

## **Challenges of Using Icibemba in the Learning of Initial Literacy in Selected Primary Schools in Serenje District of Zambia: An Analysis of Views of Teachers and Learners**

MWIMBA CHIBESAKUNDA AND INNOCENT MUTALE MULENGA\*

*The University of Zambia*

### *Abstract*

*The purpose of this study was to establish views and investigate challenges faced by teachers and learners in the use of Icibemba in teaching initial literacy in primary schools in Serenje district. A descriptive research design supported by qualitative data collection techniques was employed. A purposive sampling procedure was used to select all the participants giving the study a sample size of 56 comprising of 40 grade four learners and 16 of their teachers sampled from 10 primary schools. Researchers decided to have more learners in this study since they were the direct beneficiaries of the curriculum. And thus the need to have a wider view from them. This was also done so as to have enough participants from each school. Data was collected through interviews, focus group discussions and classroom observations of literacy lessons. Lesson observation was used to get first hand information on the learning experiences and helped the researchers to triangulate with what participants expressed during interviews and focus group discussions. Focus group discussions and interviews enabled participants to provide their detailed views of the exact situation learners and teachers encountered. Thematic analysis was used to analyze all the data. It involved organizing data through use of open, axial and selective coding before presenting the emerging themes. The findings revealed that although the Ministry of General Education zoned Serenje district under Icibemba instead of Icilala in teaching initial literacy, learners' performance was low because the language used in school was unfamiliar to learners. Additionally, findings*

*also showed that there was a lack of teacher's guide books and learners' text books to use in teaching initial literacy hence teacher's delivery of lessons was negatively affected. Researchers concluded that learners performed poorly in literacy due to the fact that the zoned language was unfamiliar to learners in that area where it was used as a medium of teaching literacy. It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of General Education through the Curriculum Development Center should develop and produce and distribute learning materials for the teaching of literacy in grades one to four. Furthermore, lessons for literacy should be taught using concrete and real teaching and learning resources that can enhance learning. Additionally, there is a need to start thinking about the possibility of rezoning the whole country.*

**Key words:** Initial literacy, Familiar language, Local language, Language of Instruction

## **Introduction**

The choice of the language for literacy instruction during the early years of education has been a debatable issue in Zambia. Some scholars such as Tambulukani and Bus (2011), Mwanza (2012), Mwansa (2017), and Mkandawire (2017) reported that, the use of mother tongue or familiar language as medium of literacy instruction in early grades is recommended in education world wide. In Zambia, the use of a mother tongue in teaching is an issue that goes back to the days before political independence (Manchishi, 2004). Thus, when a second language is introduced as a medium of teaching in the primary school years, it goes against the universally held notion and research proven fact that mother tongue is the best language to begin ones education with at primary school level. It brings to the fore the ability of the learner to cope with learning through a second language since

second language is most often their weaker language (Kashoki, 1990). The use of a second language, for whatever reason, as a language of teaching during the early years of schooling mostly lead to learning difficulties arising out of language barrier (Kyeyune, 2003). However, such a problem does not override the crucial need to acquire a second language, especially one that has immense instrumental value. Increasingly, we see that in Zambia the bilingual approach has been adopted to facilitate learning through a second language.

Most developing countries are characterised by multilingual societies yet foreign languages of instruction pervade a majority of education systems, for example, Zambia is one of them (Kashoki, 1990). Although Mulenga and Mwila (2017:2) observed that ‘the need to use local languages or native languages in Zambian schools, started way back before Zambia got its independence in 1964’, Kashoki (1989) suggested that there is a problem of confusing two quite different, though related, concepts: language and tribe. Though Zambia has a total of seventy three ethnic groups which can be grouped into 25 distinct spoken languages, only seven of these languages have been receiving financial and material support from the government. These are: Cibemba, Citonga, Cinyanja, Lunda, Luvale, Kikaonde, and Silozi (MoGE 2015, Chishiba & Manchishi, 2016). These same seven languages have been zoned and are recommended by the Ministry of General Education to be used as a medium of teaching initial literacy in primary schools (MoGE, 2016). In principle the idea is brilliant but in practice, in some parts of the country learners seem to have benefited little from the proposed language strategy. For example, Zambia is a highly urbanised country and it is not possible for all the learners living in a multi-lingual urban area to speak and learn the dominant language which has been zoned in that particular area. In addition, there is still lack of proper teacher education among existing teachers to enable them handle the new

