

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Chapter Introduction**

Chapter One is an introduction to the study on the utilization of emergent literacy for teaching initial literacy in Grade 1 in Zambian Government schools, with special reference to selected schools in Mansa District. The chapter gives the background to the study with particular reference to the emergent literacy concept. It looks at how essential the concept is for teaching literacy skills in Grade 1. The chapter further presents the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the objectives and the research questions that were used to address the objectives of the study. The chapter also presents the significance of the study, the theoretical framework and the operational definitions that applied in this research. The scope and the structure of the dissertation are given at the end of this chapter.

#### **1.1 Background**

The concept of ‘emergent literacy’ seems to have received more attention in the Western World countries since it was introduced by Marie Clay in 1966 as a term largely referring to skills children gain from birth to the time just before their entry into the formal school system. Since then, more studies have been conducted in America and some European countries with a view to further developing and bringing about a clearer understanding of Clay’s concept of emergent literacy. Other researchers have said that emergent literacy describes the behaviours exhibited by young children who cannot actually read and write in the conventional sense but use books and writing materials to imitate reading and writing activities they observe from the adult world. Another common explanation says

emergent literacy refers to the behaviours of young children which reflect their understanding of reading and writing activities even when they are not readers and writers themselves.

Another emphasis is on the relevance of emergent literacy for conventional literacy skills development in young children. Studies from European countries show that emergent literacy involves development of skills, knowledge and attitudes which at a later stage play a significant role in the development of reading and writing skills in children. The emergent literacy skills children have acquired lay the foundation for them to learn to read and write in the conventional sense. Some of the skills that develop under emergent literacy include phonological awareness and phonological sensitivity, which give children the ability to hear, recognize, manipulate and distinguish the sounds of the language they have acquired. These are key language skills which teachers should utilize in the classroom in the teaching of the skills of reading and writing. Other literacy behaviours that teachers with knowledge of emergent literacy should look out for in children involve activities such as children talking about their families, telling or narrating stories while interacting with each other, holding books right side-up, doing pretend reading and pretend writing, flipping pages of books and interpreting pictures in books. These are taught as pre-reading skills but are not treated as possible skills children have before they come to school. The expectation is that Grade 1 teachers in Zambia should take advantage of such skills in their children as the foundation for teaching them conventional literacy.

The concept of emergent literacy has in recent years spread to some African countries and bears a similar definition to that documented in Europe and America. Henceforth, some

studies on emergent literacy among children have been conducted. In South Africa, for example, some studies show that learning to read and write begins with the emergent literacy skills gained (Hodgskiss, 2007). Arising from the studies, a strong belief has evolved that emergent literacy engages children in reading real books and writing for genuine purposes. Some of the studies also suggest that emergent literacy involves continuities in children's literacy development between early literacy behaviours and those displayed when children can read independently.

In Zambia as well, two known recent studies have been conducted on emergent literacy. The study by Musonda (2011) targeted literacy behaviours preschoolers exhibited in selected homes of Lusaka, while that by Zimba (2011) looked at classroom practices that support continuation of emergent literacy in preschools of Kasempa and Solwezi districts of Zambia. While the two studies have highlighted the importance of emergent literacy, there was no attempt to investigate how Grade 1 teachers were utilizing emergent literacy in classroom activities. The two studies targeted literacy-related behaviours and practices that are evident among children in Zambia during the early childhood and preschool periods. The two studies provide evidence that learners come to school with emergent literacy skills. Zimba's study further explains that under the emergent literacy viewpoint, children in Zambia are considered knowledgeable about reading and writing practices right from the beginning of their experiences. This is the knowledge which later becomes very essential for the development of conventional literacy in children. Given this information, one might ask some questions such as; do the teachers in primary school prepare for the teaching of initial literacy in Grade 1 taking into account what the learners already know

from their experiences? In the teaching and learning process, do the teachers guide their learners towards gaining new knowledge using what children already know?

In order for children to experience the developmentally meaningful learning of the conventional literacy skills at primary school, teachers need to exploit and utilize children's emergent literacy skills for teaching. Teachers of conventional literacy at primary school must consider children's emergent literacy skills by initiating classroom activities that will utilize such skills for the benefit of meaningful learning of reading and writing skills by children. The researcher identified utilization of emergent literacy skills in the classroom set up as an area that needs investigation.

Studies from countries that are operating on the ideas of emergent literacy concept show that there has been acknowledgement on how it supports the development of conventional literacy among school-going children (Bustos, 1999). Advocacy of its relevance and support towards literacy development is growing of late. Revelations of such knowledge raise one's curiosity and cause one to wonder as to whether this is prevalent in our primary schools in Zambia. This prompted the researcher's curiosity to raise such questions like: Do the Grade 1 teachers at primary school in Zambia have knowledge about emergent literacy and if so, do they utilize it in their teaching of initial literacy? If the serving teachers were empowered with the knowledge of emergent literacy, would this be an intervention to low literacy levels and would the teachers competently teach conventional literacy in Grade 1?

Before going further, it is prudent to understand the current state of affairs in the Zambian primary schools regarding the teaching of conventional literacy and pupil achievement in

the literacy study area. In Zambia, the teaching of reading and writing skills is currently done under the New Breakthrough to Literacy (NBTL), a Grade 1 literacy course under the Primary Reading Programme. The literacy lesson under this programme has three stages: 'Starting Together', 'Teaching Corner' and 'Sharing Together'. The one-hour literacy lesson begins with the teaching of some of the pre-reading and pre-writing skills at 'Starting Together' stage, after which they progress to the next lesson stages. The teaching of pre-reading and pre-writing skills lasts for a period of two weeks before learners begin actual reading and writing lessons. It is at each of the lesson stages that emergent literacy skills can be utilized as a foundational resource for teaching conventional reading and writing skills but we do not know if this happens in our schools; hence this study.

Under the NBTL programme, literacy lessons are based on the Language Experience Approach (LEA), which includes phonics instruction. This approach is expected to help learners to easily understand the reading and writing systems of their familiar language since they acquire the knowledge of how individual letters relate to the sounds of the spoken words and how words are formed from the letters. Furthermore, initial literacy is taught within the established lesson procedures after which learners are expected to breakthrough at the end of the New Breakthrough to Literacy programme. However, this is not the case with learners' achievement. Study reports show that conventional literacy levels are remarkably low in most of our primary schools (Matafwali, 2010). Learners still fail to breakthrough to literacy at the end of the programme as expected by the curriculum. Utilization of children's emergent literacy during teaching might provide a favourable foundational base and may as well be one of the solutions to the problem of low literacy achievements among most children in Zambian primary schools.

By associating the previously learnt knowledge with the new one, it is hoped that children will successfully progress from emergent literacy to attaining the conventional reading and writing skills taught in Grade 1. Inspired by the idea of learning from the known to unknown, the researcher embarked on finding out whether Grade1 teachers utilized children's emergent literacy skills to help them learn the conventional skills of reading and writing. The development of literacy skills in a learner must follow the principle of learning from the known to the unknown. As children learn literacy, they must go beyond the emergent literacy skills they know to that of conventional literacy. Studies now show that Emergent literacy has potential skills for promoting literacy development among children in Grade 1. The researcher wondered whether the Grade 1 teachers had this knowledge and utilized it as the foundation for teaching reading and writing skills in Grade 1. This idea motivated the researcher to embark on this study to establish whether this type of literacy instruction takes place in Grade 1.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

While a number of studies have highlighted a number of classroom factors that underlie the low literacy levels among Zambian children, little is known on the extent to which Grade 1 teachers utilize emergent literacy to enhance literacy development in children. The importance of emergent literacy as a firm foundation for conventional literacy development cannot be underscored, however, there is no empirical evidence in Zambia on the preparedness of Grade 1 teachers to utilize emergent literacy. Therefore, this study was designed to investigate teachers' utilization of emergent literacy in teaching conventional

reading and writing skills, a procedure that would enhance continued development of conventional literacy in children at Grade 1.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to establish whether primary school teachers utilize emergent literacy skills in order to teach the learners the conventional reading and writing skills.

### **1.4 Objectives**

The study sought to achieve the following objectives:

- i. Establish what primary school teachers know about emergent literacy.
- ii. Determine whether or not primary school teachers utilize emergent literacy skills for teaching learners to read and write.
- iii. Establish what extra teaching and learning materials teachers design to help utilize emergent literacy for teaching learners to read and write.
- iv. Establish the challenges Grade 1 teachers encounter in utilizing emergent literacy.

### **1.5 Main Research Question**

The main research question was:

Do the primary school teachers utilize the emergent literacy skills learners come with from home to school to learn to read and write?

### **1.6 Research Questions**

- i. What do primary school teachers know about emergent literacy?

- ii. How do teachers utilize emergent literacy skills when teaching reading and writing?
- iii. What extra teaching and learning materials are designed to help in utilization of emergent literacy for teaching learners to read and write?
- iv. What challenges do Grade 1 teachers encounter in utilizing emergent literacy among the Grade 1 learners?

### **1.7 Significance of the study**

This study sought to investigate the teacher's ability to utilize learner's emergent literacy skills in the teaching of conventional literacy in Grade 1. Exploitation and utilization of emergent literacy may be of benefit to the learners by offering them chance for a continuous literacy development when they enter the formal school system from the emergent literacy period. The results of the study may provide relevant information on the need to design a literacy programme to empower the teachers with information on emergent literacy, which may serve as an intervention to low literacy achievements scored by the learners in schools. In addition, the results may also influence a review and change of the teacher education curriculum for colleges of education in Zambia to include emergent literacy component. The results from this study might as well influence further research regarding classroom utilization of emergent literacy skills as the foundational information for literacy instruction in the formal school set up.

### **1.8 Limitations**

The major limitation was that the study was restricted to schools in Mansa District only. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized beyond Mansa District to all other districts of Zambia.

## **1.9 Methodological Framework**

In order to collect relevant data to answer the questions raised in 1.6 above, the study employed the qualitative approach to establish what primary school teachers knew about emergent literacy and whether they utilized this knowledge during teaching of reading and writing skills to Grade 1 learners. The approach was considered most appropriate in the sense that it required a description of the state of affairs as found and observed in their natural setting from the research sites. The sample for this study was drawn from the primary schools in Mansa district of Luapula Province of Zambia. A sample of sixty-two (62) Grade 1 teachers and 3,594 pupils from thirty-two (32) primary schools were selected as respondents and sources of the required information. Purposive sampling technique was employed in order to select the sample for the research. The study targeted those schools offering initial literacy in a local language to Grade 1 learners. A structured observation guide and a semi-structured standardized interview guide were the instruments used to collect data through lesson observations and post-lesson interview with each teacher observed. A detailed description of the research procedures and techniques adopted is presented in Chapter Three.

## **1.10 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that guided this study was the constructivist theory of learning stated in the works of both Piaget and Vygotsky. The historical roots of the constructivist theory of learning are in the works of both scholars who, undoubtedly, studied children's cognitive development. Both scholars emphasized that cognitive change takes place only when the previous conceptions fail to balance with new information (Slavin, 2009: 231).

### **1.10.1 The Constructivist Theory of Learning**

According to Anderson, Greeno, Reder and Simon (2000); Waxman, Pedron and Arnold (2001, as cited in Slavin, 2009), the basis of the constructivist theory of learning is that learners must individually discover and transform information if they are to own it. The theory sees learners as constantly checking new information against old rules and revising the rules when they no longer work.

Piaget's theory of cognitive development reflects constructivism, in which he says children actively build systems of meaning and understanding of reality through experiences and interactions. This is what both Piaget and Vygotsky called the social nature of learning by an individual human being. The belief is that all children are born with an innate tendency to interact with and make sense of their environments. Santrock (2002) explains Piaget's cognitive constructivist view as an approach where learners actively construct knowledge by transforming, organizing and reorganizing previous knowledge and information. Vygotsky also emphasized that learners construct knowledge through social interactions with others (Santrock, 2002).

The implications of this theory in terms of teaching and learning are that the learners must take a more active role in their own learning. The teacher should not simply give learners the knowledge they need, but the learners themselves must construct the knowledge they need in their own minds. The role of the teacher should be to facilitate this process by teaching in ways that make information meaningful and relevant to the learners by giving opportunities for learners to discover or apply ideas themselves. Slavin (2009) says teachers can give ladders that lead to higher understanding, but the learners themselves

must climb these ladders, hence the name ‘Scaffolding’. Such strategies are called ‘learner-centered instruction’ because learners take a more active role in their own learning through the constructivist strategies. In a learner-centered classroom, the teacher becomes the guide – helping learners to discover their own meaning instead of lecturing and controlling all classroom activities (Weinberger & M<sup>c</sup>Combs, 2001; Windschilt, 1999, as cited in Slavin, 2009). Similarly, Vygotsky emphasized that teachers should create many opportunities for learners to learn with the teacher and with peers in constructing new knowledge. In both Piaget’s and Vygotsky’s models, teachers serve as facilitators and guides rather than directors and molders of children’s learning (Santrock, 2002).

Apparently, the emergent literacy concept introduced by Clay (1966), operate within the realms and principles of both the constructivist strategies of learning and the theory of learning from the known to unknown in as far as literacy development is concerned. This principle of learning from the known to unknown is closely associated with Bruner’s (1974) idea of ‘Going beyond the information given’, in which he talks about ‘Scaffolding’ in the process of learning.

Santrock (2002) describes ‘scaffolding’ as the classroom practice based on Vygotsky’s concept of assisted learning in which the teacher is the cultural agent who guides instruction so that learners can master and internalize skills that permit higher cognitive functioning. In the process of learning, scaffolding is used to bridge the gap between what the learner knows and what he/she does not know. According to Vygotsky’s (1978) theory, such learning occurs within what he calls the ‘Zone of Proximal Development’ (ZPD). Scaffolding is a means of providing support to the learner when needed within the zone of

proximal development. This study wished to establish whether or not, with the teacher's guidance, children in Grade 1 develop the conventional literacy skills from the emergent literacy they earlier acquired by applying the constructivist and scaffolding strategies of learning. For this reason, it is fundamental for one to have an insight into the zone of proximal development and the emergent literacy concepts. It is also important, at a later stage, to establish how emergent literacy is the foundation for literacy development when the constructivist theory of learning and scaffolding strategy are used in teaching and learning. Bruner's concept of scaffolding is closely associated with Lev Vygotsky's (1978) idea of the Social Development Theory which gave rise to the Zone of Proximal Development, an area where according to Vygotsky learning takes place with scaffolding. A brief review of the zone of proximal development follows below to show how it relates to scaffolding.

