

# Teachers' Practices in the Teaching of Reading and Writing towards supporting learners with reading difficulties at Lower Primary

*A Case Study of teachers for fourth-graders  
in Monze District-Zambia*

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# Abstract

According to the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Measuring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) report of 2010, Zambia is among the three SACMEQ countries with lower levels of reading. This is shown in two studies that were carried out in 2000 and 2007 among grade 6 pupils. For all stakeholders in the education sector, this should be of concern. Therefore, studies as this one are necessary as they may help to inform pedagogy and policy.

This study therefore, is an investigation of how teachers practise the teaching of reading (and writing) towards supporting learners with reading difficulties at the lower primary level in Zambia. In order to achieve this objective, five sub-questions were designed. The first two questions focused on the teachers' backgrounds towards teaching reading and their situations/conditions relating to teaching reading while the last three focused on assessment of reading, planning and classroom implementation. In order to understand the phenomenon in depth, a qualitative approach was used with case study design. Six teachers of fourth-graders in three types of schools: rural, peri-urban and urban were interviewed. The interviews were supported by document analysis followed by classroom observation.

The findings reveal that there were differences in the backgrounds and realities of the teachers but with similar patterns in the three types of schools. It was also evident that the teachers were trying their best to teach reading but under very difficult conditions. Major among the conditions were over enrollment, teacher-pupil ratio and lack of teaching and reading materials. The results further show that the assessment procedures used to identify learners with reading difficulties only work to further widen the gap between the so called 'slow learners' and 'fast learners'. The focus seems to be on summative (assessment of learning) rather than on formative (assessment for learning). There is also evidence to show that the teachers' planning before teaching has been affected by the challenges of over enrollment, teacher-pupil ratio and lack of teaching and learning materials. This makes it difficult for teachers to consequently teach reading and support learners with reading difficulties leading to poor classroom practice. See appendix G. Therefore, this study helps stake holders appreciate Allington (2005) cited in Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2010) who argued that the best way to increase student achievement in reading is to improve the quality of instruction in the classroom. If learners were taught using the sociocultural perspective, most of the reading difficulties in the studied schools could be prevented.

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# Dedication

I dedicate this work firstly, to my wife Getrude Moonga Chuunga and daughters: Chipego, Lweendo and Banji for their unrelenting support for me when I was away from them all these 2 years. Secondly, to my brother Oliver and sisters: Pauline, Eness, Cathrine and Violet and my late dad Mr. Jacob Shimanga Chuunga and mum Sophia Mabuku Chuunga, late brothers: Piers, Danny & Kenny and sister: Rachel, and my mother-in-law, all whose foundation laid in me has never been shaken in spite of their demise at a time I needed them most.

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Special thanks go to my respondents for their generous support during data collection.

# List of Acronyms Used in this Study

BPS – British Psychological Society

CPD – Continuing Professional Development

DEBS – District Education Board Secretary

ELM – Educational Leadership and Management

MOE – Ministry of Education

NBTL – New Breakthrough to Literacy

NICHHD – National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

NISTCOL – National Inservice Training College

PRP – Primary Reading Programme

PTA – Parents Teachers' Association

ROC – Read on Course

ROCABS – Read on Course Activity Books

RRL – Rainbow Reading Ladder

SACMEQ – Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Measuring Educational Quality

SITE – Step in to English

TGMs – Teachers' Group Meetings

THRASS – Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

ZITEP – Zambia-Ireland Teacher Education Partnership

ZPD – Zone of Proximal Development

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

## 1.1 Introduction

The main goal for this study was to investigate how teachers practise the teaching of reading and writing to children at the lower primary level in Zambia. It begins by giving an overview of literacy teaching in Zambia to create the understanding of the context in which the research was carried out and the rationale for it. It focuses on reading skills only and decoding skills in particular although reading as a skill cannot be separated from writing as both are complementary. This has been done for research convenience. The chapter also cites some challenges in the way reading and writing is taught in Zambia. The rationale and significance of the study follows. The research questions have also been given: the first two questions focus on teachers' background and conditions under which they teach reading while the last three focus on management of learning. The chapter finally gives an overview of how the thesis has been organized and closes with a chapter summary.

## 1.2 Literacy Teaching in Zambia

The significance of reading in any society cannot be overemphasized as it is the key to academic, social and economic progression of children (Hamilton, 2012). For this to happen, the teaching of reading must be effective. A reading society is likely to succeed in sustainable development as its citizenry will participate in decision making and economic development with an informed mind. This is especially necessary in countries where majority of children do not go beyond the 7<sup>th</sup> grade due to poor retention rate and lack of infrastructure/resources to absorb them. This is the reason why many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are working hard to ensure that the school going children do not just attend school but also learn and acquire necessary skills of reading and writing. For instance, Zambia is one of the countries in the region with a number of school going children who are not able to read competently in commensurate with their age and grade levels. This has been a serious problem for many decades as indicated in the Ministry of Education (MOE) policy document and other literature (Eakle and Garber, 2003; MOE, 1996 p. 39; Millennium Development Goals Progress Report, 2011).

For the above reasons, Zambia piloted and introduced methods of teaching literacy in 1998. The project was referred to as the Primary Reading Programme (PRP) – a “sandwich” or mixture of methods/approaches to teaching reading. This was done in a bid to improve the low literacy levels that had affected the country for many years (Sampa, 2003). In this pilot review, especially during the period when the donors funded this innovation, it was evident that the methods introduced were effective as the results indicated that children’s reading and writing skills had improved (Sampa, 2003; Tambulukani cited in Eakle and Garber, 2003). But over the years, the scenario began to change as many learners, today, struggle to read in spite of the reading instruction they receive from their teachers. The extent of the problem seems serious as evident in the Educational Leadership and Management Course for head teachers (NISTCOL - ELM Change Project, 2011). In the Change Project<sup>1</sup> component of the Educational Leadership and Management course for school managers, for which I was a facilitator, it became apparent that acquisition of reading (and writing) was a major problem in most primary schools. Therefore, a significant number of head teachers started a project to try and improve the reading and writing levels among primary school children especially those pupils in lower primary (grades 1 to 4).

### **1.3 Methodologies used in teaching reading and writing in Zambia**

How do these methodologies work and how are they structured? These methodologies rely on use of a combination of approaches to teaching literacy. They also incorporate strategies such as phonics, alphabetic and syllabic principles (MOE, 2000; 2001; 2002; 2002a). The methodologies were introduced in form of courses as follows: New Breakthrough to Literacy (NBTL) for Grade 1 in which learners are taught literacy through a local familiar language. In other words, the local language is used as medium of instruction. The learners are also introduced to oral English through a component called Pathway 1. This component is given so as to prepare learners for the literacy skills in English which they will start in Grade 2. Step in to English (SITE) is for Grade 2. It bridges the gap between NBTL and Read on course (ROC) and learners are taught literacy in English. Another oral English component called Pathway 2 is taught alongside SITE.

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<sup>1</sup> Change Project was the major task to be done by students of the Educational Leadership and Management Course. It was based on the action research model. Students were to identify a problem in their school, investigate it and write a report on how the investigation went about.

Finally, it is Read on Course (ROC) for Grades 3 to 7 where literacy skills are taught side by side in both English and Zambian languages according to the class routine.

These methodologies are similar in principle in that they all focus on phonemic awareness and phonics. They also advocate for learner-centredness whereby learners are taught through strategies that encourage them to participate in the lesson more actively while the teacher acts as a facilitator (MOE, 2001; 2002). The methodologies also use cooperative learning whereby learners are assessed and grouped in pace groups (ability groups). Slow and fast learners are each on their own in groups determined by the teacher through an assessment. They also have similar three-stage lesson procedures: they begin by a session where all learners come to the teaching station group by group to listen to or tell a story as well as receive instructions for the day's activities from the teacher. This is followed by the second stage where the teacher does focused teaching to a particular group while the other groups work independently in their learning stations. The last stage marks the conclusion of the lesson when the teacher allows learners to share individually as well as to comment constructively and, criticise each other on the activities they were doing in their groups (MOE, 2000).

The three methodologies also have each a teacher's guide that gives the teacher suggestions on how to assist slow learners. They recognise and set aside one day called Day 5 (the Fifth Day) specifically for helping pupils who have difficulties. For Grades 3 and 4, two groups – slow learners, are seen on the fifth day in the teaching station and assisted in their areas of difficulty. Each group is supposed to be seen for 20 minutes by having focused instruction with the teacher. After that, they are supposed to be given a follow up activity to reinforce what they were doing in the teaching station. The teacher is supposed to identify pupils who may need specialised instruction according to their needs.

## **1.4 Some challenges**

But one wonders whether teachers do all these activities to help learners with reading difficulties. It is also questionable as to whether slow learners benefit much from these methods when they are segregated into ability groups without adequate help from more capable peers, sometimes not even from the teacher. Are these methodologies effective for crowded classrooms like those in Zambia?

The gap between slow and fast learners seemingly, keeps on widening without much being done to bridge it. Hence, the question: How do teachers practice the teaching of reading and writing at the lower primary level in Zambia?

## 1.5 Background of the Problem

The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Measuring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) report (2010) shows that Zambia is among the three SACMEQ countries with lower levels of reading as seen in two studies that were carried out in 2000 and 2007 among grade 6 pupils. This should be of concern to all stakeholders. Understanding why some children lag behind in learning how to read should not only be the concern of the teacher but also those who train teachers (McIntyre, Hulan and Layne, 2011). Many empirical research and evidence based studies have shown that there are certain prerequisites in the teaching of reading (and writing). Methods which focus on these prerequisites: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, fluency and comprehension may succeed in teaching reading (Duff, Hayiou-Thomas, & Hulme, 2011; Hamilton, 2012; McIntyre et al.; National Institute of Child and Human Development (NICHD), 2000; Peer and Reid, 2000; and Wearthmouth, Soler & Reid, 2003). Other scholars also say that there are other reasons that can be responsible for low literacy levels in the case of Zambia such as multilingualism which affects the teaching of literacy (Tambulukani and Bus, 2011).

Where do I draw the interest for this study? I have been a teacher trainer in the Literacy and Languages Section in Zambia for more than 9 years now. I have trained primary school teachers on how to teach reading skills. I have also trained teachers on how to meet the needs of learners with reading difficulties. Every cohort of graduates that passed through my class could be termed “competent language teachers” who would make an impact in teaching reading and writing. Unfortunately, in every school including the schools where many of these graduates have been deployed to teach, there are many children with reading difficulties. The cause of this problem is worth interrogating. While I have been a lecturer of languages, this time around, I wish to look at teachers’ practices in teaching reading and writing with a “special needs teacher's eye”. I would like to investigate how teachers practise the teaching of reading and writing towards supporting learners with reading difficulties so that I can understand the factors involved in this phenomenon.

It is alarming to say (yet it is true) that more and more learners seem to be excluded from the learning of reading skills today in Zambia. But the pending questions are: Is it the methods that are exclusive? Is it the teachers that do not know how to use the methods? As the saying goes: ‘A good method is as good as the teacher who uses it’. Given that teachers are trained to teach reading, another question is: are they taught the rationale behind the kinds of strategies and methods they use to teach reading and writing? Therefore, this study sought to investigate the process of implementing these methods for developing reading skills in children with reading difficulties. It was seen as noteworthy to appreciate the teachers' level of knowledge in the use of these methods in accommodating learners with reading difficulties. By so doing, their experiences and practices in teaching reading skills may provide a basis for a way forward.

## **1.6 Rationale and Significance of the study**

The teaching of reading in Zambia until now has left many puzzling questions among educationists and stakeholders owing to the growing number of learners with reading difficulties. Some studies have been conducted to investigate the problem – one of which was the Zambia-Ireland Teacher Education Partnership (ZITEP)<sup>2</sup>. As a teacher trainer, through experience in training teachers of language and through monitoring of students on school teaching practice, I have always observed that the literacy methods seem not to work well for whatever reason and do not favour children with reading difficulties except the so called ‘fast learners’. This is seen in the growing number of learners with reading difficulties who are segregated according to their abilities. The so called “slow learners” seem to outnumber the “fast learners”. It is on this basis that this study has been undertaken.

It is important to state that acquisition of reading skills is very important in the life of every child and in one's adult life. McIntyre et al., (2011) says that children will be inadequate in life if they do not acquire reading skills. They further assert that children who read proficiently generally do better in school including mathematics and science. These children will have a positive self-image and are likely to excel into college with much knowledge about the world better than those who are not proficient readers. Reid (2003) reports that in a longitudinal study, NICHD through the National Reading Panel (NRP) found out that, individuals with

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<sup>2</sup>ZITEP was a consortium of colleges of education in Zambia and Ireland that worked together with a view to improving pedagogy in teacher training. This project ended in April 2012.



reading difficulty often face discrimination, low-self- esteem and do not progress well in life to find meaningful employment. This study has been motivated by the aforementioned factors.

Undertaking this study was worthwhile as it contributes to existing research on reading difficulty and literacy development. The study sheds more light on how to help children with reading difficulties especially in Zambia where much research has not been done so far. The findings of the study could help teacher training colleges to understand how best to prepare student teachers with practices that are effective in teaching children. The findings act as a feedback to teacher trainers on how their graduating teachers have been prepared to handle children with reading difficulties. Consequently, they could help teachers, teacher trainers and policy makers to design new, appropriate and effective teaching strategies and policies that meet the diverse needs of children with reading difficulties. Above all, the study opens opportunities for future research into reading disability and dyslexia which have not been fully explored in Zambia, at least until now. The following were the research questions:

## **1.7 Research Questions**

The main research question for this study is:

How do teachers practise the teaching of reading and writing towards supporting learners with reading difficulties at the lower primary level?

The following are the sub-questions for the study:

1. What are the teachers' backgrounds regarding children with reading difficulties?
2. What are the teachers' realities regarding children with reading difficulties?
3. How do the teachers identify learners with reading difficulties?
4. How do they plan their teaching to support these learners?
5. How do they support these learners in the classroom during the lesson?

## **1.8 Research Method**

In order to answer these questions, a qualitative approach was adopted because the study needed answers in depth. Since the study aimed at listening to teachers that teach reading and later describing their story, a case study design was deemed suitable and thus it was used. Primary data was collected through interviews of six (6) teachers teaching the 4<sup>th</sup> graders. The focus was on teachers of fourth-graders because by the time a child is in grade 4, it is easy to see the reading problems (Wanzek and Roberts, 2012). Two teachers from each of the following categories of schools in Zambia were involved: rural, peri-urban and urban schools. Teachers' planning documents and records were analysed.

## **1.9 Structure of Thesis Organisation**

This thesis is divided into six (6) chapters. Chapter 1 gives a brief background of literacy teaching in Zambia and the experiences of the author thereby creating the context for teaching of reading in Zambia. Chapter 2 briefly reviews some of the research-based and empirical evidences regarding teaching reading within the context of the sociocultural theory. The third chapter explains the research design that was used. A presentation of the findings and a detailed discussion thereafter follow in chapters 4 and 5 respectively. The thesis ends with a conclusion, implications and recommendations for future research in chapter 6.

## **1.10 Summary**

This chapter has given an overview of literacy teaching in Zambia - thus giving the reader a basic understanding of the aim of the study. It has also shown what the study is all about, in terms of its rationale and significance. The objective of the thesis is clear: investigating how teachers practise the teaching of reading and writing towards supporting learners with reading difficulties at the lower primary level. Given that the investigator is a teacher trainer, this study may work as basis for further works in action research and policy evaluation in the training of teachers of language for primary school level. The research questions have been given towards the end of the chapter focusing generally on how teachers at the lower primary level practise the teaching of reading and writing. The chapter ended with an outline on how the thesis is organized. The next chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study and some of the literature reviewed.

# CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

## 2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has outlined how this study has been structured. This chapter begins by setting in context the sociocultural theory as framework of the study. This is followed by a review of evidence and research-based findings relating to reading and writing, and reading disabilities. It gives a glossary of important terms for the study. Then the possible reasons as to why some children struggle to read are given. Dynamic assessment will be emphasized as helpful in identifying and planning tasks that help to meet individual needs of learners in an on-going manner. After that, the models of reading will be briefly cited as basis for the kinds of teaching methods teachers use in each given environment. The vital elements of reading based on the report of the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) and Spear-Swerling and Sternberg's (1994) integrative theoretical model of reading disability will be discussed as these are evidence and research based and used for analysing the data.

## 2.2 Conceptual Framework and Reading Methods

### 2.2.1 The Sociocultural Theory

This study is rooted within a particular conceptual framework. But what is a conceptual framework? In their report, the UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2011) define conceptual framework as a structure that stands for the main aspects of a phenomenon at hand presenting clearly its make-up and relatedness. They add that a conceptual framework is important in that it makes it easier for users to comprehend the scope of the phenomenon; realize the knowledge gaps in the subject as well as benefit from its use as a tool for analysis of the data. In this study therefore, the sociocultural theory has been used as the underpinning conceptual framework for dealing with teaching reading and writing. This conceptual framework is helpful in assisting users to have a clear view of the scope of the issue at hand and the principles that govern it. It further may show the direction of the research and what gaps exist for possible future works. The framework is also important in the analysis of the data.

One of the prominent psychologists and educator whose works have played a key role in teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is Lev Vygotsky. In his book 'Mind and Society' (1978), he presents a theory to human development in which he describes the interplay between an individual and the society and argues for the interaction between learning and development. In other words, culture plays an important role in human development because the activities, thoughts and inventions are dependent on the past and that it is this past that shapes the future. Consequently, the younger generations depend on their experienced adults from whom they learn skills and knowledge through social interaction. Vygotsky is also known for the concept of 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD) which he says:

It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.  
(Vygotsky in Cole et al. 1978, p.86)

He argues that by receiving support from a more knowledgeable adult through mediation and use of signs/tools, a child is able to work beyond what he or she can do alone and thereby move from a minimal level to a higher level of performance (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978; Wells & Claxton, 2002).

### **2.2.2 The Sociocultural Perspective in Teaching Reading**

Having laid the groundwork regarding the sociocultural theory and its importance in acquisition of skills and knowledge, it is now important to see the relevance of this theory to teaching reading (and writing). McIntyre, et al (2011), whose views influence much of what is said in this discourse, argue that there is interplay between a child's difficulties or successes in learning to read and write with the environment in which that child is. But all this depends on the social interaction between these forces. Additionally, they argue that reading (and writing) difficulties, "...is a perception contextualized and constructed within a learner's history, culture, institutions, and interactions" (p. 45). For instance, although there are common and evidence-based studies that have been carried out in the world that have been adopted by many countries to inform policy and shape methodologies for teaching reading and writing; each country has its own practices, choices and challenges.

Therefore, the practices teachers employ in teaching reading, for example in Zambia, are influenced by the Zambian environment in which they are and so are the challenges and strengths of the children in a given school.

In view of the above theory, reading today is perceived not only as a cognitive process but also a social process in that although reading deals with mental processes in the head of an individual, the reader is surrounded and affected by a number of factors in his or her learning environment. Without viewing reading in this way it becomes difficult if not impossible for educators to appreciate why some learners struggle with reading and writing. For this reason, McIntyre et al., (2011) argue, "...all actions, including reading, are mediated by tools, of which language is the primary tool; and...a learner's development occurs through assisted performance". It can therefore, be stated that teachers who view the teaching of reading and writing as a social process will recognize the importance of tools in learning and teaching. Some of the tools apart from language (which Vygotsky calls 'sign') include the actual teaching and learning materials that the teacher uses to teach as well as the willingness and positive attitude towards learners. The social process also recognizes the important role of a teacher as a mediator or facilitator who should help learners (apprentices) develop their reading skills by working with the teacher and peers and later being able to work alone. This is what other scholars call 'scaffolding the learners' which means giving learners help only when they need it and withdrawing it once they are able to work on their own (Bruner, 1990; Cole, 1996; Rogoff, 2003 & Vygotsky, 1978). The teacher uses this process to find out the inadequacies and strengths of learners so as to determine the appropriate assistance and support to give them. In this way, the aspect of zone of proximal development has occurred.

The theory is based (among others) on the belief that culture, through time, plays a key role in child development and influences learning. Secondly, cultural mediation and tools such as caregivers/teachers, books, language, posters and other resources help children internalise what they learn. Thirdly, these tools are introduced to the child by a mentor or more experienced member of society. Fourthly, guided participation and assistance given should help children move from learning with others to learning alone (scaffolding). The theory can be useful in any intervention especially in reading intervention.

## 2.3 Definitions of Terms

### 2.3.1 Reading

There are many terms used in reading problems whose definitions need to be explored. Understanding definitions and using terms is helpful as it equips teachers with necessary tools on how to handle different learners and meet their needs. This is in line with Hall (2009) who states that definitions may help teachers come up with dynamic assessment that is appropriate for each child. But before going into detail there is need to define *reading* so that this understanding will be helpful in appreciating what reading difficulties are. There are many definitions of reading but at least three of these have been a source of debate for quite some time. For instance, the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory cites the following as definitions of reading:

...first definition, learning to read means learning to pronounce words. ...the second definition, learning to read means learning to identify words and get their meaning. According to the third definition, learning to read means learning to bring meaning to a text in order to get meaning from it (para. 1).

From the first definition, reading is defined as pronouncing words. Pronouncing does not just come about but has something to do with accuracy and may relate to identification of letter sounds and sounding them out. In the second and third definitions, the whole word approach seems to be inferred, whereby learners begin to understand words in their own way and attach meanings to them. Such definitions may be definitions of performance as they do not go beneath the surface to show the processes involved in learning to read as such they may not be suitable for use in teaching reading.

Similarly, America's No Child Left Behind Act gives a research-based definition of reading as "...deriving meaning from print..." (Wrightslaw, 2009, par.3). Although this definition seems highly favoured as other scholars seem to endorse it (Torgesen, 2002; Cline, Johnstone & King, 2006), it does not show the process rather it shows the product. It leaves out the means to how one reaches the stage of deriving meaning from printed words. Those who take reading as deriving meaning from print may have their own reasons for teaching reading the way they teach it just as those that take it as pronouncing words may have theirs. Others seem to take all the three definitions as one in today's teaching of literacy.

It is also interesting to look at another definition of reading by Gough and Tunmer (1986). They define reading as “...the product of decoding and comprehension” (p. 7). They use the following equation:  $R = D \times C$  to illustrate their definition. In their definition they show the importance of both decoding and comprehension. They argue that both are necessary for reading to take place. But it can be concluded that the whole essence of reading is to get meaning from text – no matter what type the text is. Therefore Gough and Tunmer conclude that, there can be no reading without understanding just like there can be no understanding without converting the printed symbols into language. This last definition seems to tie everything together. These definitions will later be linked to the models of reading process.

