

**AN ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS' ABILITY TO TRANSFER  
LITERACY SKILLS ACQUIRED IN A ZAMBIAN LANGUAGE TO  
ENGLISH BY THE END OF THEIR GRADE TWO: A CASE OF FIVE  
SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN CHADIZA DISTRICT, ZAMBIA**

**BY**

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A dissertation submitted to the University of Zambia in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of master of education in Applied Linguistics

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA**

**LUSAKA**

**2019**

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## DECLARATION

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## **APPROVAL**

This dissertation of Mtiose Banda has been approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Education in Applied Linguistics by the University of Zambia.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess Grade Two learners' ability to transfer literacy skills acquired in a Zambian language to English by the end of second grade.

The research adopted a descriptive case study design in which the mixed methods approach was employed. 75 Grade Two learners were randomly selected from five rural selected primary schools and were tested in Nyanja word reading and writing tests. A Burt reading test was used to assess pupils' ability to decode English words. Qualitative data was collected through, classroom observation, document analysis, and interviews with 10 Grade Two teachers, from selected five schools, and one DEBS representative.

Data were analyzed using SPSS. Frequency and percentage of tables showing the population distributions were generated. Paired and independent t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used for statistical analysis. To examine whether there is a relationship between Zambian language reading performance and English word reading ability, the correlation test was conducted.

The findings showed that 42(56 percent) out of 75 learners managed to score above the mean of 5.5 with a standard deviation of 4.3 in reading out of the total score of 10. The calculated mean score for writing was 4.4 with a standard deviation of 3.9 and 41(54.6%) of the population sample scored above the mean. An independent t-test further indicated that there was a significant difference between boys and girls reading performance with boys outperforming the girls; mean score for boys ( $M = 6.7$ ,  $SD = 4.0$ ) and girls ( $M = 4.2$ ,  $SD = 4.3$ ) in Nyanja word reading performance; " $p < .01$ ". In a Burt reading test, the findings show that learners were reading far below their grade level. The results from correlation analysis revealed that L1 reading ability was a significant predictor of L2 reading performance before instruction in English was given. There was a positive correlation between learners' L1 reading performance and L2 reading word reading,  $r = 0.796$ ,  $n = 75$ ,  $p(2\text{-tailed}) < .001$ . The results suggest that English word reading is dependent on learners' L1 reading performance. The low reading levels in a Zambian language affected English word reading negatively. The study recommends that learners need more time of L1 instruction and there should be more practice in writing activities. There is a need to ensure that teachers teach literacy using systematic phonics methods.

**Keywords:** *Decoding, Literacy, Reading, Transfer*

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

My special gratitude goes to Dr. J.M Mwansa my academic supervisor for the encouragement and guidance throughout the process of this study. His assistance in this work has been truly useful and without his professional support and cooperation, this work would not have been completed. Sincere thanks go to all course mates in Applied Linguistics from the University of Zambia for moral support and assistance. Special thanks go to Brother Vigilio Bwalya who helped to edit my work tirelessly.

I also thank the grade two pupils, primary head teachers and grade two teachers from primary schools who contributed to the successful compilation of this report. God bless them. To God be the Glory for giving me the strength, endurance, and courage to overcome all the obstacles I encountered during my study.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated first to the Lord Jesus Christ Almighty to whom I owe all my strength in everything I do. I also dedicate it to the loving memory of my late father; Mr. Simon Lemekani Banda and my mother Mrs. Lufina Banda. To my husband Mr. Justin Costa Banda who has been on my side for strength, encouragement and financial support and to my three children; Costa, Chrisness and Cletus, my brothers and sisters for their encouragement, moral and spiritual support

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## **OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF TERMS**

**Decoding** – The ability to sound out and blend the letter sounds of written words.

**First language**- The language that a child acquires first at home.

**Literacy**- the ability to read and write.

**The second language**- the language learned in school.

## ACRONNYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BTL .....	Breakthrough to Literacy
DEBS .....	District Education Board Secretary
MOE.....	Ministry of Education
MOGE.....	Ministry of General Education
NBTL.....	New Breakthrough to Literacy
NICHD.....	Child Health and Human Development
NLF.....	National Literacy Framework
PLP.....	Primary Literacy Program
PRP.....	Primary Reading Program
ROC.....	Read on Course
SACMEQ.....	Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SITE.....	Step into English
SPRINT.....	School Program of in service for a Term
TGM.....	Teacher Group Meeting

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

This chapter is an introduction to the study on 'Assessment of Grade Two learners' readiness to transition from literacy in a Zambian language to English'. Hence, the chapter provides the background to the problem being investigated by looking at the language and literacy policy contexts in Zambia from the pre-colonial era to date. This chapter will thus present in addition the statement of the problem, the purpose and research objectives and questions, the significance of the study, the theoretical framework, the definition of terms, study delimitation and limitations.

### 1.2 Background

Zambia's pre-independence education is reported to have been extremely successful in terms of its learning outcomes. It was characterized by an emphasis on local language medium education. Because of this language strategy, it is reported that the missionaries' program of evangelization proved extremely successful as many of those who were enrolled managed to read and write (Manchishi, 2004). This was basically the policy adopted by the British South Africa Company that administered Northern Rhodesia from 1890 to 1924. This company played a minimal role in the running of African education but left this to missionaries.

When Northern Rhodesia was taken over directly by the British colonial office in 1924, the Phelps-Stokes Commission was asked to make recommendations of how to run African education. They recommended a three-language policy in which initial education in the first two grades was to be in a mother tongue. In the third grade, children made a transition to a regional language and in the fifth grade used English as a medium of instruction. The colonial government chose four languages as regional languages namely, CiBemba, CiNyanja, Citonga, and Silozi. Manchishi (2004)

In the colonial period as in the former missionary period, children thus were able to start their education in a mother tongue and even when they moved onto a regional language, they were still using related languages. Transition to the use of English came only after they had acquired initial literacy and numeracy in the local languages. As the country moved towards independence, there were calls by the settler communities to introduce English earlier in the

education system. The incoming African government asked UNESCO to recommend a language in education policy for the country. UNESCO responded by recommending that English should be introduced in Grade One on the assumption that the earlier children were introduced to English the better would be their spoken and written English. In 1966, English was made the sole medium of instruction in the country. Seven Zambian languages were to be used as school subjects only in different regions of the country.

The implantation of an 'all English' policy affected the literacy levels negatively in Zambia. A series of literacy studies in Zambia have been conducted which revealed the low literacy levels in the country. Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality, SACMEQ in 1995 revealed that twenty-five percent of Grade six pupils could not read at a minimum level of proficiency and only three percent could read at a specified desirable level (MOE, 1995). William (1998) in his reading research which was aimed at establishing the reading proficiency of the learners in English and local languages in Zambia and Malawi demonstrated that reading levels among the Zambian students assessed were poor in both English and local language when compared to their Malawian counterparts. Most Zambian pupils were reading below their appropriate grade.

After realizing that using English as the medium of instruction, particularly at the primary level, did not enhance educational gains, it was decided that the initial literacy be done in a local language predominantly spoken in an area (MOE, 1996). The teaching of initial literacy using local languages was advocated for because of the low reading levels among learners in Zambia as indicated in the studies above. This concern led to the establishment of the national language policy, which directed that initial literacy instructions were to begin in a child's local language, preferably their mother tongue (MOE, 1996).

In 1998, Break Through to Literacy BTL, an initiative of a South African non-governmental organization, Molteno project was piloted in Kasama and Mungwi in Northern Zambia. This was among grade one learners. Ibibemba was used as the language of initial literacy. The results of the project were positive as the learners were able to read in grade one and by the time they reached grade two, they were able to read at the level equivalent to those in grade four (MOE, 2001). In 2000, the project was renamed New Break Through to Literacy NBTL and it was extended to Mongu, Chipata, and Lusaka where Lozi and Nyanja respectively were used to teach initial literacy. The NBTL approach required that a child learned to read and write in their mother tongue or familiar language before learning to read in English. NBTL

was based on the Language Experience Approach and it included phonics, Syllabic, Look and Say and Real Books (MOE, 2003a)

The Primary Reading Program PRP was officially introduced from 1999 to 2013 and NBTL was part of the program. The aim of the program was to improve reading and writing skills among pupils at the lower and middle basic levels in Zambian schools so that they could learn more effectively across the curriculum (Kanyika, 2002). Initial literacy was in familiar languages and in Grade Two, learners were introduced to reading in English, Step Into English SITE. In Grade Three, learners continued to learn to read a familiar language during Zambian language lessons (Read on Course, (ROC)). The Ministry of Education (2000) was designed to give priority to the teaching of reading and writing skills in the early grades of primary education. In the curriculum, there was a separation of literacy teaching and language teaching. Literacy emphasized the teaching of reading and writing skills while language teaching emphasized skills such as grammar and syntax (oral, lexical and structural elements of language). These were taught and time-tabled separately in schools as literacy in a familiar language and Zambian language.

Initial results of the PRP indicated a success as Sampa (2005) reports that the program was achieving access and quality learning in basic schools. The success of the program was attributed to the use of an appropriate language policy that promotes the use of local languages, allowing children to read initially in the familiar language followed by transfer of the reading skills acquired in the familiar language to the English language.

However, the PRP was faced with some problems. PRP could not continue due to some challenges such as a shortage of PRP teaching materials. When PRP materials wore out, they were difficult to replace. Some of the challenges may have related to the inadequacies of trained teachers in the target familiar languages. The ineffectiveness in the implementation of the Primary Reading Program PRP is evident in some evaluation studies. As a result of continued low reading results indicated in some studies such as Matafwali (2010) and others, the Ministry of Education decided to review the PRP whose results were not promising and replaced it with Primary Literacy Program, PLP.

From 2012 to 2013, the Ministry of General Education revised the curriculum and explored new approaches to teaching literacy under a language policy that demands the use of local languages to be used as medium of instruction from the start up to Grade Four. Primary Literacy Program (PLP) whose implementation is guided by the National Literacy

Framework, (NLF) is being implemented to date. The NLF is based on the principles that reading is a foundational skill for all learning and that learners learn literacy skills more easily and successfully through familiar languages among others.

