

**TEACHERS' INTERPRETATION OF ACCELERATED CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION CURRICULUM TO TEACH READING, IN PRIVATE
SCHOOLS IN LUSAKA DISTRICT.**

BY

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**A dissertation submitted to the University of Zambia in Partial
fulfillment for the award of the Master of Education in Literacy and
Learning.**

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DECLARATION

I, Precious Zulu do declare that this work is my own and that the work of other persons utilized in this thesis has been duly acknowledged. This work presented here has not been presented previously at this or any other university for similar purposes.

Signed here in

Date

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This dissertation by Precious Zulu is approved as fulfilling part of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Education in Literacy and Learning.

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ABSTRACT

Children are increasingly expected to progress in reading at a standard speed and through one methodology. The Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum developed in the 1970s in Garland, Texas by Dr. Donald Howard plays a role and contributes to reading through the use of Individualized Instruction in teaching initial literacy to Pre and Lower Primary school learners, as one of its special features.

The purpose of the study was to establish the understanding of the teachers who are using the Accelerated Christian Education Curriculum to teach reading at Pre and lower Primary school level, in private schools in Lusaka District. The study sought to establish the teachers' interpretation of the ACE programme in terms of its ability to produce students who are capable of acquiring the basic skills of reading in initial literacy.

The study employed phenomenological design in which qualitative methods were triangulated to describe snap shots of the population about which data was gathered. The Mode of data collection, included interviews, observations and analysis of documents. The sampling technique was purposive.

The major findings indicated that ACE reading program fosters development of the Individual child to his full capacity. The program encourages individual progress with the use of self-pacing. The initial diagnosis conducted for every pupil takes away assumption based on chronological age or class expectations. The pupils continue on to individual work once they are able to read.

Finally, it was recommended that local curriculum developers should tailor the literacy curriculum according to individual needs of the learner to achieve the objectives of literacy. Teachers and all other stake holders should consider individual needs as they teach children to read, because with the right exposure, every child can learn to read. The developers of ACE program should authorize printing of materials locally to reduce the cost and delivery time.

Key words: literacy, reading, individualised instruction.

DEDICATION

This piece of work is dedicated to my family for their unwavering support throughout my study period.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration.....	i
Certificate of Approval Form.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Overview.....	1
1.2 Background to the study.....	3
1.3 Statement of the problem.....	5
1.4 Purpose of the study.....	6
1.5 Main Objective.....	6
1.6 Specific Objectives.....	6
1.7 Research Questions.....	6
1.8 Significance of the Study.....	7
1.9 Scope of the Study.....	7
1.10 Delimitations of the Study.....	7
1.11 Operational Definitions.....	7
1.12 Conceptual Framework.....	8
1.13 Ethical Considerations.....	8
1.14 Summary.....	9

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1	Overview.....	10
2.2	Theories of Learning.....	10
2.2.1	Behaviorist Theory.....	10
2.2.2	Constructivist Theory.....	13
2.2.3	Summary.....	15
2.3	Mastery Learning.....	16
2.3.1	Individualised Instruction.....	21
2.4	The Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) Curriculum.....	23
2.4.1	Curriculum.....	25
2.5	Principles of ACE Curriculum.....	25
2.5.1	Goal Setting.....	26
2.5.2	Character Building.....	28
2.6	Literacy Aspect of the Curriculum.....	28
2.6.1	Literacy Defined.....	28
2.6.2	Reading.....	32
2.6.3	ACE Reading Program.....	35
2.6.3.1	Kindergarten with Ace and Christi.....	35
2.6.3.2	ABCs Ace and Christi.....	35
2.6.3.3	Speaking English with Ace and Christi.....	35
2.6.3.4	Reading Readiness Test.....	36
2.6.4	Assessment.....	37
2.6.5	ACE Assessment of Reading.....	39
2.7	Studies Conducted outside Zambia.....	39
2.8	Summary.....	44

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1	Overview.....	45
3.2	Research Approach.....	45
3.2.1	Qualitative Research.....	46
3.3	Research Design.....	47

3.4	Study Population.....	48
3.5	Study Sample.....	48
3.6	Sampling Technique.....	49
3.7	Instruments for Data Collection.....	50
3.8	Procedure for Data Collection.....	50
3.8.1	Interviews.....	50
3.8.2	Observation.....	51
3.8.3	Document Analysis.....	52
3.9	Data Analysis Procedure.....	52
3.10	Confidentiality.....	53
3.11	Summary.....	53
CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS		
4.1	Overview.....	54
4.2	Administering the ACE System.....	54
4.2.1.	Interviews.....	54
4.2.2.1	Teachers Interview.....	54
4.2.2.2	Student Offices.....	54
4.2.2.3	Procedure for Scoring.....	55
4.2.2.4	Goal Setting.....	55
4.2.2.5	PACEs.....	56
4.2.2.6	Assessment.....	56
4.2.2.7	Teacher –Learner Relationship.....	56
4.2.2.8	Experience with other Programs.....	57
4.3	Strategies used to achieve Reading Objectives.....	57
4.3.1	Teacher Interview.....	57
4.3.2	Strategies used to teach Reading.....	58
4.3.2.1	Introduction of the Lesson.....	58
4.3.2.2	Mastering and Forming Letters.....	60
4.3.2.3	Library Time.....	60
4.4	Perceived strengths and weaknesses of the system.....	61
4.4.1	Strengths and weaknesses.....	61

4.4.2	Concluding Remarks.....	61
4.4.3	Pupil Interviews.....	62
4.4.3.1	Background.....	62
4.4.3.2	Individualised Instruction.....	62
4.4.3.3	Assessment.....	63
4.4.3.4	Teacher- Pupil Relationship.....	63
4.4.3.5	Strengths and weaknesses.....	64
4.5	Management and Implementation of the program.....	64
4.5.1	Head of Department Interview.....	64
4. 6	Document Analysis.....	65
4.7	Observation.....	66
4.7.1	Classroom Activities.....	66
4.7.2	Reading Lessons.....	67
4.7.3	Teacher – Learner Relationship.....	68
4.7.4	Availability of Resources.....	68
4.7.5	Assessment.....	68
4.8	Summary.....	68

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1	Overview.....	69
5.2	Administration of the ACE Program.....	69
5.2.1	Student Offices.....	69
5.2.2	Procedure for scoring.....	69
5.2.3	Goal Setting.....	71
5.2.4	PACEs.....	72
5.2.5	Assessment.....	72
5.2.6	Teacher-Pupil Relationship.....	73
5.3	Strategies used to Achieve Reading Objectives.....	73
5.4	Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses.....	75
5.4.1	Strengths.....	75
5.4.2	Weaknesses.....	75

5.4.3 Individualised Instruction.....	77
5.4.4 Resources.....	78
5.5 Summary.....	79

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Overview.....	81
6.2 Conclusion.....	81
6.3 Recommendations.....	81
6.4 Implications for Future Research.....	81

REFERENCES.....	82
Appendices.....	94
Appendix 1: Request to Conduct Research.....	94
Appendix 2: Pupil Request to Participate in Interview.....	96
Appendix 3: Teacher Request to Participate in Interview.....	97
Appendix 4: Response from the School	98
Appendix 5: Teacher Interview Schedule.....	99
Appendix 6: Student Interview Schedule.....	101
Appendix 7: Head of Department Interview Schedule.....	103

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1	Interpretation of ACE Curriculum.....	9
Figure 3.1	Methodology Summary.....	41

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Without the ability to read, a child cannot fully access his or her democratic rights. Ontario Early Reading Strategy (2003) states that, the ability of teachers to deliver effective reading instruction is the most powerful factor in determining how well children learn to read. It is essential to recognise the critical role teachers play in preventing reading difficulties and to provide teachers at all grade levels with the best and most up to date knowledge and skills to teach reading and to promote literacy. Evidence continues to mount that early success in reading is the key to long term success in school and in lifelong learning, and that early intervention when reading problems arise is essential if long term problems are to be avoided.

Reading is said to significantly help in developing vocabulary. The children who start reading from an early age are observed to have good language skills, and they grasp the variances in phonics much better. Reading helps in mental development and is known to stimulate the muscles of the eyes. Reading is an activity that involves greater levels of concentration and adds to the conversational skills of the reader. It is observed that children and teenagers who love reading have comparatively higher IQs. They are more creative and do better in school and college. It is recommended that Parents inculcate the importance of reading to their children in the early years (E-Library Newsletter, 2011).

Reading impacts on literacy levels and there is overwhelming evidence that literacy has a significant relation to a person's success in life. Improvements in reading and literacy can have profound effect on individuals and their contribution to society. Literacy impacts on skills, employment and life opportunities, thus improving the quality of life for people of all ages. Reading improves literacy levels, social skills, and personal well being and provides meaningful activity and a sense of purpose (The Society of Chief Librarians, 2011).

Today's children are increasingly expected to progress in reading and writing at a standard speed and through one methodology. Attitudes and literacy practices have a very significant influence on learner's initial literacy development, all the way through secondary school. The most common understanding of literacy is that, it is a set of tangible skills – particularly the cognitive skills of reading and writing – that are independent of the context in which they are acquired and the background of the person who acquires them (Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2006).

The aim of the literacy expectations is to encourage learners to develop and demonstrate their skills in oracy (speaking and listening), reading and writing for different purposes across the curriculum. The expectations are essentially concerned with developing and recognising learners' ability to select and apply literacy skills in ways that are appropriate to each context (National Literacy and Numeracy Framework, 2013).

The Government of Zambia is committed to providing quality education. This is apparent from the numerous treaties and protocols that it has signed, such as the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) among others. In addition, the Ministry has encouraged the establishment of alternative forms of education delivery, such as the introduction of community schools, private schools, Distance Education and Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) centres (Educational Statistical Bulletin 2004, 2005).

The EU High Level Group Final Report (2012) states that, Pre-school programmes should focus on developing children's emergent literacy skills through playful experience where children see and interact with print as they build an awareness of its functions and conventions. Curricula should be age-appropriate and designed to meet the full range of children's needs: cognitive, emotional, social and physical. An emphasis on non-cognitive skills such as perseverance, motivation, movement and the ability to interact with others in early years is essential for all future learning. Cullinan (2000) asserts that the preschool years are the crucial ones for children's language and literacy learning; what happens during those years has a lasting effect on all learning.

Several models of Instruction have been employed in different classrooms with varying results of successes and challenges. The Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum also plays a role and contributes to reading through the use of Individualized Instruction in teaching initial literacy to Pre and Lower Primary school learners, as one of its special features.

The study sought to establish the understanding of teachers who use the ACE programme in teaching initial literacy skills, with particular emphasis in reading, in order to get their experiences and of learners who are involved with the program in Private Schools. This chapter in particular presents a brief background to the study which will help to shed light on the ACE program and its use, specifically in Private schools. Research questions, aims and objectives will be discussed and these will lead to the significance of the study.

1.2 Background

Accelerated Christian Education Curriculum is built on five basic laws of learning:

- Pupils must be placed at the academic level in each subject where they can perform.
- Reasonable goals must be set each school day.
- Pupils must be controlled and motivated.
- Learning must be measurable.
- Learning must be rewarded.

Working from these five principles, the first school was founded in Garland Texas, in 1970. Three years later, the ministry moved to Lewisville, Texas. Presently the corporate offices are located in Hendersonville, Tennessee. A.C.E. provides curriculum for home educators, private schools, and government schools in over 145 countries (Home Educator's Manual, 2015).

Accelerated Christian Education is an American educational products company that produces the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) school curriculum.

(www.aceministries.com).The founders set about developing a biblically literalist educational curriculum that was adopted by a number of private Christian schools worldwide.

The distributor of this programme in South Africa is Accelerated Christian Education Ministries, (Africa and Scandinavia), based in Durban. The curriculum materials are largely imported from the United States although these materials are selected in terms of their alignment to the requirements of the Department of National Education curriculum requirements. The ACE curriculum, though written and published in the USA has been developed for an international clientele. Each Regional distributor, e.g. ACE Ministries (Africa and Scandinavia), has authority and responsibility to develop national curriculum pertinent to the regional needs of its clients, within the context of economic viability (Baumgardt, 2000). It is also referred to as programmed instruction because the methodology used in the curriculum is not regular or conventional in approach.

The material for the classes has an emphasis reflecting the Christian ideas and principles of the company, including memorising Bible passages and learning creationism. A new student starting the ACE system is given a placement test, which assesses ability in the five areas with corresponding subjects. The test results then place the student at appropriate levels by subject. Students are required to set daily goals for work completion and are generally expected to finish a given PACE within two to three weeks (depending on the school).

In addition to the educational material contained, many of the PACE's also include "Wisdom Inserts", small comic-strip features intended to demonstrate desired character traits. The strips feature many recurring characters, both adults and children, all of whom have surnames that contain a character quality. The portrayal of the children is age-progressed; early-grade PACE's show the children as young while later-grade PACE's shown them as teenagers.

Baumgardt (2006) states that the pedagogic approach used in the academic program is "individualized learning not in its content, but in that every student progresses through the program at his/her own pace; this learning is facilitated by an educator who deals

with each student's individual problem as it arises. The Accelerated Christian Education School of Tomorrow curriculum and total educational system is available currently through more than 7,000 schools in over 140 countries around the world (Rowe, 2010).

The program is used by homeschooling families and private schools. The company provides instruction and structure for operating a "Christian school". Schools are not required to use the entire ACE curriculum and may augment it with other resources.

Some private schools in Lusaka have been using this programme for some time. Not much is known about the program's contribution to literacy in Zambia, especially at Pre and Primary school level specifically in the area of reading. It is for this reason that the researcher set out to get the teachers' opinions on the usage of the programme in the teaching of the reading aspect of literacy. Being the implementers of the programme in these particular schools, their view will be very informative to this researcher. The study will only concentrate on the literacy aspect of the curriculum so as to get a view on how it works and contributes to the basic literacy skills of reading.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Although there is a Curriculum approved by The Ministry in charge of Education in Zambia, some Private Schools have opted to use The Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) Curriculum which is not an initiative of the Ministry of General Education, to teach initial reading. Studies in a number of countries have been conducted that analysed the entire ACE curriculum as well as the various components. It is not clear whether similar studies have been done in Zambia especially studies that focus on the reading aspect of the program and its effectiveness in teaching reading. This study therefore, was designed to establish the teachers' understanding of the ACE Curriculum in teaching the reading aspect of Initial literacy.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to establish the understanding of Accelerated Christian Education Curriculum by the teachers using it, effectively teach reading in Initial literacy at Pre and lower primary school levels, in private schools in Lusaka District

1.5 Main Objective

To determine the teachers' interpretation of the ACE programme in terms of its ability to effectively produce students who are capable of acquiring the basic skills of reading in initial literacy.

1.6 Specific Objectives

1. To explain how the ACE system is administered in pre and primary school level to teach reading.
2. To establish the strategies used to achieve the reading objectives in the ACE program.
3. To determine the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the ACE system in preparing learners to acquire reading skills in initial literacy.
4. To establish how the management and implementation of the ACE programme can be improved to address any perceived weakness and enhance the experience of the learners in the programme.

1.7 Research Questions

1. How is the ACE system administered in pre and primary school level to teach reading?
2. What strategies are used to achieve the reading objectives in the ACE program?
3. What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the ACE system in preparing learners to acquire reading skills in initial literacy?

4. How can the management and implementation of the ACE programme be improved to address any perceived weakness and enhance the experience of the learners in the programme?

1.8 Significance of the Study

The study aimed to inform schools, Curriculum Developers and all stakeholders of the findings which may add new information on how to teach reading in initial literacy. Such a study that endeavored to get interpretations of the program's attributes both positive and negative could make a positive contribution to the management of literacy programs in schools and especially in teaching of reading which is an aspect of literacy is.

1.9 Scope of the Study

The study was limited to private schools using the ACE Program in Lusaka District only.

1.10 Delimitations of the Study

A number of studies have been conducted on various aspects of the ACE. This research was mainly focused on the reading aspect of Initial Literacy at Pre School and grades one and two.

1.11 Operational Definitions

ACE Programme- the educational programme that uses the ACE Curriculum.

Interpretation- view point of reality or opinions that are gained through experience of that reality.

Pre-School -learners between three and six years of age who are not yet in grade one. It is regarded as the first step in the formal education journey of a child.

Lower primary- grade one and two in a given school.