### **2.3.2 Reading Difficulties**

Having defined reading, it is now time to look at other important terms. It must be stated that in this study, the terms reading disability, specific reading disability and dyslexia will not be discussed in detail because they refer to specific problems among individuals as used in different contexts (Wearmouth, et al., (2003). The term “*reading difficulties*” shall instead be used. According to Hamilton, (2012, p. 2) “Reading difficulty is defined from a normative perspective (ie. how a child performs in reading compared to peers or educational expectations)”. Similarly, Snow, Burns & Griffin (1998, p.93) also describe learners with reading difficulties as “...those whose achievement levels are lower than those of the rest of the people in the distribution.” This definition will be used in this study: how teachers of the fourth-graders practise the teaching of reading towards helping learners whose performance is low compared to their (pupils) peers and/or educational intentions. In addition, the term ‘reading difficulty’ seems to be more inclusive and appropriate for the Zambian scenario where there isn’t much research on reading disability and many teachers do not adequately assess their pupils in their classes to find out the type of reading difficulty their learners have. Yet assessment is cardinal in making decisions to help learners with reading difficulties (Ford & Opitz, 2008).

Reading difficulty can be attributed to a number of causes, major among them is reading disability but also including environmental factors such as insufficient reading instruction or lack of exposure to reading materials, impairments such as cognitive, language or hearing; terminal illness and psychosocial problems (Lyster, 2001; Hamilton, 2012).

Therefore, investigating how teachers practise the teaching of reading may help this group of learners referred to as having reading difficulty. It may lead to detailed research in future and possibly more specific studies in reading disability and/or dyslexia.

Therefore, the term “reading difficulties” in this paper will be used loosely to include both learners who cannot read at the expected rate due to insufficient instruction from the teacher as well as learners who have reading difficulties due to other factors such as neurobiological difficulties. Using terms and definitions may be quite problematic at times as they (terms) have different meanings from one society to another.

The argument of this paper is that teachers have challenges to meet the academic needs of learners who have reading difficulties due to a number of factors such as lack of knowledge and skills to implement the reading methods effectively. As long as teachers do not have the capacity and know-how to implement the methods effectively and to understand the usage of terms that describe their learners, it will be difficult for them to prepare work that meets their pupils' needs.

### **2.3.3 Dyslexia**

The other term worth discussing is *dyslexia*. As earlier alluded to, this study will not venture into discussing dyslexia but it is important to have a brief discussion of what it is about and why it has not been adopted for this study. There are a lot of views concerning this term. Some scholars argue that it is a medical term (Downing & Brown, 1967; Franklin, 1962 cited in Gough and Tunmer, 1986; Hall, 2009). There are many definitions of the term; only a few have been selected here. The British Psychological Society (BPS, 1999) is quoted in Hall (2009) saying:

Dyslexia is evident when accurate fluent reading and or spelling develops incompletely or with great difficulty. This focuses on literacy learning at the word level and implies that the problem is severe and persistent despite appropriate learning opportunities. It provides the basis for a staged process of assessment through teaching. (p.7)



This definition is quite open and may include all sorts of learners who for one reason or another have difficulties reading. However, it can be argued that not all learners with problems in fluency, spelling or literacy learning have dyslexia.

In their article “The road not taken”, Spear-Swerling and Sternberg (1994, p.92) developed a model that can be helpful in understanding reading disability. They argue that children may drift away from the road to normal reading development at one of the several points. Their model shows reading development taking place as a developmental route with important learning themes along the route. At every point described by the authors, the child has to learn precise abilities in order to develop normally. However, if the child does not learn one of these abilities, the child will go off-track and the development will stop. It may be possible to bring the children back on track according to the point at which they have gone off-track. Now the teacher has to concentrate on the child and be sure that necessary remedial activities become part of the teaching. For instance, if a child does not have phonemic awareness, he or she cannot develop phonological decoding strategies as the first step in reading development. This is why they show in their model that phonological awareness is a very important ingredient on the road towards normal reading development as it leads to efficient decoding skills. However, the lack of decoding ability may result into lowered comprehension, motivation, expectations and efficiency of reading in general.

Another definition to be looked at is the one used by the United States National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD, 2002; cited in Hall, 2009):

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterised by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. (p. 8)

It is clear from this definition that: 1. Dyslexia is neurological in nature, 2. A learner with dyslexia exhibits difficulties in the following areas: phonological awareness, fluency in word recognition, and as a result of this also leading to reduced comprehension. Yet these are four of the five aspects that are described in the National Reading Panel report as “prerequisites for

reading” (NICHD, 2000). There is also no consensus as to whether dyslexia should be looked at as a form of reading difficulty or as a concept that encompasses other factors (Wearmouth, et al., 2003). However, this study will not delve into the dyslexia debate due to space limitations.

These definitions show how “serious” dyslexia is. And for teachers and educationists to describe children as having dyslexia, there is need for a thorough assessment of the learners. This then explains the reason why this study may not venture into use of this term because very few teachers if any, in Zambia do assess their learners so as to find out if they have dyslexia or not. Even the few that may be conducting assessment, may simply be labelling all learners experiencing reading problems as having dyslexia. What is common in Zambia are learners described as “slow learners” if they have reading difficulties.

So it can be argued that the number of children that have reading difficulties is quite significant in Zambia. It is therefore, unwise to conclude that all those learners have dyslexia. Therefore, I will use the term “reading difficulties” in this study as it describes the majority of learners in Zambia who may move away from the road to efficient reading and not benefit from the reading instruction, just as argued by Spear-Swerling and Sternberg (1994). However, even if the school system of Zambia for the time being will be unable to decide whether children have dyslexia or not, it is possible to underline the importance of educational efforts to prevent reading difficulties, this will be discussed later in the text.

#### **2.3.4 Educational Inclusion of learners**

This therefore, leads to the next very important term – *inclusion*. Though not directly mentioned in the title of this study, inclusion of learners with reading difficulties is what the study seeks to advocate for. This can also be inferred from the sociocultural theory that has been used as theoretical framework. Many societies seem to think that inclusion is having learners with different needs learn together in mainstream classes/schools. This is true to some extent and called inclusive education according to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 1994: ix). However, inclusion is more than grouping children in the same classroom. The principle of inclusion firstly, holds that all pupils should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties. Secondly, societies must recognise and respond to the diverse needs of pupils accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and thirdly, ensuring quality to all through appropriate curricula,

organisational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities (UNESCO, 1994, pp. 11, 12).

In this regard, the Zambian government as a signatory to the Salamanca Statement of Action endeavours to build capacity for the provision of quality education. Although the term quality is quite relative, the Zambian government wishes that all children in the lower and middle basic level (Grades 1 to 7) should "...acquire essential literacy, numeracy and communication skills" (MOE, 1996, p.30). Although the education policy document does not spell out the concept of inclusion, it does recognise that slow learners and all children with special educational needs need to be provided with high quality education so that they can overcome (or compensate) their learning difficulties. Therefore, these so called "slow learners" need to be included in the acquisition of reading skills. This can be achieved by having a diversity of methods which can meet the educational challenges and make inclusion possible; hence, this investigation. This is in line with Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2010) who cite Allington (2005) as having argued that the best way to increase student achievement in reading is to improve the quality of instruction in the classroom. Failure to improve the quality renders the curriculum and the teaching discriminating against children with reading difficulties.

## **2.4 Why do some children struggle with reading?**

My hope in this text will be to develop a methodology for teachers so that the teaching is able to prevent some of the problems children with reading difficulties have. Later I will return to the steps to be taken regarding reading difficulties. Having defined some terms that are necessary for this study, there is need to briefly discuss the reasons why some children have difficulties learning to read. Solutions to reading difficulties can only be found if "Teachers...develop a firm understanding of why some children struggle with reading" (McIntyre, et al., 2011, p.1). The same authors state that many of the children struggle with reading difficulties due to lack of phonological awareness resulting from sociocultural factors. So some causes for these difficulties can be accounted for environmental reasons (Alexander, Andersen, Heilman, Voeller, & Torgesen, 1991 in Spear-Swerling and Sternberg, 1994). Environmental causes may also include language usage in the child's home or community. If the child does not have adequate oral language or does not have access to reading materials or a stimulating environment, then he or she may have reading difficulties or disabilities later in life (Fletcher, Francis, Vaughn, Roberts, Denton & Papanicolaou, 2010; Lyon, 2003).

In addition, although there are opposing views among scholars, there is evidence that class size, as an environmental factor, has an effect on student performance (Ecalte, Magnan & Gibert, 2006). In Zambia where class sizes in some schools reach an average of 60 per class, it can be assumed that children with reading difficulties may never have adequate attention from the teacher. As of 2010 the pupil-teacher ratio for primary school in Zambia was 58.00 ([www.indexmundi.com/zambia/](http://www.indexmundi.com/zambia/)). This makes the teaching of reading very difficult.

Tambulukani and Bus (2011) in their article 'Linguistic Diversity: A Contributory Factor to Reading Problems in Zambian Schools', argue that linguistic diversity in Zambia might be responsible for most reading difficulties. Since Zambia uses English as medium of instruction from grade 1 to university, although literacy has been taught in Zambian languages for sometime now in grade 1 and English introduced in grade 2, this factor could be true. The new government (as of September 2011) has proposed the use of local languages as media of instructions in the first 4 years of primary education. At times, teachers who are not familiar with the medium of instruction for teaching reading and writing will always struggle. As a result it impacts negatively on the children who also come from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This is a sociocultural factor as the situations in countries where they have only one or two languages used may be different. A similar case to this is that of Fiji where English is introduced in grade 3. In a study by Shameem (2007), it is evident that teaching language and literacy in a multilingual and multiethnic environment poses challenges.

Research also states that some pupils' reading difficulty may be a result of a mixture of phonological processing, visual and auditory system failure or due to neurological and genetic reasons (Fletcher, et al., 2010; Peer & Reid, 2000). This is usually the case for children with dyslexia. Such children are born with the potential for a reading disability (Gray, 2008). In fact at times this challenge may run in families. For these children, prevention policy is extremely important.

It is also interesting to note that some children struggle to read due to lack of motivation in learning to read (Chapman, Tunmer and Prochnow, 2000; Ecalte, Magnan & Gibert, 2006; Spear-Swerling and Sternberg, 1994). Quirk & Schwanenflugel (2004) cite three motivational aspects for reading by learners: developing self-confidence towards reading; realizing both their strengths and weaknesses; and appreciating the benefits/rewards of reading. Usually, children with reading difficulties lack self-confidence and esteem because they feel inadequate when they compare themselves to their classmates (Lyon, 2003).

Sometimes they may not even realise their own weaknesses and strengths unless they have a good teacher. Worse still, some teachers always emphasise the learners' weakness rather than strengths. This is against the sociocultural theory which underpins this study. Because of these reasons, motivation is key in learning to read.

There is also empirical evidence to show that social economic status may have adverse effects in the acquisition of reading skills (Evans, 2004; Kozol, 1991; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Rothstein, 2004 cited in Crowe, Connor & Petscher, 2009). Children that come from well to do families or homes where both or one of the parents has a stable income, tend to do fairly well at school with a lot of self-esteem and concentration levels compared to those who come from poor and starved homes. This may especially be the case for Zambia where majority of children come from poverty stricken homes. In some schools, food supplements in terms of meals provided to such learners may help them develop motivation to learn not only how to read but also to attend other subjects on the curriculum.

## **2.5 Assessment, Prevention and Remediation for Children with Reading Difficulties**

Having discussed why some children struggle learning to read, it is now time to turn to assessment, prevention and remediation. Assessment plays two roles in education. Firstly, it is used to evaluate teaching and learning. Secondly, it is used to support learners having difficulties. So, evaluation is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. It is also the first step towards solving the existing problem. Unless teachers understand what evaluation is, there may be huddles in alleviating the reading problems of struggling readers. According to Woolfolk, Hughes and Walkup (2008, p. 320), evaluation has to do with "...making judgements about the processes and outcomes of thinking and learning". This 'making of judgements' must be deliberate and influenced by reflection. Teachers need to consciously ask themselves whether their practice on reading and writing is making any positive impact on their learners right from the input (planning), through the process (implementation of lessons) and up to the product (realisation of the learning outcomes). From this idea, it is clear now that evaluation has something to do with assessment.

## 2.5.1 Dynamic Assessment in Reading and Writing

One very important type of assessment is dynamic assessment which has to do with investigating how each learner learns, the processes involved and how this can be strengthened (Lunt, 1994). This kind of assessment is rooted within the sociocultural theory and puts the learner at the centre as the main beneficiary to learning. Similarly, Gipps (2002) adds that assessment if used loosely encompasses many ways of finding out how learners are doing academically and what they are achieving. She further brings to the fore the relationship between assessment and learning and the benefits of using informal assessment over formal assessment. Johnston and Costello (2009), define assessment as, "...a social practice that involves noticing, representing, and responding to children's literate behaviors, rendering them meaningful for particular purposes and audiences" (p. 147). From these ideas it can be seen that assessment is not only about measuring performance of learners in reading or writing but also considering how the teaching process is impacting on the children. So there cannot be effective teaching and learning without effective assessment. It has to do with making meaning out of the learners' behaviours with a view to finding appropriate ways of reducing or removing their challenges. Therefore, the teacher has a number of questions to reflect on: Do I have children with reading difficulties in my class? How do I identify them? How can I effectively assess my learners in reading in order to bring about positive change? Why should I assess them and how often should this be? What assessment instruments and tools are effective for identifying children's real problems? And above all, how do I interpret the assessment results in order to benefit the learners? A realistic answer to each of these questions is one of the keys to alleviating children's reading difficulties.

There are basically two kinds of assessment: formative and summative (Wold, Young and Risko, 2011). The former is on-going and aims at capacity building the learners while the latter is done at the end of a programme to check performance. The focus here is on formative assessment. Any kind of assessment given to the learners should be systematic if it is to bear good results. Amanda, Marcotte and Hintze (2009) define systematic formative assessment as monitoring an academic transition of an individual learner from time to time using a variety of instructional methods. Through a consistent and systematic formative evaluation, a teacher will be able to change the way of doing things so as to benefit individual learners and place them in appropriate levels. This can only succeed if the following factors of the sociocultural theory are taken into consideration: collaboration, interaction, role of tools, giving assistance

and guidance to learners, the power of cooperative learning (group learning and assessment) role of a knowledgeable adult to the 'novice' (helping learners move from one zone of proximal development to the next) through scaffolding (Gipps, 2002).

Additionally, Mokhtari, Porter and Edwards (2010) identify a number of salient factors that a teacher should take into consideration in the classroom. These include: taking time to assess learners' reading strengths and needs; using assessment information collected to inform instructional decisions; monitoring learners' reading patterns not only as a group but as individual learners, organizing instruction based on group needs of the learners; recording how learners are responding to assessment and teaching; and the teacher reflecting on instructional practices in view of the learners' performance.

### **2.5.2 Prevention and Remediation for Reading Difficulties**

After assessing learners, intervention should follow. Intervention for children with reading difficulties, especially early intervention, is very effective towards alleviating these difficulties (Fletcher, et al., 2010). The intervention may be preventive or aimed at solving the already existing problem (remediation) through preventive activities. The latter may be achieved through emergent literacy (introducing children to reading and writing at an early stage). But also the methods teachers use to teach reading play an important role in alleviating pupils' difficulties. According to Lyster (2001) and Lyon (2003), obtaining meaning from print, having frequent and intensive opportunities for reading, exposure to frequent, regular spelling-sound relationships, learning about the nature of the alphabetic language system and understanding the structure of the spoken words are key in reading development. Methods which focus on these prerequisites may succeed (NICHD, 2000).

Torgesen, Wagner, Rashotte, Alexander, Voeller and Conway (2001) in their study found that programmes that are aimed at reducing the impact of reading difficulties in elementary grades, if well implemented, can be effective especially for those children that have problems in phonological awareness. They also assert that emphasis on teaching phonics brings about improvement in word attack and identification skills unlike emphasis on teaching both phonics and text-level reading. There are even more recent findings that "...intense phonological intervention can improve brain function during word recognition activities" (Gray, 2008, p. 119). So if intervention is provided, children of all kinds of reading difficulties

may learn to read; in line with Conley's '...Creating Inclusive Learning Environments for Struggling Readers' (2012).

It is indisputable that effective early intervention is helpful towards improving reading levels for children with reading difficulties (Torgesen, 2002). One empirical study that was done to examine the effects of reading interventions among grade 4 students found that interventions that are done when learners with reading difficulties are already older have less impact (Wanzek & Roberts, 2012). This underscores the importance of early intervention.

## **2.6 Models of Reading**

Having looked at the need for prevention and early intervention, there is now need to look at some of the models of reading. This is important in that it helps in understanding the theoretical basis in mediating children with reading difficulties. Wearmouth, et al., (2003, p.1) further state that there are models of reading which teachers need to understand if they are to make informed decisions about appropriate methods, strategies and techniques which will help pupils learn how to read. Without this understanding by teachers, it will be difficult for them to choose methods of teaching reading and how to implement such programmes. Two of these models are 1. The 'bottom-up', data-driven model and 2. The 'top-down', concept-driven.

### **2.6.1 Bottom-up Model**

This model focuses on letter-sound relationship while the meaning of text comes later. The learners are first taught the letters and their sounds and later they learn to combine these letter-sounds (grapheme-phonetic relationship) to make words using phonological techniques such as blending, substitution, rhyming and sequencing. Usually, direct instruction from the teacher is dependent on teaching small groups (NICHD, 2000; Quirk & Schwanenflugel, 2004). When this has been well done, it results into word identification skills which help learners attack and read new words even those they may have never read before.

### **2.6.2 Top-down Model**

The top-down model on the other hand emphasises meaning prior to structure of words or text. This model is based on Goodman's (1976, cited in Wearmouth et al., 2003) advocacy



that a good reader will not read or attempt to read every word in a text but will make guesses about meaning. This model of reading, led to real book and whole language approaches with a view that, "...children learn to read through reading, being read to and being immersed in a literacy-rich environment" (Wearmouth, et al., 2003, p.13). Therefore, according to this view children learn to read by interpreting pictures and other elements in relation to the context.

A critical examination of the Zambian way of teaching reading will show that such are some of the ideas that the literacy methodologies incorporate. In fact, both models are used in teaching reading. What is not clear though at this point is whether a combination of these models has any effect on the reading acquisition by learners. What is clear is that there is heated debate among scholars. Some argue that children need to learn phonics first and the meaning will come later. Others argue that meaning is paramount in reading while phonics comes secondary; yet others argue that both meaning and phonics are needed but phonics should come earlier than meaning or that the order does not really matter but both models are necessary in reading (Strickland & Culliman, 1994; Harrison, 1994; Adams, 1994; Stanovich, 1988; Snowling, 2000 cited in Wearmouth, et al., 2003).

### **2.6.3 The Interactive Approach**

Having ended with differing views in the above models, there is need to turn to another approach. This approach builds from the two already cited models and advocates that there are three interacting processes in reading namely; sound, visual cues and meaning. In other words, the reading process involves phonics (letter-sound), visual identification in the whole-word method and of course the meaning aspect and prediction of words which is realised through context (Ehri, 1997). The three processes can further be described as linguistic, visual and auditory (Wearmouth et al., 2003). Without an understanding, on the part of the teacher, of these factors and how they contribute to the pupils' reading difficulties, the entire reading instruction will be compromised. For instance, linguistic factors include helping pupils break up words into constituent sound segments and sequencing these sounds, keeping them in memory for retrieval later, articulating them correctly as well as recognising them in written form. This is similar to some of Ehri's five ways of reading words: "...sounding out and blending letters...retrieving sight words...using context to predict words" (Ehri, 1997, p.165). Children come to a realisation that what they hear can be said, what they say can be written down and what is written can also be read (MOE, 2001).

Visual factors on the other hand, include recognising the visual cues of letters, identifying words and word patterns and shapes and being familiar with the left to right eye movement – a prerequisite for those who read from left to right. To do sight word reading, a child needs to retrieve what is stored in memory (Ehri, 1997). The auditory factors include recognition of letter sound groups/patterns, sequencing them, matching them to visual stimuli, distinguishing them from other sounds as well as within words using their shapes. If a learner has difficulty in any of these areas, reading difficulty is imminent.

#### **2.6.4 Developmental Model of Reading**

In order to be able to plan the optimal intervention activities, it is necessary to plan according to the developmental steps of reading. This model asserts that reading is a process that does not happen at once but involves different other skills. And that children may go off-track the ‘road to efficient reading’ at one of the many points (Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1994). Therefore, the sub-skills of reading need to be identified before teaching of reading continues. Marcotte & Hintze, (2009) cite Adams (1990) who acknowledges that once children have mastered the code of reading, it becomes easier for them to develop the other skills such as fluency and reading comprehension. Each child is an individual who is different from others; as a result of this, every child in the classroom needs to be tracked in terms of his or her reading path through formative assessment so as to identify areas needing reinforcement. This realization on the part of the teacher is very cardinal because it helps the teacher to celebrate diversity (Befring, 2001) of learners without quickly giving up in the teaching of reading. Learners cannot learn how to read all at the same time or in the same way but the teacher has to employ different techniques ranging from motivation up to technical skills such as use of the alphabet and phonics in identifying and pronouncing words (Ehri, 1997).

Teaching reading and writing requires effective and appropriate approaches, methods and techniques (Rodgers and Richards, 2001). Some methods and key areas have been subjected to research and their effectiveness tested; such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, sight word acquisition, comprehension, and vocabulary (Hamilton, 2012; NICHD, 2000). But a teacher needs to understand why each of these components should be taught. For instance, phonemic awareness is said to be the first step in mastering the alphabetic principle, the ability to map letters onto the spoken sounds of language (NICHD, 2000). However, each method may work according to many competing factors such as teacher knowledge of how

and why the methods should be used, teacher qualification, motivation, commitment, resource provision and use, linguistic nature of each society (bilingual or multilingual), learning environment and many other factors each society is faced with. This is in agreement with McIntyre et al., (2011, p.1) who state: “...there are competing perspectives on the most appropriate programs, materials, and methods for teaching reading, especially to children from populations who have historically struggled with reading.” Zambia has been using English as the medium of instruction since 1965 (MOE, 1996). For many years, reading problems have persisted among primary school going children.

