

# **Teaching of Literacy in First Grades in Zambia and Norway: Exploring Some Similarities and Differences**

*By*

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## **Abstract**

*This article presents the findings of the study conducted in Zambia and Norway on the teaching of literacy in the first grades. The aim of the study was to broadly reflect on the language of instruction and initial literacy situation in three grade one multilingual classrooms in both Zambia and Norway, and possibly highlight on the similarities and differences in the teaching of literacy between the two countries. Apart from reflecting on pedagogical and the general implementation in the classroom, other salient features and themes surrounding the topic were also highlighted. This was a qualitative study as data was collected through face to face interviews with two school managers (one from Zambia and one from Norway) from the two selected schools in the two countries. Four grade 1 classroom (two in Zambia and two in Norway) observations were also conducted. The data collected was analyzed thematically and the findings revealed that there were several similarities and differences between the two countries. Among the noted ones were that both countries are multilingual with the language policy that demand the use of local languages as media of instruction as well as languages of initial literacy. The only difference was that for Norway, Norwegian is used as language of instruction at all levels (grades 1-13) in all public schools, including the University level, while for Zambia a local language is used as medium of instruction from Grade 1 to Grade 4. The other feature was that in both countries some parents supported the language policy whereas, others wanted their children's mother tongue to be used as both language of instruction and language of initial literacy. In addition, teachers in both countries taught constrained finite skills such as alphabetic letters, letter-sound relationships and*

*how one sound blended with others to form syllables, and slow learners were taken care of by receiving remedial work.*

*Another similarity was that there were talking walls and teaching and learning materials in both countries although for Zambia, serious inadequacy of teaching and learning materials was noted. On the issue of helping children from different language backgrounds other than Cinyanja, results showed that there was no specific policy in Zambia that explained how teachers should be helping pupils in schools that were not speakers of language used to teach initial literacy, while Norway has a sounding policy of helping the minority speaking pupils without sufficient language skills in Norwegian. In both countries there was mutual collaboration between the schools and the community. Finally, the paper commended the working collaboration that exist between the two countries, and recommended for continuity and support from both parties in aspects of good pedagogical practices. Zambia should also emulate Norway in formulating inclusive language policies that do not disadvantage the minority languages in terms of teaching initial literacy.*

**Key Terms:** Literacy teaching, language policy, local language, language of instruction, initial literacy, first grade learners

## **Introduction**

The present article reflects on the teaching of literacy using indigenous local languages as medium of instruction in the first grades in Zambia and Norway. It starts with a discussion on the importance of the first language in the teaching of initial literacy. This is followed by a brief discussion on language policies in Zambia and Norway before the similarities and differences in terms of pedagogical and implementation of literacy in the two countries are presented. In addition, other salient features and themes surrounding the topic in the two countries are presented. The article highlights certain themes that may be a learning point for both countries under discussion.

### **Language Policy in Zambia**

Zambia is a multilingual and multiethnic country whose sociolinguistic landscape has been brought about through migration and imperialism.

Chanda and Mkandawire (2013) noted that;

*The exact number of Zambian languages is not known although many texts claim that Zambia has 73 languages or 73 languages and dialects. The figure 73 languages is probably due to a non-distinction between language and dialect using the criterion of mutual intelligibility. If this criterion was used, the number of Zambian languages would probably be about 20 or 30 only (P. viii).*

Ohannessian and Kashoki (1978) further contended that, there are 73 languages and dialects, approximately 20 of them are said to be mutually intelligible while others are not (Ohannessian and Kashoki, 1978). Out of the existing languages in Zambia, seven of them (Bemba, Nyanja, Tonga, Lozi, Luvale, Lunda and Kaonde) are used as official regional languages and are used in local courts, education, media and parliament among other domains (Kashoki, 1990; Kashoki, 1978; Ohannessian and Kashoki, 1978; Mkandawire, 2015). The current education language policy in Zambia demands for the use of local languages as media of instruction and also as languages of initial literacy in the first grades (MESVTEE, 2013). According to the new Literacy Framework, a local language is to be used as medium of instruction from grade 1 to 4. Oral English language is introduced as a subject at Grade 2 but continues to be used as a language of instruction from Grade 5 to tertiary level.