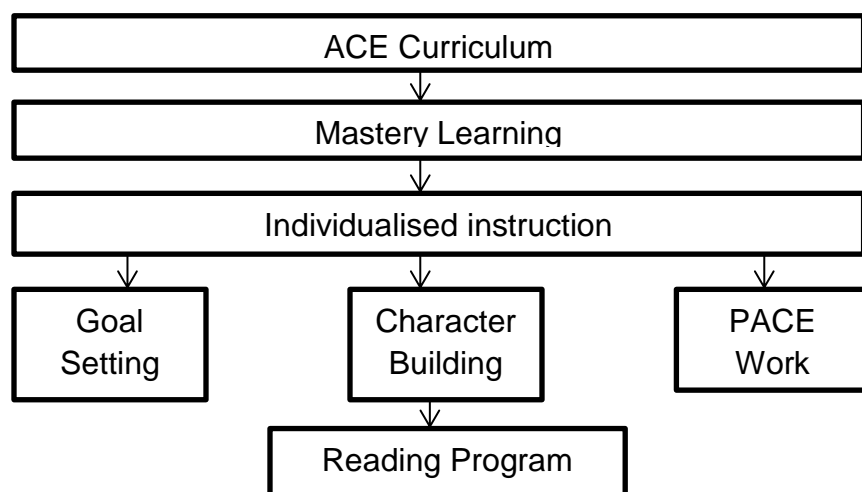
Goals- Daily tasks that a learner must complete in their academic work

1.12 Conceptual Framework

Conceptual Frameworks influence how we interpret events (Svincki, 2010). The model below is an illustration indicating some of the concepts related to the ACE Program and how the program is interpreted in relation to the teaching of reading.

The concepts that are outstanding in influencing the teaching of reading include: Mastery learning, individualised instruction, goals setting, character building and PACE work.

Figure 1.1 Interpretation of ACE Curriculum



Source: Author, 2016.

As outlined in Figure 1.1 above, ACE Curriculum drives its strength on mastery and back to the basics academics for pupils with a concentration on Individualisation in teaching, to meet children's specific needs and learning capabilities. Setting of Goals in daily tasks, Godly Character Building activities and children working at their own pace, contributes to fostering reading according to the ACE Catalogue (2015).

1.13 Ethical Considerations

The researcher respected Participants by observing confidentiality, informed consent and protection from harm. Participants' right to privacy was highly upheld during collection, analysis and publication of data for this study. Only those participants that gave informed consent took part in the study. The researcher made sure that apart from

the School Manager who wrote the school letter to the parents, no other person was aware of the identities of the students and teachers involved. The teachers were also interviewed separately to avoid timidity or influence by the others. All participants were briefed about the purpose of the research and that they had a right to withdraw at any time if they wished to do so. The researcher ensured that participants voluntarily participated in the study maintaining an honest, open approach throughout the study.

1.14 Summary

Chapter one was an introduction to the research topic. It introduced the ACE curriculum and its use in private schools. It stated the background to the study, statement of the problem, Research aims and objectives, scope of the study and significance of the study. Chapter two is a review of the literature related to the study topic .It covers the theoretical aspect and views on what various authorities have stated in relation to the topic in the region. It gives an overview of what is obtaining in other countries too.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

This chapter examined literature from various authorities focusing on Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) Curriculum. The literature used examined issues and ideas that will assist in the understanding of the ACE system. It started with a brief description of theories of learning related to ACE. The review also focused on studies by various researchers on ACE.

2.2 Theories of Learning

ACE shares behaviorist and constructivist elements in its instructional strategy. These were analysed to identify any matching features so as to position ACE within the broad spectrum of educational thought. However, the most outstanding is Mastery learning which is emphasised in the learning material.

Learning theories provide instructional designers with verified instructional strategies and techniques for facilitating learning as well as a foundation for intelligent strategy selection. Yet many designers are operating under the constraints of a limited theoretical background (Ertmer and Newby, 2013).

2.2.1 Behaviorist Theory

Behaviorism equates learning with changes in either the form or frequency of observable performance. Learning is accomplished when a proper response is demonstrated following the presentation of a specific environmental stimulus (Ertmer and Newby, 2013). Many of the basic assumptions and characteristics of behaviorism are embedded in current instructional design practices. Specific assumptions or principles that have direct relevance to instructional design include the following:

- An emphasis on producing observable and measurable outcomes in students (behavioral objectives, task analysis, criterion- referenced assessment).

- Pre- assessment of students to determine where instruction should begin (learner analysis).
- Emphasis on mastering early steps before progressing to more complex levels of performance (sequencing of instructional presentation, mastery learning).
- Use of reinforcement to impact performance (tangible rewards, informative feedback).

The history of behaviorism in educational technology can be found in a teaching machine constructed by Skinner in 1958. Skinner's teaching machine was a rote-and-drill machine where individual instruction was presented in the form of a book; the machine housed, displayed, and presented programmed instruction (Weegar, 2012).

Central to behaviorism was the idea of conditioning that is, training the individual to respond to stimuli. The mind was a "black box" of little concern. But behavioral theorists had to make way for the "cognitive revolution" in psychology, which involved putting the mind back into the learning equation (Wilson and Peterson, 2006).

With the view of a functionalist, Skinner (1953 cited in Lowery, 2003) developed his theory of learning on the concept of operant conditioning. He offered that the organism operates in the environment doing whatever it does. According to Skinner, while operating, the organism encounters stimuli to which he referred as reinforcing stimuli. As a result, the reinforcing stimuli affect the behavior occurring just before interaction with the stimuli.

The ACE Procedures manual (ACE, 2001a) confirms that, the pupil must be motivated to the point where he assimilates, uses or experiences the material and his or her learning must be rewarded. The PACES (Packets of Accelerated Christian Education) are structured based on instructional objectives.

The operant condition then is the behavior followed by a consequence of interaction with stimuli; the nature of the consequence modifies the organism's tendency to repeat the behavior in the future (Lowery, 2003). Skinner argued that learning proceeds most effectively if the information to be learned is presented in small steps and if the learner is given rapid feedback concerning the accuracy of his learning; for example, he is

shown immediately after a learning experience whether he has learned the information correctly or incorrectly; and if the learner is able to learn at his own pace.

According to Demirezen (1988), Behaviourist theory is the habit formation of language teaching and learning. Language learning concerns us by 'not problem solving but information and performance of habits'. In other words language learning is a mechanical process leading learners to habit formation whose underlying scheme is the conditioned reflex. In behaviorist theory, the process of learning relies more on generalization, rewarding, conditioning, three of which support the development of analogical learning in children. But it can be argued that a process of learning or teaching that encourages the learner to construct phrases, clauses and sentences modeled on previously settled set of rules and drills is thought to obstruct the instinctive production of language (Guskey, 2005).

The goal of instruction for the behaviorist is to elicit the desired response from the learner who is presented with a target stimulus. To accomplish this, the learner must know how to execute the proper response, as well as the conditions under which that response should be made. Therefore, instruction is structured around the presentation of the target stimulus and the provision of opportunities for the learner to practice making the proper response. To facilitate the linking of stimulus-response pairs, instruction frequently uses cues to initially prompt the delivery of the response and reinforcement to strengthen correct responding in the presence of the target stimulus, (Ertmer and Newby, 2013).

The behaviourist learning theory supports the use of instructional, sequenced, small unit texts, modeled in ACE PACEs and program management that incorporate time, environment, reinforcement and controlled behavior precepts. These are the key principles of ACE. Speck and Prideaux (1993) concluded that this was an approach that excluded other kinds of learning methods and that there was a perceived lack of group learning activities and that these were not valued. They observed that children using the ACE would lack verbal skills. They further stated that, programed instruction does not cater for individual learning styles or crucial learning needs. Butler (1995) concluded

that programmed instruction materials did not have broad based acceptance in the classroom because critical thinking skills and student centred learning was lacking.

Shaba (2013) agrees with this theory in that in one of its principles, the ACE has a carrot and stick analogy, where a donkey is motivated to work under a controlled environment while being motivated to do so. In a typical ACE classroom, there are rules to be followed and a set of merits and demerits that help motivate children to adhere to the rules. Merits are usually redeemable at the end of the month in what is known as a 'merit shop' and demerits, depending on the number per day could send a child to the School Manager's office for a 'spanking'.

This, as highlighted by the behaviorist theory helps to achieve the desired response (i.e learning to read) from the learner, who is presented with a stimulus. The pupils' behavior is modeled by the instructions given by the teacher to achieve the desired objectives of learning.

2.2.2 Constructivist Theory

The philosophical assumptions underlying the behavioral theories are primarily objectivistic; that is: the world is real, eternal to the learner .The goal of instruction is to map the structure of the world onto the learner (Jonassen, 1991 cited in Ertmer and Newby , 2013). Constructivists do not share with behaviorists the belief that knowledge is mind-independent and can be "mapped" onto a learner. Constructivists do not deny the existence of the real world but contend that what we know of the world stems from our own interpretations of our experiences.

Constructivism is a theory of knowledge with roots in philosophy, psychology and cybernetics. It asserts two main principles whose application has far reaching consequences for the study of cognitive development and learning as well as for the practice of teaching, psychotherapy and interpersonal management in general. The two principles are:

- Knowledge is not passively received but actively built up by the cognizing subject.

- The function of cognition is adaptive and serves the organization of the experiential world, not the discovery of ontological reality (Husen and Postlewaite, 1989).

Taber (2011) states that, the aim of constructivist teaching is not to provide 'direct' instruction, or 'minimal' instruction, but optimum levels of instruction. Constructivist pedagogy therefore involves shifts between periods of teacher presentation and exposition and periods when students engage with a range of individual and particularly group work, some of which may seem quite open ended. However, even during these periods, the teacher's role in monitoring and supporting is fundamental. Constructivism as a learning theory suggests that effective teaching needs to be both student centered and teacher directed.

Husen and Postlewaite (1989) further add that the researcher's and to some extent also the educator's interest will be focused on what can be inferred to be going on inside the student's head, rather than on overt 'responses'. The teacher will realize that knowledge cannot be transferred to the student by linguistic communication but that language can be used as a tool in a process of guiding the student's construction. The teacher will try to maintain the view that students are attempting to make sense in their experiential world. Hence he or she will be interested in students' 'errors' and, indeed, in every instance where students deviate from the teacher's expected path because it is these deviations that throw light on how the students, at that point in their development, are organizing their experiential world.

Although knowledge in one sense is personal and individual, the learners construct their knowledge through their interaction with the physical world, collaboratively in social settings and in a cultural and linguistic environment (Taber, 2006 cited in Baker et al, 2007).

Learning activities in constructivist settings are characterized by active engagement, inquiry, problem solving, and collaboration with others. Rather than a dispenser of knowledge, the teacher is a guide, facilitator, and co-explorer who encourage learners to question, challenge, and formulate their own ideas, opinions, and conclusions. "How

constructivism is interrupted and whether the learning strategies account for individual and social diversity are issues that gain limited attention during curriculum development” (Gulati, 2008, cited in Weegar, 2012).

The goal of instruction is not to ensure that individuals know particular facts but rather that they elaborate on and interpret information. The constructivist designer specifies instructional strategies that will assist learners in actively exploring complex topics/ environments and that will move them into thinking in a given content area as an expert user of that domain might think. Knowledge is not abstract but is to the context under study and to the experiences that he participants bring to the context (Ertmer and Newby, 2013).

The role of the ACE teacher and the perceived role of the pupil shows there is a close kinship with the constructivists. The teacher’s role is that of supervisor or facilitator. Teacher generally provides guidance and consultative services at the request of the pupil. This is believed to assist children develop self-reliance and self-expression (Shaba, 2006).

Pupils in the ACE are expected and encouraged to be responsible for their learning and actions. This is built through the use of merits, to encourage achievement and character development, and demerits to discourage violations of rules.

2.2.3 Summary

As one moves along the behaviorist, constructivist continuum, the focus of instruction shifts from teaching to learning, from passive transfer of facts and routines to the active application of ideas to problems. Both cognitivists and constructivists view the learner as being actively involved in the learning process, yet the constructivist look at the learner as more than just an active processor of information; the learner elaborates upon and interprets the given information (Jonssen, 1991).

Behaviorism and constructivism are learning theories which stem from two philosophical schools of thought which influenced educators’ view point (Weegar, 2012). Skinner and Watson, the two major proponents of behaviorism, studied how learning is affected by

changes in the environment and sought to prove that behavior could be predicted and controlled (Skinner, 1971 cited in Weegar, 2012). Paiget and Vygotsky, were strong proponents of constructivism which viewed learning as a search for meaning and described elements that helped predict what students understand at different stages of development (Rummel, 2008 cited in Weegar, 2012).

ACE prides itself in being learner centered, although there is no evidence of collaboration between the pupils. Pupils are expected to be responsible for their learning and actions.

2.3 Mastery Learning

According to Sagimin and Abdulwahab (2015), Mastery learning is a theory as well as a teaching strategy. As a set of instructional practices, it helps most students to learn at high levels. As a theory, it postulates that, all students if given the time can master the course work.

ACE's vision is captured in the phrase 'educating the World one child at a time' (ACE, 2001). The objective is to create an environment where each individual child is able to learn at his/her own pace, at his/her own academic competence level without putting pressure on them to perform to routine timing.

Mastery Learning is a teaching strategy which has demonstrated its effectiveness in improving achievement, adopted by many school systems since the early 1970's. The theory and research upon which Mastery Learning is based specifies that under appropriate instructional conditions virtually all students will learn most of what they are taught (Block and Burns, 1976). Mastery should be achievable for virtually all students, provided suitable provisions can be made in the time allowed for learning and provided that the quality of instruction be held at a high level. This quality should include provision for formative evaluation testing (of the students) and for feedback to them.

ACE is based on the principles of mastery, discipline and Godly Character building. To achieve this, the teacher – learner ratio is 1:10. From pre-school to Grade 12, the ACE curriculum is a self-pacing, Biblical based program with students working through a

prescribed number of PACEs (Packet of Accelerated Christian Education), and a series of assessments that encourage and test content mastery. (ACE Ministries, 2001).

Mastery Learning individualizes learning by clearly defining what students should learn and the expected level of competence by giving them additional time to learn and by helping them when and where they have learning difficulties. The benefits of Mastery Learning strategies towards improving school achievement have been well documented. If school personnel are sensitive to a variety of implementation issues (Guskey, 1985), the likelihood of success is increased even more so. Mastery Learning has been especially successful, for example, when introduced in the sequential, skill-based curricula of the early elementary years (Ford, 2014).

Among the positives of mastery learning, independent learning and high self esteem are prominent results. Pupils are encouraged to move on to greater tasks as they achieve lesser tasks. This in turn helps to build self-esteem among the pupils. Mastery learning theory finds application in the ACE program that allows for an individualised approach where pupils determine their own goals on a daily basis (i.e. how much they will individually learn in that day).

Mastery learning is an instructional strategy based on the principle that all students can learn a set of reasonable objectives with appropriate instruction and sufficient time to learn. Mastery Learning puts the techniques of tutoring and individualized instruction into a group learning situation and brings the learning strategies of successful students to nearly all the students of a given group. In its full form it includes a philosophy, curriculum structure, instructional model, the alignment of student assessment, and a teaching approach (Kazu et.al, 2005).

It is an optimistic and generous theory of school learning based on the notion of managing learning than learners. The theory suggests that schools can provide not only equality of educational opportunity but also equality of educational outcome (Bloom, 1971 cited in Horton, 1979).

Mastery learning is an optimistic and generous theory of school learning based on the notion of managing learning than learners. The theory suggests that schools can

provide not only equality of educational opportunity but also equality of educational outcome (Bloom,1971 cited in Horton,1979).

Mastery learning uses differentiated and individualized instruction, progress monitoring, formative assessment, feedback, corrective procedures, and instructional alignment to minimize achievement gaps (Zimmerman & Dibenedetto, 2008). The strategy is based on Benjamin Bloom's Learning for Mastery model, which emphasizes differentiated instructional practices as strategies to increase student achievement. Drawing from the principles of effective tutoring practices and learning strategies, mastery learning uses feedback, corrective procedures, and classroom assessment to inform instruction. Rather than focusing on changing content, this strategy endeavors to improve the process of mastering it.