## 2.7 Vital Elements of Reading

With the realization through the stated developmental model that reading is a process that does not happen at once but involves different other skills, there are vital elements in the teaching of reading that teachers should take seriously. The National Reading Panel: *Teaching Children to Read* (2000), recommends five important evidence and research-based elements as key to learning to read: phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, fluency in word recognition, vocabulary and comprehension. Although there have been a number of studies which came after the findings of the National Reading Panel, most studies support the findings of this study (Bus & van IJzendoorn, 1999; Lyons, 2003; NICHD, 2000; Shanahan, 2006; Torgesen, 2005 cited in Duff et al., 2011; Torgerson, Brooks, & Hall, 2006; Wrightslaw, 2009). Lyons adds, “...majority of children...[who are] at-risk for reading failure can learn to read at average or above levels, but only if they are identified early and provided with systematic, explicit and intensive instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary and reading comprehension strategies (2003, para. 10). Therefore, if children with reading difficulties are exposed to these elements at an early stage, they may develop the skills of reading. Children pass through a gradual and systematic developmental reading process from logographic reading (use of visual cues) through phonological reading (use of phonetic cues) to orthographic reading (attainment of decoding skills) (Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1994). Reading instruction that recognises these factors may succeed. For the purposes of research however, this study has focused on phonemic awareness and phonics – decoding skills only.

## **2.7.1 Phonemic Awareness**

On the route from logographic reading to phonological reading, the first important step towards reading is phonemic awareness. As one of the important elements in learning to read, phonemic awareness is about the knowledge that words are built up of sound units (Nicholson, 1997). It deals with "...hearing and thinking about" sounds (Shanahan, 2006, p.6). It is no longer a disputable matter that phonemic awareness plays an important role in reading development as well as in identifying learners with reading difficulty. Ehri (1998, cited in Torgesen, 2002) says, "...phonemic decoding skills are necessary in the formation of accurate memory for the spelling patterns that are the basis of sight word recognition" (p.11). This formation of accurate memory for the spelling patterns comes as a result of the connections that the learner makes between graphemes (alphabetic letters) and phonemes (basic sound units) and "meanings" (Ehri, 1997, p. 169). It is through phonemic awareness that children become familiar with print. Therefore, practices in teaching reading that take phonemic awareness into consideration may succeed if well implemented because they help learners understand how words are formed.

## **2.7.2 Phonics and Decoding skills**

The understanding of how words are formed together with letter knowledge leads to phonics. Phonics as a method of teaching refers to helping children understand the "mappings between letters and sounds" (Beck & Juel, 2002, p. 2). Through exposure to this instruction, learners will be able to grasp the alphabetic code and learn how to read and write. Whereas phonics is an instructional aspect, decoding is a skill a learner develops. So decoding is the ability to separate and distinguish between different sound units (phonemes) – which Gough and Tunmer (1986) call the 'orthographic cipher'. For example, the word 'big' is made up of three different sounds /b/ /i/ /g/ which are also letters. As far back as the 1960s, it was established that phonics played an important role in reading acquisition process (Chall, 1967). This has been confirmed by other researchers in the 1980s (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson (1985). The 1990s and 2000s have seen a number of researchers in agreement with these findings that phonics is key in acquiring reading skill and basic with regard to preventing reading problems (Adams, 1990; Henry, 1993 cited in Lyster, 1995; Hiebert, Pearson, Taylor, Richardson, & Paris, 1998; Snow, Burns, & Griffin 1998; Torgesen, 2002; Wagner &

Torgesen, 1987 cited in Ecalle, Magnan & Gibert, 2006; Swanson, Rosston, Gerber & Solari, 2008).

However, vocabulary development is another basic aspect in learning to read. Empirical findings show that children born in a literacy stimulating environment where they have adequate practice of oral language and are introduced to print at an early age, such children will have advantages in vocabulary and oral comprehension (Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1994; Edward, 2004). Vocabulary acts as a firm foundation for phonemic awareness (NICHD 2000). Once children are equipped with decoding skills through phonics and supported by comprehension, they will be able to read new words. The opposite is also true that children that are poor in these skills will often have difficulties learning to read. This is what Stanovich called ‘Matthew effect’ where the poor readers get poorer and the better readers get better (cited in Beck & Juel, 2002). Many studies have shown that inadequate decoding skills result in impaired reading comprehension and word recognition as such it is a major contributor to children with reading and writing problems (Frith, 1985; Gough & Tunmer, 1986; NICHD, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1994).

## **2.8 Summary**

This chapter has reviewed some of the literature on best practices in the teaching of reading and writing. It has attempted to show the relevance of the sociocultural theory in supporting children having difficulties learning to read. A number of terms have been defined and the context in which they have been used in this study given. There are a number of factors responsible for children’s reading difficulties as shown. The chapter has shown that assessment, prevention and remediation can help bring on course every learner and that this should be anchored on relevant models of reading. It is clear from this presentation that teaching reading let alone teaching reading to learners with reading difficulties requires a lot of expertise from the teacher. Unless teachers appreciate the main elements of teaching reading namely: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development and reading comprehension, teaching reading will just be a nightmare. Research-based methods with empirical evidence to teaching reading should be used effectively. The next chapter gives the methodology for this study.

# CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to investigate how teachers practise the teaching of reading and writing towards supporting learners with reading difficulties at the lower primary level. It seeks to understand the teachers' background knowledge of teaching reading in particular. It further explores their conditions that may impact on their practice and choice of methods. The way they assess learners with reading difficulties has been investigated. Consequently, the teachers' planning of their teaching to support learners with reading difficulties and classroom practice during lessons has also been explored. This chapter discusses the research design and the methodology for this study. This being a qualitative study, a case study design was seen as appropriate. A mixed methods approach to data collection has been used namely; interview, observation and document analysis. The main tool of data collection was the interview but supported with lesson observation and analysis of the teaching documents. This is followed by the setting for the study to shed light on where the study was conducted. The sampling procedures and techniques, process of data collection, validity and reliability of data and ethical considerations for the study have also been discussed. The chapter closes with a summary.

## 3.2 Research Design

Research design refers to the overall plan that has been used to execute a study (Boudah, 2010). According to Yin (2009) research questions for a study may determine the design to be used. For instance 'how' or 'why' questions are suited for case studies. Since the aim of this study was to investigate how teachers practise teaching reading and writing towards supporting learners with reading difficulties, a case study design within the qualitative approach was chosen. This is a social phenomenon that requires an in-depth study in real life settings in line with Yin (2009).

It is also vital to state that research methods vary and are used according to type, purpose of the study and nature of the phenomenon under study. If the purpose of the study is to generalise the findings to a larger population, then a quantitative research is used. On the other hand if the aim is to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the respondents, then

a qualitative research is used (Bryman, 2008). It is also important to note that qualitative research, like this one, can also be called interpretive research. This is so because it falls under the phenomenology research tradition in which it is believed that respondents have meanings and interpretations to the phenomenon. Therefore, anyone wishing to understand the phenomenon must go and spend time in the social world of the respondents to make sense of how they perceive of reality (Birnbaum, Emig and Fisher, 2004; Gall, Gall and Borg, 2007). Guba (1990), adds that reality cannot be understood unless through what he terms ‘a window of theory’. In this regard interpretivists are interested more in meaning as opposed to quantitative researchers who are mainly concerned with numbers.

Maxwell (2005, p.22) cites five goals for which the qualitative research are suited and these are: understanding the meaning from the respondent’s point of view, understanding the context in which the actions, events take place, identifying new discoveries and relationships, understanding the process rather than the product and finally, to understand causality for phenomena. These goals are what this case study seeks to achieve so as to improve the situation in the near future. It seeks to understand the meaning attached to teaching reading and writing from the Zambian teachers’ point of view. It also seeks to understand the teaching of reading in the context of rural, peri-urban and urban schools and how these contexts impact on teaching. The study also explores possible new discoveries and relationships between environment and teacher practices, class size and learner performance, assessment and learner motivation. It further explores the process of teaching reading and how teachers support learners with reading difficulties. Above all, it investigates possible causes of the low reading levels among lower primary school learners.

### **3.3 Case Study**

A case study design was used to investigate how teachers practise the teaching of reading and writing towards supporting learners with reading difficulties. A phenomenon as this one needs to be studied in depth within the natural and wider context so as to understand it in detail (De Vaus, 2002; Gall et al., 2007; Yin, 2009). According to Creswell, (2009, p. 13), “Case studies are a strategy of inquiry, in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals.” There was need to explore the process of teaching reading in order to understand how and why things work. Through this design, common features, themes and patterns were established for the reader to assess. The case study is suited

for this study because the way reading is taught in Zambia cannot be studied by detaching it from its context (Birnbaum et al., 2004). Case studies provide knowledge on causal factors that may lead to successes and failures of a programme or phenomenon at hand.

Why is this study considered a case study? This study is what Yin called an embedded case study design and a *single case*<sup>3</sup> for a number of reasons in line with Gall, et. al., (2007), Yin (2009) and Bryman, (2008). Firstly, it is an in-depth investigation of how teachers practise the teaching of reading at the lower primary level and it focuses on teachers' practices in teaching reading (one instance of the phenomenon) among all the respondents. This was done through a face to face interview with teachers, review of their teaching records as well as lesson observation in the classrooms. Secondly, it was done in real-life setting in the classrooms where the respondents teach from and it attempts to understand their environment and what meaning they give to it with regard to teaching reading and supporting learners with reading difficulties. Thirdly, the study adopts and reports the perspective of the respondents. This was achieved through the investigator's participation in the field and interaction in both formal and informal conversations with respondents. The role of the investigator was simply to understand how to report the phenomenon like the respondents view it. Fourthly, the study used triangulation which is interview, observation and document analysis in order to strengthen the findings. In this way, the argument by some scholars that case study lacks rigour (Yin, 2009), has been countered in that these methods for data collection complement and strengthen each other. Above all, the study investigated six (6) "cases" or respondents in three kinds of contexts (embedded units): rural, peri-urban and urban so as to understand the phenomenon. The six cases were purposely reported as a single case. Lastly, Wolcott, (1992) contends that it is better for a researcher to focus on one case rather than having many especially if such a researcher is a novice. Yin advises against multiple cases unless the decision is based on replication logic (cited in Gall, et al., 2007). Since the investigator did not expect any replication logic owing to a number of factors surrounding the sampled schools, this study cannot qualify as a multiple case study. Consequently, the study is a single case showing salient similarities and differences in the unit of analysis of all the three types of schools.

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<sup>3</sup> A single case study design is "a form of case study research in which either the unit of analysis is a single individual or a single instance of a phenomenon, or in which several instances of the same phenomenon are collectively studied as one case" (Gall, et al., 2007, p.653)



There are many purposes for using case studies. Some of the main purposes of case studies may be to describe, explain or evaluate the phenomenon (Gall, et. al., 2007). The purpose of this case study is to reveal and describe various practices of teachers in the process of teaching such as their knowledge of teaching reading, their environment and contextual factors that influence the way they teach reading and how they support learners with reading difficulties. That way the findings of this study may provide knowledge for future improvement in literacy teaching. Through this design, both the reader and the investigator may form theory based on what is practised and possibly carry out further studies (Benbasat, Goldstein and Mead, 1987).

There have been debates in some circles questioning the validity of case study in qualitative research. Some researchers argue that case studies use small samples as such the results may not be generalised. Others contend that case studies are largely controlled by the researcher thereby subject to bias in reporting (Bryman, 2008; Gall, et. al., 2007; Hogan, Dolan & Donnelly, 2009). Although there have been these debates, case study is largely used and has been accepted especially in the field of education. For instance, through this case study, the teachers' practices in teaching reading have been reported and understood. So the investigator showed the participants' views (emic) and reported in a truthful manner so as to avoid bias. Through this design, multiple methods for data collection (triangulation) have been used as stated by Yin (2009) that case studies use multiple methods in collecting data. Through a careful use of triangulation the weaknesses of each method were strengthened by other methods.

The case study enabled the investigator to be the main means for data collection. In this way, the investigator played the role of non-participant-observer. This means that the observer was a neutral outsider who wanted to understand the context and the process by observing and recording the proceedings. Although this may be a limitation in that the observer was seen as an intruder, it gave an opportunity for the investigator to spend time and interact with the respondents in order to solicit for data as well as to understand their world and the meaning they attach to it (Berger, 2011, Gall, et. al., 2007). Therefore, the investigator began each visit to the teachers with an atmosphere of calm and assurance for trust. In this way mutual trust was established and data collection was successful.

## **3.4 Multiple Methods to Data Collection**

This study used multiple methods to data collection in line with Yin (2009). This had an advantage of the methods complementing one another thereby strengthening the findings. But use of this approach was also challenging as the investigator had to ensure that these were carefully used to avoid duplication of work and ambiguity. The following three methods were used: interview, observation and document analysis. The three methods were chosen in order to help finding answers to each sub-research question asked. In order to answer the questions: What are the teachers' backgrounds regarding children with reading difficulties? What are the teachers' realities regarding children with reading difficulties? And, How do the teachers identify learners with reading difficulties? The semi-structured interview was used to answer these questions. Each of the sub-questions had specific questions aimed at ultimately answering the main question. To answer the question as to how teachers support learners with reading difficulties in their instructional planning, the teachers' schemes of work, weekly forecasts and lesson plans were reviewed. And to answer the question on how teachers support learners with reading difficulties in the classroom during the lesson, observation method was instituted.

### **3.4.1 Interview**

First of all it is important to note that interviews are a useful tool for collecting data especially in qualitative studies. This is so for a number of reasons as will be shown. Berger (2011, p. 135) defines interview as "...the conversation between a researcher and an informant". Therefore, the researcher had a conversation with teachers of the fourth-graders in the six schools under study to obtain information necessary for the study. Semi-structured interviews were used before and at times after the lesson observation. A set of carefully designed and related open-ended questions were asked to the respondents so as to allow them answer freely and in depth. The questions did not follow the exact order but followed the course of the conversation between the interviewee and the interviewer as long as all the scheduled topics on the interview guide were answered. The follow-up interview after lesson observation created an opportunity to the researcher to find out on how and why the lesson went as it did as well as why the teachers performed or used certain activities or strategies. According to Berger (2011), a researcher should not just conclude on what he or she sees during

observation but should ask respondents to explain why they did things the way they did them and this was what transpired.

The semi-structured interview that was used gave a chance to the researcher to probe for more information as the interview unfolded thereby supplementing on what the investigator may have omitted in the planned questions. Oral interviews usually allow respondents to speak in their own words thereby making the phenomenon clear (Gall et al., 2007). Respondents can express their ideas/views and attitudes to the benefit of the researcher (Berger, 2011). They also allow the researcher to record the conversation for analysis later. It is due to these advantages that the investigator used interview method.

In spite of all these advantages interviews have their own limitations. For instance, in this study in two occasions the interviews were interrupted when suddenly a head teacher walks into the room to greet the visitor. There was no alternative but to stop the session for a while and resume later. Another disadvantage was that some respondents had to be literally persuaded to speak and answer the questions either by rephrasing the questions or increasing the probes. An embarrassing moment happened when suddenly the new batteries could no longer work in the midst of the interview. So the interviewer had to use the voice recorder on the mobile phone to continue recording the conversation. Luckily, the respondent remained calm and was very willing to be recorded. Lastly, interviews are time consuming in that the interviews needed to be transcribed so as to derive meaning from the data as soon as each interview was conducted. This study had 300 minutes of un-transcribed data. This required many hours of listening to the same conversation time and again so as to make sense out of them. This was manually done since there was no computer software to use for transcribing. This worked very well as the investigator was sure of having eliminated possible errors.

The first two sub-questions centred on finding out the backgrounds and situations for the respondents. This was necessary as it would equip the researcher and the readers with understanding of the backgrounds and conditions in which the teachers of the fourth-graders operate in Zambia and other factors that affect them. Within this question, they were asked about their experiences in teaching reading with regard to meeting the educational needs of children with reading difficulties. Such factors as teaching experience, class size, teacher's knowledge of the reading difficulties and the support the teachers receive were brought to light. Secondly, it was supported by how the teachers identify learners with reading difficulties in their lessons. The interview covered the following topics under this question:

the assessment process, frequency, important elements in the assessment process and interpretation and use of results after assessment. Thirdly, respondents were asked as to how they support learners through planning and evaluation of their own teaching. But this needed to be checked by not only listening to what teachers say they do but by checking their actual planning tools such as lesson plans, weekly forecasts and schemes of work. This was seen as helpful to the investigator to ascertain as to whether the respondents understand the dimensions of reading as these are necessary in appreciating the needs of learners. Lastly, some of the respondents were interviewed again after being observed in the classroom so as for them to clarify on certain issues where the investigator had questions. A number of follow up questions were asked as the interview progressed. See appendix D for the interview guide.

### **3.4.2 Observation**

Although the main method for data collection was interview, there was need to use observation method too. In order to see how the teachers implement their instructional planning, lesson observation and field notes were used. Observation is said to surpass information obtained from the respondents in an interview especially if it has been done for a long time (Gall et al., 2007). For this reason, it was suitable for complimenting the interview as the interview could not answer how teachers support learners with reading difficulties during the lesson. The observer used an adapted observation guide containing these aspects: teacher's knowledge and mastery of the teaching methods, pupil involvement, organisation and management of the learning environment, teacher's professional characteristics, lesson conclusion and achievement of the stated learning outcomes. In addition to this, the observer made field notes about the happenings in the classroom. What was taken note of was based on the research questions as well as the observation instrument. An observational protocol was used containing two columns: descriptive notes and reflective notes (Creswell, 2009). Using this protocol, the researcher wrote down what he observed and the meaning of it. The use of field notes has a number of advantages: since the observer cannot remember everything that was observed, there is need to aid memory by taking notes of important things observed in relation to what is being looked for in the study. These notes taken during observation acted as the basis for the follow up interview to seek clarification on certain aspects of the lesson. Apart from this, field notes may be quite friendly to the teacher being observed in comparison to a video which may make the teacher feel insecure. The field notes were also helpful in data analysis and discussion.

Observation was meant to aid the investigator in understanding some of the respondents' answers given during the oral interview and avoid prejudice (Gall et al., 2007). It also helped the observer to see what goes on inside the classroom on why and how teachers practice the methodologies rather than just depend on what they tell orally. Maxwell, (2005) observes that interviews are mainly helpful if one wishes to understand the respondent's perspective but inferences about this perspective can only be obtained through observation. Observation however, may make the observed uncomfortable unless trust is built which is not possible always. Personal bias may also be an issue but may be reduced through the use of an observation checklist. The observation was based on a self-made observation instrument but based on the research questions. The observation instrument was made with the help of the Charles Lwanga College of Education school teaching practice monitoring instrument. This instrument has been revised and used many times as such it is more reliable. In order to make the study more valid, the observation instrument was pilot-tested in order to ascertain its suitability from both the perspective of the researcher and that of the respondents. See appendix E for the observation instrument that was used.

### **3.4.3 Document Analysis**

Document analysis is another method for data collection that was used in this case study. But there is need to ask the question: what are documents and records? Lincoln and Guba (cited in Gall, et al., 2007, p.291) define documents as "...written communications that are prepared for personal rather than official reasons". To the contrary, records are those meant for official records according to Lincoln and Guba. The investigator for this study adopts these views. For example, the teacher's teaching notes as documents were used though they were not meant for official use but for personal use by the teachers during the lesson while lesson plans and weekly forecasts may be referred to as records as they are officially required of a teacher in any government school in Zambia.

In order to see how much the teachers know and plan for each learner with reading difficulties, the teachers' planning documents were analysed. The sub research question: how do teachers plan their teaching to support learners with reading difficulties?, was answered by scrutinising teachers' planning documents. These included lesson plans, teaching notes, weekly forecasts, progress charts and assessment results. In these documents and records the investigator looked for how teachers plan tasks; differentiation of tasks, teachers' reflexivity

towards learners with reading difficulties as well as the possible supervision teachers receive from their supervisors. The investigator also looked at how the respondents evaluate their own teaching and how they reflect on their inadequacies and pupils' weaknesses and needs with focus on those with reading difficulties thereby creating meaning on possible mediation process (Gall, et al., 2007). This was done so as to check the teachers' assertions in the interview. But the problem arose when some teachers did not have these documents.

## **3.5 Sampling**

Sampling is about finding research participants for the study. The investigator used purposeful criterion sampling which allows for modification to the study during data collection. It also provided “information-rich” respondents (Gall, et al., 2007). Purposeful sampling provided the investigator a chance to have a wider understanding on the teachers’ practices.

“Purposeful sampling can also increase variance and thus improve the validity of the findings” (p.127). This was achieved in this study since six teachers were interviewed in different schools. It helped the investigator in understanding the phenomenon in different contexts. However, in schools where there was only a single fourth-grader class, in case of the teacher being away, there was need to reschedule the programme. Therefore, the data collection had to be rescheduled.

### **3.5.1 Population Sample**

In this study sampling was done at two levels. Firstly, schools were sampled in relation to the criteria of urban, peri-urban and rural. Secondly, these teachers needed to be teaching fourth-graders. Therefore, 6 teachers were purposefully selected for observation and interview. The teachers were selected as follows: 2 teachers from urban schools; 2 teachers from peri-urban schools and 2 teachers from rural schools. The criteria for selecting the teachers was that any teacher of fourth-graders in the schools chosen, who accepted to participate in the study would qualify as a research participant. Secondly, in schools where there were more than 1 class of grade 4, a teacher recommended as ‘good’ by the school administration would be chosen. This provided the investigator with an opportunity to see the best practices as well as the available practices in an ordinary school. The teachers were 5 females and 1 male. They were aged between 18 and 35 years. They had between 2 months and 7 years of teaching experience.

### **3.5.2 Setting**

The study was conducted in six schools of Monze District in Southern Province. Zambia has three kinds of schools although they all must implement the same general curriculum. There is an urban school which is usually situated in or very close to town. Then there is the peri-urban school that is situated slightly away from town-between an urban and a rural school. Finally, there is the rural school that is more than 30 kilometres away from the nearest district education office. The conditions for the three types of schools vary. The schools had a number of differences: the urban schools were densely populated and with pupils from both well to do and poor families. The peri urban schools were centrally located while the rural schools were targeted for usually having poor results. One may argue that it may have been better to carry out the study in schools that are almost identical in nature. But the scenario of having three kinds of schools in Zambia is a reality which may not change soon. It was important to investigate the phenomenon in three contexts as this may give a wider understanding of the problem. The district in which the investigator lives was selected. It was selected in order to find it easy to implement the findings as well as to carry out further studies in the near future. However, this had a limitation in that one of the respondents is the investigator's former student. So the investigator had to emphasise strongly that he was a student who had come to learn how the teacher was practising the teaching and not to inspect or rate the teacher.

## **3.6 Data Analysis**

The data was reflectively analysed starting from the time it was collected while still in the field just like what researchers say that data analysis in qualitative research is in parallel with data collection (Creswell, 2009; Gall et al., 2007; Maxwell, 2005). This enabled the researcher to discover important sources and information that may have been overlooked in the design. This was achieved in three ways: 1. Having consultative meetings or sessions with respondents and supervisors. 2. Having field note summaries 3. Having data summary sheets (Drew, Hardman & Hosp, 2008). The recorded interviews were transcribed, while the memos, observational & teaching documents and records reports and notes were read and analysed. Field notes were analysed and interpreted in readiness for coding in relation to the answers of the structured questions.