### **1.10.2 The Zone of Proximal Development**

As stated above, scaffolding refers to assistance offered to the learner by an adult person in bridging the gap between what the learner already knows to learn what he does not know. Lev Vygotsky, (1978) generated a very useful concept relating to how people learn when engaged in tasks they cannot accomplish on their own unless assisted by knowledgeable peers or adults. Vygotsky's social development theory suggests that social interaction leads to continuous systematic changes in children's thought and behavior and that these vary from culture to culture. The progressive changes in thought and behaviour take place in an area Vygotsky called the 'Zone of Proximal Development', a socio-cultural psychology theory generated under cognitive development principle (Vygotsky, 1978). The zone of

proximal development is the gap between what the children can do unaided and abilities exhibited when supported by social scaffolding, as suggested by Bruner (1987). For children, learning is believed to take place within this zone of potential development following social interaction through dialogue.

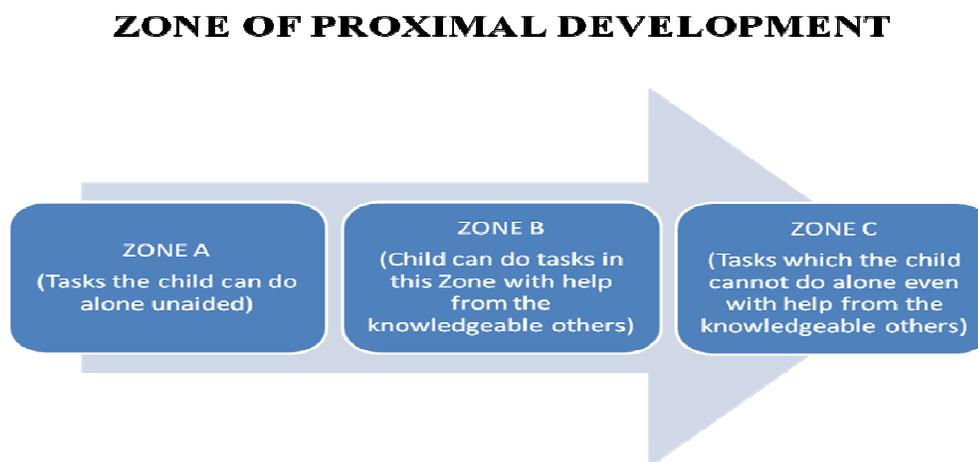
According to Vygotsky (1978), the zone of proximal development describes the area between what the learner can do by himself and that which he can only attain with assistance from the more knowledgeable adults or peers. Vygotsky believed that adult assistance creates learning that leads to development and this sequence results in zones of proximal development. In the process of learning, children need provision of appropriate support through scaffolding. A conclusion can be drawn that the process of scaffolding results into learning taking place in the zone of proximal development. The process involves sharing of knowledge between the knowledgeable adult (teacher or peer) and the learner as they attempt to bridge the gap between what the learner knows and what is unknown in terms of knowledge. The assumption drawn from both concepts is that with thoughtful guidance from the teacher, children learn things that are just beyond their abilities, as supported in Wood (1998) and Slavin (2009). In relation to these processes of learning, children are expected to become competent with the oral means of communication but cannot just read and write conventionally in the language that they speak very well. They will need scaffolding (careful assistance) to learn to read and write meaningfully in their target language.

Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) focuses on the developmental level of the learner with adult guidance to progress to the next level in problem solving. It

looks at the way the child's performance is mediated socially. The zone of proximal development embodies readiness by the child to learn and achieve higher cognitive levels of competence with help from a more knowledgeable person. Vygotsky (1978) also points out that dialogue is an important tool of this process in the zone of proximal development. During dialogue, a child's unsystematic, disorganized and spontaneous concepts are met with the more systematic, logical and rational concepts of the skilled helper. This means that as the child's cognitive skills are in the process to maturation, the assistance from a more-skilled person can help accomplish the development process of the child's cognitive skills. This process of learning relates to a child's early experiences. The able instructor at school (the teacher), must offer the necessary scaffolding the child needs in order to progress to another level of language skills, those of reading and writing.

Figure 1 below shows a diagrammatic representation of the Zone of Proximal Development, in which the child's progression to the next level of possible development depends on the scaffolding offered by the knowledgeable adult.

**Figure 1: Zone of proximal development theory**



The child requires more assistance to learn how to read and write. It is the duty of the teacher in the classroom to facilitate the learning process. Children know their language orally but cannot read and write in this language since they are not familiar with the two literacy skills. The roots of learning to read and write are in learning to speak during the children's early development. As stated by Santrock (2002), continuing with positive adult involvement in children's learning is likely to benefit children's development. The new knowledge that an individual learner accumulates is built upon the knowledge that he/she previously acquired. Vygotsky refers to this process as internalization (see Slavin, 2009; Barton, 2007; Santrock, 2002). The child's emergent literacy must be treated as that knowledge the child has already while the literacy skills of reading and writing is the new knowledge to be added and developed through scaffolding at a formal school, in Grade 1.

Pianta (as cited in, Dickinson & Neuman 2006: 149-150) emphasizes that it is abundantly clear that relationships with adults play a more meaningful and long-lasting effect in literacy development than simply as a setting for book reading. Equally, Vygotsky (1978) states that relationships children experience support literacy in terms of providing language stimulation and conversation; co regulation of attention, interest, and emotional experience; direct transmission of phonological information and content; and engagement in understanding of the language that fosters cultural understanding. Bruner's concept of scaffolding in the process of learning supports Vygotsky's idea above about literacy development. Scaffolding is changing the level of support during the learning process. In literacy lessons this should involve utilization of appropriate emergent literacy skills by the teacher to assist Grade 1 learners achieve reading and writing skills based on what they already know.

## 1.11 Operational Definitions

The following were the relevant operational definitions of concepts used in this study:

**Continuum** – Learning that creates continuity gradually and seamlessly.

**Emergent literacy** –All knowledge and skills of the literacy events acquired and practiced by children leading to conventional literacy development.

**Emergent literacy development** – acquisition and natural practice of the literacy events from home and the surrounding environment.

**Emergent literacy skills** – the observable behaviour children exhibit which relate to conventional reading and writing practices of the adults.

**Initial literacy** – the conventional early reading and writing practices by a learner

**Literacy** – language skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and interpreting what is in the surrounding

**Literacy behaviour** – children’s practices of literacy resulting from their experiences

**Literacy events** – everyday activities and occasions in which literacy is made use of.

**Literate environment** – a surrounding rich with print material exposed to the child

**Literacy development** – **assimilation** of the skills of reading and writing by an individual

**Pretend reading** - children’s literacy behaviour exhibited when they hold a book and imitate to read as adults do.

**Utilization** – applying emergent literacy skills in the classroom to enhance development of conventional literacy

### **1.12 The Scope of the study**

The scope of this study was confined to the potential relationship existing between children's emergent literacy and the development of conventional reading and writing skills in children who enter the formal school system in the respective schools where this research was conducted. The study was not intended to provide the historical development of emergent literacy skills in children from their homes or pre-school. Rather, the study focused on how the emergent literacy skills children acquired would be utilized by the teacher in the formal school set up, through available teaching methods and strategies, to develop the formal reading and writing skills among the Grade 1 learners. The study was a pedagogical survey on how teachers in primary school, particularly in Grade 1, utilized the literacy potential in children to teach them new skills of the language – the reading and writing skills – on a continuum model. The study was undertaken in order to establish whether or not the Grade 1 primary school teachers utilized the emergent literacy in children to help them develop the formal literacy skills of reading and writing. In this regard, the results of the study were interpreted within the confines of Mansa primary schools where the investigation was conducted and should in no way be taken as a reflection of what may obtain outside these schools.

### **1.13 Structure of the dissertation**

This dissertation consists of six chapters. The first chapter introduces the study by providing background information to the investigation, stating the specific problem under investigation and giving the rationale for the study. The chapter further outlines the purpose and objectives of the study, the specific research questions addressed, and the

research limitations experienced. The chapter presents the theoretical framework within which the study was undertaken and also presents the operational definitions by defining and illustrating some of the major concepts relating to the study.

The second chapter reviews some of the available literature that was considered to be of direct relevance to this study in order to place the investigation within the context of similar surveys, thereby enriching it and providing a justification for the study.

The third chapter describes the methodology used by this study in order to provide answers to the questions raised in Chapter One. This chapter presents a brief summary of the methodological framework employed in data collection and analysis, the details relating to the research paradigm and research design employed in the study, the population and sample size, sampling techniques, the data collection instruments and procedures, data analysis, and reflections on ethical issues.

The fourth chapter presents the research findings organized in terms of themes that guided lesson observations and post-lesson interviews. The themes were derived from the research objectives and questions as set out in Chapter One of this report.

The fifth chapter presents a discussion of the findings in response to the objectives that guided the study. The chapter presents the answers to the research questions as drawn from the data that were collected. Research objectives provided headings under which the findings were discussed in order to find what answers have been provided from the data.

Finally, Chapter Six presents a summary of conclusions and recommendations regarding utilization of emergent literacy by Grade 1 teachers in primary school for purposes of

teaching learners how to read and write conventionally on a continuum model. Based on the findings, the chapter draws conclusions and recommendations with regard to teacher preparedness to utilize emergent literacy for teaching reading and writing conventionally. The chapter concludes with recommendations for policy development and further research on emergent literacy.

#### **1.14 Summary**

Chapter One has presented the background to the study investigating the utilization of emergent literacy by Grade 1 teachers with a view to teaching learners the conventional literacy skills on a continuum scheme. Thereafter, the chapter presented the problem under investigation, the rationale, the objectives and the specific questions through which the objectives were addressed and, the limitation to the study. Explanation of the operational definitions and theoretical concepts in this section involved defining them to show how they applied in this study. Finally, the chapter has presented the scope of the study and the structure of the Dissertation.

The next chapter deals with a review of some of the available foreign and local literature considered relevant to this study with a view to align this study to other previous studies and bodies of knowledge on emergent literacy.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter reviews some of the relevant literature available on the emergent literacy concept with a view to identifying the gaps in our existing knowledge that this study intended to fill. It outlines the emergent literacy concept and presents some of the prerequisite skills in emergent literacy that are considered relevant for the development of conventional literacy skills. The chapter also presents a review of some studies that were done in some European countries and Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as those done in Zambia, with a view to relate the current study to the on-going dialogue in literature on emergent literacy as prior knowledge to conventional literacy development in children. The chapter ends with a summary on the literature that has been reviewed.

#### **2.1 The Emergent Literacy Concept**

In this study, the concept emergent literacy bears the definition as was advanced by the western world researchers. Clay (1966), (from New Zealand), introduced the concept emergent literacy to refer to all the experiences children acquire from birth to the time just before their entry into the formal school system. Clay's (1966) view is that with support of parents, early childhood educators and exposure to a literacy-rich environment, children exhibit behaviours such as attempts to interpret meaning from pictures and pretend to write through scribbling. These are examples of emergent literacy which help children successfully progress from emergent literacy to conventional reading and writing. Following Clay's (1966) view, extensive research has expanded the understanding of

emergent literacy. For example, Rhyner et al. (2009) cite Teale and Sulzby (1986) who further developed Clay's concept of emergent literacy, by emphasizing the importance of considering both reading and writing together as comprising literacy. According to Teale and Sulzby (1986), they recognized that 'emergent' conveyed the perspective that children were 'in the process of becoming literate'. Since then, more studies have been conducted with a view to bringing about further understanding of what is meant by the concept emergent literacy.

Bayder, et al. (1993) and Francis, et al. (1996), for example, consider emergent literacy as the foundation for a sustained and sound literacy development. Another common explanation is that emergent literacy refers to behaviours of very young children, which reflect their understanding of reading and writing activities even when children are not yet reading and writing in a conventional sense. Studies by Ramsburg (1998, as cited in Johnson & Sulzby, 1999) explain that the term emergent literacy describes the behaviours exhibited by young children who cannot actually read and write in the conventional sense but use books and writing materials to imitate reading and writing activities which they observe from the adult world.

Some researchers link their definition of the concept to later learning. One example is that emergent literacy refers to children's early reading and writing behaviours that mark the beginning of their development into conventional reading and writing processes (Bustos, 1999). Similarly, Korat (2005) says emergent literacy relates to the early steps that young children take in the world of print – in reading and writing – both before and at the beginning of formal schooling. A further explanation is that beginning from birth young

children experience oral language and a variety of literacy interactions that set the stage for early literacy development (Dickinson & Neuman, 2006). During the childhood period, children acquire the various language and literacy knowledge and skills on a developmental continuum starting early in their life before they enter the formal school environment. Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998: 848-872) did research on emergent literacy and state that, “Emergent literacy consists of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are developmental precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing.” This implies that as children interact, either during play or in class, they will portray emergent literacy practices or skills referred to as literacy behaviour. One question arising from the definition of emergent literacy is: What skills do we find in emergent literacy which prove essential for conventional literacy development in children? Before this question is answered, it is important to explain why emergent literacy represents a continuum.

## **2.2 Emergent Literacy as a Continuum of Literacy Development**

The study by Rhyner, et al. (2009) explains that it is difficult to delink the sets of knowledge and skills children acquire, which show great support for the notion that emergent literacy represents the beginning of a continuum of literacy development in children. Teale and Sulzby (1986) reviewed early reading research and concluded from their findings, with a number of reasons, which support that the concept ‘emergent literacy’ is a continuum of literacy development. One of the reasons they advanced was that literacy development begins early in life and long before any formal literacy instruction in elementary and formal school. It is from their home environment that children acquire oral skills that are used for instruction at school. The second reason they

advanced was that there is an interrelationship between oral language skills (of listening and speaking) and literacy skills (of reading and writing) because the skills develop concurrently and in interrelated manner rather than in some sequence.

The third reason they noted was that the functions of literacy remain as important as those for oral language. For example, people order a meal by reading from menu at a restaurant, they obtain information on an event through hearing or reading, and they invite friends to a birthday party orally or by writing to them. The spoken forms are as important as those of literacy (the letters, the words and sentences) to the child's literacy development in early childhood. Their other argument in favour of emergent literacy as a continuum is that children's active exploration of print within their environment and their social interactions with adults, particularly their parents and other relatives within reading and writing contexts, provide important opportunities for adults to model literacy behaviour for children to learn. For example, reading the bible or magazine together, making a shopping budget together, following a drug dosage, and other events, are opportunities for children's learning.

The fact that acquisition and learning of language skills begins early in a child's life strengthens the concept that emergent literacy is the beginning of the continuum of literacy development. Justice (2006) observes that there are no definitive 'endpoints' along the path of children's development between emergent and conventional literacy development. This makes it even more difficult and complicated to draw separate lines of development of knowledge, skills and attitudes in children. This is the justification for continuity in learning to read and write at primary school with emergent literacy skills as the foundation.