In 2014, Zambia adopted and implemented the Primary Literacy Program (PLP). In PLP, the Grade 1 literacy course is guided by the phonics-based approach with the five key competencies (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension) that emphasizes beginning teaching of letter-sounds in familiar language, blending sounds into syllables and forming words (Chileshe et al, 2018). The methodology involves introducing letter-sounds scoped and sequenced from simple to complex in each familiar language. The PLP replaced the Primary Reading Programme (PRP), an initiative which was introduced in 1999 to improve literacy levels among Zambian school children (Chibamba, 2012). However, as Mwansa (2017) postulated, PRP proved to be ineffective in developing reading fluency in Zambian languages because the transition to English was too abrupt, just after a year. Chileshe et al (2018, p. 84) stated that replacing PRP by PLP therefore meant to facilitate acquisition of literacy skills, which have been seen to be falling among primary school going children even after the introduction of PRP. PLP was developed in order to

address the weaknesses under PRP and improve literacy levels among learners in primary schools. PLP therefore focuses on the teaching of initial literacy using the seven prescribed local languages as the media instruction in the early grades.

### **Language Policy in Norway**

Norway too is a multilingual country with Sami and Norwegian as official languages, and Sami language is protected by the constitution. The Sami people are indigenous to Northern Scandinavia, and though they have largely accepted and adopted Norwegian as their language, they have maintained the three main varieties of their language Sami: Northern Sami spoken by most people around 15,000, Lule Sami spoken by around 500 people and South Sami spoken by around 300 people. Even though Sami language is considered as an official language, the most widely spoken language in Norway is Norwegian and there are two written standard forms of Norwegian: Bokmål, by far the most frequently used, and Nynorsk. Sami which is a minority language, is used by a smaller group of people living up north in the country and used as an administrative language in six municipalities alongside the two standard forms of Norwegian (Banda et al, 2012; Statistics Norway, 2010; Todal, 1998 and the Constitution of Norway, Article 108).

Norwegian is the main language spoken in Norway, and the primary language of instruction at all levels of education. Even though there is a difference in language policy for immigrant minorities and for indigenous population, the national education policy demands that Norwegian should be the language of instruction at all levels (grades 1-13) in public schools, including the University level (Mullis et al, 2011). The Sámi population speaks and writes one or possibly two of the three Sámi languages mentioned above. However, in some schools, Sámi is the language of instruction (Banda et al, 2012; Mullis et al, 2011).

It is also important to understand that in Norway the language used for initial literacy education depends on the age of the learner and mother tongue. Norwegian is normally the language of initial literacy and also the language of instruction (Banda et al, 2012, pp. 17 and 27) for those starting grade 1. In this study the language of instruction is the language that is used to teach across all subjects, while the language of initial literacy is used to teach reading and writing in local language.

Even though Zambia and Norway appear to have different education

language policies, the two countries share common challenges in terms of pedagogical and the general implementation in the classroom. The aim of this study therefore is to explore the language of instruction and initial literacy situation in the two countries (Zambia and Norway), and broadly highlight on the similarities and differences in the teaching of initial literacy between the two counties. Apart from discussing pedagogical and the general implementation in the classroom, other salient features and themes surrounding the topic have been discussed in this paper.

### **Importance of Familiar Language in Teaching Literacy**

The importance of literacy in early childhood cannot be ignored because it is the foundation for learning and academic achievement later in a person's life (Mkandawire, 2018). Without literacy, certain subject areas are inaccessible. In line with this, some scholars (Hamilton et al, 2016, p. 401) state that learning to read in the early years of education provides a foundation for later literacy development and academic success. In Zambia, literacy is a major part of the school curriculum and is the responsibility of government to see that every child is able to read and write by the end of the primary education. Reading and writing skills are not just important in education but also in social life (Silavwe et al, 2019). This is why the government of the republic of Zambia in 2013 decided to come up with the new Curriculum Literacy Framework which aims at improving the reading standards among the school going children through the teaching of literacy using local languages as media of instruction. Norway too use Norwegian (a local language) as the language of instruction at all levels in public schools (Banda et al, 2012). In this study, a local language and the first language will be used interchangeably to mean the language of instruction and the language of initial literacy. The teaching of initial literacy using a familiar language as the medium of instruction has proved to be effective in improving literacy levels in children. Once learners have basic literacy skills in the L1, they can begin reading and writing in the L2 by easily transferring the literacy skills they acquired in L1.

A review by Escamilla (2009) on 'Language-Minority Children and Youth' for example, revealed that there is clear evidence that tapping into first-language literacy can confer advantages to English learners. This is because the first-language oral proficiency also influences developmental patterns in second language speech

discrimination and production. In fact, first language literacy is related to literacy development in English, including word and pseudo word reading, reading comprehension, reading strategies, spelling and writing. Therefore, language minority students who are literate in their first language are likely to be advantaged in the acquisition of English literacy (p. 437). Learning to read is also most efficient when learners know the language used.