Creswell defines coding as, "...the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of texts before bringing meaning to information...segmenting sentences...or images into

categories...” (2009, p. 186). Transcripts were read carefully. They were then coded into themes in relation to the research questions and information collected (Berger, 2011). Then a list of all topics were made and sorted according to similarities and differences using highlighters of colours. The topics were later abbreviated as codes and the codes written near the related text in word document. Then these topics were turned into categories – major topics, unique topics, leftovers and emerging themes. Finally, the information assembled according to category and a preliminary analysis was made (adapted from Creswell, 2009, p. 186). The categories were developed from both the data and research questions based on theory and determined at the formulation of the research instrument. The sub-themes were mostly developed from the data. The pattern of interaction between the teacher and pupils with reading difficulties was analysed using the lesson plan and the observation instrument checklist. The results were analysed from both the perspective of the participants (emic perspective) and that of the researcher (etic). The data from interviews, observation and document analysis were all sorted according to themes.

Above all, the sociocultural theory was used as the basis for analysing and for discussing the findings and chatting possible interventions for the future. Interpretative and reflective notes made from teaching documents were analysed in relation to intentions of the curriculum and lessons but also incorporating reading development theories and decoding skills. Therefore, interpretational analysis was largely used whereby the case study data was examined carefully so as to find constructs, themes and patterns that are useful in understanding the phenomenon under study. Lastly, intuition and judgment were used to evaluate the phenomenon based on the researcher’s experience (Gall et al., 2007). Above all, the investigator tried by all means to make sense of the meanings that the respondents attach to the phenomenon just like argued by Cohen et al., (2007). This was quite a challenging task but through reading books and consulting the research advisor, a meaningful analysis was made.

## **3.7 Reliability and Validity**

### **3.7.1 Triangulation and truthfulness**

Reliability according to Gall, et al., (2007) in case study research may refer to the degree to which similar results would be arrived at by other researchers if they used the same procedures. Validity on the other hand refers to the extent to which the data that has been



gathered, measure that which they purport to measure. This study has adopted the triangulation approach so as to make the study reliable and valid. In other words, the study has used multiple methods of data collection: interviews, observation (formal and informal), as well as document analysis. By so doing, areas that may have been overlooked by one method were strengthened and checked by the other. The cross-checking of data through multiple method approach has made the data collected reliable. This is in line with Cresswell (2009) who contends that the use of multi-model technique to data collection averts the possibility of having invalid and unreliable data.

In order to avoid researcher bias, the respondents were asked to verify the data collected before it was processed. Consequently, the investigator tried as far as possible to stick to the instruments for carrying out both the interview and observation rather than to opinion and experience. This way, the data collected is perceived to be valid and reliable. In addition to this, the researcher tried as far as possible to report only that which the respondents said, that which was seen in the documents analysed and that which was observed indirectly or directly. As far as possible, the respondents' answers were given as verbatim statements so as to show the reader what the respondents actually said. This is assurance for credibility. In some cases, the researcher's personal views may have been used but they have been supported by evidence and empirical findings from other scholars. Shortcomings and limitations have been acknowledged. Therefore, what this report contains are not the researcher's opinions but a true reflection of the findings of this study in line with what is believed to be true in the research world. Hence this study is dependable and transferrable to similar cases. It is possible to generalise the findings of this case study to similar cases. Additionally, if another case study was conducted with similar settings it is also very likely to arrive at similar findings with this study – reliability (Gall, et al., 2007).

### **3.7.2 Pilot testing**

In addition to the aforementioned measures the investigator had to test the instruments prior to using them. As a novice in the field of research, the investigator had to undergo a series of field trips in Oslo. Two institutions were visited: a primary school and a kindergarten. During these visits the investigator practised how to ask questions and solicit for answers. Although the cultures differ in that Norwegians are more closed, the visits helped a lot because Zambians on the other hand are more open.

Apart from this, the investigator requested two teachers of the fourth-graders in Zambia from two schools to do the pilot test on them by explaining what they understood from the questions that were in the interview schedule just as proposed by Gall, et al., (2007). The tests were successful and necessary changes were made.

The changes made to the interview schedule were as follows: The double-barrelled question was changed into two. Earlier question: How do teachers support learners both in their instructional planning and lesson implementation in the classroom? Two separate questions were formulated: 1. How do teachers support learners with reading difficulties during the lesson? 2. How do teachers support learners in their instructional planning? The two questions were subjected to interview and document analysis respectively, as methods for collecting data. It was also realised that one question tended to be difficult yet necessary and it had to be paraphrased during each interview. The question was: Which elements of reading do you consider important for children to learn how to read? The question was paraphrased as follows: Some people believe that there are certain elements or aspects that are considered very important and if children are taught these elements, then they would learn to read quickly; which elements do you consider important yourself? In this way, issues of reliability and validity were taken care of.

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations in research refer to issues of “...right and wrong conduct” (Wikipedia). It is important to do what is perceived as good practices in research and to avoid what is wrong. De Vaus (2002, p.58) identifies the following ethical considerations: voluntary participation, informed consent, no harm, confidentiality and anonymity and privacy.

As a procedure in social research and education in particular, the aspect of informed consent was taken seriously. The respondents were informed of the nature and implication of the study through a letter. They were also free to participate as well as to withdraw from the study at any time they feel like (Gall et al., 2007; Homan, 2002). Permission was sought firstly from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) and later in Zambia, from the office of the District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) for Monze district, head teachers as well as from the respondents themselves. See appendices: A, B, and C.

Confidentiality was highly observed and no one else will have access to names and responses of respondents except the investigator. Besides, the names of respondents were not used in the data. Only the researcher may know which data relates to a particular respondent and only if the codes of names are compared with the data. No personal identifying data will be left loosely. For instance, the authorisation letter from the district education office has not been attached for fear that some respondents may be identified. The recorded interview will be erased after the project. All personal indirectly identifying data has been anonymised or removed. The data collected will be strictly used only for the study and not any other purpose. Above all, this case study has been reported is in line with ethics whereby respondents have been respected.

### **3.9 Summary**

This chapter has described the methodology that was used for the study. A case study design was used to investigate the phenomenon in detail so as to understand the meaning from the perspective of the respondents. The study is an embedded single case study trying to explore one instance of the phenomenon. Semi-structured interview was used for data collection to understand the respondents' backgrounds, realities and knowledge of teaching reading. In order to see how teachers implement the instructional planning in the classroom, lesson observation was also used. Since planning for teaching precedes teaching, the investigator also analysed the teachers' documents to see how they plan for learners with reading difficulties in their planning. Purposeful sampling was used to select six teachers of fourth-graders from 6 schools: two from urban schools; the other two from peri-urban while the last two were from rural schools. This was done in order to understand the phenomenon in a broad context. Coming to data analysis, the recorded interview was transcribed after careful listening. Memos, observational and teaching documents and records reports were analysed with the help of field notes. These were later coded to come up with themes and categories. The chapter has shown that the sociocultural theory was used as basis for analysing the data. The pilot testing that was done prior to collection of data and the use of multiple methods to collect the data helped in the issues of reliability and validity. This was supported by truthful reporting. Ethical considerations that were taken care of in this study have also been given. The next chapter presents the findings of the study.

# CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

## 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has outlined the methodology for the study and justified its suitability. This chapter describes how the data was analysed. It will also present the findings of this study and put them in context in relation to the research objectives and main research question with regards to how teachers practise the teaching of reading and writing towards supporting children with reading difficulties at the lower primary level. The data was collected from interviews and lesson observations of six (6) fourth Grade teachers in three types of schools: urban, peri-urban and rural. Therefore, six schools were involved in the study: two schools from each of the school types. For ethical reasons, the names of teachers observed have been replaced with pseudo names as follows: Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher D, Teacher E and Teacher F. The first 2 teachers (A and B) are from rural schools; C and D from peri-urban while E and F are from urban schools. In order to make the data from interviews analysable, they were first transcribed from audio to graphic formats. This resulted into categories for possible coding using themes.

Both the interview schedule and lesson observation instrument were framed from the following sub-questions which were also framed from the literature reviewed. This resulted in the following sub-research questions which also guided the data analysis: 1. What are the teachers' backgrounds regarding children with reading difficulties? 2. What are the teachers' realities regarding children with reading difficulties? 3. How do the teachers identify learners with reading difficulties? 4. How do they plan their teaching to support these learners? 5. How do they support these learners in the classroom during the lesson?

The summary of the findings from both the interviews and lesson observations is given towards the end of the chapter. The following outline is the summary of the findings:

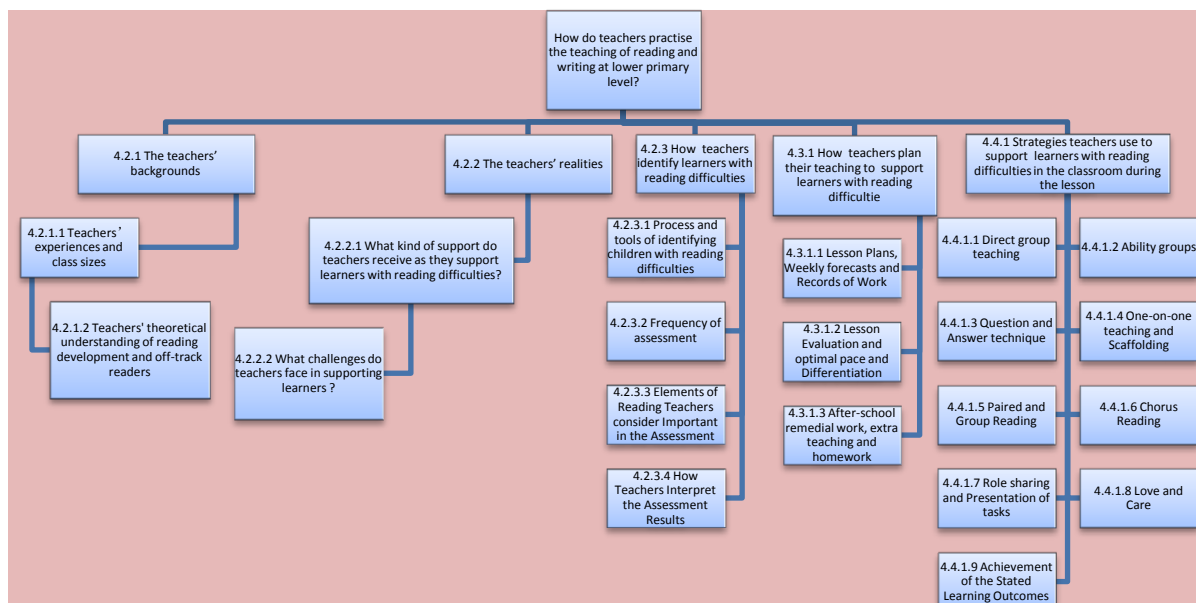


Figure 1: Outline for the data presentation

## 4.2 Presentation of the Findings

Through years of experience in training of teachers, the researcher had hunches of what was likely to be collected and why. However, there was need to get it from the respondents themselves who are involved in teaching reading so as to validate or invalidate the researcher's beliefs. It came out clearly from this study that some of the researcher's hunches did not agree with reality on the ground. The analysis was highly driven by the nature of the research questions and structure of the interview schedule – all rooted within the sociocultural theory; thus focusing on these aspects: 1. teachers' individual backgrounds and situations regarding teaching reading. 2. How teachers identify children with reading difficulties. 3. Planning and assessment for mediation of children with reading difficulties. Each of the questions had sub topics that guided the interview to solicit for answers.

### 4.2.1 The Teachers' Backgrounds

This aspect was included in the interview schedule so that the researcher would understand other variables that may influence teachers' practices in the teaching of reading and how children with reading difficulties were supported from one school or type of school to another. This would also enable the researcher to understand circumstances surrounding teacher performance and use of methods such as experience, class enrollment, teacher efficacy and

other conditions. This is in line with what other researchers advise (Echalle, Magnan & Gilbert, 2006). This study found out that the six teachers that were involved in the study were from different backgrounds and these played a role in their teaching of reading and support for learners with reading difficulties. Noted among them were the following diversities:

#### **4.2.1.1 Teachers' Experiences and Class sizes**

The six teachers had teaching experience ranging between 7 years and 2 months. For instance, Teacher A had 5 years teaching experience while Teacher B had only 2 months. Teacher C had 6 years of experience while Teacher D had only 3 years. Teacher E and F had 7 years and 4 years and 7 months respectively. Although teacher F had more than 4 years of experience she had taught literacy only for 1 year by the time this study was being conducted. Another aspect worth noting is that while Teacher A had 78 learners in one classroom, Teacher B had 55. It was further discovered that while this was the situation in the two rural schools, the scenario was different in the peri-urban ones. Teacher C had 86 learners while Teacher D had 80 but both teachers did not have all these learners within one classroom. They met and taught the learners at different times of the day as different classes locally known as 'double class.' On the other hand, Teachers E and F had 54 learners each in the urban schools. It can further be stated that while some teachers complained about meeting a large number of learners within one classroom others were challenged by being kept busy the entire day meeting learners at different times of the day.

#### **4.2.1.2 Teachers' qualifications and understanding of reading development and off-track readers**

All the six teachers had a primary teachers' certificate each. Each had at least two years training. Three (A, B and F) were trained by private teacher training colleges while the other three were trained in government colleges. Although no conclusions can be made at this point, teachers from private colleges felt not adequately trained to teach reading.

All the six teachers did indicate that they had learners with reading difficulties in their classes as they all said 'yes' when asked as to whether they had any learners with reading difficulties in their classes. On average there were about 20 learners with reading difficulties in each of the classes studied. Nearly all the teachers involved in the study also did allude to the fact that most of the children with reading difficulties had also writing difficulties. They added that

usually when they assessed children in reading, they also assessed them in writing. However, in one case the investigator was told that some children that had reading difficulties did not have writing difficulties and those with writing difficulties did not have reading difficulties. Teacher F said: “You may find that one pupil is able to write but cannot read while another may be able to read but cannot write. Then we group them just like that.” Teacher B also added that: “I can also say [that] it is not only reading that the learners have problems with but also with writing...in fact mostly those that have reading difficulties... usually have also writing difficulties.”

This meant that each teacher had an understanding of reading development and off-track readers. Therefore, teachers grouped the learners according to their similar strengths and weaknesses.

## **4.2.2 The Teachers’ Realities**

Considering that the six teachers were drawn from three different kinds of environments rural, peri-urban and urban, the circumstances in which the teachers were found were also different. For instance, these teachers received different kinds of support and faced different challenges.

### **4.2.2.1 The Support teachers receive**

Teachers have a great job in a school as such they need to be supported by the school administration, parents, other teachers and stakeholders. Without this support, their effort of mediating for children with reading difficulties will not bear good results. When asked if they received any support from anybody, nearly all the respondents said that they did. Starting with *rural teachers*: Teacher A said: “Yes...I receive support from colleagues...teachers”. Teacher B also answered in the affirmative to the question about receiving support and elaborated as follows:

Yes I do...from their parents. When I give the children work as homework, I ask them to work with their parents [in doing the homework]. Some of the parents have even approached and thanked me...especially when they come to collect school report forms for their children. Even the teachers are very helpful to me. I normally come early to school even if I am supposed to go into my class at 10:40. I come earlier than that so that any teacher that is free can assist me.

Most of the support rural teachers receive, seems to come from the school administration although it varies in terms of form and amount. Some of the support comes from their fellow teachers and in other cases from parents. It was also learned that sometimes teachers receive no support at all. This was what Teacher A said: “Sometimes teachers are busy. Unless you ask for it, you may not receive any support.” Additionally, one rural teacher had to provide pencils and exercise books for some pupils to use in the classroom as children came to school without these materials. “Sometimes I am compelled to help my learners with pencils and exercise books as some parents cannot provide these to their children...you can't teach reading without writing”, narrated Teacher B. Nearly all the teachers observed had to improvise on the teaching and learning materials used.

As for *peri-urban teachers*: only teacher C was asked the question and answered as follows: “Yes...I receive support from Management. I am usually given story books for the children as well as entry books for the performance of learners so as to track those with reading difficulties”. Whereas Teacher B from a rural school is able to work with parents in supporting children with reading difficulties, Teacher C from a peri-urban school had the following to say: “I wished parents worked hand in hand with teachers so as to help these learners with reading difficulties.” So some teachers have difficulties getting support from parents as seen here. Like her rural counterpart this teacher also simply has to use initiative and improvise on teaching materials and at times even learning materials. “Normally I ask from other teachers or use my own initiative to find how I can help my learners” narrated Teacher C.

Both *urban teachers* said they do receive some support. The type of support that these teachers receive varies from one school to another and includes assistant teaching, verbal encouragement, teaching materials as well as training on how to teach reading. This was narrated by Teacher E from an urban school:

The school supports us because you can't manage alone. As a school we receive resources. Normally we improvise but they provide resources because alone you can't manage... And there is this new programme ‘that has just been introduced’ to support the PRP (Primary Reading Programme) – the THRASS... The letters stand for: Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills. The programme is practised in many countries like Zimbabwe.....It was adopted from Zimbabwe. It was adopted to supplement the PRP we already have. It is just a complement to PRP. It deals with



reading and spellings. It normally, emphasises Graphemes and Phonemes. Phonemes are sounds and graphemes are set of spellings.

Teacher F also had this to say: “Yes we receive lesson demonstrations and training from the Deputy Head teacher.” However this teacher complained that although the support was given it was overshadowed by the high enrollment levels. The capacity building being offered does not seem to take into consideration the numbers of pupils which are the teachers’ real problems. However, the practice seems to focus on phonemic awareness.

#### 4.2.2.2 Challenges Teachers Face

There is a tendency by qualitative researchers to focus only on etic perspectives – how the outsider views the phenomenon and interprets it from that angle. However, there is also need to look at the phenomenon from the respondent’s perspective (emic perspective) (Gall, et al., 2007) especially in this study where the sociocultural theory has been used as the framework. This helps the researcher to take into consideration what the respondents go through rather than taking the blame approach. Therefore, to understand each teacher's situation there was need to find out about their experiences in the teaching of reading and writing in their respective environments.

This study found that there were a number of challenges that the teachers were faced with in all the three types of schools under study: rural, peri-urban and urban. Two major challenges that all the schools faced regardless of location or proximity from the district education office were lack of literacy teaching and learning materials and over-enrollment. The following table shows the responses from the teachers when asked about how they would describe their experiences in the teaching of reading:

Respondent		Response
<b>RURAL SCHOOLS</b>	Teacher A	<i>One...is <b>over enrollment</b>. Like I said earlier [that] there are 78 learners. Two...<b>not enough literacy materials</b>. At this school we do not have the Read On Course Teacher’s guides. Even the story books are not there. So we depend on old books. At times there are only 3 books which all the learners must use. Sometimes there are no books for learners to read and so as a teacher you have to write the story on the board for pupils to read. These are the problems.</i>

	Teacher B	<i>...So it becomes a very big challenge especially considering that the <b>number of learners</b> in my class is <b>very big</b>. I find it <b>hard to help all</b> the learners. Other challenges are books [<b>there are no books</b>].</i>
PERI URBAN SCHOOLS	Teacher C	<i><b>Attending to each learner</b> of the two classes is a challenge. We also have the <b>problem of books</b> especially the Read On Course Activity Books (ROCABs).</i>
	Teacher D	<i>The challenges are about <b>high enrollment</b> levels as well as the problem of pupils in reading. The other challenge I have is that the <b>teaching materials</b> are <b>not enough</b>.</i>
URBAN SCHOOLS	Teacher E	<i>...the <b>major challenge</b> is just the <b>number of pupils</b> we have in the classroom. Again because of the number; You find that the <b>materials are not enough</b>.</i>
	Teacher F	<i><b>Pupils</b> are just <b>too many</b> in one class. We also <b>do not have enough books</b> for teaching reading.</i>

*Table 1: table showing teachers' responses on challenges they face*

Before this study was conducted, the researcher had thought that only rural schools had the most challenges of lack of teaching materials while urban schools had quite enough.

Additionally, the researcher had earlier thought that over-enrollment was more pronounced in urban and peri-urban schools but this study showed that all the schools under observation had the problem of both over-enrollment and lack of literacy teaching and learning materials.

Other challenges that were faced by the rural teacher include the following: Teacher B: "Learners that cannot read usually can also not write". So this rural teacher was facing two problems at the same time. Teacher C from a peri-urban school said: "My major challenge is handling two classes alone every day". It seems that teacher-pupil ratio was a big problem affecting support for children with reading difficulties. The teacher has to plan for two classes thereby being confined to the classroom for many hours in a day. Another teacher (Teacher D) from peri-urban said: "Another challenge I face is that learners with reading difficulties have negative attitude towards learning reading. Most learners find English very difficult". So the use of English as language of instruction for literacy also seems to impact negatively on children's attitudes towards learning how to read. Apparently, this did not seem to be a problem for urban teachers whose children understand English more than their rural and peri-urban counterparts. Instead, Teacher F had another challenge which may not be compared to others where only four children in class could read. She lamented:

... in this class I would say all the learners have reading difficulties – they are less able. In this class I have only identified four (4) learners that can read: two boys and two girls. So it is really a big problem. I even complained to the Deputy Head teacher to say they should do something about this class.

The two teachers from peri-urban schools felt that the 1 hour allocated for teaching literacy was not enough. They said: “All I would say is that more time should be given for teaching reading. The literacy hour is not enough. There is need for extra 30 minutes” said Teacher C. “There is need to take or spend a lot of time in teaching reading. The time allocated for teaching reading is not enough” Teacher D emphasized. This could be accounted for high enrollment levels in the teachers’ classes as seen earlier that in both schools, the teachers were faced with about 80 learners each and had to meet them at two different times of the day.

Although some of the respondents felt that they had been adequately trained to handle reading and children with reading difficulties, some of them bemoaned their lack of adequate training. When asked if they felt that the training they received was adequate to prepare them to teach reading, Teacher A had this to say: “It is not adequate because the Primary Reading Programme came at a time when we were about to graduate...about three months before we graduated”. Teacher B equally said: “At the moment...I still need more training”.

### **4.2.3 How teachers Identify Children with Reading Difficulties**

Being faced with a unique situation and background is one thing but how teachers identify children with reading difficulties in any given classroom is another. This understanding may act as a clue as to whether or not the teacher has appropriate assessment procedures aimed at finding suitable ways of helping children using the principles of the sociocultural theory especially formative assessment. Consequently, proper and effective identification and assessment procedures may lead to better ways of supporting these children (Johnston and Costello, 2009 and Amanda, Marcotte and Hintze, 2009). By analyzing these aspects, the researcher would appreciate what is being done as well as what seems lacking and needs to be done.

