



## Malawi/ IEQ II Project

*A partnership between the Malawi Institute of Education and Save the Children  
USA/Malawi Field Office*

### WHAT HAPPENED TO THE TEACHERS? FOLLOW-UP ON TEACHER MOBILITY IN 2 MALAWI DISTRICTS

#### Background

In February 1999, IEQ in partnership with Malawi Institute of Education and Save the Children/US embarked on a longitudinal study of pupils, teachers, schools and communities. Nine months later (in October) as the school year was coming to an end, approximately 50% of the 188 teachers were no longer teaching the classes they had begun with in February.

This pattern of teacher mobility generated great interest and concern. Particularly, concern was that the change occurred within an academic year and within the context of enormous pupil-teacher ratios, further jeopardizing the tenuous relationship between a teacher and the more than 60 pupils under his/her tutelage.

To identify the causes of such a high rate of teacher mobility, IEQ/Malawi researchers conducted a follow-up survey. The intent was to trace the missing teachers by returning to the affected schools of Balaka and Mangochi districts,

#### Methodology

In order to capture substantial and reliable data two major sources of information were identified. These were the headteachers and the affected teachers themselves wherever possible. Interview protocols were developed and pilot tested with headteacher and teachers. They were subsequently modified for greater clarity and similarity of data collection across sites. Backup information was also obtained from the District Education Officers (DEO) and the Primary Education Advisors (PEAs).

The 91 teachers from the longitudinal study who were no longer teaching the classes they began with in February 1999 were targeted for follow-up. These teachers were located in 53 of the 65 schools in the sample. All but one of these schools were visited (the remaining school was inaccessible due to poor road conditions) and data were collected on 90 of the targeted teachers. Four IEQ researchers worked in pairs visiting the schools to collect the data. One pair went to Namwera and Makanjira areas, whilst the other pair went to Monkey Bay and Mangochi Boma including its surrounding areas.

## Analyses

During and following data collection, the IEQ researchers discussed what they found as they visited the schools and talked with teachers and headteachers. As needed they returned to the quantitative data available from the longitudinal investigation to look for patterns. Once all of the data were collected, they reviewed all of the interview data collectively. Responses to specific probes were transcribed for coding and further analysis. As patterns were uncovered, the data were studied to identify those instances of support for the pattern as well as negative cases or instances in which the pattern was not evidenced. The following are the findings uncovered in the analysis.

## Findings

Many different reasons were identified to explain the teacher mobility. In some instances the teachers had remained in the same school but had been reassigned to a different class or to cover additional classes. In other instances, the teachers had left the school. Some had left permanently (e.g., through posting away or death) while others were gone temporarily through illness, training, and so on.