In line with this Veii (2003, p.67) also stated that “the development of second language literacy skills depends on the extent to which a child’s first language skills are developed”. Tambulukani and Bus (2011, p. 15) also stated that, “practising reading in a familiar Zambian language is an incentive for learning to read in English. This is probably because a better understanding of the relationship between spelling and phonology in the Zambian language as a result of learning in a familiar language facilitates learning to read in English”. Technically, the expectation is that instruction in the local language at the foundation stage will support learners as they progress towards English. This recognizes Zambia as a multi-lingual society, where the use of local languages and English co-exist as part of formal and informal communication. Cummins (2007) supported this assertion when he argued that:

...[T]he relationship between first and second language literacy skills suggests that effective development of primary language literacy skills can provide a conceptual foundation for long-term growth in English literacy skills. This does not imply, however, that transfer of literacy and academic language knowledge will happen automatically; there is usually also a need for formal instruction in the target language to realise the benefits of linguistic transfer (p. 113).

On the same, Escamilla (2009) argued that:

... instructional programs that invest time and resources into the development of the first language literacy are more effective than those that are English medium or English only programs. Language minority students who are literate in their first language are likely to be advantaged in the acquisition of English literacy. In fact, studies that compare bilingual instruction with English-only instruction demonstrate that language-

minority students instructed in their native language as well as in English perform better, on average, on measures of English reading proficiency than language minority students instructed only in English. This is the case at both elementary and secondary levels. (p. 437).

Dixon et al (2010) also argued that:

...typically developing monolingual children display a pattern of errors that reflects their movement through phases or stages of literacy development. Bilingual, or multilingual, children's lexical representations follow a similar pattern with the addition that both, or all, languages, consecutively or simultaneously acquired, impact the representation in the other. Therefore, for children speaking more than one language who are learning to read, spell, and write in English, the orthography in LI must be taken into consideration when examining their reading and spelling acquisition in English (p. 212).

The views expressed by Cummins (2007), Escamilla (2009), Veii (2003), Tambulukani and Bus (2011) and Dixon et al (2010) in their excerpts above advocate for the well-developed bilingualism approach in which serious attention is given to acquiring bilingual literacy. The four scholars disputed a one-size-fits-all approach to literacy development; monolingual lens' of literacy development. Their argument suggest that monolingualism lacks emphasis on children's home languages. Grant, Wong and Osterling (2007) also argued that 'reading instruction in two languages is an important way of reducing the danger of "subtractive bilingualism" in which students lose the first language before acquiring the second' (p. 601). Thus, Grant, Wong and Osterling argued for a stronger emphasis on the children's home language. Therefore, a child's understanding and ability to use his/her familiar language is the first step in acquiring English proficiency and literacy skills.

## **Methodology**

This was a qualitative study as data was collected through face to face interviews with two school managers (one from Zambia and one

from Norway) from the two selected schools in the two countries. Interviews as method of data collection was used because it was more appropriate and allowed face to face interaction between the interviewee and the interviewer. As Cohen (2007) and Yin (2011:133) postulates “all interviews involve interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee.” This will further result into a more in-depth data collection and comprehensive understanding. Lesson observation in classrooms were also carried out. In Zambia two grade 1 classes at one primary school were observed, while the other two grade 1 classes were observed at one school in Norway.

### **The source of information**

Two school managers (one from Zambia and one from Norway) in the selected primary schools were interviewed. In addition, observations were conducted in four grade 1 classrooms ( two in Zambia and two in Norway) in the two selected schools in two countries. Apart from interview and classroom observations, searches for necessary literature related to my study were conducted both online and offline. Some international databases such as JSTOR and Science direct were searched for literature related to the two countries on the use of a local language as language of instruction. Extensive research was done by using institutional repository for University of Zambia which stores huge volumes of data, google scholar and some search engines such google and yahoo. The other data came from the researchers experience as a primary school teacher who has been exposed to the way literacy is taught in both Zambia and Norway. The main aim for all this was to gain an insight about the general impression of what goes on in both Zambian and Norwegian first grades classrooms, and probably try to compare the two countries.

### **Findings**

The first part in this section presents the findings from Norway in line with the reflective themes and questions as they appear in this section as posed below:

1. What was the general feeling of parents about the use of Norwegian as the language of instruction in all public schools?

2. How were children from other races with different language backgrounds helped considering that local language is the language of instruction in public schools?
3. Who purchases the iPads and how has the community received the use of iPads when writing instead of using books and pencils?
4. As a school, how do you incorporate the parents in the school activities?