Motamedi (u.d) adds on that, in a mastery learning classroom, teachers follow a scope and sequence of concepts and skills in instructional units. Following initial instruction, teachers administer a brief formative assessment based on the unit's learning goals. The assessment gives students information, or feedback, which helps identify what they have learned well to that point (diagnostic) and what they need to learn better (prescriptive). Students who have learned the concepts continue their learning experience with enrichment activities, such as special projects or reports, academic games, or problem-solving tasks. Students who need more experience with the concept receive feedback paired with corrective activities, which offer guidance and direction on how to remedy their learning challenge. To be effective, these corrective activities must be qualitatively different from the initial instruction by offering effective instructional approaches and additional time to learn. Furthermore, learning goals or standards must be aligned with instruction (or opportunities to practice), corrective feedback, and evaluation.

According to literature, Ace is sequential and a child who fails to complete a PACE, repeats it until the score is 80% and above. This indicates that the corrective measures are not qualitatively different because it's the same PACE that is repeated until a child passes with the required score.

Mastery learning is used in order to advance an individual's potential for learning. Compared to traditional learning models, sufficient time, attention, and help are afforded to each student. By applying mastery learning as a teaching strategy, students achieve higher learning and better academic performance. Bloom's studies focused on individual differences, especially in students' school learning. While he recognized that many factors outside of school affect student learning (Bloom, 1964), his investigations showed that teachers have potentially strong influence as well.

In his observations of classrooms, Bloom noted that most teachers included little variation in their instructional practices. The majority taught all students in much the same way and provided all with the same amount of time to learn. The few students for whom the instructional methods and time were ideal learned excellently. The largest number of students for whom the methods and time were only moderately appropriate learned less well. And students for whom the instruction and time were inappropriate due to differences in their backgrounds or learning styles, learned very little. In other words, little variation in the teaching resulted in great variation in student learning.

As a matter of curriculum development, mastery learning does not focus on content, but on the process of mastering it. Curriculum materials can be designed by in-house instructional designers or via a team approach by various professionals in a given setting either in a school or industry. Instructional materials can also be obtained as prepared materials from an outside commercial source. A combination of these is also possible however, the instructional materials are developed or obtained; the teachers must evaluate the materials they plan to use in order to ensure that they match the instructional objectives set up for a given course of instruction (Kazu, et.al., 2005). The great advantage of a mastery approach for catch-up or accelerated work is that, as teachers, we start by finding out what our students know, and then help them learn the things they will need to know in order to demonstrate mastery. Using a mastery approach also provides flexibility for accommodating instruction to individual learning styles, needs and interest.

Mastery learning is a formative assessment strategy that involves the use of specific interventions, called correctives, to address the specific comprehension needs of the

learner. Effective correctives are crucial for the effectiveness of mastery learning, so it is important that teachers make good decisions about what activities and strategies are used to address gaps in student knowledge. Correctives are defined as any instruction that present the concepts differently than originally presented, involve students in learning in different ways, and provide students with successful learning. Because of the time constraints inherent in the mastery learning process, not all instructional strategies can be used for correctives (DeWeese and Randolph, 2011).

Benjamin Bloom then outlined a specific instructional strategy to make use of this feedback and corrective procedure, labeling it “learning for mastery”(Bloom, 1968), and later shortening the name to simply “mastery learning” (Bloom , 1971).With this strategy, teachers first organise the concepts and skills they want students to learn into instructional units that typically involve about a week or two of instructional time. Following initial instruction on the unit, teachers administer a brief “formative” assessment based on the unit’s learning goals. Instead of signifying the end of the unit, however, this formative assessment’s purpose is to give students information, or feedback, on their learning. It helps students identify what they have learned well to that point and what they need they to learn better (Bloom, 1971).

Paired with each formative assessment are specific “corrective” activities for students to use in correcting their learning difficulties. Most teachers match these “correctives” to each item or set of prompts within the assessment so that students need work on only those concepts or skills not yet mastered. In other words, the correctives are “individualised.” They may point out additional sources of information on a particular topic, such as page numbers in the textbook or workbook where the topic is discussed. They may identify alternative learning resources such as different text books, learning kits, alternative materials, CDs and videos.

The ACE Program emphasises individualization. The progress of student is not dependent on chronological age or grade advancement but on individual achievement of academic goals. The student is not seen as part of a group to be kept going together but rather, as an individual to be allowed to go at a pace convenient and adequate for him/her to achieve the same goals but at different times.

This method of individualization in the ACE makes the problem of learning gaps non-existent even in cases of absenteeism, for example. Since a child cannot progress without getting a passing score, the possibility of a learning gap is eliminated.

Each child's progress depends on skills acquired since the ACE curriculum is designed as a step-by-step, skill on skill process. The more skills the student acquires, the higher he/she progresses.

2.3.1 Individualised Instruction

Heathers(1977) defines individualized instruction as consisting of any steps taken in planning and conducting programs of studies and lessons that suit them to the individual student's learning needs, learning readiness and learner characteristics or learning style. Individualisation must not be viewed as all or none. It can exist in all degrees from ignoring student differences most of the time to continually giving explicit attention to each student's special needs, readiness and learning style.

The process of individualizing instruction consists of four primary steps (Pretti-Frontczak and Bricker, 2004 cited in Boat et al, 2010):

- Get to know each child's interests, needs, and abilities.
- Create opportunities for learning that build on children's interests.
- Scaffold children's learning through supportive interactions.
- Monitor children's progress toward achieving important goals.

Since the earliest days of pedagogy, educators have recognized that learners differ in numerous ways and that it would be desirable to cater to these differences and for each student to gain the maximum from their educational experience. In ancient times individualizing was not an overt concern since one to one tutoring was the dominant mode. Later, as formal education spread to larger segments of society and group methods came into vogue, the issue rose to prominence. In the 18th century Rousseau and Pestalozzi developed pedagogical theories around the concept of individual growth (Molenda, 2012).

By the 50s attention became focused sharply on individualized reading. Educators had become increasingly aware that students were individuals with wide ranges in ability and learning rate. Considering this fact, individualised reading seemed to be the most likely developmental approach taking into account the assumption that more learning occurs when students are self paced than when grouped (Thompson,1975).

In the individualized instructional model, which ACE curriculum follows, pupils learned based on their own ability levels and goals. They studied with their own style and pace, as active participants in their own learning. Subject matter and skills were often divided into segments and taught at a self-paced level to each individual student. Because each student was solely responsible for his or her own work, there was a loss of whole-class instruction and group interaction (Betrus, 1995). Teachers often tried to provide different objectives, methods of learning, materials, and pacing for each and every student (Kitao, 1994). From a management standpoint, this type of teaching could quickly devolve into a nightmare for the instructor (Good, 2006).

Programmed instruction or programmed learning is one of the important innovations in the teaching and learning process. It is carefully specified, systematically planned, empirically established, skillfully arranged and effectively controlled self instructional technique for providing individualized instruction or learning experiences to the learner. The subject matter or learning experiences is sequenced into small segments. In order to help the learner, assistance primes and prompts are provided in the introductory frames (Fathima,2013).

Individualised education plans are implemented by carrying out the directives of the individualised education plan. Ideally, everyone responsible for implementing the individualised education plan for an individual pupil has access to a copy of the individualised education plan, and each person knows which responsibilities to implement (Beattie et al., 2006 cited in Bwalya, 2014). Along with providing the designated services, supports and accommodations that are described in the individualised education plan, the individualised education plan defines how the pupil's progress toward meeting the goals stated in the individualised education plan will be measured.

Just as children's learning falls along a continuum from passive to active, so does the process of instruction. Instruction may be as basic as modeling how to put on a coat, or it can be as complex as helping children learn to read. The degree to which teacher direction or guidance is used depends on the objective of the experience and the children's individual needs. Thus, for teaching to be instruction, it must be intentional. The result of appropriately individualized instruction is meaningful learning for all young children (Boat et al, 2010).

Teaching in an individualized learning system should consist, of the following three elements:

- a. Diagnosis.
- b. Adaptive instruction.
- c. Follow-up (Chen, 1976).

2.4 The Accelerated Christian Education Curriculum (ACE) systems

The term curriculum is used here to refer to the overall plan or design for a course and how the content for a course is transformed into a blueprint for teaching and learning which enables the desired learning outcomes to be achieved (Richards, 2010).

According to the curriculum, the ACE "program is individualized and nongraded." ACE states that its "core curriculum is an individualized, Biblically-based, character-building curriculum package". The educational system consists of PACEs (Packets of Accelerated Christian Education) that each student works through independently at his or her own rate (Alberta Department of Education, 1985). A PACE is a small paper booklet that the student can read and work through independently, filling in the spaces and blanks provided for written responses. It is used world-wide by thousands of schools and covers the main academic areas of English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies, with a wide range of elective subjects for older students.

Each student works at the level best suited to his or her individual ability. He or she progresses at the rate best suited to his or her needs rather than to those of a group.

The ACE programme approaches subjects with a carefully constructed and consistent method of study; variety is provided by the wide range of subjects available. Students take responsibility for their own progress at every turn ([www. maranathaschool.org](http://www.maranathaschool.org)).

The founders of the program believe that it allows students to advance from Pre School through to high school. As earlier stated, the Accelerated Christian Education curriculum is based on a series of workbooks called PACEs (Packets of Accelerated Christian Education). At the beginning of each PACE is an overview of what the child will be learning, a scripture to memorize, a character trait to strive toward, and a "heads up" on what supplies the student will need. Each subject has 12 PACEs per grade level. The basic subjects of ACE are mathematics, English, science, social studies, bible, and word building (spelling and word usage). Test keys are published for corresponding PACEs.

Accelerated Christian Education describes their learning materials as self instructional, individually prescribed, continuous progress material (ACE, 1999). Accelerated Christian Education offers these self-instructional materials for kindergarten through twelfth grade and each level is divided into twelve PACEs in each subject area (Fleming & Hunt, 1987). The curricula present not only the information on the basic subjects, but each PACE also emphasizes one of sixty ideal biblical character traits such as appreciative, attentive, compassionate, efficient, faithful, fearless, meek, patient, submissive, thrifty and virtuous (ACE, 1999). Through these PACEs, ACE claims that children are able to not only attain knowledge and understanding, but also wisdom.

The A.C.E. School of Tomorrow curriculum is diagnostically prescribed. Each individual student introduced to the program will bypass material he already knows and begin studying the curriculum consistent with where he or she can learn and progress at a steady rate (Rowe, 2010). The A.C.E. School of Tomorrow curriculum is geared not to class progress, but to individual progress. The education is tailored to and consistent with the student's personal uniqueness.

Just as a physician diagnoses a physical ailment and writes a prescription, the A.C.E. School of Tomorrow educator administers a diagnostic test, then prescribes an

education program designed to precisely meet the student at the level of his or her educational need (Rowe, 2010).

2.4.1. Curriculum

A balanced curriculum reflects the philosophy and beliefs of educating the whole child, and enabling the child to take an active role in constructing meaning from his or her experiences (The Balanced Curriculum, 2003).

The development of an appropriate curriculum for children before they enter compulsory schooling is paramount. The curriculum for primary age students needs to dovetail with that devised by the Early Childhood Unit for children under five years of age (Overview Aims and guiding Principles, 2007). The curriculum must encourage high expectations and challenging but attainable goals for all students. The content must ensure that the needs of all students can be met, through different outcomes and teaching approaches, where appropriate.

2.5 Principles of the ACE Curriculum (ACE, 2001)

The ACE curriculum distinguishes itself in a number of areas: (ACE publication, 2009). It Places the child at exact academic ability through diagnostic testing. It incorporates goal setting, Godly character building, and Biblical principles.

When students have the opportunity to learn through their strengths, not only will their academic needs be met, but they will also be more engaged in their learning (Dickinson, 1996 cited in Gangi, 2011).

The program encourages development of critical thinking skills, Utilization of multimedia and computer technology and of parental involvement (Home school Catalogue, 2010). The A.C.E. individualized curriculum has been carefully compiled to introduce children to concrete and abstract reasoning skills at appropriate age levels. New concepts are presented several times to assure mastery. Diagnostic placement testing ensures that students begin at the exact point of their academic needs. Diagnostic testing determines if there are any “learning gaps.” Students can simply fill in the “learning gaps” without the stigma of “failing” a grade or falling behind. One of the distinguishing features of the

ACE is its insistence on diagnosis. This ensures that a child is not placed by chronological age expectations but on the actual performance level of the child. This procedure helps ease student's minds and places no unnecessary performance strain on the child.

The curriculum put emphasis on the following as part of the training for the pupils:

2.5.1 Goal Setting

Personal learning goals are the behaviours, knowledge or understandings that students identify as important to their own learning. They may relate to general work habits, specific subjects, domains of learning, or a combination of these (Victoria, 2007). Students need to understand that the process of setting learning goals is a key part of their learning. Learning goals can help students close the gap between what they have achieved and what they want to achieve. Effective personal learning goals:

- are personally important to the student.
- can be attained through the student's own actions.
- have a reasonable chance of being achieved in a set time frame (e.g. a semester).
- include a specific plan of action.

It is important that students develop a sense of personal ownership of their learning goals. A combination of discussion, sharing, and writing can help students develop a sense of commitment and a range of goal development skills and strategies (Moeller et.al, 2012).

Goal setting is defined as the process of establishing an outcome (a goal) to serve as the aim of one's actions. In educational settings, the ultimate outcome is usually some form of learning as operationalized by the instructor and/or the students (Marzano, et.al, 2001). Goal setting is an important component of academic settings both for instructors and students. Appropriate goal implementation (both instructor set goals and student set goals) in the classroom encourages students to take a more active role in the learning process. He further clarifies that, it has fundamental impacts on increasing

student motivation, self regulation, self efficacy and achievement. When they practice goal setting in different classrooms, students will be able to develop goal setting and flexible thinking skills that are widely applicable in many areas of their lives. As students go through the cycle of goal setting, regulating and attaining, they will become proficient in evaluating their capabilities to engage in these tasks and develop their self regulatory competencies.

Dweck, et.al., (1986) exemplify that goal setting, is the process of establishing clear and usable targets, or objectives, for learning. Goal theory proposes that there are two general goal orientations students can adopt: a task-focused orientation with an intrinsic focus on learning and improving and an ability-focused orientation with an extrinsic focus on external rewards (e.g., getting good grades and doing better than other students). The former is commonly referred to as learning, task involvement, or mastery goals and the latter is labeled as performance or ego-involving goals.

Teaching goal setting skills to young students is important and valuable as it increases their repertoire for learning, but it is crucial that the teacher be involved, on a day to-day basis, in conversations with students about their work. This is especially important with young learners who often lack the vocabulary to express their difficulties in learning and who will often not discuss learning with their peers, unless prompted to do so (Jones, undated).

Goal-setting may be carried out in whole class, pair, and small group configurations. When individual students reach their set goals, instructors need to provide those students with opportunities to set and implement new goals (Magy, 2010).

A goal is a specific idea that one forms consciously, as opposed to motives or desires, which more often occur on a subconscious level. This makes goal-setting an interesting hybrid of the internal/external motivator. It could almost be said that a goal is an extrinsic manifestation of intrinsic motivation (Center on Education Policy, 2012).

Explicitly setting goals can markedly improve performance at any given task. Individuals with clear goals appear more able to direct attention and effort toward goal-relevant activities and away from goal-irrelevant activities, demonstrating a greater capacity for

self-regulation. The establishment of clear goals also appears to increase enthusiasm, with more important goals leading to the production of greater energy than less important goals. Goal clarity increases persistence, making individuals less susceptible to the undermining effects of anxiety, disappointment, and frustration (Morisano, 2010).

2.5.2 Character Building

Character building education is the intentional effort to develop in young people core ethical and performance values that are widely affirmed across all cultures. Character education so conceived helps students to develop important human qualities such as justice, diligence, compassion, respect, and courage, and to understand why it is important to live by them. Quality character education creates an integrated culture of character that supports and challenges students and adults to strive for excellence (A Framework for school success, 2010).

A character education component in an early childhood curriculum is at the heart of the curriculum in the first five years of life. It strives to build in each child a positive sense of self as the basic core of positive mental health and motivation for learning.

Character Education is the deliberate effort to help people understand, care about, and act up core ethical values. An intentional and comprehensive character education initiative provides a lens through which every aspect of school becomes an opportunity for character development. It promotes character development through the exploration of ethical issues across the curriculum. It develops a positive and moral climate by engaging the participation of students, teachers and staff, parents, and communities. It teaches how to solve conflicts fairly, creating safer schools that are freer of intimidation, fear, and violence, and are more conducive to learning (Character Education Informational Handbook and Guide II, 2006).

