

**TEACHERS' VIEWS ON FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LOW READING LEVELS
AMONG MOZAMBICAN PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS. A CASE OF GRADE FIVE
TEACHERS AT SELECTED SCHOOLS, IN MAPUTO DISTRICT – MOZAMBIQUE.**

by

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**A Dissertation Submitted to the University of Zambia in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Award of a Degree of Master of Education in Literacy and Learning.**



**UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA
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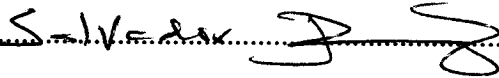
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DECLARATION

I, Salvador Julião Zunguze, do hereby declare that this dissertation is a product of my own efforts and it has never been previously submitted to any University to merit a degree other than that for which I am a candidate.

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the teachers' views on factors contributing to low reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils. In Mozambique, in the last two decades, the government has been working hard to increase school access in primary school, reduce and eliminate illiteracy. The government efforts have included building more primary schools, training more teachers and introducing new primary school curriculum. However, while the government has been multiplying efforts to increase school access and reduce illiteracy, there has been an increasing concern by teachers and parents that most primary school pupils have very low reading levels, especially after the implementation of the new curriculum in 2005.

Despite these concerns, the causes of low reading levels have not been profoundly analyzed in Mozambique and in cases where there have been attempts to establish them, the researchers concentrated on conducting tests to pupils. Therefore this study was conducted to ascertain the teachers' views on factors contributing to low reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils.

It was a case study conducted in Maputo district of Mozambique. The study was purely qualitative and the data was collected using face to face interviews and focused group discussions. This was to allow the study to collect detailed and in-depth views of teachers on factors contributing to low reading levels, in Mozambique.

The sample of this study which consisted of forty grade five primary school teachers from four selected primary schools was drawn randomly using a simple random procedure. Principals and inspectors were also part of the participants.

The findings of this study revealed the following as the key factors that contributed to low reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils:

- the automatic transitions which allowed pupils to proceed from one grade to another without being subjected to an examination;
- the three shift system used in suburbs as an attempt to respond to the parents demand for school vacancies;
- the language policy which establishes Portuguese, a foreign language, as the only medium of instruction and language of initial literacy;
- the short duration of the teacher training programme for primary school teachers (grade ten qualification plus one year of training);
- High teacher – pupil ratio.

Other factors revealed by the study included: lack of exposure to pre-schools for most children, inadequate libraries, poor school/parents' collaboration and lack of motivation on the part of the pupils.

In view of the findings stated above, the following recommendations were made:

- a) The Ministry of Education should re-visit the automatic transition policy where pupils proceed from one grade to another without being subjected to an examination.
- b) In suburban areas where there is the three shift system, the Ministry of Education should introduce measures that compensate the limited teacher – pupil contact time.
- c) There is a need for the government to revisit the language in education policy which establishes Portuguese as the only medium of instruction and language of initial literacy and introduce a local familiar language to teach initial literacy in schools.
- d) The Ministry of Education should re-think about the duration of the teacher training programmes and increase it to at least two years as it used to be.
- e) There is a need for the government to build more schools in order to reduce the excessive number of pupils in classrooms which in some cases reaches 70 pupils per class.

Recommendations for future research:

For future studies the following were recommended:

- There is a need to ascertain the views of pupils on factors contributing to low reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils;
- Studies should be conducted to establish the difference in reading levels between city and countryside pupils.
- A countrywide survey is required to evaluate the new curriculum of automatic transitions.

DEDICATION

This Dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Julião João and Auneta Saize, for encouraging and supporting me during my studies. It is also dedicated to my sister and my brothers for enduring my absence during my studies when they needed me most.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

EFA FTI– Education for All Fast Track Initiative

SACMEQ – Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality

UNICEF – United Nation International Children’s Emergency Fund

AHRQ – Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

NALS – National Adult Literacy Survey

OECD – Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

QUEST – Quality Education for Social Transformation

IEA - Insurance Education Association

PISA – Programme for International Student Assessment

PIRLS – Progress in International Reading Literacy Study

ECER – European Education Research Association

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

MDGs – Millennium Development Goals

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background

In the last two decades, in an attempt to comply with the Education For All (EFA) goals, most developing countries have been making remarkable effort to put every child of school age in schools, and ensure that pupils retention in primary school is the lowest possible (Abadzi, 2010; EFA FTI Secretariat, 2010). Studies show that in countries like Malawi, Zimbabwe, Niger, Sierra Leone, Zambia and Mozambique in the last two decades the level of enrolment and the number of schools and that of trained teachers have increased in double (SACMEQ, 2006; UNICEF, 2006; World Bank, 2007).

In Mozambique, in the last two decades the government has been working hard to increase access in primary schools by offering free primary education, building more schools, training more teachers and reducing the teacher training period (from two to one year for primary school teachers), as well as introducing automatic transitions in lower primary school level (UNICEF 2006; Bilale, 2007).

While the government of Mozambique has been multiplying efforts to increase access to school as an attempt to achieve the EFA goals, there has been an increasing concern by parents and teachers that most primary school pupils at different levels have very low reading ability, some cannot read at all, and that those who can read cannot read at the expected level.

The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) report (1995 - 2010) revealed that the percentage of grade six pupils reading achievement at each reading performance level, in Mozambique, was as follows: pre-reading 2.3%; emergent reading 3.9%; basic reading 11.2%; reading for meaning 28%; interpretive reading 32.7%; inferential reading 16.1%; analytical reading 5.0% and critical reading 0.1%.

The EFA 2000 Assessment Country report for Mozambique indicated that in the National Evaluation Study carried out in 1997, in grade two, only 45.3% of the pupils could attain the basic

objectives of the Portuguese language syllabus. In grade three the rate was higher (65.1%), although according to the expectations was still low and even after three years at school around 50 % of the pupils seemed not to have developed all the skills and abilities required in grade two (EFA 2000 Assessment country report, 2000).

The ability to read is not only of great educational importance, but it is also a major determinant of success in other learning subjects or learning areas where reading knowledge is required, such as mathematics and science. Therefore, children who cannot read at comfortable levels experience significant difficulties mastering many types of academic contents (Matafwali, 2005, 2010; AHRQ, 1980; Abadzi, 2010, Geske & Ozola, 2008).

In Mozambique most of the children with reading difficulties fail massively when they reach grades where they are supposed to sit for a national examination, (e.g. grade five for lower primary level and grade seven for upper primary level), and others never pass these grades and end up dropping out.

The number of enrolled pupils tends to decrease from grades one to seven, due to the high repetition and drop-out rates, as from grade one (Bilale, 2007). This may hamper the government efforts to achieve EFA goals, MDGs, and the government's Absolute Poverty Reduction Programme.

1.2 Statement of the problem

In Mozambique over 40% percent of primary school children have a very low reading level (SACMEQ, 1995 – 2010; UNICEF, 2006; EFA Assessment Country report, 2000). Nevertheless, the causes of low reading performance have hardly been thoroughly analyzed. In cases where there have been attempts to establish the causes for low reading levels the researchers have concentrated on conducting reading tests on pupils (EFA Assessment country report, 2000). Our research problem was, we did not know the teachers' perceptions on factors contributing to low reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this Study was to ascertain the views of teachers on factors contributing to low reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils.

1.4 Objectives

The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. ascertain the views of teachers on factors contributing to low reading levels.
2. determine if there were variations of reading levels in terms of gender.
3. establish the causes of gender variations, if any, in reading levels.
4. identify the measures taken by teachers, schools and parents to mitigate the problem of low reading levels.
5. ascertain the attitudes of teachers towards the teaching of reading.
6. ascertain how teachers taught reading.

1.5 Research questions

1. What are the views of teachers on factors contributing to low reading levels?
2. Are there gender variations in reading levels? If yes, which gender does better?
3. What are the causes of gender variations, if any, in reading levels?
4. What are the measures taken by the teachers, schools and parents to mitigate the problem of low reading levels?
5. What is the attitude of teachers towards the teaching of reading?
6. How do teachers teach reading?

1.6 Significance of the study

While a number of studies have been carried out to establish the factors contributing to low reading levels in countries which use the bilingual system of education such as Afghanistan, Haiti, Zambia, and South Africa (Abadzi, 2010; Matafwali, 2005, 2010), very few studies have been conducted in Mozambique, where Portuguese is the only medium of instruction, to establish clearly the factors contributing to low reading levels.

Therefore, it was hoped that the findings from this study would reveal teachers' own views on factors contributing to low reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils which could be used in the development of new teaching strategies.

In addition, it was hoped that language policy makers, and decision makers in general, would use the findings from this study to introduce effective measures aiming at improving reading levels among pupils.

Lastly, it was hoped that the findings from this study would contribute knowledge in the field of reading.

1.7 Delimitation

This study was conducted in Maputo province, most specifically in Maputo city. Four schools were involved in the study.

1.8 Limitations of the study

This study was limited to a small number of grade five teachers from the selected schools in Maputo District of Maputo Province. Therefore, the findings can not be generalised to the whole country.

1.9 Operational definitions

Reading:	the ability to decipher meaning from print.
Low reading level:	refers to the instance in which a pupil's reading performance is below the expected level according to the reading syllabus of his or her grade.
Factor:	situation which helps or inhibits the learning.
Automatic transitions:	situation in which pupils proceed to next grades without being subjected to an examination.
Failure consent form:	Form designed by schools for parents to sign in an event where a

child fails a grade in the automatic transition system.

Quadro silábico:

handout containing all the letters of the Portuguese alphabet,
combination of consonants and vowels to form syllables and
combination of syllables to form words and words divided into
syllables.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Overview

This Chapter presents the relevant literature documented on the factors contributing to low reading levels in school. It also presents a review of available statistics on reading levels in various countries in the world. In addition, it dwells on measures taken to mitigate low reading levels in different parts of the world. Lastly, it presents some commonly used methods in the teaching of literacy.

2.1 Statistics on reading levels

The problem of low reading levels is not unique to developing countries, such as African, Asian or South American countries. The National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), conducted by The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality –AHRQ, in 2004, in the United States of America, showed that low literacy was a common problem in the United States. In this study, 40 million adult Americans scored at the lowest of five levels (level one); while other 50 million scored at level two. These levels correspond to having trouble finding pieces of information or numbers in a lengthy text, integrating multiple pieces of information in a document, or finding two or more numbers in a chart and performing a calculation (AHRQ, 2004).

In Britain, a study conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in 2001, indicated that about seven million British adults were unable to read, write or add up to the level they would need to communicate in the world of business. The study also revealed that the gap between the performance of the top 10 per cent of adults and the bottom 10 per cent in Britain was 153 points, according to the OECD's measures (Garner, 2001; OECD, 2001).

In Scotland, a country with 73.3 percent of its population with an internationally recognized level of reading and writing, a study conducted in 2010 revealed that despite the high levels of literacy, more than a quarter, 26.7% of Scots experienced challenges due to their lack of adequate reading skills, while 3.6% were classified as having "very poor" reading skills (BBC, 2010).

Recent studies carried out in 2003 by Quality Education for Social Transformation (QUEST) suggested that the majority of pupils at primary schools in Kenya, Uganda, and Zimbabwe were failing to read at the expected levels. In Kenya, it was found that one out of three (34%) children, from a nationally representative sample of primary school pupils in grade six, failed to achieve even a minimum level of literacy in English - measured as the capacity to recognize basic linguistic building blocks such as the alphabet and simple words (QUEST, 2003).