## **Interview with the School Manager**

### **Norway**

The questions above were asked to broadly explore and gain an insight about the general impression of what goes on in the school, in relation to the use of Norwegian as the language of instruction.

In response to the first question, the school manager explained that most parents were happy with the use of Norwegian as the language of instruction for initial literacy. However, he was quick to mention that some parents expressed their concerns with teachers teaching Norwegian language when they were not mother tongue speakers of Norwegian themselves. The school manager further revealed that in that school, approximately 20 % of the pupils had parents with other national backgrounds; 45 different mother tongues represented in the parents' group in total by October 2017. For the second question, the school manager stated that:

*the National Education Policy in Norway demands that Norwegian should be the language of instruction at all levels (grades 1-13) in public schools. However, in schools, some minority speaking pupils without sufficient language skills in Norwegian are given special instruction in basic Norwegian in a small group. Others are offered additional language support by bilingual teachers and mother tongue is expected to be a “support language” for the development of fluent Norwegian speaking or writing. Parents with other national backgrounds are expected to teach their children mother tongues at home (and are encouraged to do so).*

The school manager further revealed that at her primary school, they have a strategy which proved to be working out very well in helping children from different language background. The school engaged multilingual teachers who were a link between the two languages (Norsk and the child's mother tongue). These teachers were always there for the children to explain certain concepts from their mother tongue languages into Norsk and the children were doing very well although there are some challenges. He explained that the number of teachers engaged to assist pupils that are not Norwegians is determined by the number of pupils in school with different mother tongue languages.

The other question was on the use of the iPads in the first grades. The researcher wanted to know how the community received the idea of using iPads to write instead of books and pencils. The researcher was also interested in knowing the supplier of the iPads. In response to my questions, the school manager explained that:

*...the issue of using iPads by the first grades learners is new, and currently there is an ongoing national educational debate on this issue; applied research findings are few as to document the learning effect of extensive use of iPads as learning equipment. However, in Hamar municipality, the policy is a balanced use of the equipment; e-learning encouraged, but also traditional methods and hand writing introduced to the school starters.*

On the issue of purchasing of the iPads for the pupils, the school manager explained that it was the responsibility of the Hamar municipality to provide iPads to all first grade learners. The researcher was also interested in finding out how the school incorporated the parents in the school activities. The response from the school manager revealed that the role of the contact teacher is vital. The same teachers that were working with children with different mother tongue languages were also working as a link between parents and the school. The contact teacher has the mandate of having a one- to one responsibility for his/her contact pupils. This also includes regular communication with the

parents via phone calls, massages and meetings.

### **Classroom Observations**

After the interview with the school manager, the researcher conducted classroom observations in two first grade classrooms with pupils aged 5 – 6 years.

The general Classroom observations showed that Norwegian also known as Norsk language was used as the language of instruction in the first grades and pupils know less about English language. Even though teachers taught these pupils initial literacy using Norwegian, not all of them were mother tongue speakers of Norwegian themselves. Similarly, not all of the pupils were mother tongue speakers of Norwegian. It was also observed that teachers played a good morning song in English (and not in Norwegian) as the pupils were coming in one by one to sit in front in a semi-circle.

After the good morning song, teachers introduced the lesson by going through all the daily activities and presented the plan for the day as planned. In all the two classrooms, it was observed that teachers played a mathematical song in Norwegian after the good morning song. The pupils were singing through the song and making gestures according to the way the song was playing. Although I could not understand most of the words in Norsk, I was able to follow the song and I could tell that the mathematical song was about adding numbers from 1 to 10 because ‘jeg snakker og forstar litt norsk’ ‘I speak and understand some Norwegian’. It was also easy for me to follow because of the gestures the pupils were making.

After playing the mathematical song, pupils were split in three groups called Norwegian stations, and each group was assigned a teacher. The three teachers performed their deliberations according to how they had planned. For instance, in one class, the week’s letter was ‘Jj’ and the pupils in the first group were made to practice how to write the letter ‘Jj’ in their exercise books. In the other class the week’s letter was ‘Vv’ and pupils were also made to practice how to write the letter in their exercise books after a demonstration by the teacher.

Pupils in the second group were using the iPads to construct sentences using the structural exponent ‘Jeg ser en ....’ ‘I see a....’ (‘katten’ - ‘cat’). For these pupils using the iPads, the teacher displayed

a picture of different animals in the jungle on the screen accompanied with the sound demonstrating how to construct the sentences by naming the animals in the picture. Pupils were expected to listen and follow the demonstration on the screen before they could complete and write the sentences in full on the iPads. In the other class pupils in the second group were also using the iPads to construct sentences using the same structural exponent ‘Jeg ser en ....’ ‘I see a....’. This time the pupils were expected to complete and write the sentences on the iPads by naming the people in the picture (e.g ‘familie’ - ‘family’), and not the animals as in ‘Jeg ser en ....’ ‘I see a....’ (‘jente’- ‘girl’).