### **2.3 The Literacy Skills in Emergent Literacy**

The most expected literacy behaviour from the children as they enter Grade 1 will be their ability to use their spoken language sufficiently well to facilitate easy communication while at school. Teachers in schools need to promote this skill among the learners. With a wide variety of vocabulary and structures they have acquired about their home language, children talk about their family, tell or narrate stories, interact with each other and follow instructions and commands. They will also be expected to know and use the writing tools such as pencils, pens and crayons for scribbling and drawing pictures of their own imaginations. Children will show ability in holding story books right side-up and flipping pages from left to right; they will be expected to talk about pictures in the story books and give their own interpretations about the pictures, they would say why people read and write and they would do pretend reading and pretend writing. From the emergent literacy perspective, such literate behaviour exhibited by children seems to match the statement by Barton (2007) which says literacy is embedded in language. The teacher in the classroom should consider such literacy behaviours as the starting point for any scaffolding strategies towards children's conventional literacy development.

Children gain phonological awareness of their language and they develop knowledge about print in their environment through stimulating experiences and support provided in the home by parents and other key caregivers (Dickinson & Neuman, 2006; Korat, 2005; Vygotsky, 1962). Activities of looking through books, singing songs and nursery rhymes, encouraging communication and dramatic play, continually promote the development of the said skills with a rich oral language. These emergent literacy skills are what Beth

Phillips (n.d.) calls “the basic building blocks for learning to read and write” ([bphillips@fccr.org](mailto:bphillips@fccr.org)). Cited examples are that beginning from birth young children experience oral language and a variety of instances of literacy interaction such as bedtime storytelling and, or story reading, picture reading, pretend reading, drawing, scribbling, saying rhymes, playing games, and singing activities among others that set the stage for early literacy development in them (Neuman & Dickinson, 2006).

What would be of interest are the other literacy skills in emergent literacy that are of benefit to literacy development as stated in some of the definitions above. Matafwali (2010: 29) cites NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (2005) who state, “Learning to read successfully is heavily dependent on mastery of a number of basic perceptual, cognitive, and language processes, including phonological awareness, orthographic, semantic, and comprehension skills.” This suggests that for children to easily and effectively learn to read and write conventionally, they need to have knowledge of the above listed language skills. Whitehurst and Lonigan (2001, cited in Matafwali, 2010) show that the phonological awareness (or processes) are essential for learning to read. As earlier stated, one cardinal foundational skill that should not be ignored is the ‘phonological awareness’. Phonological awareness is awareness about the sounds of a language. It is the ability to hear, recognize and distinguish the sounds in a language. This ability helps learners to realize that each word is made up of several speech sounds. Oral language abilities that children acquire, especially vocabulary, lay a very strong foundation for phonological sensitivity, which is a key language skill towards learning to read and write (Sénéchal, 2009).

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) further says children learn to divide the words into separate sounds, move sounds around, add other sounds, and then ‘map’ them onto in print. Phonemic awareness is knowledge of individual sounds (or phonemes) in a language. It is part of phonological awareness. Both phonological and phonemic awareness help children become prepared to learn how letters and sounds go together into words. These abilities make it much easier for one to learn to read and write. What this entails is that those children entering school with strong speech and language skills will acquire quickly and successfully the literacy skills. On the other hand, weak skills in phonological awareness are a primary cause for reading difficulties in some learners (Sénéchal, 2009). This explains what role both phonological and phonemic awareness, which are components of emergent literacy, play in literacy development.

Studies on literacy indicate that children begin the process of learning to read and write very early in life and that the children are able to demonstrate these signs of literacy such as being able to identify signs and labels in their play activities. The children’s early reading and writing behaviours mark the beginning of their development into conventional reading and writing processes (Teal & Sulzby, 1989). Bustos (1999) cites Sulzby (1991) who describes this as the development from picture-governed to print-governed attempts at reading. The children who are beginning to read conventionally attend to print using their knowledge of grapheme-phoneme correspondence, which builds up from oral language. Studies on emergent literacy by Gunn, Simmons and Kameenui (1995) show that awareness of print, relationship of print to speech, text structure, phonological awareness, and letter reading and writing components are interrelated and develop concurrently. Phonemic awareness or the ability to focus and manipulate phonemes in spoken words and

knowledge of the alphabet are two best predictors of how well children will learn to read and write (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Finally, the strategies for increasing literacy development focus not only on improving the reading skills, but also on developing the higher-order thinking skills that enable learners to comprehend, analyze and communicate ideas. This calls for well-designed literacy programmes that will provide learners with frequent opportunities to efficiently practice the language skills of listening and speaking, and reading and writing for varied authentic purposes in their everyday life. Zimba (2011) indicates that available literature on emergent literacy suggests that early childhood experiences affect successful reading acquisition along several dimensions. The current language policy on literacy in Zambia under the Primary Reading Programme (PRP) is a means through which emergent literacy skills in children would be utilized meaningfully for the development of conventional reading and writing skills, alongside the oral language skills. It was for this reason that this study was undertaken to establish if teachers in Grade 1 utilize the emergent literacy skills of their school children for a smooth and continued development of both the oral language and conventional literacy skills.

#### **2.4 Advanced Prerequisite Skills to Literacy Development**

Research by the National Reading Panel (2000) shows that literacy develops over time as the learners progress from emergent to skilled readers and writers who can comprehend and analyze complex texts. What this suggests is that reading for understanding requires an active thinking process that is influenced by the reader's prior knowledge and experiences. As stated by Matafwali (2010), the child's success throughout formal education depends

largely on the ability of the individual learner to read for meaning. Ability to read, therefore, is a positive and significant step towards the child's learning process and success at school. The foundational skills in language development that children experience through emergent literacy are essential for the development of conventional literacy skills at Grade 1 (Sénéchal, 2009).

As observed by the National Reading Panel (2000), proficient reading requires drawing inferences by using background knowledge along clues provided in the text, and ability to separate main ideas from other details. This may be achieved with the help of knowledge of foundational skills coupled with comprehension abilities. The learner must go beyond the information given to achieve meaningful learning (Vygotsky, 1962; Brnner, 1960; 1987). Given this knowledge then, the following are some of the foundational skills and strategies that a learner in Grade 1 must develop along in order for one to become a proficient reader Zambia looks forward to produce: ability at activating background knowledge while learning how to read and write; ability at making connections between new and previously acquired knowledge. In addition, the learner must exercise self-questioning skills to clarify and deepen understanding of what he or she is reading. Another important skill is that of using sensory images to understand and visualize ideas. The task before the teacher should be to facilitate the development of these skills in the learner through appropriate classroom teaching approaches and strategies. This study sought to address this concern about conventional literacy learning from the initial development stage in Grade1 by investigating whether teachers knew the emergent literacy skills and if they applied them in teaching literacy. This study intended to fill this

knowledge gap in teaching where children should benefit from their previously acquired knowledge through the teacher's assistance as they learn to read and write.

Emergent literacy is based on behaviours modeled and supported by adults who interact with the child during cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978; Piaget, 1966). As children socialize with adults, they experience literacy events, the practices that encourage children to change and refine their own ideas to more closely match conventional notions. The assumption then is that when a child arrives at school for Grade 1 he/she already knows a great deal about language and literacy. The acquisition of most such literacy behaviours and practices takes place over a stretched period in a child's life, meaning that the skills take place on a developmental continuum, starting early in the life of a child to just before they enter the formal school environment.

Worth noting is the fact that the word-knowledge that children acquire through oral language development becomes important for learning the printed words at a later stage. Glazer (1989) does suggest that without oral language, it might be impossible for the affected child to develop the ability to read and write. Jennings (n.d.) (<http://www.ehow.com/about-role-language-development>) gives a similar view that oral language acquisition lays the foundation for learning reading, writing and speaking skills, and it is a good indicator of how well and how quickly literacy will develop in a child. By the school age, children will have gained enough competence in the spoken language to help them progress in their path of language and literacy development. Teachers need to take advantage of such competences to introduce new language skills to the children. In addition, teachers should be aware that the concept emergent literacy embodies more of the

literacy skills than what schools currently cover under pre-reading skills. The pre-reading skills covered under reading readiness do not adequately describe the experiences children undergo towards the development of the literacy skills. To adequately stimulate learners' interest for literacy learning, teachers need to exploit and apply emergent literacy skills in their teaching. What advantages has emergent literacy over reading readiness?

## **2.5 Reading Readiness in Emergent Literacy**

Emergent literacy overrides the idea of 'reading readiness' which emerged in the 1920s. Reading readiness suggested that there was a period during the pre-school years during which children developed skills necessary for learning reading and writing. In this century, emergent literacy shows that this process begins long before children are able to read and write (Fields & Spangler, 2000; Teale & Sulzby, 1986, cited in Rhyner, et al. 2009). Because of the close relationship between emergent literacy and early language acquisition, authors such as Strickland and Morrow (1988); Clay (1991); Neuman and Roskos (1993); and Justice (2006) advocate that emergent literacy begins at birth. Therefore, teachers no longer need to talk about reading readiness skills before they can begin to teach the young ones the skills of reading and writing. Utilization of 'emergent literacy skills' should be the concept upon which to base the teaching of reading and writing to children in Grade 1 today because reading readiness skills are embedded in emergent literacy.

The traditional belief concerning literacy learning is that it begins when children start school and are "ready" to learn to read and write as stated in Terrell (1994). The notion of emergent literacy, in contrast, postulates that children acquire knowledge about

relationships among oral language, reading, and writing before entering school as supported by Morrow & Smith (1990, as cited in Dickinson and Neuman, 2006). Learning to read and write is not a matter of readiness, but is integrated with and naturally embedded in the many routine social interactions with literate individuals that children interact with from infancy onward ( see Heath, 1982; Stallman & Pearson, 1990; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; from <http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art> ...). In discussing what early literacy is and how it is commonly measured, Britto, et al. (as cited in Dickinson and Neuman, 2006: 311) give a further explanation where they state that, "... literacy development can be understood in terms of acquisition of a set of complex multidimensional skills that take place on a developmental continuum, with its origins early in life." This means that learning of literacy is a build-up process from early childhood stage until this child enters the formal school system in Grade 1, and will continually accumulate the necessary reading, writing and decoding or interpretive skills of a given language with help from the people the child associates with in life.

As a concern for this study, there was need, therefore, to broaden the foundational base of literacy learning by using the emergent literacy skills in teaching. These skills and attitudes that children portray are what the class teacher should look out for as potential foundational information to be used as the starting point in teaching reading and writing. The said skills provide continuity in literacy development among the children. The approach most applicable in this type of learning is moving from the known to unknown. It is necessary to present the theory behind this approach to teaching.

## **2.6 ‘Going Beyond the Information Given’ Through Scaffolding**

One of Bruner's theoretical ideas of learning is based on the theme that learners construct new ideas or concepts based on existing knowledge (Bruner, 1966; 1983). His emphasis was on the point that acquiring new knowledge meant a learner fitting new knowledge on the already existing one, a process that involves going beyond information that is already known. Bruner (1974) defined thinking as ‘going beyond the information given’. He stresses that learning is an active process, and the elements of the process include selection and transformation of information, decision-making, generating theories and making meaning from the experiences that an individual has undergone during his or her development.

Bruner (1987) referred to the teacher’s process of facilitating learning in the classroom as ‘Scaffolding’. Scaffolding refers to various forms of adult support offered to the learner to facilitate the process of transition from teacher assistance to independence at solving problems. It is the form of support from the teacher or other peers for the development and learning of children. The question arising from this concept is, ‘How does the teacher choose the right kind of assistance that will later lead to learner’s independent performance during literacy learning? In the classroom situation, the literacy teacher is expected to help learners to use their oral language skills to learn how to read and write conventionally. Bruner proposes that the teacher’s role in the teaching process should be to prompt, encourage and provide clues to the learner who should actively engage in learning himself. For children this process of cognitive development occurs with emergent literacy at play, which is utilizing their background knowledge to learn new information.

To support this continued development towards learning of reading and writing skills in Grade 1, instruction must hinge on what the child already knows (the cultural tools) about literacy. Based on the theory of learning from the known to unknown, one of the objectives of this study, therefore, was to establish the utilization of emergent literacy for continued literacy development among the learners by building new knowledge on the previously acquired literacy skills. This research was conducted with a view to establish how the formal school instructional system utilizes emergent literacy in children to promote literacy development on a continuum model. A review of study reports was found to be necessary in order to distinguish the focus of those reports from the focus of this study.

## **2.7 European Studies on Emergent Literacy**

The first of these reports is that by Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) who carried out a research on child development and emergent literacy in which they used both quantitative and qualitative studies. The quantitative studies were used to examine the relation between emergent literacy and the acquisition of conventional literacy while the qualitative studies were used to examine the development of behaviours of preschool-aged children in response to literacy materials and tasks. The aim of their study was to survey emergent literacy with particular emphasis on applied issues, at a level that would be useful to both psychologists and educators. Their research brought out relevant theoretical concepts and facts about emergent literacy which apply to this date and this study in particular.

It has been documented in their research that literacy consists of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are developmental precursors to reading and writing. They show how an emergent literacy perspective views literacy-related behaviours occurring in preschool

period as legitimate and important aspects for later literacy development. Their research report provides a preliminary typology of children's emergent literacy skills, a review of evidence that relates emergent literacy to reading, and a review of evidence for linking children's emergent literacy environments and the development of emergent literacy skills. From their findings, they outlined the components of emergent literacy in relation to reading skills as follows:

- i. There are outside-in skills or processes of emergent literacy which include language, conceptual knowledge, conventions of print and emergent reading.
- ii. There are inside-out skills or processes of emergent literacy which involve phonological awareness, syntactic awareness, phoneme-grapheme correspondence, and emergent writing.

Other skills include phonological memory and print motivation as suggested by others.

The relevance of their study to the current one is that it provided an established source of the definitions and belief about emergent literacy which the current study applied. The current study focused on the application of children's emergent literacy for conventional literacy development at school level. Additionally, the current study aimed at finding out how the potential emergent literacy skills in children were applied at formal school for teaching reading and writing to children as proposed by Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998).

Another study was by Bustos (1999). She conducted an exploratory, descriptive study to investigate the unique emergent literacy behaviours of Filipino deaf children. She employed the moderate participant observation method as the main data collection

technique. Bustos (1999) did purposive sampling to select her targeted population. Her investigation was based on exploring three categories involving early reading, early writing and book orientation literacy behaviours.

Early reading behaviours referred to attempts at recognizing and decoding print once children had an opportunity to interact with environmental print, and as stimulus lessons were introduced. The children from the oral school, which was the control group of the study, exhibited phonemic awareness behaviour by moving their lips and made sounds while attempting to read, which the deaf children could not do. For the control group, this was an indication that they had knowledge of letter – sound relationships. The reason why the deaf children could not exhibit the phonemic awareness skills was that their learning model did not rely on the oral – aural channel. Oral language could not be considered as the basis for literacy development for the deaf children.

