

Children in Malawi have been making fantastic progress using a new maths app. This could be very positive for the future of one of the world's poorest countries.

Eurotalk is a London-based company that makes language-learning software. Recently, their Onebillion project has been in the news, especially since their maths learning app for children in Malawi was shown to improve learning. Dr Nicola Pitchford, a psychologist from the University of Nottingham, found that children using the app tripled their knowledge of maths in just eight weeks.

The name 'Onebillion' comes from the 'goal of reaching one billion children'. This is more or less the number of children who don't have the opportunity to learn basic skills, says Andrew Ashe, who started Eurotalk. Primary education has been free in Malawi since 1994, and the one million increase in student enrolment has put pressure on teachers, classrooms and resources. Educating children in developing countries has many great benefits. For example, explains Ashe, 'there is very strong evidence that if you can get the basic skills right at primary level for girls, they have fewer children, healthier children, and more likely to be part of the economy. An average girl in Malawi will have 5.9 children and it's unsustainable at the moment.'

Virtual teacher

Jamie Stuart, Chief Technology Officer of Onebillion, explains that 'children are put in groups of 30 or even 60 and taken to a special classroom to spend 30 minutes every other day with the device.' One tablet device can be used by ten or twelve children each day. Each Oneclass is managed by an international volunteer and there is a virtual teacher guiding the student through the app. 'All of the children in Oneclass are learning at their own pace,' says Stuart, 'every child is going at their own speed.'

The apps are designed to be as culturally friendly as possible, and they promote a positive image of girls. The project works closely with the education ministry in Malawi to make sure there are no cultural misunderstandings. As Andrew Ashe points out, the success of the project depends on the project 'working with existing structures. One of the things we are most happy about is that they do see it as their project.'

The project is funded by people in wealthier countries who buy their own language version of the app. 'Every single penny that we earn from selling those apps goes towards developing our literacy material in Malawi,' says Stuart. The key to the success of the app is how it takes advantage of the enthusiasm of young children to learn. 'The children are so engaged and able to progress at their own pace,' says Ashe. 'They are like sponges, they absorb so much information at this age and we think this is why we are getting such a good learning result.'

Circle the best answer to these questions.

1. The progress the children have been making with the maths apps in Malawi ...
 - a. is difficult to measure.
 - b. could be very beneficial for the country in the future.
 - c. has positive and negative consequences.

2. The name 'Onebillion' comes from ...
 - a. the number of children who currently participate in the project.
 - b. the number of children who have participated in the project up to now.
 - c. the number of children the project has as an objective for participation.

3. According to Ashe, educating girls with basic skills in Malawi ...
 - a. means they will be healthier and have more children.
 - b. means they will have smaller numbers of healthier children.
 - c. means they are less likely to find paid work.

4. In the learning model called Oneclass, ...
 - a. the children work in their normal classroom.
 - b. the children work for 30 minutes every day.
 - c. the children go to a different classroom.

Read the text and write the correct form of the word in brackets to complete the gaps. Look at the example at the beginning of the text.

Children in Malawi are making great progress in *education* (**EDUCATE**) using a mathematics app. This could have some very important advantages for a country like Malawi, which suffers from high levels of _____ (**POOR**). The _____ (**DEVELOP**) of a maths learning app for children in Malawi by a company called Eurotalk has been in the news recently. The app has produced a great _____ (**IMPROVE**) in the learning of maths and some children in Malawi have tripled their knowledge of maths in only eight weeks. In 1994, primary education was made free in Malawi and one million extra students registered for school. The _____ (**EDUCATION**) needs of so many students put pressure on teachers, resources and buildings. This was obviously a very _____ (**CHALLENGE**) situation for the government of Malawi. Andrew Ashe, who founded Eurotalk, speaks about the _____ (**IMPORTANT**) of educating children in developing countries and thinks that this has great advantages. The app is designed to be _____ (**SENSE**) to the local culture and the education ministry in Malawi works closely with the project to _____ (**SURE**) that there are no cultural problems with the content of the app.