situation as stated by the Ministry of Education (1992). Despite the Ministry of Education recognizing this many years ago, the situation of having competent teachers to teach local languages in every part of the country is still problematic as observed by Chileshe, Mkandawire and Tambulukani (2018), and Kafata (2016). As for teaching materials, they seem to be far from being adequate (MoE, 2001). The seven local languages that have been zoned to teach initial literacy skills from grade one to grade four are said to be familiar language to the Zambian learner. This is said to have helped in improving literacy levels according to MoGE (2015). However, teachers and learners seem to be facing a number of challenges with this language approach of literacy teaching.

When the primary school curriculum was revised in 2013 it allowed learning instruction to be conducted in the learners' familiar language so as to enhance literacy teaching and learning for better learning achievements. Familiar language here is meant to refer to a language that learners spontaneously and easily use in their daily activities including at play on a regular basis. Research has clearly shown that learners acquire basic literacy skills when the language which is familiar to them is used as a language of teaching (Mbewe 2015; Chileshe, Mkandawire and Tambulukani (2018); Matafwali, 2010; Mubanga, 2012; Banda, Mostert, & Wikan 2012; Mwanza, 2012; Kumwenda 2010). However, according to the reports by SACMEQ (2012) the results consistently showed that Zambian learners are at the bottom in terms of literacy in comparison to their Southern and Eastern Africa counterparts. Using local language as medium of instruction has been re-introduced in Zambian Primary Schools with a different approach. Without making comparisons with other countries in the region, this has helped in improving literacy levels and it is hoped that the use of a familiar language will continue to improve the literacy levels for learners in primary

schools. However, places like Serenje whose local language is lala has been zoned under icibemba which is not a familiar language to learners. In this study the researchers wondered how the use of icibemba in a lala speaking area would help learners to improve literacy levels. It was for reasons that this study aimed at establishing views and investigating challenges faced by teachers and learners on the use of icibemba in teaching initial literacy in a predominantly lala-speaking area. The overall research questions that guided the study were;

1. What views did teachers and learners have on the use of icibemba as a medium of teaching initial literacy in primary schools in Serenje district?
2. What constraints were faced by teachers and learners in the use of icibemba when teaching and learning initial literacy using icibemba as opposed to lala in Serenje district?

Although different studies have been done in other parts of the country, this study is likely to be significant in many ways. Most importantly, the results from the study may act as a reference point to inform educational practitioners, educational administrators, policy makers, curriculum developers, politicians and other stakeholders interested in language policy. Stakeholder may utilize the findings of this study to bring about workable solutions in the challenge of teaching initial literacy in primary schools. Moreover, the findings of this study may add to the already existing body of knowledge on literacy education.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was informed by Basil's Theory of Pedagogical discourse which was proposed by Basil Bernstein (1990). Basil Bernstein constructed basil theory based on the premise that there is a need for a genuinely original line of thought, developed through a constant refinement, deepening and reorganisation of ideas, as

a consequence of a permanent reflexive and interrogative attitude before the problems which interested him. Furthermore, Basil theory hinges on the rules or principles that governs the learners learning. For example according to this theory, it postulated that learners who learn from a known language are more likely to actively participate in their learning experience and are thus likely to perform better academically. Additionally, failure to show performance may indicate lack of recognition or realization of rules or both. Bernstein in his Basil theory maintains that in types of societies, the “simple” and the “complex”, the distribution of forms of consciousness and systems of meaning is structurally similar, but that they are specialized differently through different agencies and pedagogic discourses. The applicability of this theory was based on the learning principle of simple to complex. Learners feel more confident and therefore, respond better to learning if that learning is taking place in a language with which they are familiar. They easily communicate to each other and to the teacher teaching them. This helps both teachers and learners to express themselves fully and clearly. Learning should be a fun process that learners choose to engage in but learning and reading for enjoyment will not take place if learners cannot understand the language being used as the medium of instruction. Furthermore, using a familiar language makes learners appreciate school because they are able to learn effectively and participate in many learning experiences. Teaching that is done from known to unknown language of the learner is considered to have no barrier. The success of the first language learning is believed to be essential for the success in the second language and learner improvement in performance.