Early writing behaviours ranged from hand dominance, grip control, strokes, scribbles, drawings, letter strings and single letter representations or common words in children's written work in their environment. The deaf children demonstrated grip control and strokes by the hand, wrote from left to right, copied letters correctly, interacted with other deaf children, and used drawings and scribbles as message carriers. For communication, they relied on gestures and 'home sign language', which the researcher could not qualify as language. According to Bustos (1999), gestures and home signs did not comprise language. For the third category of Bustos' (1999) study, book orientation behaviours referred to the manner of handling books or behaviours of examining books independently once they had an opportunity to interact with reading books. From her observation, the children chose

books with characters, held them correctly, opened the book correctly and flipped pages sequentially, looked at pages variably, and took books back to shelves or table.

Bustos (1999) categorized deaf children's emergent literacy behaviours using Pado's (1990) classification of literacy behaviour of preschool age Filipino children; Sulzby's (1991) storybook reading; Morrow's (1990) categories of coding children's responses under interactive story reading; and Medrano's (1997) classification of early writing attempts, which could apply universally in an emergent literacy study.

The significance of Bustos' (1999) study to this one is that it helps to confirm the presence of emergent literacy skills in children, and that the emergent literacy in children becomes essential for later literacy instruction at a formal school set up later on the continuum line of literacy development. The fact that both groups were enrolled at a formal preschool level and exploitation of emergent literacy was possible at preschool level, gave an inspiration to this study that utilization of emergent literacy at the formal school set up was very much possible and workable for the continuous development of conventional literacy among the Zambian Grade 1 learners.

In her study report, Bustos (1999) cites Jennings (1965) who once said, "Reading begins with wonder at the world around us." As regards literacy learning, the implication from this statement is that the wonder experienced by children causes them to explore the print-rich environments and find connections between print and language in various ways. Bagga-Gupta (2004) expresses this view differently when he says reading and writing skills are communication practices that enable human beings to relate to reality. This clearly signifies that conventional literacy goes beyond traditional views of reading and

writing. McLane and McNamee (1990) also give their own explanation about literacy which implies that literacy involves mastery of a number of attitudes, expectations, feelings, behaviours and skills that relate to written language, which teachers were expected to look out for and utilize during their teaching. This is workable in Zambia.

Another related study was conducted in the United States of America. Bodrova and Leong (2001) collaboratively conducted a case study called, 'The Tools of the Mind', a project which aimed at fostering the cognitive development of young children in relation to early literacy learning. Additionally, the two researchers and authors developed a number of tools to support early learning and a highly innovative method for training teachers in using the designed approaches. Their monograph informs us that piloting of their approaches demonstrated the potential to develop children's early literacy skills, and the approaches are increasingly being used in early childhood education programmes in the United States. Their project was based on the theories of Vygotsky and as applied in the cultural context of the United States. The question that arises is, how possible is it in our Zambian schools to apply the Vygotskian theories using the prevailing Zambian cultural contexts?

The low levels of achievement of American students in general and specifically on international tests in mathematics and literacy was the main problem that influenced their case study. The 'Tools of the Mind' project began as a search for tools to support the cognitive development of young children. The project was developed to address issues affecting educators of young children from pre-school to Grade 2. For example, they focused on the need for developmentally appropriate techniques for scaffolding both

underlying cognitive skills and foundational literacy skills for children. Their other focus was on the need for classroom instruments that combine authentic classroom assessments which are standardized with best features. They also considered the need for a mechanism to monitor child progress towards required standards.

Generally, their collaborative project focused on aspects that address issues of learning and development of children. Their collaborative efforts ended up focusing on the development of a number of teaching tools to scaffold early learning and a unique method of training teachers in how to use these tools which they created based on the Vygotskian approach. The strategies they created support the development of early literacy, meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic skills as well as other foundational literacy skills. Bodrova and Leong (2001) further conducted an empirical evaluation of the project, and the results of the project revealed that the strategies had a positive effect on literacy achievement in young children. Similarly, this study was aimed at establishing what tools were designed to scaffold literacy skills development.

In their case, they developed the 'Early Literacy Advisor' (ELA), a diagnostic-prescriptive computerized assessment tool that acts as an 'expert teacher'. The tool is capable of generating information for advising on how to address the specific instructional needs of an individual learner. The teachers are made to use specific assessment results of their learners to arrive at most suitable classroom literacy activities for their learners. The teachers are also made to learn the concepts of Zone of Proximal Development and scaffolding as they apply in their own teaching, instead of having lectures on the Vygotskian approach. Their monograph also reports that at many levels, the 'Early

Literacy Advisor' (ELA) was able to break down barriers to innovation in literacy teaching. Alongside the ELA, educational videos, books and articles for literacy teaching were developed. This study was designed with a view to seek innovations in literacy instruction and break down some barriers to literacy development.

How does the study by Bodrova and Leong (2001) help solve this out? One of the benefits the current research achieved from 'Tools of the Mind' project is the concerns about classroom learning shared under a similar theoretical framework. The theoretical framework that formed the basis of the 'Tools of the Mind' project was the Cultural Historical Theory of Lev Vygotsky (1896 - 1934). Vygotsky (1978) pioneered the revolutionary approach to two issues of learning and development. According to Vygotsky, the Social-Cultural Context in which learning occurred (Bodrova & Leong, 2001) shaped children's learning. As proposed by Vygotsky (1978), children's constructed or spontaneous (natural) learning is influenced by children's own learning, and culminates into their own mental development. The social context plays a greater role towards children's learning. In the process, children acquire specific cultural tools, handed down to them by more experienced members of society. These cultural tools facilitate the acquisition of 'higher mental functions', which include focused attention, deliberate memory, and logical thought (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Bodrova & Leong, 2001). Through the cultural tools or artifacts, children learn to use language first to communicate with people and later regulate their own behaviour. Without the necessary tools, children have little or no control over what they can remember and when they can remember it. This study sought whether or not the children in Zambian schools exposed to such cultural tools received literacy instruction through scaffolding while in their classrooms.

For educators to follow Vygotsky's beliefs about the process of learning and development, the goal of early instruction years at school must aim at equipping children with tools that will lead to development of higher mental functions the children need most in order to succeed at school. The current research was designed with the central idea being utilization of the various 'cultural tools' in the classroom to foster continuous learning of literacy skills of reading and writing.

While maintaining the theoretical foundations underlying the project that developed in the United States, the worthwhile educational practices that emanated from the project may spark the creation of new literacy practices in the Grade 1 Zambian primary school classrooms and help with the continuous development of literacy skills among learners. The study by Bodrova and Leong (2001) provides a platform on which to share ideas about new literacy instructional practices befitting the Zambian classroom. When achieved, the newly developed instructional practices may be useful in addressing the current literacy teaching problems to an extent where the Grade 1 teacher would easily implement the methods in his or her classroom. Zambia needs developmentally appropriate literacy instructional practices that will produce consistent achievement gains among our learners.

Tizard and Hughes (1984) embarked on a study called, 'Young Children Learning: Talking and Thinking at Home and School'. Their study cites examples of experiences of children in Britain at Nursery school as observed by teachers and parents. From their studies, they concluded that teachers felt parents should model themselves on teachers. On the other hand, parents feel teachers inhibited much of children's decision-making and negotiated behaviour of their children. Teachers were said to exhibit too much restriction on

children's learning. Their other conclusion was that teachers create artificial situations in the classroom. One example cited was that teacher's initiated talk in the classroom was mainly about play rather than the rich variety of situations that children discussed at home. Teachers created classroom activities without real and meaningful communication.

The other major finding from their study was that teachers were more intent on pursuing their own educational ends than offering children the chance to explore the world at their own level. In the classroom, the lesson objectives tended to dictate achieving aims of the lesson than focusing on the child. The objectives of the lesson limited the teaching pattern in the classroom, thereby ignoring children's needs and interests.

The relevance of this study by Tizard and Hughes (1984) is that it brings out the weaknesses of the teacher in the classroom as regards teaching of literacy to young children. Besides, the study also points out lack of much needed partnership between teachers and parents over children's learning. The missing rich variety of real life situations in the classroom environment involves children's background knowledge or the 'cultural tools' that children depended on to interact and communicate with the society. Such is the knowledge that must be utilized to ensure continuous learning of conventional literacy skills at a later stage in formal school. The focus of this study was to establish if teachers in Zambia utilized children's previous knowledge to assist them learn to read and write under formal classroom environment.

## **2.8 Study Conducted in South Africa**

In South Africa, Hodgskiss (2007) conducted a school-based case study to trace the development of emergent literacy in Grade R class and on the need of emergent literacy for successful literacy development among children in South African Schools. The purpose of her study was to trace and document children's emergent literacy development in a Grade R class in South Africa. Her sample consisted of 4 children and the parents of the four participants. The interpretive approach was used to collect and analyse data. The findings of the study revealed that Social Class and language were some of the factors that impacted significantly on children's literacy development. Conversely, the study also revealed that disparities between the English and Xhosa-speaking children had a considerable impact as well on the children's literacy performance. The Xhosa-speaking children lagged behind their English-speaking peers in literacy achievement.

In the report, Hodgskiss (2007) points out that under-resourced schools in South Africa could not encourage emergent literacy behaviour among the children. Teachers need to create a literacy rich environment in their classrooms in order to encourage literacy practices. The report also points out of the need for teachers to be given the tools and materials in order to implement literacy in schools and to ensure a deep understanding of children's literacy development. The report states further that children learn to become literate by interacting with print themselves and that the "roots of literacy" (Goodman, 1980 as cited in Hodgskiss, 2007: 12) are established in early childhood through real life situations. As stated, literacy is functional in any society. In order to identify the gaps in

Hodgskiss' study, we needed to answer the question of how relevant the study is to the current one.

One important fact about Hodgskiss (2007) study is that it provides insights on the possibilities of applying emergent literacy behaviour for promoting children's literacy development in school. In addition, the study informs us of how some aspects of emergent literacy like social class, language and interaction with print by the children themselves, impact significantly for literacy development among the school children. The following questions need answers: Does this work in the Zambian schools and if so, to what extent? Do the teachers in Zambia have this information about emergent literacy? Do they know how it significantly affects literacy development among the learners? Do the children in Grade 1 have that opportunity to interact with more print materials during literacy lessons? Hence, this study was instituted to investigate the nature of classrooms' environment and what patterns during the literacy lessons.

## **2.9 Studies on Emergent Literacy in Zambia**

There are recent studies on emergent literacy that have been conducted in Zambia based on the definition pioneered in the Western World. To date, there has not been any documented investigation in Zambia as regards utilization of emergent literacy in a Grade 1 classroom as the base for teaching children the 'literacy' skills of reading and writing on a continuum model. It was necessary, therefore, to bring on board insights from other researchers with a view to identifying the specific knowledge gaps and contributions this study was expected to make to the body of knowledge on emergent literacy.

Musonda (2011) carried out a study entitled: Literacy Behaviours which Preschoolers Exhibit in Selected Households of Lusaka. The aim of this study was to establish the literacy behaviour(s) that children already exhibit from their homes before receiving formal instruction in school. In this study, she based her investigation on the literacy behaviour(s) among preschoolers, which could be used as the starting point in learners' progression to conventional literacy when they enter Grade 1. Her research sought to establish answers to questions such as: What observable literacy activities were in children's homes that would support the development of emergent literacy? She also sought to find out what type of print existed in children's homes and their immediate environment before they started formal schooling. She also wanted to find out what children say was the use of print in their environment, and what role parents played in facilitating the development in their children.

**The objectives of her study were:**

- i. To find out the type of literacy activities that would support the development of emergent literacy in children's homes.
- ii. To find out the type of print environment existing in children's homes or immediate environment.
- iii. Establish children's views of print in the environment.
- iv. Establish the role of parents in facilitating literacy development in their children.

Musonda's (2011) research was naturalistic and she employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies for her study. To gather the needed data for the study, interviews, practical test and observation were used.

Musonda (2011) brings out the fact that emergent literacy involves listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities though not in the conventional sense. She also points out the fact that literacy development begins in the very early stages of childhood, and that the early literacy behaviours like 'reading' from pictures and writing with scribbles are an important part of children's literacy development. She established that a literate home environment supports development of literacy in young children. She further states that the early literacy experiences are essential for successful literacy acquisition. It was established that children generally exhibit enough literacy behaviour of various ranges that remain vital for successful literacy development.

The research she conducted was important to this research because it brought out the need to investigate how much of the exhibited literacy behaviour was used in the formal classroom environment for continued literacy development. This was expected to be new knowledge added to the body of knowledge on emergent literacy.

The second known study on emergent literacy in Zambia was based on the preschool sector. Zimba (2011) investigated the extent to which classroom practices in Zambian preschools support the continuation of emergent literacy in children. His study aimed at establishing the emergent literacy support in early childhood education in the selected preschools of Kasempa and Solwezi Districts. The objectives of his study were:

- i. To ascertain preschool teachers' knowledge of emergent literacy in children
- ii. To establish the extent to which classroom environment supports the continuation of emergent literacy
- iii. To establish what literacy instruction programme is in place and the extent to which it supports emergent literacy
- iv. To find out teaching and learning materials that are available in preschools and the extent to which they support emergent literacy
- v. To establish classroom literacy practices that obtain in preschools and to what extent they support emergent literacy.

Zimba's (2011) study was mainly qualitative in which he sought to interpret his observations and those of his respondents to establish the extent to which practices in the target schools support the continuation of emergent literacy.

Zimba (2011:5) reports that, "Research conducted on emergent literacy indicates that support to a child's emergent literacy in early childhood education facilitates easy literacy development in children." Like the home experiences, the support children receive during early childhood education must continue at primary school level as they learn to read and write conventionally. As a continuum process of acquiring the literacy knowledge, teachers at primary school need to exploit and utilize the literacy knowledge children have come with from homes and preschools into Grade 1, where they receive formal education, to ensure developmentally meaningful learning of the conventional literacy skills.

Using Zimba's study, the present study was instituted with a view to establish whether primary school teachers provide purposeful literacy development processes to the children by considering the knowledge children came with to Grade 1 rather than suppressing it (Hall, 1989, cited in Zimba, 2011). Research findings on emergent literacy pose a challenge to teachers of young children, to provide open-ended classroom activities to children as a means to utilize knowledge already acquired about literacy. The hope was that this type of instruction would build on what the child knows already and that it would support the child's continued growth in conventional reading and writing abilities offered at the primary school environment. Self-motivated and self-regulated learning might be the result if such instructional models were made available to Grade 1 children.