Following the phonological characteristics of Zambian languages that fall under Bantu languages, the languages used to teach initial literacy are transparent in nature. This means that most if not all Zambian languages have a one-to-one sound-grapheme mapping. The direct sound-grapheme mapping characteristic of Zambian languages also necessitated the changes in the methodology used to teach initial literacy. The curriculum has moved away from the Whole Language Approach to one that synthesizes reading instruction based on explicit lessons in key competency areas: synthetic phonics and daily instruction that offers learners opportunities to practice reading, writing, listening and speaking. According to the Literacy Framework, the local language will give learners a strong foundation in which to build literacy and language skills in English later.

To sum it up, it can be said the goal of PLP is to support literacy in familiar languages for learners from Grade 1 to 4. From grade 1 to 4 local languages are used for learning to read as well as media of instruction for other subjects (National Literacy Framework, 2013). However, it should be mentioned that transfer of literacy skills from a Zambian language to English is expected to be exercised as learners start Grade Three as the MOGE (2013) states that, "When learners start learning to read and write in English in Grade Three, they will build on literacy skills they have acquired in their first languages ...."

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

The Literacy Framework states that when learners are taught in a Zambian language in Grades One and Two, they would transfer the acquired literacy skills from Zambian language to English in Grade Three. Here is what is stated in the Literacy Framework: "When learners start learning to read and write in English in Grade Three, they will build on literacy skills they have acquired in their first languages ..." (MOGE, 2013, p.1). Despite many studies having been conducted on literacy-related issues, there is no research to verify whether this transfer occurs by the end of Grade Two. This study, therefore, sought to verify whether this transfer occurs.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate whether the transfer of literacy skills acquired in a Zambian language occurs from a Zambian language to English among Grade Two learners by the end of the second grade before instruction in English is given.

#### **1.5 Specific objectives**

1. To assess whether learners are able to read and write in Nyanja by the end of the second grade.
2. To investigate whether learners are able to read English words by the end of Grade Two.
3. To examine whether there is a relationship between Nyanja word reading ability and English word reading by the end of second grade.

#### **1.6 General research question**

Are the learners able to transfer literacy skills acquired in a Zambian language (Nyanja) to enable them to decode English words by the end of second grade?

#### **1.7 Specific research questions**

1. Are the learners able to read and write in Nyanja?
2. Are the learners able to read English words by the end of second grade?
3. Is there a relationship between Nyanja word reading performance and English word reading by the end of the second grade?

#### **1.8 Significance of the study**

The study may help teachers and educators to determine the appropriate time for learners to transition from literacy in Zambian language to literacy in English. It may also inform teachers and educators on what strategies to employ to impart the necessary literacy skills in learners in both L1 and L2. It is hoped that the study will inform the teaching fraternity on knowledge in terms of initial literacy and what knowledge teachers need in order to teach literacy effectively. Finally, the findings of the study may act as a foundation for other researchers who may wish

### **1.9 Delimitation of the study**

The study was conducted in rural primary schools of Chadiza district in the Eastern province of Zambia. Urban schools were not included in this study because the researcher targeted the monolingual classroom set-up.

### **1.10 Limitation of the study**

One major limitation of this study is that the findings cannot be generalized because the study used a small population sample from five rural selected schools of Chadiza district in the Eastern province of Zambia. The study was done at the end of the third term of second grade and no follow-up was done to check on how learners performed in English reading after being introduced to literacy in English. Although the results indicated that pupils were not ready for transitioning from literacy in a Zambian language to literacy in English, possibilities could be there that some pupils improved in their performance or even dropped.

## CHAPTER TWO

### RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Overview

In this chapter, literature related to this study has been reviewed following the research objectives from which themes have been derived. However, prior to the literature review section, the theoretical background of the study has been provided. Thereafter, the related literature to the study which follows themes derived from the research objectives has been presented. The first theme in section 2.2 is 'Reading and writing among early graders'. This theme probed into studies that outlines the levels of reading among children in early grades and some factors that have led to high or low achievements in reading. Then in section 2.3 probes into the literature on the transfer of literacy skills from L1 to L2. Section 2.4 reviews literature on, 'Activities/methods used to impart literacy skills into learners' The theme probed into studies that focused on activities and methods of teaching reading that yields both positive and negative results. The chapter closes with a summary

#### 2.2 Theoretical Framework

There are a number of theories associated with literacy development and there are different views associated with the concept of literacy by individuals in different fields. The theories are based on people's ideas about how children learn. However, this study considered three theories namely the Ehri's model of phases of learning to read theory by Ehri (1991, 2005), the Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis and the Threshold Hypothesis by Cummins (1979, 2000).

##### *Ehri's Phases of Learning to Read*

The theory by Ehri has a notion that children progress through different phases of reading. However, it should be stated that this theory is flexible enough to acknowledge that children do not necessarily progress through the phases in a strict sequence. Ehri (1991, 2005) proposes that children develop as readers through four phases. The first phase is the pre-alphabetic phase. During the pre-alphabetic phase, children read words by memorizing their visual features or guessing words from the context. This phase is associated with a number of features such as visual cues being the primary method of word identification. For example, a child may identify a word due to the surrounding context in which it occurs. A learner may

also memorize words by their shape or use environmental print and logos. At this stage, word identification is not yet related to letter-sound knowledge.

The second phase is the partial-alphabetic phase in which children recognize some letters of the alphabet and can use them together with context to remember words by sight. Children under this phase use 'Phonetic cue reading' in which the reader uses a combination of reading some letters in the words and using these to attempt a pronunciation. The first and final letters in the words are the most important during this phase.

In the third phase; the 'Full alphabetic phase' the readers are able to form alphabetic connections and they can use this knowledge to analyze fully the connections between graphemes and phonemes in words. They can decode familiar words and store fully analyzed sight words in memory. Sight words are those words that the reader has read several times. The readers in this stage are also able to read new words by blending generated pronunciation. Children in this phase adopt strategies to handle words, for example by noting silent letters as in the Nyanja word *bvina* 'dance'. The letter 'b' in the Nyanja word *bvina*, 'dance' is silent.

The last phase is the consolidated-alphabetic phase in which children consolidate their knowledge of the grapheme-phoneme blends into larger units that recur in different words (Ehri, 2005).

The Phases of learning to read are some of the theoretical hypotheses that offered the framework for the study. Other theoretical frameworks that guided the thinking of this study are the developmental interdependence hypothesis and the threshold hypothesis developed by Cummins (1979).

### ***Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis and the Threshold Hypothesis***

The Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis and the Threshold Hypothesis were both proposed by Cummins (1976,1979). The Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis argues that certain first language (L1) knowledge can be positively transferred during the process of second language acquisition. The L1 linguistic knowledge and skills that a child possesses can be extremely instrumental to the development of corresponding abilities in the L2. However, the hypothesis emphasizes that for transfer to occur, L1 must be sufficiently developed prior to the extensive exposure to L2 (Cummins, 1976, 1979).

This hypothesis in this study was used to relate the literacy development of children in Chadiza district who started with L1, Nyanja literacy. The study sought to assess whether

children had reached a stage where they could transfer literacy skills learned in L1 to English, their L2. Another hypothesis that relates to this study in a similar manner is the Threshold Hypothesis as explained below.

### ***Threshold hypothesis***

Another theoretical hypothesis related to the Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis is the Threshold hypothesis by Cummins (1976, 1979). According to Cummins (1976) Threshold Hypothesis, posits that a minimum threshold in language proficiency must be passed before a second language speaker can reap any benefits from language. It further indicates that in order to gain proficiency in a second language, the learner must have passed a certain limit or threshold level of competence in his or her first language.

The Threshold Hypothesis relates to this study in that it specifically points out that the ability levels in the first language act as a mechanism that facilitates attainment in the second language. The current study assessed the learners' reading and writing abilities in L1 before assessing the reading abilities in English, their second language. Following this hypothesis, learners could be judged as ready to transition from literacy in L1 to literacy in English if the reading levels in L1 were high.

## **2.3 Studies on reading and writing among early graders**

There is a large body of research related to literacy issues. In this section, the literature review is presented in sections showing what has been done in Zambia on section 2.2.1 and studies on reading and writing conducted elsewhere on section 2.3. The studies from Zambia have further been divided into subsections of the studies that focus on critiquing the language-in-education policy in section 2.2.2 and those that focus on factors that enhance or hinder the literacy acquisition process among early graders on section 2.2.3.

### **2.3.1 Studies on reading and writing from Zambia**

In this section, studies that focus on critiquing the language-in-education policy and those that focus on factors that enhance or hinder literacy acquisition have been presented.

### **2.3.2 Studies that critique the language-in-education policy in relation to literacy among early graders**

In order to solve the challenge of low literacy levels in Zambia, different scholars have conducted numerous studies that critique the language-in-education policy. One of the major contributing concerns related to literacy issues has been the language-in-education policy in Zambia. The current language-in-education policy mandates that local languages which are considered regional standard languages must be used to teach initial literacy and other subjects from preschool up to Grade Four (4) in all Zambian schools (MOGE, 2013). The policy is premised on the grounds that many studies have provided convincing support for the promotion of mother tongue education in the early years of schooling (William, 1995). These studies claim that knowledge and skills gained in the mother tongue can transfer across languages; they also argue that multilingual children perform well at school when the school teaches the mother tongue even when the goal is learning a second language. However, despite the positives of using local language to enhance literacy acquisition, lapses have been identified as the studies below indicates.

Banda and Mwanza (2017) problematized the use of zonal or regional standard African languages at the expense of other African varieties for initial literacy development as a continuation of colonial monoglot/monolingual model. They explained that the starting point of departure to analyze why to use the mother tongue or familiar language for initial literacy development have not been successful so far. They used Bourdieu's notions of symbolic violence and misrecognition of the standard language as the sole legitimate language of education to explain the negative effects of failure to recognize other languages in teaching literacy in multilingual contexts. The clarification of how the negative effects of failure to recognize and use other languages that are not considered legitimate are shown in the studies that follow.

Mwanza (2012) conducted a study to investigate the appropriateness of Nyanja which is regarded as the sole language of initial literacy in Lusaka district which is a cosmopolitan environment. The study involved six basic schools, six head teachers, 38 Grade One teachers, 120 Grade One pupils from six sampled schools. The researcher employed both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and data was analyzed qualitatively.