In Zimbabwe, a similar study carried out in 2003 revealed that more than half (54%) of grade six pupils could not achieve the minimum level of reading in English; an indication that these pupils were virtually illiterate in English. In Uganda, a study conducted by the National Examinations Board in 2003 found that 98% of standard six primary school pupils failed to achieve the needed mastery in English language to comfortably pursue further education (QUEST, 2003).

In fact the reading levels among Uganda pupils are very low. According to the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality - SACMEQ II Report (2000) the reading achievement percentage of grade six pupils at each reading area, in Uganda, was as follows: pre-reading 7.2%; emergent reading 18.3%; basic reading 21.8%; reading for meaning 21.5%; interpretive reading 14.8%; inferential reading 8.2%; analytical reading 5.3% and critical reading 2.9% (SACMEQ II Report, 2000).

For Botswana, the SACMEQ research results report indicated that only a little over one half (56 percent) of grade 6 pupils had reached a minimum level of reading, and that less than one fifth (16 percent) of grade six pupils had reached a desirable level of reading (Masalila, 2008).

In Zambia, the National Assessment Survey conducted in 2006 indicated that the national mean performance in reading in English among grade five pupils was 34.5 percent compared to 33.9 percent in the 2003 survey. The study revealed that pupils were able to deal with material presented successfully. However, the performance decreased with the complexity of material presented. Better performance was exhibited in the narrative prose, followed by the expository prose and the documentary prose for Zambian languages. The results showed that the majority of grade five pupils lacked the ability to make inferences and draw conclusions in the expository domains, lacked skills required in the documentary prose, such as the ability to search for information, locate and apply the obtained information (Ministry of Education, 2006)

Matafwali's study (2010) revealed that despite the existence of a rich literacy programme in Zambia, the reading level of the majority of Zambian children was remarkably low. This study further revealed that 50 percent of grade one and two children involved in the study scored zero or only one word on the reading subtest, testing Zambian Languages or English.

In Mozambique, The Education For All - EFA 2000 Assessment Country report, indicated that in the National Evaluation Study carried out in 1997, involving grades two, three and four, in grade two, only 45.3% of the pupils could attain the basic objectives of the Portuguese language syllabus. In grade three the rate was higher (65.1%), although according to the expectations was still low. Even after three years at school around 50% of the pupils seemed not to have developed all the skills and abilities required in grade two. In this study, most difficulties were related to spelling, reading comprehension of simple texts and simple sentences (EFA 2000 Assessment country report, 2000).

SACMEQ report (1995 -2010) revealed that, the percentage of grade six pupils reading achievement at each reading performance level, in Mozambique, was as follows: pre-reading 2.3%; emergent reading 3.9%; basic reading 11.2%; reading for meaning 28%; interpretive reading 32.7%; inferential reading 16.1%; analytical reading 5.0% and critical reading 0.1%.

2.2 Factors Contributing to Low Reading Levels

Researches have shown that there are many different and usually very complex causes for the differences in the reading achievement levels. These are often factors beyond school influence, such as the income level and education, which correlate with the academic achievements of students, but there are quite many factors that influence students' learning achievements at school (Goodwin, 2000). Research results have also proved that there is a close correlation between the meaning of education to parents and students' learning achievements, i.e., if education is regarded as a value in the family, there is a big possibility that children will have high learning achievements (Goodwin, 2000).

Socio-economical conditions are significant for early achievements in reading. Children from families with better socio-economic status tend to do better when compared to their peers from poor socio-economic status. The child's family reading habit is another important factor. It is important for parents to read aloud to their children at home (more frequently than three times a

week), because it is salubrious and it nurtures positive attitude to reading. Sex is another important factor; at early school age reading comes easier for girls. The age at which a child enters school also impacts on his/her achievement, i.e., the more knowledgeable a child starts schooling, the better learning achievements are anticipated during the primary school years (Denton and West, 2002).

The results of some researches, for instance, (Linnakylä et al. 2004; Geske & Ozola, 2008) show that the number of siblings influence students' learning achievements, namely, the more children there are in a family, the greater possibility to be in a group of students with low reading achievements.

Several authors (Purves, 1973; Guthrie, 1978; Taube, 1988; Elley, 1994; Lehmann, 1996; Lietz, 1996; OECD, 2001, 2002; Fredriksson, 2002; Geske & Ozola, 2008) emphasize that parents' level of education, socio-economic position of the family and cultural heritage play an important role in the learning achievements of children. These researchers revealed that there was a strong correlation between parents' education, study aids at home, financial position of the family and children reading achievements.

The actions taken by parents at the pre-school age are of great importance in students' reading literacy. A number of researches worldwide have proved that reading aloud at the pre-school age positively influences a child and his/her reading achievements (Denton and West, 2002). Several other authors have emphasized that reading aloud is necessary and that the experience gained in such a way helps to create comprehension about the relation between the written word and the pronounced word (Beck and Juel, 1999; Snow et al., 1998; Lyon 1999; Geske & Ozola, 2008). These authors also established that students reading literacy is substantially influenced by collaboration of parents and children at the pre-school age.

As in every domain of learning, motivation is crucial. Although most children begin school with positive attitudes and expectations for success, by the end of the primary grades and increasingly thereafter, some children become disaffected (Snow et al., 1998).

Children who are particularly likely to have difficulty with learning to read in the primary grades are those who begin school with less prior knowledge and skill in relevant domains, most notably, general verbal abilities, the ability to attend to the sounds of language as distinct from its

meaning, familiarity with the basic purposes and mechanisms of reading, and letter knowledge. Children from poor neighbourhoods, children with limited proficiency in English, children with hearing impairments, children with preschool language impairments, and children whose parents had difficulty learning to read are particularly at risk of arriving at school with weaknesses in these areas and hence of falling behind from the outset. (Snow et al., 1998)

An Insurance Education Association (IEA) literacy study published in 1994, conducted in 33 countries, revealed that students whose home languages differed from the language of instruction had lower literacy performance, with the exception of the students from Singapore, who achieved high levels of literacy despite being instructed in a non-native language from the beginning of their schooling. This study also showed that the schools that were more effective in developing reading literacy had more female than male reading teachers, and the reading teachers were more experienced. Students in classes where teachers emphasized reading for comprehension and encouraged more reading also did better (Elley, 1994; Wagemaker, 1996).

The availability of books (home, school, nearby community library) was identified as a key factor for high achievements in reading literacy in the IEA study. The amount of voluntary book reading that students did during out-of-school time was also positively related to students' achievement levels. For most countries, the achievement in reading literacy was closely related to their national indices of economic development, health, and adult literacy. However, Hong Kong attained high levels of achievement at both grade levels but had only average status on the developmental indices. Nine-year-olds in Finland and Italy and 14-year-olds in Hungary, Portugal, and Singapore also achieved above the expectations on the developmental indices (Elley, 1994; Wagemaker, 1996).

Oral language is described as a potential predictor of literacy outcome in grades one and two, even if the effect of alphabetic knowledge, cognitive process and background variables are taken into account (Matafwali, 2010). This study, conducted in Zambia, also revealed a strong correlation between familiarity of the language of initial literacy instructions and the progress in reading words, i.e. when pupils are familiar with the language of initial literacy instruction they make more progress in reading.

Surprisingly enough, factors such as cognitive process and background, e.g. age, gender, preschool exposure, home literacy practice and socioeconomic status, were not indicated as factors contributing to literacy development in Zambia (Matafwali, 2010).

Classroom features such as teacher-child ratio, teacher training level and experience are critical for literacy success (Matafwali, 2005). Both teacher-child ratio and the high quality of teacher have repeatedly been found to result in better literacy outcomes in children, this could be because having fewer children increases the opportunities teachers have to converse with individual learners (Matafwali, 2005).

A study by Kingdon (2006), conducted in India to establish whether there was a correlation between teacher characteristics and student performance, concluded that teacher's possession of Masters level qualification and pre-service training had well identified but small effects on student achievement. While a teacher's union membership strongly reduces pupil achievement, union membership is typically not a policy variable. The bulk of the variation in student achievement in a school fixed effect and observed school characteristics explain less than 30% of this fixed effect.

In Malawi, Researches indicated an evident consensus that emphasis on quantity (increased access to education) at the expense of quality education has been one of the factors contributing to the poor reading achievement over the past few years (Kachala, 2007). The swelling primary school attendance necessitated the construction of more schools and recruitment of more teachers to cope up. As a result, sub-standard secondary schools were constructed and unqualified teachers recruited (Dambula and Chibwana, 2004; Chinula, 2000).

Focus groups organized by a commission of inquiry set up by the State in the year 2000 revealed that poor working conditions for teachers, shortage of learning materials, and indiscipline were other contributing factors accounting for low reading performance (Mchulu, 2000). Lack of reading culture associated to lack of libraries, especially in rural areas, were pointed out as other factors impacting on low reading achievement in Malawi (Kachala, 2007).

In Mozambique, a study titled "Human Capital and Social Welfare in Mozambique" (1998) carried out on the basis of the National Enquiry to Families on Living Conditions (IAF) in 1996/7, led to some conclusions that show the impact of Adult Education and Literacy, mainly

on women, in various components of social and material well-being of Mozambican families. Among other conclusions, the study indicated that, in rural areas, the fact that the mother could or could not read and write increased the probability of the child attending school in 23.8%. The study further revealed that, the higher the academic level of the head of family the better the performance of the children (EFA Assessment Country Report, 2000).

Another survey conducted in Mozambique, in 1999, entitled “Conditions of Teaching and Learning in Primary Schools”, which aimed at among other objectives; contributing to the definition of an “Investment Action Plan” in order to improve the quality of education and access, and identify the teaching-learning conditions that more influence the annual results of the pupils, particularly in Grades 1, 5 and 7, indicated that over 50% of the teachers involved in the study, considered that parents’ indifference had a great influence in the low pupils achievement; 45% assumed that social economic status of the pupil also largely contributed for low achievement in general. More than 35% of teachers felt that the fact that a child was an orphan and the lack of remedial teaching largely affected achievement. Finally, 30% of the teachers considered divorce as another influencing factor (EFA Assessment Country Report, 2000).

It is important to note that, the focus of the two aforementioned studies, carried out in Mozambique, was not to look at specific factors that contributed to low reading levels, but on school achievement in general (Portuguese, Mathematics and Science). Therefore, there was still a knowledge gap on factors that specifically affect the reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils.

2.3 Variation of Reading levels Between Boys and Girls

Several variables which influence boys’ and girls’ achievement differently were found in different studies. It has been found that school environment has greater impact on boys’ reading literacy as well as boys’ achievement. For both genders, the following factors facilitate the attainment of better reading skills: safe school environment, out of school reading activities, ability to write when entering the first grade, high level of parents’ education (Geske & Ozola, 2009).

Studies show that boys are overrepresented among the weakest readers. For example, in the Swedish parts of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) studies in 2000,

2003 and 2006 revealed that the proportion of boys in the two groups at the lowest level of reading competence had been twice as high as the girls' proportion. In the Swedish part of Progress in International Reading Literacy Studies (PIRLS) 2001, ten percent more boys could be found among the lowest performing students and ten percent more girls among the highest performing students. The same pattern was found in PIRLS 2006 (ECER, 2010).