2.6 Literacy Aspect of the ACE Curriculum

2. 6.1 Literacy defined

Literacy can be defined as “a set of cultivated skills and knowledge that serve as a basis for learning, communication, language use and social interaction.” Literacy ranges from

the basic ability to read, write, listen and comprehend, to higher level processing skills where the learner is able to deduce, interpret, monitor and elaborate on what was learnt (A National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo, 2014). Literacy acquisition is not only one of the most important goals of schooling and the highest of academic responsibilities, but it is also the foundation for future learning and participation in society and employment. It also allows access to sources of personal enrichment such as social interaction and cultural activities.

Literacy is the use of language skills in daily activities at school, at home, at work, and in the community. Literacy describes a set of skills, including speaking, listening, reading and writing, which enable us to make sense of the world around us. Literacy is not narrowly about the mechanics of being able to decode the words on a page or write a grammatically correct sentence, although these are essential skills in their own right. It is about the skills needed to understand written and spoken language, to interpret what has been written or said, and draw inferences from the evidence that surrounds us. It is also about being able to communicate in our turn fluently, cogently and persuasively. Literacy is based on reading, writing and oral language development across all subject areas (National Literacy and Numeracy Framework, 2013).

Literacy includes talking, listening, visual literacies such as viewing and drawing, and critical thinking not just reading and writing. In addition, the literacies of technology (e.g. computer games and activities, internet searching, faxes, emails), popular culture (e.g. movies, theatre, arts), functional literacy (e.g. road maps, timetables), ecological literacy (especially for Indigenous groups) and literacies other than English are relevant to the lives of young children today. Kindergarten programs based on this definition of literacy aim to provide young children with the foundation they need for a successful transition to the literacy learning (Queensland kindergarten learning guideline,2014).

Literacy learning is a communal project and the teaching of literacy skills is embedded across the curriculum; however, it is the language curriculum that is dedicated to instruction in the areas of knowledge and skills – listening and speaking, reading, writing, and viewing and representing, on which literacy is based (The Ontario Curriculum Education, 2006).

The literacy experiences and outcomes promote the development of skills in using language, particularly those that are used regularly by everyone in their everyday lives. These include the ability to apply knowledge about language. They reflect the need for young people to be able to communicate effectively both face-to-face and in writing through an increasing range of media. They take account of national and international research and of other skills frameworks. They recognise the importance of listening and talking and of effective collaborative working in the development of thinking and in learning.

In particular, the experiences and outcomes address the important skills of critical literacy. Children and young people not only need to be able to read for information: they also need to be able to work out what trust they should place on the information and to identify when and how people are aiming to persuade or influence them(Curriculum for Excellence: literacy across learning).

Placing Literacy as the first cross-curricular theme highlights the fact that all learning happens primarily through language in its various forms, and that therefore all educators need to see themselves as guarantors of the language mastery required of their learners in their particular area of knowledge. This implies that literacy competence is not only the concern of the Primary class teacher and the language teachers in Secondary school but in fact it is the responsibility of all educators. Additionally, the school community as a whole needs to embrace the primacy of literacy competence: this implies the active involvement of parents and the local community among others (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012).

In the Early Years (ages 4-6), literacy is nurtured by generating the initial skills and knowledge used in oracy, reading, writing and language. Cognitive and linguistic proficiency become apparent and as early as age five, differences in literacy performance between children are evident (Entwisle, & Alexander, 1993). During the early years, children move from optional education to compulsory education where informal teaching methods become formal instruction (National Institute for Literacy (2006). Children begin to link the literacy awareness that they obtained in the preschool years to basic written and spoken language. Letter sounds are gradually blended to

create simple words. Learning strategies and associations take place. There is an initial understanding that what was learnt previously is related to future learning (Tabors & Snow, 2003).

It is important that reading, comprehension and writing skills are acquired systematically and that children with particular learning needs are identified at an early stage and provided with adequate remedial support (Primary School Curriculum, 1999).

The literacy experiences and outcomes promote the development of skills in using language, particularly those that are used regularly by everyone in their everyday lives. These include the ability to apply knowledge about language. They reflect the need for young people to be able to communicate effectively both face-to-face and in writing through an increasing range of media. (www.curriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk). Literacy is fundamental to all areas of learning, as it unlocks access to the wider curriculum. Being literate increases opportunities for the individual in all aspects of life.

Literacy encompasses the knowledge and skills students need to access, understand, analyse and evaluate information, make meaning, express thoughts and emotions, present ideas and opinions, interact with others and participate in activities at school and in their lives beyond school.

Becoming literate is not simply about knowledge and skills. Certain behaviours and dispositions assist students to become effective learners who are confident and motivated to use their literacy skills broadly. Many of these behaviours and dispositions are also identified and supported in other general capabilities. They include students managing their own learning to be self-sufficient; working harmoniously with others; being open to ideas, opinions and texts from and about diverse cultures; returning to tasks to improve and enhance their work; and being prepared to question the meanings and assumptions in texts (General Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum,2013).

Literacy focuses on developing each child's ability to understand and use language, both spoken and written, as an integral part of learning in all areas. The development of these skills enables children to interact effectively in the world around them, to express themselves creatively and to communicate confidently, using the four modes of

communication (Talking and Listening, Reading and Writing) and a variety of skills and media.(The Northern Ireland Curriculum Primary, 2007)

Competence and confidence in literacy, including competence in grammar, spelling and the spoken word, are essential for progress in all areas of the curriculum. Because of this, all teachers have responsibility for promoting language and literacy development. Every teacher in each area of the curriculum needs to find opportunities to encourage young people to explain their thinking, debate their ideas and read and write at a level which will help them to develop their language skills further.

2. 6.2 Reading

Reading is the process of constructing meaning from written text. It is a message-getting, problem-solving activity which increases in power and flexibility the more it is practised. The definition states that within the directional constraints of the printer's code, language and visual perception responses are purposefully directed by the reader in some integrated way to the problem of extracting meaning from cues in a text, in sequence, so that the reader brings a maximum of understanding to the author's message (Clay, 1991).

Reading is an essential part of literacy. Any discussion of reading must take place in the context of what it means to be literate in today's society. The following definition of literacy underpins these materials. Literacy is the ability to read and use written information and to write appropriately, in a range of contexts. It is used to develop knowledge and understanding, to achieve personal growth and to function effectively in our society. Literacy also includes the recognition of numbers and basic mathematical signs and symbols within text. Literacy involves the integration of speaking, listening and critical thinking with reading and writing. Effective literacy is intrinsically purposeful, flexible and dynamic and continues to develop throughout an individual's lifetime (The Australian Language and Literacy Policy,1991).

Reading is a process very much determined by what the reader's brain and emotions and beliefs bring to the reading: the knowledge/information (or misinformation, absence of information), strategies for processing text, moods, fears and joys, all of it. The

strategies one uses vary according to one's purpose, including whether one is reading for oneself only or for somebody else, such as reading to answer comprehension questions, reading to perform for listeners (including the teacher and classmates), and much more (Weaver,2009).

The programmes of study for reading consist of two dimensions ,i.e. word reading and comprehension (both listening and reading). It is essential that teaching focuses on developing pupils' competence in both dimensions; different kinds of teaching are needed for each. Skilled word reading involves both the speedy working out of the pronunciation of unfamiliar printed words (decoding) and the speedy recognition of familiar printed words. Underpinning both is the understanding that the letters on the page represent the sounds in spoken words. This is why phonics should be emphasised in the early teaching of reading to beginners (i.e. unskilled readers) when they start school (National curriculum in England,2013). .

The National Curriculum in England(2013) adds on that, good comprehension draws from linguistic knowledge (in particular of vocabulary and grammar) and on knowledge of the world. Comprehension skills develop through pupils' experience of high-quality discussion with the teacher, as well as from reading and discussing a range of stories, poems and non-fiction. Reading widely and often increases pupils' vocabulary because they encounter words they would rarely hear or use in everyday speech. Reading also feeds pupils' imagination and opens up a treasure-house of wonder and joy for curious young minds.

According to the Northern Ireland Curriculum (2007), children should be encouraged to develop a love of books and the disposition to read. As stories are read to them by adults and older children, they should see the reader as a role model. Children should have opportunities to listen to a range of interesting and exciting fiction, non- fiction, poetry and rhymes, retell familiar stories and share a wide range of books with adults and other children. Opportunities should be given to browse in the book corner and use books to find information. As children begin to realise that print has meaning and that reading can make sense of print, they should be encouraged to develop a curiosity about words, how they sound, and the patterns within words and how they are

composed. Through sharing and using books, children should become familiar with letters and their shape and sound.

Reading experiences should be informal and enjoyable, with children learning in an environment where print is all around them, for example, in captions, labels and instructions. Children should have access to a wide range of reading materials throughout the day, for example, menus, catalogues, fiction, non-fiction, comics, magazines, on-screen text, personalised books, class books, and books related to areas of play. They should have regular opportunities as a whole class, in small groups and individually to see modeled reading and to participate in shared reading. As they move through the Foundation Stage they should have opportunities to read individually or in small groups with teacher guidance (The Northern Ireland Curriculum Primary, 2007).

Furthermore, Comprehension skills develop through pupils' experience of high-quality discussion with the teacher, as well as from reading and discussing a range of stories, poems and non-fiction. Reading widely and often increases pupils' vocabulary because they encounter words they would rarely hear or use in everyday speech. Reading also feeds pupils' imagination and opens up a treasure-house of wonder and joy for curious young minds. It is essential that, by the end of their primary education, all pupils are able to read fluently, and with confidence (English programmes of study: key stages 1 and 2 National curriculum in England, 2013).

Through reading, people access the ideas, information, and experiences that help them to understand themselves, their world and to learn and work effectively. The reading across the curriculum strand focuses on two elements: Locating, selecting and using information, and Responding to what has been read. These are subdivided into three aspects. Locating, selecting and using information is subdivided into this aspect (National Literacy Framework, 2013).

2. 6.3 ACE Reading Program

According to the Educators Scope and Sequence (2005), the reading program is subdivided into three segments: Kindergarten with Ace and Christi, ABCs with Ace Christi, Speaking English with Ace and Christi.

2.6.3.1 Kindergarten with Ace and Christi

This program is designed for learners who score less than eighty percent on the reading readiness test. They learn to identify letters of the alphabet. Visualised instruction allows students to take the initiative in the learning process and to become independent learners. This program incorporates specific activities such as developing sequencing. Phonetic skills promote auditory processing and improves eye- hand coordination and visual perception (The Educators Scope and Sequence, 2005).

2.6.3.2 ABCs with Ace and Christi

The educators Scope and Sequence (2005) explained that, the ABCs with Ace and Christi, is an excellent thirteen- week phonics program for students who score above eighty percent or higher on the Reading Readiness test. It is a well organised program that uses animal stories to reinforce all the alphabetic sounds. It also reviews the alphabet sequencing and word relationships. Scripture passages support the phonics lessons, and stories illustrate Christian traits. This program also utilises various activities to help develop physical skills and visual discrimination. ABCs with Ace and Christi provides students with all the tools needed to be able to move into the Individualised instruction of the first level ACE PACE curriculum. While completing the program, students are also introduced to numbers and simple math skills.

2.6.3.3 Speaking English with Ace and Christi

The Speaking English with Ace and Christi program provides the means for the young school aged child who does not speak English as his first language to become acquainted with spoken English. It is a series of sixty lessons designed to teach young children conversational English skills that will enable them to progress through the

ABCs with Ace and Christi program. This program provides lessons for aural oral language development that include:

- English language for everyday listening and speaking.
- English vocabulary necessary for children to move through the ABCs with Ace and Christi program in English and the word Building PACEs.
- English communication structure that allow children to express verbally their questions, statements (The Educators Scope and Scope, 2005).

2.6.3.4 Reading Readiness Test

The ABCs Reading Readiness Test is a test administered to students who have never been in school or who do not yet know how to read. Children who score at least 80 percent on the test are generally ready to begin learning to read. These students can begin the ABCs with Ace and Christi program. (One-half of 5-year-olds and most children below the age of 5 are not physically ready to learn the skills involved in reading and may benefit more from the Kindergarten with Ace and Christi program.) This multi-sensory, phonetic learning-to-read program is designed to prepare a child for the individualized instruction of the PACE curriculum. (The learning-to-read program should be attempted only after children have been diagnosed “ready to read” by the ABCs Reading Readiness Test.)

Within a period of twelve to fifteen weeks of tutoring, a child will learn to read by becoming acquainted with cartoon animals, songs, and stories, which help him learn letter sounds, alphabet sequence, and word relationships. Physical and character development skills are built through poems, displays, and various physical activities. Following this twelve to fifteen week tutorial program, the child is ready to begin the journey of the self-paced individualized program. The Speaking English with Ace and Christi program provides the means for the young school-aged child who does not speak English as his first language to become sufficiently acquainted with spoken English to prepare him for learning to read the English language. Speaking English with Ace and Christi includes a series of sixty lessons intended to teach young children conversational English skills at levels appropriate for the successful comprehension of

and participation in the ABCs with Ace and Christi learning-to-read program. This program provides lessons for aural and oral language development which include English language for everyday listening and speaking, which will allow children to function in home school activities and routine. English vocabulary necessary for children to succeed in the ABCs with Ace and Christi learning-to-read program in English and in the Word Building PACEs.

2.6.4 Assessment

Assessment is an essential element of the teaching and learning process. Its principal purpose is to provide the teacher with continuous detailed information about children's knowledge, their grasp of concepts and their mastery of skills. This, in turn, can lead to a greater understanding of the child and his/her needs, and can help the teacher to design appropriate learning activities that will enable the child to gain maximum benefit from the curriculum. This cyclic process of learning, assessment, identifying individual needs, evaluating teaching strategies and planning future learning experiences is central to effective teaching and learning. As language is a central feature of the learning process in every area of the curriculum the assessment of the child's language development and his/her learning through language can be monitored in many other learning activities (Primary School Curriculum, 1999).

McMillan and Hearn (2008) further explain that self-assessment, defined as a dynamic process in which students self-monitor, self-evaluate, and identify correctives to learn, is a critical skill that enhances student motivation and achievement. Self-assessment represents a process that every teacher can emphasise. When students set goals that aid their improved understanding, and then identify criteria, self-evaluate their progress toward learning, reflect on their learning, and generate strategies for more learning, they will show improved performance with meaningful motivation.

In the current era of standards-based education, student self-assessment stands alone in its promise of improved student motivation and engagement, and learning. Correctly implemented, student self assessment can promote intrinsic motivation, internally controlled effort, a mastery goal orientation, and more meaningful learning. Its powerful

impact on student performance in both classroom assessments and large-scale accountability assessments empowers students to guide their own learning and internalize the criteria for judging success (McMillan and Hearn, 2008). Self assessment could mean that students simply check off answers on a multiple-choice test and grade themselves, but it involves much more than that. Self-assessment is more accurately defined as a process by which students monitor and evaluate the quality of their thinking and behavior when learning and identify strategies that improve their understanding and skills. That is, self-assessment occurs when students judge their own work to improve performance as they identify discrepancies between current and desired performance.

ACE assessment is in three levels comprising tests that are set up in each PACE, i.e. Checkup, Self Test, PACE Test. The Checkup is set for the pupil to test mastery in segments of the PACE. The Self-Test set at the end of the PACE also helps the student to test overall mastery. In each of these, the student is expected to score no less than 80% to be able to do the PACE test, which is the teacher's tool of measuring performance, to decide readiness for promotion.

Assessment describes or measures learning outcomes, that is, what has been learnt, or how much has been learnt. The purposes of assessment include to;

- facilitate learning
- describe / measure learning.
- diagnose learning gaps.
- provide a structure for learning.
- provide opportunities for students and teachers to talk about learning.
- provide information for the evaluation of teaching.
- provide information for certification.

Assessment can enhance and facilitate learning, but it can also be a barrier to learning. It is possible that certain assessment strategies can limit students' experience and create an environment where students resort to surface approaches to learning (Bundy, 2004).

The Primary School Curriculum (1999) further clarifies that; assessment can be used to monitor the rate of children's language development and the effectiveness with which they are using language to learn. It provides the teacher with the means of identifying the needs of individual children and enables them to modify curriculum content, to create the learning contexts and to adopt the teaching strategies that will facilitate effective learning. Used like this, assessment has a formative role to play in children's development. It can also be used to indicate areas of learning difficulty in particular children. These can include weaknesses in general language development and a failure to acquire language skills. Crucial among these will be the acquisition of literacy skills. In identifying children with such language problems assessment has diagnostic role to play.