### 4.2.3.1 Process and tools of identifying children with reading difficulties

Although there were a lot of similarities in the way the teachers assess, identify and support children with reading difficulties, a number of differences were also observed. The teachers identify children with reading difficulties through an assessment. When asked how they identify children with reading difficulties, the teachers said the following:

Respondent		Response
<b>RURAL SCHOOLS</b>	Teacher A	<i>You write the words on the board. First of all you tell them to copy the words and attempt to read them. When you find that a child cannot copy or read the word then you know that this child has a problem.</i>
	Teacher B	<i>When I give them the work to read, they just say "I don't know...I can't read" You just give them simple work but the child will simply say they don't know.</i>
<b>PERI URBAN SCHOOLS</b>	Teacher C	<i>Usually it is those who are unable to recognise words as well as those who have difficulties in pronouncing words. Such learners may usually have reading difficulties.</i>
	Teacher D	<i>Usually the pupils are put in groups. Therefore, I give the learners simple books to read; for instance, I may ask them to identify particular letters. Depending on the way they respond to this, I can tell if they have reading difficulties.</i>
<b>URBAN SCHOOLS</b>	Teacher E	<i>How we identify those... you find that may be we put some words, those who fail to read words will not manage to repeat what you have said. Yes we normally assess them to know those who have managed to read and those who are still behind.</i>
	Teacher F	<i>We assess the learners once a month. Usually we assess them so as to identify those with reading problems so that we concentrate on them and then help them improve on their reading skills.</i>

Table 2: table showing teachers' responses on how they identify children with reading difficulties

Some said they write words on the board and then ask learners to read them. The children that fail or have difficulties reading the words usually have reading difficulties. It was also learned that the learners were assessed as individuals within a group. One teacher (D) said learners are given simple books to read but those with reading difficulties, usually may not be able to read the simple books. Additionally, most teachers seem to use story books and flash cards as

assessment tools. Therefore, teachers use both formal and informal assessment to identify learners with reading difficulties.

#### **4.2.3.2 Frequency of assessment**

All the teachers said that they assessed their learners at least three times in a term but it was difficult to prove this as there were no records to check whether this had been done at the time of this study except in one case for Teacher B. Even in this one case, the assessment that had been given was simply routine termly (summative) assessment and not specifically aimed at helping children with reading difficulties as admitted by the teacher. The data also show that all the teachers assess their learners at least once a month. When asked how often they assessed their learners the teachers had the following to say: “I assess them once a month...so three times in a term” said Teacher A. The rural counterpart (Teacher B) said: “we assess them weekly, after covering a topic....may be once a month; So three times in a term”. Teacher C was the only one who said: “I assess them fortnightly” while D simply answered: “*Monthly*”. The two urban school teachers E and F said: “May be at the end of each month. So, thrice in a term” and “Once every month” respectively. From some of the responses like that of teachers B and E, one can deduce that at times teachers do not assess their children consistently. The use of “may be” in their responses may account for this.

When asked how they assessed their learners Teacher A said: “I assess them orally individually. I write a word or sentence and ask them to read. If the child reads correctly, I give a mark. I also assess them by group”. On the other hand, Teacher B said, “How I assess learners...in literacy?.. They should be assessed weekly. After you have covered a particular topic, you assess them to see if they have understood.” One teacher admitted having not assessed the learners at all in spite of having explained the identification process and frequency.

From these quotations it can be inferred that all teachers interviewed assess their learners summatively after a certain period of time or after covering a particular set of lessons as opposed to formative assessment which normally should be on-going.

#### **4.2.3.3 Elements of Reading Teachers consider Important in the Assessment**

To understand how the teachers were practising the teaching of reading (and writing), there was also need to understand what the teachers hold as important elements of reading as these may influence the assessment. When asked which elements of reading they consider important for children to learn how to read, a variety of answers were given. While some of the respondents felt that it was phonics others thought it was pronunciation; yet others felt it was spelling and other elements. For example, Teacher A gave the following answer: “I give them finger exercises, left to right eye movement. I also give them a lot of books. I normally read for them”. Teacher B on the other hand opted not to answer the question due to lack of an idea about important elements of reading. When the question was rephrased as to whether phonics was an important element in teaching reading, the following answer was given: “It is helpful to the children because when you are teaching phonics, the children will be able to see the words, even the letters. So they will be able to remember and they can manage to construct sentences” but Teacher A said: “Phonics may be given but we must integrate the methods.” Teacher C answered that it was: “...pronunciation where learners are asked to pronounce the words with the help of the teacher. Then you also ask a child to read alone and see if they can attempt. The other element is spelling and also phonics.” Then Teacher D had the following to say: “I use phonics with the help of pictures. I feel that these help pupils to guess words and later master them. Once they know the sound, they will be able to pronounce words even on their own.” Teacher E however felt that it was important to start from vowels to consonants, syllables, words and sentences in this order. The urban counterpart said: “Give them a particular book and ask them to read...literacy is about phonics”.

The responses given suggest that each teacher will teach reading according to what they consider as important elements. Those who place emphasis on pronunciation may usually teach learners how to sound out words correctly while those who think phonics is more important may teach letter-sound relationships more often. However, time spent could not allow the investigator to observe this over a period of time.

#### **4.2.3.4 How Teachers Interpret the Assessment Results**

Assessment on its own is helpless unless the teachers use the assessment results to mediate for learners with reading difficulties. On the aspect of interpreting learners’ results after assessment all the teachers except Teacher B indicated that they did it for the sole reason of

grouping learners in ability groups. Teacher B answered as follows: "...the results, as I have already said, are bad....Others could say they don't know how to read. So I don't know whether it were the questions that they found difficult or what...". The following were the responses given by the other five teachers beginning with Teacher A:

I draw up registers. After assessing the learners, I plot them on the progress chart or display the results in class. Sometimes I announce the results to pupils. If I find that the gap between learners in their performance is too wide, then I concentrate on those with poor performance so as to reduce the gap between them.

Teacher C: "I look at the passing mark [scores of learners] which normally helps me to place the learners into appropriate ability groups." Similarly, Teacher D said: "Using the colour levels<sup>4</sup>, I am able to tell if a child is at red, yellow, green or orange level. After this I place learners in ability groups. I also do some follow ups to see which learners still need help."

Still on how the teachers interpret the results after assessment, Teacher E said:

After assessment, we normally put them in ability groups; normally we have 4 groups in the classroom: slow learners on their own, those who can read sentences just like that, in their group; those who read few more words, also in their group and so on. So that is how we put the records.

The urban counterpart too seems to emphasise assessment for pace grouping and gave this answer: "How do I interpret the results.....Yes we record the results... Then those who fail or have difficulties reading the words, we are able to know that these need help. Then we group them just like that."

The main aim of assessing learners seems to be that of placing them in ability groups. Each of the respondents emphasises this in one way or the other. What is not clear though at this point is whether or not these learners benefit from these groupings.

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<sup>4</sup> The colour levels being referred to by this respondent is a system adopted to detect the reading level at which a learner may be. This is called the Rainbow Reading Ladder (RRL). The colours are arranged in a logical and progressive order: red at the bottom of the ladder stands for children that cannot read at all or just read few words and letters with help of pictures. This is followed by yellow that represents those that attempt to read but cannot read fast enough. Green on the other hand, represents the learners that can read at quite a good pace and can read with some amount of understanding. Orange represents learners that can read at a fast rate and with understanding. At the top most are those learners that are fluent and competent readers that can read even novels and newspapers with understanding, represented by blue. For instance, learners still in the red level need assistance on how to read while those at Orange or blue may even help their counterparts at red level (Read on Course: A Literacy Handbook, MOE, 2002, pp 54-56).

#### 4.2.4 How Teachers Plan their Teaching to Support Learners with Reading Difficulties

One of the best practices in a teacher's life is planning what and how to teach. Planning what and how to teach especially for children with reading difficulties is as important as doing the actual teaching in the classroom. Good planning may yield good and effective classroom teaching (Woolfolk, et al., 2008). Therefore, how the teacher plans the lessons has a bearing on classroom implementation of those lessons. This was why this aspect was included in the observation instrument.

Before going through their planning and evaluation records, the teachers were asked about how they support learners with reading difficulties. The question invited a lot of responses as shown in the table below:

Respondent		Response
<b>RURAL SCHOOLS</b>	Teacher A	<i>By doing remedial work. I can encourage them not to be discouraged or lose hope but to go ahead with remedial work.</i>
	Teacher B	<i>What I do [is that] I ask the learner when they say they don't know to come to me...Then give the child home work to go and read the same words. Next time, I jumble the words and ask the child to read them again. Later I give them a task to go and memorise some words.</i>
<b>PERI URBAN SCHOOLS</b>	Teacher C	<i>I use supplementary books. I also give them assignments which they do as individuals. Very often the support is given within the daily routine of the literacy teaching.</i>
	Teacher D	<i>I always encourage them to pay more attention whenever I am teaching. I also meet them thrice in a week at the teaching station so as to have more time with them. I also give them work to go and do.</i>
<b>URBAN SCHOOLS</b>	Teacher E	<i>Eeeh... it is challenging. Normally, at times some children learn better through their friends. At times we use fast learners to teach the slow learners. We go back to the same structures: of sentences, vowels.....Alone you can't manage the number of 54 is too big. So we normally use the fast learners to teach their fellow pupils. Also we stick the charts on the walls. We also display their work so that they can go back to the work they have already done and revise at their own time.</i>



Teacher F	<i>[By] spending more time with them. It is during the literacy hour and also when they knock off.....[after school].</i>
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*Table 3: table showing teachers' responses on how they support learners in their instructional planning*

Teachers' support to the children with reading difficulties include extra teaching outside normal lessons in form of remedial work, homework, planning of independent learning activities according to each group's ability, display of learners' work on the walls for them to revise and use of verbal encouragement to learners during lessons. Some respondents tried to dodge the question especially regarding instructional planning but were answering on support given in the classroom.

### **4.3 Presentation of the Findings for Document Analysis**

Although the interview was the main means for data collection, it was further supported by review of the teaching documents as well as the lesson observation. This was necessary so as not only to depend on what teachers said they do but also for the researcher to interact with them and see exactly what was happening on their records and in the classroom. It is common for respondents to say what they know should be done even when they do not do it. The fourth research question was about how the teachers support learners with reading difficulties in their instructional planning. Such a question could be best addressed through document analysis of the teachers' records.

#### **4.3.1 How teachers Plan their Teaching to Support Learners with Reading Difficulties**

Before they were observed, the researcher began by looking at the respondents' planning documents so as to see how they mediate for children with reading difficulties at planning and evaluation level. The following themes were derived from the data.

##### **4.3.1.1 Lesson Plans, Weekly forecasts and Records of Work**

The importance of planning what to teach has already been stated in the previous note. Planning of tasks at group level was seen in the weekly forecasts, lesson plans and teacher's

lesson evaluations. Some teachers did mention names of individual learners with reading difficulties. Few teachers' teaching records were checked by supervisors. In addition to this, no follow up reflections on an individual learner was seen in the records although there was need for the researcher to stay longer in order to see if there was any consistence in planning.

However, it is important to state that the instructional planning differed from one type of school to another. For example, the rural Teachers A and B did not have their teaching documents checked by the supervisor and one of them did not even have any weekly forecast from which lesson plans are usually devised. One respondent said that the supervisor was too busy. When asked about how to interpret the results after the assessment that was given to the class Teacher B said:

It was bad. I even informed the office [head teacher]. I don't know if my questions were bad or not. This class was handled by him [Senior teacher]. So it went down...[because he is too busy or over-loaded with work]. Like this time, he is the Deputy Head teacher, Acting Head teacher, Senior teacher and Class teacher. I took over from him. So the class is poor. Others got 0...simple work! Others 1 out of 10...2 out of 10...just like that...only few got 10.

#### **4.3.1.2 Lesson Evaluation/reflections and Optimal Pace and Differentiation**

Most of the teachers' available teaching record analysed, show that there was little indication of detection of and planning for individual learners with reading difficulties. This was also scarcely found in the teachers' evaluation of the lessons taught except for Teacher C who had mentioned a particular pupil's name with reading difficulties. No individualized attention was observed for learners with reading difficulties except the "general individualized attention" meant for the lesson routine. In other words, there was some optimal pace and differentiation of activities to be given for each group of learners in the class.

In one account Teacher F was found pacing around looking for a teacher's guide just few minutes before commencement of the lesson – which she did not find. Teacher F confessed as follows: "I have failed to find any teacher's guide. There are no books in this school. Only

four teachers have teacher's guides. In fact to tell you the truth sir, we do not teach ROC<sup>5</sup> here". A look at the progress charts in the classroom seems to show that the class had been assessed in reading once by the end of that term.

#### **4.3.1.3 After-school remedial work, extra teaching and homework**

The documents accessed for all the six teachers did not show any after-school activities planned. There was also no extra teaching recorded to have been done for children with reading difficulties. Lastly, no homework was seen planned for learners with reading difficulties. Consequently, there were no follow up reflections on an individual learner seen in the records. This did not support what the teachers said in the interview.

## **4.4 Presentation of the Findings for Observation**

In order to investigate how teachers practise the teaching of reading and writing in the classroom there was need to observe them do the implementation process. Since the aim of this study was to attach meaning to the phenomenon from the perspective of the respondents, observation was inevitable. The teachers' practices were observed in the classroom.

### **4.4.1 Strategies teachers use to Support Learners with Reading Difficulties in the Classroom**

While planning acts as a basis for having an effective lesson in the classroom, there can be no learning if what was planned is not effectively implemented. Lesson implementation therefore, acts as the core of learning. This is where it can be observed as to whether learning has taken place or not. It is during this forum when the principles of the sociocultural theory such as scaffolding learners, using tools (mediation), guided participation can be applied.

It was observed that teachers mostly use the following strategies to involve learners: direct group-based teaching, small groups, question and answer, one-on-one teaching, paired reading, chorus reading, role sharing and sharing/presenting tasks as groups and individuals. A number of strategies they use to support learners in general in the classroom observed were the following:

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<sup>5</sup> The so called ROC stands for Read On Course. It is a literacy subject for Grades 3 to 7 in Zambia meant for all government primary schools. In this subject, learners are taught both reading and writing skills in both English and Zambian language by alternating languages on a weekly basis.

#### 4.4.1.1 Direct group teaching

Direct group teaching was the commonest strategy teachers were using to support learners with reading difficulties. Teachers mainly use group-work-based teaching. Phonics and phonemic awareness mainly characterized the lessons as important elements of reading. All the six respondents organized and divided their learners into 4 groups as shown in the figure below:

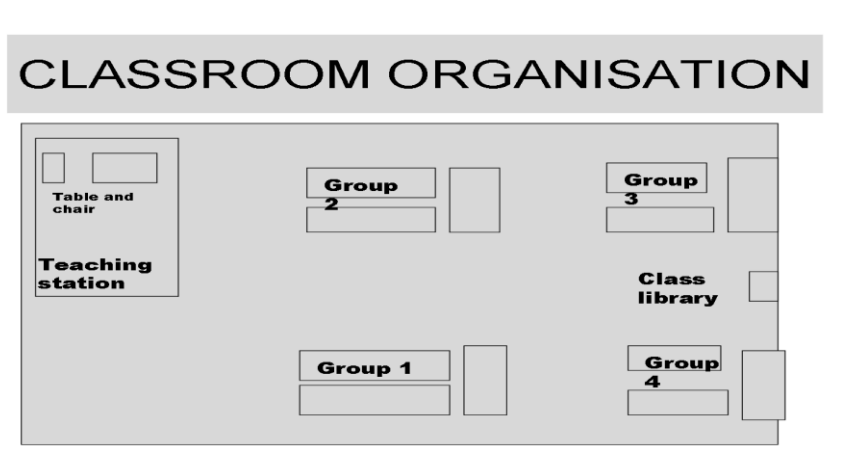


Figure 2: Classroom organisation for direct group teaching (adapted from Charles Lwanga College LLE Module)

Two groups: 1 and 2 were referred to as 'fast learners' while the other two groups: 3 and 4 were referred to as 'slow learners'. The 'slow learners' were seen by the teacher three times in the 'teaching station' while the 'fast learners' were seen twice. During their turn in the teaching station, they were taught the decoding skills directly by the teacher for 20 minutes.

All the classrooms visited appeared orderly and had a similar arrangement of desks: learners sitting in such a way that they face each other as a group as shown in the figure above. There were four groups in the classroom, grouped according to ability as determined by the teacher through a formal or informal assessment. Then there was also what was termed 'Teaching Station' a place near the chalkboard where focused teaching was done.

#### 4.4.1.2 Ability groups

All the six teachers observed began by explaining the learning activities for the groups in a step called 'starting time'. Each group was given their own activity to do either as independent learning activity or supervised activity by the teacher in the teaching station. The groups designated as 'slow learners' were mostly exposed to very basic skills of reading as

teachers feel that the learners do not have the capacity to deal with more challenging work. This was the case for Teachers A and F; Teacher F said: “I am using grade 2 teacher’s guide to plan activities for grade 4 pupils because even if they are in this grade, they cannot manage to do grade 4 work.” The other groups deemed as ‘fast learners’ were given slightly more advanced work.

#### **4.4.1.3 Question and Answer Technique**

In all the lessons observed teachers were using the question and answer technique to encourage learners to participate in the lesson. During the ‘starting time’ part of the lesson, Teachers A, B, C, D, and E each read a story to the learners. After reading the story, learners were asked questions relating to the story. In this way they said they were able to check the learners’ understanding. Teacher F too used the question and answer technique but as on-going assessment of learners’ attention during the lesson.

#### **4.4.1.4 One-on-one teaching and Scaffolding of Learners**

All the teachers did spend some time with one learner or two during the lesson if the learners had some difficulties. However, this was done to any learner regardless of the group to which the learner belonged. Scaffolding was not seen at individual level with learners from the ‘slow learners’ category. Therefore, one-on-one teaching was not common. Although nearly all the teachers observed exhibited some amount of knowledge of the reading methods, Teachers A, B and F felt they were inadequately trained as such they still needed more training in teaching reading. This inadequacy may somehow be linked to the teachers’ difficulties during the lesson although other factors may also be responsible.

#### **4.4.1.5 Paired and Group Reading**

Paired reading was mostly used in most of the classes visited. Even if learners were not told to read in pairs, some of them were seen working as pairs. For example, Teacher B asked learners to be in pairs and then read to each other. Most learners did not read to each other although they had the story books in their hands. Another group was asked to read the words that were on the word cards to each other. Meanwhile, the teacher had a focused lesson on one of the ‘slow learners’ group. She read to them at first and then encouraged them to read aloud to the group. Those with difficulties were helped by the teacher.

Teacher D also did word identification skills with the ‘slow learners’ in the teaching station but in form of a game. The learners were shown the cards with letter sounds and asked to identify the words. The words were read to the whole group while the teacher helped the learners.

#### **4.4.1.6 Chorus Reading**

Chorus reading was common among all the six respondents. From time to time, each teacher would say a sound or word or even a sentence and asked the learners to repeat after the teacher. Learners were also asked to repeat after a learner who was asked to read. When asked why chorus reading was used, Teacher C said that it was a way of reinforcing the concepts and skills that were taught. It also helped in crowded classrooms where it was not possible to ask each individual learner to say something during the lesson.

#### **4.4.1.7 Role sharing and Presentation of tasks**

Another strategy that was widely used by all the respondents was sharing of roles as well as presentation of group tasks to the whole class. Each of the four groups in the classroom had a group leader chosen by the teacher. One of the roles of group leaders was to assist learners during the lesson for problems that were not beyond their power such as explaining the task to a slow learner.

After the focused teaching and independent learning tasks, each teacher called up group leaders to collect learners’ exercise books and hand them to the teacher in readiness for sharing what they had been doing. Most teachers begin by sampling a few learners’ exercise books and later ask learners to comment on the work done in those books. This was seen among teachers A, B, C, D, and E. In this way, learners with difficulties were helped on how they should have done the activity.

In most cases, roles and responsibilities were not clearly spelt out by the teachers. As a result during group activities or sharing time, many learners seemed not knowing what to do as they continued making noise or only one child dominated the discussion. Again when it was time for the group to present their answers, the teacher had a tough time in persuading who should represent the group.

#### **4.4.1.8 Love and Care**

Teachers are professionals as such should hold certain ethics and behaviour without compromise. Teachers' interpersonal relationships with learners play an important role in teaching especially for learners with reading difficulties (Johnsen, 2001). Professionalism should include classroom communication both verbal and non-verbal and this promotes effective learning. It is also important to state that "teacher-pupil talk time" during the lesson helps in understanding the effectiveness of the communication. In all the schools observed, teachers seem to talk more than learners almost throughout the lesson; although except in few cases where the children were given independent learning activities.

Most teachers seemed to have good rapport with their learners. However, one of them had difficulties with emotional management. The teacher had a tough time trying to make learners get focused on the activities. Mostly, this teacher threatened the learners that they would be beaten if they continued making noise.

#### **4.4.1.9 Achievement of the Stated Learning Outcomes**

"A successful lesson is one in which the stated learning outcomes have been achieved" said Teacher D and added that this helps individual pupils to benefit especially if their individual needs have been met. Therefore, teachers' reflexivity on children with reading difficulties is important.

When asked as to whether they thought they had achieved the stated learning outcomes after the lesson, each of the respondents either said the lesson was average or below average. None felt confident enough to state that the stated learning outcomes had been achieved fully.

## **4.5 Summary of the Findings in relation to the Research Questions**

### **4.5.1 Teachers' Backgrounds**

Prior to conducting this study, the researcher had thought there were marked differences in challenges being faced by the three types of schools in Zambia, the results seem to show the opposite to be true, at least for the six schools. Firstly, the study found that all the teachers

were still 'young' in service ranging from 2 months of experience to 7 years. Secondly, most of the problems being faced in the rural, peri-urban and urban schools, sampled in this study, are common. Prevalent among them was over-enrollment as this cut across all the school types. When asked what they wished could be changed to improve the teaching of reading, one of the rural teachers (B) passionately said: "First of all, I would reduce the number of pupils in my class so that I can have ample time to help each and every pupil with difficulties in reading." One challenge of transfer of teachers was the only one exclusive to Teacher F's school (urban). She lamented as follows: "Usually there are a lot of transfers. Every term teachers are being transferred. This is frustrating because there is no progression with one class as one may be given another class anytime." And for sure the last time the investigator went to the same school for verification of data, the teacher had been given a new class (grade 2).

All in all, the study found that teacher-pupil ratio in the six schools was extremely high with many learners against 1 teacher. One of the teachers (F) said this: "At the moment it is difficult even to identify slow learners because learners are too many. Like in this class I have children with special needs. So it's like they need special classes." Similarly, teacher A also said: "So it becomes a very big challenge especially considering that the number of learners in my class is very big. I find it hard to help all the learners." This made one-on-one teaching, scaffolding of learners and differentiated learning impossible as teachers were overwhelmed by large numbers of learners in each of the schools.