Ryan and DeMark (2002) raised the question of whether gender differences in reading were related to the type of items presented in tests and the subject of the items. In an analysis of data from IEA (1991), Taube and Munck (1996) looked at the gender difference in reading to see whether it was related to the content of different texts, the cognitive demands in the items, the length of the texts and the number of task linked to the items. An "inequality index" was used to measure the proportion of boys and girls who had responded correctly to the different items considering the difficulty of the item. The results showed that items about human beings, animals behaving as human beings and human activities were more favourable for girls than items about neutral subjects or science oriented subjects. This could be seen in all participating countries. It was also shown that girls performed better in relation to narrative texts and that long texts favoured girls more than short texts. Among the fourteen year old students there was also a difference between boys and girls related to whether the main character of the text was male or female. Boys performed significantly better in reading texts with males as main actors. For the girls, the gender of the main character did not seem to influence the results. These findings are in line with the earlier findings in a study by Asher and Markell (1974). They found that boys were more sensitive towards the content of the text than girls. Boys performed better when they found the texts interesting, while girls performed at the same level independently of whether they found the text interesting or not. A study by Scott (1986) indicated that boys seemed to perform better when the content of the text seemed to be more "suitable" for boys than when it did not seem to be. Data from the PISA studies have been used for similar analysis by Roe and Taube (2003) who found a very large difference in girls' favour, where the students were asked to respond to items containing continuous texts, especially narrative, argumentative and injunctive texts. The difference between boys and girls was smaller when the item contained non-continuous texts such as charts, maps and diagrams.

An IEA study published in 1994, conducted in 32 countries, including two African countries namely, Nigeria and Swaziland, indicated that at the nine-year-old level, girls achieved better than boys in all the countries for narrative passages. In 24 countries, girls had better scores for expository passages, whereas girls' achievement was significantly better than boys' achievement on documents in only seven countries. At the 14-year-old level, girls achieved at higher levels in the majority of the countries. However, fewer of these differences were significant and, for documents, in particular, several favoured boys (Elley, 1994; Wagemaker, 1996).

In Pakistan, the social status of a girl child and a boy is distinct, which, unfortunately, is also visible in the choice of their studies, especially in middle and lower class families. The girl child has to work all by herself, without any extra help, guidance or coaching and the parents' attitudes toward girls' studies are a huge contributing factor. Girls have to cope with a lot of household chores which make girls too exhausted by the end of the day to study, and a lack of motivation on their part as their prime object, which according to their parents is to be experts in cooking, cleaning, washing, mopping, and consequently be successful housewives after their marriage. However, despite the above constraints, girls still manage to secure better positions in matriculation examinations than the boys (Victor, 2000) cited in Roe & Tube (2003).

In Mozambique, however, we did not find specific studies conducted to investigate whether there was variation in reading level between girls and boys. This gap needed to be filled by this study.

2.4 Measures Taken to Mitigate Low Reading Level Problem in Different Countries in the world.

The National Reading Panel (2000) states that reading comprehension is critically important to the development of children's reading skills and therefore to the ability to obtain an education. Slavin et al. (1994) note that students who complete the third grade and lack reading skills are not likely to graduate from high school. Furthermore, American school children without high levels of reading comprehension face a difficult and uncertain economic future.

In order to solve the problem of low reading levels various measures across the world have been taken at both government and private organization levels. Recreational reading programmes are designed and adopted in various countries to encourage the development of the reading habit.

Reading is a skill that requires much practice to perfect. Activities to practise reading should bring both success and enjoyment to all children in order to foster an ongoing interest in reading.

The Accelerated Reader (AR) programme (Paul et al., 1996) is the most commonly used recreational/motivational reading programme. According to the Education Commission of the United States (1999), approximately 43,000 schools (one out of three) throughout the United States are currently using the Accelerated Reader (AR) programme. The AR programme (Paul et al. 1996) combines a literature-based reading programme with the use of a computer to provide detailed reports to parents, teachers, and administrators on each child's reading progress. The purpose is to offer students appropriate recreational reading as a means of encouraging reading achievement gains. Students that read sufficient numbers of books often receive awards such as certificates of achievement, ribbons, picture-taking, or pizza parties. The AR was developed by Paul and his associates at the Institute for Academic Excellence (Paul, et al.1996).

Students that participate in the AR programme choose their own books from the Accelerated Reader book list, which contains more than 12,000 titles. Each of the 12,000 books is assigned a point value based on its length and the Flesch-Kincaid reading index to determine readability (Flesch, 1974, p. 23). Students read selected books at their own pace and then take a test on the computer. The computer test consists of multiple choice questions about important facts in the book. Most of the questions evaluate literal comprehension. In order to earn any points on a book, the student must answer at least 60 percent of the questions correctly on the test. Careful test writing and security features in the software greatly reduce the possibility of student cheating. AR points are, therefore, a fairly accurate measure of the quantity of words being read and comprehended. Students may only test once for a given book. If students read too quickly, they score poorly because they are not reading to comprehend.

Wojciechowski & Zweiq (2003) concluded that making a connection between home and school reading strengthened the reading habits of students who participated in their study. Student engagement in and enjoyment of recreational reading was heightened due to the positive impact of parental support and encouragement. McQuillan (1997) cited several studies (Lance & Hamilton-Pennell, 1993; Krashen, 1993; McQuillan, 1996), demonstrating that better libraries lead to more reading and higher test scores. Further, children who have access to books, a quiet comfortable place to read, and see others take pleasure in reading, will read (McQuillan, 1997).

In order to support disadvantaged children's academic success in school, communities around the world have adopted a variety of creative and effective literacy interventions. A profile of a few such interventions includes:

Reading Clubs in Nigeria

Informal initiatives that support literacy in the language of instruction in schools by making relevant and interesting reading materials accessible to community members offer a valuable resource that supplements the formal educational system. One important example is “the reading clubs”, a Nigerian grassroots initiative where reading clubs were conducted by a local organization called *The Centre of Excellence for Literacy and Literacy Education – CELLE* (Onukaogu, 1999).

Based on student and community interest in acquiring literacy in English, school teachers and university faculty functioned as facilitators to provide opportunities for literacy empowerment of primary school-age children, newly literate adults, as well as adults from secondary schools and universities who were already mature readers. The goal of the reading clubs was not only to foster language skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking, but also to provide opportunities for critical thinking, questioning, and building self-esteem through group-based reading-writing activities. While facilitators offered each group options in reading, writing and activities according to their interests, they also facilitated critical literacy and supported family literacy activities between parents and children (Onukaogu, 1999).

Involving Parents in Children's Literacy in Australia

Another interesting example of a supportive literacy intervention programme described by Cairney and Munsie (1995) is *The Talk to a Literacy Learner* (TTALL), which was implemented in an elementary school located in an urban suburb of Sydney, Australia, where the local community was characterized by a low level of educational participation, high levels of crime and unemployment, problems with drug use, and also high levels of family breakdown. In their article, the authors demonstrate TTALL's effectiveness in making meaningful connections between schools and parents in a troubled, low resource setting. This programme was also implemented in a hundred other schools in New South Wales.

The goal of TTALL was to engage and assist parents in their children's reading and writing, and it was implemented in three stages. In phase I, parents who were interested in interacting more effectively in their children's literacy acquisition process were identified and trained. In phase II, these parents were trained to be literacy tutors in the school, and then in Phase III to become community tutors who would introduce other parents to TTALL strategies in their own homes. In describing programme outcomes at the end of the initial year-long implementation phase, Cairney and Munsie (1995) found qualitative gains in children's literacy levels. Children not only reported finding school work less difficult, but were also observed to select and read a range of materials at higher reading levels and to have increased their confidence in themselves as readers and writers. They also observed notable outcomes among the parents, who had not only developed a repertoire of effective strategies to assist their children's literacy development, but who felt more confident, and had begun to take a greater level of interest in the school and its activities.

In a more recent Australian study, Lawson (2000) explained how parental involvement in literacy could be further improved by going beyond the kind of initiative described by Cairney and Munsie. Lawson recommends recognizing parental insights about literacy that may be very different from those proposed within schools and recognizing the need to learn from families who may see home-based literacy practices as being distinct from school based literacy. She suggests that rather than developing literacy support programmes that use a common script both in the school and home, home-school relationships can be "mutually supportive" and "harmonious" if they build on the different elements of literacy practised in the home and the school.

Protecting children from failure through out-of-school programmes in the United States

While the Australian initiative described above built on parental knowledge and interest in children's literacy, Query and Hausafus (1998) report on a programme developed to shield elementary and middle school students from factors that contribute to school failure and to assist them in improving their academic performance. This long term project conducted in a low income area of Des Moines, Iowa, was implemented over approximately two years, and involved 507 students in: long-term after school sports and recreational programmes; summer camps designed to increase students reading, writing, math, and science literacy; field trips; job

shadowing opportunities for middle school students; and mentoring programmes where students developed a long-term relationship with a caring adult. During implementation, both qualitative data (in the form of observation forms, journals, teachers and parent surveys) and quantitative data (in the form of grades on student report cards) were collected on participants. In a case study of nine participating elementary students, records maintained over the two years indicated that their academic achievement levels had improved. Mentors and tutors identified improvements in student behaviour and attitudes as well as in their social skills, self-esteem and problem solving. It was also noted that during the course of interventions, students had developed a close and supportive relationship with a peer, a caring adult, as well as some community members. These positive changes occurred along with a reduction in the number of times students had been in trouble in school and at home.

In Mozambique, no study was found conducted to identify the measures taken by educational stakeholders to mitigate the problem of low reading level among primary school pupils. This gap needed to be filled by this study.

2.5 Teachers' attitude and pupils performance

Attitude as a concept is concerned with an individual's way of thinking, acting and behaving (Bandura, 1971). It has very serious implications for the learner, the teacher, the immediate social group with which the individual learner relates and the entire school system. Attitudes are formed as a result of some kind of learning experiences. They may also be learned simply by following the example or opinion of a parent, a teacher or a friend. This is mimicry or imitation, which also has a part to play in the teaching and learning situation. In this respect, the learner draws from his teachers' disposition to form his own attitude, which may likely affect his or her learning outcomes.

In his observational theory, Bandura (1971) demonstrated that behaviours are acquired by watching another person (the model, teacher, parent, mentor, friend) that performs the behaviour. The model displays it and the learner observes and tries to imitate it. Teachers are, invariably, role models whose behaviours are easily copied by students. What teachers like or dislike, appreciate and how they feel about their learning or studies could have a significant effect on their students. Unfortunately, however, many teachers seldom realize that how they teach, how

they behave and how they interact with students can be more paramount than what they teach. In a nutshell, teachers' attitudes directly affect students' attitudes. Teachers' attitudes are, in turn, influenced by their culture and belief system. Teachers' attitudes towards their students in school must be favourable enough to carry the students along.

When the learner exhibits the expected behaviour, the value attached determines very significantly the effectiveness of the learning processes in any aspect of education. Gangoli (1997) cited in Igwe (2002) stipulates that for the teaching and learning of science to be interesting and stimulating, there has to be motivation on the part of both the teacher and the learner so as to ensure the development of positive attitude and subsequently maximum academic achievement. It has been observed that teachers teach science in a way that merely requires the pupils to listen, read and regurgitate.