In addition, the goal of education is to help students learn and succeed. The most important purpose of assessment is to identify strengths and weaknesses in students' performance in order to help them make good progress. Assessment is the means by which we know whether students have achieved in a particular area and what more needs to be done (Overview Aims and guiding Principles, 2007).

2.6.5 ACE Assessment of Reading

The Preschool (Kindergarten) program is a full year program designed to develop the basic skills that prepare a child to learn to read. Three, four and five year old children who are entering kindergarten and any children who are diagnosed "not ready to read" after taking the reading readiness test should participate in the kindergarten program for a full year (Home Educators Manual, 1996).

2.7 Research Studies

Even though there is a large number of children that ACE serves, very few published research studies have been conducted to date, which analyze this educational system. Most of the research that has been done on ACE was done in the early 1980's (Kelly, 2005). The most recent research is still not considered to be recent according to professional standards, and therefore illustrates the need for further study to be done on ACE especially in the area of reading. There were very limited studies found on ACE by

the researcher and none were specific with the topic under discussion. Regardless of the dates of the studies, however, ACE has changed very little since it began and is still using the third edition of PACEs, which were initially printed around the 1980s. Therefore, the findings despite seemingly being outdated can still be applied to ACE today.

In a study conducted by Rose (1988), comparing students of an ACE school to students of a conventional Christian school, she stated that, ACE students should be well prepared to digest how-to-manuals but less well prepared to write essays and ask critical questions. She asked sixth and seventh graders of both schools to write essays on a specified topic. When comparing the students work, it was noted that the ACE students' essays were significantly shorter, less detailed, less well organized, and more restricted in vocabulary. Furthermore, through interviews and surveys, Rose reported that ACE students could not easily transition to other forms of curricula because most were unable to handle the wide scope of other materials

In another study by Stoker and Splawn (1980) a survey of ACE schools in Amarillo, Texas for the West Texas State University was carried out. The purpose of their study was to determine if any ACE practices could be imitated in public schools. In the schools which Stoker and Splawn observed, they noted that since the students pay tuition, families in poverty would be unable to send their children to these schools, thus the poorest children were omitted.

They further observed several aspects of the ACE schools which they believed could be replicated in public schools. Stoker and Splawn recommended the individual learning approach for gifted students and for students who do not learn well from traditional teacher led classes. They applauded the strict discipline and the way in which ACE administrators performed corporal punishment, and they also recommended the small pupil to teacher ratio. A small number of pupils in class helps to manage the class well in terms of discipline and teaching.

In 1985, the Alberta Department of Education performed an audit of selected private school programs which were Christian based and ACE was included among the several

programs they reviewed. In this review researchers analyzed the ACE curriculum to determine to what degree it aligned with the goals and objectives set by the Alberta Department of Education. Through their audit, researchers noted the following: For the most part, PACEs are well written, present information clearly and are organized around explicit objectives. The use of examples, practice exercises, systematic reviews, and cumulative exercises illustrates the incorporation of commonly accepted, sound principles of pedagogy.

Despite this positive observation, however, researchers also noted several areas of concern regarding the ACE system. Researchers found that ACE materials rarely met more than 50% of the goals and objectives set by the Alberta Department of Education. Also, of the five main competencies required in language arts by the Alberta Department of Education (reading, writing, viewing, listening, and speaking), ACE materials only covered two of the five, reading and writing, and Alberta researchers deemed the writing coverage to be insufficient. Alberta researchers further noted that “there are far too few examples in the ACE curriculum of materials where students are called upon to exercise their creative powers, to be original and to develop critical thinking skills” (Alberta Department of Education, 1985).

It was also observed by researchers that PACEs seemed to encourage “rote learning” through their high number of exercises which require little more than “simple recall”. Through their audit, researchers determined that ACE did not adequately prepare students to do well on this examination. Overall, the Alberta Department of Education found ACE materials lacking in educational soundness according to their standards.

In another research by Kelly, she highlights that due to the small number of ACE students, it is difficult to determine if their academic abilities are representative of ACE students as a whole. The paucity of research on ACE justifies the need for further studies in this area. Despite the large number of children ACE serves worldwide, no recent research has been done on this method of education. In a modern world that values higher education, it is very necessary to evaluate curriculum to determine to what degree it prepares students for college and careers. As previously mentioned, few

researchers have sought to determine the adequacy of ACE and no recent data is available on this subject (Kelly, 2005).

On the other hand according to Rowe (2010), he states that for many years, A.C.E. School of Tomorrow has been the world's foremost leader in demonstrating the success of individualized education. There can be no doubt that this method is superior. The student experiences a sense of value, importance, and motivation as achievable goals are set and accomplished on a regular basis. Best of all, the student receives a superb education.

There has been so much debate in Christian education circles about the validity of individualized learning. The fact remains, however, that all of us are individuals and it is on this that individualized learning is based. God has, in His wisdom, decreed that we should be creative unique beings; each with our own learning curve and rate of absorption. Children need to learn basic skills, knowledge and concepts at a rate that suits their individual learning profile. (Cheatham, 2005).

In her research, Shaba (2013) noted that, the expense of setting up and running an ACE school has been an issue of discussion and a road block to the spread of ACE schools in Nigeria. One great concern over the PACEs is the fact that they are ordered and shipped into the country from either America or South Africa. This factor is a serious drawback for the program in Nigeria. This feature of the ACE program is so like that of the Programmed instruction where the curriculum is preplanned irrespective of the student's needs or learning type. It has been made clear that Individualized instruction seeks to manipulate three elements in the learning process: the content, process and method. ACE manipulates in its curriculum the Pace which is the process of learning, it does not diversify method according to students' needs as all have to read and the content is the same for everyone (Shaba, 2013).

The curriculum's emphasis on rote recall has been criticized by educational researchers. The teaching methods were described as "low-level cognitive tasks that emphasize simple association and recall activities, as is typical of instruction from

workbooks. The materials make heavy use of behavioral objectives, programmed learning, and rewards.

Flemming and Hunt (1987) analyzed the ACE curriculum and concluded that, if parents want their children to obtain a very limited and sometimes inaccurate view of the world, one that ignores thinking above the level of rote recall, then the ACE materials do the job very well. The world of the ACE materials is quite a different one from that of scholarship and critical thinking.

Elkins(1992 cited in Kelley,2005) observed that most classrooms contain only what is necessary to implement the ACE program and little else. Elkins reported the materials for instruction are, for the most part, limited to those which ACE provide, materials which act as censors to outside secular ideas. Elkins further demonstrated the narrowness of ACE materials by using the ACE reading program as an example. This program, then and now, uses only one strategy to teach children to read, phonics, and ignores all other reading strategies. Finally, Elkins noted that ACE is narrow “in terms of accountability”. ACE places all responsibility of learning on the shoulders of the students, their failure is their fault (Kelley, 2005).

On the other hand, Elikns (1992) explains that for the most part PACEs are well written, present information clearly and are organized around explicit objectives. The use of examples, practice exercises, systematic reviews, and cumulative exercises illustrates the incorporation of commonly accepted, sound principles of pedagogy. Despite this positive observation, however, researchers also noted some areas of concern regarding the ACE system. Researchers found that ACE materials rarely met more than 50% of the goals and objectives set by the Alberta Department of Education. Of the five main competencies required in language arts by the Alberta Department ACE and College Preparedness of Education (reading, writing, viewing, listening, and speaking), ACE materials only covered two of the five, reading and writing, and Alberta researchers deemed the writing coverage to be insufficient. They further noted that “there are far too few examples in the ACE curriculum of materials where students are called upon to exercise their creative powers, to be original and to develop critical thinking skills”.

Baumgardt (2006) believed that, the ACE program is designed around a format of building skill upon skill. The scope and sequence ignores the concept of grade level and moves with continuous progress beginning with first skill to be mastered. Depending on their ability and motivation levels, students may move ahead rapidly or take as long as necessary, but each student masters the material. Students are not locked into a group but progress through skills as they are mastered.

Justins (2002), highlights that the popularity of ACE schools in Australia waned in the early 1990s, due to their unconventional classroom structure. Lambert (1997) quoted in Justins (2002) comments that their curriculum is based on creation and is centred around a system of programmed learning booklets called PACEs.

2.8 Summary

Traditionally we have thought about literacy as the skills of reading and writing; but today our understanding of literacy encompasses much more than that. Literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media. Throughout this document, when we refer to “literacy” we mean this broader understanding of the skill, including speaking and listening, as well as communication using not only traditional writing and print but also digital media.

The various studies above indicate views of what has been discovered by researchers. While others believe there are so many strong points about the ACE curriculum in general, the studies have brought out a number of concerns too. Among the concerns include; rote learning encouraged by the system, one method of teaching reading, insufficient examples as well as materials for teaching.

CHAPTER THREE

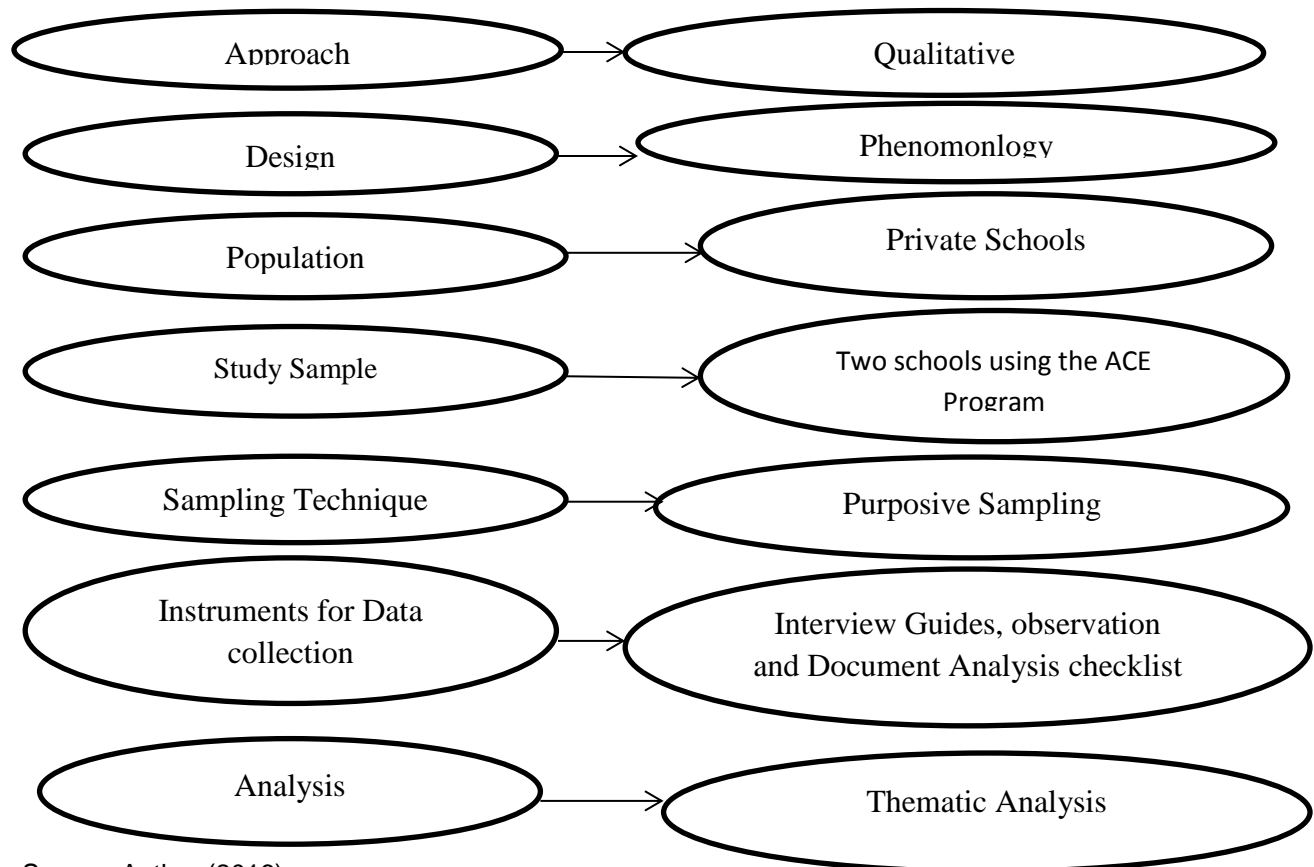
METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

This part of the study outlines methods selected which were used in the study. This chapter details the procedure by which data was collected and utilised so that the desired information with sufficient precision could properly analyse the interpretations of the teachers who are using the ACE curriculum. The research methodology complete with scope, addressing research design, the population to be studied, sampling technique, data collection procedure, data analysis, to mention but a few will be outlined in this chapter.

3.2 Research Approach

Figure 3.1 Methodology Summary



Source: Author (2016).

3.2.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a type of scientific research. In general terms, scientific research consists of an investigation that seeks answers to a question, systematically uses a predefined set of procedures to answer the question, collects evidence and produces findings that were not determined in advance. These findings may be or are applicable beyond the immediate boundaries of the study (Family Health International, Undated). Qualitative research shares these characteristics. Additionally, it seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population it involves. Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular populations.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define Qualitative research as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Hancock et.al. (2009) explain that Qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena. That is to say, it aims to help us to understand the social world in which we live and why things are the way they are. It is concerned with the social aspects of our world and seeks to answer questions about:

- Why people behave the way they do
- How opinions and attitudes are formed
- How people are affected by the events that go on around them

Kielborn (2001) describes qualitative research as 'an umbrella' under which several forms of enquiry, such as Interpretive research, Field study, Ethnography, etc., finds coverage.

Leedy (2010) acknowledged that 'qualitative research is to be used when, little information exists on a topic, when variables are unknown or when a relevant theory

base is inadequate or missing. In this light a researchers' ability to interpret and make sense of what he or she observes is critical for understanding any social phenomenon'.

Furthermore, Bryman (2008) explains that qualitative research is a research method that usually places premium on words rather than numerical quantification in the collection and analysis of data. This implies that qualitative research places emphasis on understanding through looking closely at people, words, actions and records. It examines patterns of meaning which emerge from data and these are often presented in the participants 'own words'.

Cresswell (1994) defined qualitative research as "an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting".

From the definitions outlined above, it is clear that qualitative research is aimed at discovering the patterns that emerge after careful documentation, observation and analysis of the research topic. Contextual findings in the process of researching form a fundamental basis for qualitative research and these are not sweeping generalisations.

This method was settled for by the researcher because it gives participants freedom to express themselves and the researcher becomes the voice to the issues they address. It further opens up a world of information about the topic under discussion of which little is known.

3.3 Research Design

Phenomenological studies examine human experiences through the descriptions provided for by the people involved. These experiences are called lived experiences. The goal of phenomenological studies is to describe the meaning that experiences hold for each subject. This type of research is used to study areas in which there is little knowledge (Donalek, 2004).

A phenomenological study attempts to understand how participants make sense of their experiences (it does not assume that participants' accounts refer to some verifiable

reality) but it recognises that this involves that this involves a process of interpretation by the researcher. It looks at subjective states and takes an insider perspective. It is also interpretative in that, it recognises negotiation between researchers and researched to produce an account of the insider's perspective, so both researcher and researched are "present." The data are accounts, which researcher then code for emergent themes, looking for connections (Hancock, et al, 2007).

This design was settled by the researcher because it provided a very rich and detailed description of the teachers' experience with ACE reading program.

3.4 Study Population

The population of the study was all private schools in Lusaka District. This includes private schools run by churches, individuals and other organisations.

3.5 Study Sample

A sample is a "subgroup of a population" (Frey et al. 2000). As explained, a sample is a group of people, objects, or items that are taken from a larger population for measurement. The sample should be representative of the population to ensure that we can generalize the findings from the research sample to the population as a whole. This helps to draw conclusions to enable us to determine a population's characteristics by directly observing only a portion (or sample) of the population.

Latham (2007) states that, two standard categories of the sampling method exist. These are probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling is sometimes called random sampling as non-probability sampling is sometimes called non-random sampling selection. The choice to use probability or non-probability sampling depends on the goal of the research.