## **Literature Review**

The education system in Zambia is structured in such a way that there is elementary school, primary, junior secondary, senior

secondary and tertiary education (Mkandawire and Illon, 2018). In elementary and lower primary classes, local Zambian languages are used as medium of instruction in schools. English serve as medium of instruction from Grade 5 to University (Zambia's National Literacy Framework, 2013). Local language education in Zambia is encouraged as it allows learners to use what is already known to learn new skills such as reading, writing and numeracy in familiar contexts (Mkandawire, 2018; Mwanza, 2012). This enhances active interaction and communication in schools from the first day a learners start formal education and enables learners at a later time to gradually transition to education in that language when they are ready (Kashoki, 1990). The challenge becomes more serious when learners come to a stage where they are completing primary schooling without the requisite standards of reading and writing. In a setting where this has been a challenge, many countries have adopted mother tongue education policies with the objective of improving literacy skills. This shift to mother tongue-based educational policy is premised on research evidence that support the view that learning is easier and faster in a learner's mother tongue (Manchishi, 2004).

Kashoki,(1989 and 1990) and Manchishi (2004) had made recommendations decades ago and yet very little progress had been made. Since 2013, the Ministry of General Education in Zambia eventually revised the curriculum in order to address the low literacy levels among Zambian learners (MoGE, 2015). Kashoki (1978:1) explained that 'they are up to 17 dialect clusters based on general linguistic closeness reflected in similar phonology and overlapping vocabulary' in Zambia. The groups are divided further into clusters that can be considered to be dialects of the same language. Bemba and Lala according to Kashoki (1978) do not belong to the same cluster. Lala is together with Ambo, Luano and Swaka, while Bemba is with Chisinga, Kabende, Mukulu, Ngumbo, Twa, Unga, Bwile, Luunda, Shila and Tabwa. Based

on the clustering there are about 25 distinct language spoken in Zambia although there is some mutual comprehension between clusters within the same group as opposed to between groups.

In 2013 the government introduced that the teaching of initial literacy was to be in local familiar languages in the first four grades of primary schools. Despite the initiative done by government empirical evidence shows that, there are still challenges that teachers and Zambian learners encounter as they implement the 2013 revised curriculum (MoGE, 2016).

It is again worth noting that various studies have been conducted within Zambia that looked at the challenges faced when using a familiar local language as medium of teaching (Banda, Mostert & Wikan 2012, Mwanza 2012, Simfukwe 2012, Ndamba 2008, Gacheche 2010). The studies have indicated various challenges teachers encountered as they implemented the curriculum at classroom level in a multilingual area. For instance, Banda, Mostert, and Wikan (2012), as cited in Mbewe (2015) carried out a pilot study on the language of education policy implementation, practice and learning outcomes in Lusaka district at White Primary School. One of the findings of this study was that although Cinyanja still remained a lingua franca and recognised as the familiar local language for Lusaka province, the prominent languages spoken by the majority of learners in this school once they got to their homes were Cinyanja, Bemba, Tonga, Soli, Lenje, Lozi, Kaonde and several other Zambian languages. The information was relevant to this study in that although *icibemba* may be considered as similar to *lala*, some words used in *icibemba* though may sound like *lala* have different meanings hence they are likely to bring in a mismatch between the language of instruction and the language of play. For instance the word *umwele* in *icibemba* means a knife while in *lala* it means beautiful and the word *balemita* in *bemba* means being called by some one while in *lala* it means to get pregnant. There are many

other such words. Therefore, this information gave researchers an insight in finding out what challenges teachers and learners encountered in teaching/learning using icibemba as opposed to lala. Additionally, the information was also relevant to this study which was carried out in Serenje district which is a mono-lingual area where the government has zoned icibemba to be used. Based in other researches and theory researchers assumed that this situation might disadvantage some learners due to the fact that icibemba is not the mother tongue for many other learners. Therefore, it was important to analyse views and challenges faced by teachers and learners on the use of icibemba in teaching initial literacy in primary schools in a mono-lingual area of Serenje district.