The findings revealed that CiNyanja was the language of play in high and medium density areas and the dominant language of play in low-density areas was English. Other languages

such as Bemba, Tonga, Nsenga were also found to be languages of play. The study revealed that CiNyanja was not a language of play to all children in Lusaka district and other places. There was also a mismatch between CiNyanja spoken by children during play and the one recognized in schools. It was therefore concluded that the language of initial literacy in Lusaka district was not appropriate as a sole language of instruction. Mwanza recommended the recognition and use of other languages that were not regarded as standard languages but were familiar languages to the learners and teachers in the teaching and learning of literacy.

In the same line, Mubanga (2012) conducted a case study that focused on the effects of using Nyanja language as the medium of teaching initial literacy in a predominantly Soli speaking area of Lwimba in Chongwe district. The study involved 97 participants. Qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis were employed. The research instruments used included the observation checklist, NBTL reading tests, and interviews. The study revealed that the use of Nyanja as the medium of teaching initial literacy was not appropriate for learners whose first language was Soli. The results produced a significant difference in reading performance between Nyanja and Soli speaking learners with Nyanja speaking learners performing better. Soli speaking learners were found to have a limited vocabulary in Nyanja thereby limiting their literacy development.

While the current study and the two just above reviewed studies (Mwanza 2012, Mubanga, 2012), have similar concerns of literacy among early graders, the two studies differ in a number of ways in trying to address literacy-related problems. Mwanza (2012) and Mubanga (2012) focussed on the appropriateness of the language of initial literacy among Grade One learners in Lusaka district which is described as a cosmopolitan environment and Lwimba in Chongwe; a predominantly Soli speaking area respectively. It is a well-known fact that Zambia is a multilingual and multi-ethnic country. Due to this fact, the two researchers were prompted to investigate the appropriateness of what is regarded as the standard sole language of initial literacy.

However, this study was conducted in the rural parts of Chadiza district where the problem of mismatch between language of play as well as the language of initial literacy does not exist. All learners involved in this current study had Nyanja as their first language and used it as the language of play. The current study focussed on Grade Two learners' ability to transfer the literacy skills acquired in a Zambian language to English after receiving instruction in a Zambian language for two years before instruction in English was introduced. This was done

in order to find out if there was a relationship between Nyanja reading performance and English word reading ability.

The other difference between the two studies is the method of data analysis involved. The former analyzed data collected qualitatively while the later used both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis.

Another study that reported similar low reading levels among learners associated with the language policy is Kalindi (2005). He studied reading problems of 60 Grade Two poor readers (identified by teachers) from selected basic schools in Kasama and Mpika urban, Northern province. According to the study, only 13 percent could read two-syllable words and only eight (8) percent could identify 20 letters of the alphabet. The study showed that even with excellent and intensive instruction in place, some children still failed to make satisfactory progress in reading.

The challenge was associated with the exclusive use of Bemba in multi-ethnic/multilingual classes which was not the mother tongue of familiar language to a good number of pupils and therefore, they struggled to learn to read and write.

Zimba (2007) also set out to establish whether the use of Nyanja was effective as a medium of initial literacy development in communities that were predominantly Tumbuka speaking in Lumezi district. Nyanja is the zonal or local official language used to teach initial literacy in Lumezi. The study revealed that pupils in Lumezi performed below expectations in literacy skills because they could not understand Nyanja which was used to perform classroom tasks.

From the studies that have been revealed in this section, it is clear that the low reading levels that have been reported are associated with failure by the policy and policy implementers to recognize and use other languages that are considered illegitimate in the teaching of initial literacy. Thus, Banda and Mwanza (2017) advise that translanguaging can be one of the options to solve this problem.

The unanswered question that still remains unanswered from the above-reviewed studies could be that, 'What could be the explanation behind low reading levels among learners where language disparity is not an issue'? Thus, the current study investigated learners reading levels among learners from rural setups where the problem raised in other studies was not there. Furthermore, the researcher in the current study assessed learners reading levels in their first language to determine whether the reading performance in a Zambian language had a

relationship with reading ability in English. The stated focus was not a focus among any of the just above reviewed studies.

### **2.3.3 Studies that focus on other factors that enhance or hinder literacy acquisition among early graders**

Factors contributing to the low reading levels have also been studied. Hence this section will review related literature. Mubanga (2015) which is a doctoral thesis focused on investigating risky (hindering) and super (enabling) the factors for the acquisition of grade level early literacy and numeracy skills among first graders. The study sought to establish the interplay of child characteristics and environmental factors in the context of quality on literacy and numeracy skills. The study drew 100 children from low and high performing schools.

The researcher hypothesized that low literacy and numeracy attainment levels among children were less reactive in schools with poor didactics and high literacy and numeracy attainment levels among children with low-stress level reactivity in schools with poor didactics. It was further hypothesized that low SES and deprived home environments elevated levels of stress reactivity whereas high SES suppressed reactivity as the influence of biological sensitivity is dependent on the positive or negative settings.

The study involved 100 children from low and high performing schools. These children were administered tests that assessed their skills in reading, writing and mathematics tasks. A Biography sheet, Family Literacy questionnaire, behaviour rating Inventory for Executive Function (BRIEF), Electrocardiography (ECG) measure, Basic Assessment Skill Tool (BASAT), Mathematics Assessment Battery and DLE mathematics were the research instruments that were used in the study.

Background variables comprising of child-characteristics, home, and school factors were used to predict reading, writing and numeracy skills. Children's parents responded to questionnaires to provide information about home literacy circumstances and teachers gave information about each child's behaviour as observed in the classroom.

The findings revealed that school quality was a strong predictor of reading and writing, but not mathematics skills. It was further found that preschool, home literacy, and home learning were not strong predictors of literacy and numeracy skills, except for alphabetic knowledge. The study reported that children's performance in literacy and numeracy skills was generally

low compared to what others found regarding the predictive role of variables such as executive function.

The study further revealed that the school factor was one of the factors that contribute to children's literacy and numeracy performance. Low and high performing schools had different weaknesses with high performing schools performing better on literacy and numeracy performance. The study further noted the association with preschool, phonemic awareness reading and writing as well as mathematics number facts. The study, therefore, concluded that phonemic awareness had the strongest predictive power to literacy skill compared to background variables. Thus the low reading levels being experienced in the country was connected to the failure to teach and apply the phonemic awareness skills in schools.

The current study and Mubanga's (2015) are both intended to provide solutions to problems associated with the acquisition of initial literacy skills among early graders. Besides, both studies found that the reading levels among the learners involved in the studies were low. The NLF is based on the principles that reading is a foundational skill for all learning and if children do not acquire this skill at the foundation level of education, it will affect education. Despite the two studies intended to solve problems associated with literacy problems among early graders, the two studies differ on the areas such as the instruments of data collection used and the main focus of the study. The former was centered on investigating factors that hinder or enhance the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills ranging from individual learner characteristics, home, and school factors without paying particular attention to the language-in-education policy. In the latter, factors were not the major focus, instead, they were investigated as supportive information on the quantitative data that helped to explain whether there is a relationship between reading in Zambian language performance and English word reading ability among Grade two learners who have not been introduced to instruction in English. In other words, the aim of the study was to find out if Grade Two learners were able to transfer the skills acquired in Zambian language to English.

Another study worth noting among the many studies conducted in Zambia is that of Tambulukani (2015). In his study, he focussed on the importance of the language in which initial reading is taught. The hypothesis drawn was that oral language plays major roles in initial reading especially when beginning readers have acquired a minimum of alphabetic understanding that enables word reading and writing. He conducted an experiment using a quasi-experimental design. Through the quantitative approach, he tested the effects of a fit

between the local language spoken in the homes and playground and the language officially designated as language of instruction using the Familiar Language among grade Two pupils. Literacy tests were administered to children. A population sample of 240 pupils who were described as low and high achievers from three districts under the Primary Reading Program PRP, were administered the tests. The researcher assessed their beginning literacy in a Zambian language and English in their second grade after eighteen months of instruction. The test results were analyzed using regression, multivariate correlation analysis at the t-test.

The results confirmed the hypothesis that oral language plays major roles in initial reading especially when beginning readers have acquired a minimum of alphabetic understanding that enables word reading and writing. The results further indicated that the transfer of skills from the first language to the second language was evident for learners who had acquired initial reading ability in their first language.

Both this study and Tambulukan's study assessed literacy abilities in both L1 and English. However, Tambulukan's study assessed children's reading and writing abilities in L1 and English under Primary Reading Program PRP. This study sought to assess reading and writing abilities among grade two learners under the Primary Literacy Program PLP with an intention to find out whether there is a relationship between reading performance in a Zambian language and English before instruction in English is given. It is undeniable fact that under the two programs, there are different recommendations in as far as teaching methods and guidelines on the language of instruction are concerned. Hence, in this study, one of the factors of concern was to examine classroom practices that hindered or promoted the teaching of initial literacy which was not the focus in Tambulukan's study.

Matafwali (2005) also conducted a case study whose population sample comprised of 109 grade one NBTL pupils, the DEBS, three head teachers from sampled schools and their grade teachers which gave the total population sample of 116 of respondents in the study. The study sought to find out the initial reading performance levels of pupils to whom Chichewa was not their first language compared with pupils to whom Chichewa was their L1 in multi-ethnic classes in selected Chipata Urban Basic schools. The researcher used the Ministry of Education achievement NBTL reading tests, interviews, and classroom observation checklist to collect data. Data were analyzed using SPSS. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was done.

The findings indicated that 109 pupils passed with an average score of 55%. When the groups were categorized into L1 and L2, there was a significant difference from an ANOVA test of

16.7 in performance between L1 learners and L2 Learners where L1 learners got 66.7% and L2 learners got 55%.

Matafwali's 2005 study focused on literacy levels among NBTL Grade One learners from an urban setup. However, this study focused on Grade Two learners from rural schools. Learners from urban places differ from those from a rural setup when it comes to literacy issues. This is so due to differences in the prevalence of emergent literacy skills that they come with to school with due to most parental educational levels and other available literacy initiating activities such as pre-schools. The purpose of Matafwali's 2005 study was centered on comparing the reading levels in reading among children who differed in their L1, and the current study sought to assess the reading and writing levels among Grade Two learners with the same L1 literacy background in order to determine their readiness to transfer literacy skills from L1 to English.