Figure 1: Reasons for teacher missing in the Follow-up Survey

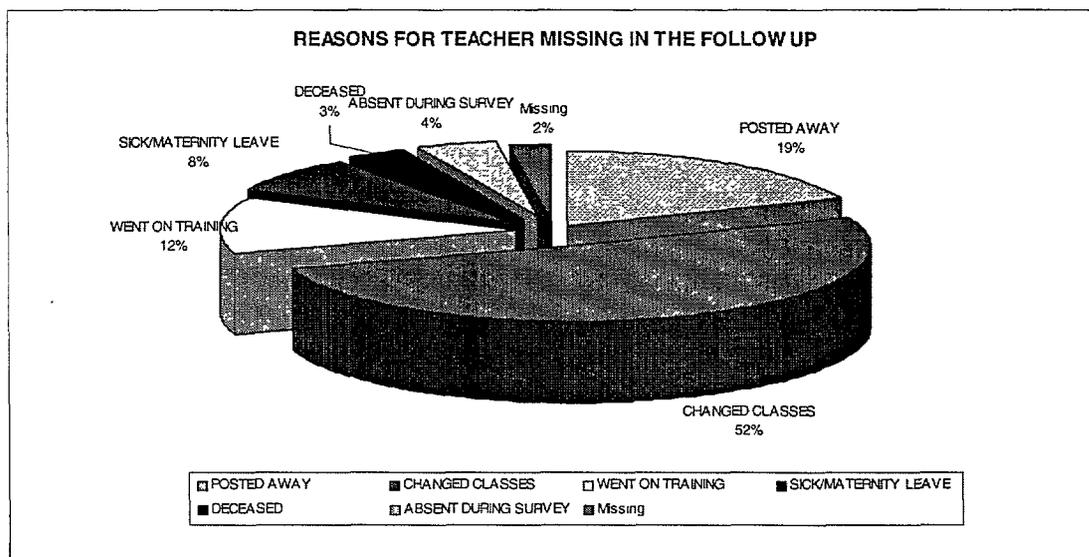
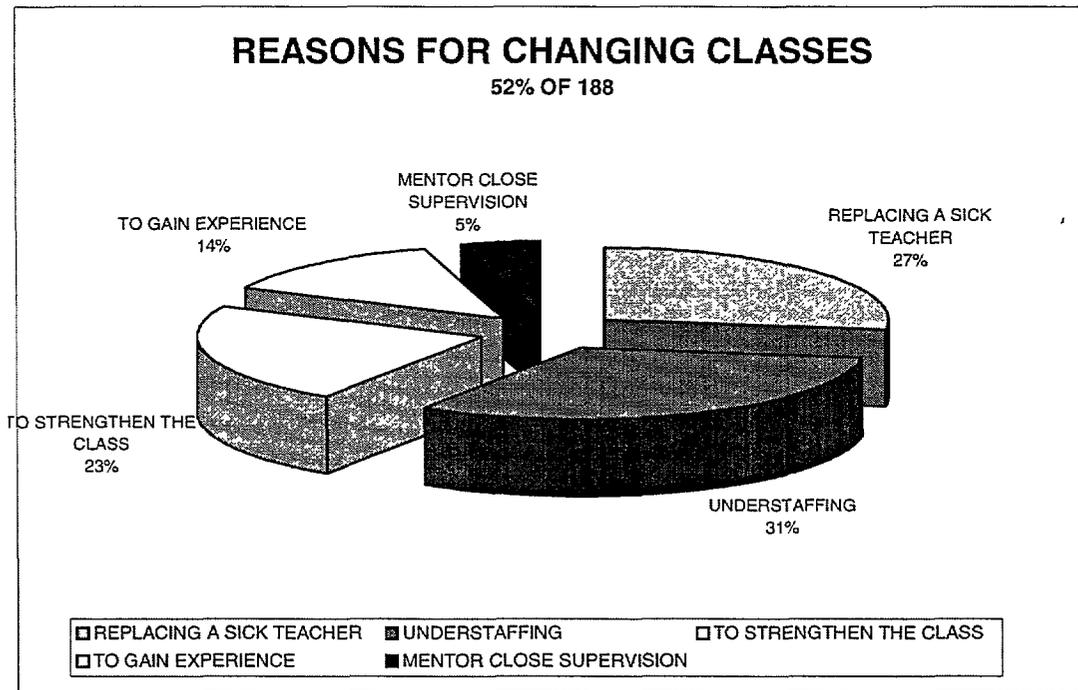


Figure 1 provides the reasons that were given for why teachers were not with their February classes. The primary reason identified was that the teacher had been reassigned to another class in the school ( 52% had changed classes). The second most frequently given explanation for teachers no longer being with their February class was that they had been posted away to another school (19%) . Other reasons that were given were that the teacher was away on training, ill, absent for an unspecified reason, or that the teacher had died. Following is an elaboration of these explanations.