## **2.10 Summary**

This chapter has reviewed some studies on emergent literacy as precursor skills to the development of conventional literacy among children. It has reviewed foreign studies on emergent literacy research as well as studies done in Zambia to show how relevant the studies were to the current one and particularly with a view to bringing out the identified knowledge gap in the available literature.

The next chapter presents the methodology that applied in the current study, the population, sample size, data collection instruments and data analysis procedures that were used for this research.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

Methodology refers to a set of methods and principles used to perform a particular task (Kothari, 2004). Research methodology refers to the various steps and techniques that are generally adopted by a researcher in studying his or her research problem logically (Kothari, 2004). This chapter explains the methodology adopted for the study in terms of the research design, the population, sample size and sampling techniques, data collection instruments and data collection procedures, and data analysis. Finally, the chapter highlights some of the ethical issues that were taken into account during the research.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

As Kombo and Tromp (2006) state, research design is the conceptual structure within which the planned research is conducted. Research design shows the planned outline the researcher has opted to use to generate answers to the research problems identified. It is the scheme of the research. This study was a descriptive survey. Orodho (2003, as cited in Kombo & Tromp, 2009) says descriptive survey is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals. This study was also qualitative in nature since it required the researcher to describe the state of affairs as found and observed in their natural setting in the research sites. The research required reporting on the findings, classification, analysis and interpretation of data (after collection) in order to propose possible principles and solutions to the research problems. The research was also a naturalistic one because it required the researcher to collect data in

the natural setting by carrying out lesson observations in the normal classroom setting. There was no systematic manipulation of any process during data collection.

### **3.2 Population**

In research, a population is a group of individuals with at least one or more characteristics, which distinguish that group from the rest of individuals and the group should be of interest to the researcher (Best & Kahn, 2006). For this research, the targeted population consisted of all Grade 1 classes and their teachers in Mansa District. This group was targeted as the main source of information the researcher intended to collect.

#### **3.2.1 Sample Size**

A sample is a portion of the elements in a population (White, 2005). The sample for this study consisted of sixty-two (62) Grade 1 teachers and sixty-two classes (which gave 3,594 pupils) in thirty-two (32) primary schools. All the schools were selected from within Mansa District. Ten (10) of the schools were located in Mansa town and twenty-two (22) of them were from the outskirts. The targeted schools were those that offer initial literacy lessons using the New Breakthrough to Literacy (NBTL) methodology, and those that were easily accessible by motor transport.

#### **3.2.2 Sampling Techniques**

Sampling means making a selection from the population frame in order to identify the people or issues to be respondents or sources of information (White, 2005). Purposive sampling was used in this study to ensure that it captured the intended and rightful sample; that is, the primary schools that teach initial literacy in the local language. The sampling technique was based entirely on the judgement of the researcher. This sample was selected

as one thought of to provide the best information to address the purpose of the research. The thirty-two selected schools constituted a suitable and reliable sample for the research. Another condition taken into account was accessibility of the schools.

### **3.2.3 Data Collection Instruments**

The following instruments were used to collect data:

- i. **Classroom observation instrument:** Structured observation instrument was used to check classroom practices pertaining to teacher utilization of the emergent literacy knowledge learners may have acquired from birth up to the time they were enrolled in Grade 1. The instrument was also used to check for extra teaching and learning materials the teachers are using when teaching initial literacy to Grade 1 learners.
  
- ii. **Interview guide:** For this research, a semi-structured interview guide was used for data collection. The written questions in the semi-structured interview guide were of great use when interviewing the grade 1 teachers about what they knew of emergent literacy. The focus of the interview was on whether teachers use this knowledge from among the learners during teaching of conventional literacy. The interview also aimed at finding out if teachers knew how valuable emergent literacy was to the learners in the classroom's learning situation. It was also possible to draw comments from teachers on the current methods for teaching initial literacy, their experiences and challenges they encounter during teaching of initial literacy to Grade 1 learners. In the quest to investigate effective utilization of emergent literacy skills among Grade 1 learners during teaching of initial

literacy, the focused interviews conducted gave the researcher a detailed understanding of teacher's knowledge and attitude in relation to the topic under investigation.

### **3.2.4 Data collection procedures**

This study involved description of the state of affairs, as it existed at the time of data collection. Descriptive survey was the method employed for collecting information by observing the lessons, and interviewing the Grade 1 teachers on the teaching of initial literacy in their classes. A set of expected classroom attitudes, behaviours and conducts were looked out for in the classrooms during the observations. A set of questions were constructed for use in the classroom to solicit the desired research information.

The data were collected in two (2) ways as follows:

#### **(i) Lesson observation**

The researcher then began the data collection exercise by conducting lesson observations of the actual literacy lessons being taught by each of the teachers, using the observation checklist instrument. The teacher was allowed to teach his or her lesson normally while the researcher sat at the back of the class quietly taking complete and descriptive field notes of the observations he was looking out for in the lesson using a pre-designed lesson observation guide.

Some of the emergent literacy practices looked out for in the lessons included pupil's knowledge of how to hold and use various writing tools, teacher-initiated scribbling, drawing, and copying or writing activities. Learners' holding of storybooks right side up, teacher instruction on flipping of pages from left to the write, varied picture reading

exercises initiated by the teacher, and pretend reading. Looked out for writing exercises from the teacher that involved left to right eye-movement patterns, observed learners general interest towards learning and how the children value print material, what traditional or word games and songs teacher used for purposes of teaching literacy skills, what oral language activities and other practices which focused on literacy learning were employed in the lessons. The observer was alert for non occurrences, that is, things that should have happened but did not. The researcher was also interested in finding out if teachers use any other teaching and learning materials that would invoke learners' background knowledge to help them easily learn the literacy skills. Nearly all the teachers showed willingness to participate in the research. The data collection exercise in the selected schools (research sites) lasted five (5) weeks.

**(ii) Post-lesson oral interview with each teacher observed**

After the class observations, the researcher used the designed interview guide and carried out the face-to-face interview with each one of the teachers observed. According to Tuckman (as cited in Cohen and Manion (1981: 243), an interview “provides access to what is inside a person’s head, makes it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences) and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs).” The focus of the interview was on teachers’ knowledge and perspective on emergent literacy. The investigation was on how important this knowledge was for teaching reading and writing in a formal literacy classroom. During this process, the researcher was in a position to find out what challenges teachers experienced during teaching of literacy and further probed on some of the major and

interesting issues that arose from the teacher's responses. The interviewer avoided being judgemental during the interviews by relying on what was observed. The main aim was to find out how much teachers of conventional literacy in Grade 1 knew about emergent literacy and if at all, they utilized this knowledge from among their learners while teaching them to read and write under the New Breakthrough to Literacy methodology.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

Since this was a qualitative research, data analysis was mainly interpretive and involved categorizing of findings. Thematic data analysis began as soon as the data collection exercise was in process. The procedure followed was by identifying and organizing information according to categories in relation to set research objectives and questions. The aim was to write objective accounts of fieldwork experiences. Description, explanation and interpretation of the observations and responses were done, followed by a summary report under identified major themes and conclusion.

### **3.4 Reflections on Ethical Issues**

The following were taken into consideration to ensure that Research Ethics were observed: The researcher first sought permission through a letter from the Provincial Education Office and the District Education Board Secretary, for Mansa District, to conduct this educational research in the selected primary schools in Mansa. After authority was granted, the researcher went round the schools to distribute the 'Informed Consent Form' to Grade 1 teachers through their Head teachers. Before any lesson observation was done, the researcher explained to the teacher the purpose of the visit in line with contents of the 'Informed Consent Form', which they signed.

The designed Informed Consent Forms were distributed to the intended respondents to seek their informed consent about the research at school level and to assure them that participation in the research by the teaching staff was voluntary. At the sites where permission was granted, the respondents (Grade 1 teachers) were briefed about the procedures to be used, and the purpose of the research. To maintain confidentiality, participants were assured that their names would not be used on the observation instrument. This was done as planned by using letter codes, instead. They were also assured that the data collected would not be disclosed to other persons. To ensure that the school programmes were not interrupted, lesson observations were conducted following the usual class timetables. The interviews were administered outside the class hours after lesson observations. All other consequences as regards the research process were entirely the responsibility of the researcher.

### **3.5 Summary**

This chapter has explained the scheme of the research, that is, the methodology used to carry out the research. It has highlighted on the research design, the population, sample size and sampling techniques, data collection instruments and data collection procedures, and data analysis. The chapter closes with a reflection on research ethical issues observed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents research findings based on the thematic approach of data organization and analysis. Information has been presented under themes derived from the research objectives and questions that were formulated for this study. The sub-themes under 4.2 and 4.4 relate to the research questions and objectives that guided the lesson observations and post-lesson interviews that were conducted with respondents. The findings from both the standardized observation and interview instruments have been presented under the themes derived from the objectives of the research. The following were the objectives of the study:

- i. Establish what primary school teachers know about emergent literacy;
- ii. Determine whether or not primary school teachers utilize emergent literacy skills for teaching learners to read and write.
- iii. Establish what extra teaching and learning materials teachers design to help utilize emergent literacy for teaching learners to read and write; and
- iv. Establish the challenges Grade 1 teachers encounter in utilizing emergent literacy.

Arising from the objectives, the study sought to answer the following questions:

- i. What do primary school teachers know about emergent literacy?
- ii. How do teachers utilize emergent literacy skills when teaching reading and writing?

- iii. What extra teaching and learning materials are designed to help teachers utilize emergent literacy for teaching learners to read and write?
- iv. What challenges do Grade 1 teachers encounter in utilizing emergent literacy among the Grade 1 learners?

The chapter aimed to find out what answers the collected data provides to the questions that were set in line with the objectives of the study. The themes under which the major findings have been presented were drawn from the research objectives. The chapter ends with a summary to the research findings.

#### **4.1 Primary school teachers' Knowledge of Emergent literacy**

In line with objective number 1, this study established that none of the sixty-two (62) Grade 1 teachers observed and interviewed had an idea about emergent literacy. None of them was able to answer the question that focused on the importance of emergent literacy in class during teaching and learning of initial literacy. It was equally difficult for all the respondents to cite examples on how they utilized emergent literacy knowledge from among the learners in their teaching sessions. Neither, could they state the problems they encountered nor experienced in their efforts to utilize emergent literacy for continuous literacy development among their learners.

On the question about how teachers value or consider children's previous experiences during literacy lessons, most of the teachers stated that learners come to school in Grade 1 without knowing anything, especially if they had not been to nursery school. One common comment to the question was that learner's background was unreliable because they had not been to preschool.

*“I have to begin from the scratch”*, one teacher said. An additional comment was that, *“It is quite difficult to organize the learners since everything is new to them.”* It was further stated that, *“We take children as coming from unknown backgrounds, and this does not matter, the teacher has to begin everything with them right from the base.”* From the teachers’ observation, *“Preschool learners did much better than those who came direct from home.”* However, another respondent reported that the learners in her class from preschool found problems with the local language. Only one teacher gave a contrary comment based on her experience that, *“It is important to use learners’ environmental background to teach them to write what they say.”* The teacher further stated that this was achieved by asking learners to talk about their homes in relation to the literacy lesson for that day. Though this was the response, there was no activity in her lesson that depicted the aspect to do with learners’ background.

A related response from another teacher was that, *“The language children used at home was the same language we use for teaching them literacy.”* It was exemplified that the use of a local language helps learners to participate and interact freely during lessons and learners capture information quickly. Oral language, which is a component emergent literacy, is the basis for teaching learners the literacy skills. One other common response from most teachers was that traditional songs and storytelling are helpful and valuable during literacy lessons. Contrary to the above information was the response that, *“Children’s background does not matter in the teaching of literacy because learners come from different homes with various backgrounds.”* The emphasis was that children come to school without any literacy. While some children showed interest to learn, it was

completely the opposite with other learners. The feeling of many teachers was that they needed to encourage, or force the children to begin learning from the scratch.

## **4.2 Grade 1 Teachers' Utilization of Emergent Literacy**

This theme is responding to objective number 1. The Breakthrough to Literacy lesson in the schools comprised stages at which emergent literacy could be utilized in a classroom through a variety of activities. The three lesson stages were 'Starting Together', 'Teaching Corner' and 'Sharing Together', each of which comprised a variety of activities that may have involved usage of emergent literacy skills. It was under such activities that the researcher sought to observe utilization of emergent literacy among the learners in each of the classes that were targeted for the study. This was sought under the following 4 sub-themes:

### **4.2.1 Classroom oral language for literacy development**

To mark the beginning of the literacy lesson at 'Starting Together' stage, the teacher and learners briefly discussed the picture on the selected storybook. Spoken language is the starting point for literacy development. This area was important for the researcher to investigate as to how much of the emergent literacy embedded in oral language was to be used by the teacher. The next activity involved the teacher reading part of the story in that book to the whole class. The teacher then asked some questions based on the story. Fifty-seven (57) teachers followed this pattern of teaching. The other five teachers opted to narrate a short story to the class after which they asked some questions as well.

In terms of preparing activities to follow the story, the majority of teachers (fifty-three of them) did not prepare any activities that required learners to interpret the meanings of the

stories read or narrated, or relating the stories to real life situations at home. Only nine (9) teachers required their learners to relate the stories they had heard to their own situations. In two different classes, the teachers asked their learners to compare what they had heard in the stories to their own homes. In the other seven classes, the teachers asked learners to give their own experiences in relation to the story they had heard and what they knew about things mentioned in the story. Oral language activities in a literacy lesson were very important for the researcher because they were to reveal what emergent literacy skills the sampled learners possessed. The expectation was that richer the oral vocabulary learners exhibited, the more emergent literacy there was in the learners for the teacher to make use of in his/her teaching of reading and writing skills.

Learners were asked, for example, to state how they would have behaved themselves at home, church, or *Insaka*. There were no other activities or tasks prepared for learners meant to further exploit the stories they had heard through reading or narration. Learners hardly talked about their families. This was where the teacher would have explored most of the emergent literacy in pupils. They never engaged in conversations that would help them learn or realise the usefulness of stories that they had heard, read or narrated to them. Learners never engaged in any activities that would have helped develop their memory and broaden their attention span and as a way of making them more involved in learning activities. None of the teachers involved learners in language-based play as a means to improve speaking and listening skills. There was no provision of meaningful context and concrete experiences for learners to use language and integrate opportunities to read, write, speak and listen. All these skills emerge from emergent literacy.