Frey, *et al* (2000) indicate that the two sampling methods differ in terms of how confident we are about the ability of the selected sample to represent the population from which it is drawn. Probability samples can be rigorously analyzed to determine possible bias and likely error.

Non-probability sampling does not provide this advantage but is useful for researchers to achieve particular objectives of the research at hand. These objectives may allow for selection of the sample acquired, because the sample “knows” the most, or because the sample is the most typical (Henry,1990).

The sample in this study comprised all the schools that run the ACE programme in Lusaka. Non probability sampling was used because the selected schools know more about the program. Information was obtained from the Private Schools Association (PRISCA) and the Ministry of General Education concerning the schools using the ACE programme. Two teachers from each section were selected randomly from the two schools that agreed to participate in the study and are still using the curriculum.

3.6 Sampling Technique

The sampling technique involved was purposive. Purposive sampling according to Given (2008) is a deliberate ‘choice’ of the participant(s), the location and the methodology used in carrying out a research. She further clarified that sampling strategies are chosen based on the context and the objectives of the research which shows that there is no sampling strategy that is better than the other.

In addition, Purposive sampling is selecting a sample on the basis of one’s knowledge of the population, its elements, and the nature of the research aims (Babbie ,1990). That is, the population is non-randomly selected based on a particular characteristic (Frey, et al.2000). The individual characteristics are selected to answer necessary questions about a certain matter or product” (MacNealy 1999). The researcher is then able to select participants based on internal knowledge of said characteristics. This method is useful if a researcher wants to study a small subset of a larger population in which many members of the subset are easily identified but the enumeration of all is nearly impossible (Babbie,1990).

The Researcher used this design to specifically target schools using the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) Curriculum.

3.7 Instruments for Data collection

The instruments for data collection were interview guides, Observations checklists and documents to obtain data from class teachers and pupils.

Other data was obtained from literature such as books, journals, reports, the internet and authentic sources. Furthermore, additional information was obtained from the Ministry of General Education (Provincial Headquarters) in Lusaka, Private schools and Colleges Association (PRISCA) and Central Statistics Office (CSO). This assisted the researcher to analyse the data come up with the findings.

3.8 Procedure for Data Collection

This involved briefing the participants about the nature of the study, obtaining informed consent after reading and explaining their role, in this study

3.8.1 Interviews

A considerable range of qualitative approaches use semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Despite the large variations in style and tradition, all qualitative and semi-structured interviewing has certain core features in common:

- The interactional exchange of dialogue (between two or more participants, in face-to-face or other contexts).
- A thematic, topic-centred, biographical or narrative approach where the researcher has topics, themes or issues they wish to cover, but with a fluid and flexible structure.
- A perspective regarding knowledge as situated and contextual, requiring the researcher to ensure that relevant contexts are brought into focus so that the situated knowledge can be produced. Meanings and understandings are created in an interaction, which is effectively a co-production, involving the construction or reconstruction of knowledge (Edwards and Holland, 2013).

The researcher thanked the participants for their willingness to be part of the interview before starting. The purpose of the research being purely academic was made known to

them. Participants were informed that their participation would help to bring understanding of how reading is conducted using the ACE Curriculum.

Qualitative interviews are not always as structured as the quantitative ones. Guiding questions were used by the researcher to allow for clarifications in the case of unclear responses. They were also made aware of their right to decline participation.

Open ended questions in the interview were used in such a way that the participants were allowed to share their experience and guiding questions asked to shed further light on unclear areas. Two separate set of questions was prepared for the interviews, one for the students and for the supervisors or the teachers. The interviews were conducted and recorded with the aid of a voice recorder. Participants were encouraged not to be intimidated by the recording and assured that they would have access to both recording and the transcribed notes before the researcher used them in the research.

3.8.2 Observation

Observation is a technique that can be used when data cannot be collected through other means, or those collected through other means are of limited value or are difficult to validate (Hancock, 2007).

Conducted observations involves a variety of activities and considerations for the researcher, which include ethics, establishing rapport, selecting key informants, the processes for conducting observations, deciding what and when to observe, keeping field notes, and writing up one's findings (Kawulich, 2005).

Data obtained through participant observation served as a check against participant's subjective reporting of what they believe and do. Participant observation is also useful for gaining an understanding of the physical, social, cultural and economic contexts in which study participants live; the relationship among and between people, contexts, ideas, norms and events; and people's behaviors and activities (Family Health International, undated). Through participant observation, researchers can also uncover factors important for a thorough understanding of the research problem that were unknown when the study was designed.

3.8.3 Document Analysis

Godfred (2016) states that documentary analysis is a social research method which is used as a tool for obtaining relevant documentary evidence to support and validate facts stated in a research to validate individual research objectives.

Documents can provide background information prior to designing the research project, for example prior to conducting interviews. They may corroborate observational and interview data, or they may refute them, in which case the researcher is 'armed' with evidence that can be used to clarify, or perhaps, to challenge what is being told, a role that observational data may also play (Yanow, 2007 cited in Owen, 2014).

The Home Educators Scope and Sequence (2005), Home Educators Manual (2015) and Procedures manual 1 and 2 (2001), were reviewed to assess documented objectives, curriculum, classroom activities as far as reading is concerned. Also included in this document, are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the program.

3.9 Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis was qualitative and involved the use of information gathered through interviews from teachers and students, lesson observation analysis of documents. After collection, the information was grouped into categories themes for interpretations, after which discussions occurred. Some of the respondents' direct quotations were included in the text to maintain authenticity. A verbatim presentation of data was done after lesson observation to interpret the transcription of the observations. The information acquired from teachers helped to bring out the strength and weaknesses of using the ACE curriculum for reading in initial literacy. The verbatim presentation of data was very important because it provided authentic data from the respondents on how to teach reading ACE.

3.10 Confidentiality

Confidentiality in data collection means that the researcher assures the participants of the fact that their identities will not be revealed in the research. Confidentiality also involves not revealing information that may make the identity of the participant apparent (Wiles, 2012).

The researcher made sure that apart from the school manager from whom permission was sought and who wrote the school letter to the parents, no other person was aware of the students identities who were involved in the interview. The teachers were also interviewed separately to avoid or intimidation or being influenced by the others.

To preserve anonymity and confidentiality, the codes below were used:

- P1-P6 Learner interview
- T1- T3 Teachers interview
- H1-H2 Heads of Department interview

3.11 Summary

This chapter justified the qualitative nature of the research, explaining the reason for the various methodologies employed and showed the researcher's attention to ethical issues. The next chapter will present a report of responses from the participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Overview

This chapter presents the findings from the analyses of documents, interviews and observations from the preceding chapters. In chapter three, the research methodologies were discussed. The methods of data collection, sample and sampling techniques were discussed. This chapter will be concerned with presentation of the findings. The findings will be presented according to the research questions asked in chapter one.

4.2 Administering the ACE System

How is the ACE system administered at Pre and Primary School level to teach reading?

In response to the first question, data was collected through interviews, lesson observations and analysis of documents, (The Home Educators Scope and Sequence, Home Educators Manual and Procedures Manual).

4.2.1 Interviews

4.2.2.1 Teachers Interview

The study established that the teachers in the lower primary section and Pre School had been teaching at the school for more than ten years and had gained adequate at experience using the program. They were qualified teachers from trained in government colleges. In addition, the school sponsored them to train in the ACE methodology when they joined the school. T2 added, “I had heard about the program as I applied for the job. After being offered the job I went for ACE Supervisor’s training despite having a teacher education qualification. The training was sponsored by the school; I liked it and I stayed to teach”.

The study also established explained that the school only used the reading aspect of ACE and not the curriculum in its entirety.

When asked about how the administration of the program was done, participants highlighted the following procedures that are unique to this program:

4.2.2.2 Student Offices

The ACE reading program distinguishes itself through the use of offices (work stations) where each child can work independently following a set of goals determined by the child at the beginning of each day. However, children occasionally wondered off in their thoughts instead of concentrating on their work. T2 commented, “Some younger children think that the offices are play areas and will not work if the teacher is not very observant.”

The study further noted that an office is a space with a chair and table with boards partitioned like a cubicle to give each pupil privacy and avoid disturbance from other pupils. Some teachers believed that student’s offices can only work on children who are self motivated. T3 noted, “ there is little that a teacher can do if a child is not self motivated,” adding that, “while attending to others, this unmotivated child will waste time on playing instead of working”.

4.2.2.3 Procedure for Scoring

Responding to procedure for scoring, the participants felt that, it made work lighter as they did not have to spend a long time marking after school or while in class, because pupils marked their own work using score keys. T3 added that “scoring teaches children to be serious with studying and fosters honesty too.”

The respondents appreciated the scoring procedure because it made marking of homework, classwork and other assignments easier.

4.2.2.4 Goal Setting

All the participants agreed that goal setting set the ACE apart. T1 point out, “for a child to determine how much work he or she should do and endeavor to complete it, is quite impressive. ACE trains children to do just that and the end result is discipline in children.”

The participants testified and were convinced that setting goals instilled commitment to complete work. They emphasised the part played by the teachers in helping children learn the habits for setting goals. The study noted that the teacher must monitor the children for them to learn the impact of setting goals even in their daily life.

4.2.2.5 PACEs

T1, delighted about PACEs, said “there is really no need for lesson planning as it has been done for you already,” and T2 added that “even you as a teacher have a lot to learn from the paces, because of its rich content.”

Because PACEs have work that is already prepared in the booklets, teachers lesson planning is eliminated and all they have to do is supervise the pupils, guide and monitor to ensure that the work gets done.

4.2.2.6 Assessment

The program’s assessment procedures include check-ups, self tests and PACE tests. The teachers were in agreement that these assessment procedures helped the children a great deal.

T1 highlighted that some students still failed the assessment despite getting help. He stated “some children who are lazy and do not follow rules lag behind because they cannot move as fast as expected.” The teachers were convinced that if the learners took time to review the check-ups, they would not face challenges in passing a self-test and Pace tests.”

The teachers felt that the assessment procedures were friendly and pupils would pass the tests if they took time to review the check-ups and self-tests before writing them. T2 added that “if students will review the check-ups and self-tests the PACE test should not be difficult for them.”

4.2.2.7 Teacher – Learner Relationship

The study ascertained that the teachers felt their job was enjoyable but tedious. Children asked for assistance so often and at different times in different levels of their

work. Each child was at his/or own level and that became exhausting as each child needed attention with different concerns. They felt would easier if the class enrolment were lower than thirty five pupils per class.

T2 believed that the teacher's role at foundation phase was very important. He said, "If the teacher is not committed to teaching proper reading skills and diction, the end result will be children who poor at reading and pronunciation". T3 concured, "with the help of teacher aids in classrooms, the work was manageable."

4.2.2.8 Experience with other programs

When asked if the participants had experience with different programs, all the three teachers had experience with other programs as they had taught elsewhere before joining the institution. They were familiar with the local program having being trained in government colleges.

4.3 Strategies used to Achieve Reading Objectives

Data was gathered through interviews, observations and analysis of documents for the second question. The following were the responses:

4.3.1 Teacher interview

The teachers explained that the reading objectives, as covered in the rest of the curriculum include training the heart as clearly seen from the curriculum's emphasis of Biblical training. Learners had monthly scriptures outlined in their paces and they had to memorise them.

The study established that, learners are taught character traits from every PACE. Sixty traits are emphasized and are part of character training. The teachers pointed out that the learning to read program is a stronghold of ACE. Children learned to read within fifteen weeks. The strategies used included teaching phonics, discipline, character training and biblical training.

In support of this, T1 had this to say, “ one of the reading objectives was to assist the children to learn about God. When children have learnt to read, they can access information that will help them know more about God.”

The respondents explained that, the major attraction of ACE is the Learning to Read program and people always got surprised that children can learn to read in fifteen weeks.

They emphasised that ACE reading program is concerned with opening up a whole new world of information for the child. All participants concerted that the program achieved the reading objectives. They stressed that the program was effectively implemented according to the outlined procedures in the ACE Manuals.

Children were taught to be honest in all class activities. The teachers were confident that they could proudly present any of them for external examinations without the need to assist them in reading as young as they are.

T3 further asserted that ACE’s reading program was one of the best in the country. She explains that “children who start with the ACE learning to read programs show an air of curiosity to learn and are always different in their confidence.”

All the participants were not sure of whether the program had been evaluated or not in Zambia but were sure of its strength in promoting reading in young children.

4.3.2 Strategies used to teach reading

When queried about the strategies that the teachers employed to teach reading, the following were the responses:

4.3.2.1 Introduction of the lesson

The study established that the first lesson always began with a welcome to make the pupils feel comfortable. They were encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings by expressing themselves orally during the sharing period. Learners met a new animal sound each week.

To illustrate how the introduction of the lesson is done, T2 said, “An example could be the display of the ape cartoon shown to the learners. They may discuss what they think happened to the ape and why they think he is in that particular situation. Learners express their thoughts freely to allow creativity.” She added that the teacher could share the real life information about the ape, such as where they live.

The participants agreed that learners should be allowed to talk about something that happened to them just to open up and make them feel free. The learners were given time to listen to the story about the animal of the week and answer comprehension questions. The alphabet song was to familiarize pupils with the letters. The researcher observed that the song helped the learners know the sequence of the letters in the alphabet.

The letter sounds were taught using animal cartoons because children love cartoons and introducing reading through these animals captured their interest. The example that was used to introduce the sound for the letter **a** was the word ape. The respondents agreed that the sound should be taught until each learner could say it correctly after which they reviewed the animal song.

T1 went as far as demonstrating how the sound can be cemented in the learners’ minds. She said the teacher could emphasize the sound by saying, “Ape reads **AAA**” and “A reads **AAA**.”

The participants all agreed that the reading program discouraged learners from writing in the initial stages of learning to read. Students should not see the letters for the sounds which they have not mastered, for example:

<u>Cake</u>	<u>rake</u>	<u>lake</u>
<u>Paint</u>	boat	tree
Board	like	<u>bake</u>

The teachers clarified that, learners would then be asked to listen to a sentence that the teacher reads and find the specific word the **a** sound. T3 stresses, “The teacher can

read the sentence twice as learners listen attentively then ask for the with the **a** sound”. The sentences below were used as examples and the underlined words were the ones with the sound of the week to be learned by the children and the one expected to be pointed out by the children:

1. Moses ate the peach.
2. The garden gate fell off.
3. Go outside and play.
4. Mail the letters.

4.3.2.2 Mastering and Forming Letters

The respondents explained that they had to teach pupils the sequence and direction for forming letters according to the ACE Manual. This was done by asking the pupils to watch the teacher trace the shape of the letters after which they practiced making the letters in the air using their fingers. Pupils were given plain papers and crayons on which they wrote upper and lower case letters following instructions by the teacher. This gave pupils time to practice correct letter formation.

4.3.2.3 Library Time

The teachers outlined that the learners did not blend the first three sounds learned. A collection of picture books and primary level books were usually selected for the pupils to enjoy. The books were borrowed from parents, church library or bought elsewhere. Emphasis was placed that a high standard of quality be maintained and if secular books were used, they were screened carefully before issuing them to pupils. For the lower primary school children, as they completed their pace work, they had the privilege of looking at books in the library.

The teachers believed that it was important to portray a relaxed atmosphere to create book enjoyment. They were encouraged to show their enthusiasm about books to pupils so that they grow to love books too. All the participants agreed that this helped the pupils to attain reading skills and they met familiar words in the books. T2 said, “even as

children learn to read, their character gets shaped too.” Teachers read the Bible verse and asked pupils to repeat it five times after the teacher as per procedure. This is done after sharing a story or poem related to the Bible verse.

4.4 Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses of the System

4.4.1 Strengths and Weaknesses

Commenting on the strengths of the ACE reading program, the participants said that Biblical training encourages confidence in the children and believed that, a child who trained in this system, should be able to grow up into a confident reader, honest and resourceful with ability to act responsibly in all things that he does.

T3 commented on perceived strengths by saying, “in the first grade, children easily become confident mostly due to classroom arrangement. The offices shield them from their friends’ ridicule in case they have a weakness in an area of learning.”

The teachers raised a concern on the teacher-learner ratio. They all agreed that the program provided for a good Teacher-Learner ratio, which ideally should be one teacher to fifteen pupils. However, this was not the case as the enrolments were quite high. Some classes had more than thirty pupils but the required results were still expected to be achieved by administration.

4.4.2 Concluding comments

In conclusion, almost all the respondents were in favor of the reading program and were confident to recommend this program for all the children in Zambia. The program as expressed by the teachers would help to improve the literacy levels especially in reading.