Several research findings have confirmed the hypothesis that teachers' attitude either towards science or towards science teaching affect their students' achievement in and attitudes towards science. Okpala, (1985) found that the effect of teachers' attitude towards assessment practices on students' achievement and their attitude towards Physics was positive. In the same vein, Onocha (1985) reported in one of his findings that teachers' attitude towards science is a significant predictor of pupils' science achievement as well as their attitude. Igwe (1985) also showed that the effect of teachers' attitudes to mathematics was stronger on the students' mathematical achievement than on their attitudes. Chako (1981) reported in a study of teacher and student characteristics as correlates of learning outcomes in mathematics that teachers' attitude towards teaching significantly predict students' attitude as well as achievement in Mathematics. Chidolue (1986) also found that teachers' attitude towards Biology teaching is one of the major contributors towards students' cognitive achievement. In the same vein Odubunmi (1986) and Odunsi (1988) confirmed that teachers' attitude towards Integrated Science teaching affect their students' attitude to and achievement in the subject while Ogunwuyi (2000) found significant causal relationship between the teachers' attitude and students' achievement in Integrated Science. Teachers' attitude towards the teaching of Mathematics plays a significant role in shaping the attitude of students towards the learning of Mathematics. Ogunniyi (1982)

found that students' positive attitude towards science could be enhanced by the following teacher-related factors:

- Teachers' enthusiasm,
- Teachers' resourcefulness and helpful behaviour,
- Teachers' thorough knowledge of the subject-matter and their making science quite interesting.

From the above, we can say that the role of the teacher as facilitator of learning and his/her contribution to students' achievement are enormous. Bajah (1999) was of the opinion that the success of our school programmes depends greatly on the classroom teacher as he is the one that translates all our thoughts into action. It can be argued to some extent that the characteristics of the teachers and their experiences and behaviours in the classrooms (whether language or science classroom) contribute to the learning environment of their students, which in turn will have an effect on student performance. It is also important that we do not undermine the role of the parents as affecting student learning.

During the review of literature we did not find studies conducted to investigate teachers' attitudes towards teaching reading in primary school. This gap needed to be filled by this study.

2.6 Some approaches and methods of teaching initial literacy

2.6.1 Phonics approach

The Phonics approach is a method of teaching beginners to read and pronounce words by learning to associate letters or letter groups with the sounds they represent (Halvorson, 1992). In the Phonics Approach to reading word recognition is taught by using the grapheme-phoneme association method. A grapheme is the written letter (what you see on paper). A phoneme is the sound that the letter represents (what you hear). Learners are taught the vowels, consonants and blends. They are then taught to combine the sounds and blend them into words. In this way the learner can read unfamiliar words by using the association of speech sounds with certain letters or groups of letters. The early introduction of a phonics programme as part of an overall reading approach has become an almost universal practice in the teaching of reading. The phonics approach can be added to a basal reading approach as well as the language experience

approach as soon as learners have mastered a basic sight vocabulary of about 50 – 100 words (Halvorson, 1992; Aukerman, 1984; McCormick, 1988).

There are two phonics methods; the synthetic and the analytic methods. Using the synthetic method the sounds are taught in isolation, the pupils learn that the letter represents a certain sound, e.g. *b = buh*, and they must then learn to blend the sounds to form words or, in other words, synthesize.

The analytical method, on the other hand, teaches the sound as part of a word, e.g. *b* as in *bat*. The learners learn the new words as the phonic elements are introduced to them. Although the two phonic approaches differ, the end result is the same, as they teach the learner word- attack skills based on a grapheme-phoneme approach. Using this approach a learner will soon be able to read independently (Halvorson, 1992; Aukerman, 1984; McCormick, 1988)

There are a few disadvantages to the phonics approach (synthetic and analytic methods). Some learners may struggle to combine and blend the sounds into words. Learners may focus so much on the pronunciation of words that comprehension of the sentence or paragraph is lost. The exceptions to the basic phonic rules may also confuse learners. However, beginning readers may find the use of phonics in their reading very helpful. It can also be used as a support technique if a learner has sufficient sight vocabulary, but finds it difficult to analyze. (Halvorson, 1992; Aukerman, 1984; McCormick, 1988).

2.6.2 The whole language approach

Whole language is a method of teaching children to read by recognizing words as whole pieces of language. It is based on the recognition that language is derived from experience and that the language art skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing are interrelated and should be taught in an integrated way. Proponents of the whole language philosophy believe that teachers should take advantage of opportunities that occur naturally throughout the school day for students to listen attentively, to communicate with others, and to read and write for meaningful purposes (Ontario, 1982; Artwergen et al., 1987).

The philosophy of whole language is complex and draws from education, linguistics, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Whole language is a constructivist approach to

education; constructivist teachers emphasize that students create (construct) their own knowledge from what they encounter. Using a holistic approach to teaching, constructivist teachers do not believe that students learn effectively by analyzing small chunks of a system, such as learning the letters of the alphabet in order to learn language. Constructivist instructors see learning as a cognitive experience unique to each learner's own perspective and prior knowledge, which forms the framework for new knowledge (Ontario, 1982).

Some important aspects of the whole language philosophy include an emphasis on high quality literature, a focus on cultural diversity, and integration of literacy instruction across the subject areas. Whole language reading instruction creates many opportunities for children to read, either independently, with other children in small guided reading groups, and being read aloud to by the teacher (Artwergen et al., 1987).

In the whole-language approach, students are given opportunities to read to improve their reading skills and time to write to improve their writing skills. This contrasts with the approach in which component skills (e.g., spelling, grammar, punctuation) are singled out for direct teaching and reinforcement. In the whole-language approach, children are encouraged to express their ideas and feelings and to find new interests to talk about. Techniques include brainstorming and use of learning centres, and materials include literature and printed material from everyday life (e.g., newspapers, magazines, advertisements, notices) (Artwergen et al., 1987; Ontario, 1982).

There are some disadvantages in the whole language approach. Aside from overlooking spelling and technical mistakes, the whole language approach can also present problems for students with reading difficulties. Students with dyslexia and other language processing disorders need explicit strategies in order to improve their reading skills. These students need to learn word decoding skills such as phonemic awareness and phonics in order to build their reading fluency. In addition, students may misinterpret words, never learning how to sound out unknown words and not comprehending the basics of the English language (Stephens, 1991; Ontario, 1982).

2.6.3 The Alphabetic Method

The alphabetic method teaches children the names of the letters and spells the names into words. The emphasis in this method is on the name and shapes of letters and this helps the learning of the letter sequence, left to right word attack and spelling (Adams, 1990).

According to this method, if children come across the alphabet letters in their normal order in words and if letters are read many times, children would learn to read as the names of many consonants suggest their sounds. However, since the names of many letters are often different from the sound they represent in words, it is difficult for children to relate certain symbols to certain sounds (Adams, 1990).

Among the most used methods, we did not know which methods were being used in Mozambique, in the teaching of initial literacy. This gap needed to be filled by this study.

Summary

The review of literature has shown that, factors such as levels of education of parents, child entry age at school, reading habit at home, family socio-economic status, preschool experience, similarity between the language of initial instruction and the language spoken at home were encountered as factors that may contribute to low reading levels. In addition, measures such as involving students in out-of-school based literacy activities that connect them with their communities and enrich their day-to-day lives can play a key role in literacy skills acquisition in school. While contextual factors always need to be taken into account in designing and implementing interventions to develop children's literacy skills, insights obtained from projects across the world can be used to enrich local implementation of this kind of activities.

Furthermore, studies have shown variations in reading levels in terms of gender and that girls did better in reading than boys. Finally, approaches and methods such as the phonics approach, the whole language approach, the analytic method, the synthetic method, and the alphabetic method were referred to as being among the methods and approaches used to teach initial literacy.

For the case of Mozambique, during the literature review we did not find studies conducted to explore teachers' views on factors contributing to low reading levels. We also did not find instances of measures taken to mitigate the problem of low reading. In addition, no studies were

found, conducted in Mozambique to find out if there were variations in terms of gender as well as the methods and approaches used to teach initial literacy. These gaps needed to be filled.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Overview

This chapter describes the methodology of the study i.e., the study design, the target population, the sample and the sampling procedure, research instruments, data collection procedure and data analysis.

3.1 Research Design

This study was a case study on teacher's views on factors contributing to low reading levels in four selected primary schools, in Maputo District. Because the findings were based on opinions of teachers, school principals and school inspectors, the study employed qualitative methods of data collection. Robson (1993) states that qualitative research methods deal with data that are principally verbal and help in the understanding of the way in which the individual and other data can be transformed into numbers. A case study design was chosen to allow for a detailed and in-depth study of the factors contributing to low reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils, from teachers' point of view. Scholars have pointed out that a case study seeks to describe a unit in detail, in context and holistically (Kombo & Tromp, 2006).

3.2 Target Population

The study population was restricted to all grade five teachers in Maputo District, in Maputo Province-Mozambique. Grade five was selected because it is the last grade for lower primary school level and it is hoped that by grade five pupils should have a good reading levels to proceed to upper primary school level. Grade five was also selected based on the assumption that at grade five, pupils are no longer learning to read, but reading to learn.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Procedure

For the purpose of this study the sample was drawn randomly, using a simple random procedure, except for school C where there were only nine grade five teachers. In each school involved in the study, the researcher got the list of names of grade five teachers from the principal, and then he wrote the names of each teacher on a piece of paper, folded and placed them in a container.

After that the researcher mixed the paper and then drew the required number of the names. This was to provide each population element an equal probability of being included in the sample. The participants of this study consisted of 40 teachers. There was an equal sample size in schools A and B (ten teachers in each school) but for schools C and D, the sample size was 8 and 12 respectively.

Four school principals, one from each of the participating schools, and three school inspectors, one from the Maputo city Directorate of Education and 2 from the District Directorate of Education were selected. The principals and inspectors were selected purposively based on the researcher's judgments that they could have relevant information that could be used for triangulation purpose.

3.4 Research Instruments

Taking into account that this study was intended to be purely qualitative, the data was collected using qualitative methods of data collection and instruments, namely:

3.4.1 Face to Face Interviews

Face to face interviews were conducted in Portuguese language using an interview guide. During the interview the Researcher took field notes.

3.4.2 Focus Group Discussions

Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) were also conducted using an interview guide. The focus group discussions (FGDs) were carried out in the four schools. One focus group discussion was held in each school. In schools A and D, the groups comprised 10 teachers; in schools B and C, the groups comprised 9 and 8 teachers respectively. One teacher from school B could not participate from the FGD because she had to rush to another school where she was also teaching, while 2 teachers from school D could not participate from the FGD because they had to attend to lectures at the university where they were pursuing their studies.

In general both the focus group discussions and the face to face interviews focused on the six research questions of the study as described above on the section on research questions.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Firstly, permission to conduct this study was sought from the relevant authority at The University Of Zambia, secondly, it was sought from the Ministry of Education Head Office in Mozambique, then from the Maputo city Directorate of Education Office, and finally from the District Head Office and the school principals.

Primary data was collected through face to face interviews and focused group discussions. During the interviews the researcher took notes and during focused group discussions the researcher, apart from taking notes, where the participants accepted he tape recorded the FGDs. During the interview, there were only two people, the interviewer (Researcher) and the Interviewee.

The data was collected between January and February 2011. At the four schools that the researcher visited, the principals and their deputies helped to mobilize the teachers for the researcher to carry out his research. Before the interviews and the FGDs could begin, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and assured the participants that the information obtained was going to be used for academic purpose only and would be kept in confidence.

Face to face interviews were used in order to allow for the collection of in-depth information on the views of teachers on factors contributing to low reading levels. This was possible because in cases of misunderstanding the interviewer could ask probing and follow up questions.

There were four Focused Group Discussions which comprised 10 teachers from each visited schools, except schools C, where there only 8 teachers.