#### **4.2.2 Classroom reading activities for literacy development**

At the 'Teaching Corner' stage, individual or group reading activities were given to the learners for practice. Though some of the teachers tended to distribute the storybooks to some learners or groups concerned, they did so without any accompanying instructions on the usage of the books. It was only in rare cases that few teachers gave instructions regarding handling of the storybooks. Instructions like take care of the books, no use of saliva, do not tear or fold the books were very rarely given. In some cases, some teachers went round the class opening the pages where learners would find the work to do. This trend was common even during use of the 'Learners Activity Books', which contain writing tasks for learners. Teachers assumed that learners on their own could not manage to open books to the right pages because they did not know how to do it. Some teachers did confirm that most of the learners came from their homes without knowing a single skill associated with reading and writing. With this idea in their minds, most of the teachers had to perform such tasks of opening book pages for their learners to work on.

Teachers noted that while some learners showed interest and willingness to learn how to read and write, others had to be forced to do so by beginning with pre-reading and pre-writing activities. Teachers thought learners' backgrounds had a negative effect on the child's attitude toward school in general. Yet, appreciation of learners' background, which is a component of emergent literacy, could have come out very well to the teacher's advantage during teaching of reading and writing.

Throughout the observation period, no teacher gave learners an independent task that concerned learners' usage of storybooks from the classroom library corner such as

interpreting and telling stories from the pictures in the book. The only and most common activity that required picture reading was the one where the teacher was required to elicit the key sentence for the day's lesson using the 'conversation poster', as established in the lesson daily routine. The main reading task learners did was to practice reading of the elicited key sentence, which the teacher wrote on the chalkboard. There was no other reading opportunity for the learners, and there were no other tasks based on reading materials provided for in the NBTL kit. If more activities to do with storybooks were generated in the sampled classes, the 'pretend reading' component of emergent literacy could have exposed the precursor knowledge to reading and writing.

#### **4.2.3 Classroom writing activities for literacy development**

'Pretend writing' activities, which learners exhibit, are products of emergent literacy. The researcher looked out for such activities among the sampled learners to see how the teacher was going to build the conventional writing skills among the learners from the emergent literacy point of view. It was observed in all the classes that teachers gave their learners writing exercises only after distribution of the independent learning activities. The activities given were based mainly on the pre-reading and pre-writing skills introduced at 'Starting Together'. This is the stage, apparently, at which aspects of emergent literacy are supposed to come out from among the learners and where the teacher is expected to begin scaffolding procedures for literacy development. the most common writing activities were the handwriting patterns, drawing a picture and copying the word that goes with the picture. However, innovations to utilize the emergent literacy for the development of conventional literacy among the pupils were lacking.

Usage of writing tools such as pencils and chalk by the learners was a noticeable and very common practice in all the classes the researcher visited. In addition, a variety of writing exercises such as drawing of pictures, practicing the handwriting patterns, copying words and key sentences were done. These activities were necessary because they required the learners to handle pencils correctly for writing purposes. Besides, the finger-stretching exercises were limited. There were no instructions issued to the learners from their teachers concerning correct handling of writing tools (pencils in particular). Such an instruction from the teacher would be one way through which children would be encouraged to develop the proper writing skills from the emergent literacy point of view. Learners who were observed holding pencils at the writing tip and using saliva on the pencil by dipping it in their mouths before writing down any letter in their exercise books needed the teacher's guidance about the good mechanics of writing. Any legible writing requires a firm and thorough grip on the writing tool. This is what the teacher should encourage as a way of building on learners' emergent literacy in the classroom.

What learners say in class comes from their emergent literacy background. It was also observed that most of the teachers did help learners to realise that what was said could be written down, and could be read as well. In a way, this was reflecting the utilization of emergent literacy and scaffolding as the means to help learners learn new skills of language which they did not know. Teachers did this by making the learners say the elicited key sentence after them, who in turn wrote the said sentence on the chalkboard for learners to read later. Some teachers never said anything to their learners regarding the association between the spoken and the written word. Teachers are expected to play this

major role of helping learners to realise that writing, as a skill, is meaningful and purposeful in life. Only eight (8) teachers emphasized this to their learners.

As the teachers concluded the day's lesson at 'Sharing Together' stage, all the learners were invited to the teaching corner where they were given chance to comment on their friends' written exercises. Teachers sampled out a few exercise books and asked learners to comment on neatness of the work done, especially on handwriting. Most of the teachers' emphasized on neatness and handwriting. Very few teachers advised their learners to observe the margin on the left, to rest their writing on the lines and to practice spacing between words in the sentences. Advice on skipping of pages was rare. In some cases, the teacher wrote down the day's date in the learners' exercise books as a guide on where they would write the exercise for that day. The New Breakthrough To Literacy (NBTL) lesson stages were important to the researcher because it was through these areas that emergent literacy skills were to come out for the teacher to use.

#### **4.2.4 Teachers' theoretical perspective on teaching literacy**

Most of the teachers believed that teaching of literacy should encourage learner participation with interaction among themselves and their teacher through group work. Teachers believed that teaching of literacy was helpful especially that it involved a variety of activities such as picture interpretation, matching letters with sounds, and matching pictures with words. These are components of emergent literacy which teachers are expected to survey from among the learners to identify what they already know so that they could help them move to something new. However, teachers teach everything thinking pupils did not know. They ignore the emergent literacy children have already.

Quite true from the theoretical point of view, most of the respondents believe that this way of teaching literacy skills would make learning practical because learners were not taught from abstract. Learners are made to say what they have experienced. In addition, they observed that learners developed a sense of creativity and self-confidence.

The researcher agreed with these views from the teachers quite well but what they lacked was the knowledge that learners have potential information for conventional literacy development. One respondent stated that the teacher had to begin teaching literacy from the elementary level involving the pre-reading skills, which was. Children know much from their experiences which is of use in the classroom learning situation contrary to their positive comments presented above. The practice by teachers did not match what they believed about literacy teaching.

#### **4.3 Extra Teaching/Learning Materials to facilitate Utilization of Emergent Literacy**

In response to objective number 3, the study found out that teachers did not design extra teaching and learning materials that had an emergent literacy background in them for literacy teaching. During the research period, none of the teachers observed used other extra teaching and learning materials during the initial literacy lessons. All the teachers relied on the teaching and learning materials provided in the New Breakthrough to Literacy Kit. Where the NBTL kit materials were not available, as it was the case with four schools, teachers either drew similar posters like those in the kit or rather borrowed similar materials from the neighbouring schools. The finding was that teachers exclusively relied on the NBTL kit materials for the teaching of reading and writing skills.

#### **4.4 Challenges Grade 1 Teachers Encounter to Utilize Emergent Literacy**

To respond to the fourth objective of the study, the contents here below were categorized into three. The first is ‘home parental support for literacy development’, which helps one to identify what literacy skills children bring with them from home to school. The second category deals with the ‘pedagogical challenges of initial literacy teaching’ and the third category involves challenges emanating from ‘pupil over enrolment’.

##### **4.4.1 Home parental support for literacy development**

Most of the pupils from both town schools and those from the outskirts of Mansa town that the researcher interacted with during the study, exhibited some knowledge indicating that they encountered print material from their homes and surrounding environments before they entered Grade 1. Other privileged children experienced literacy related materials from both home and their pre-schools. For example, some children talked about playing with toy cars, plastic stickers, picture books, toy watches, magazines and newspapers as some of the materials they liked playing with which parents provided for them. Some children enjoyed watching cartoons from television and that they were able to count some objects they mostly played with in their homes. Apparently, some teachers confirmed that most of the children in their classes enjoyed playing with books that contained pictures. Some children said they liked books with numbers and buildings in them, while most of them said they enjoyed listening to stories from parents and friends. For the researcher, this was enough evidence to signal that those children in Grade 1 had literacy related experiences from their home and pre-school backgrounds. It was an indicator that, in a way, parents support their children with literacy skills in varying ways before they come to school in Grade 1. This

was a sign that parents were concerned about the welfare of their children at home, which in a way is educational support to them. All this is emergent literacy children have developed before school.

#### **4.4.2 Pedagogical challenges of Initial literacy teaching**

The expectation from the researcher was that the teachers would make use of what the learners knew already about literacy to teach them new things. Contrary to their theoretical praise about literacy teaching, most of the teachers expressed a concern that literacy teaching involved too many activities within one lesson. Another concern observed was the weaknesses of the methodology, which they felt encourages learners to read words through memorizing. The researcher's argument here is that the aspect of learning from memorization could have been solved had the teachers made use of pupils' emergent literacy to teach them the conventional literacy skills of reading and writing. Another challenge the teachers expressed was that the routines were confusing and very difficult for learners to follow, especially at 'Stage 1' of the lesson where emergent literacy skills could easily be identified. In addition, teachers complained that time was too limited to fully cover all the lesson stages successfully. Teachers who were not familiar with Icibemba confirmed it was difficult to teach initial literacy to children using a language the teachers did not know themselves.

There was one interesting but unique challenge the teachers brought out during the interviews. Those interviewed in two separate schools shared their experiences about teaching literacy skills to children with Special Education Needs (SEN). The four learners in question were deaf and dumb. The two teachers confirmed that it was not easy for them

to teach literacy skills to such children because they were not specialized to handle such cases. Because of their condition, the children were usually ignored and left unattended to by their teachers.

One very common challenge teachers emphasized about was lack of teaching and learning materials in their classes because the kit either wore out, was stolen or vandalized. In schools where there were more than one stream, sharing of the few teaching materials available in that school hampered lessons progress, especially if allocation of classes was within the same time. Though this was the situation, teachers never took advantage of the available resources to exploit what emergent literacy children come along with from their homes so that their teaching was based on what was known. Another compounding challenge to this one was that the fewer materials could not be allocated permanently to one classroom for learners to use for revision during their spare time. It was observed that learners had limited time to interact with teaching and learning materials. The situation did not leave enough room for teaching literacy only in one room. The common view from most of the teachers was that Grade 1 learners needed to have permanent rooms for easier storage and usage of materials. In addition, the class arrangement was usually disturbed because learners had to leave immediately to give room to other classes.

#### **4.4.3 Pupil over enrolment**

The study further sought to determine what the classroom enrolment pattern was like per class. The least class enrolment was at 34 learners per class while the highest was at 135. The majority of the classes had above 40 learners per class. The average enrolment stood at 58 learners per class. Information on class enrolment is presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Class enrolment**

<b>NUMBER OF CLASSES</b>	<b>ENROLMENT LEVEL PER CLASS</b>
8 classes	34 to 39 learners
17 classes	40 to 49 learners
10 classes	50 to 59 learners
16 classes	60 to 69 learners
4 classes	70 to 79 learners
7 classes	80 to 135 learners

Over enrolment was cited as one of the major challenges hampering the teaching of initial literacy. The challenge posed a number of problems for the teacher in the classroom. Teachers found it extremely difficult to attend to individual learners and to effectively monitor an individual child's progress in the lesson. This research found out that sometimes teachers experienced late enrolment of learners as well as enrolment of children below the age of five. The present study also established that most of the classes were too large for the fewer materials, which made it difficult for learners to breakthrough. Besides, teachers strongly hinted that absenteeism also hindered progression of learners. Generally, teachers believed there was no motivation for the Grade 1 teacher who worked so hard to make the illiterate child literate.

## **4.5 Summary**

This chapter has presented the research findings under research objectives and questions that guided the whole study. Further, information has been presented by sub- themes generated from the research questions and objectives. It has also presented the findings on what teachers know about emergent literacy, whether they utilize this knowledge when teaching reading and writing skills, whether teachers use extra teaching and learning materials for literacy development and finally, it has made a presentation on the findings about challenges teachers encountered in their quest to utilize emergent literacy for teaching conventional literacy. The next chapter presents a discussion of these findings, draws conclusions to the study and proposes recommendations for further research developments.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings based on the objectives of the study. The chapter discusses the findings on what primary school teachers knew about emergent literacy, and whether or not they utilized such knowledge from among their learners for purposes of teaching them literacy skills. It also presents a discussion of findings on what teaching and learning materials teachers designed to help them utilize the emergent literacy in learners for teaching them to read and write. The chapter further discusses the findings on the challenges Grade 1 teachers encountered in their efforts to utilize emergent literacy in Grade 1 classes. The main objective of the present study was to establish what primary school teachers knew about emergent literacy and whether or not, they utilized the emergent literacy skills in teaching learners the conventional literacy skills. It also aimed at establishing whether teachers designed extra teaching and learning materials to help with the utilization of emergent literacy while teaching literacy. Finally, the study sought to establish what challenges Grade 1 teachers encountered in their efforts to utilize emergent literacy among the Grade1 learners. The discussions are here presented under the sub-headings derived from the objectives of the research.

#### **5.1 Primary school teachers' knowledge of Emergent Literacy**

In response to objective number 1 of the research, analysis of the data collected showed that none of the sixty-two (62) Grade 1 teachers observed and interviewed knew what emergent literacy was. Neither did they know how useful emergent literacy was for

teaching children the conventional reading and writing skills on a continuum model. Their inability to answer any question that dealt with the emergent literacy concept was a clear indication that the teachers did not have an adequate understanding of this concept. This implied that teachers lack knowledge of emergent literacy skills, which is children's most useful foundational knowledge in the classroom set up for teaching them the reading and writing skills. Another implication was that emergent literacy was a new concept to them and its relevance not appreciated and therefore not applied in teaching. The researcher's argument is that lack of emergent literacy skills renders the teachers incapable of creating the necessary classroom conditions that would bring about continuity in the learning of conventional literacy.

During the interviews, a further probe on learners' experiences in a learning atmosphere revealed that Grade 1 teachers relied mostly on teaching the pre-reading and pre-writing skills as their starting point for teaching literacy skills to Grade 1 learners. The pre-reading and pre-writing skills that are normally covered under the concept 'reading readiness' in literacy teaching, suggest that there was a point in time when children were ready to learn to read and write only after they had mastered a set of basic skills that were sequenced (see Vacca, et al, 1991). Opposed to this view, emergent literacy suggests that there is continuity in children's literacy development. As stated by Teale and Sulzby (1986) and Hodgskiss(2007), emergent literacy acknowledges the gradual, or continuous development of literacy from birth through interaction with others and a stimulating environment. Literacy is viewed as an ever-expanding set of literacy experiences and activities. The implication is that pre-reading and pre-writing skills, which are just a component of the many skills that emergent literacy encompasses, cannot be relied upon exclusively without

the other skills if teachers were to create a very conducive literacy-learning environment for the children in Grade 1. Empowering teachers with information on emergent literacy skills might be a solution to low literacy achievement.

Another implication arising from the data gathered is that the teachers' opportunities to explore and utilize emergent literacy for the benefit of teaching the learners new language skills of reading and writing are extremely low because of lack of teacher's improvisation though the New Breakthrough to Literacy (NBTL) methodology allows them to do so. This seems so because teachers rely so much on the teaching of pre-reading and pre-writing skills, which seem to close up opportunities for further classroom exploration.

