A STUDY OF THE UNDERSTANDING AND USE OF MATHEMATICAL CONCEPTS BY SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS OF PHYSICS: THE CASE OF SELECTED SCHOOLS IN LUSAKA.

BY

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A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Science Education.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

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DECLARATION

I James Kabwita hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work and that it has not been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other University.
CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This dissertation by James Kabwita is approved as a fulfillment of the award of the degree of Master of Education in Science Education by the University of Zambia.

SIGNED ....................................EXAMINER, DATE ..........

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my late mother, Norah Yosa Kabwita; her life always inspired me to do greater things. Thank you mother, you were my hero.
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ABSTRACT

Throughout the study of physics, mathematical related terms, facts, figures and concepts are learned. Although the relationship between mathematics and physics is evident and interwoven, no studies of Zambian origin have focused on how mathematical concepts should be understood and used by physics teachers in secondary schools. This situation indicates a gap in knowledge which calls for systematic investigation. The purpose of this study was to investigate the understanding and use of mathematical concepts by teachers of physics in teaching physics at secondary school.

The participants of this study included 250 male and female secondary school learners aged between 15 and 25 who were in Grade 10, 11 and 12 in 2011. The study also included 25 teachers of physics. The methods used to collect data in this study included questionnaires, interviews, examination analysis, analysis of documents and diaries as well as observations.

The research findings suggested that the majority of the teachers of physics used mathematical concepts in one physics lesson every two weeks. Their inadequate knowledge in the understanding of mathematical concepts prevented them from using them. This frequency was low though teachers used the concepts. The lesson observation revealed that the teachers of physics used methods which failed to reflect mathematical concepts as most of the lesson objectives were of low cognitive domain.

It was recommended that teachers of physics should use methodologies of teaching that promote acquisition of the ability to understand and use mathematical concepts which allow learners to use and understand mathematical concepts. The ministry of education, science, vocational training and early education (MoESVTEE) should draw up a curriculum that emphasizes methodologies of teaching particularly in the use and understanding of mathematical concepts in science rather than in physics content only. Curricula in colleges, and universities should also be restructured so that they teach pre-service and in-service teachers methodologies that are in line with problem – solving approaches, which lead to a proper understanding and use of mathematical concepts in physics.
# TABLE OF CONTENT

Title page…………………………………………………………………………………………………i

Declaration…………………………………………………………………………………………...ii

Certificate of approval………………………………………………………………………………iii

Dedication……………………………………………………………………………………………iv

Acknowledgement…………………………………………………………………………………v

Abstract……………………………………………………………………………………………vi

Table of Content…………………………………………………………………………………vii

List of Tables……………………………………………………………………………………xi

List of Appendices………………………………………………………………………………xii

List of Abbreviations ……………………………………………………………………………xii

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION……………………………………………………………………1

1.0 Back ground of the study……………………………………………………………………1

1.1 Statement of the problem …………………………………………………………………1

1.2 Purpose of the study ………………………………………………………………………2

1.3 Objectives of the study……………………………………………………………………2

1.4 Research questions ………………………………………………………………………2

1.5 Significant of the study……………………………………………………………………3

1.6 Definition of terms…………………………………………………………………………3

1.7 Layout of dissertation……………………………………………………………………4
# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Relationship between physics and mathematics

2.2 Mathematical concepts and competences required in physics

2.3 Solving physics problems using mathematical concepts

2.4 The role of mathematics in physics

2.5 Literature summary

# CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

3.1 Research design

3.2 Population

3.3 Study sample

3.4 Sampling procedure

3.5 Procedure for data collection

3.6 Research instruments

3.7 Reliability

3.8 Content validity

3.9 Data analysis procedures

3.10 Ethical Considerations

3.11 Limitation of the Study
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

4.1 Survey Participants

4.2 Learners

4.3 Teachers of Physics

4.4 The extent to which teachers of physics understood and used mathematical concepts in teaching physics

4.5 Frequency of the use of mathematical concepts by teachers of physics in physics lessons

4.6 Knowledge in the use of mathematical concepts by teachers of physics

4.7 Methods teachers of physics used in teaching mathematical concepts

4.8 Feelings, opinions and impression of the learners and teachers on the understanding and use of mathematical concepts by teachers of physics