#### **4.5.2 Teachers' Situations**

Another challenge that was cross-cutting in all the three types of school was inadequate teacher support. Although all the respondents acknowledged receiving some form of support especially from parents and/or school management, the support was seemingly not enough. The type of support that these teachers received varied from one school to another. While some teachers needed teaching materials such as books others yet needed both teaching and learning materials and additional training in teaching reading. For instance, one peri-urban teacher said: "The other challenge I have is that the teaching materials are not enough." Yet another teacher from a rural school bemoaned lack of literacy materials: "Two...not enough literacy materials. At this school we do not have the Read On Course Teacher's guides. Even the story books are not there. So we depend on old books." In most cases these teachers



receive no support at all other than being encouraged and urged to improvise the teaching and learning materials such as text books and pupils' pencils. This can be proved from Teacher A, "Sometimes teachers are busy. Unless you ask for it, you may not receive any support." In the two urban schools visited each of the respondents was assisted by a colleague during the lesson which is not the case in all the other four schools.

All in all, the respondents seem eager to teach but they are hampered by a number of challenges. Through the encouragement they receive from colleagues and school management, some of the teachers had developed some amount of resilience though working under very difficult conditions. Others still had lost hope and became frustrated like Teacher F: "Like in this class I would say all the learners have reading difficulties – they are less able. In this class I have only identified four (4) learners that can read: two boys and two girls".

### **4.5.3 How Teachers Identify Learners with Reading Difficulties**

Based on four factors; analysis of teachers' teaching records, one to one interview, informal observation and formal classroom observation, the study seems to suggest that teachers in all the six schools use both informal and formal assessment to identify learners with reading difficulties. The results further reveal that most teachers seem to use formal assessment to identify learners with reading difficulties although they also seem to know that they should assess children informally.

What was common in all the schools studied was the assessment of learning (summative) and not assessment for learning (formative). When asked why she assessed her learners, Teacher D said: "In order to know if they are able to remember what they learned. To see if they grasped any content." Therefore, it was common to find teachers comparing learners' performance scores against other learners to see which learner was able to remember what was taught.

### **4.5.4 How Teachers Plan their Teaching to Support Learners with Reading Difficulties**

The findings were that teachers were using a variety of what can be termed "survival tactics" to support children with reading difficulties. Most of the teachers' available teaching record analysed, show no indication of planning for individual learners with reading difficulties.

This was also scarcely found in the teachers' evaluation of the lessons taught except for Teacher C who had mentioned a particular pupil's name with reading difficulties. No individualized attention was observed for learners with reading difficulties except the "general individualized attention" meant for the lesson routine.

While some teachers were trying to implement the recommended way by the Ministry of Education in Zambia, on how to help slow readers, majority were not following this methodology. Although Day 5 designated for helping those with reading difficulties is still being used for remedial lessons in literacy, most of these lessons do not seem to help individual learners. Instead the lessons are planned for the entire group and not individual learners in focus. All the teachers were using group-based teaching where activities were planned for four groups that can further be categorized into two: slow learners and fast learners. There was no consistency on how often the learners receive support. Support was only given at times and only when the teacher deems necessary. Therefore, support seemed to have been generally given as a routine and not with special attention to learners who really needed help.

#### **4.5.5 Strategies Teachers use to Support Learners with Reading Difficulties in their Lessons in the Classroom**

It was interesting to note that teachers use a variety of strategies during the literacy hour. Most of these strategies can be termed "good practices". These included direct group teaching where learners are divided into four groups; ability groups where learners are given work that suit their level of mastery; question and answer techniques were used to encourage learners to participate in the lessons as well as to check their attention; one-on-one teaching and scaffolding of learners; paired and group reading; chorus reading; role sharing and presentation of tasks; love and care to the learners and reflection on whether the lesson outcomes had been achieved.

However, most of the teachers observed did not seem to understand the benefits of these strategies to the learners. Additionally, even those that seem to know the benefits had difficulties applying the strategies effectively due to challenges such as over enrollment, inadequate competency and lack of teaching and learning materials. In most of the lessons observed, focus was still placed on phonics and phonemic awareness. Lastly, although all the six teachers said that they give extra support to children with reading difficulties during the

lesson and/or after class, it was very difficult to prove this as there were no records for proof. It was also difficult to capture this during observations as the observer did not spend a long time with the respondents.

## **4.6 Summary**

This chapter has analysed and presented the findings of the study. It has shown a number of successes, similarities, differences and even challenges that the teachers face in their locations. It has also analysed some of the strategies that teachers use to support these learners both in their planning and evaluation of their teaching records as well as in the implementation process during the lesson. It has further shown teachers' knowledge of teaching reading in the schools visited. The challenges that these teachers face seem to cut across school type although a few of them are exclusive to one type of school. It can further be stated that although the environments for schools differ, in reality these schools have a lot in common: they use similar methods, teachers are graduates of similar teacher training institutions and they face very similar challenges.

In spite of the many good trends and practices in the teaching of reading and writing such as emphasis on phonemic awareness, phonics and use of an integrated approach to teaching, a lot still needs to be done. It can be tentatively said that teaching reading in rural, peri-urban and urban schools in the schools studied in this research, calls for more vigorous methods and efforts if learners with reading difficulties are to benefit. Application of scaffolding, guided participation, cooperative learning and putting of the learner at the centre of the teaching and learning process if well implemented could help many of the learners.

The following chapter will discuss the findings in light of other research findings and reading theories. The issues highlighted in chapter 2 will also be brought into focus and further answers to the research questions given.

# CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

## 5.1 Introduction

A summary of the findings has been given in the previous chapter for the interviews, document analysis and lesson observations. In this chapter, the findings of this study will be discussed in the context of previous empirical findings and the sociocultural theory. Both the emic (respondent's) and etic (researcher's) perspectives will be taken into consideration but within the socio-cultural theory that underpins this study. The discussion will take the following approach: 1. Restatement of the sub research question. 2. Overview of the findings in context of the research questions. 3. Evaluation of the findings in the context of theory. And a summary for the chapter will close the discussion. The discussion will take a similar format to the one presented in the previous chapter but has been altered in some cases for discussion purposes.

Many children remain excluded from the acquisition of reading and writing skills due to many factors. One of these factors is how teachers practise the teaching of these skills. There are practices that are inclusive and those that are exclusive in nature. If all teachers could implement the good practices effectively, most children would acquire the reading and writing skills (McIntyre et al., 2011). This study is an investigation of how teachers practise the teaching of reading and writing at lower primary level in Zambia towards supporting learners with reading difficulties. In order to investigate the teachers' practices and to answer the main research question, sub-questions were formulated and these centred on five areas: 1. The teachers' backgrounds; 2. The teachers' realities; 3. How teachers identify learners with reading difficulties; 4. How teachers plan their teaching to support these learners; and 5. How teachers support the learners during lessons in the classroom. In the following I will use these as main headlines for the rest of the chapter.

## 5.2 Teachers' Backgrounds

The first research question was: **what are the teachers' backgrounds regarding children with reading difficulties?** The focus of the question was also on finding out the teachers'

teaching experiences, class sizes as well as their understanding of reading development and off-track readers.

### **5.2.1 How the teachers' background impact their practices**

This study found that the six teachers involved in the study had different backgrounds and these backgrounds may have influence on their practices in the teaching of reading and writing. For instance, the teachers had different years in service ranging between 7 years and 2 months. For example, one of the respondents had 4 years and 3 months of teaching in general but only 1 year of teaching reading and writing. Apparently, this particular teacher had difficulties managing the class although these difficulties may not all be due to the teacher's lack of experience. The more experienced teachers seemed to have more and somewhat effective ways of dealing with learners during reading lessons compared to the less experienced ones. This is in line with Rice (2010) who states that although not always the case, experience plays an important role in improved teacher effectiveness and production in teaching reading and mathematics.

Additionally, it was interesting to look at the differences among learner populations that were drawn from different socioeconomic backgrounds. While some children in rural schools came from homes where poverty was prevalent most of their counterparts in urban schools came from slightly well to do homes. These factors may usually impact both teacher and learner motivation and subsequently affect learner performance and output just like what research suggests (Alexander, Andersen, Heilman, Voeller, & Torgesen, 1991 in Spear-Swerling and Sternberg, 1994; Crowe, Connor & Petscher, 2009; Wold, Young & Risko, 2011). This may explain the difficulties faced by teachers for instance, with regard to homework which learners do not do, and their negative attitude towards learning how to read.

The other aspect worth noting in this study is that the teachers' understanding of reading development and off-track readers varied. They had different understanding of reading development and off-track readers as evidenced in their answers. While some teachers seemed clear in their articulation of answers to the questions regarding teaching reading, others had difficulties. This however, may not entirely be blamed on the teachers as it could be the questions themselves that might not have been very clear. While some teachers felt adequately trained in the teaching of reading and writing others felt inadequately trained and needed more training. It is important to state that although these teachers had similar qualifications, they

were graduates of different colleges of education: public and private. This variation may have a role in the teachers' attitudes, effectiveness and competence. There is correlation between teacher beliefs (self-perception) and teacher performance. Teachers that feel adequately trained may perform relatively better than those that despise their competence (Baccus, 2004). In their article 'Qualities of an Influential Literacy Teacher Educator', Wold, Young & Risko (2011) argue that attributes that teachers have about themselves, impact on how they teach. They add that literacy teachers need to have adequate knowledge in the teaching of reading and literacy. Allington (2005, cited in Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2010) argues for the need to improve the quality of instruction in order to increase student achievement in reading. Spear-Swerling and Cheesman (2011) equally add that in spite of having many factors responsible for reading gains among children, there is agreement among researchers that one of these factors is teacher effectiveness which is influenced by the support the teacher receives during and after training. As long as teachers have difficulties understanding reading development, their teaching of reading may not be effective. This could be one of the reasons for the schools studied.

## **5.3 Teachers' Realities**

Coming to the second research question: **what are the teachers' realities regarding children with reading difficulties?** As stated in the previous chapter, teachers are often confronted with a number of issues in their respective working stations. Some of these are the support they receive and the various challenges they have to face.

### **5.3.1 How the teachers' conditions impact their practices**

The following were the findings: that teachers received different kinds of support from one school to another. The variation was both in form and quantity (type and amount). While some teachers received more relevant support in relation to their needs, for instance training, others received only verbal encouragement and yet others received no support at all. What may be complicating the situation; however, were the individual school dilemmas such as low staffing levels, the type of school administration that each school was having and the distance from the nearest district education office. It is vital to state that while some teachers (Teacher B) had only 2 months of teaching experience, they were allocated a class of more than 80 learners in a rural school with socioeconomic challenges. Yet the urban teacher may have only

54 learners but supported by another teacher during the reading lesson. In their article 'The Wrong Solution to the Teacher Shortage', Ingersoll and Smith (2001) state that teachers that are not supported in terms of learning materials, induction or a teaching assistant may get frustrated and leave the teaching profession in their early years of service. This underlines the importance of supporting teachers especially newly deployed teachers who may not have much experience in the teaching profession. This is supported by MetLife Survey, (2005 cited in Berry, 2006) where it is said it is common to find teachers that feel not adequately prepared to handle the different challenges in their first few years of service. If such teachers do not get appropriate support from their school head teachers and education authorities, their teaching attitudes will continue growing negative.

It was also found that some schools were just few kilometres away from the district education office and the school authorities were able to supervise teachers, because they (school authorities) were seemingly aware that the district standards officers 'formerly inspectors of schools' could visit the urban schools any time. To the contrary those in the rural areas, many kilometres away from the district office, were relaxed and did not bother at times to supervise the teaching of reading as the inspectors found it difficult to visit such schools regularly due to logistical problems. It can further be argued that it may not have been by coincidence that two of the teachers investigated: one from urban and another from peri urban were receiving professional development training in teaching reading. Since the district education office usually has difficulties monitoring teachers due to lack of transport, the nearby schools were easier to monitor. Unfortunately, the rural schools may not have such privileges. This may mean that in some schools children remain disadvantaged unless teachers are supported by both the district education office as well as the school head teachers (Berry, 2006). Unless the correct support is given, reading difficulties may continue among learners.

It was also interesting to note that the teachers were facing a number of challenges including lack of learning and teaching materials and over enrolment which results in smaller classroom space. For example, in one rural school, some of the learners did not have books and pencils for writing during lessons. This is all due to socioeconomic problems whereby some parents cannot afford to provide such necessities to their children. Some of the parents were leaving this responsibility in the hands of the already burdened teachers. This was putting teachers under very difficult conditions. Researchers show that socioeconomic factors may be among the contributing factors for some of the reading and writing difficulties (Crowe, Connor &

Petscher, 2009; Duncan & Magnuson, 2005 cited in Wamba, 2010; Hoff, 2003; Jecks & Philips, 1998; McIntyre, et al., 2011; Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1994).

The most common challenge in all the three types of schools was over enrolment. All the schools were overenrolled although some teachers had to see two classes at different times of the day while others had to see a single but overenrolled class in a day. This may have resulted in difficulties in classroom organisation and management. Before this investigation, the investigator had thought that rural schools were less enrolled than urban schools. This is so because there are more people near and in urban areas than in rural areas. However, after the investigation it became apparent that all the types of schools studied were overenrolled with enrollment levels ranging between 54 learners (for one of the urban schools) and 86 learners (for one of the peri-urban schools). The explanation on the over enrollment in rural schools could be that while there are more schools found around town, there may only be one school to cater for a number of households in rural areas. There is irrefutable evidence that class size has some effects on literacy acquisition. It does not only affect class management and organisation but also teaching and learning resources. In their study, Ecalle, et al., (2006) found that smaller classes performed better than bigger ones in reading. Big classes also seem to have an impact on teacher-pupil ratio where one teacher alone has responsibility for a great number of learners. This therefore, could result further in reduced one-on-one contact between the learners with reading difficulties and their teacher. Consequently, it further may have a negative implication on scaffolding of learners and on giving differentiated activities. Learners may not receive the adequate and appropriate support and guidance that they need because the teachers are overwhelmed by the large numbers of learners within one classroom.

Consequently, the situation of over enrolment was making it hard for learners to have access to learning materials. Worse still many teachers also did not have access to teaching materials. This was making the teaching of reading and writing more problematic especially to new teachers. Even when some teachers have the correct methods for teaching, they need resources to support their teaching. All the teachers bemoaned the lack of books - teacher's guides and pupils' story and activity books in the teaching of reading.



Because of these challenges, some teachers were losing hope (Teacher F) while others had developed some amount of resilience and were able to get around some of these challenges. Writing about the relevance of teaching and learning materials, Crowe et al., (2009, p.211) state: "...materials that are recommended for schools will help them achieve the desired academic outcomes". Unfortunately, when these materials are not there, the desired outcomes may not be achieved. The investigator also learned that the two teachers from peri-urban schools found that the 1 hour allocated for teaching reading was not sufficient. As stated earlier, Echalle et al. (2006) in their study on class size effects on literacy found that larger classes coupled with socioeconomic challenges and other environmental factors do affect learning how to read. Other studies are in support of this (Crowe et al, 2009).

In one case, rampant transfer of teachers was cited as a big challenge. Although this was not mentioned by the other respondents, it is worth taking note of because in this particular class, the teacher seemed troubled by this issue. She complained about lack of continuity as teachers were regularly transferred from that school to another. This resulted in teachers being reallocated different classes. Therefore, learners were affected because they had to start getting used to another teacher from time to time. And for sure, when the investigator went to visit the teacher for verification of data, it was found that she had been allocated a Grade 2 class. Changing of teachers anyhow may only work against learners with reading difficulties who apart from having reading problems have another problem of a new teacher in their class. It takes long for teachers and learners to develop mutual relationship which can result in learning.

## **5.4 How Teachers identify Learners with Reading Difficulties**

The third question was: **how do teachers identify learners with reading difficulties?** This was necessary because in order to judge the effectiveness of any reading instruction, assessment is cardinal and should be part of the reading curriculum (Torgesen, 2002).

### **5.4.1 Process, tools and frequency of assessment**

It was evident in this study that the teachers use both formal and informal assessment to identify learners with reading difficulties. The teachers also assess learners as individuals as

well as groups using their own self-made word cards as tools. These were good features. However, there is reason to believe that some of the teachers did not know how to describe the exact problems of the learners other than saying “the learners cannot read” or “they are slow learners”. It can also be argued that some of the reasons given by teachers on the purpose of the assessment may not be helpful for supporting these learners. For instance, Teacher F said: “...Yes we normally assess them to know those who have managed to read and those who are still behind” while teacher D said: “In order to know if they are able to remember what they learned. To see if they grasped any content.” Such responses seem to show that the teacher’s focus is on seeing how much content the learners have been or not been able to remember (assessment of learning) as opposed to which learning needs of the learners have to be met (assessment for learning). This therefore, poses a problem. It is good for teachers to notice the variations in reading achievement among learners as supported by Snow, Burns & Griffin (1998). But teachers should go beyond knowing those that have managed and those that are still behind. They should sustain the good readers so that they can read better as well as help those that cannot read. Since assessment is important in making decisions to help learners with reading difficulties (Ford & Opitz, 2008), teachers who have limited knowledge in assessing these learners may also not provide them with appropriate assistance they need. This could be the reason why a significant number of learners in the schools visited have reading problems.

The teachers were also asked on how often they assess their learners. The data show that they assess them about three times in a term or once a month although it was difficult to prove this since there were no records to show whether this had been done. Some of the teachers also gave answers that showed doubt on the frequency in assessment. For instance, teachers B and E used the phrase: “...may be once a month...”; “...may be at the end of each month” respectively. Therefore, summative assessment was more common – assessing learners after covering a particular topic or after a long duration such as three months. Many researchers agree that on-going assessment in reading instruction is very important (Gipps, 2002; Johnston & Costello, 2009; Lunt, 1994; Torgesen, 2002). Learners need to be monitored and observed consistently by the teacher in order to find ways of meeting their needs. But again, this can only succeed where the enrollment levels are not too large to handle. Informal assessment was a bit challenging for these teachers under study due to large class sizes.

## **5.4.2 Elements of Reading Teachers consider important in the assessment**

It is not only the process, tools or how often the learners are assessed which is important but also which elements of reading the teachers consider crucial in the assessment. It is likely that what influences the whole assessment could be what the teachers consider important in the teaching of reading. When asked which elements of reading the teachers consider important for children to learn to read, they gave a variety of responses. One of the teachers gave finger exercises and left to right eye movement activities. Others said they gave children books to read. Still another said she reads aloud to the children. Another teacher opted not to answer the question expressing ignorance on elements of reading. Some teachers felt that phonics should be considered important because it helps children to see words. Still others talked about integrating the methods but when probed further they could not explain the methods in question. Pronunciation and spelling were also given as important elements while others gave vowels, consonants, syllables, words and sentences.

The investigator had held a view that teachers knew some of the important elements in teaching reading because a look at the Zambian methodology of teaching reading seems to show emphasis on some of these elements – especially phonics. The answer to this question is that teachers may generally have an idea of some elements of reading. However, these responses show that most of the teachers do not seem to know which elements are keys in the teaching of reading. The understanding of teachers on this subject seems not clear. For example, it is hard to associate ‘finger exercises’ with reading yet one teacher gave this as an answer. Of course activities on finger exercises may be given in writing readiness for beginners but not for fourth-graders. Even those that gave phonics as one of the elements did not demonstrate knowledge of what is involved in phonics. Many researchers agree that certain elements are crucial in teaching children the reading skills. These elements include: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. There is also agreement that phonemic awareness and phonics instruction are necessary for fluency in word recognition, as vocabulary is for reading comprehension (Bus & van IJzendoorn, 1999; NICHD, 2000; Lyons, 2003; Shanahan, 2006; Torgerson, Brooks, & Hall, 2006; Torgesen, 2005 cited in Duff et al., 2011; Wrightslaw, 2009). In fact Torgesen (2002) states that usually children that have problems in phonemic awareness and letter-sound knowledge will need remediation. Therefore, for fourth-graders that show problems in these two elements need

assistance to reduce or correct the learning difficulties. The assessment and teaching should therefore, focus on these elements in order for children to develop the reading skill. Unless the teachers are aware of the role of these elements, children with reading difficulties may still be deprived of appropriate mediation activities.

Why should the assessment and teaching focus on phonics and phonemic awareness? To answer this important question, there is need to look at what researchers say. As reviewed in the literature chapter, phonics instruction is said to be effective in teaching children how to read. It acts as a catalyst to acquisition of decoding skills which help children crack the code of reading (Chall, 1967; NICHD, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin 1998; Swanson, Rosston, Gerber & Solari, 2008; Torgesen, 2002; Wagner & Torgesen, 1987 cited in Ecalle, Magnan & Gibert, 2006). This happens when children begin to make associations between letters and sounds. And it is this making of connections that leads to reading of words (Ehri, 1997; 2005). The use of phonics instruction is in itself a good practice in the teaching of reading. However, phonics should be supported with phonemic awareness which is said to be the first step in mastering the alphabetic principle as supported by many researchers (Crowe, Connor & Petscher, 2009; Ecalle, et al., 2006; Ehri, 2005; NICHD, 2000; Wearmouth, et al., 2003).

Unfortunately, a closer look at the practices of the teachers under study reveals that phonics and phonemic awareness are not fully utilised. Although the teachers use these elements to some extent, they seem not to be clear about the rationale behind them (Hamilton, 2012). This is seen in the teachers' responses during interviews as well as during lesson observation. It can also be argued that some of the teachers that seem to use a lot of phonics do not give enough opportunity for children to practise what they learn. Children seem to depend on the 1 hour classroom instruction to use the sounds and words. To support this claim, in their article 'The Role of Decoding in Learning to Read' Beck & Juel (2002) say that the teaching of phonics in abstract form leads to rote learning where children are drilled to memorise things which they may not really understand and cannot put to use. This may be further complicated by the fact that children do not have enough story books and other reading materials to reinforce what they learn. An ideal situation would be to give the children an opportunity to practise the new sounds in words as they read the stories as well as in their everyday life. In a situation where there are no such story books and the language of instruction being used is in a foreign language, learning how to read becomes a harsh reality. Children may not even have a chance to practise new sounds and develop new vocabulary because they speak a local

language whose sounds may be different from the English language which they learn through. This is in line with Tambulukani & Bus (2011) who attest to the fact that multilingualism in Zambia might be contributing to most of the reading difficulties children are facing. Shanahan (2006) and Shameem (2007) equally acknowledge the difficulties of teaching learners from different dialects in a language that may not be their mother tongue. The lack of developing new vocabulary impedes development of reading comprehension. Therefore, systematic, explicit and intensive instruction in phonemic awareness in their mother tongue is cardinal in teaching children learn how to read (Lyons, 2003; NICHD, 2000). The lack of it may be an explanation for the reading difficulties among a significant number of learners in the schools studied just as seen in some of the literature reviewed (Frith, 1985; Gough & Tunmer, 1986; NICHD, 2000; Snow, et al., 1998; Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1994). As long as the quality of instruction is poor, children's reading development will be equally poor (Hulme & Snowling, 2012).