## Changing of Classes

Changing of classes (52%) was the most frequently given reason for the teachers not to be with their February classes. Of those teachers who changed classes, it was most typical for a teacher to be reassigned to teach a higher level standard. The data has revealed the following reasons being responsible for the headteachers to change teachers from one class to the other:



- Pedagogic expertise (11.2%): Sometimes the headteacher reassigned teachers to new classes for pedagogical reasons. Some teachers were considered more skillful to teach either lower or higher classes. Most of the targeted teachers who moved were assigned to higher levels (xxx%), although a few were reassigned to lower standards. When moving teachers to higher standards the headteachers indicated that the reassigned teachers were better prepared to teach these classes. The reasons provided for changing teachers to lower standards referred to their expertise in working with younger children. In some instances, teachers were assigned more than one class, either adding a class to their previous assignment or changing class assignments to cover adjacent or complementary standards. In one instance a teacher was moved to a lower standard to facilitate greater supervision.
- Filling vacancies due to the posting away (7.4 %): Sometimes targeted teachers left their February classes to fill vacancies in their school caused by the posting away of other teachers. When teachers were posted away from schools, it was found that replacement of these

teachers (posting in) was very minimal. The headteachers had no choice but to reassign the teachers who were left in the schools. For example, in one school the standard 6 teacher was posted away. The targeted standard 2 teacher was reassigned to teach standard 6 and the standard 4 teacher was assigned the standard 2 class. The headteacher indicated that this rearrangement was based on the capabilities of the teachers.

- Understaffing: There is a shortage of teachers in Mangochi that is exacerbated by poor distribution (add data). This has been triggered by several factors. New schools have sprouted in Mangochi and some teachers have been moved to head and teach in these schools. In other schools the allocation of classes has been increased. Often there are not enough teachers to fill the open positions. The DEO of Mangochi said: "Mangochi district has more problems on staffing of teachers than other districts because there are only a small number of teachers who come from Mangochi district...most of the teachers come from other districts." The greatest shortfall is in the rural areas). The headteacher from one rural school gave evidence to support the acute problem of understaffing saying that his school of 6 classes had only 3 teachers. The same situation was also observed at another rural primary school where there were only 3 teachers against 8 classes.
- Covering vacancies left due to short term leave In some instances, teachers took leave of the school for reasons such as illness or maternity. Teachers also left temporarily for training. In these cases, other teachers in the school covered the class . Some of the visited teachers were those on leave while others were the same teachers who were asked to cover two or more classes.

### Posting Away of Teachers (19.3%)

Posting away of teachers from one school to another was identified as the second most frequently identified reason for the teachers to have been found missing from their February classes. Twenty percent of the targeted teachers were not available in October because they had been posted away during the school year. As was just mentioned, this posting away of teachers has serious ramifications within a school causing reallocation of the remaining available teachers into the vacated classes.

The reasons given for teachers leaving a school varied. While in some instances the teacher initiated the posting, in other instances the impetus for posting away came from elsewhere e.g. opening of new schools within the district necessitated the posting of teachers to these new schools, a teacher from Nankhwali school was posted to head a new Luwi Junior primary school . Based on an analysis of the explanations provided by the headteachers, and sometimes the teacher colleagues of the posted teacher, the following trends emerged.

- Personal reasons About 10.5% of the teachers initiated a posting for personal reasons. Some of the reasons given were the following:
  1. Following a spouse

2. To be away from home
3. To be near home
4. To be near hospital (sickness)
5. To be in a town.

In many cases where the postings were done due to personal reasons, the survey has revealed that normal and appropriate procedures were not followed. According to the official policy, the teacher should first approach the headteacher with a request. It is then the responsibility of the headteacher to forward the request to the DEO. Before making a decision, the DEO seeks the advice of the PEA.

From the survey responses, it would seem that many of the teachers circumvented this process. Some teachers failed to discuss the matter with the headteacher and went directly to the district office or made contact with the district office through the PEA. Their headteachers reported that they did not know how these postings had originated. In line with this, 60 percent of the headteachers who were interviewed indicated that they had no role in re-posting. A head from one of the schools visited lamented saying , *"I was just told by other teachers that my teachers have been posted away to other schools."*