3.6 Data Analysis

In this study, data was analyzed qualitatively, i.e., The responses from research respondents were put into categories according to the emerging themes and then analyzed and interpreted critically and objectively in order to allow the researcher to go beyond the information given from the gathered data, and then make vivid and reliable conclusions.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

Ethical concerns were taken into consideration in this study. All data collected during this study were kept strictly confidential and was used for academic purpose only. Consent was sought from the respondents and there was freedom of participation. The researcher maintained an open and honest approach and ensured protection of the names of both participants and their schools.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Overview

This chapter presents the research findings according to the six research questions. Firstly, what were the views of teachers on the factors contributing to low reading levels?; secondly, were there variations in reading levels in terms of gender?; thirdly, what were the causes of variations (if any) in terms of gender?; fourthly, what were the measures taken by teachers, schools and parents to mitigate the problem of low reading levels?; fifthly, what was the attitude of teachers towards the teaching of reading?; lastly, how were teachers teaching reading.

The data were collected from teachers who taught grade five in the four selected schools involved in the study. Data were also collected from school principals and school inspectors. Two methods of data collection were used in this study to come up with in-depth data about teachers' views on factors contributing to low reading levels, namely, face to face interviews and focused group discussions (FGDs). The sample size was 40 teachers; four school principals and three education inspectors. The researcher tried to draw equal sample sizes from the participating schools; however in school C, it was not possible due to school size. It had only 9 grade five teachers and one teacher was on maternity leave.

Table 1: Breakdown of the interviewees.

School	Principal	Teachers	Total
School A	1	10	11
School B	1	10	11
School C	1	8	9
School D	1	12	13
Total	4	40	44

Three education Inspectors were interviewed, one from the Maputo city Directorate of Education and two from the District Directorate of Education. In terms of gender, 2 inspectors were male and 1 was female.

4.1 Participants' qualifications

All the participants to the study said that they had the 10 +2 (grade 10 qualification plus two years of teacher training course). Some participants, apart from this training had undergone further training up to university level.

Table 2: Breakdown of participants in terms of qualifications

School	Number of participants	Type of training			Total
		10+2	10+2 plus a Degree	10+2 and an on going degree programme	
School A	10	3	4	3	10
School B	10	4	2	4	10
School C	8	2	3	3	8
School D	12	2	5	5	12
Total	40	11	14	15	40

4.2 Findings

4.2.1 Findings from the teachers

The first question was; what were the teachers' views on factors contributing to low reading levels? During the face to face interviews and the focus group discussions the following factors were cited by the participants as the possible factors that contributed to the low reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils:

- *Automatic transitions (which allowed pupils to proceed to the next grades without being subjected to an examination);*
- *Inadequate preparation of pupils by teachers in initial grades (1 and 2);*
- *Lack of motivation on the part of the pupils from grade three onwards;*
- *Lack of parents' collaboration with schools;*
- *The three shift system;*
- *Education policy (which establish 70% as the minimum pass percentage that a teacher should have);*
- *Language of instruction and initial literacy (Portuguese);*
- *The replacement of the alphabetic method by the analytic and synthetic methods ;*
- *Teachers working in more than one school;*
- *Short duration of the teacher training programme (one year);*
- *Lack of pre-school exposure to most children;*
- *Influence of TV and computer games;*
- *Inadequate school libraries;*
- *School entry age (six years of age)*
- *High teacher/pupil ratio*

One teacher had the following to say with regard to automatic transitions:

Automatic transition is one of the major factors that contributes to low reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils because according to the new curriculum that introduced automatic transitions in 2005, all children in grades without examinations should proceed to next grades regardless of whether they have mastered the skills recommended for such grades.

Another teacher reported that the three shift system (6.30am – 10.15am; 10.30am to 13.45 pm and 14.00pm – 17.30) used in suburban areas as an attempt to respond to parents' demand for school vacancies contributed to low reading levels:

With the three shift system we do not have enough time to look at each pupil's needs and difficulties due to time constraints.

Commenting on the language of instruction another teacher said as follows:

Almost half of our pupils come to school without speaking Portuguese and it is very difficult to teach these children because you say something and they do not understand. And if you take a lot of time trying to explain those who do not understand Portuguese, you will be behind with the programme.

The second question was: were there gender variations in reading levels? If yes, which gender did better? The majority of teachers reported that there were gender variations and that girls did better than boys.

One teacher had the following to say on which gender did better in reading than the other:

Girls in most of the classes that I have taught in my life tend to perform better in reading than their peer boy pupils.

Relating to the question which sought to establish the causes of gender variations, most of the teachers pointed out the following:

- *Girls' level of responsibility (girls are less playful than boys);*
- *Ambitions or dreams;*
- *Girls' playing activities (most girls playing activities take place in the home);*
- *Mozambican culture;*
- *Girls' maturity (girls' maturity is faster than the boys').*

One teacher had the following to say about dreams:

Most girls at early age dream of becoming nurses, doctors and teachers and these dreams make them get more interested in books. Boys on the contrary, at early age dream of becoming film and football stars and therefore spend much time playing football and wrestling, in order to become as good as their role models.

Another teacher reported the following about Mozambican culture:

In our culture, girls most of the times are at home with the mothers and older siblings to learn about cooking, cleaning, washing and being obedient while boys are usually outside playing. Therefore, it is easier to control the girls, tell them to sit down and do their school home works and help them in case of difficulties.

Commenting on girls' maturity another teacher had the following to say:

Girls' maturation process is faster than the boys' one and this facilitates the girls to perform better than boys.

The fourth question was: what were the measures taken by teachers, schools and parents to mitigate the problem of low reading levels? The teachers revealed the following as the measures taken:

Measures taken by teachers

- *Abandon grade five syllabus for a while;*
- *Use alphabetic method;*
- *Sensitize parents to sign failure consent forms;*
- *Sitting arrangement in classes(in groups according to pupils' difficulties)*
- *Give daily copying and reading activities;*

Measures taken by schools

- *Joint lesson planning in school clusters(ZIP);*
- *Peer teaching in school clusters (ZIP);*
- *Record of the number of pupils who can read at the beginning of the year, end of trimester, end of semester and end of the year;*
- *Giving of prizes to best pupils and to teachers with best results;*
- *Strict selection of teachers to teach grades one and two;*
- *Distribution of "quadro silábico";*
- *Lesson plan control;*

Measures taken by parents

- *Send their children to private tutors*

One teacher said the following about the measures taken by teachers to mitigate the problem of low reading levels:

We usually leave the syllabus of grade five for a week or so and use the syllabus of previous grades to help pupils with serious reading problems.

Another teacher had the following to say about sensitizing parents to sign Failure Consent Forms (forms previously prepared by the school and used in the automatic transition system for the parents to sign in case they accept that their child should repeat a grade):

The school often organizes class meetings with parents in which one of the items in the agenda is to sensitize parents to accept signing failure consent forms when they are requested to do so.

The fifth question sought to ascertain the attitude of teachers towards the teaching of reading. Most teachers responded that they enjoyed teaching reading.

One teacher said the following when asked about the teachers' attitudes towards the teaching of reading:

I personally like teaching reading because it is enjoyable. What I am not happy with are the automatic transitions because they allow pupils to proceed to the next grades even in situations where they should fail. I think that the Ministry of Education should urgently do something about automatic transitions.

The sixth question was: how were the teachers teaching reading? All the participants explained that they used the analytic and synthetic methods to teach reading.

One teacher reported the following about how teachers were teaching reading:

The new curriculum recommends that reading be taught using the analytic and synthetic methods, so we use the analytic or synthetic methods in accordance with the suggestions from the teachers' book. In analytic we teach from sentence to word and from word to letter and in the synthetic method we use the other way round.

4.2.2 Findings from school principals.

What were the school principals' views on factors contributing to low reading levels? The school principals revealed the following as the main causes:

- *Automatic transitions (which allowed pupils to proceed to the next grades without being subjected to an examination);*
- *Lack of parents' collaboration with schools;*
- *Influence of technology (television and computer games)*
- *Short duration of teacher training programmes (one year); and*
- *Excessive number of pupils in classrooms.*

One school principal explained the following about lack of parents' collaboration:

Most parents' leave all the responsibility of their children education to the teacher and school. Once they have a vacancy at school for their child, that is all, they simply do not worry about what is happening with their children at school.

Another school principal said that the excessive number of pupils in classrooms, especially in suburban areas (45 to 70 pupils per class) was another major factor that accounted for low reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils.

In his own words, one school principal had the following to say about excessive number of pupils in classrooms:

The teacher -pupil ratio is very high. In some cases it reaches up to seventy and with such number it is very difficult for a teacher to pay full attention to each pupil's needs.

The second question was: were there gender variations in reading levels? If yes, which gender did better? The school principals revealed that, in general, the statistics that they had showed that girls did better than boys.

One school principal said the following about gender variations in reading levels between girls and boys:

According to statistics, the general tendency is that girls do better than boys, though it is possible to find classes where there are more boys doing better than girls, in terms of reading.

The third question sought to establish the causes of gender variation in reading levels and most school principals pointed out the following causes:

- *Boys were more playful than girls*
- *Role models*

One school principal had the following to say:

Unlike the girls, boys play too much. They are often outside playing football, running and wrestling.

What were the measures taken by the schools and parents to mitigate the problem of low reading level? In relation to this question, most school principals revealed the following measures:

Measures taken by the schools

- *Joint lesson planning in school clusters (ZIP);*
- *Control of the number of pupils who can read at the beginning of the year, end of trimester, end of semester and end of the year;*
- *Distribution of prizes to the best pupils and to teachers with best results;*
- *Strict and careful selection of teachers to teach grades one and two;*
- *Distribution of “quadro silábico” ; and*
- *Lesson plan control*

Measures taken by parents

- *Send their children to a private tutor*

One school principal said the following in relation to distribution of prizes:

At the end of the year we give prizes to some best pupils and to teachers with best results as a way of motivating both the pupils and teachers to work hard. The prizes consist of diplomas and computer courses for pupils; kitchenware, items of clothes and cell-phones to teachers.

Another school principal reported the following about the distribution of “quadro silábico” to pupils:

We usually distribute “quadro silábico”, which is a kind of hand out containing all the letters of the alphabet, combination of consonants and vowels to form syllables and some basic words to all our pupils.

On the other hand, another principal had the following to say about the measures taken by parents:

Most parents who can afford paying private tuition fees opt for taking their children for private tuition. So if the pupil attends normal classes in the morning, then she/he attends private tuition classes in the afternoon.

What was the attitude of teachers towards the teaching of reading? All the school principals reported that teachers enjoyed teaching reading.

One school principal responded as follows:

Teachers like teaching reading. There are subjects such as physical education and music where some teachers do not like, but with Portuguese and mathematics it is different.

The sixth question sought to ascertain how teachers were teaching reading. Most school principals revealed that reading was taught using the analytic and synthetic methods.

One school principal said the following about how reading was taught:

Reading is taught through a combination of analytic and synthetic methods, depending on grades and following the suggestions from the teacher's book. However, teachers can always adapt whenever it is necessary and depending on their experiences, objectives of the lesson and the pupils' needs. In the analytic method the teacher starts from sentence to word and from word to letter and sound and in the synthetic method is the other way round.

4.2.3 Findings from school inspectors.

Three school inspectors were interviewed in the study based on an interview guide. The first question sought to ascertain, the school inspectors' views on factors contributing to low reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils. The inspectors explained that there were many factors that accounted for the problem of low reading levels. The following were cited:

- *Misunderstanding of automatic transition;*
- *Poor lesson planning;*
- *Poor teacher/parent collaboration;*
- *Lack of pre-schools exposure to most children; and*
- *Language of instruction and initial literacy (Portuguese).*

One school inspector said the following about misunderstanding of automatic transitions:

In the beginning of automatic transitions, the general understanding of most teachers and school principals was that every child in grades without examinations should proceed to next grades at the end of the year, regardless of whether or not they have acquired the necessary skills and knowledge for such grades. Only later, when we started to disseminate the curriculum and explain the schools that pupils who, at the end of the year, do not have the necessary skills and knowledge could fail, but in that

case the parent should accept that their children fail by signing a consent form, the schools started failing children.