However, this study also established that though the teachers themselves lacked adequate understanding of the concept emergent literacy, some of the classroom activities that learners did involved use of emergent literacy. For example, involvement of learners in picture discussion in readiness for story reading and eliciting the key sentence and asking learners to explain how they would behave themselves given a situation, were activities that required learners to look back at their experiences. Activities that required learners to draw, copy words and sentences, match objects on paper, for example, involved use of emergent writing skills. Though this was the case, it was evident that teachers did not have adequate information on emergent reading and emergent writing skills. The theoretical implications of these findings are that teachers need to have an adequate understanding of emergent literacy for them to provide meaningful teacher-mediated interventions and interactions for literacy development. They need to provide more conducive literacy learning environments in their classrooms where learners will explore and construct

understanding about conventional reading and writing skills. The teacher has a critical role to play in modeling and promoting literacy learning by children and this will only come where the teacher appreciates learners' existing literacy practices emanating from emergent literacy.

## **5.2 Grade 1 Teachers' Utilization of Emergent Literacy**

In dealing with the demands of objective number 2, this study established that most of the teachers regarded their children as not knowledgeable about anything to do with reading and writing. The teachers ignored most of the prior knowledge (see Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998) to formal reading and writing which learners acquired before entry into Grade 1. They judged their learners as mere beginners who did not know anything about such literacy skills as holding books right side up, identifying 'print' on a page and that they were without any early writing development such as scribbles. The findings are in line with Musonda's (2011: 5) report that, "It is common in most Zambian schools to find children in Grade 1 being treated as complete illiterates." The findings of this study imply that children's emergent literacy which greatly affects their abilities to learn, remember, reason, solve problems, and acquire new knowledge from their classroom or learning environment is not appreciated by their teachers and therefore, not utilized for the benefit of conventional literacy learning. The prior knowledge to reading and writing which children come with into the classroom is the emergent literacy that teachers must make use of in scaffolding learners to conventional literacy development.

The other implication is that teachers do not adequately guide their learners during literacy lessons to locate the knowledge that children themselves learnt earlier at home through

social context so that they apply it to learn new skills such as reading and writing. For this reason, much of the learners' potential is not stimulated in the direction towards helping the learners to actively seek new information in the process of learning. Further implication from this is that the range of prior knowledge, skills, beliefs, and concepts that significantly influence what learners notice about the environment and how they organize and interpret it, as stated by the National Academic Press (2000), will not be fully functional in the learning process provided in the classroom. The implication stands that teachers lack conscious utilization of the emergent literacy in learners.

Further findings of this study were that limited foundational listening and speaking skills activities necessary for literacy development were generated for learners in the classrooms where this research was conducted. For example, the few classroom stories that were either read or narrated were not exploited any further for the benefit of children learning new language skills related to literacy development. Learners hardly engaged in conversations and hardly talked about their families as a way of relating the stories they heard in real life situations. The implication of their approach to teaching is that it works against what Gable (n.d.) (<http://missourifamilies.org/features/childcarearticles/childcare3.htm>) stated that to promote young children's delight in talking, listening, reading and writing, adults need to provide a variety of interesting language experiences. The language experiences can only come from children's emergent literacy. Because teachers do not adequately scaffold the learning process, a child's reading difficulties in the primary grades will not be alleviated by the learning experiences they undergo. This is because the link between children's emergent literacy and the new knowledge to be learnt is missing.

The other finding from this study was that though the NBTL methodology provides room for the teacher to improvise during lesson delivery, most of the teachers did not go beyond the proposed teaching methodologies as a means to broaden their teaching styles. This implied that the limited language activities that teachers planned for their learners in most of the classrooms did not provide a broader base which Vygotsky (1978) calls the cultural tools for learning, from which meaningful learning of reading and writing skills would have been achieved on a continuum model.

Another possible effect from this inadequacy of classroom oral language activities will be that the process of learning to read and write will not be holistic and meaningful without involving the child's experience of spoken language, which is a component of emergent literacy. One implication is that the role of vocabulary during initial literacy learning should be recognized because it is already part of children's vocabulary and that is what they need to make sense of in print (Dickinson & Neuman, 2006). The reason is that it is through the spoken language that children acquire the knowledge of how sounds of the language operate, how the words are formed and relate to each other, how they are pronounced, how language conveys meaning and how members of the community achieve their goals using language, as supported by Halle, et al. (2003). The other implication is that, if not generated under learning activities, this essential knowledge acquired through spoken language will not apply in the classroom situation as children learn to read and write. Meaningful classroom learning will only take place if a link is generated between the old and new information.

This research further established that teachers hardly gave learners independent tasks that required learners to use the storybooks from the library corner to thoroughly explore and interpret stories from the pictures in the books. Given overwhelming evidence about children's home experiences, the researcher argues that pupils come to school with a lot of stories which teachers can develop into cards or brochures and use them to enhance literacy development other than relying on the limited stories in the kits. Where teachers manage to use pupil-generated stories thoroughly to the advantage of the learners, the practice would acknowledge Morrow's (1995) argument that environmental print is of no use to the child if no adult brings the child's attention to it. This study also established that despite the confirmation from some teachers that most learners preferred books with pictures in them, teachers still relied on the limited activities of utilizing the knowledge they observed from amongst their learners. As a way to scaffold the development of conventional reading skills among Grade 1 learners, teachers need a variety of resources that are pupil-generated for them to teach reading and writing skills meaningfully based on the theory of teaching from the known to unknown. The implication arising from this inability is that learners in the classroom were deprived of an opportunity to freely interact using their own stories to stimulate their minds for learning. If only the teachers initiated this activity to make pupils' minds ready to adapt and accommodate new information as proposed by Piaget (1969), thereby fulfilling the approach of learning from the known to unknown (Bruner, 1974).

The most common picture-reading activity teachers set for their learners was the one that required the teacher and the learners to elicit the key sentence from the 'conversation poster', as established in the daily lesson routine. The only major reading task that required

learners to read the key sentence that the teacher wrote on the chalkboard was not sufficient to stimulate effective learning among the learners. The theoretical implication is that the absence of guided literacy practices will not spearhead literacy development as observed by Bodrova and Leong (2001) when they talk about shaped children's learning. In this case, limited reading tasks and opportunities were provided from which learners would independently learn the conventional literacy skills using the available reading materials provided under the Breakthrough to Literacy kit. In order to develop new skills in children, teachers must work alongside them in modeling and guiding their learning (Evans, 2001 as cited in Hodgskiss, 2007).

This study also established that right from the early stages of formal learning, learners received little attention to help them develop skills of legible writing. Though a variety of writing activities such as handwriting, picture drawing, and copying exercises were given to the learners, little interest was shown from the Grade 1 teachers to assist their learners develop appropriate writing skills. There were no instructions issued to the learners concerning correct usage of pencils as writing tools. Some learners held pencils at the writing tip and applied saliva to the writing tip by dipping it in their mouths before they wrote down any single letter in their exercise books. Advice on skipping of pages was rare and some teachers laboured and wrote down the day's date in the learners' exercise books as a way of showing them where to write new work for that day. These findings show that the respondents did not adequately utilize the emergent writing skills portrayed by the learners for purposes of teaching and developing conventional literacy skills in them on a continuum model. One major implication from these findings is that children's emergent writing skills remain underutilized thereby not achieving the intended legible writing skills

looked out for among our learners. This observation is in line with Korat (2005) who maintains that children's emergent literacy knowledge of written language helps them in understanding the conventions of print.

### **5. 3 Extra Teaching/Learning Materials to facilitate Utilization of Emergent Literacy**

For objective number 3, the finding was that none of the teachers designed and used extra teaching and learning materials with an emergent literacy background as a means to utilize the emergent literacy practices in children. Teachers rather relied on the limited materials already prescribed for the New Breakthrough to Literacy (NBTL) programme. One implication drawn here is that there were limitations of opportunities from which teachers were to explore a variety of emergent literacy practices from among their learners. Scaffolding through using extra teaching and learning materials would help learners easily and quickly grasp conventional literacy skills in the literacy classrooms. This observation is in line with Vacca, et al (1991) who maintain that children's literacy develops through active engagement with their world in purposive and real-life settings. An underlying assumption drawn from this study is that designing and using appropriate extra teaching materials with emergent literacy background may stimulate and broaden the chances of utilizing the essential prior knowledge to reading and writing that learners earlier acquired from their homes and pre-school environment.

The other implication observed, as supported by Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (1992) document, is that learners cannot attain relatively satisfactory levels of learning and achievement in the absence of appropriate learning materials. Provision and appropriate usage of the learning materials enhances

learners' cognitive achievement. This statement is in line with Johnston's (2005) idea saying new language tools mean new opportunities for social understanding, for learning about the world, and for sharing experiences, pleasures and needs. The findings from this study further imply that lack of provision of relevant and appropriate learning resources, especially in literacy classes, will not cater for children who lack these materials in their homes and even the wider society. The findings further imply that the relative abundance of reading books, writing materials, and other varied educational aids of various kinds will set the quality of an education system that will produce an efficient reader and writer into the Zambian society. The learning materials will help the teachers to utilize the learners' experiences for grasping new information offered by the teacher in the literacy classroom environment.

This study also established that teachers assumed learners came from their homes without a single skill associated with usage of materials for developing the reading and writing skills. Teachers assumed that learners would not manage to use the 'Activity Books' on their own correctly. For example, teachers believed learners would not open the books to the right pages where writing exercises meant for that day's lesson were found. They believed that teachers had to do it for the learners and so they went round their classrooms opening the pages where learners would find the work to do. Though guided learning is important at this stage as suggested by Vygotsky, (1978), the implication from this model of using learning materials in such a manner, in literacy classrooms in particular, limits learners' opportunity to interact and freely use the materials accordingly. Here, the researchers' argument is that where freedom of participation in a learning environment is restricted, development towards personal responsibility and educational growth is

restricted as well. As supported by Zygouris-Coe (2001), teachers lack skills of creating literate environments in classrooms and children receive insufficient instructional support to help them learn to read and write successfully.

#### **5. 4 Challenges Grade 1 Teachers Encounter to Utilize Emergent Literacy**

This part was in response to objective number 4 of the research. One challenge established was that due to large class sizes, meaningful scaffolding was lacking in most of the classes. One major possible cause could actually be lack of knowledge about emergent literacy among the Grade 1 teachers. They did not attempt exploiting and utilizing emergent literacy skills in teaching and this was an evident knowledge gap which this research sought to fill. This implies that the knowledge and beliefs that learners bring along do not receive any attention and support from the teachers as a way to enhance learning in the classroom as suggested by the National Academy Press (2000). Teachers need to use this knowledge as a starting point for teaching new information and to help monitor the achievement made by learners as instruction progresses. Individual learners need meaningful scaffolding in order to achieve a more mature understanding of new knowledge in the classroom. As supported by Sénéchal (2009) and, Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998), learners' new knowledge must be constructed using the existing knowledge as teachers pay attention to the incomplete understandings, the false beliefs, and the naïve interpretations of concepts that learners bring along to a given subject.

Another challenge established as a result of too large class sizes was that they could not be managed efficiently by one teacher. One contributing factor to this challenge stemmed from Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education's

enrolment policy that all eligible children be enrolled into Grade 1. The policy was implemented without intervention measures on the resultant large class sizes. For example, the teacher-pupil ratio had not been addressed. The implication of these findings, as supported by Cakmak (2009), are that large class sizes have a negative effect on classroom management, class motivation, teaching methods and strategies.

As observed, large classes tend to be noisy, control for effective learning becomes difficult and the teacher cannot afford individual attention to all the learners in class. The present study established that most of the teachers found it problematic to create, maintain quality relationships and motivate the learners in their classes. This was not workable in a class of over seventy-five (75) learners, where even the teacher lacked motivational drive. The findings imply that in the event where other classroom conditions were favourable for teaching and learning, if not addressed, large class sizes will still pose a challenge to teaching and learning processes and further hamper smooth literacy skills development in children. As Cakmak (2009) indicates, the requirement of knowing the individual child's characteristics and motivating them differently will not apply and that general pupil performance will remain remarkably low.

Where pedagogical issues were concerned, the current study established that implementation of learner-centered instructional procedures were not possible. Activity based learning strategies did not work in most of the classes and besides, the methods left greater room for memorization of reading words and sentences as most of the learners failed to read words in the absence of an accompanying picture. These findings are in line with the results of the study by Blatchford et al. (2003) cited in Cakmak (2009: 401) which

state that, “children in large classes are more likely to be off task in terms of not attending to the teacher and not attending to their own work when on their own.” The effect is that learners do not breakthrough to literacy and chances of developing a sense of creativity and self-confidence is completely lost.

Another challenge this research established concerned learners with Special Education Needs in two separate schools. The two teachers found it difficult to teach the dumb and deaf children who were combined with the so-called ‘normal’ children. Both teachers never received specialized training to handle learners with special education needs. As such, the children did not receive any language and literacy learning support from their teachers. The implication of the above challenge is that children with learning difficulties are denied their chances to achieve conventional literacy development according to their own pace of achievement if they were offered equal learning opportunities. This is even made worse where there is lack of a strong partnership between the school and parents towards their children in school. The challenged learners are often disadvantaged in as far as education provision is concerned.

## **5.5 Summary**

The objectives of the research were the source of themes used in this chapter to discuss and analyze the research findings from the field. This research has established the position of teachers as regards their knowledge of emergent literacy, utilization of the skills for teaching, designing of teaching and learning materials and the challenges experienced in teaching conventional literacy. The next chapter presents a summary of the conclusions and recommendations proposed by this study.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

The chapter presents the summary, the conclusions and the recommendations drawn from this study for possible policy development and further research.

#### **6.1 Summary**

This study set out to establish whether or not, Grade1 teachers had the knowledge about emergent literacy and whether or not, they utilized it for teaching learners the reading and writing skills. This research has generated information on what is meant by emergent literacy and has identified some of the skills that teachers may apply in the teaching of conventional literacy in Grade 1. It has also suggested the approach and teaching techniques that the teachers can apply to utilize the emergent literacy skills. In addition, this research has proposed some of the teaching and learning materials that teachers may design or indeed source out for their teaching purposes.

It was established through this research that primary school teachers lack knowledge of emergent literacy skills which are children's essential foundational skills for learning to read and write. As a result, most of the teachers tended to ignore the learners' background knowledge and treated them as illiterates during the learning process. In addition, very limited oral language activities were provided for the continuous development of literacy skills. This research also established that lack of knowledge of emergent literacy among

the Grade 1 teachers at primary school, renders them incompetent to utilize the acquired emergent literacy skills for teaching learners to read and write conventionally.