Matafwali (2010) in her study argued that there is unequivocal evidence which generally suggested that efforts to learn to read in an unfamiliar language can be thwarted as this is assumed to be an enormous challenge since learners in this case would be learning two complex skills at the same time. The challenge Matafwali was referring to was as a result of the fact that the Zambian learner, whose mother tongue was any of the local languages, were being taught using English language which was not familiar to them or which they were not exposed to. As a result of this, scholars such as Kelly (2000) indicated that the initial use of English language in schools compromised, to a greater extent, the quality of education being offered in schools. Additionally, Kelly (2000), further stated that the quality was not only compromised at the initial grades of primary schools, but the problem also went further to the higher grades as there was no proper transition done from the first language to the second language. Kashoki (1990) further explained that the observed mismatch would definitely negatively affect the implementation of the content for teachers and cause challenges as they teach in a mono-lingual setting.

## **Methodology**

The study approach was predominantly qualitative where views and opinions of teachers and learners were sought based on their experience. The research applied more emphasis on exploring the richness, depth and complexity of experiences that teachers and learners had during the teaching and learning of literacy. Bryman (2008) explained that qualitative research methodology is a research strategy that usually emphasises words rather than quantifications in the collection and analysis of data. The design used for this study was descriptive in nature that needed the collecting of data about people's attitudes, opinions, views on the teaching and learning of initial literacy. A qualitative research methodology was used because of the nature of the study that sought to understand human and social behaviour from the perspective of those engaging in the target practices of teaching and learning literacy.

With the view of understanding the teachers and learners views about the use of Icibemba in teaching initial literacy in primary schools, the researchers took the opportunity to listen and understand the lived experiences with regard to the subject relating to the medium of instruction at primary school level. Semi structured interview guides, a lesson observation check list and focus group discussion guide were used to collect needed information. For the sampling procedure, homogenous purposive sampling was used to arrive at a sample of 56 participates with similar characteristics. These were 40 grade four learners and 16 teachers of literacy of the same grade sampled from 10 primary schools in Serenje district.

Data was analysed thematically. Kombo and Tromp (2006) defined thematic analysis as a process of coding, and then grouping the coded information into similar groups according to themes. Analysis of data began in the field as soon as data collection commenced. At the end of data collection, all collected data was categorized for the purpose of orderly examining and refining differences in emerging and grounded concepts.

## Findings

Findings have been presented in line with the two research questions that have been mentioned in the previous sections of this paper. Learners were asked to give their views on whether or not they were compelled to use Icibemba when learning how to read and write. The findings of the study revealed that all the learners who participated in the study indicated that the language that themselves and the teachers used when they were learning how to read and write was Icibemba. For instance one nine year old boy indicated that:

*For me Icibemba is not easy to understand and I fail to follow what the teacher is teaching especially if the teacher is just teaching without using Icilala and this makes me not to participate very much in learning experiences and usually it makes me not to ask the questions as learning is taking place.*

Another learner, a girl, in another group disclosed that:

*I have no problem with the use of Icibemba as we learn because I am able to speak it. It is only a problem because the teacher at times uses difficult words and then I fail to follow. But I would be happy if the teacher used Icilala.*

In a different focus group discussion at another school a learner mentioned that;

*At home we speak Icilala but I find it very difficult to read and write in Icibemba and my friends laugh. But if I was to speak and write in Icilala I can do it very well. Icibemba is difficult.*

There was also a very interesting view from a grade four learner who questioned that;

*Is Icibemba the only language we should learn? I can speak*

*a bit of it since we go to sell with mum at the market but it is not easy to write it because at home we speak in lala. The teachers should just use lala it will be fine.*

It was very clear from the learner's views that they would prefer to learn in Icilala and not in Icibemba since Icilala was more familiar to them and it was the language that they used at home and most likely as they play with their friends. We can thus say that learners were having challenges with the use of Icibemba as they tried to learn how to read and write. With regard to teachers' views on the selection of Icibemba as a language of teaching literacy. The findings revealed that Icilala was the language of play for most learners so it was difficult for the learners to communicate during the teaching and learning of literacy using Icibemba. In particular, one teacher who herself was quite fluent in Icibemba explained that;

*It is not a bad idea to use Icibemba in teaching and learning of literacy in this area but learners are more comfortable to use Icilala even when they are in class because Icilala is the most used language by learners at school and at home even when they play around with their friends. Therefore, a lot of learners find it difficult to communicate effectively in the teaching and learning of literacy.*

However, another teacher from a different school mentioned that some learners spoke a bit of Icibemba when playing and thus she supported the selection of Icibemba as a medium of teaching initial literacy. She mentioned that:

*I think it is just fine that Icibemba is used in school here because some of these pupils speak Icibemba in their homes and the official language of this country which is English they cannot speak it and understand. And when these pupils are playing you hear some of them using Icibemba and not Icilala so it is easy even as you are teaching them you are*

*teaching them in a language they use.*

Three teachers who opposed the selection of Icibemba made reference to the mixing of English with the mother tongue, Icilala. Teachers emphasised that this was confusing the learners more since they were forced to use Icibemba which to them was like a second language. One participant actually indicated that she would have preferred her learners using their mother tongue which is Icilala alongside English. The teacher suggested that;

*For me obviously I would have wished that teaching and learning of literacy was done in Icilala in this area because whenever you want the learner to speak using Icilala they do it very well and have very fewer difficulties in understanding concepts. And also English should have been a must to be used as early as grade two. We can't put English aside because where ever a child goes to learn even in other provinces or countries one can communicate in English without any problem and it won't affect their performance. So I think both local familiar language and English are very important. Icibemba should be used in Northern and Luapula provinces not here in Serenje.*

Furthermore another teacher said that;

*It would have been better to consider Icilala in teaching for preserving the culture since Chief Kabamba area is home to the lalas. Most of these learners are lala and therefore they should learn how to read and write in their language so that one day they can write their tribal history and thus preserve their culture for future generations.*

Another teacher also said English would have been carried alongside lala for purposes of national unity. When asked about his views concerning the selection of Icibemba he said that;

*My view is that the selection of Icibemba in a mono-cultural*

*setting like ours is a very bad idea because it undermines our culture. So for me I look at two issues: culture and unity in our country. Icilala would have been the best culturally since it is spoken by the indigenous of Serenje district but when we look at the aspect of unity in the country, there is no doubt English is the best. So for me we would have picked English and Icilala for purposes of culture and unity.*

From the teacher's views on the use of Icibemba and not Icilala in the teaching of initial literacy they raised very important issues that are cardinal for the learners. They looked at language of teaching in terms of understanding of concepts by learners and the preservation of culture. These are very important aspects in understanding the functions of education and why citizens are to receive an education that is tailored to their local needs.

Teachers were also asked to indicate if the teaching of literacy in Icibemba was supported by appropriate and adequate teaching and learning materials. The teachers mentioned that lack of adequate materials such as teacher's guide books and learner's textbooks was posing a very serious challenge in the teaching of literacy. Participants said that there were no books for teachers and learners that could be used during the teaching and learning of literacy. For example, one teacher indicated that;

*Lack of teaching and learning resources is a very big problem when it comes to teaching literacy. For instance, there are very few available learner's textbooks am telling you. Thus, most learners do not have access to text books hence it is very difficult to explain what one is teaching them since they do not have books to read and do individual work. Learners need textbooks so that they can do some reading even at home.*

Another teacher observed that;

*It seems this new policy was just brought for teachers to implement without providing teaching resources as well. As*

*I am talking now, there are no books in our school or any other teaching and learning material. Our school cannot even afford to buy manila paper. I think government was just interested in telling us to implement without concern for materials. So this has really been a challenge and it has made our work so difficult and this has negatively contributed to learner participation in class.*

Yet another teacher in another school complained that;

*I think one big problem is that there are no books for us to implement the 2013 revised curriculum using learner-centred approaches. You know it is already difficult for us to teach in Icibemba and making teaching and learning aids without raw materials such as manila paper. Yes sometimes a teacher can improvise but there is a limit to what one can improvise.*

From the teachers' views one of their challenges was lack of teacher's guide books and learner's text books. They complained that apart from teaching in a language that is not familiar to learners they did not have relevant teaching and learning resources such as text books. Additionally, both teachers and learners bemoaned the complexity of Icibemba as a language. It was observed that the Icibemba used in the syllabus was too complex compared to the Icibemba which was used as a language of play by learners in the some communities of Serenje district. One of the teachers commented that;

*The other challenge is that the Icibemba that is used in the few textbooks that we have is totally different with the Icibemba we know in our community. It is actually deep Bemba because even for me a teacher, for most words I have to consult. The Icibemba that we speak here is just on the surface. For example, in our simple Icibemba we say 'kalete sefa' (go and bring a sieve) but in books it is written 'kalete*

*ulunyungo'. This affects the acquisition of literacy among learners as they need to learn the language first before learning the literacy skills.*