Another school inspector had the following to say about poor lesson planning:

During our inspection missions in schools we notice that some teachers do not plan adequately their lessons. Some show lack of mastery of certain topics others master the topic but fail to adequately plan their lessons.

Were there gender variations in reading levels? If yes which gender did better? All the three school inspectors agreed that there were gender variations and that the girls did better than boys.

One school inspector had the following to say about whether there were gender variations:

Yes, there are gender variations in reading levels and according to statistics that the schools provide at the end of each year, the girls are doing better than boys.

The third question was: what were the causes of gender variations (if any) in reading levels? The following causes were revealed by the inspectors:

- *Mozambican culture;*
- *Boys are more playful than girls.*

Commenting on culture, one school inspector said:

In our culture, unlike boys, girls are not allowed to stay long playing outside the home. They are expected to stay home near their mothers, to learn about cooking and washing and being prepared to be good mothers. This helps the parents to have a better control of the girl, including telling the girls to sit down and do their school home-works.

What were the measures taken by the inspection office, schools and parents to mitigate the problem of low reading levels? The inspectors pointed out the following measures:

Measures taken by the inspectors

- *Do regular pedagogical inspections*
- *Instruct schools to have monthly planning sessions in school clusters (ZIP);*
- *Peer teaching during the monthly planning sessions at school clusters;*

- *Instruct schools to do a strict and careful selection of teachers for initial grades (1 and 2);*
- *Instruct school principals and their deputies to control teachers' lesson plans and assist teachers with difficulties*

Measures taken by schools

- *Distribution of “quadro silábico”;*
- *Prizes for best teachers;*
- *Lesson planning control;*

Measures taken by parents

- *Send their children to private tutors*

One school inspector had the following to say with regards to regular pedagogical inspections:

We have regular pedagogical inspection visits in schools and among other issues we check the level of fulfilment of our recommendations with regards to reading levels control, school cluster meetings and lesson planning and we also observe some teachers.

Commenting on measures taken by parents, one inspector said:

Some parents help their children, with school difficulties at home, but most parents who have financial capacity, opt for taking their children for private tuition.

The fifth question was; what was the attitude of teachers towards the teaching of reading? The three inspectors agreed that from their experience, teachers liked reading.

One school inspector had the following to say about the attitudes of teachers towards the teaching of reading:

From my experience when I was teaching, I can say that teachers like reading.

How were teachers teaching reading? All the inspectors referred to the analytic and synthetic methods.

One school inspector had the following to say about how teachers were teaching reading:

The curriculum recommendation is that reading be taught through the analytic and synthetic methods for initial grades.

Summary

This chapter has presented the findings from all the different participants from the study, namely teachers, school principals and school inspectors. The findings have been presented in accordance with the six study questions.

In general, the study revealed that, the automatic transitions (which allowed pupils to proceed to next grades without being subjected to an examination), the language of instruction and initial literacy (Portuguese), the three shift system used in suburban areas, the replacement of the alphabetic method by the analytic and synthetic methods, the short duration of the teacher training programme (one year), the influence of television and computer games, poor lesson planning and inadequate preparation of pupils by teachers in initial grades (1 and 2) and lack of motivation on the part of the pupils from grade three onwards were the main factors contributing to low reading levels.

Other factors revealed by the study included, lack of pre-school exposure for most children, high teacher/pupils ratio, lack of parent's collaboration with schools, poor socio-economic situation of most families, inadequate libraries and the school entry age (six years of age).

As regards to the question which sought to establish whether there were variations in reading levels, the study also confirmed the findings from previous studies by revealing that there were variations and that the female pupils did better in reading than their peer male pupils.

As for the measures taken by teachers, schools and parents, the study revealed that the measures taken by teachers included, designing easier reading materials for their pupils, abandon grade five syllabus for a while, use alphabetic method; sensitize parents to sign failure consent forms, sitting arrangement, daily coping and reading activities. On the other hand the schools took measures such as, joint lesson planning in school clusters (ZIP), lesson plan control by school principals and their deputies; distribution of prizes to best pupils and teachers with best results;

strict and careful selection of teachers to teach grades one and two; distribution of “*quadro silábico*” to pupils. The study revealed that most parents with financial capacity opted for taking their children to private tuitions.

As regards the teachers’ attitudes towards teaching reading and how the teachers were teaching reading? The study findings revealed that the teachers enjoyed teaching reading, however, they were not happy with automatic transitions. On the other hand, the study revealed that teachers taught reading through the analytic and synthetic methods.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.0 Overview

In this chapter, findings on the views of teachers, school principals and inspectors of factors contributing to low reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils are discussed. The findings are discussed in accordance with the six objectives that guided the study. In addition, the findings have been discussed in relation to what other scholars have said regarding this topic.

5.1 Ascertain the views of teachers on factors contributing to low reading levels.

The first objective of the study was to ascertain the views of teachers on factors contributing to low reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils. According to the findings from the teachers and school principals involved in this study, there were a number of factors that contributed to the low reading levels. However, one of the highly emphasized factors by the interviewees was automatic transitions which allowed pupils from grade one, two and four to proceed automatically to the next grades without being subjected to an examination. Apparently, the objective of the government in introducing the automatic transitions is to increase school access. However, ensuring that children have a place in school without ensuring quality learning does not help. In a long term, the implication can be severe for the country. Firstly, very soon these children who are completing grade five with a lot of reading problems will be enrolled in secondary schools and after secondary schools to universities and they will continue facing serious problems because reading skills are important for understanding other school subjects such as mathematics and science subjects. The above findings are in line with the results of an earlier study conducted in Malawi by Kachala (2007) who observed that emphasis on quantity (increased access to education) at the expenses of quality has been one of the contributing factors to poor academic achievement, over the past few years in Malawi. It seems to be clear from the findings of this study that the main gain of automatic transition is mostly quantity of graduates and not their quality.

Surprisingly enough, during the triangulation interview with school inspectors, automatic transitions were not mentioned as a factor contributing to low reading levels. The three inspectors involved in this study talked of misunderstanding of automatic transitions during the first year of the implementation of the new curriculum by teachers and school principals. They reported that the understanding of most teachers and school principals was that all pupils would proceed to next grades, which according to the inspectors was not true; because if a teacher found that a pupil deserved to fail, he/she was free to call the parents and ask them to sign a failure consent form for their children to fail. According to the teachers, the problem was that when parents were called, most of them did not go to school and most of those who went did not accept to sign the consent forms. According to the new curriculum if the parents do not sign the failure consent forms, their children cannot fail. However, six years have passed since the implementation of the new curriculum and the schools are still facing the problem of low reading levels. This could mean that the inspectors were not aware of the negative consequences of automatic transitions or they were simply avoiding criticizing the curriculum, since they were part of the implementing party of the curriculum.

According to the findings of this study other factors which might have contributed to low reading levels included the three shift system used in high population density areas as an attempt to respond to parents' demand for school vacancies and the current primary school educational policy. According to the interviewees in high density areas, primary schools had three shifts during the day, and not two that primary schools had in low density areas. The government seems to have taken this measure in order to alleviate the parents search for vacancies in suburb areas and increase school access, but it is putting at risk the quality of learning in such schools. This is because the government by increasing one more shift it had to reduce on the number of learning hours and no other measure such as providing more learning resources e.g. libraries, reducing teacher-pupil ratio etc, were taken which could have compensated for the reduction of learning hours. This agrees with Kachala (2007) who observed that emphasis on quantity (increased access to education) at the expense of quality had been one of the contributing factors to poor academic achievement, over the past few years in Malawi. There is nothing wrong with increasing access to school. However, measures that secure educational quality should be taken along side those ones that increase access. Children are one of the most important assets for the

country and primary schools are like a house foundation whereby if the foundation is not of good quality, the house can easily fall when there is a storm. In the same line, it can be argued that initial literacy is a pillar on which the major part of an economy of a country stands because it is responsible for preparing the forthcoming generation. If the pillar is strong enough to hold the economy, it will stand firm and resist against a variety of problems and the economy will grow. And if the pillar of initial literacy is weak and fragile the future of the country will be weak and fragile. Scholars such as Dambula and Chibwana (2004) and Chinula (2000) observed in their studies conducted in Malawi that, in Malawi, the swelling primary school attendance necessitated the construction of more schools to cope up. In the case of Mozambique, this study revealed that the automatic transitions, the three shift system and the current primary school educational policy were doing fine by stimulating access, but putting at risk the quality of education, and perhaps the solution could be building more schools and reducing the number of shifts per day to allow pupils to have more time at school.

The findings of the study further indicated that inadequate preparation of pupils by teachers in initial grades (one and two) could be another contributing factor to low reading levels. In this study most interviewees observed that most grade five pupils showed lack of mastery of basic reading skills that were taught in grades one and two (e.g., letter recognition, word recognition, blending sounds into word and dividing words into syllables). Perhaps this is not a factor as such but a consequence of automatic transitions. Some interviewees explained that since the introduction of automatic transition in 2005, grades one, two and four teachers were no longer making a lot of efforts in their classes as they knew that even if their pupils did not master the necessary skills recommended for their grades, at the end of the school year they would all the same proceed to the next grades. The Ministry of Education needs to re-think the new curriculum and effect the necessary modification, to avoid having many children with grade five certificates, but who cannot read.

Other factors reported by teachers as contributing to low reading levels included, lack of motivation on the part of the pupils from grade 3 onwards, lack of parents' collaboration with schools and poor lesson planning. These factors could also be consequences of automatic transitions. According to the interviewees, the teachers, in the new curriculum, had no authority to fail a pupil, except with the written consent of the parent, meaning that, the parent had more

authority than the teacher. This situation was de-motivating teachers because they worked with the pupils during the whole year and at the end of it the parents were the ones who decided whether their children should proceed or fail. These findings are consistent with the results of a study conducted by Epstein & Sanders (2002) who observed that parental involvement in their children's academic activities such as communicating; volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with school and community stimulated children's interest in school and positively influenced academic achievement. In addition, Hill & Craft (2003) observed that parental involvement in school activities made an enormous impact on the student's attitude, attendance, and academic achievement and promoted better cooperation between parents and schools. In addition, the children from grade three onwards are mature enough to realize that whether they do well at school or not, at the end of the year they would all proceed to the next grade, hence loss of interest on their part.

A literacy study conducted by the Insurance Education Association – IEA published in 1994, conducted in 33 countries revealed that students whose home language differed from the language of instruction had lower literacy performance. The findings from this study confirmed the results of the above IEA study. The majority of teachers and school principals involved in this study revealed that the language of instruction and initial literacy (Portuguese) was a contributing factor to low reading levels. These findings are also in line with the results of a study carried out in Zambia by Matafwali (2010) which revealed that oral language was a potential predictor of literacy outcome in grades one and two. Matafwali (ibid) further observed that there was a strong correlation between familiarity of the language of initial literacy instruction and the progress in reading words. i.e., when children were familiar with the language of initial literacy instruction they made more progress. In Mozambique, the study indicated that most children who entered school with no notions of Portuguese, especially children from suburbs and rural areas, where Portuguese was not popular, faced serious difficulties learning to read as they actually struggled to learn the four skills at the same time (speaking, listening, reading and writing). Although language is only a small element which affects reading levels, perhaps the government should re-visit, its Language Policy, which recognizes Portuguese (a foreign language) as the only medium of instruction and language of initial literacy.