## **6.2 Conclusion**

This study concludes that emergent literacy, a phenomenon dealing with the development of reading and writing skills in young children before their entry into formal school, deserves thorough and careful consideration by the education sector in Zambia. As supported by Strickland and Morrow (1988) and Hodgskiss (2007), the concept emergent literacy concerns the recognition that during their development stage, children acquire knowledge and skills that become very essential later for learning of formal reading and writing skills. The assumption therefore is that teachers need to understand emergent literacy thoroughly as a body of knowledge to be utilized fully during the teaching of conventional literacy in the formal school set up. A further assumption from this study is that given adequate knowledge on emergent literacy, the Grade 1 teacher may make the classroom an environment that will promote and develop learners into more skilled readers and writers.

Teachers do not design other teaching and learning materials; neither do they bring to class other language materials for teaching reading and writing. The concept of teaching from the known to unknown is underutilized. Teachers rely on the pre-reading and pre-writing skills, which are just a part of emergent literacy, as a base from which to teach conventional reading and writing skills to children in Grade 1. Research also did establish that teachers rely only on the Breakthrough to literacy kit teaching and learning materials. They have ignored the concept of ‘improvisation’ in their teaching.

One of the major challenges that Grade 1 teachers encountered was the large pupil numbers in their classes, which made literacy class management and teaching extremely difficult for the teacher. The teacher-pupil ratio was still unaddressed since the enrolment policy was revised to enroll all eligible children into Grade 1. It was also found out that there was lack of a strong partnership between the school and parents towards the learning process for their children. Parents tended to leave everything to the teacher; they had nothing to do with their children at school.

The overall conclusion from this study is that teachers lack knowledge of the emergent literacy skills and are incapable of utilizing it for teaching new language skills of reading and writing in the formal school set up. Though this may be the case, the findings of this study cannot be generalized as applying to all the schools in the country since the research was only confined to some schools in only one district out of over seventy-two of them in the country.

### **6.3 Recommendations for Policy Development**

The question raised here is, what should be done to clear this knowledge gap among the teachers? To close this gap in knowledge, teachers need this knowledge of emergent literacy skills for them to appropriately explore and apply the skills holistically and meaningfully in teaching reading and writing, as supported by Cunningham and Stanovich (2003); Wray, Bloom and Hall (1989, as cited in Hodgskiss, 2007). This research suggests the following as necessary emergent literacy skills for the information of teachers: oral language and narrative skills, vocabulary, print awareness, print motivation, letter recognition, emergent reading, emergent writing, phonological and phonemic awareness

among some. Teachers can utilize these skills in their teaching to enable learners competently acquire the conventional reading and writing skills.

### **What Teaching Approach**

This study suggests and strongly recommends the ‘learner-centered’ approach as the teaching approach to apply where the learner shall be at the center of learning and the teacher will be responsible for facilitating their learning (see Luangala, 2010). Among the teaching techniques under learner-centered learning are: ‘group work’ where learners learn from each other while the teacher gives special attention to the weak in class; ‘role-play’ where learners act out defined social roles in class. As a learning activity, the learners are asked to behave in the way somebody else would behave in a particular situation. Role-play stimulates interest in the learners and encourages interaction, the natural means through which children learn effectively. Another strategy related to this is ‘discovery learning’ (see Slavin, 2009 & Santrock, 2002), in which learners construct an understanding on their own. Dewey (1933) and Bruner (1966, as cited in Santrock, 2002), promoted this strategy by encouraging teachers to give their learners more opportunities to learn on their own. To promote discovery learning in a literacy class, teachers will be expected to provide learners with stimulating activities that will activate and feed their natural curiosity and inquiry.

### **Strategies for utilization of emergent literacy skills**

This research suggests the following as some of the strategies teachers would employ in utilizing emergent literacy skills:

- a) Observe what skills the learners portray or practice in class. From the observations, the teachers may give the learners activities that will require learners to practice more of those emergent literacy skills they saw in children in relation to the lesson objectives and guide them to discover new knowledge.
- b) Explore the skills from among the learners through interactive games/play and songs from which the teacher would involve conventional literacy activities, as supported by the National Reading Council (1998).
- c) Provide learners with a variety of familiar teaching and learning materials. The materials may include dolls, picture books, charts and books with letters of the alphabet, a variety of writing tools (e.g. crayons, pencils, and brushes for painting), toy machines, talking books, drawing and writing paper, and other materials from the surrounding environment. Allow the learners to interact with the learning aids so that they stimulate learners' minds. It will also allow the learners to develop a sense of judgement of what they experience around them at home and in school. The teacher may ask learners to talk about them, such as describing them or explaining their uses from learners' own imaginations.

The justification for this strategy is that it will allow the learners to learn more vocabulary and improve their phonological and phonemic awareness in the language, as supported by National Reading Panel (2000)). They will learn to use the vocabulary for communication and for learning how to read and write it with the help of the teacher.

d) In teaching learners how to write, the principle of ‘learning by doing’ or ‘experiential learning’ should apply (Santrock, 2002). This approach requires that learners are given reflective and practical writing activities to do. For example, learners may be asked to begin their writing exercises by drawing the shapes of the objects they have interacted with in class. Later they can proceed to practicing writing the beginning letters of names of the objects they draw, before engaging in writing the complete names of the objects. The teacher should allow the learners to use their various writing tools available in class. As supported by Zygouris-Coe (2001), effective teachers of literacy should design developmentally appropriate activities which match children’s developing abilities and level of emergent literacy. The teachers need to provide children with sufficient instructional guide and support to help them learn to read and write successfully.

Since children are naturally curious, provision and use of a variety of appropriate learning materials may influence freedom to interact with the materials and thereby stimulate discovery learning. This is supported by the idea from Matafwali and Munsaka (2011) who say the quality of teaching is measured by the availability of developmentally age appropriate teaching and learning materials. This calls for deliberate designing of extra and more appropriate teaching and learning materials for literacy classrooms. This is also supported by the idea from ‘Focus on Learning’ (1992) document saying exposure of children to relevant reading and writing materials of varied nature influence and support the process of learning. The document outlines and emphasizes the need for a school curriculum to promote student learning through usage of appropriate learning materials. This procedure would positively influence learners to think, investigate, question, reflect,

discover, appreciate, and achieve competency in essential skills of reading and writing and thereby encourage learners acquire knowledge and skills that enhance quality life. This is supported by Cunningham and Stanovich (2003); Wray, Bloom and Hall (1989, as cited in Hodgskiss, 2007), who maintain that for children, literacy development is holistic and meaningful.

Alongside the New Breakthrough to Literacy kit materials, a number of other teaching and learning materials may be designed for teaching literacy skills, as suggested by (Kitao, et al., 1995). The key is in providing the scaffolding that learners need to be successful in the learning experience.

This research recommends that the Government through the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education, the Teacher Education department reviews and redesigns the teacher-education curriculum to include a component on emergent literacy to ensure that teachers are equipped with emergent literacy skills through training. This may help teachers successfully offer literacy lessons on a continuum model and may help prepare teachers for explicit reading and writing instruction in Grade 1.

The Breakthrough to literacy methodology in Grade 1 be reinforced by revising the syllabus so that literacy instruction includes a component of exploration and utilization of emergent literacy skills among the Grade1 learners. This may maximize the concept of teaching from the known to the unknown. The process may influence improvement in pedagogical skills and other knowledge meant for efficient teaching of reading and writing skills among the Grade 1 learners.

The research further proposes to the Government that through the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education, considers the possibility of formulating a policy on offering nursery and preschool education to all children in Zambia before they enter Grade 1. This may help equip the children with the much needed background experience, or prior literacy knowledge, before they begin receiving literacy development instruction at formal school level.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education should create a print-rich and language-rich environment in the primary classroom that will reinforce the learners' awareness of the text. The Ministry should design learning centers that will encourage young children to engage in active exploration of their environment, and to talk and write about their learning experiences as a measure of enhancing literacy development in the children.

To improve the rate of development of literacy skills in Grade 1, the Government through the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education should consider supplying a variety of teaching and learning materials in form of talking storybooks and Information and Communications Technology (ICT). This way, teachers may help to scaffold their learners better and help them move from dependence to independence in the process of learning in the classroom.

This study recommends that in the absence of Special Education teachers, let the literacy teachers receive Special Education training to help in teaching learners at the risk of reading and writing failure, the hard-to-teach children and those with diverse needs.

## **6.4 Recommendations for Further Research**

The study came up with the following as suggestions for further research:

1. Patterns of acquisition and development of emergent literacy among children in Zambia
2. Interrelationship between oral competence and emergent literacy for conventional literacy development
3. Emergent literacy support for children with disabilities in inclusive and special education settings
4. Home based activities for conventional literacy development
5. Influence of oral literature on emergent literacy development in a home environment

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### **Web Sites**

[http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art\\_index.asp?HREF=/articles/handbook/wilkinson/index.html](http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art_index.asp?HREF=/articles/handbook/wilkinson/index.html)

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/content/cntareas/reading/li100.htm>

**APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX I: Letter Seeking Authority to Conduct Educational Research**

The University of Zambia  
Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies  
P.O. Box 32379  
**LUSAKA**

**U.F.S.** The Provincial Education Officer  
Luapula Region  
**LUAPULA**

**U.F.S.** The District Education Board Secretary  
Mansa District  
**MANSA**

**TO:** The Head teacher  
..... Basic School

**RE: FIELD WORK FOR MASTER’S STUDENTS: SAMUEL IMANGE**

The bearer of this letter, **Samuel Imange (Mr)** computer number **530506824** is a duly registered student at the University of Zambia, School of Education.

He is taking a Master’s Programme in Education – Literacy and Learning. The programme has fieldwork component which he has to complete. He is seeking your authority to allow him carry out an educational research in the selected Basic Schools within Mansa District, Luapula Province.

Yours faithfully,

Luangala, J. R. (Dr.)

**COORDINATOR**

## **APPENDIX II: Informed Consent Form**

Dear Respondent,

This serves to give you an understanding of the purpose of this research and procedures that will be followed. Further implications for your participation are explained below. Finally, you are being asked to sign this form to indicate that you have agreed to participate in this exercise.

Thank you in advance.

### **1. Description**

This exercise is an educational research; the researcher is a student at the University of Zambia pursuing a degree in Literacy and Learning. This research is a major requirement for the researcher to complete his programme. Therefore, this exercise is purely academic.

### **2. Purpose**

The researcher wishes to find out how literacy lessons are carried out in the Primary Schools. The researcher is interested in how the learners' home or preschool knowledge is utilized in the classroom to teach them how to read and write. The researcher is also interested in extra teaching and learning materials available in the classrooms teaching initial literacy.

### **3. Consent**

Participation in this exercise is voluntary. You are free to decline to participate in this exercise.

**4. Confidentiality**

All data collected from this research is treated with utmost confidentiality. Participants are assured that they will remain anonymous and untraceable in this research.

**5. Rights of Respondents**

All effort will be taken to ensure that the rights of participants are protected and respected. Participants are assured that they shall suffer no harm as a result of participating in this exercise. Participants are free to ask for clarification at any point of the exercise and to inform the research if they feel uncomfortable about any procedure in the research.

**6. Declaration of Consent**

I have read and fully understand this document. I therefore agree to participate in this exercise.

.....

Signature

Date

**APPENDIX III: Observation Instrument**

**Section A. Personal Details**

1. Name of School: ..... District .....

2. Teacher's Gender:

Male		Female	
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3. Institution where teacher trained: .....

4. Period of service as a teacher: .....

5. Grade: ..... Number of learners present: .....

**Section B. Content for Lesson Observation**

The *Zambian New Breakthrough to Literacy Teacher's Handbook* provides a lesson procedure to be followed when teaching initial literacy in a local language in Grade 1. Though this is the case, each of these stages leaves room for the teacher to improvise the content for teaching. The researcher will look out for such gaps as an area where learners' emergent literacy knowledge can be utilized as a resource for teaching conventional reading and writing skills in addition to the foundational language skills of listening and speaking. It is important to note that literacy practices (which are emergent literacy), depend on oral language skills.

**1. Starting Together**

**Does the teacher make use of the following emergent literacy skills in children during literacy lessons?**

Telling/narrating stories, \_\_\_\_\_

Interpreting meaning/s of stories heard or told, \_\_\_\_\_

Relating stories to real life at home, \_\_\_\_\_

Making learners value the stories, they listen to, \_\_\_\_\_

Learners talking about their family, \_\_\_\_\_

Handling of writing tools (pencils, crayons), \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Teaching Corner

**Does the teacher utilize the following skills?**

Handling of reading/story books, \_\_\_\_\_

Flipping of pages from left to right, \_\_\_\_\_

Pretend reading and writing, \_\_\_\_\_

Reading pictures/telling stories from pictures (when eliciting the words and key sentence), \_\_\_\_\_

Meaningful usage of story books in the library corner, \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Interest to read, \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Interest to write (scribbling or drawing practices), \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Does the teacher help learners to realize that what is said can be written down? How?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### **3. Sharing Together**

**Does teacher allow learners:**

Make comments/advice about their friends' work (for example, the drawings and shapes of letters), \_\_\_\_\_

Talk about writing mechanics of moving from left to right, \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Advice on skipping of pages, \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Use songs, rhymes to end the lesson, \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Does teacher help learners realize that writing is meaningful in life** (for example, through shopping lists, letters, and messages on phone)? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What extra teaching and learning materials is the teacher using when teaching initial literacy? (a) reading materials: \_\_\_\_\_

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(b) for teaching oral language skills: \_\_\_\_\_

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(c) What materials do learners play with in class? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What attitude does the teacher have, or show towards the learners' participation in the lesson (friendly, encouraging, allows learners' freedom of participation and contribution, gives support, or harsh and frowns at the learners, discouraging to slow learners)? \_\_\_\_\_

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**APPENDIX IV: Interview Guide**  
**(Semi-structured/focused interviews)**

1. What challenges are you experiencing with your class in the teaching of initial literacy?

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2. Of what value are children's past experiences in your teaching of reading and writing?

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3. What do you understand by 'emergent literacy'? (Any idea about emergent literacy)

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4. Of what value is emergent literacy in children to you as a teacher of initial literacy?

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5. Cite examples on how you exploit such knowledge from among the learners in your teaching sessions. \_\_\_\_\_

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6. Do your learners show interest and willingness to read storybooks or pictures?

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How do you utilize this skill during teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

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7. Do your learners show interest and willingness to write something?

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How do you utilize this skill during teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

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8. What comment do you have on the methods available for teaching initial literacy? \_\_\_\_\_

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9. Through your experience of teaching learners how to read and write, what should be done to improve the teaching of reading and writing among the Grade 1 learners in schools?\_\_\_\_\_

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10. What challenges do you encounter, or experience, in your efforts to exploit emergent literacy among the Grade 1 learners in your class?\_\_\_\_\_

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