The third group I observed comprised of pupils with different national backgrounds. This group comprised of pupils that have different national backgrounds and they were doing remedial work, going through sounds ‘Jj’ and ‘Vi’. Interestingly, the groups kept on swapping every after 30 minutes so that each group can have a feel of all the activities for the day. Shortly before 11.00 am, there was food and exclusion were pupils were allowed to have a light meal. Interestingly, pupils were not allowed to go out to eat. They were eating from inside the classroom while they were listening to the teacher’s story from the story book ‘The very hungry caterpillar’. After the food and exclusion, pupils were allowed to go out to play for a while.

After the observations, the general findings were in both classrooms, group teaching was key and pupils from different language background were taken care off. There were also adequate teaching and learning materials in the classrooms including iPads for pupils to use. Interestingly, all the lessons were being projected on the screen, and teachers never used the boards except when pupils were put into smaller groups.

## **Interview with the School Manager**

### **Zambia**

The second part in this section presents the findings from Zambia in line with the research questions posed below:

1. How has the community received the use of local language as the language of instruction in the early grades?
2. How do teachers help children with different language backgrounds

considering that Cinyanja is a language of instruction in all public primary schools in Lusaka District?

3. As a school, do you have enough teaching and learning materials to teach literacy?
4. How does your school incorporated the parents in the school activities?

Just like Norway, the aim for this interview was to explore broadly and have an insight of the general impression of what goes on in the Zambian schools, in relation to the use of local languages as media of instruction. In the first place, the researcher wanted to find out how the community received the use of local language as the language of instruction in the early grades. Responding to this question, the school manager said:

*In Zambia, the language policy is that local languages should be used as media of instruction to teach literacy from grades 1 to 4. This is a very good policy that everyone should embrace. It reminds me of my time when we used to learn in our own languages from Sub A to Standard 2. During my time, by the end of Sub A, everyone should know how to read the Bible.*

She further said:

*I get surprised when I see parents coming to complain to me that their children cannot utter any single word in English because teachers use Cinyanja language when teaching. To my surprise, some parents have even removed their children from this school to private schools because they want their children to be learning in English. However, not all parents are against the idea of teaching using a local language. Most parents have welcomed this policy very much although it has come with some challenges.*

On the issue of helping children from different language backgrounds other than Cinyanja, the views gathered through the interview with the school manager indicated that there was no specific policy to explain

how teachers should be helping pupils in schools that were not speakers of the local language used to teach initial literacy. All what the school manager knew was that the current Literacy Framework in Zambia demands that local languages should be used as media of instruction from grades 1 to 4 in all public primary schools. Therefore, the views gathered on this question revealed that the current language policy has not mentioned anything about helping children with other language backgrounds other than the prescribed ones.

On the issue of teaching and learning materials, the school manager explained that the school lacked adequate teaching and learning materials. She stated that there is only one grade 1 teachers' guide that is shared among four teachers to prepare lessons. She further stated that even the learners activity books are few. However, she was also quick to mention that the school is working hard to make sure that teachers are supplied with enough teaching and learning materials.

In terms of incorporating the community into school activities, the study revealed that this had been working very well in Zambia. The school manager revealed that parental involvement at her school was very important as it was an integral part of a successful educational framework. She further revealed that parents were very much willing to participate in the school activities and they were always available whenever their services were needed. She further stated that the school and parents were meeting once in the term for Parents Teachers Association (PTA) meetings.

## **Classroom Observations**

After the interview with the school manager, the researcher conducted classroom observations in two grade 1 classrooms with pupils aged 6 – 9 years.

The general Classroom observations showed that all the pupils in the two classrooms were Zambians, but coming from different language background. After checking through the register, I noted that four regional languages (Cinyanja, Tonga, Bemba, and Lozi) were prominent, with Cinyanja having the highest number of speakers.

The lessons observed were one hour lessons just like in Norway. The general Classroom observations showed that in both lessons Cinyanja

language was used as the language of instruction. In one classroom, the teacher was Tonga but she was using Cinyanja language as the language of instruction since it is the prescribed language for Lusaka District (Ohannessian, 1978). Interestingly, the teacher had very good command of the target Zambian language (Cinyanja) although he was Tonga.