### **5.4.3 How Teachers Interpret the Assessment Results**

Assessing children is one thing but how the teacher interprets and uses the results is another. In order to investigate how teachers practice the teaching of reading, there was need to find out their interpretation of the results after they have assessed the learners. When asked the question, five of the teachers responded that they used the results to put learners in ability groups. Two of the five also said that they do follow up to see which learners still need help. Another respondent said sometimes he announces the results to the learners or displays them in the classroom and added that if the gap between learners in their performance is too wide, he concentrates on those with poor performance.

There are both strengths and weaknesses in these practices. For example, it is good practice to use the assessment results to plan remedial work for learners having reading difficulties. It is also good to divide learners in small groups as supported by the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) and to set follow up activities that match their level of competence (Mokhtari, et al., 2010). The system of assessment being used by some teachers is also good practice. For instance, the teachers divide learners according to colour levels that describe the reading level and characteristics of learners in the Rainbow Reading Ladder (RRL)<sup>6</sup>: red level that stands

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<sup>6</sup> The Rainbow Reading Ladder is an assessment instrument used in Zambia to assess the reading levels of learners in Grades 3 to 7. It contains colour levels that are used to describe the level at which a learner may be and what necessary skills the learner needs to be helped to move up the ladder of reading (MOE, 2002).

for learners that can only read few words. The yellow level signifies learners that can read although not fast enough while those at green level are good readers (MOE, 2002). This is similar to Spear-Swerling & Sternberg's (1994) integrative theoretical model of reading: logographic (red level) phonological (yellow level) and orthographic (green level). This way, the teacher is able to track all learners in their reading development and help them according to their needs.

On the contrary, announcing or displaying the results in the classroom may work against slow learners who may end up being teased by their classmates. This may further reduce their motivation as they may feel inferior and intimidated. According to some of the literature reviewed (Ford & Opitz, 2008) in the end these learners may develop a negative attitude towards reading and lose interest which eventually impacts on their reading achievement. The aim of informal assessment is to help the child move from one level of mastery to the other in the reading process as noted by Gipps (2002) and in line with Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD. And the performance of each learner should only be known by the teacher and the learner; or may include the parent or guardian if need be. Education systems that are competitive in focus and examination oriented – like the Zambian education, usually make teachers focus on which of their learner performed better or worse at the expense of helping all learners to achieve good reading gains.

It is also important to point out that focusing on few learners that have poor results in reading may only work against the teacher's efforts in alleviating the reading difficulty. This is so because if the teacher 'neglects' the 'fast readers' and focuses on the 'slow readers' only, the next time these 'fast readers' may end up lagging behind. This becomes a vicious cycle where one problem leads to another. The teachers need to bring back on track the off-track readers while ensuring that those on the route to efficient reading do not go off-track (Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1994).

It can further be stated that teachers should not end up assessing learners once in a term and group them into ability groups but should use the assessment results continuously to inform their planning of tasks and activities for remediation during a given learning period. In their definition of assessment, Johnston & Costello (2009) use words such as "noticing, representing, and responding". In this regard, the teacher's role is to notice learners' strengths and efforts; representing these learners' behaviours by bringing them out clearly through assessment as well as responding to learners' weaknesses and needs using appropriate

intervention activities to alleviate the reading problem. Unfortunately, this may not go without challenges, especially in schools that are overenrolled. The teachers in this investigation seem to focus on fast readers while ignoring the slow ones.

## **5.4 How Teachers Plan their Teaching to Support Learners with Reading Difficulties**

Investigating how teachers practise the teaching of reading may not succeed without looking at the planning aspect of the teaching process. Most successful lessons are grounded in good planning (Woolfolk et al. 2008). Before the actual teaching in the classroom, the teacher needs to support learners with reading difficulties in the planning. One of the sub-questions was: **how do teachers support learners with reading difficulties in their instructional planning?** This was supported by actual checking of their planning and evaluation records.

### **5.4.1 How Teachers Include Learners with Reading Difficulties in their Planning**

In the interviews the teachers said they give the following support to the learners: extra teaching in form of remedial work, homework, planning of independent learning activities based on group ability level (optimal pace and differentiation), and displaying of learners' work. Other aspects noted from the reviewed documents were: lesson plans, weekly forecasts and records of work, and lesson evaluation.

It is important to acknowledge some of the good practices on how these teachers support learners with reading difficulties. Looking at these responses from a general point of view, one would say the teachers are doing a commendable job as they seem to take care of these learners in their planning before actual teaching of the lessons. For instance, learners that have not yet grasped the alphabetic principle in learning to read need well planned extra instruction (Shanahan, 2006). They may also need independent learning activities that match their ability. Above all, these learners need to have their work, at times, displayed in the classroom as a way of motivating and reinforcing what they previously learned. This is supported by other researchers (Bursuk and Damer, 2007; Ford & Opitz, 2008). It is also good to note that some of the teachers had planning documents such as lesson plans, weekly forecasts with records of work. It was even interesting to note that some of the teachers were able to take note of

learners with reading difficulties by mentioning their names. They were also able to show in their lesson plans the group activities to be given during the lesson. Additionally, a few of these teachers had their planning documents checked by their supervisors as a monitoring strategy for the benefit of learners.

In spite of all these good practices, a number of issues raising questions were also noted. Even if the teachers said that they support learners with reading difficulties by giving extra instruction in form of after-school remedial work and homework, the records and documents analysed did not show these activities and programmes. It must be noted though that the investigator did not spend long time to study the trend. However, typically these teachers would have shown either already done extra teaching or planned teaching for these learners. No extra teaching was observed or had been recorded to have been taught; no homework had been planned and no reflections had been made on individual learners. Yet researchers say: “these students must receive instruction in the basic elements of word reading” (Wanzek & Roberts, 2012). So teachers said what they knew should be done but were not doing.

With the emphasis on dynamic assessment where learners are assessed in an on-going manner, there is great need for teachers to support learners with reading difficulties in their planning and evaluation. The plan needs to take into account the weaknesses, strengths and needs of learners observed and recorded in the continuous assessment. It is the assessment result that should inform planning of subsequent reading lessons (Ford & Opitz, 2008). Shanahan (2006) adds: “...it is important to be diagnostic, adjusting the amount of teaching to meet the learning needs of the individual child” (p.8). So, the weekly forecasts should show what the teacher is doing or planning to do about the learners’ needs. This was not the case in this study.

What the investigator learned in this study is that these teachers seem to know what to do but may be overwhelmed by the overenrolled classes. The teachers are too busy as some of them have to meet two classes per day thereby being busy the whole day to an extent of having no time for extra teaching or individualized attention to scaffold the learners. Most teachers do not seem to display learners’ work except in one case. Although displayed work should be changed from time to time on the walls of the classrooms, it may not be coincidence that five classrooms did not have any learners’ work displayed. Some teachers prefer displaying other kinds of work but Anderson (2011) argues that the classroom should have more of the learners’ work displayed as they may spend more time looking at their own relevant work.



This will motivate the learners and “...the more motivated children are to read, the more practice they will get in reading” (Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1994, p.98).

The rural teachers’ documents such as lesson plans and weekly forecasts were not checked by their supervisors. Checking of teachers’ planned work helps supervisors to see what and how the teachers are teaching. The benefits of this will eventually trickle down to the learners as they may be taught effectively. Unsupervised teachers may become relaxed and do shoddy work especially in environments that have all sorts of challenges like these schools visited. Again this may be due to lack of visits by the district education office to all the schools especially those in the rural areas. While the school head teachers in schools that are in or near town may be expecting standards officers (formerly inspectors of schools) to visit them any time, those in rural schools may relax as it may take long before they can be visited by the district education officials. In this regard, it can be argued that unless teachers are supported by the education system, they may find it hard if not impossible to support learners with reading difficulties (Berry, 2006). The Zambian methodologies for teaching reading and writing in the primary school sector: NBT, SITE and ROC do emphasise the need to have teachers supported so that they too can support the learners (MOE, 1996; 2002). Supporting teachers is not only about giving them words of encouragement or providing them with necessary teaching and learning resources but it is also about supervising their teaching. According to Bantu, Okello & Kimathi (2012) there is significant correlation between teacher supervision and quality of teaching in primary schools. Supervision includes checking teachers’ planned teaching before the actual teaching has taken place as well as after the lesson has been taught. Unfortunately, this has not been achieved well in the schools studied.

## **5.6 How Teachers Support Learners with Reading Difficulties in the Classroom**

As stated earlier, good and well planned lessons usually may result in effective classroom practice. Although not all that has been planned will always be taught in the exact way, usually there is a link between what has been planned and the actual implementation in the classroom. The question asked was: **How do teachers support learners with reading difficulties in the classroom?** In other words, the question sought to investigate the strategies that teachers use to support learners with reading difficulties in the classroom. This was done through observation.

## **5.6.2 Strategies Teachers use to Support Learners during Lessons**

A number of practices were seen such as the following: lessons characterised by phonics instruction and some emphasis on phonemic awareness. The teachers also use a number of strategies to support the learners such as direct group teaching, dividing learners into ability groups, use of question and answer technique, one-on-one teaching and scaffolding of learners, paired and group reading, chorus reading and repetition, role sharing and presentation of tasks, love and care and achievement of the stated learning outcomes.

### **5.6.2.1 Direct Teaching to Small Groups**

Another practice in the teaching of reading among the six teachers was direct teaching of sounds by dividing learners into small groups according to ability levels. Teachers divide the learners according to their performance in the assessment given. The learners are called to the teaching station as a whole class in the first 15 minutes of the lesson to learn the phoneme(s) of the day. Thereafter, independent learning activities are given while a small group receives direct teaching for 20 minutes in the teaching station. Only two groups are seen in the teaching station for 20 minutes each while the last 5 minutes is for feedback.

This instructional strategy has been supported by researchers (Ford & Opitz, 2008; NICHD, 2000; Shanahan, 2006). For instance, Shanahan cites a number of advantages for teaching phonemic awareness to small groups of learners as opposed to whole class. Direct teaching to small groups leads to more effective learning as it allows the teacher to receive more attention of learners. It also allows learners to see the teacher's mouth and how sounds are produced since they are seating near the teacher. He adds that it allows quick feedback from the teacher to the learners as areas of concern and the intervention needed are given as soon as they are needed to those learners who need them. Ford & Opitz (2008) similarly add that small groups allow the teacher to model to learners what they are learning. The teacher can also scaffold the learners by providing the support that they need. They further say it helps to strengthen the relationship and build a positive relation between the teacher and the learners, which are necessary ingredients in the learning process. However, the two authors recommend combining both whole class and small groups by starting with whole class and ending up with small-group follow-up teaching to individual groups. Some researchers also argue that direct instruction leads to more controlled tasks by the teacher (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001).

More focused and explicit approaches on reading skills have a higher chance of succeeding (Reid, 2003).

Despite teachers using direct teaching to small groups as recommended by some researchers, it can be argued that the benefits are overshadowed by other conflicting factors such as over enrollment. Instruction that is centred on small groups is time consuming. This may explain why two of the respondents complained about time not being enough for teaching reading. They are supposed to see two groups for 20 minutes each. One may argue that small groups should be working very well in Zambia where some classes have more than 60 learners. But it must be understood that some 'small groups' are just too large thereby defeating the very purpose for which small groups should be used. Learners are denied the opportunity for explicit teaching, modelling and application of what they learn (Wold, Young & Risko, 2011). Foorman and Torgesen (2001) underline the importance of explicit instruction in reducing incidence of reading failure. But in large classes, time may not be enough to have each child practise the phonemes. Such classes also make it difficult for the teacher to have one-on-one teaching to individual children. It was observed that the teachers had to labour in maintaining calm and ensuring that the learners were focused on the activities. From time to time the teachers were being interrupted by noise makers. The teachers had challenges of setting adequate and challenging tasks especially for fast learners. This confirms Ecalle, et al.'s (2006) findings that class size has an impact on student performance.

There is also a need to question the effectiveness of dividing learners according to ability level based on an assessment given. From the observed six teachers, there is justification to speculate that the slow learners were perceived in a negative way rather than for them to benefit from the small groups. Some teachers were focusing on the so called fast learners while others were warning fast learners to work hard or else they would be taken to the slow group. It is such labels that could lead to low self-esteem among slow learners thereby leading to lack of interest in reading. As stated in 5.4.3, the learners are not assessed regularly. So, some of them have been assigned the label of 'slow learner' probably the entire term if not year. This is why some scholars argue for the need to have flexible and fluid groups that may also be grouped according to needs rather than to ability level (Ford & Opitz, 2008). Another matter of concern is a situation whereby some of the teachers have made these groupings permanent and they use them even in other subjects. These groups should not be permanent. Apart from labeling, the idea of 'slow learners' grouped alone equally raises other questions.

How do learners considered 'weak' learn from each other when segregated alone as a small group? Could they not have learned better if they were put together with the so called 'fast learners'? This to some extent defeats the idea of the sociocultural principles where more capable learners are helping the less capable ones. Mixed groups could enable learners with difficulties learn from their peers since the teacher may not be able to assist each and every learner due to over enrollment. This is another subject attracting debate and each side may have its positives and negatives as argued by Chorzempa and Graham (2006).

### **5.6.2.2 Scaffolding the Learners**

It was also observed that teachers use other techniques to scaffold the learners such as question and answer and one-on-one teaching though to a less degree. According to Foorman & Torgesen (2001, p.209), "Scaffolded instruction involves finely tuned interactions between teacher and child that support the child in accomplishing a task that he or she could not do without the teacher's help". Teachers were seen asking questions to the whole class, or to a group or to individual learners. They were seen helping some individual learners having difficulties during the lesson. These too could be said to be good practices in the teaching of reading especially towards off-track readers but teachers needed to do more. Going by the sociocultural perspectives on children with reading difficulties, there are several dimensions necessary to understand why some children have reading difficulties. Two of these dimensions are: (1) "all actions including reading are mediated by tools, of which language is the primary; and [2] a learner's development occurs through assisted performance" (McIntyre, et al., 2011, p.45). In this regard teachers are supposed to use tools to mediate reading. This can be achieved through asking well phrased questions to elicit the sounds that make up the words. The reading of a story at the beginning of the lesson and asking questions to check learners' attention and comprehension are equally good strategies. But teaching aids of all sorts are necessary for this to succeed. It is also vital to state that reading development among learners with reading difficulties can be achieved through assisted performance. The teacher needs to have one-on-one interaction with individual learners to help them move from one level of performance to the next in line with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development.

It is also important to state that although the strategies such as these discussed above were seen during some lessons, they were not adequately applied due to other factors. For instance, one-on-one instruction was used rarely in spite of having many learners that needed

assistance. This is understood. The same factor of over enrollment comes in again. It seems not possible for one teacher to have a one-on-one interaction with learners in 20 minutes when there were about 12 learners in a group. According to Rogoff (2003), the learner is seen as an “apprentice alongside the teacher”. McIntyre, et al., (2011) add that the teacher therefore, needs to know the learners so that he or she can engage them in their ZPD. Even the planning of lessons should be based on the teacher’s knowledge of each learner. In line with this, Torgesen (2002) recommends two types of scaffolding: careful sequencing of remedial tasks as well as teacher-learner dialogue in order to help the learner know what and how they are learning. However, when the number of learners is too big, it becomes very difficult to know each learner well enough to scaffold them as individuals.

### **5.6.2.3 Paired, Group and Chorus Reading**

Paired, group and chorus reading characterised the lessons observed. The use of paired and group reading is one of the strategies recommended by the NRP (NICHD, 2000) because they enable learners to work together and learn from one another. However, when learners with reading difficulties are doing paired or group reading, they need the teacher to monitor what they are doing (Shanahan, 2006). Shanahan adds that paired reading is a very good strategy to use in classrooms where there are no teaching assistants. Therefore, teachers who use this strategy for learners with particular needs and during the teaching station time, this may be necessary and successful. Whereas in the late 1990s when ‘new’ methodologies for teaching reading and writing were introduced in Zambia it was not recommended for learners to answer in chorus (MOE, 2001; 2002), during this study many teachers used chorus reading. In this context, chorus reading includes reading aloud which according to Foorman & Torgesen (2001) is rooted in the reader response theory of Rosenblatt (1978). This may be beneficial since they cannot involve every learner due to over enrollment. It was the only way all the learners could be involved. On the other hand, this makes it very difficult for the teacher to ascertain the involvement of all the learners as well as to reinforce what has been taught.

### **5.6.2.4 Feedback**

Apart from the above discussed strategies, the teachers seemed also to value immediate feedback both to themselves and to the learners. The idea of the teacher sampling learners’ work done and allowing learners to comment on it seems to be a very good practice.

It allows the learners to see whether they have done the work correctly. It also gives an opportunity to the teacher to assess how effective the reading instruction has been. Since the teacher is only able to be with one group at a time, there is need to have a time when learners report what they were doing in their independent learning activities. The teacher will be able to identify the needs of learners and prepare appropriate remedial activities in the next lessons. Constructive feedback is said to be one of the important aspects of a literacy teacher (Wold, et al. 2011). The use of group leaders to help the teacher manage the groups while the teacher is engaged with one group is equally very good. It is only through feedback time that the teacher can evaluate the effectiveness of peer tutoring among groups (Torgesen, 2002).

Despite there being provision for feedback, time allocated for it – 5 minutes (sharing time) does not seem to be enough. As a result, the teachers had to rush through the few learners' exercise books sampled. Time for feedback should be adequate so that the teacher can help learners that need help although much of the help could be given outside the literacy hour. It can also be argued that feedback should be given in an on-going manner so that the teacher does not depend on the 5 minutes to understand the needs of the learners. Feedback can be given at each stage of the lesson. Again the issue of over enrollment comes in. It is usually difficult to engage the learners with reading difficulties when they are seated with other learners in the teaching station to give feedback to the teacher. These learners, according to Torgesen, (2002) need "...more intensive, more explicit and more supportive" feedback other than the general feedback for all learners.

In connection with feedback, there is need for teachers to show love and to care for the learners. In her 'Curriculum Relation Model' Berit Johnsen (2001) shows that learning depends on basic human needs which include love and care for the learner. When teachers love and care for their learners, they will be able to give them constructive feedback as they need it. Although nearly all the teachers observed seemed to have good rapport with the children, it was clear that they had difficulties due to high enrollment levels in the classes. One teacher however, seemed frustrated. She harassed the learners almost throughout the lesson and threatened to beat them for their failure to participate in the lesson. Her frustrations may be tolerated but teachers need to show that they love the children. They should also realise that children do not become off-track readers by choice. It is the duty of teachers to develop good rapport with their learners so as to motivate the learners to learn to read.

If teachers can use games and other strategies that make learning more interesting, children can participate in the learning process (Shanahan, 2006).

Lastly, the teacher gets feedback also by looking at the stated learning outcomes. The stated learning outcomes act as pointers for the teacher to know whether the lesson has been successful. These must be adapted to the learning needs of the learners. In this way, the teacher can assess the learners' knowledge, skills, learning potentials and needs (Johnsen, 2001). Although all the lessons observed had learning outcomes, some of the outcomes were not clearly stated. This makes it difficult for the teacher to assess his or her teaching. None of the teachers felt confident as to whether the learning outcomes had been achieved. Their lack of confidence shows honesty on the part of teachers concerning their reflexivity but it may also be helpful to the teachers to relook at how they state their learning outcomes.

## **5.7 Summary**

This chapter has discussed the findings of the study in relation to the research questions. Firstly, the study has shown that teachers had different backgrounds such as teaching experience, understanding of off-track readers and learners from different socio economic backgrounds. It seems very likely that these different backgrounds impact on teacher and learner motivation and classroom management. Secondly, the teachers were faced with different realities but with overlapping similarities of challenges. For instance, teachers receive support that differs in type and amount. While those in urban schools had another teacher with whom they shared the class, those in peri-urban and rural had to face the class (es) alone. The schools were located in different proximity in relation to the district education office and this had an impact on the amount and kind of supervision the teachers received. Above all, the teachers had a number of challenges. Major among them were over enrollment which resulted in insufficient teaching and learning resources. Thirdly, although the teachers were using both formal and informal assessment, they seem not to have a clear understanding of the important elements of reading. They also seem to have problems with describing their learners' problems and needs. Because of this, they have difficulties coming up with appropriate interventions. Their planning does not seem to be informed by the assessment results. Fourthly, it was good to find some teachers had teaching and evaluation records such as lesson plans, weekly forecasts and schemes of work. However, most of these documents were not evaluated and were not checked by supervisors.

Those evaluated did not show learners' skills, needs and appropriate intervention. It came out that teachers may not be giving any extra teaching to the learners in that even if they said they gave extra work, no record showed any work to have been given. Lastly, teachers use a number of strategies to support learners with reading difficulties during the lesson such as direct teaching in small groups, scaffolding learners, paired, group and chorus reading, and feedback. However, over enrollment played a major negative impact on achievement of any significant reading gains. See appendix G for illustration. The next chapter gives conclusion and recommendations of the study.



# CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter sums up the entire study. It begins by a recap of the research questions. The conclusion of the study follows. Later, it gives the limitations followed by recommendations for future research. A summary closes the chapter.

This study has attempted to answer the research questions using a case study design within the qualitative approach. The study used multiple methods to data collection: interview, observation and document analysis. The main research question for this study was: How do teachers practise the teaching of reading and writing towards supporting children with reading difficulties at the lower primary level? In order to answer this question, the following sub-questions were asked: 1. What are the teachers' backgrounds regarding children with reading difficulties? 2. What are the teachers' realities regarding children with reading difficulties? 3. How do the teachers identify learners with reading difficulties? 4. How do they plan their teaching to support these learners? And, 5. How do they support these learners in the classroom during the lesson?

## 6.2 Conclusion and Implications

### 6.2.1 Teachers' Backgrounds and Situations

It has been shown in this study that teachers had different backgrounds and situations such as teaching experience, class enrollment, teacher efficacy, socio economic factors, support they receive and other challenges but with similar patterns. They had similar qualifications but trained in different colleges. They had different teaching experiences ranging between 2 months (lowest) and 7 years (highest). These differences seem to influence the teachers' way of doing things and their understanding of teaching reading and off-track readers. For instance, more experienced teachers seemed to have fewer difficulties in classroom management compared to the less experienced ones. On the other hand, teachers trained in private colleges seemed not well vest with teaching of reading. This confirms Rice's (2010)

findings that though not always, experience plays an important role in the effectiveness of teachers in teaching reading. However, their hope may only be rekindled through continuing professional development (CPD) within the school. Although CPD is one of the items highlighted in Zambia's education policy (MOE, 1996, pp.115-123), more still needs to be done in response to needs of the Zambian over enrolled classrooms. But as long as the district education office that is charged with the responsibility of supervising teachers does not go round to supervise teachers in schools, most teachers will relax on their job. In addition to this, the Ministry of Education needs to strengthen their supervision and monitoring of colleges of education to bring about quality of training.