Matafwali (2010) further conducted a cross-sectional and longitudinal study whose population comprised of children enrolled in grades One and Two from seven selected schools from Western, North-western, Eastern and Northern provinces. She wanted to know how the level of proficiency in the mother tongue explains difficulties in becoming a conventional reader in a Zambian language and English among grade 2 learners. The study further sought to evaluate the progress made by children in Grade One and Two. The target sample population was 557 (242 boys and 315 girls). The longitudinal sample comprised children enrolled in Grade One from six schools in Lusaka province. Children were tested at the end of Grades One and Two respectively. The target sample for the longitudinal study had a total population sample of 144 children. Children were tested at the end of Grade One. A follow-up test was administered nine months later after the initial test was completed. Tests were administered in the seven curriculum local languages for the cross-sectional sample at both levels. Whereas for the longitudinal sample, Nyanja was applied in Grade One, and both Nyanja and English were applied at grade Two.

To assess alphabetic knowledge, and early literacy skills, the investigator applied the Basic Skills Assessment Tool (BASAT). To assess the familiarity with the language, narrative tests, storytelling were used as measures of expressive vocabulary and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary test and a test of syntactic knowledge measured receptive vocabulary. To measure nonverbal cognitive abilities, the researcher used Picture completion (WISC-R), Block Construction (NEPSY) and Pattern Reasoning (Kauffman test for Children). Qualitative data

was collected through interviews with children and teacher questionnaires. The methods of data analysis in Matafwali's study included correlation, hierarchical regression and logistic regression.

The findings revealed that due to the cognitive relationship that exists between language and thought, the NBTL in which the children were taught initial literacy in a familiar language could be effective. The study further indicated that lack of proficiency in the initial language of instruction was the hallmark for the poor reading skills observed in the majority of Zambian children.

The findings of the current study are similar to the findings reported by Matafwali (2010) despite the differences in the research designs used in the two studies. While Matafwali (2010) study employed the longitudinal and cross-sectional methods, this study adopted a descriptive case study design that employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. The similarity lies in the finding which indicates that lack of proficiency in the initial language of instruction was the hallmark for the poor reading. The level of proficiency in the mother tongue explains difficulties in becoming a conventional reader in a Zambian language and English among Grade 2 learners.

The findings conform with the threshold hypothesis by Cummins which posits that 'a minimum threshold in language proficiency must be passed before a second language speaker can reap any benefits from language. It further indicates that in order to gain proficiency in a second language, the learner must have passed a certain limit or threshold level of competence in his or her first language.'

The studies reviewed so far confirms the Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis by Cummins (1979) which states that the acquisition of the second language is partly a function of first language competence as some linguistic skills are believed to transfer from L1 to L2. The Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis is one of the theories that has informed this study

Another study that has helped to clarify the need for the current study is a study by the Ministry of Education MOE (1995) which also revealed low literacy levels. The Ministry of Education in 1995 initiated a major study under the auspices of the Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ). The survey conducted by SACMEQ measured the literacy levels among grade 6 pupils in the Southern African countries and Zambia was included. Its findings indicated that only 25 percent of grade 6

pupils could read at minimum levels and only 3 percent could read at desirable levels. According to the National Assessment conducted by the Ministry of Education in 2003, only 31.1 percent of the pupils out of the total number of pupils who were introduced to PRP had achieved the expected performance level in Zambian familiar languages. In 2012, with the full implementation of the PRP, the percentages had increased slightly to 36.8 percent in Zambian local languages which were still below the required minimum of 40 percent. The Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Quality Education, SACMEQ (2010) report also indicated that among grade 6 learners that were tested in reading in Zambia, only 27.4 percent were able to read at a basic competency level. The USAID Read to Success Project (2013:18), the Baseline Survey report indicates that out of 2,024 Grade 2 learners were assessed in oral passage reading, only 11 percent were able to read some words.

The reports were given by SACMEQ (2010) and USAID (2013) both report low reading levels. One may wonder why reviewing literature that focused on grade six yet the current study focuses on grade Twos. To clarify the matter, it should be stated that firstly, reading determines educational success and so it is important for the educational system to pay attention to reading development. The educational system is judged by the literacy levels that its learners achieve. Although the population sample in the 2003 report included the grade six (6) pupils, there is a direct link to the initial literacy levels attained in early grades as Sibanda, (2015) asserts that "One critical schooling transition landmark that can either disorient or empower learners in educational contexts is the shift from the foundation phase to the next level." Thus, this study sought to establish whether learners acquired the much-needed literacy skills which would later determine the success or failure in their academic progression.

The Curriculum framework (2013) highlights the literacy skills that are said to be the most powerful predictors of subsequent reading ability. The low reading levels indicated in the Assessment report is an indication that learners were still in their initial stages of learning to read despite having progressed to higher grades.

#### **2.3.4 Studies on reading and writing from elsewhere**

There are similar studies that have been reported elsewhere that reveal learners' literacy levels. One such study is that of Pretorius and Mokwesana (2009) from South Africa. Pretorius and Mokwesana reported of an evaluation study by the Department of Education

which commissioned its first National Systematic Evaluations in 2001, in which Grade 3 learners achieved a national mean of 38 percent for reading and writing in their home language (Department of Education, 2003). In Western Cape, the province with the highest literacy level, over 34,000 Grade 3 learners were assessed in literacy in either English, Afrikaans or Xhosa. An average of 39 percent of Grade 3 learners passed the literacy test on the grade 3 level in the home language, only 62.7 percent of these learners met the Grade 2 literacy requirements and 86.9 percent met Grade 1 literacy requirements.

The report given by Pretorius and Mokhwesana from South Africa relates to this current study in that both studies focus on literacy levels among early graders. However, Pretorius and Mokhwesana's study aimed at revealing the literacy levels only among grade 3, while the current study aimed at revealing the literacy levels among Grade 2 and their ability to demonstrate the transfer of the acquired skills to English. Besides, Zambia and South Africa are two different countries that differ in their social, economic, cultural and political backgrounds which can impact on citizens' educational attainments differently.

The literature reviewed so far indicated the common challenge of low literacy levels not only in Zambia but other countries such as South Africa too. The next section reviews the literature on some skills that have been found to enhance reading.

#### **2.4 Transfer of L1 literacy skills to L2**

This section probes into literature that focuses on the transfer of literacy skills from L1 to L2. The question of the transferability of literacy skills is in a large measure related to how literacy is defined. The response is both affirmative and negative. Literacy is defined differently by different scholars. However, in this study, the definition which limits literacy to encoding/decoding skills was being used. Hence, literacy is defined as, "the ability to decode and encode written symbols in a language." The other concept worthy defining is the term 'transfer'. Perkins and Solomon (1989) in Mwansa (2015) defined the term 'transfer' as, "The ability to apply knowledge, skill, and specific strategies from one domain to other novel situations." Mwansa (2017) calls such learning; 'deep learning' as opposed to rote learning. There are many studies that have been conducted that show evidence for the transfer of literacy skills.

Many studies have provided convincing support for the promotion of mother tongue education in the early years of schooling (William, 1995). These studies claim that knowledge

and skills gained in the mother tongue can transfer across languages; they also argue that multilingual children perform well at school when the school teaches the mother tongue even when the goal is learning a second language.

August (2002) compiled a comprehensive report on 'Transitional programs for English Language Learners'. The report was drawn after conducting a meta-analysis review of relevant evaluation studies and studies that investigated the transfer of skills from the first language to English. One such study was the study conducted by Durgunoghu et.al (2002) who examined the relationships between phonological awareness and reading in Native Spanish speakers learning English as a second language L2. They found that in Grade 1, phonological processing skills in both the first language (L1) and L2 correlated with L2 word recognition. Besides, children who had strong Spanish phonological awareness and word recognition skills performed much better when reading English words and English-like pseudo words than did children who had weak Spanish phonological awareness and word recognition skills.

The case study by Durgunoglu (2000) despite being conducted outside Africa and Zambia, in particular, is similar to the current study in that both studies involved languages that differ in their language characteristics. The current study used English as a second language which is opaque while Nyanja is transparent. Durgunoglu's study used Spanish which was learners' L1 is also transparent while English is opaque. One notable aspect of Durgunoglu's case study that linked it to the current study is the mention of predictors of reading being the phonological awareness in which phonemic awareness is embraced. Following the literacy framework, phonemic awareness is one of the five key reading skills that a learner must acquire in order to learn to read. The reading levels indicated in this study cannot be separated from the acquisition of such reading predicting skill. The fact that most learners failed to read given words in the familiar language is an indication that they have not mastered this skill.

The findings of the studies support the 'Developmental Interdependence hypothesis' proposed by Cummins (1978, 1979). The fact that phonological awareness in Spanish correlated with L2 reading indicates that some L1 linguistic skills transfer to L1. In other words, the acquisition of L2 is partly a function of L1 proficiency.

Hulstijn (2015) reported several empirical studies concerning the relations between L1 and L2. Among the many studies reviewed, is Cummins (2015) study which involved Finnish students in Sweden, Hispanic and Asian students in the United States and Canada. Cummins

in Hulstijn (2015, p. 116) reported correlations between L1 and L2. The correlations between L1 and L2 reported by Cummins are in line with the assertion that "Reading is a unitary process across languages, and that learning to read in a second language (L2) mainly requires the transfer of 'old' strategies acquired when L1 reading skills are fully developed (Mwansa, 2017)

The concept that reading is a unitary process was evident in this study as learners who were in a position to read L1 could read words in English though following the Nyanja orthographic features. That was a demonstration of the ability to transfer acquired skills.

Wurr (2014) progressed with the study by answering the question, 'Is the second language reading a language problem or a reading problem'? The study examined both the linguistic/grammatical knowledge and first language (L1) reading skills and that either facet, that is L2 knowledge or L1 reading would be the better predictor of second language reading performance. The study progressed by looking at how L1 literate does a second language reader needed to be to make second language Knowledge work. The hypothetical framework which guided the study included the linguistic threshold hypothesis (LTH) which states that 'In order to read in a second language, a level of second language linguistic ability must first be achieved'.