- Conflicts with the community (5.6%): In some instances either the headteacher or teacher reported that there was trouble between the teacher and the community. It was even reported that teachers were known to provoke trouble in order to catalyze a change in posting. For example, the headteacher of one school said that one of the teachers was posted away because of the conflicts with the local leaders of the community. It was thought that the teacher treated children from one village more harshly and the community leaders thereby asked the headteacher to make a change.
- Shortage of accommodation: In some schools, shortage of teachers' houses caused the teachers to move away. It was thought that perhaps there were no appropriate local accommodations provided or available for rent. For example, in one school three recently posted teachers were re-posted away reportedly due to shortage of houses. Although the head was unaware of why the three were removed, when the DEO was asked to comment on these postings, he said, *"There were no houses there for these teachers, anyway, these teachers were there temporarily."*

### Training (12.5%)

The survey also revealed that training of teachers in the Malawi Integrated Inservice Teacher Education Programme (MIITEP) was another reason given for the teachers to be missing in October from their February classes. Just over 12 % of the missing teachers (6% of the full sample of teachers) were on training. It was inevitable for the unqualified teachers to go for this training as part of their professional development .

**Sick (7.9%)** Some teachers were not available at follow-up because they were on sick leave. From the interviews it was determined that 3.4% were on maternity and about 4.5% were out on sick leave.

### **Death (3.4%)**

The hope is that sick leave is temporary and that the teachers on sick leave will return but this is not always the case. During the school year, 3 of the February teachers died. While they were sick, other teachers in the school covered their classes. In fact, even a replacement teacher, someone who was asked to cover one of the classes in the study, died within 3 months of being assigned to the class.

### **Absenteeism (3.4%)**

Teacher absenteeism contributed to 3% of the teachers being unavailable during the October 1999 data collection. The headteacher did not provide any substantial reasons for the teacher absenteeism. In one instance, the headteacher reported that the teacher had disappeared for one week and the headteacher did not know about this teacher's whereabouts.

### **Miscellaneous (2%)**

There were isolated cases in which the February teachers were - missing due to other reasons. For example, two teachers decided to swap subjects (1.1%) to give each other a chance to be observed and interviewed. This was an isolated case because these two teachers thought that those surveys were a ladder for promotion. One of the teachers asked: "*What are you going to do for us who have been involved in these surveys?*" In another instance, the teacher had been reported as changing classes when in fact the teacher had continued teaching the February class responsibility and had even added another class.

## **DISCUSSION**

The sheer volume of teacher movement evidenced in the visited schools suggested an atmosphere in which movement was the norm (48% of target survey teacher of 188). By the end of the 1999 school year, almost half of the teachers in the longitudinal sample were no longer teaching the classes they taught in the beginning of the year. About half of these teachers had changed classes within the school during the year while the rest were not at the school—either temporarily through training or health leave or permanently through posting away or death. When there were not enough teachers due to died or posting away, there was disruption of the system. To overcome the disruption the headteacher had to make changes within the system with the available teachers.

It seemed that movement of teachers within and between schools was interconnected and at the core of this movement was the departure of a teacher from the school. This departure sent a ripple effect through the system. It created a need for headteachers to reassign teachers to fill the gaps. o Sometimes even an incoming teacher disturbed the system,if the incoming

teacher lacked training or carried special skills, teachers were reassigned to accommodate teacher strengths.

### Chain Reactions

In the context of this study, teacher movement seemed best represented by a series of interconnected events, a chain reaction caused by factors such as posting away of teachers, sickness, training and leave of absence.

