
13	Nthara	Ivy	DCE
14	Kamulaga	Flossie	MERIT
15	Daka	Lizinet	MoEST - DBE
16	Kapito	Kingsley	MIE
17	Kapito	Patrick	Chancellor College
18	Khasu	Denis	DCE
19	Kalinde	Nicholas	DCE
20	Kankuza	Jeremiah	MoEST - DIAS
21	Banda	Odala	EGRA
22	Kaunda	Zikani	EGRA
23	Simuwelu	Francis	MIE
24	Manyamba	Frackson	MIE
25	Chilimanjira	Margret	MIE
26	Agabu	Raphael	MoEST - DIAS
27	Mwatsika	Joseph	MoEST – DIAS
28	Gunsaru	Charles	MERIT

Annex B. Information on SACMEQ Evaluation of Reading Proficiency

SACMEQ categorizes reading performance according to the eight levels described below.

Level 1—Pre-reading: Matches words and pictures involving concrete concepts and everyday objects.

Level 2—Emergent reading: Matches words and pictures involving prepositions and abstract concepts; uses cuing systems to interpret phrases by reading forward.

Level 3—Basic reading: Interprets meaning (by matching words and phrases completing a sentence) in a short simple text.

Level 4—Reading for meaning: Reads forward and backward to link and interpret information located in various parts of a text.

Level 5—Interpretive meaning: Reads forward and backward to combine and interpret information from various parts of a text in association with (recalled) external information that completes and contextualizes meaning.

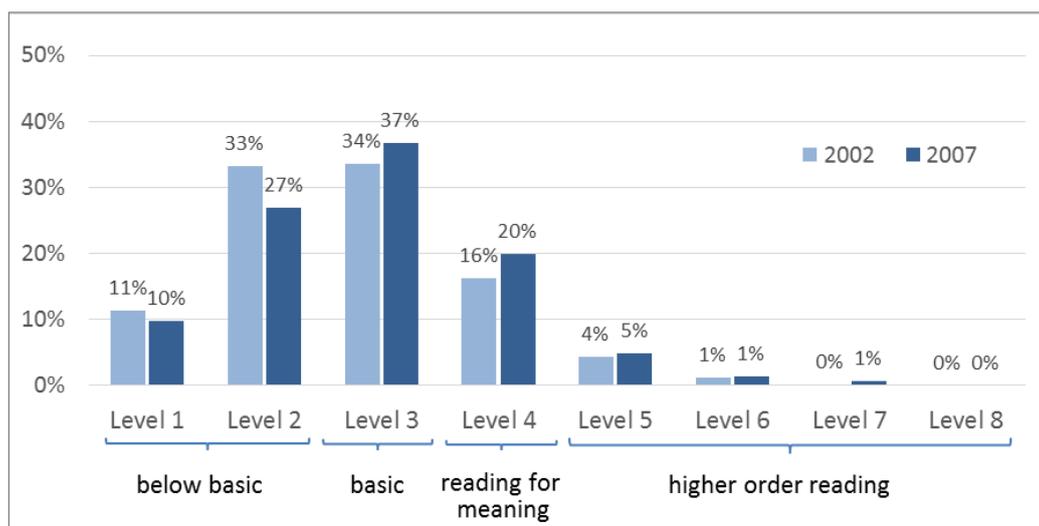
Level 6—Inferential reading: Reads through longer (narrative, expository) texts to combine information from various parts of a text to infer the writer's purpose.

Level 7—Analytical reading: Locates information in longer (narrative, expository) texts to combine information to infer the writer's personal beliefs (value systems, prejudices, biases).

Level 8—Critical reading: Locates information in longer (narrative, expository) texts to infer and evaluate what the writer has assumed about both the topic and characteristics of the reader (for example, age, knowledge, personal beliefs, values).

Data from the 2002 and 2007 SACMEQ tests show how Malawian Standard 6 students performed in reading. These are summarized in **Figure B-1**.

Figure B-1. Distribution of Malawian Standard 6 Students' Reading Performance across Eight Levels of Reading Ability (Data from SACMEQ, 2002 and 2007)



There was some improvement from 2002 to 2007, but still 37 percent of Standard 6 students were scoring in the two levels that are below basic, and another 37 percent were scoring at basic. Together, 74 percent of students were at basic reading levels or below, and only 26 percent were able to at least read for fuller meaning. Very few

students achieved the higher order levels of reading that include being able to draw deeper meaning from and interpret the purpose or point of view of a text.