The author progressed by conducting a meta-analysis of case studies that focussed on the student population of adult L2 readers who are literate in the native language L1. He examined the case studies that illustrate the varying degrees to which readers are able to access their L1 knowledge when reading in a second language. The results indicated that linguistic Knowledge was consistently a more powerful predictor upwards of 30 percent while the first language literacy had an upward 20 percent prediction of second language acquisition. The findings suggested that firm first language reading skills could not help learners compensate when reading the second language. A lack of second language knowledge hindered the reading process and in turn, short-circuited the first language reading knowledge.

The studies reviewed are just a small fraction of the vast research that indicates that children transfer a variety of skills from their first language L1 to second language L2, including phonological awareness, word reading, word knowledge, and comprehension strategies. Teachers need to be knowledgeable that transferring these skills from one language to another

may produce errors. The errors produced should not be viewed as detrimental, but rather a diagnostic tool to help a learner build on what they already have.

#### 2.4. Classroom practices that enhance reading and writing skills among children

In this section literature that focuses on methods and activities that help learners acquire literacy skills will be reviewed. While most literature focuses on providing students with phonics/phonological awareness interventions to improve reading, some researchers have examined the effect of fluency-building interventions on reading for students who are struggling readers.

Ross and Begeny (2011) conducted a study with a population comprising of a sample of five Spanish-speaking English learners in their second grade. The researchers used a single-subject alternating treatment experimental design to examine the effects of fluency intervention delivered at three levels; one-on-one individual instruction, small group, and non-treatment control. Students were subjected to each intervention condition (one-on-one and small group) and four sessions of the non-treatment condition. Both one-on-one and small group conditions included listening passage, preview, repeated reading, retell, and phase drill error correction.

Results indicated that both one-on-one and small group intervention improved students' gains. The researchers argued that fluency interventions may help learners attain fluency skills in reading and that the gains are not only associated with English learners only but all language learners. In this study, it was found during classroom observation that teachers did not prioritize the strategies of one-to-one or small groups to teach reading. Instead, lessons observed were characterized by whole class teaching with a few instances of group work.

Whereas multiple factors can affect children's literacy development including home, parenting, parental educational levels, preschool, community, resources as well as formal schooling, (NICHD, 2004) contends that classroom instruction is one of the most important sources of influence. Children fail to achieve proficient reading skills because they do not receive appropriate amounts of particular types of literacy instruction during primary grades. Early literacy instruction that is balanced between phonics and more meaningful reading experiences has been shown to be more effective than the instruction of others (Sihatschneider 2005). Bennett (1993:6) argues that teachers are generally poor at doing this to an often fairly inadequate grasp of the subject being taught. Bennet's view of teacher's subject knowledge poses a crucial question; "How can teachers teach well knowing that they don't fully understand?"

Conceptualizing teacher knowledge is a complex issue that involves understanding key underlying phenomena such as the process of teaching and learning, the concept of knowledge, as well as the way teachers' knowledge is put into action in the classroom. The pedagogical knowledge base of teachers includes all the required cognitive knowledge for creating effective teaching and learning environments. Research shows that this knowledge can be studied. Most studies use the distinction between declarative ('Knowing that') and procedural knowledge (knowing how') from cognitive psychology as a theoretical basis. This approach is relevant as it focuses on understanding how knowledge is related to behaviour, or in other words the quality of teaching performance.

Wray (2006) emphasizes how the teacher's knowledge is important. In his view, he considers that teachers need subject context knowledge which is an understanding of the main concepts, principles, skills, and content of the areas which a teacher will teach. He advises that one cannot assume that he or she has the required subject knowledge as a result of one's own education, whether at college or university. One needs to audit and where necessary, top up his or her subject knowledge by reading or attending courses.

The second kind of knowledge which teachers need to have is the application of subject knowledge in teaching the children, sometimes termed, rather grandly as 'pedagogical subject knowledge' (Wray, 2006). Hence, as the study focused on pedagogical subject knowledge needed by teachers, mainly specifically focused on methods and activities as pedagogical areas of study.

These crucially important areas involve knowing how to make the knowledge, skills, and understandings of subjects accessible and meaningful to children – how best to represent particular ideas; what examples to draw; what kind of explanations to offer; how to relate what needs to be taught to children's experiences or interest and so on (Wray 2006). A further issue for teacher's content knowledge is that although all primary teachers are effective readers and have demonstrated this through examination success, they learned these skills without necessarily having been explicitly aware of them (Wray 2006).

The literature reviewed indicates the value for primary school teachers who are also teachers of literacy to have a clear theoretical understanding of the process of learning to read and strategies for assessing the literacy skills of the students. They need to know a range of strategies for targeting the needs of learners as well as resources for additional support (Fillmore and Snow, 2000; Valdez et al. 2005). The question which is significant in analysing

primary teacher's knowledge of teaching literacy is, "Do grade two teachers demonstrate a good understanding of the teaching of initial reading and writing?"

## **2.5 Methods of teaching reading**

Whereas multiple factors can affect children's literacy development including home, parenting, parental educational levels, preschool, community, resources as well as formal schooling (NICHD, 2004) contends that classroom instruction is one of the most important sources of influence. Children fail to achieve proficient reading skills because they do not receive appropriate amounts of particular types of literacy instruction during primary grades. Early literacy instruction that is balanced between phonics and more meaningful reading experiences has been shown to be more effective than the instruction of others (Sihatschneider 2005).

Teaching reading and writing requires effective and appropriate approaches, methods and techniques (Rodgers and Richards, 2001). Some methods have been subjected to research and their effectiveness tested.

A large body of research suggests that learners of alphabetic orthographies can achieve reading through instruction that is largely based upon a phonemic approach that involves teaching letter-sound correspondences (Ziegler & Goswami, 2006). While the phonemic approach to teaching reading is well acknowledged, Goswami et.al (2003) alludes that phonologically inconsistent alphabets are thought to require additional instruction beyond the phonemic level.

A teacher needs to understand why and how each of these components must be taught. However, the methods employed to teach these elements may work according to many competing factors such as teacher knowledge of how and why certain methods should be used, teacher commitment, availability of teaching and learning resources and linguistic characteristic; (transparent or opaque languages) to mention a few (NICHD, 2000). One of the methods that have been proven to yield positive results in reading is the phonics method. Its emphasis is on the idea that letters represent the sounds of speech and that there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken letter combinations. The written letters and spoken words are specific to the alphabetic writing system. Children are therefore expected to learn letter sounds that convey the sounds of a

language then they can read whole words by decoding their component phonemes (Gibb, 2014).

Phonics as a method of teaching refers to helping children understand the "mappings between letters and sounds" (Beck & Juel, 2002:2). Through exposure to this instruction, learners will grasp the alphabetic code and learn how to read and write. Whereas phonics is an instructional aspect, decoding is a skill a learner develops. So decoding is the ability to separate and distinguish between sound units (phonemes). Research has shown that phonics plays an important role in learning to read and write (Adams, 1990). Goswami (2000) also stated that agreement on the importance of phoneme awareness and progress in reading has found a positive connection.

Resmck (2005) also stated that the phonics method of reading teaches children the sound values of letters and letter clusters which can be done by matching pictures and objects with letters. Morrow (2009) further suggested three principles to focus on in phonemic awareness; firstly, child appropriate, using songs, rhymes, word games and other activities that are playful and engaging, interactive and social and should stimulate curiosity and experimentation with language. Secondly, deliberate and purposeful and taught with a specific, goal in mind so as to be the most effective and finally broader literacy programme within the context of real reading and writing.

It is for these reasons that matching reading methodologies in Africa; Zambia inclusive to the linguistic characteristics of the learners' knowledge is being emphasized. To highlight the significance of the phonics method to teaching reading, (Gibb 2014) claims that the phonics method increases reading in age by up to three years. Not only does phonics appear to increase the child's reading age, but it also teaches other skills simultaneously. Phonics teaches reading and spelling outset. Children are taught to read through blending the individual speech sound and spelling skills coming from segmenting and the spoken word (Debbie Hepplewhite, 2011).

However, the phonic method is criticized by whole word supporters saying it does not support children with the tools to draw meaning from text (Lyle 2014). The author gives a critique of phonics which points to the dangers of confusing decoding with reading. In other words, decoding has nothing to do with the whole purpose of reading which is meaning-making. Examples in a language with irregular orthography such as English are given as follow: whereas 'go', 'so' and 'no' are pronounced in the same way, this does not apply to 'do', 'to',

'who' which have to rhyme with 'shoe' which however 'does' (in a common pronunciation of the derivate from 'do') and what can be made of the 'wh' in 'who' and 'whole'; of one and bun, of all and aught; has and was and many other common illustrations.

While there is no disagreement that phonics provides children with essential skills, there is an argument that it does not teach children the meaning of what they are reading. Whole word supporters say that the absence of meaning makes reading futile (Ekwall and Shanker, 1993). However, Behaviourist scholars argue that when children learn to pronounce words correctly meaning will follow automatically (Weaver 1994). Kidd (2011) felt that the phonics approach tendered to ignore the valuable information, language patterns and reading strategies children bring to the reading experience, as well as reading and writing simultaneously. According to Kidd, when the phonic method is used, children struggle to use their acquired knowledge when approaching texts during reading because they are forced to focus on lists of phonics words and rules they have memorized instead of applying reading. Hence they argue that the phonics method may hamper the ability to read to some cases.

However, Kidd's view does not match with the teaching of reading in Zambian and other African languages with regular patterns. The phonic method is based on two assumptions; most languages have consistent phoneme (sound) to grapheme (letter) correlation, and that once learners have learned the relationship of letters to sounds, they pronounce printed words by blending the sounds together (Aukerman, 1984). The argument by Aukerman clearly gives the significance of the phonic method of teaching reading in Zambian languages as they match with the given assumption of the theory.

Phonics knowledge is the precursor and strong predictor of reading proficiency (Vogt and Shearer, 2011). Research has shown that children construct phonics knowledge from instructional and independent experimentation in order to understand phonic concepts. It helps children map sounds into spellings while allowing them to decode words. Decoding words efficiently increase reading fluency which in turn improves reading comprehension, (Grogan, 1999). Fluent readers, in fact, do not process words as wholes. In normal reading, fluency is defined as the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and proper expression in order to understand what the reader reads whether aloud or silently (Yopp and Yopp 2000).