The findings also show that all the six teachers' classes were over enrolled although in varying degrees. The two peri-urban classrooms seemed to be most enrolled followed by the rural ones and lastly, the urban ones. It came out clearly that these problems are interwoven. While the rural teachers had to meet the learners as single classes, their peri-urban counterparts had to see two separate classes of the same grade at different times of the day. Still the urban teachers shared their relatively over enrolled classes thereby having more advantages over their rural and peri-urban counterparts. This meant that the rural teachers were having crowded classrooms whereas the peri-urban had less crowded classrooms but were kept busy on a daily basis as they had to plan for and teach each of the classes. Above all, class sizes seemed to have a negative impact on classroom organisation and management and on teaching and learning resources. This has an adverse effect on teacher performance just like Ecalfe, et al. (2006) found in their study. All in all, the three types of schools are all over enrolled but the effects are long lasting, in varying degrees but may be contributing to the rising number of learners with reading difficulties.

Because of these problems, some teachers have lost hope and feel not qualified enough to teach reading. This lack of confidence in themselves may be contributing to further falling standards in teaching reading and supporting learners with reading difficulties. This is compounded by other socio economic factors such as the type of learner population that these teachers are handling. The rural learners seem more affected because they lack emergent literacy and come from poverty stricken homes while their counterparts in urban and peri-urban seem slightly better off. But there was no consistence in this because in one urban school the teacher said that only four learners could read. There could be other factors such as teacher support that could be responsible for some of the problems teachers were facing.

Unfortunately, over enrollment and lack of teaching and learning materials seem to have an influence in each of these problems. Unless high enrollment levels are reduced, it may take long to resolve this problem. Alternatively, it may not be possible any time soon in Zambia to reduce over enrollment since more and more children are qualified enough to undergo primary education yet the infrastructure is not enough to accommodate them. So, there is need to come up with measures aimed at supporting the classroom teachers. One of the ways could be to train and recruit more qualified teachers in all the schools and to come up with policies that facilitate effective teacher training for both preservice and inservice teachers as recommended by the Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (2011) and in line with Zambia's National Policy on Education (MOE, 1996). Introduction of assistant teachers or classroom aides such as parents or unemployed school leavers may also help. These may not need monetary gains. A strategy to reduce or avoid costs could be worked out. For instance, school leavers who volunteer to be teaching assistants could be later recommended for training as teachers if they so wished. Another way could be ensuring that each classroom has adequate resource provision to support explicit, intensive and supportive teaching of reading. If teachers are not provided with necessary and appropriate support such as supervision, teaching assistants and teaching and learning aids, the teaching of reading may remain a challenge for a long time.

### **6.2.2 How Teachers Identify Children with Reading Difficulties**

Coming to assessment of reading, the study shows that while teachers use both formal and informal assessment, formal assessment seems to be more favoured. This seems to be caused by two factors: teachers' lack of adequate knowledge about dynamic assessment as well as over enrollment which makes it very difficult for them to assess learners' needs. The tools the teachers are using to assess may not be useful. Most of them do not use the recommended ROC's Rainbow Reading Ladder due to lack of teacher's guides in most schools. Teachers also seem to know how often they should assess the learners but they do not assess them regularly due to over enrollment and lack of resources. Although some teachers appear passionate about teaching reading, there is also reason to believe that most of them do not know well the important elements of reading. They seem to teach so as to please the 'powers that be' or to fulfill the curriculum or better still to earn a living. Lastly, most of the teachers seem to assess learners more for the sake of dividing them into ability levels rather than for solving learners' real needs.

In this regard there is need for teachers to be sensitised on the benefits of dynamic assessment especially in reading. This could be achieved through teachers' group meetings (TGMs) and including dynamic assessment in syllabuses for teacher training colleges. However, there is also need to have an overhaul of the entire assessment system in Zambia. While the literacy teaching methodology in Zambia emphasises assessment for learning (formative) the education system ultimately is examination oriented and implicitly encourages assessment of learning (summative). The situation is worsened by over enrollment. This is retrogressive as it seems to work against children with reading difficulties but only benefits the so called 'fast learners'. It is also important to state that the RRL recommended in the ROC teacher's guide seems to be a very effective assessment instrument. The reasons teachers don't use it include over enrollment and lack of teachers' guides in schools. As stated earlier, once these two factors are taken care of, the RRL could be a perfect tool for assessment. These factors seem to be at the centre of frequency of assessment. If teachers are supported by the Ministry of Education through good policies and resource provision, they may start assessing learners as recommended.

As discussed in the previous chapter, teachers do not seem to know the important elements of reading and the role of these elements in identifying learners with reading difficulties. The big question is: how can teachers be made aware of the important elements of reading? For serving teachers, this could be achieved through CPD within schools or by introducing inservice training in training institutions to retrain the teachers. It can also be achieved by increasing research in reading so that classroom teachers and college tutors become aware of these elements. Teachers need to understand the rationale for teaching these elements. Lastly, there is the issue of interpretation of results after assessment. Many teachers may only understand the benefits of using the assessment results to inform planning if they are educated in these matters. This is in agreement with what evidence based research in reading says (Johnston & Costello (2009); Muktari, Porter & Edwards, 2010; Wold et al., 2011).

### **6.2.3 How Teachers Plan their Teaching to Support Learners**

Coming to the aspect of how teachers plan their teaching to support learners with reading difficulties, a lot of good practices were recorded. It was found that teachers seem to know which strategies are helpful towards alleviating the reading difficulty among learners. The following were mentioned: extra teaching through remedial work; homework after the literacy

hour; setting up of independent tasks according to ability level of learners; and displaying of learners' work. It was also good to note that in spite of the hard conditions under which some of these teachers work, they are able to plan their weekly forecasts /records of work, and lesson plans. They also seem to know the benefits of evaluating one's lesson during and after teaching. These are all good features for which these teachers should be commended. One would only appreciate their effort after carrying out a study like this one.

In spite of these good strategies, there is need to point out the following: even if the teachers said that they support learners with reading difficulties by giving extra instruction in form of after-school remedial work and homework, the records and documents analysed did not show these activities and programmes. This may mean that these teachers seem to know what to do but may be overwhelmed by the overenrolled classes, lack of teaching resources as well as other confounding factors. There are two possible ways to solve this. Firstly, the school education authority can enhance collaboration in the management of education at school level. This can be done by working with parents through the already existing Parents Teachers' Association (PTA). Parents are important partners in education, including teaching reading. They can help supervise homework given to their children once the school has made a policy and has sensitised them. Parents can also contribute their labour and other resources towards the school. Although teachers know that parents are stakeholders in teaching reading, many have not used this knowledge. Each of the teacher's guides for NBTL, SITE and ROC has information on how parents can work with teachers to promote reading. But teachers and school authorities have not implemented these guidelines.

Secondly, as earlier pointed out, supporting teachers is more than verbally encouraging them, or providing them with necessary teaching and learning materials. It is also about supervising their teaching. This should be enforced by the Zambian government through the Ministry of Education. Standards officers at national level, through provincial level and down to the district should play their monitoring and evaluation role. If they can play their role, then head teachers and literacy teachers in schools will equally do theirs. But this needs political will and resources by viewing education as investment for the country. Teachers, mainly in rural schools may tend to relax on their job because they are not fully supervised.

## **6.2.4 How Teachers Support the Learners in the Classroom**

The last research question focused on strategies teachers use to support learners with reading difficulties in the classroom. The study revealed a number of research and evidence based strategies such as direct group based teaching, small groups, question and answer techniques, one-on-one teaching, paired and group reading, chorus reading, and giving feedback. The benefits of all these strategies cannot be overemphasized as discussed in Chapter 5. It is equally important to appreciate what the teachers are doing in the schools studied under very difficult conditions: high enrollment levels and lack of teaching and learning resources.

In order to make these strategies more meaningful there is need for teachers to be supported in the classroom. As long as the enrollment levels remain high and the inequality on teacher-pupil ratio continues to widen, these strategies will not benefit learners who have reading difficulties. But if government, parents and other stake holders can come up with measures of introducing assistant teachers, as discussed in 6.2.1, it may be meaningful to use these strategies. The teachers also need capacity building on how to use these strategies. Some of them do not seem to know the reason for using them. As a result, they do not use them well to the benefit of off-track readers. The teachers need training in the benefits of the sociocultural principles to teaching reading. The Sociocultural theory may be helpful for overenrolled classrooms as weaker learners may be assisted by the stronger ones. But there are also trainee teachers in colleges of education. There is need to make the training of teachers in Special Needs Education less academic but more practical so that they can be made ready to handle the type of learners found in the schools they will be sent to. Lastly, if government could provide each school with a computer, a printer, power and the basic know-how to run these, then each school may be able to prepare basic but necessary materials for teaching reading. It could greatly contribute to meeting the needs of learners with reading difficulties. If government could provide solar panels through the Rural Electrification Project, each of the six schools would be able to produce their own simple learning materials such as word cards.

## **6.3 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

This study is small and a case study with six respondents as such the results cannot be generalised to a larger population. However, it has brought out a number of teachers' practices

in the teaching of reading. It has raised a number of questions seeking answers and further research in the teaching of reading and writing. The study may act as a preparation for a more detailed and focused quantitative study in one of the needy areas that have been highlighted. It has shown that most teachers studied need support in various forms such as retraining on teaching reading, understanding of reading and off-track readers, assistant teachers, effectiveness of the important elements of reading in prevention of reading failure, and role of supervision in promoting quality and provision of resources for teaching reading.

It is also important to state that, the study needed more time so as to observe and interview each teacher at least three times in order to establish patterns on how they teach children with reading difficulties. However, this was not possible as time and finances would not allow.

There were also other factors at play which may have influenced the outcome such as individual teachers' circumstances and problems at the time of the study. There may be likelihood that if this study was to be done at another time, some of the respondents' answers might change.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that the researcher in this study is still a novice. There may be weaknesses regarding collection and analysis of data which may not have been the case if the study was done by an experienced researcher. However, the advisers have done all they could to ensure that a reliable and valid study was conducted.

## **6.4 Summary**

This chapter has provided an overview of the findings of the study and their implications in relation to the research questions. It has also acknowledged some of the limitations and suggested recommendations for future research. The investigator has given both the emic (respondents' view) and the etic (investigator's view) but leaving room for readers to make their own conclusions in relation to the evidences given in the analysis chapter. The study seems to have successfully answered the main research question and has shown how teachers practise the teaching of reading and writing towards supporting learners with reading difficulties at the lower primary level in Monze District of Southern Province in Zambia. The sociocultural perspective to teaching reading, if well implemented, could be the surest way of ensuring that every learner is included in the acquisition of reading skills.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Letter for Seeking Permission

Charles Lwanga College of Education

P.O. Box 660193, Monze

6<sup>th</sup> July 2012

**The District Education Board Secretary**

Monze District.

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: PERMISSION TO DO RESEARCH AT THE FOLLOWING SCHOOLS: (NOT SHOWN FOR ETHICAL REASONS)**

I am a teacher trainer at Charles Lwanga College of Education and Head of Section in the Literacy and Languages Education at the same college. Currently, I am a student at the University of Oslo pursuing master's degree in Special Needs Education. I have a lot of interest in training effective teachers but I have always wondered why a number of children in a number of schools in Monze district have difficulties learning to read. This has made me resolve to carry out studies on methods for teaching reading to children with reading difficulties. This study may contribute to training effective teachers of language and literacy.

As part of my thesis, I wish to interview and observe two 4<sup>th</sup> grade teachers from each of the schools listed in the heading above. Apart from interviewing and observing them, I will look at their planning and teaching documents to enable me understand how reading is taught.

I am therefore, asking for permission to do my studies in these schools from July to October 2012. I promise that every data collected will be treated as confidential and used only for this study. The recorded data will be erased as soon as the study comes to an end in June 2013.

I thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely,

Mathias Shimanga Chuunga

# Appendix B: Consent Letter

## Requesting you to participate in my study

Dear teacher,

My name is Mathias Shimanga Chuunga. I live in Chikuni in Monze District. I am a teacher by profession. Currently, I am a student at the University of Oslo in Norway. I am carrying out a study. The purpose of my study is to investigate how teachers practise the teaching of reading and writing towards supporting learners with reading difficulties in grade 4 classes.

So I would like to interview and observe teachers teaching the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. My interest will be in the teaching of reading. Therefore, you should be currently teaching literacy in a school.

The interview may last an hour and will mainly focus on how you support learners with reading difficulties. I will ask your experiences in teaching reading. In the lesson observation, I will look at how you plan and implement your reading lessons. I will also look at your teaching documents.

The interview will be recorded and I will take notes to enable me pick all important details. Be rest assured that no one, except me will have access to the information you will give me. Nobody will be able to recognise you in the report at any time. I will erase and delete all personal data as soon as I finish my thesis in June 2013.

Participation in this research project is voluntary. Besides, you have the possibility to withdraw at any given time without having to state the reason. However, I would personally appreciate your participation very much. I have a lot of interest in teaching reading and my desire is that all children should learn how to read because reading is a survival and life skill. By participating in this study, you will contribute to finding answers on how best we can teach reading in Zambia for the benefit of our children.

If you would like to participate in this study, kindly complete the attached consent form and return it to the head teacher. Should you have any questions, you are most welcome to contact me at any time.

Your participation in this study will be highly appreciated!

Yours sincerely,

Mathias S. Chuunga

## Appendix C: Consent Form

# Consent Form

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I have received oral and written information about the study of how teachers practise the teaching of reading and writing towards supporting learners with reading difficulties. I understand that I am free to answer or not to answer any question. I am also aware of my right to withdraw from this interview or to refuse to be observed at any time I feel like without having to give any reason. I have also been assured that whatever I say will be treated with the confidentiality it deserves and

- would like to participate.

Full name of the participating

teacher:.....

Signature:.....

Date:.....

Phone number:.....

- do not want to participate.

Name:

.....

Signature: .....

Date: .....

# **Appendix D: Interview Guide**

## **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

### **General questions:**

1. For how long have you been a teacher?
2. How long have you taught literacy?
3. How many pupils do you have in your class?

### **Teachers' backgrounds regarding children with reading difficulties**

1. Do you have children with reading difficulties in your class?
2. How do you know that those learners have reading difficulties?
3. How would you describe your experiences regarding the teaching of reading in your school?

### **Teachers' situations regarding children with reading difficulties**

1. Do you receive any support from anywhere/anybody regarding teaching reading?
2. Explain the kind of support you receive.
3. How would you describe the training you received from the institution you concerning the teaching of reading?

### **How teachers identify learners with reading difficulties**

1. Do you assess your learners?
2. Give reasons why you (not) assess them?
3. Explain how you identify learners with reading difficulties in your class?
4. How often do you assess them?
5. What assessment instruments do you use for assessment?

6. After you have assessed your learners, what do you do with the results?

### **Elements of reading considered important**

1. Some people feel that there are certain elements of reading that children should be taught in order for them to learn how to read quickly. Do you feel the same? If yes or no... Which elements of reading do you consider necessary/important for children to learn how to read?
2. Some teachers think that phonics/phonemic awareness helps children learn to read fast – do you think phonics helps children to learn to read? Why do you say so?

### **Supporting learners with reading difficulties**

1. How do you plan your teaching to support your learners with reading difficulties?
2. Explain how you support your learners with reading difficulties in your class during the lesson.
3. How often is the support given to the learners?
4. How are you going to work with other teachers or Do you think you need to receive any support from anybody apart from what you put in alone as a teacher concerning pupils with reading difficulties? Explain please.
5. If you were to do things differently to enhance reading skills among children with reading difficulties, what and how would you do differently?
6. Do you have anything you would like to say relating to children with reading difficulties, before our interview comes to an end?

# Appendix E: Observational Protocol

## Observational Protocol

Descriptive notes (what I have seen)	Reflective notes (how I interpret what I have seen)

# Appendix F: Lesson Observation Guide

Name of teacher (pseudo name):.....Class:.....

School:.....Grade:.....

Subject:.....Sub-topic:.....

Date:..... Time:.....

**Strategies the teacher uses to support learners with reading difficulties both in instructional planning and lesson implementation in the classroom?**

## **GUIDELINES TO THE OBSERVER:**

Make a comment on what was observed; take note of areas that are of concern.

### **6. Instructional Planning**

Aspects indicating clarity of learning outcomes, pupils' needs, indication of needed teaching and learning materials/aids, reflection of the learning goals, content preparation of materials to be utilised for various age groups and ability levels, indication of activities which should contribute to pupils' learning achievement, indication of provision of reinforcement of concepts and evaluation of learning.

Comments and specific concerns:.....

### **7. Lesson Implementation**

- ⤴ Effectiveness of lesson introduction, indication of expected learning outcomes to the pupils, motivation of pupils for learning, modelling and logical development of the lesson.

Comments and specific concerns:.....

- ⤴ Attentiveness to aspects of the general lesson implementation activities that contribute to the effective achievement of the intended learning outcomes; optimal pace and differentiation of instruction according to pupils' needs and abilities, repetition.(not all

children need the same amount or type of support). Does the teacher scaffold learners?  
Is there a sequence in the reading instruction? Is there teacher-pupil dialogue?

Comments and specific concerns:.....

- ✧ Application of the appropriately stated teaching and learning strategies and techniques, ongoing assessment of pupils' learning progress through questions, eye contact, one on one assistance. Does the teaching focus on: phonics, phonemic awareness and decoding skills (word attack skills), fluency in word recognition, text processing, reading comprehension, vocabulary, spelling and writing skills.

Comments and specific concerns:.....

## **8. Teacher's Knowledge and Mastery of Methodologies**

Demonstration of practical knowledge of the literacy methodologies in the context of the prepared lesson; expression of effective teaching with a variety of skills, and an ability to simplify the knowledge content of the subject to the comprehension of pupils with reading difficulties.

Comments and specific concerns:.....

## **4. Pupil Involvement**

How does the teacher accommodate learners with reading difficulties during the lesson? What strategies is the teacher using to involve learners? Other aspects include the attainment of significant and meaningful learning activities and outcomes, the adequacy of time allocated to pupils' activities, some individualised attention to pupils in the various learning activities of the lesson, and the overall maintenance of pupils' interest and participation in the lesson. Does the teacher do these: encourage learners verbally or in action, gives them feedback, gives positive reinforcement e.g. praise?

Comments and specific concerns:.....

## **5. Class Management and Organisation**

Routine classroom procedures such as management of pupils, class discipline, attention to pupils' learning needs, seating and furniture arrangement to facilitate learning for pupils with



reading difficulties, and overall conduciveness of the classroom as a learning environment to support acquisition of reading instruction. Does the teacher use small groups? Are these supervised during an activity? Are roles and responsibilities of group members clearly defined?

Comments and specific concerns:.....

## **6. Teacher's Professional Characteristics**

Attributes include interpersonal relationship with pupils within the learning context, posture and suitability of bodily gestures for teaching and learning; communication skills: tone of voice, voice projection, tempo of speech, clarity and command of language, response to intellectual and academic criticism from the pupils, emotional management within the learning context, clarity and quality of instructions given and tolerance to pupils with reading difficulties.

Comments and specific concerns:.....

## **7. Lesson Conclusion**

Was the lesson brought to a sequential conclusion for the educational benefit of the pupils with reading difficulties? Or, was the lesson simply abruptly concluded at the educational expense of the pupils? Was the given learning task satisfactorily accomplished by the pupils with reading difficulties? Were the given instructions for the task sufficient and clear enough for the effective accomplishment of the task by pupils?

Comments and specific concerns:.....

## **8. Achievement of the stated Learning Outcomes**

Was there evidence to indicate that the stated learning outcomes were achieved? Was there evidence to indicate that the pupils' learning needs were met by the teacher?

Comments and specific concerns:.....

## **9. Lesson Evaluation**

In the opinion of the observer, were the activities of the lesson conducted in an academic manner and did contribute to the effective learning of the pupils with reading difficulties? In this sense, what is your overall rating of the lesson: below average, average or above average?

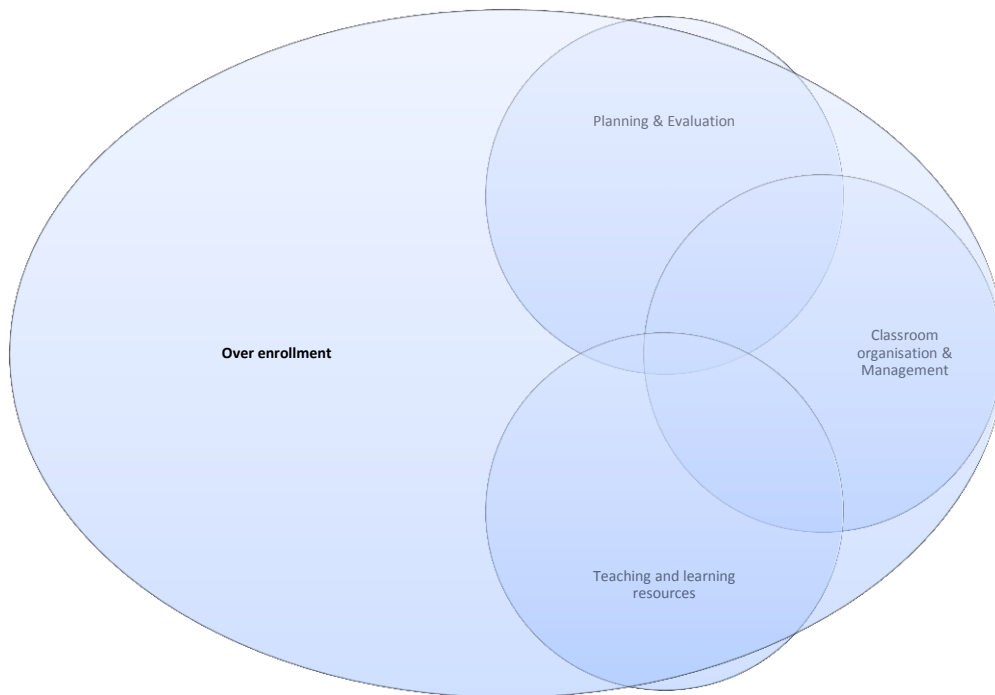
Comments and specific concerns:.....

Name of Observer:.....Signature:.....

Date:.....

*Adapted from CLCE monitoring instrument 2012*

## Appendix G: Impact of Over-enrollment



Source: Author (2013)