Snow et al., (1998) observed in their study that children who were particularly likely to have difficulty with learning to read in the primary grades were those who began school with less prior knowledge and skill in relevant domains, most notably, general verbal abilities, the ability to attend to the sounds of language as distinct from its meaning, familiarity with the basic purposes and mechanisms of reading, and letter knowledge. Obviously as most Mozambican children enter school without having attended pre-school, they enter primary school with no or little notions of Portuguese (language of instruction and initial literacy), because they did not attend pre-school. In addition, Elley (1994) and Wagemaker (1996) observed that the availability of books (home, school, nearby community library) was a key factor for high achievements in reading literacy. The amount of voluntary book reading that students did during out-of-school time was also positively related to students' achievement levels. In this study most interviewees from the four schools stated that the lack of libraries in their schools was a factor that contributed to low reading levels. In fact, in all the four schools, none of them had a school library and the interviewees revealed that there were no community libraries to stimulate out of school reading among the pupils.

According to Snow et al., (1998) the first obstacle, which arises at the outset of reading acquisition, is difficulty understanding and using the alphabetic principle - the idea that written spellings systematically represent spoken words. It is hard to comprehend a connected text if word recognition is inaccurate or laborious. The findings from this study seem to have confirmed those of the study above. Most interviewees revealed that in the new primary school curriculum, the alphabetic method was replaced by the analytic and synthetic methods and that the replacement had affected the level of reading achievement among primary school pupils. The interviewees noted that, with the introduction of the analytic and synthetic methods, most pupils started showing problems such as letter recognition, dividing words into syllables and consequently reading problems. This could mean that the combination of synthetic and analytic methods alone is not enough, hence the need to include more methods to cater for the various individual pupils needs and learning styles.

The findings from this study further revealed that the fact that teachers worked in more than one school could have been contributing to low reading levels. The interviewees stated that the high cost of living and the low salaries paid to teachers had forced most teachers to work in both

government controlled schools and private ones and some times teachers worked day and night shifts. Although during our review of literature, the teacher's work load was not mentioned as a factor contributing to low reading levels it is obvious that a teacher who works in more than one school will have more books to mark, more lessons to plan, and will be more tired at the end of the day and consequently less time to think about individual pupils' problems and their possible remedial work.

Other possible factors cited in this study as contributing to low reading levels were the new duration for the teacher training programme, i.e., grade ten qualification plus one year of teacher training (10+1) and the excessive number of pupils in classrooms. The interviewees stated that one year of training was not enough for teachers to acquire and practice all the necessary teaching skills. These findings are in line with Matafwali (2005) who observed that both teacher – child ratio and the quality of teachers were critical to literacy success. In fact, Eady (2009) observed that teacher education programmes need to be considered more than just in terms of a vehicle for ensuring newly qualified teachers that are able to support pupil achievement on national test and examination, but also prepare quality teachers. From the foregoing, one can notice that with the new teacher training programme duration, what the Ministry of Education will mostly achieve is to ensure newly qualified teachers each and every year, but not highly qualified teachers due to duration of teacher training period which seems to be too short.

Several authors (Bourdieu, 1986; Purves, 1973; Guthrie, 1978; Taube, 1988; Elley, 1994; Lehmann, 1996; Lietz, 1996) have emphasized that, the availability of resources, such as television, computer and other study aids, is a stimulating factor for literacy acquisition. However, the findings from this study did not support the above findings. The interviewees revealed that the advent of new technologies such as television and computer games was a contributing factor to low reading levels. They claimed that the children spent much time playing games and watching television than doing their school work. Perhaps this was a result of lack of parent collaboration that has already been alluded to, because if children were spending more time on television and computer games, this could mean that the parents were allowing the children to do so. In addition, the parents could not be assisting the children in selecting appropriate television programmes that boost literacy acquisition.

A study conducted by Matafwali (2010) revealed that cognitive process and background, (e.g., age), were not counted as factors contributing to literacy development. In this study, most interviewees from the four schools observed that the school entry age (6 years of age) could be a contributing factor to low reading levels. The interviewees reported that at the age of 6, children were still too young to start primary school and on top of that, some parents forged their children birth certificates to allow their children to start school earlier. These findings are in line with the findings of a study conducted by Denton in 2002, who observed that the age at which a child enters school also impacted on his/her achievement, i.e., the more knowledgeable a child started schooling, the better learning achievements were anticipated during the primary school years (Denton, 2002). Although there are many countries in Europe, including the UK, where formal education starts at the age of 6, and the results are successful, perhaps due to their socio-economic conditions and cultural and ethnical diversity, in the case of Mozambique, more studies should be conducted to establish if the age of 6 is the right one for Mozambican children to start formal education.

5.2 Determine if there were variations of reading levels in terms of gender.

The second objective was to determine if there were variations of reading levels in terms of gender. The findings from the teachers, school principals and school inspectors indicated that there were gender variations of reading levels and that the girls did better than boys. This is in line with the findings from many other studies which observed that girls did better in reading in different countries than their peer boys (PISA, 2000, 2003 and 2006; PIRLS, 2001, 2006 and IEA, 1994). Culturally, in Mozambique, the girls after school have to stay home and help their mothers with house work (cooking, drawing water, washing and cleaning) while the boys most of the times are playing. On the other hand, the boys especially in the city are allowed to go out to play. This means that the boy child has got more time to attend to school than the girl child and even at the end of the day the girl is expected to be more tired than the boy. But despite this constraint the girls performed better than boys. This seems to agree with the results of a study conducted in Pakistan by Victor (2000) cited in Roe & Tube (2003) who observed that in Pakistan despite the fact that the girl child had to work all by herself, without extra guidance or coaching and the parents attitudes towards the girls' studies, i.e. the girls had to cope with a lot of household chores, such as cooking, cleaning, washing and moping, which consequently made

the girls to be exhausted at the end of the day, girls still managed to secure better positions in matriculation exams than boys.

5.3 Establish the causes of gender variations (if any).

The third objective sought to establish the causes of gender variations in reading levels (if any). As regards this objective, the findings from this study indicated that the Mozambican culture counted for the variation in reading levels. The interviewees reported that in Mozambique girls were expected to be more responsible than boys. For instance, girls after school, unlike boys, were expected to stay home near their mothers to learn about cooking, washing and learn to be good mothers. This helped the parents to have better control over the girls, including telling them to sit down and do their school home works. While the above situation could be looked at as a disadvantageous situation to the girl child given that at the end of the day they would be exhausted due to the work load that they have during the day, in this study it was described as an advantage. This could mean that the more work load the girl child had, the more time management skills she developed and the more responsible she became. This findings are again consistent with the findings of the study conducted in Pakistan by Victors (2000) cited in Roe & Tube (2003) who observed that in Pakistan despite the fact that the girl child had to work all by herself, without extra guidance or coaching and the parents attitudes towards the girls' studies, i.e. the girls had to cope with a lot of household chores, such as cooking, cleaning, washing and moping, which consequently made the girls to be exhausted at the end of the day, girls still managed to secure better positions in matriculation exams than boys.

Another finding from this study which is related to the culture has to do with the girls' playing activities. The interviewees observed that in Mozambique most girls' playing activities, unlike the boys', took place at home near the parents and older brothers and sisters, which made it easier to control and help the girls with school difficulties. During the literature review, the girls playing activities were not mentioned as factors contributing to low reading levels or to school achievement.

The findings from the study further indicated that dreams and role models were other causes for the variations in reading levels. The interviewees revealed that at early age most girl role models were nurses, doctors and teachers because they dreamt of becoming nurses, doctors and teachers

and these dreams made them get more interested in books. Boys on contrary, at early age dreamt of becoming film and football stars and therefore spent much time playing football and wrestling, in order to become as good as their role models. These findings seem to be culturally bound in that we do not know what children from other regions dream of at early age. During the literature review there was no study which accounted for dreams and role models as causes for variations in reading levels.

5.4 Identify the measures taken by teachers, schools and parents to mitigate the problem of low reading levels.

The fourth objective sought to identify the measures taken by teachers, schools and parents, to mitigate the problem of low reading levels.

Measures taken by teachers

According to the findings the measures taken by teachers included, designing easier materials and abandon grade five syllabus for a while. Although in general most interviewees said that the books on the new curriculum were good, well designed and with appropriate contents, some teachers reported that for children who reached grade five with serious reading problem the best solution was to abandon the contents of grade five for such pupils and look for appropriate materials for them. This could help in the sense that in grade five pupils were expected to be reading to learn and not learning to read. Therefore, the teachers must look for easier materials to help such pupils learn to read. In fact, Remillard (2000) stated that the teaching and learning materials themselves did not promote learning but, rather, it was the process of adapting topics, concepts, representations, and tasks included in these textbooks to the needs of students that promoted learning. Other findings from the study which seem to be in line with the above statement included, the use of alphabetic method as opposed to the recommended synthetic and analytic ones and giving daily copying and reading activities. This could mean that the teachers were aware of the importance of adapting, not only the reading texts, but also the methods and the type of activities, in promoting learning. If this is working, then it means that curriculum experts when devising a curriculum should allow flexibility on the part of the teachers, not to follow the textbooks as strictly as it is prescribed, but rather, be allowed to adapt whatever part of the textbooks to suit the needs of their pupils.

Bennett (1991) cited in Cedric Cullingford (2002) observed that studies of pupils group work tended to conclude that the more onus that is placed on the pupils, to learn from each other to find alternative sources of information, the more successful they were. The findings from this study revealed that another measure taken by teachers was sitting arrangement in classes. Some teachers stated that they mixed brighter pupils with slow learners so that they help each other and others reported that they placed pupils in groups according to their levels of difficulties so that they could pay special attention to the groups with more difficulties. Both teachers who used the mixing strategy and those who used the separating strategy reported that they were successful in helping pupils to learn.

The last measure taken by teachers was to sensitize parents to sign failure consent forms, given that there was an inadequate collaboration from parents to sign consent forms for their children to fail. These findings are in line with those by Epstein & Sanders (2002) who observed that parental involvement in their children's academic activities such as communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with school and community stimulated children's interest in school, and positively influenced academic achievement.

Measures taken by schools

Lyn., et al. (2002) in his study conducted in Australia observed that peer teaching and joint lesson planning processes had a number of strengths and benefits for the peers such as, increasing collaboration with peers, promoting clarification of subject content through discussion among the peers, viewing situations from different perspectives, having opportunities to determine curriculum content and strengthening communication skills. The findings from this study confirmed the findings of the study above. All the four schools did joint lesson planning and peer teaching in school clusters (ZIP) once a month. This means that the schools were aware of the gains from joint planning and peer teaching.

The study also revealed that the schools controlled the number of pupils who could read at the beginning of the year, end of the trimester, end of semester and end of the year. Although in the review of literature no study was found which talked about control as a measure for improving reading levels, it can be noted that this measure seems to help control the number of pupils who can read that a teacher has at the beginning of school year so that they can be compared with the

number of pupils who can read at the end of the first trimester and so on. This could help motivate the teacher to work harder.