The chief foundation of all reading especially where African languages are at play depends on particularly on a thorough knowledge of the pronunciation of characters of the alphabet and the method of forming them into syllables, words and so on (Diak 1965). To engage in phonic

analysis a child must understand that the sound pattern of a word is divisible into smaller units and that these units are common to the sound patterns of other words.

Words are the essential elements of written language. Growth in reading comprehension depends on the ability to recognize the words of text accurately and quickly. Recognizing words accurately is important because the meaning of the text depends crucially on the meaning of words that make up the text.

Thus this study's area of focus was extended to check how the phonic method of teaching initial reading was being practiced by teachers. All that has been revealed from different literature in support of the phonics method can be summarized by a report that was given by the National Reading Panel, NRP and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development NICHD, (2000). The committee that developed 'Preventing Difficulties in Young Children (National Research Council, 1998) was asked to consider the effectiveness of the interventions for young children who are at risk of having learning to read. The committee found that children who are successfully learning to read have an understanding of how sounds are represented alphabetically. They are exposed to sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency. They have sufficient knowledge and vocabulary to render written text meaningful and interesting. Besides, such children have continued interest and motivation to read for a variety of purposes.

The committees further went ahead to find the difficulties that were found to be stumbling blocks that impend children's progress towards skilled reading. The research base reported that the major obstacle to reading included the difficulty to understand and use the alphabetic principle. Alphabetic was said to include both phonemic awareness and phonics which are described as 'the best school-entry predictors of how learners learn to read. The other obstacle pointed was the lack or absence of motivation to read (NRP, 2000).

Other literature gave different views from those that support the use of the phonemic approach or the phonic method for teaching reading. Isfaha et.al (2009) who did comparisons between African language writing systems provides a unique perspective on the role of the grain size. The study focused on the mapping principle differences and examining variation in the grain size emphasized during instruction. It was suggested that the grain size of the writing system does not dictate the grain size of instruction. They also suggest that the writing system for languages with more complex syllabic structures does not necessarily need to focus on the phoneme level. Isfaha (2009) found that children trained to decode words using

rhyme analogy (larger grain size of instruction) exhibited better reading outcomes as compared to children trained to decode words using letter-phoneme strategy (smaller grain size of instruction).

Despite the given suggestion on the use of larger grain size as an ideal manner of teaching reading, the writer does not minimize the importance of phonemic coding, but rather highlights the potential utility of larger phonological units of reading instruction as well. The method of teaching reading can be well understood when they are related to the models of teaching reading as discussed below.

### **2.5.1 Models of teaching reading**

There are three main theories or rather models of reading (Waezi,2006). These are the traditional view which follows the bottom-up model (Haris,2006). Following this model, reading should begin from letters that form printed words to form sentences and text. It follows the principles of phonic methods of teaching reading. Following this model, the reading process consists of a number of skills that children need to be taught to be able to hear and identify sounds in words (phonemic awareness), match sounds to letters (phonics) and recognize words in isolation with automaticity (Moller, 2013).

The bottom-up model matches with the phonics method which is advocated for in the implementation of the current PLP. The Zambian languages being used to teach literacy as well as other subjects are phonologically consistent. Hence, this model proves to be effective as it teaches emphasizes on teaching learners the letter sounds first, then blending the sounds to form syllables, words and sentences in that order.

The top-down reading model works in the reverse order from that proposed in the top-down process (Nunan, 1991, Smith, 1978). It supports the whole word reading approach to teaching reading. This model is so helpful when teaching reading in a phonologically inconsistent language such as English. However, literature acknowledges the importance of the phonemic approach to teaching reading in English which is under the bottom-up model (Isfaha et.al, 2009).

The interactive model, on the other hand, recognizes the interaction of bottom-up model and top-down model processes simultaneously (Derchant, 1991). Educators need to have knowledge about these models and when to apply them in the teaching process. Especially the

bilingual education program that the government adopted requires teachers with this knowledge.

## **2.6 Summary**

The above chapter has reviewed some related literature to the study. The literature reviewed has shown that mother tongue use of teaching initial literacy has some benefits. Besides, reading skills acquired in a child's L1 can facilitate the acquisition of L2. However, despite the benefits acknowledged in multilingual policies that encourage the use of mother tongue to teach initial literacy, studies have revealed low reading levels not only in Zambia but Africa as a whole. Literature has further revealed the reading skills that predict reading. Factors such as classroom factors which include methods and other strategies that facilitate low or high reading levels of reading have been revealed. It is evident from the literature reviewed that despite there being studies concerning transitional bilingual studies, none of these studies focused on transitional abilities of grade two learners from a Zambian language to English under the new language policy PLP which was the main focus of the current study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Overview**

This chapter outlines the proposed methods which were used in the study. In this study, the methodology includes the research design, study population, study sample, sampling procedure, and data collection instruments and data analysis. Further, other important aspects such as data validity and trustworthiness of the instruments have been explained. Ethical issues in the study have also been discussed.

#### **3.2 Research design**

The study research design that was adopted in this study was a descriptive case study design. This design was deemed fit for this study because it allowed the investigator to observe the participants in a completely natural and unchanged natural environment. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods approach to data collection. The mixed methods approach was adopted because it is recognized that all methods have limitations, hence it is felt that biases inherent in any single method could neutralize or cancel the biases of other methods. The qualitative method allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth information about the phenomenon under investigation while the quantitative method ensured high levels of reliability of the gathered data. The other reason for adopting a mixed method approach is that the first two research questions needed a quantitative method of data collection while the third research question needed a qualitative method of data collection. Therefore, triangulating data sources has been an end to seeking convergence across qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell,2014).

#### **3.3 Population**

According to White (1998, p.134), "a population is a collection of objects, events or individuals having some common characteristic that the researcher is interested in studying". In this study the target population comprised of Grade two (2) learners and teachers, primary head teachers from public primary schools and District Education Standards Officer (DESO) in Chadiza district.

### **3.4 Sample size**

A sample is a population that is used to represent the entire group as a whole (White, 2003). In this study, the sample size was 91 which comprised of 75 grade two learners from five primary schools; (38 boys and 37 girls). The DESO, five primary school head teachers, ten (10) grade two teachers took part in the study.

### **3.5 Sampling procedure**

Both simple random and purposive sampling was used in the study. Simple random sampling was used to come up with the five schools. According to White (2003), the simple random technique is a selection technique that provides each population element an equal chance of being included in the sample. Simple random sampling was used to sample 5 primary schools and 75 grade, two learners. This gave all primary schools and all grade two learner in sampled schools chance to participate in the study. Simple random sampling was also done to come up with the 75 pupils who were sampled for the test from each school. Lists of pupils' names present on that day were obtained and written on pieces of paper. A raffle draw was conducted to come up with the pupils who were tested.

Purposive sampling was used to sample the DESO, 5 primary school Headteachers, 5 grade two teachers. According to Kothari (2004), purposive or deliberate sampling involves the deliberate selection of particular units of the universe for constituting a sample that represents the universe. Purposive sampling was adopted as it helps target a group of people believed to have the best information to address the purpose of the study (De Vos, 2000). The researcher used purposive sampling because, in this study, the researcher was targeting a group of people believed to be reliable for the study

### **3.6 Research instruments**

The study used a number of data collection instruments as explained below:

#### **3.6.1 Tests**

Reading and writing tests were administered to 75 (38 boys and 37 girls) grade 2 pupils to assess the reading and writing ability in Zambian language and reading ability in English. A group of 15 pupils from each of the five schools were sampled.

### **3.6.2 Nyanja word writing test**

In a Nyanja word writing test, a list of ten (10) words that varied in their syllable structure from simple consonant-vowel, CV structure to complex syllable structure such as consonant, consonant-vowel, CCCV structure were dictated to a sampled group of learners in their respective schools. The selection of the words that were administered was derived from the National Literacy Framework (NLF) that comprised of sounds expected to have been taught by second grade. The researcher explained the instructions and administered the test to the learners in the presence of the grade teacher who helped in maintaining quietness of the place. To avoid learners copying from each other, they were made to sit one meter apart. The test did not have a time limit. Each word was read as many times as possible to ensure that all learners heard the read word correctly. Answer papers were collected for marking by the researcher and grade teachers were allowed to check the answer sheets.

### **3.6.3 Nyanja word reading test**

After dictating a list of Nyanja words to the sampled group of learners in each school, the same words used in a dictation test were used to assess learners' reading performance in Nyanja. Learners were tested individually in a quiet room at their respective schools to assess their reading performance in Nyanja word reading. Time was not limited. The learner was allowed to try as many times as possible. Guesswork was allowed. The responses that were read correctly were marked by a tick and a cross for wrongly read responses against each learner's name. The investigator made sure the pupil never saw the results to avoid discouraging them. The responses were also recorded to allow for verification later. Grade teachers attended the sessions though most of them failed to observe the entire reading sessions as they were time-consuming.

Nyanja reading test also comprised of 10 words (refer to appendix 3 and 4) each with words that varied in their syllable structure from consonant-vowel, CV as in 'leka' 'stop' to CCCC as in 'nkhwangwa', 'an axe'.

### **3.6.4 English word reading test (Burt Reading test)**

To assess English word ability, a 'Burt reading test' which is an international instrument used to assess reading ability was used. A Burt reading test which is an international assessment tool for assessing reading literacy in English was administered to the same population sample

of learners who were assessed in Zambian language reading and writing tests. The Burt reading test is an English reading assessment tool comprising of 110 English words which vary in their complexity from simple to complex.

The test was administered to individual learners in a quiet room. The scores obtained in the test were later converted to reading age following the 'Burt Reading Test' guide. These instruments were chosen because they yield data of a high level of accuracy and that they are direct methods of data collection.

### **3.7 Semi-structured interview guide**

A semi-structured interview guide containing open-ended questions is the second research instrument that was used in this study to collect qualitative data. Berger (2011:135) defines interview as, "the conversation between the researcher and an informant". The researcher conducted interviews with five primary head teachers, 10 grade 2 teachers from the five selected primary schools under study to collect the necessary data. Although the number of sampled primary schools was 5, the researcher had a chance to interview other teachers who had experience in teaching grade two. Oral interviews usually allow participants to speak in their own words thereby making the phenomena clear (Gall et.al, 2007).