The teachers believed that if the issue of teacher-learner ratio was handled according to ACE recommendations, the results will be astounding in the area of reading. In addition, the issue of reusing old PACEs should be looked into as some had become “tattered and others misplaced.” Despite using the ACE program for reading, acquiring a new set of PACEs would be helpful for the teachers. The teachers further recommended that

management handle the issue of ordering PACEs seriously because it slowed the children down.

4.4.3 Pupil Interviews

4.4.3.1 Background

The important information required from the interview schedule included age of the participants, grade and the Pre School which they attended before going to grade one or two.

According to the information gathered from the participants, they were between the ages of seven and nine. These were grade one and two learners. The Pre School learners were exempted from the interview because of their young age. For the lower primary school children, three were from grade one (L1-L3) and three were from grade two (L4-L6). When asked which Pre Schools they attended, they said: “I started my pre school here” (L1, L2, L3 and L5). (L4 and L6) said they had have attended other schools. They added that the reasons for changing schools were varied, “my parents wanted me in an ACE school” (L4) and “I don’t know” (L6).

4.4.3.2 Individualized Instruction

On individualised instruction the study has established that, it helped the pupils to pay attention to their work. The pupils liked the idea of working at their own speed and asking teachers for help when they got stuck. L4 added, “it helps you not to copy your friends work.”

One of the prominent issues in ACE’s individualized system is goal setting. In response to the question about goal setting, the study further found out that it was not difficult to set goals but at times it was hard to complete the work and meet the target. L6 believed that, “goal setting helps me to finish my work on time and I remember easily what I was reading.”

All the students agreed that the PACEs were easy and had all the information required and had words that we use everyday. They noted happily that they were easy to follow.

L2 in his own opinion stated “PACES are good, I don’t skip pages when working plus I get to read Bible verses. The other pupils said they love the work from the PACES and acknowledged enjoying reading from the PACES.

4.4.3.3 Assessment

When asked to explain their experience with check-ups, self-tests and PACE tests, the participants agreed that check-ups helped them to remember the new words. L1 pointed out, “because you are allowed to look at the paces, it is easy to remember what you learnt”. The rest of the respondents said it was a good reminder as there are several check-ups in the PACES.

The self test is done after completing the PACE. This is only after the check-ups have been completed and corrected if need be. The PACE test then follows and this is done after the learners review the self test. The study noted that some learners rushed to complete a PACE and they end up failing the test. The pupils believed that the test could be done easily after reviewing the self test.

However, the study also established that some pupils felt PACE tests were tiring because too much time was spent on reading the self test before doing them. They expressed concern that it was more like repeating the self test. Some pupils on the other hand, believed the tests were reasonably easy as long as you read well. L5 said, “I don’t like tests, but I have to do them.”

4.4.3.4 Teacher-Learner Relationship

On the relationship between teachers and pupils, the respondents believed that teachers were helpful and listened to them as they read. L4 however felt the teachers were a bit rough. He was not happy with being told, “Stop being playful” when he didn’t complete his work on time.

Answering to the question of whether the resources were sufficient, the learners all felt the resources could be more than what was available. On resources especially reading books the students all felt they were not adequate. L1 said, “We need more readers for practice.”

They outlined that they worked more often and that, it would be nice to have a good sports ground. The rest of the participants highlighted that it would be good to have adequate reading books from the library unlike sharing or depending on old paces as is currently the practice.

4.4.3.5 Strengths and weaknesses

The participants were requested to share their views about the program so as to draw out the strengths and weaknesses. The concentration was on Biblical training, character training, their view of the teachers teaching them and how friends from different schools viewed their program.

The study established that Pupils hoped to be better people by reading the Bible in that they learnt new verses from PACES and had the opportunity to read about people's lives and how they lived. L3 commented, "In my reading, I come across memory verses that teach me about discipline so that I can be a good child".

The respondents acknowledged character training as been helpful. It made them know what they were supposed to be doing at the right time. If they failed fail to complete their work, then it was their fault.

On the issue of teachers, L3 and L6 seemed uncomfortable with some of the teachers whose pronunciation was not good in some words. L3 said, "Wrong pronunciation by teachers delays our word building progress".

Coming to how their school is perceived, the participants said other people perceive their school as good. This is because they would ask for help in reading. L5 said he thought his friend at home would want to join him but "the fees are too high".

4.5 Management and Implementation of the Programme

4.5.1 Head of Department Interview

H1 and H2 were requested to explain what the curriculum entails. They were further asked if the program has been evaluated. If yes, what were the results and has anything changed for the better/worse?

The departmental Heads explained that, the curriculum is based on biblical principals. It is fully outlined in the Procedures manuals (ACE Procedures Manual 1 and 2).The curriculum has activities spread over from Pre School to secondary school.

The two Heads of Department explained that the curriculum was developed in America. It is self-paced and individualized. They clarified that the school only used the reading part of the curriculum. They used the local syllabus for the rest of the subjects and at grade seven, pupils seat for Examination Council of Zambia exams. They added that they were not aware of program being evaluated in Zambia.

4.6 Document Analysis

The study established some strengths and weaknesses of the program in the ACE Manuals.

One of the fundamental drawbacks of the program is that it is not very well known because the way it is operated differs from the traditional way. To highlight the benefits of the program, school administrators organise Parent's orientation to showcase the program and explain how it is managed by letting parents get involved in helping their children with reading and homework.

Parents get really excited when they see their children reading in a short space of time and are usually encouraged to keep helping the children with reading at home.

The ACE believes that the more aware a person is of a situation, the better equipped they are at handling it. So staff is repeatedly attending training to keep abreast of new developments and parents are reoriented to remind them of the values of the program.

The Learning to Read Manual discusses how to care for reading books. Pupils are encouraged to wash hands before getting a reading book. They are reminded to turn pages carefully one at a time and never mistreat a book by sitting on it or throwing it.

During library time, they are advised not to talk or disturb others and to always put books back where they got them from.

The problem of high cost and availability of PACEs is one other weakness faced by those following the program. Because printing is restricted, delays are encountered in receiving the PACEs. This delay affects classroom activities. However some countries have been granted permission to print black and white copies to reduce the cost and delivery delays.

Lack of socialization is another criticism of the program. The critics say that the program because of its individualized nature does not provide for collaborative learning, group discussions or any kind of interaction between the students.

In the light of the above complaint about the program many schools either leave the program entirely or choose to use the preschool and grade1 curriculum while the other classes will be conventional or else they begin to misuse the program and then increase the incidences of complaints about the program.

4.7 Observations

The observation made use of non-participant observation. These were conducted after the interviews. The researcher observed reading lessons by moving from class to class within a week.

The following were the findings:

4.7.1 Classroom activities

The researcher observed that the school did not have designated offices for each pupil as stipulated in the Procedures Manual but instead the classrooms had smaller desks in the Pre School (Reading Readiness class) and bigger desks for grades one and two. This arrangement of furniture was necessitated by the form of instruction taking place, i.e. use of local curriculum for other subjects. The Reading readiness class requires the teacher to be in close contact for story reading, sound training and co-ordination skills drills.

The classrooms were spacious and well ventilated. The walls were filled with colorful pictures, diagrams and other informative charts. The learner's drawings displayed

around the classroom were impressive. Furniture in the classrooms was arranged in rows neatly and movement for both teachers and learners was easy.

4.7.2 Reading Lessons

The observation was that the lessons started with an introduction which was the song of the month. This was followed by revision of letters that were learnt in the previous lesson. The teachers paid particular attention to the sounds in which pupils were weak. Children made the letter sound in relation to the animal previously learnt and were guided to sing the cartoon song with motions. The lessons continued with comprehension story and the pupils answered questions based on the story after which physical drill followed.

Pupils were taught how to form letter shapes to assist the learners to recognise the general shape of letters. Teachers demonstrated the proper form of the letter shapes in the air before asking the learners to imitate by instructing pupils to make the letter shapes in the air using their dominant arm. They never wrote the letters on paper at any time. The letter shapes were being alternated and pupils were asked to state whether the letters were big or small as the teacher wrote or modeled the letters.

Furthermore, pupils were made to sit in positions where they could see while the teacher explained that the letter sound of the week may be at the beginning, in the middle, at the end or may not be in the word at all. The pupils were requested to pay attention and listen to the teacher attentively. The teacher read the list asking the pupils for the particular sound of the week, for example, the pupils would be asked to listen for the sound **c** in:

Cereal	rice	foam	cement
Circle	rain	ice	grace
Celery	city	tricycle	

Pupils were required to blend sounds and words following the list provided containing only the words and sounds taken from the alphabet letter thus learned.

4.7.3 Teacher-Learner relationship

During the day, the class was noisy as the teachers seemed not be in complete control of the class. Children walked around and talked to other as if it was not time for lessons. This observation indicates there were insufficient teachers and more learners. The children had to wait a while before being attended to. Another observation was that despite being overwhelmed by work, the teachers were particular when it came to goal setting, scoring and testing.

4.7.4 Availability of resources

The researcher observed that old PACEs were being used as the school no longer ordered new ones since they just use the program for reading. The teachers photocopied the appropriate material needed for the day.

The researcher noticed the students being issued with new books from the library for reading at home according to their level. There was also evidence of the students having library time in class as there was a reading corner filled with assorted books appropriate for each grade level in each classroom.

4.7.5 Assessment

The ACE assessment procedure portrayed a similarity to that of the conventional program consisting of read-answer-feedback. Learners complete prepared or extracted portions of material by filling in the blanks on prepared questions after completing a small section of the PACE.

4.8 Summary

The data presented indicates a positive perception of the ACE reading program in achieving initial reading skills. Challenges have been identified too despite the program's positive perception. The implications of these findings are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Overview

This chapter discusses the research findings that were presented in chapter four. Themes emerged from the findings that were in line with the research objectives outlined in chapter one and were used as a guide in the discussion. Thematic analysis is a type of qualitative analysis used to analyse classifications and present themes (patterns) that relate to the data. It illustrates the data in great detail and deals with subjects via interpretations (Boyatzis, 1998 cited in Ibrahimn, 2012).

Thematic analysis is considered the most appropriate for any study that seeks to discover using interpretations. It provides a systematic element to data analysis. It allows the researcher to associate an analysis of the frequency of a theme with one of the whole content. This will confer accuracy and intricacy and enhance the research's whole meaning (Ibrahimn,2012).

5.2 Administration of the ACE Program

5.2.1 Student Offices

From the data gathered, it is clear that ACE reading program distinguishes itself in various ways. The use of offices where each child can work from, for example, creates an atmosphere of seriousness to complete the task at hand. Children concentrated on

their work which was obvious from the observations. Learners appeared to be self motivated as the teachers moved around attending to each individual child.

The observation above is supported by Ertmer and Newby (2013) as they outlined that behaviorism, equates learning with changes in either the form or the frequency of observable performance. Learning is accomplished when a proper response is demonstrated following the presentation of a specific stimulus. The idea of offices creates an environment of seriousness as children tackle their daily work in class.

However, some younger children seemed lost in thought while the teachers were attending to others in the classroom. They occasionally played while the teachers were busy. Though a good idea to have children confined to their work area, a lot of monitoring was required to ensure that learning was taking place at all times.

The behaviorists (Newby and Ertmer, 2013) believe that the learner must know how to execute the proper response, as well as the conditions under which that response should be made. Therefore, instruction is structured around the presentation of the target stimulus and the provision of opportunities for the learner to making the proper response. This supports the observation above that younger learners need constant monitoring to achieve desired response.

5.2.2 Procedure for Scoring

Scoring also known as marking was mostly done by the pupils in the lower grades as they were familiar with the procedure and more mature. The Pre school learners were still learning to read which was done under the guidance of the teacher at all times, hence the teacher recorded the learners' progress.

In the lower section, scoring was easier for the teachers as they just had to give direction and monitor without doing the work themselves unless one of the learners was completely stuck with procedure. There was evidence of children's work being scored and there were no piles of books left unmarked. This procedure lifts up the pressure of work from the teachers who can concentrate on other areas of teaching and provides immediate feedback to the learner as well as the teacher.

This procedure for scoring helped in progress monitoring, formative assessment, feedback, corrective procedures, and instructional alignment which are used to minimize achievement gaps as stated by Zimmerman and Dibeneditto (2008). The strategy was based on Benjamin Bloom's Learning for mastery model, which emphasises differentiated instructional strategies to increase student achievement.

Drawing from the principles of effective tutoring practices and learning strategies, mastery learning uses feedback, corrective procedures, and classroom assessment to inform instruction. Rather than focusing on changing content, this strategy endeavored to improve the process of mastering it.

In addition, this procedure helped the learners to cultivate discipline and honest in their work, which is part of character building as emphasised in the ACE Program. The Character Information Handbook and Guide II (2006) stated that a positive and moral climate is developed by engaging the participation of students.

5.2.3 Goal Setting

All the participants agreed that goal setting instilled good judgment in learners and set ACE apart. Children were able to determine how much work they should do and endeavored to complete the work. The teachers assisted the learners by monitoring and encouraging them. Learners are expected to set a minimum of four pages each day. Helping children develop this culture instills commitment to work now and in adulthood.

Teachers play a critical role in ensuring that learners stick to and complete their goals. Jones (undated) agreed that teaching goal setting skill to young students is important and valuable as it increases their repertoire for learning but it is crucial that the teacher be involved, on a day to-day basis, in conversations with students about their work. This is especially important with young learners who often lack the vocabulary to express their difficulties in learning and who will not often discuss learning with their peers unless prompted to do so (Jones, undated).

5.2.4 PACEs

PACEs (Packets of Accelerated Christian Education) are small booklets or work books, prepared for learners to complete work in small segments, mastering material by reading and filling in blanks. Since the work is already prepared, teachers do not spend time planning lessons for learners. The learners as well do not spend time copying work from the board. They just read and fill in the blanks and this gives them more time to concentrate on their reading.

This confirms Ford's (2014) observation that the likelihood of success is increased even more so. Mastery learning has been especially successful, for example, when introduced in sequential skill-based curricular of the elementary years (Ford, 2014).

In addition, the experiences and outcomes address the important skills of critical literacy. Children and young people not only need to be able to read for information: they also need to be able to work out what they should place on the information and to identify when and how people are aiming to persuade or influence them.

5.2.5 Assessment

The program's assessment procedures include check-ups, self tests and PACE tests. The teachers were in agreement that these assessment procedures helped the children a great deal to be successful readers.

There was emphasis that when learners follow the guidelines, success was assured. Learners were guided to review each section before the check-up and to revise both the check-up and the self- test before the PACE test. Once the guideline is followed, learners are assured of a hundred of a hundred percent pass.

The teachers' opinions were that the assessment procedures were manageable for the learners as long as they took time to revise the check-ups and self-test before writing them.

As McMillan and Hearn (2008) suggested that, self- assessment indeed helps students monitor and evaluate the quality of their thinking and behavior when learning and

identify strategies that improve their understanding and skills. As confirmed by the procedure, self assessment occurs when students judge their own work to improve performance as they identify discrepancies between current and desired performance.

5.2.6 Teacher –Pupil Relationship

The teacher's role is more of a guide than teacher to the pupils. The teacher assists the learners by guiding them. This is done by helping learners find the answers in their paces, blending sounds of words that they are unsure of or asking them questions that will help them find the right answer. The teachers were committed to helping the learners acquire proper reading skills and diction.

This is in agreement with Wilson and Penelop (2006) explanation that, every teacher needs a repertoire of instructional strategies that range from methods of direct instruction to cooperative and small group work to one on one work. Teachers need to weigh their options thoughtfully, making decisions about what methods and content best meet their goals and the needs of their students for a given unit of instruction.

Furthermore, learning in constructivist settings are characterized by active engagement, inquiry, problem solving, and collaboration with others. Rather than a dispenser of knowledge, the teacher is a guide, facilitator, and co- explorer who encourages learners to question, challenge and formulate their own ideas, opinions and conclusions (Gulati, 2008 cited in Weegar,2012).

5.3 Strategies used to achieve the reading objectives

With the ACE reading, young children can benefit greatly from the program, according to the participants. Pupils who may have difficulty in blending are allowed to work at their own pace in reading. The letter sounds are arranged in such a way that consonants and vowels can be blended to form words easily as early as in the first two lessons. Each new letter that the pupils meet has an animal story and song to make remembering easy and interesting.