Another measure that schools had taken was daily lesson plan control. The findings from the interviews with school inspectors revealed that during their pedagogical inspection visits, they had noticed that some teachers did not adequately plan their lessons. Therefore, they instructed the schools to do daily lesson plan control to enhance the teachers planning skills and help the school principals see which teachers were having problems with planning and thereby help such teachers in school cluster sessions of planning. In line with this measure, the schools had taken another control measure which consists of strictly and carefully selecting teachers to work with grades one and two. This measure is relevant in the sense that the schools are trying to ensure that grade one pupils are handled by highly professional teachers, with adequate experience and personal qualities. This measure if well implemented alongside with other relevant measures such as reducing the number of pupils in classrooms, providing enough learning resources and giving teachers more authorities to fail pupils, it can reduce the number of pupils who pass through the initial grades with a lot of reading problems.

Snow et al., (1998) observed in their studies that in every domain of learning or work, motivation was crucial, whether it is internal or external. Both teachers and school principals interviewed in the four schools revealed that one of the measures that the schools had taken so far to mitigate the problem of low reading levels was the distribution of prizes to best pupils and to teachers with best results. This measure is important because it helps to increase the levels of motivation in both the pupils and the teachers.

The last measure taken by schools to mitigate the problem of low reading levels, according to the findings from this study, was the distribution of “quadro silábico” which is a kind of handout containing all the letters of the alphabet, combination of consonant and vowels to form syllables and combination of syllables to form words and words divided into syllables. This handout follows the principles of the alphabetic method, which according to the interviewees was replaced in the new curriculum by the analytic and synthetic methods. The simple fact that the schools were distributing this handout which is based on the alphabetic method’s principle perhaps is an indication that the schools and the teachers recognized the usefulness of the alphabetic method and they regretted its replacement by the synthetic and the analytic methods.

In fact, according to the interviewees, “quadro silábico” was being distributed in collaboration with the Office of the First Lady. Perhaps, the office of the First Lady also realized the gap created by the replacement of the alphabetic method in the new curriculum of automatic transition, because otherwise, the Office of the First Lady would not spend so much money, on the printing and distribution of “quadro silábico” if it was of no value.

Measures taken by parents

The findings from this study revealed that the parents resorted to private tutors to mitigate the problem of low reading levels among their children. Private and home tuitions are very popular across the world. There are different reasons why concerned parents are turning to home and private tuitions as an effective alternative to the school system. For example, the child’s capabilities are not being fully developed, the child’s preferred learning style is not being catered for, or the child may be experiencing difficulties at school which are not being addressed. (Home Tuition Agency, 2010). The problem is that the level of poverty is very high in Mozambique, especially in families from suburbs and rural areas. This means that this measure can only be taken by very few families which can afford private tuition fees. The majority of families who cannot afford private tuition fees due to financial difficulties and who cannot help their children with reading difficulties because they cannot read and write simply watch their children sink in illiteracy.

5.5 Ascertain the attitude of teachers towards the teaching of reading.

The fifth objective sought to ascertain the teachers’ attitude towards the teaching of reading. According to Leite (1994) the word attitude (from Latin aptus) is defined within the framework of social psychology as a subjective or mental preparation for action. It defines outward and visible postures and human beliefs. Attitudes determine what each individual will see, hear, think and do. The findings from the study revealed that the teachers enjoyed teaching reading. However, the new system of automatic transition was de-motivating them because it allowed all pupils to proceed to the next grades, regardless of whether they were competent or not. This can mean that although teachers, in general, enjoyed teaching reading, the fact that they were not fully motivated due to the automatic transition could contribute negatively to their readiness to teach and take measures to improve the reading levels of their pupils. Therefore, the government



needs to take measures towards increasing teachers' motivation, such as re-thinking about the new policy of automatic transitions in order to give the teacher more power to decide which pupils to pass and which ones to fail, since the teacher is the one who works with the pupils day after day in the classroom and not the parents.

5.6 Ascertain how teachers taught reading.

The last objective of this study sought to ascertain how teachers taught reading. The findings from the study revealed that teachers taught reading using the analytic and synthetic methods. Scholars have observed that no single reading method will be effective for all students with reading problems. Most individuals with reading problems will benefit from the application of a variety of methods (Meiers, 1998). The fact that the new policy of automatic transition combines two methods in the teaching of reading seems to be very good and beneficial to the learners. However, the new policy should allow more space for the teachers to use other methods, including the alphabetic method which according to the interviewees was replaced in the new curriculum.

Summary

In this chapter the findings that were generated from the study have been discussed. The findings have been discussed in relation to the objectives that the study sought to achieve. In the proceeding chapter we present the conclusion and recommendations made by the researcher.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.0 Overview

This chapter presents the conclusion and the recommendations of the study. The chapter further suggests a number of areas where further research is needed.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicated that there were a number of factors which contributed to low reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils. Some of the factors were quite particular to Mozambique and others were common factors and had been indicated in earlier studies conducted in other countries.

The factors that were found to be particular to Mozambique were as summarised here below.

1. The automatic transitions which allowed all pupils from grades one, two and four to proceed to the next grades without being subjected to an examination, including those who by the end of the academic year had not mastered the skills and knowledge prescribed by the curriculum.
2. The three shift system used in suburbs as an attempt to respond to the parents demand for school vacancies as opposed to the two shift system used in the city. The study revealed that the government increased the number of shifts from two to three and reduced the number of hours per shift and no other measures were taken to compensate the hours that were reduced which meant that the children from suburbs had less teacher/pupil contact time than those from the cities and therefore increasing even more the levels of reading difficulties in suburban schools.
3. The language policy which established Portuguese, a foreign language, as the only medium of instruction and language of initial literacy. The study revealed that most

children from suburbs and rural areas faced a lot of problems at schools due to the language of instruction and initial literacy (Portuguese) because they entered school with no notion of Portuguese and therefore they had to learn the language at the same time.

4. Short duration of the teacher training programme for primary school teachers (one year). The interviewees indicated that one year of training was not enough for the teacher trainee to acquire all the necessary skills and practices for a good teacher.
5. School entry age (six years of age). In Mozambique the official school entry age is six years and according to the interviewees at that age children were still too young to start formal schooling.

Other findings of this study that were also found in earlier studies conducted in other countries included:

1. Lack of pre-school exposure to most children;
2. Inadequate libraries,
3. Lack of parents' collaboration with schools and;
4. Lack of motivation on the part of the pupils.

The study also established that there were gender variations between girls and boys and that the girls did better in reading than boys. The causes attributed to gender variations included girls levels of responsibility, girls playing activities, ambitions and dreams and the Mozambican culture.

As for the measures taken by teachers, schools and parents, the study revealed that the measures taken by teachers included, designing easier reading materials for their pupils, abandon grade five syllabus for a while, use alphabetic method; sensitize parents to sign failure consent forms, sitting arrangement in classes, give daily copying and reading activities. On the other hand the schools took measures such as, joint lesson planning in school clusters (ZIP), lesson plan control by school principals and their deputies; giving prizes to best pupils and teachers with best results; strict and careful selection of teachers to teach grades one and two; distribution of "*quadro*

silábico” to pupils. The study also revealed that most parents with financial capacity opted for taking their children to private tuitions.

Finally, the study revealed that the teachers enjoyed teaching reading and that they used the analytic and synthetic methods for teaching reading.

Recommendations

In view of the findings stated above the following recommendations are made:

- (i) The Ministry of Education should re-visit the automatic transition system where pupils proceed from one grade to another without being subjected to an examination.
- (ii) In suburban areas where there is the three shift system, the Ministry of Education should introduce measures to compensate the limited teacher – pupil contact time.
- (iii) There is a need for the government to revisit the language in education policy which establishes Portuguese as the only medium of instruction and language of initial literacy and introduce a familiar language to pupils to be used to teach initial literacy.
- (iv) The Ministry of Education should re-think the duration of the teacher training programme (one year). It should revert to two years as it used to be.
- (v) There is a need for the government to introduce teacher incentives, including better salaries in order to increase teacher’s motivation and limit them from working in more than one school.
- (vi) There is a need for the government to build more schools in order to reduce the excessive number of pupils in classrooms which in some cases reaches 70 pupils per class.

Recommendations for future research:

For future studies the following are being recommended:

1. There is a need to find out the views of pupils on factors contributing to low reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils;
2. Studies should be conducted to establish the difference in reading levels between city and countryside pupils.
3. A countrywide survey is required to evaluate the new curriculum of automatic transitions.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL SCIENCES EDUCATION

Title of the Research:

Teachers' views on factors contributing to low reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils. A case of grade five teachers at selected schools in Maputo District – Mozambique.

1. In your opinion, what are the causes of low reading levels in your school?

2. In your school, who tends to read better, boys or girls?

3. What do you think are the causes behind the differences of reading levels between girls and boys?

4. What measures do you normally take to mitigate the problem of low reading levels in your school?

5. What measures has the school taken to mitigate the problem of low reading levels?

6. Do you know any measures taken by parents, to mitigate the problem of low reading levels?

7. Do you enjoy teaching reading? If so or not why?

8. What method or methods do you use to teach reading in your class?

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL SCIENCES EDUCATION

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Title of the Research:

Teachers' views on factors contributing to low reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils. A case of grade five teachers at selected schools in Maputo District – Mozambique.

ican
uto

1. In your opinion, what are the causes of low reading levels in your school?

2. In your school, who tends to read better, boys or girls?

girls

3. What do you think are the causes behind the differences of reading levels between girls and boys?

low

4. What measures have the schools taken to mitigate the problem of low reading levels?

5. Do you know any measures taken by parents, to solve the problem of low reading levels?

els?

6. Do you think that teachers enjoy teaching reading?

7. What method or methods do teachers use to teach reading?

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SCHOOL INSPECTORS

UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL SCIENCES EDUCATION

Title of the Research:

Teachers' views on factors contributing to low reading levels among Mozambican primary school pupils. A case of grade five teachers at selected schools in Maputo District – Mozambique.

1. In your opinion, what are the causes of low reading levels in primary school?

2. In your opinion, who tends to read better, boys or girls?

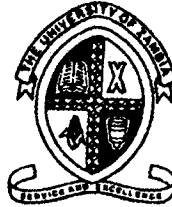
3. What do you think are the causes behind the differences of reading levels between girls and boys?

4. What measures have the schools and your office taken to mitigate the problem of low reading levels?

5. Do you know any measures taken by parents, to solve the problem of low reading levels?

6. Do you think that teachers enjoy teaching reading?

7. What method or methods do teachers use to teach reading?



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Date: 12 Nov. 2010.....

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: FIELD WORK FOR MASTERS/ PhD STUDENTS

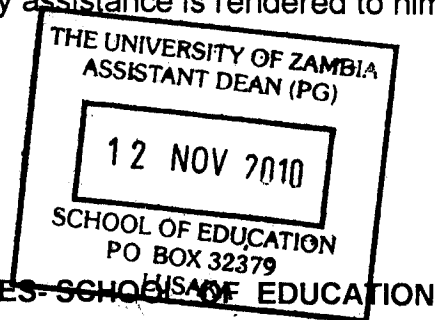
The bearer of this letter Mr./Ms. Z. V. A. G. U. Z. E., SALVADOR..... Computer number 530500222..... is a duly registered student at the University of Zambia, School of Education.

He/She is taking a Masters/PhD programme in Education. The programme has a fieldwork component which he/she has to complete.

We shall greatly appreciate if the necessary assistance is rendered to him/her/.

Yours faithfully

Sophie Kasonde-Ng'andu (Dr.)
ASSISTANT DEAN POSTGRADUATE STUDIES- SCHOOL OF EDUCATION



Cc: Dean-Education
Director-DRGS