The researcher recorded the conversation for analysis later. It was due to these merits that the researcher used the interview method to collect data in relation to grade two reading abilities, factors responsible for the reading levels reported as well as their views towards the language policy at play.

### **3.8 Class observation checklist**

A class observation checklist was another instrument that was used to collect qualitative data. As indicated in the third research objective, the researcher wanted to find out what teachers do in the classroom to assist learners to acquire literacy skills in Nyanja to enable them to transfer the skills to English. To do this, the lesson observation checklist was also used to collect qualitative data concerning the activities and strategies employed by teachers to help learners learn. In general, a lesson observation checklist provides information on the actual behaviours of the teacher and learners in the classroom. The observation checklist was structured and only those aspects which were appearing on the observation checklist were recorded. While observing lessons and using the video recorder, some lessons were also video recorded.

### **3.9 Document analysis**

"Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents- both print and electronic material" (Bowen, 2017). Document analysis was another way in which data was collected. In this study documents such as assessment records, lesson plans, schemes of work and weekly forecasts as well as teaching aids used for the teaching of initial literacy were analyzed through skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), and interpretation. The researcher was interested in identifying pertinent information in relation to the teaching of initial literacy such as how teaching phonics was prepared in records such as lesson plans, weekly forecasts, and schemes. Accommodation for learners' ability differences and how the differences were coped to meet learners' needs was another recurring theme.

### **3.10 Data analysis**

The research used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to data analysis. The qualitative data was analyzed by transcribing the interviews, classroom observations and data from document analysis were summarised and organized into categories. In other words, thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data set. As observed by Ndhlovu (2011), thematic analysis involves identifying major themes and describing them. This form of analysis categorizes related topics by identifying major concepts or variables usually, from the questions or objectives.

Quantitative data from tests were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences SPSS. Computer generated tables showing percentages and frequencies were used in describing distributions of the variables which were presented in form of tables or pie charts. The t-tests were used to establish the significance of the differences in the reading and spelling abilities of learners and between gender.

### **3.11 Validity and reliability of instruments**

According to Khotari (2004), validity is the extent to which differences found with a measuring instrument reflect true differences among those being tested. As validity entails the extent to which an instrument fairly and comprehensively represents the factors under study (Cohen et al., 2000), it is also understood as the degree to which the results obtained from the analysis of the data actually answers the research questions and reflects what is stated in the concepts and theories of the study.

On the reliability of the instrument, Khotari (2004) also stated that a reliable instrument is one that provides consistent results. To ensure the validity and reliability of the study and instruments, the following was done. The interview guide and observation checklist were first discussed with the supervisor to ensure their appropriateness (Polit et al,2001). Secondly, multiple uses of data collection strategies and data sources or triangulation were used by the researcher in order to obtain a more complete picture of what was being studied and to cross-check information. The test instrument was also pre-tested at a school that had similar characteristics with the schools where the research was conducted to look for weaknesses in the instrument. The results were compared with the overall analysis and they were similar to what has been presented in this study.

### **3.12 Ethical considerations**

Strydom (2000) defined ethics as a set of moral principles suggested by an individual or group, which is widely accepted and it offers rules and behavioural expectations towards respondents and other stakeholders in research. During this research, the researcher observed the ethical considerations by respecting the views as well as the rights of all participants regardless of age and position. To ensure this, the researcher sought written informed consent from the University of Zambia prior to carrying out this study. Furthermore, permission to collect data from schools was sought from the DEBS office and school head teachers to engage teachers and learners in the study data from learners and teachers. The researcher also ensured that the language used was the language that the participants were comfortable with prior to, during and after the interviews.

### **3.13 Summary of chapter**

This chapter discussed the methodology that was employed to collect data. The study was a descriptive case study and it used both qualitative and quantitative designs. Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used in the study. The chapter that follows is the presentation of findings.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Overview

In this chapter, data from tests, interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis are presented following the research objectives and techniques appropriate to the methodological approach used for data collection and aligned to the research purpose. Thus, the chapter presents the findings on the learners' performance in reading and writing in a Zambian language and reading in English. The chapter progresses by presenting qualitative data obtained from classroom observation, document analysis and interviews with Grade Two teachers, head teachers, and DEBS office representative. Findings follow the research objectives.

#### 4.2 Learner's background information

The learners' average age was 10 years. A group of 15 pupils from each school were sampled.

#### 4.3 Findings on reading and writing tests in a Zambian language

The first objective of this study sought to assess Grade Two learners' reading and writing performance in Nyanja. To achieve this research objective, 15 pupils from each of the five selected schools participated in Nyanja word reading and writing tests.

##### 4.3.1 Findings on Nyanja word reading test

Table 4.3.1 below shows the mean, mode, maximum and minimum reading scores for schools which will be identified as school A, B, C, D, and E.

*Table 4.3.1: Mean, Mode, Minimum and Maximum scores for each school*

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
Mean	6.7	3.9	4.2	3.9	8.6
Mode	10	0	0	0	10
Std. Deviation	3.9	4.4	4.3	4.5	2.6
Minimum	0	0	0	0	0
Maximum	10	10	10	10	10

From Table 4.3.1, the data show that only two schools A and E managed to produce mean scores above 50 percent, that is 5 out of 10. The tables below show the frequency tables for the individual five primary schools.

*Table 4.3.2 Frequency table for school A in Nyanja word Reading*

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0 score	1	6.7	6.7
	2 score	4	26.7	33.3
	7 score	2	13.3	46.7
	9 score	2	13.3	60.0
	10 score	6	40.0	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	

From school A, a majority of learners scored above 50%. The mean score ( $M = 6.7$ ) for school A was above 50 percent.

*Table 4.3.3 Frequency table for school B in Nyanja word Reading*

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0 score	5	33.3	33.3
	1 score	2	13.3	46.7
	2 score	2	13.3	60.0
	5 score	1	6.7	66.7
	9 score	2	13.3	80.0
	10 score	3	20.0	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	

The majority of learners from school B failed to score above 50 percent and the mean score was 3.9. The table below shows the frequency table for school C.

*Table 4.3.4 Frequency table for school C in Nyanja word Reading*

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
	0 score	6	40.0	40.0
	1 score	1	6.7	46.7
	3 score	1	6.7	53.3
	5 score	1	6.7	60.0
	7 score	1	6.7	66.7
	9 score	3	20.0	86.7
	10 score	2	13.3	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	

The majority of the learners from school C failed to score above 50 percent as indicated by the mean score of 4.2. The table below shows the frequency table for school D.

*Table 4.3.5 Frequency table for school D in Nyanja word Reading*

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
	0 score	8	53.3	53.3
	5 score	1	6.7	60.0
	7 score	1	6.7	66.7
	8 score	2	13.3	80.0
	10 score	3	20.0	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	

The reading test conducted in school D revealed that most of the learners 53 percent had a score of zero while 47 percent scored above 50 percent out of the total score of 10 (100 percent) as shown table 4.1.6 below.

Table 4.3.6: Frequency table for school E in Nyanja word Reading

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
0 score	1	6.7	6.7
7 score	1	6.7	13.3
8 score	3	20.0	33.3
9 score	2	13.3	46.7
10 score	8	53.3	100.0
Total	15	100.0	

The majority from school E got above 70 percent. The investigator later compared to check whether there was a significant difference among the mean scores for the five schools in the Nyanja reading test by conducting an ANOVA test in SPSS. Table 4.2.7 below shows the descriptives of how the scores were distributed among the population sample of 75 pupils.

Table 4.3.7 Descriptives of distribution among population sample in reading

Allocations								
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
0 score	2	2.142	1.01419	.22131	1.6812	2.6045	.00	4.00
	1	9						
1 score	3	1.333	.57735	.33333	-.1009	2.7676	1.00	2.00
		3						
2 score	6	.3333	.51640	.21082	-.2086	.8753	.00	1.00
3 score	1	2.000	.	.	.	.	2.00	2.00
		0						
5 score	3	2.000	1.00000	.57735	-.4841	4.4841	1.00	3.00
		0						
7 score	5	1.800	1.78885	.80000	-.4212	4.0212	.00	4.00

		0						
8 score	5	3.600	.54772	.24495	2.9199	4.2801	3.00	4.00
		0						
9 score	9	1.777	1.48137	.49379	.6391	2.9165	.00	4.00
		8						
10 score	2	2.181	1.70814	.36418	1.4245	2.9392	.00	4.00
	2	8						
Total	7	2.000	1.42374	.16440	1.6724	2.3276	.00	4.00
	5	0						

The ANOVA test shows that there is a significant difference in the mean scores of the five sampled primary schools,  $F(8, 66) = 2.30$  when rounded off to two decimal places,  $p < .05$ . The significant or alpha level used was 0.05

#### 4.4 Findings on Nyanja word writing test

To further achieve objective 1 which sought to investigate writing abilities in Zambian language among grade two learners by the end of second grade, the researcher administered a Nyanja word writing test. The results obtained from each of the five selected schools (School A, B, C, D, and E), are presented in a summary table 4.4.1 below.

*Table 4.4.1: Mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum writing scores for school A, B, C, D and E.*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
School A	15	0	10	5.6	4.0
School B	15	0	10	2.9	4.1
School C	15	0	9	3.3	3.4
School D	15	0	10	3.5	4.1
School E	15	0	10	6.7	2.8

The majority of the schools had mean scores below 50 percent which is 5 out of 10. Only two schools (schools A and E) had mean scores above 50 percent. The tables below are the frequency tables for each individual school performance in the Nyanja word writing test.

*Table 4.4.2: Nyanja writing test scores for school A*

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
	0 score	3	20.0	20.0
	1 score	1	6.7	26.7
	2 score	1	6.7	33.3
	5 score	2	13.3	46.7
	7 score	2	13.3	60.0
	9 score	3	20.0	80.0
	10 score	3	20.0	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	

53 percent of the population sample from school A, managed to score above the mean score of 5.6

*Table 4.4.3 Nyanja writing test scores for school B*

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
	0 score	9	60.0	60.0
	1 score	1	6.7	66.7
	7 score	2	13.3	80.0
	9 score	2	13.3	93.3
	10 score	1	6.7	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	

Learners from school B performed poorly as the majority with a cumulative frequency of 67% scored below the low mean of 2.9.