- ◆ Posting away of teachers from one school to the other caused other teachers to change their classes. For instance at one school, a standard 4 teacher who happened to be a head teacher had been posted away to another school because the community was unhappy with the way she ran the school. This resulted in another teacher from standard 6 to move to standard 4 to replace the teacher who had been posted away. Another example is seen from a junior primary school where a standard 3 teacher requested to be posted to a different primary school in order to be near a sick mother. Subsequently, a teacher from a third primary school was posted to the original school to cover the standard 3 class which had no teacher.
- ◆ Chain reactions were often catalyzed by sickness. For example, a standard 2 teacher from one school who became ill was replaced by a standard 6 teacher from the same school. This pattern was observed repeatedly. In another school, the standard 3 teacher left at the end of the first term because, according to the headteacher, *"There was too much sickness at the school."* This meant that there were a lot of witch craft going on at the school. The teacher who left was re-posted to another school in Mangochi. The teacher who had been teaching standard 4 in a neighboring school assumed the teaching of standards 3 and 6 at the end of second term. Other examples from the study include teachers who moved to be closer to health care facilities or to family members who were sick.
- ◆ Similarly, when a teacher leaves the school temporarily on maternity leave or for training, a gap is created that requires reallocation of teachers from other classes. For example, at one school a standard 4 teacher went on MIITEP and a standard 8 teacher was given the extra responsibility of teaching standard 4. This was a typical scenario.

### Weaknesses in the system allow slippage in policy

Weaknesses in the system allow slippage in posting and communication policies and record keeping procedures.

- ◆ Policies designed to guide the posting of teachers are not followed. Weak communication channels allow teachers to circumvent procedures and undermine adherence to the policies. When the DEO was asked to comment on these postings, he said, *"I don't know that those postings took place."* The research team was then told by both the DEO and the PEA who were being interviewed that it had come to their notice that there had been some postings which were done without their knowledge. The headteachers too

felt isolated from the decision making. For example, at one school the Head said, *“I have no say on posting. To prove this to you, I got a letter from the DEO’s office telling me that I had no power to stop any postings. It was only the DEO’s office which can post teachers to my school and take them away. This letter was written to me because I did not agree with the removal of my teachers from my school, the school was understaffed.”*

- From the survey, it appeared that schools do not have records on teacher movement either within school or from one school to the other. In response to a question about record keeping, one headteacher said, *“Brother, how can I keep these records? There is so much teacher movement that I can hardly cope.”*

◆ .”

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Rationalization of teacher posting: A comprehensive review of teacher distribution should be undertaken in order to rationalize the assignment of teachers and to address the serious understaffing in rural areas. Severely understaffed schools should be identified and given priority. It is the already understaffed schools that suffer most with the loss of a teacher.
- ◆ Clearly defined policies on teacher posting: There should be well defined and well publicized roles and channels of communications between the teacher, headteacher, PEA, and DEO in teacher posting.
- ◆ Improved record keeping: The DEOs, with input from the PEAS and headteachers, should develop a mechanism for maintaining district, zone, and school records on posting and class reallocation.
- ◆ Reduce mid-year changes: Wherever possible the class reallocation of teachers within the academic year should be minimal. Less urgent personal reasons for posting away teachers should be postponed until the end of academic year.
- ◆ Review of training schedules: If possible any residential teacher training programmes should be conducted during long school vacation for example MIITEP residential training
- ◆ Support for school level leadership: Administrative and pedagogical roles of PEAs and headteachers need to be more clearly defined. The headteacher should be vested with powers to deal with the teacher absenteeism in schools.

### Conclusion

This investigation provided a window into the circumstances, policies, and beliefs that support a norm of change. On the one hand, with teachers being

called away or leaving for health or training purposes, the teacher mobility within a school seemed to reflect a spirit of cooperation on the part of the headteacher and the remaining teachers--a desperate attempt to cover classes with teachers able to teach them.

On the other hand, the researchers uncovered a frustration within the system that begs the attention of policy makers and those in positions of leadership who can bring some stability to the system. Teachers reflected their frustration by circumventing the posting policy and taking advantage of weaknesses in record keeping. Headteachers were frustrated with the demands placed on them by diminishing resources and they felt powerless to cope with such situations. For example a headteacher of one rural school said, *"Next time you come here, you will not find me. I am tired of being a headteacher. I want to be a common teacher so that I too, can come and go as I please."*

Addressing this growing frustration will be crucial to avoid the contaminating effects of discouragement. This headteacher, like others in the study, looked to the researchers with hope that something could be done. DEOs, PEAS, Headteachers, teachers, and the communities will have to work together in their efforts to support greater teacher stability and thereby improve the quality of education in Malawi.