In a similar way, another teacher said that;

*I know Ibibemba but not the one that we are expected to teach in class. The syllabus and the textbooks have very difficult Ibibemba that the learners in this area find very difficult to understand.*

The learners also complained that the Ibibemba that they learn was too complicated compared to the one some of their friends who speak it use. One of the learners commented that;

*The Ibibemba the teachers use in class is too difficult and it is totally different from the one I know and use when am playing with my friends. The Ibibemba we learn is too difficult. So it is so difficult for me to actively participate in the lesson and perform as expected as it takes me more time to learn and then apply to the situation. When my teacher gives us home work my parents refuse to help me and usually sends me back to my teacher at school because they say that they do not understand the language. At times my parents would ask a neighbour to help but this cannot be done always since our neighbours go to the farm.*

This situation is also made worse by the fact that there is a shortage of dictionaries in Ibibemba in the country. It was revealed that it was even more challenging for learners who joined the schools on transfers from other non Ibibemba speaking regions to adapt to a new language. For example, a teacher said that;

*Local languages affect learner performance due to regional transfers. Imagine a child who through lower primary was learning a different local language and then he eventually come here on transfer such a child*

*will eventually fail. We have this problem of such pupils who come on transfer and it is very difficult to help them.*

Similarly, another teacher noted that;

*It is very difficult to teach learners who come on transfer from private schools and also from other provinces because they were using a different language where they came from. It is really proving to be a problem to teach such children because whatever you say the child will either just be looking at you, chorusing with others, copying activities for the day and talking less in class, this makes learners passive in class.*

Both teachers and learners seemed to agree on a number of issues that made the teaching and learning of reading and writing at lower levels difficult.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The views of teachers and learners point to the fact that the use of Icibemba as a medium of teaching and learning literacy in lower primary schools in Serenje district as directed by the Ministry of General Education following the 2013 revised curriculum posed a challenge to the effective implementation of literacy education. The majority of the participants supported the idea that Icilala was the most appropriate medium of teaching than Icibemba in the teaching and learning of literacy in Serenje district. Most teachers who were interviewed indicated that Icilala was a familiar language in the area and thus was predominantly used by learners. This finding indicated that the language of preference by both teachers and, learners who are the beneficiaries of the curriculum was the local language since that was what they used in their daily activities. The findings are consistent with Mkandawire (2017), and Kinyaduka and Kiwara (2013), who postulated that learners

performed well in initial literacy when taught in a familiar language than in any other language that was strange to them. Similarly, Matafwali (2010) also said that it is much easier for learners to learn how to read when taught in a familiar local language.

As can be noted from the findings, learners were not of the view that Icibemba was appropriate for use as a medium of teaching them how to speak, read and write. One would then wonder how the Ministry of General Education zoning assumed that Icibemba was predominately spoken by learners and other people in Serenje and failed to understand that Icilala was the language that was mainly used by learners in the area. If teachers and other members of the society were involved in curriculum implementation decisions such mistakes which heavily affected learners would have been avoided. This confirms Mulenga and Mwanza's (2019) observation that teachers were not fully involved in curriculum development though the Ministry of General Education claimed so.

The findings in this study further indicated that the Icibemba that was used as a medium of teaching was too complicated for most learners and even for some teachers as compared to the one that was spoken by a few people and learners in Serenje district. This finding was in tandem with Mbewe (2015) who postulated that, there was usually a discrepancy between the language used as medium of teaching and the language spoken by teachers and learners hence it hindered the learners' active participation in class.

Thompson (1992) stated that what teachers do in the classroom is fundamentally influenced by their personal views and beliefs. Teacher's attitudes are a major predictor of the use of new technologies in instructional settings (Mwanza, 2012). Consequently, the negative attitudes held by teachers about changes in the curriculum may negatively affect the use of instructional strategies which may in turn compromise the quality of teaching and learners academic performance in literacy. In this study teachers were concerned about the use of Icibemba