In one lesson, the teacher began with a song in Cinyanja and pupils were singing together with the teacher. After a song, the teacher introduced the lesson by going through all the daily activities and presented the plan for the day as planned. The first thing he did after the song was to introduce the sound of the day ‘Mm’ using a picture of ‘mazira’ ‘eggs’. After this, pupils were told to blend the sound ‘m’ with the vowels ‘a e i o u’ to form the syllables ‘ma me mi mo mu’ and later words ‘mame, amai, mume’ which he asked pupils to read. For the writing activity, the teacher gave the handwriting where pupils were asked to write small letter ‘m’ as well as capital letter ‘M’ in their exercise books. After the handwriting activity, pupils were told to copy an activity from the learners’ activity book, page 13. After the writing activity, the teacher read a story to the pupils that had words containing the sound of the day. He later asked questions about the story before giving the home work which was the last activity.

In both lessons the lesson procedures were followed, although the classes were too overcrowded to accommodate all the activities. However, it was a bit easy for the teachers because there was no need to take the pupils in front when teaching as it was not mandatory for Primary Literacy Programme. In terms of teaching and learning materials (especially the learners activity books), I observed that they were not enough, and pupils had to share among themselves. In some cases, five pupils were sharing one book.

## **Discussion of Findings and Recommendations**

In this section, the findings of the study conducted in Zambia and Norway are discussed in terms of their similarities and differences in the teaching of literacy in the first grades. Apart from discussing pedagogical and the general implementation in the classroom, other salient features and themes surrounding the topic have been discussed.

## **Pedagogical Similarity and Differences in the Teaching of Initial Literacy between Zambia and Norway.**

As can be noted from the findings, there were several similarities and differences noted in terms of teaching methods that were employed, and also about the general impression of how things were done in schools in the two countries. To begin with, both countries are multilingual countries with a language policy that demands the use of a local language as a language of instruction as well as the language of initial literacy for early grades. By extension, in both countries, literacy teaching is centred on aiding reading and writing skills in learners by teaching skills such as letter-sound relationships, and how they blended with others to form syllables.

Even though Zambia and Norway seem to have a similar language policy of using a local language as a medium of instruction, there is a difference in the sense that for Zambia, seven regional languages (Bemba, Nyanja, Tonga, Lozi, Luvale, Lunda and Kaonde) are used as media of instruction as well as languages for initial literacy from grade 1 to 4. This is supported by the National Literacy Framework (2013) which indicated that the seven regional languages should be used as media of instruction in Zambia from grade 1 to 4. Oral English language will be introduced as a subject at Grade 2 but continues to be used as a language of instruction from Grade 5 to tertiary level. In my view, the idea of recommending only seven languages as media of instruction in a multilingual country has given rise to the marginalisation of indigenous languages. This is so because even though the language policy recognizes the use of widely used community languages in specific school catchment areas, it has not explained clearly on how this can be done.

I can therefore conclude that the Zambian language policy gives room for multiple regional language practices in the lower primary school when it states that “the seven (7) zone languages as well as the widely used community languages in specific school catchment areas will be used for this purpose” as it is stated in the Curriculum Framework (2013: 19), but lacks proper guidance on how the other indigenous languages can be embraced as is it the case with

Norway. For Norway, a local language (Norwegian/Norsk) is used as the medium of instruction at all levels (grades 1-13) in public schools, including the University level, while the the language used for initial literacy education depends on the age of the learner and mother tongue. Normally it will be Norwegian, and for those who start in Grade 1, Norwegian is normally the language of initial literacy and also the language of instruction (Banda et al, 2012, pp. 17 and 27). This system is different from the Zambian education system that uses the seven local languages for initial literacy teaching in early grades across all ages and languages.

In Norway, apart from using Norwegian as the language of instruction in all public schools, primary schools also offer mother-tongue instruction to children from other cultures. This implies that in schools, some minority speaking pupils without sufficient language skills in Norwegian are given special instruction in basic Norwegian in a separate small group. Others are entitled to special tuition and some mother tongue instruction by bilingual teachers. For instance, some schools have engaged some teachers who are a link between the two languages (Norwegian and the child's mother tongue). These teachers are always there for the children to explain certain concepts from their mother tongue languages into Norwegian. This is line with what Gerd et al (2007) said that in Norway, there is a growing interest in improving the learning outcomes of learners from language minorities.