4.9 Learners’ feelings, opinions and impression on the challenges faced by learners in studying physics

4.10 Feelings, opinions and impression of teachers of physics on understanding and use of mathematical concepts

4.11 Establishing if challenges faced by pupils in studying physics were due to the way mathematical concepts were understood and used by teachers of physics

4.11.1 Findings from examination analysis

4.11.2 Findings from the learners

4.11.3 Responses from focused group discussion for teachers

4.12 Summary of the findings
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.0 Introduction

5.1.0 How do secondary school teachers of physics understood and used mathematical concepts in teaching physics?

5.1.1 Frequency of the use of mathematical concepts by teachers of physics in class?

5.1.2 Knowledge of the teachers in understanding and use of mathematical concept and the frequency of the use of the concept.

5.1.3 What methods did teachers of physics use in the teaching of mathematical concepts?

5.2.0 What feelings, opinions and impressions did learners have over the way teachers of physics understood and used mathematical concepts?

5.2.1 General feelings, opinions and impressions

5.2.2 Feelings, opinions and impression on the challenges faced by learners in studying physics.

5.3 What feelings, opinions and impressions do teachers have over the way teachers of physics understand and use mathematical concepts?

5.4.0 Are the challenges faced by learners of physics due to the way mathematical concepts are understood and used by teachers of physics?

5.4.1 Findings from examination analysis

5.4.2 Challenges faced by learners in learning physics according to the learners

5.4.3 Challenges faced by learners in learning physics according to the teachers

5.5 Summary of the discussion
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ..................................................53

6.0 Conclusions ........................................................................................................53
6.1 How teachers of physics understood and used mathematical concepts in teaching physics ........................................................................................................53
6.2 The feelings, opinions and impressions of the teachers and learners with regard to the way mathematical concepts were treated by teachers of physics ........................................53
6.3 Establishing whether or not challenges faced by learners in physics were due to the way mathematical concepts were understood and used ........................................53
6.4 Recommendations ..............................................................................................54

REFERENCES ..........................................................................................................56

Appendix I .................................................................................................................61
Appendix II ...............................................................................................................66
Appendix III ..............................................................................................................74

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Learner’s survey participants by gender ..................................................23
Table 2: Learner’s survey participants by age group .............................................24
Table 3: Survey participants by school categories and gender of teachers of physics 24
Table 4: Frequency of the use of mathematical concepts by teachers of physics during physics lesson per week ..........................................................26
Table 5: Knowledge of teachers of physics in the use of mathematical concepts and the frequency of the application of the concepts ...........................................27
Table 6: Ratings of the methods used by teachers of physics in the classroom ........28
Table 7: Learners’ feelings, impression and opinions on the understanding and use of mathematical concepts .................................................................31
Table 8: Feelings, opinions and impression of teachers of physics on understanding
and use of mathematical concepts.............................................................34

Table 9: Analysis of failed concepts due to understanding and use of mathematical concepts........................................................................................................38

Table 10: learner’s difficulties in studying physics.........................................................39

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix I Questionnaire for teachers.................................................................61
Appendix II Questionnaire for learners.................................................................66
Appendix iii Lesson observation schedule.............................................................74

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

C PD Continuous Professional Development
ECZ Examinations Council of Zambia
FETVC Free Education Television Channel
FGDs Focus Group Discussions
GCE General Certificate of Education
IN-SET In - Services Training
Kg Kilogram
MoE Ministry of Education
MoESVEE Ministry of Education Science, Vocational Training and Early Education
mksa Meter, Kilogram, Second and Ampere
N.B Take note
NGOs Non-Government Organizations
O-level Ordinary level
UNZA University of Zambia
ZASE Zambia Association for Science Educator