in a predominately lala speaking area and they seem to wonder why the Ministry of General Education was forcing a language on learners that was not familiar as a medium of teaching. In addition, Mubanga, (2012) noted that when a new curriculum is introduced, teachers are normally concerned with the following; the overwhelming work required in the implementation of the new curriculum, lack of proper training on the new curriculum and inadequacy of supporting material. Findings related to the availability of appropriate and adequate teaching and learning resources shows that they were not available at all. The findings indicated that there were no adequate text books for teachers to use and for learners to read during the process of teaching and learning. Additionally, teachers were finding it difficult to prepare teaching and learning aids for them to use in lessons. These findings were consistent with Mbewe (2015) who also found that teachers in some selected schools of Lusaka urban faced the challenge of inadequate materials while implementing the use of cinyaja as medium of teaching in the first four grades of primary schools. It was further revealed that materials were not only unavailable in schools but also in the entire country. Those that were available were of poor quality and thus could not effectively aid the teaching of speaking, reading and writing. Provision of appropriate and adequate teaching and learning resource especially textbooks in literacy is vital as Sianga and Mulenga (2019:99) also observed that;

It is a well-known fact that the use of textbooks and other learning resources by learners in schools have a positive effect on learning and on the overall quality of education. Thus, the quality of an education system can be noted by the provision of quality textbooks and other educational teaching and learning resources. Lack of teaching and learning resources was one of the prominent challenges that teachers and learners encountered in the teaching and learning of literacy. These findings are consistent with the observation by Ndamba (2008) who mentioned that lack of resources and insufficient curriculum time, expenses for training

and lack of appropriate materials were some of the factors that made curriculum seldomly implemented as intended. In relation to this Simfukwe (2012) argued that curriculum change implies teacher change. If teachers were not empowered to effectively implement a new concept and education in a language that they knew better, the investment of time and resources in developing a new curriculum package can be a waste.

It is also important to note that although the Ministry of General Education was passionate about literacy in Zambia, by revising the curriculum, they did not provide adequate materials in schools and teachers' resourcefulness in providing some teaching aids was hampered by lack of raw materials in schools. This aspect of teaching in local languages actually comes with the whole package of the competency-based curriculum whose philosophy is to help 'learners to acquire three critical educational elements namely; worthwhile skills, appropriate attitudes and applicable knowledge which make up competences' as explained by Mulenga and Kabombwe (2019:118). One then wonders if this can be possible when the language of teaching is problematic to both the teacher and the learner. Furthermore, teachers and learners found the use of Ibibemba for teaching to be more complex than the Ibibemba that was spoken by some learners and people around Serenje. Ndamba, (2008) emphasized that the best place for designing a curriculum was where the teacher and the learner meet. This again bring us back to the theory that this study was based on, that learning is best done in the familiar language of the learner.

## **6. Conclusions and Implications**

While Mwanza (2012) in his study argued that one of the challenges faced when using a local language for teaching initial literacy was that teachers lacked fluency and enough vocabulary relevant for delivering content to learners, findings in this study actually indicated that the challenges of teaching literacy in Ibibemba in Serenje goes beyond the issue of vocabulary. Although teachers may have the right vocabulary learners in Serenje

would still not benefit from it since their main challenge was the whole idea of using a language which was not familiar to them. The overall conclusion in this study is that the government of the Republic of Zambia through the Ministry of General Education should seriously think about the current zoning of languages in the country in terms of which ones should be used in school for initial literacy. As situations such as the one in Serenje are not helpful at all for the effective implementation of the curriculum for lower primary schools. The situation may even be the same for learners who may want to take a local language as a subject at higher level. Curriculum implementation for literacy should be accompanied by the provision of teaching and learning materials especially teachers guides and learners' textbooks. A curriculum document alone in form of a syllabus will not solve the problem of low levels of literacy if teachers are not provided with appropriate and adequate teaching and learning materials and if learners are forced to learn in a language that they are not familiar in.

It is also important at this point to pay attention so some of the significant indicators of performance such as PISA and SAQMEC results which have consistently provided literacy performance data for the education system in Zambia. For instance the 2019 PISA-D results showed that to reach the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) reading target, average proficiency levels among 15-year-olds in Zambian schools, the country need to work extremely hard. The results indicated that in Zambia far fewer-only 5 percent of test takers achieved minimum reading proficiency with its average reading score of 275 which was more than two standard deviations below the OECD mean of 500 (Kaffenberger, 2019).

The 2019 PISA results seems to confirm the past SAQMEC results as those reflected in literacy about Zambian learners. If the language challenges, such as the ones in this study, that scholars are bringing forward are not urgently and adequately attended to by the relevant education authorities in Zambia these poor performances by learners may continue to prevail.

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