The ABCs Manuals of ACE reading readiness and ABC with Ace and Christi Manual have step by step information on how to teach reading. The reading readiness manual comprises daily activities for the pre-school class such as:

Phonic sounds, character building songs and Bible stories and psychomotor development activities. The Ace program has thirty six sounds and one sound is taught each week. Good character is taught through animal stories with names that begin with the sound being taught. For example, the character trait of contentment is introduced using the /a/ sound from the Ape animal story.

Songs and Bible stories are used to stress the character trait. In addition, memory verses are given each week according to the character trait of the week. Psychomotor skills development activities such as eye-hand, eye-leg coordination, multi tasking and handwriting enables young children develop muscles to help with good posture.

The gives a suggested timetable of the activities to be carried out in the class with time allocation and a complete list of things to do and the PACEs children are to work with. The ABCs with ACE and Christi is the Manual that takes care of the first thirteen to fifteen weeks of the grade one class. At this stage children learnt to blend the sounds they have learnt in the pre- school class to form words and sentences. This Manual includes:

- Animal Stories- These are similar to the stories in the pre school manual but with greater attention to detail to appeal to the children's higher level of understanding and reasoning.
- Bible stories- These are similar to the pre school program.
- Memory verses-The children have scripture verses per PACE.
- Instruction on letter formation for the students-The word building PACEs are aimed at correcting children with problems in blending sounds to form and learning sight words.

These two classes (pre school and grade one) form the bedrock of the ACE curriculum and success, since the program depends heavily on the ability of children to read.

The findings are in line with what Boat, *et al* (2010) highlight, teachers certainly want to encourage young children to be able to identify and name common objects. This skill is necessary for language and literacy development, and provides a common frame of reference for interaction with peers. Teachers who know children well can identify what is likely to motivate them to develop an interest in everyday childhood learning materials.

In addition, Kazu *et al*(2005) confirm that mastery learning as an instructional strategy bases on the principle that all students can learn a set of reasonable objectives with appropriate instruction and sufficient time to learn. It puts the techniques of tutoring and individualised instruction into a group learning situation and brings the learning strategies of successful students to nearly all students of a given group. In its full form it includes a philosophy, curriculum structure, instructional model, the alignment of student assessment and a teaching approach.

5.4 Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses

The participants highlighted that a child who is trained in is system, should be able to grow up into a confident reader, honest and resourceful with ability to act responsibly. Because of making learners aware that they are also responsible for their learning, they become confident.

5.4.1 Strengths

Despite concerns on the teacher-learner ratio, the participants agreed that the program provided for a good teacher-learner ratio, which ideally should be one teacher to fifteen pupils. Even though this was not the case, the enrolments were still manageable. Most classes had more than thirty-five pupils in a class. The participants were confident to recommend this program for all the children in Zambia.

The program developers allow institutions to use part of the program and this is helpful in reducing the cost as schools can only order what they need and not the entire package.

The participants further highlighted that Biblical training and character training, makes the program stand out from other programs. Whereas other curricular concentrates on imparting academic knowledge, ACE provides a wholistic package which includes character training in addition to academic training. It is hoped that pupils will become better people by reading the Bible apart from becoming better readers. Character training molds the pupils to become responsible citizens in all aspects of their lives apart from school.

One of the fundamental drawbacks of the program is that it is not very well known because the way it is operated differs from the traditional way. To highlight the benefits of the program, school administrators organise parent orientation meetings to educate them about the program and explain how it is managed by letting parents get involved in helping their children with reading and homework.

Parents get really excited about seeing their children reading in a short space of time and are usually encouraged to keep helping the children with reading.

The ACE believes that the more aware a person is of the situation, the better equipped they are at handling it. For this reason, staff is repeatedly attending training to keep abreast of new developments and parents are reoriented to remind them of the values of the program.

In ACE, Mastery learning is used to advance an individual's potential for learning as stated by Bloom (1971). Compared to traditional learning models, sufficient time, attention and help are afforded to each student. By applying mastery learning and better academic performance. Bloom's studies focused on individual differences, especially in students' school learning.

5.4.2 Weaknesses

One of the drawbacks of the program as earlier stated is that it is not very well known because the way it operated differs from the traditional way.

The problem of high cost and availability of PACEs is one other weakness faced by those following the program. Because printing is restricted, delays are encountered in

receiving the PACEs. This delay affects classroom activities. However, some countries have been granted permission to print black and white copies to reduce the cost and delivery delays.

As Shaba (2013) stated in her research, the expense of setting up and running an ACE has been an issue of discussion and a road block to the spread of ACE schools in Nigeria. One great concern over the PACEs is the fact that they are ordered and shipped into the country from either America or South Africa.

Lack of socialization is another criticism of the program. The critics say that the program, because of its individualised nature does not provide for collaborative learning, group discussions or any kind of interaction between the students.

In the light of the above complaint about the program, many schools either leave the program entirely or choose to use the Pre School and grade one curriculum while the other classes will be conventional or else they begin to misuse the program and then increase the incidences of complaints about the program.

5.4.3 Individualised Instruction

The Individualised aspect of the ACE program focuses on the individual achievement or progress of each child academically. The chronological age of the child does not matter. For example, a child who is twelve and performs at the level of seven year old will be given work for that level and the child will progress at his or her own pace. Such an approach to learning helps to curb the problem of learning gaps which characterizes group learning where children are taught as a group whether they get the concept or not.

As stated by Heathers, a chief justification for individualised instruction is that it can permit every student to achieve mastery of tasks undertaken. Mastery criteria linked to task objectives set the level of advancement or sophistication the student is expected to reach. The conditions for attaining mastery are these: the task has been selected as appropriate for the student; appropriate materials and equipment are provided;

appropriate instructional methods are employed and the student is allowed sufficient time to achieve mastery (Heathers, 1977).

Individualised instruction encourages each child's progress to be centered on skill acquired moving one step at a time. A child progresses as they build on skills attained. The pupils that go through the learning to read program, read much faster than the regular reading programs available.

5.4.4 Resources

The resources that ere available for uses in the school were:

A variety of manuals for the different activities detailed in the day to day management of activities in and out of class for both the teachers and the pupils.

- The Administrators Manual outlines all requirements for the administration of a successful school. The advice includes: the detailed plan of the school building, sample of the floor to mention a few.
- Procedures Manual explains all the activities regarding the ACE Program from enrolment of a child to graduation. This manual is like the schemes of work combined with the lesson plan. Included in the Manual are: the curriculum, how to keep records and includes supplementary information on suggestions.
- The other materials are ABC's Manuals of ACE Reading Readiness and the ABC with ACE and Christi Manual and the audio and visual material. These include audio tapes and CD's that have animal songs and the alphabet sounds for Pre School and grade one.

From the responses, despite having all the materials, participants felt that the materials were limited and left no room for the teachers to improvise and were somewhat limited. The teachers would be more comfortable to make other aids that would suit them locally.

This is in agreement with some educationalists who believe that teaching materials facilitate teaching and learning activities, which result in effective teaching and improve academic performance. For efficient educational management, facilities help the school

to determine the number of pupils to be accommodated. Conditions such as lack of work space and unsafe facilities influence teachers' ability to teach effectively, which in turn impact school climate and student achievement (Faour, 2012).

Other studies showed that investing in school facilities is likely to be very cost effective. A good learning environment has significant impact on school attendance and learning outcomes. Adequate school facilities (including desks, blackboards, electricity, water and sanitation) contribute to a stimulating and healthy environment and have a positive impact on pupil attendance and learning achievement (Antoni,*et al*, 2005).

The program has too many “how to” manuals. This leaves very little room for teachers to creative in resource mobilization especially when it comes to teaching aids. Teachers' creativity is not exercised as they will only use what has been provided according to procedure.

5.5 Summary

The great advantage of a mastery approach for catch-up or accelerated work is that as teachers, we start by finding out what out students know, and then help them learn the things they will need to know in order to demonstrate mastery. Using a mastery approach also provides flexibility for accommodating instruction to individual learning styles, needs and interests (Kazu,*et al* , 2005).

On the other hand, mastery promotes rote learning as is the case with PACE work. Spellings that Pupils do in PACE tests usually have high scores but the pupils struggle to remember the same words they got right, after some time has elapsed.

The ACE program ensures that students are provided with timely, constructive feedback that is appropriate for their level as well as praise for their accomplishments. Sagimin and Abdulwahab (2015) explained that in addition, students must be given specific direction on how to correct any errors in a way that differs from the initial teaching. Students must be provided with alternate pathways to reach mastery. By doing so, mastery learning provides a more individualised form of instruction. Mastery learning

does not prescribe what should be taught, but it does require that the curriculum, instruction, and assessment be directly aligned with student outcomes.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Overview

This chapter presents the conclusions of the data findings from the interviews, analyses of documents and actual observations from the preceding chapters. This will be followed by the recommendations and suggestion of areas for further research will be discussed.

6.2 Conclusion

The main objective of this research study was to determine the teachers' on the ACE Programme in terms of its ability to effectively produce students who are capable of acquiring the basic skills of reading in Initial Literacy. This was done by first identifying what other authorities have written about the general trend of literacy and reading pedagogy in young learners and the methodology used by ACE to teach reading. The most outstanding features of the programme included: blending of sounds into words, procedure for scoring and setting of learning goals each day, to mention a few.

The ACE reading program fosters development of the individual child to his full capacity. The program encourages individual progress in the children, with the use of self-pacing. The initial diagnosis conducted for every student equally takes away assumption based on chronological age or class expectations. The students continue on to individual work once they are able to read. However, because mastery promotes rote learning, weaker pupils master the work for the sake of passing the test without benefiting fully from the learning material.

The study endeavored to clarify and shade more light on ACE program and how it contributes to reading, since it is not a very well known program.

Parents who are concerned about the reading difficulties of their children and how much time it takes for the children to learn how to read, should try ACE because it does provide a firm reading background for pupils.

Individualised instruction, ACE in particular, is making a significant contribution to education as far as reading is concerned. Despite this positive contribution, a number of improvements can be made to make the program better.

The finding of this research extends our understanding of the important role that instruction plays in teaching reading. The research was therefore meant to create a better understanding of the importance of individualised instruction and its effectiveness in fostering reading in young learners.

6.3 Recommendations

Local curriculum developers should consider planning literacy curriculum according to individual needs of the learner so as to achieve the objectives of literacy.

Teachers in other schools and all other stake holders should take into account individual needs even as they teach children to read, because with the right exposure every child can learn to read.

6.4 Implications for Future Research

The present study focused on Teachers' Interpretations of Individualised Instruction in ACE to teach reading in private schools. It is apparent that there are other areas that need further study. Considering the findings, it may not be sufficient to just know the views of the people using the ACE program. Finding out how pupils' reading rates against their peers using different programs, in other schools, would be an area worth researching.

In addition, it would be informative to evaluate the program in terms of writing, as another component of literacy.

Finally, it would be worth while to study the language used to teach reading at Lower Primary and Pre School in comparison with other methods, such as teaching in a familiar local language.

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APPENDIX 1: Request to Conduct Research

The School Manager,

.....

.....

Lusaka.

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Dear Madam/Sir,

I write to request for permission to use your school and some of your pupils and teachers as participants in my research project for Master of Education in Literacy and Learning, University of Zambia (UNZA).

The project title is “Teacher’s Interpretation of Accelerated Christian Education to Teach Reading in Private Schools in Lusaka District”. The aim of this research project is to find out how the ACE is used teach reading to Pre and Lower Primary School Pupils who are in the initial stage of learning Literacy.

There will be a need for interviews, observations and analysis of documents used to teach reading. The teachers will also be required to participate in an interview.

Pupils in Grade one and two will be required to participate, three from each grade. Pre School pupils will only be observed because of their tender age. Three teachers and two Heads of Department will take part in the interview i.e. one from Pre school and the other from the lower primary school section.

No names will be used and any confidential responses will not be used by the interviewer. Anonymity will be highly upheld.

There will be a need for parental consents to be granted for the students to participate in the research. Please find attached a copy of the interview questions and the parental consent forms for pupils and personal consent forms for the teachers.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

Precious Zulu

APPENDIX 2: Pupil Request to Participate In Interview

P.O. Box 32100

Lusaka

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO ALLOW YOUR WARD/CHILD PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH INTERVIEW.

Dear sir/madam,

I Precious Zulu, a student at the University of Zambia in Lusaka. I am writing an Med dissertation on the topic 'Teacher's Interpretation of Accelerated Christian Education to Teach Reading in Private Schools in Lusaka District.'

Your permission is requested for your child/ward to participate in an interview for the dissertation. The confidentiality and identity of your child is assured as no names will be used in the research. You will have access to the transcript of the interview before it is used in the research.

Your affirmative response will be highly appreciated.

Yours Faithfully,

Precious Zulu

0977817631

Kindly cut and send back to the school.

.....

I/We parent/guardian of _____ agree to allow our child/ward participate in the research interviews.

Signature and date:

APPENDIX 3:TEACHER REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEW

P.O. Box 32100

Lusaka

REQUEST FOR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH.

Dear sir/madam,

I Precious Zulu, a student at the University of Zambia in Lusaka. I am writing an M.Ed dissertation on the topic 'Teacher's Interpretation of Accelerated Christian Education to Teach Reading in Private Schools in Lusaka District.'

You will be interviewed and your confidence and identity will be protected as you will not be identified by name in the research work. You will have the opportunity to read the transcript of the interview before it is used in the research.

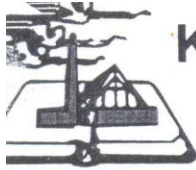
Please be aware that your contribution and sincerity will be appreciated as the research could help to improve teaching reading to young ones.

Thanks in advance of your positive response.

Yours Sincerely,

Precious Zulu

0977817631



KING'S HIGHWAY S.D.A SCHOOL

P. O. Box 36010, Lusaka, Zambia
Telephone: +260 211 254346 / 211 845356
E-mail: kh-sch@zamnet.zm, kh-sch@zamtel.zm



2th March, 2016.

P.O. Box 32100

Lusaka.

Dear Ms Precious Zulu,

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

We write to inform you that your request to conduct Academic Research and to interview some of our teachers and pupils at this institution for your research titled "Teacher's Interpretation of Accelerated Christian Education to Teach Reading in Private Schools in Lusaka District," has been granted.


Yours faithfully,

Mrs.E.S. Mwanza

School Manager.

APPENDIX 5: Teacher Interview Schedule

Background

1. What is your position in this School?
2. How long have you been teaching in this school?
3. How long have you been using the ACE Program?
4. Have you any experience with other programs?

Administration of the program

5. How do you administer the ACE system to teach reading

Reading Program

6. What does the program entail?
7. Does the reading program achieve the set objectives of reading?

Strategies to Teach Reading

8. How do you usually introduce your reading lesson?
9. Do the children who are beginning to learn reading get exposed to alphabet letters before beginning to read?
10. Do the children have time for Library?

Assessment procedures

11. What assessment procedures are used in the program?

Teacher-student relation

12. What is your role as a teacher ?
13. Is the teacher-student ratio adequate?

Training

14. What kind of training did you receive to be able to work with this program ?

Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses

15. What distinguishes this program from other programs?
16. What changes would you implement given the chance?
17. Would you recommend the program for use in Zambian Schools? Why?

APPENDIX 6: Student Interview Schedule

The researcher appreciated the participants for their willingness to participate. The Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The research clearly indicated that the research is mainly for academic purposes.

The participants were informed of the interviews being recorded and later transcribed. They were further informed of their freedom to go through the scripts and transcriptions on the information that was gathered.

Background

1. In what grade are you?
2. How old you are?
3. Where did you begin your school?
4. If not, may I know your reason for transfer?

Individualized instruction

5. How do you feel about setting goals?
6. What is your opinion on PACES

Assessment

7. Explain your views on your experience with check-up , self tests and PACE test.

Teacher –Pupil Relationship

8. What is the interaction with the teachers like?
9. Are their enough resources to enhance your learning environment?
10. Are the resources adequate?
11. How are your classes arranged? Do you like it? Why?

Strengths and Weaknesses

12. What are your views about this program?
13. What benefits do see in using this program?

14. What do you think needs changing in the Program?

APPENDIX 7

Head of Department Interview Schedule

1. Has the program ever been evaluated? If yes, what are the results and improvements made? If not, do you know why?
2. How do you use the ACE Program in the school?