The study further revealed that the number of teachers engaged to assist pupils that are not Norwegians is determined by the number of pupils in school with different mother tongue languages. This is a unique scenario that should be emulated by the Zambian government. It really shows how much the Norwegian government value other people's mother tongue languages. In addition, parents with other national backgrounds are also expected to teach their children mother tongues at home (and are encouraged to do so). At national level, some upper secondary schools, colleges and university departments offer courses in other languages, including English. This is a very good and interesting policy that I feel should also be emulated by the Zambian education system.

On the question of how the community received the use of local

language as the language of instruction in the early grades, views from the school managers revealed that most parents in both countries were supporting the language policy for both initial literacy and the language of instruction. However, some parents especially in both countries expressed their concern with teachers and pupils teaching and learning these languages when they were not fluent in the language themselves. In Zambia, some parents criticised the government for introducing the teaching of initial literacy in local languages from grades 1-4 as outlined in the 2013 national literacy framework policy. In my view, these concerns by some parents suggested that the current language policy for initial literacy education has not been welcomed well by some Zambians. This implied that despite the use of local languages as media of instruction to teach literacy being emphasized in schools, some of the parents have negative attitudes towards it. This further suggested that parents felt that acquiring English language was more prestigious than acquiring Chinyanja because this would make their children find descent jobs. Some parents therefore, thought that English was the most ideal language to use both in schools and homes.

In line with the same, Mkandawire (2017, P. 73) stated that:

*... the restless debates on whether or not Zambian languages are needed for teaching reading and writing skills in primary schools of Zambia as noted by some parents are merely a parental attitude cancer. This cancer is still a serious disease that has masked the faces of minority urban communities in towns and cities especially families of the crossroads. The mask does not distinguish what is good or bad for the innocent child but it is there because one is a parent.*

The expressions above suggested that acquiring English will permit their children to enter into higher-paid forms of employment and increases opportunities and access to tertiary education. Parents believed that when people are in good employment, generally they have a higher socio-economic status and enjoy better health and employment prospects. The findings have therefore, shown that many parents send their children to schools mainly for economic gains and status in society. Because of this, there was increased demand from some parents

for their children to continue learning in English language rather than in a local language.

The other thing that captured my attention in Norway was the collaboration that existed among teachers. In Norway, school day starts at 8.30 am, but teachersassistants are present in school by 8.00 am to receive the children and have opportunities for exchanging words with parents that bring the children if needed. Apart from receiving pupils, teachers meet briefly in the first grade office before going to class to discuss what they are going to teach, the methods and techniques and the teaching and learning materials they will use. This really captured my attention as it is a very rare situation among the teachers in my country, Zambia. Most teachers in Zambia do not meet on daily basis to discuss the day's lesson developments before going to class, rather, they only meet when they are planning for the term's work. The plan for the day is usually left to an individual teacher. The idea of going through the plan for the day with other teachers before going to class has proved to be a powerful teaching process that encourages dialogue and collaboration among teachers, and in turn benefits the learners.

In terms of classroom instruction, the general findings revealed that the lesson procedure for both Zambia and Norway is similar except in few instances. For instance, for both countries, lessons started with a song and there was reading of a story to learners. However, in Norway, a song was sang as the learners were coming in one by one to sit in front in a semi-circle, while for Zambia learners were just sitting in rows facing the teacher. This happened because the current literacy programme (PLP) does not demand for learners to start together in the circle. However, individual teachers can decide whether to allow learners to sit in front in a circle or not. On the issue of reading of stories to learners, both countries have taken this as an important activity that is performed every day during the lessons.

The other notable thing was that in both countries, slow learners were taken care of. For example, in Zambia, teachers identified slow learners and they were meeting them every Friday of the week to go through the week's work that seemed to be difficult for them to understand. Similarly, teachers in Norway identified learners that had difficulties in learning due to different national and language backgrounds. As earlier stated, in the school the study was conducted in Norway, approximately 20 % of the pupils have parents with other national backgrounds, and 45

different mother tongues were represented. This group of five learners was considered as a special group because the pupils belonged to different language backgrounds other than Norwegian. The group had a special teacher who was helping learners to sound and write letters ‘Jj’ and ‘Vv’ intensively. During this activity, pupils were more relaxed, more comical and seemed to enjoy the activities. This confirmed the interview I had with the school manager that all public schools in Norway give attention to non-speakers of Norwegian and embrace their mother tongue languages.

In terms of teaching and learning materials, both countries had prescribed teaching and learning materials. However, these materials had different levels of adequacy for effective delivery of lessons. For instance, Norway had several materials including the iPads that were used in addition to exercise books, while Zambia had limited materials. These observations were also noted by (Chibamba, 2012 and Chileshe et al 2018). These scholars stated that some teachers in some schools in Zambia had literary no teachers guides and pupils books to help in implementing the programmes in the first five years of PLP existence. Mkandawire (2012) and Mkandawire and Tambulukani (2017) also shared the same concern that limited teaching and learning materials are all contributing to low literacy levels and massive drop outs in Zambia. This is not a pleasing scenario as it can hinder the learning process of the learners, and later affect their reading performance. My advice to the Zambian government is that adequate materials need to be developed and provided to schools if we are to improve the reading standards of the learners. While I may agree with the views above, it can still be argued that non-availability of resources in schools cannot be used as an excuse for teachers' failure to teach literacy. Schools will always have some materials, and if they are inadequate, teachers can either obtain or generate them from the local community through improvisation. This can happen if teachers are motivated enough to teach the curriculum because curriculum implementation demand consented efforts from various stakeholders and teachers are key (Mkandawire, 2010). Therefore, rather than putting the blame on the government for not constantly supplying teaching and learning materials in schools, teachers too, should be creative enough so that they can be able to obtain the teaching and learning resources from the surrounding environment such as posters, magazines, newspapers, and pamphlets from other

disciplines. Mwanza and Mkandawire (2020) noted that the quality of education is partly measured by the nature of materials teachers use in their classes. This means that teaching and learning materials are important and they must be validated to facilitate learning whether or not they are improvised materials or not.

On the same issue of learning resources, Dean (1997) states that in designing and producing teaching and learning materials; we need to remember that the materials produced must be motivating to the learners and, not so easy that there is no challenge. This was the case with Norway that had several materials including the iPads (that were exciting and motivating) that were used in addition to exercise books, while Zambia had limited materials.

Interestingly, it was also revealed that it was a responsibility of the Hamar municipality to purchase iPads for the first grades. The use of the iPads by the first grades in Norway was very interesting and made work easy for both learners and teachers. This was not the case with Zambia. While the use of the iPads seemed to be interesting and made work easy for the learners to write, it may also be possible that the use of the iPads contributed to learners poor handwriting. However, results revealed that this policy was a balanced use of the equipment; e-learning encouraged, but also traditional methods and hand writing was introduced to the school starters. Nevertheless, this is one area that requires extensive research as I did not come across any study on the effects of the use of iPads in early grades in Norway.

The views stated above seem to suggest that teaching and learning materials play a vital role in the improvement of education. For Zambia therefore, all materials should fulfil the required standards to ensure quality teaching in seven regional languages.

In addition to providing iPads for the first grades, it was also revealed that all Norwegian municipalities provide iPads including all day-care programmes before and after the regular school day for children in grades 1-4. These programmes offer facilities for play, and cultural and recreational activities suited to the age, physical abilities and interests of the children. These programmes also offer good development opportunities for children with disabilities (Norwegian MOE, 2007). This is completely different from the Zambian education system. In Zambia, day-care programmes are left into the hands of private institutions and parents even if the current policy recognises

the introduction of pre-schools in public school. Perhaps this can be attributed to the fact that Zambia is still young in terms of implementing free education system.

The other notable feature was that both countries emphasised on the talking walls where each early grade classroom had pictures and charts stuck on walls that created a rich learning environment. The talking walls and pictures contained information on the teaching points such as works on phonics or phonemic awareness as this is a common practice in many countries.

On the question of how the school has incorporated the community in the school activities, it was revealed that in both countries there was mutual collaboration between the schools and the community. In schools in Norway for example, teachers have the mandate to have a one- to one interaction with the parents or via phone calls, massages and meetings. This implies that the role of the contact teacher is vital because he/she is the link between parents and the school.

## **Conclusion**

This article has shown that Zambia and Norway share some similarities and differences in terms of pedagogical and the general implementation in the classroom. For instance, there is no doubt that the two countries are multilingual with the language policy that demand the use of local languages as media of instruction as well as languages of initial literacy. The other challenge that is common is that in both Zambia and Norway some parents supported the language policy whereas others wanted their children's mother tongue to be used as both language of instruction and language of initial literacy. The study has also shown that teachers in both countries taught constrained finite skills first such as alphabetic letters, letter-sound relationships and how one sound blended with others to form syllables. This was so because the two countries focus on the aspects of teaching literacy in order to improve literacy levels among school going children. Another similarity was that classes in both programmes were expected to have talking walls with a library. For Zambia, inadequacy of teaching and learning materials was a serious issue that needs to be addressed quickly. Lastly, I would like to end by encouraging the two countries to continue learning from each other as they seem to be sharing the same challenges.

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