*Table 4.4.4: Nyanja writing test scores for school C*

Scores	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
0 score	6	40.0	40.0
2 score	1	6.7	46.7
3 score	1	6.7	53.3

4 score	1	6.7	60.0
5 score	2	13.3	73.3
6 score	1	6.7	80.0
7 score	1	6.7	86.7
9 score	2	13.3	100.0
Total	15	100.0	

A majority from school C with a cumulative frequency of 53.3% failed to score above the mean of 3.3. This was an indication of poor writing performance.

*Table 4.4.5 Nyanja writing test scores for school D*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0 score	8	53.3	53.3	53.3
	4 score	1	6.7	6.7	60.0
	5 score	1	6.7	6.7	66.7
	7 score	2	13.3	13.3	80.0
	9 score	1	6.7	6.7	86.7
	10 score	2	13.3	13.3	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

The calculated mean for school D was 3.3 and the majority 53.3 percent scored below the mean

*Table 4.4.6 Nyanja writing test scores for school E*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0 score	1	6.7	6.7	6.7
	5 score	6	40.0	40.0	46.7
	7 score	2	13.3	13.3	60.0

	8 score	1	6.7	6.7	66.7
	9 score	1	6.7	6.7	73.3
	10 score	4	26.7	26.7	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

The calculated mean for school E was 6.7. The majority of the learners from school E performed better as 8(53.3 percent) scored above the high mean of 6.7. After analysing data from individual schools the mean scores in reading and writing for the whole population sample was calculated. Table 4.4.7 below shows the results which present the mean, mode, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores in both reading and writing.

*Table 4.4.7 Descriptive statistics for Nyanja word reading and writing abilities*

<i>Measure</i>	<i>Reading test</i>	<i>Writing test</i>
Mean	5.5	4.4
Mode	10	0
Std. Deviation	4.3	3.9
Minimum	0	0
Maximum	10	10

Table 4.4.7 above shows descriptive statistics; mean, standard deviation, mode, minimum and maximum scores for five selected schools in Nyanja word reading and writing or spelling tests. The results were obtained after administering Nyanja word dictation and reading tests to 75 grade two learners (38 boys and 37 girls) from five rural primary schools of Chadiza district. Nyanja tests comprised of 10 Nyanja words that varied in length and syllable structure from consonant-vowel cv to ccçcv. Each test had a total score of 10.

The mean score in a reading test was 5.5 which is slightly above 50% of the total 10(100 percent) score with a standard deviation of 4.3. From the total population sample of 75(100 percent) Grade Two learners, 42(56 percent) managed to score above the mean score of 5.5. In a dictation/spelling test, the mean score was 4.4 with a standard deviation of 3.9. In a writing test, the mean score did not reach 50 percent of the total score. The following tables (4.3.7 and 4.3.8) present the frequency and percentage distribution among the population

sample from all the five selected primary schools in a reading and writing test respectively in a Zambian language.

*Table 4.4.8 Frequencies and percentages in Nyanja word reading test for all the five primary schools*

Score	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative frequency
0 score	21	28.0	28.0
1 score	3	4.0	32.0
2 score	6	8.0	40.0
3 score	1	1.3	41.3
5 score	3	4.0	45.3
7 score	5	6.7	52.0
8 score	5	6.7	58.7
9 score	9	12.0	70.7
10 score	22	29.3	100.0
Total	75	100.0	

Table 4.4.9 shows the frequency and percentage distribution in the Nyanja word reading test. As indicated in the table 4.2.6, the mean score for Nyanja word writing test was 4.4. From the total population sample of 75(100 percent) grade two learners, 41(54.6 percent) managed to score above the mean score of 5.5. Table 4.4.10 below shows the distribution of frequency and percentage in Nyanja word writing among the population sample of 75 grade 2 learners.

*Table 4.4.10 Frequencies and percentages in Nyanja word writing test*

Score	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
0 score	27	36.0	36.0
1 score	2	2.7	38.7
2 score	2	2.7	41.3
3 score	1	1.3	42.7
4 score	2	2.7	45.3
5 score	11	14.7	60.0

6 score	1	1.3	61.3
7 score	9	12.0	73.3
8 score	1	1.3	74.7
9 score	9	12.0	86.7
10 score	10	13.3	100.0
Total	75	100.0	

In a writing test, the calculated mean was 4.4 and 41(54.7%) scored above the mean. A t-test was performed to establish whether there was a significant difference in the mean scores obtained between reading (5.5) and spelling/writing (4.4) performance. Table 4.4.11 below shows the findings of a t-test performed on the Statistical Package for Social Sciences SPSS.

*Table 4.4.11 Descriptive statistics for Reading and Writing scores*

		Mean	N	SD	Std. Error Mean
Pair	Nyanja word Reading test	5.5	75	4.1	.492
	Nyanja word Writing test	4.4	75	3.9	.454

The paired sample t-test performed to compare the Nyanja word reading mean score and writing mean scores produced a significant difference. In the scores for Nyanja word reading performance (M = 5.5, SD = 4.1) and in Nyanja word dictation (M = 4.4, SD = 3.9) conditions  $t(74) = 3.67, p = .000$ . This value is less than the significant value of .05. Thus, it was concluded that there was a significant difference between Nyanja word reading and Nyanja word writing abilities among grade two learners by the end of the second grade. Learners performed statistically significantly better in reading (M = 5.5) than writing (M = 4.4)

The researcher further compared the Nyanja word reading and writing mean scores to find out whether there was a significant difference between boys and girls performance in both reading and writing tests in a Zambian language. To compare the two samples, an independent samples t-test was performed. Below are the tables showing the results.

*Table 4.4.12 Descriptive statistics comparing boys and girls means in reading and writing*

Test	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Nyanja word Reading	Boy	38	6.7	4.0	.654
	Girl	37	4.2	4.3	.705
Nyanja word Writing	Boy	38	5.1	3.7	.605
	Girl	37	3.7	4.1	.668

The table shows that a population sample of 38 boys and 37 were tested in the Nyanja word reading and writing test. The boys' mean score was 6.7 with a standard deviation of 4.0 and 4.2 for girls with a standard deviation of 4.3.

To find out whether these means were significantly different, an independent sample t-test was performed. An Independent Samples t-test was conducted to compare reading performance by gender and the results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between mean score for boys ( $M = 6.7$ ,  $SD = 4.0$ ) and girls ( $M = 4.2$ ,  $SD = 4.3$ ) in Nyanja word reading performance conditions;  $t(73) = 2.54$ ,  $p = .01$  at an alpha of .05. These results suggest that there was a significant difference between boys' and girls' performances in reading. The boys ( $M = 6.7$ ) outperformed the girls ( $M = 4.2$ ). In other words, boys appear to have done statistically significantly better than girls a Nyanja word reading test.

The same population sample for boys and girls who were tested in Nyanja word reading were also tested in Nyanja word writing to assess their Nyanja word writing/dictation ability. An Independent Samples t-test was conducted to compare boys and girls Nyanja word writing/dictation ability. The results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between mean score for boys ( $M = 6.7$ ,  $SD = 4.0$ ) and girls ( $M = 4.2$ ,  $SD = 4.3$ ) in Nyanja word writing/dictation performance conditions;  $t(73) = 1.53$ ,  $p = .06$  at an alpha of .05.

#### **4.5 Findings on learners' ability to read English words**

This section presents findings on the research question which sought to investigate whether learners are able to read English words by the end of second grade. To achieve the research objective, a 'Burt reading test' which is an international assessment tool for assessing reading literacy was administered to the same population sample of learners who were assessed in the

Zambian language. The scores obtained in the test were later converted to reading age following the 'Burt Reading Test' guide. Table 4.5.1 below shows the actual age frequencies and the percentages of the sample distribution from five primary schools selected.

*Table 4.5.1 Frequencies and percentages of Pupils actual ages for all the five schools*

Age Range	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
8 – 10	36	48.0	48.0
11 – 13	35	46.7	94.7
14 – 16	3	4.0	98.7
17 above	1	1.3	100.0
Total	75	100.0	

Table 4.5.1 above shows that the population sample comprised of learners whose actual ages ranged from 8 years old being the minimum age and 17 years old being the maximum age. Following the Zambian education system, children are expected to start grade 1 at age seven. By collecting the actual age of the learners, the investigator wanted to establish the age at which learners were reading. The Burt reading scores were converted to reading age as shown in table 4.5.2 below. The percentage and frequency distribution of the reading age ranges has been presented.

*Table 4.5.2 Burt reading test results converted into reading ages*

Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent	
5.3 below	31	41.3	41.3
5.4 - 5.9	8	10.7	52.0
5.10 - 6.2	4	5.3	57.3
6.3 - 6.8	11	14.7	72.0
6.9 -7.2	9	12.0	84.0
7.3 - 7.8	3	4.0	88.0

7.9 - 8.2	2	2.7	90.7
8.3 - 8.8	5	6.7	97.3
8.9 - 9.3	1	1.3	98.7
9.4 - 9.10	1	1.3	100.0
Total	75	100.0	

The table above shows that the reading scores which were later converted into reading age ranged from zero as the minimum reading age to 9.9 as the maximum reading age. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean, minimum, and maximum reading ages which were later compared with the learners' actual age as shown in the table4.3.3 below:

*Table 4.5.3 Descriptive statistics comparing actual age and reading ages*

Measure	Actual Age	Reading Age
Mean	10.9	4.0
Mode	10	5.8
Minimum	8	0
Maximum	17	9.9

The results show that Grade Two learners were reading at age four by the end of their second grade since the test was administered at the end of second grade as shown by the reading age mean score 4.0. Although the actual ages ranged from 8 to 17, the reading age ranged from 0 to 9.9, implying that some pupils could not read anything.

#### **4.5 The Relationship Between Nyanja Reading Performance and English Word Reading Ability (Pearson's Correlation)**

After establishing the reading levels in Nyanja and reading age in English among Grade Two learners' the researcher wanted to find out if there was a relationship between Nyanja word

reading performance and English word reading ability among learners. To achieve this, Pearson's Correlation test was conducted between Nyanja reading scores and the English reading ages recorded.

The results from correlation analysis revealed that L1 (Nyanja) reading performance was a significant predictor of L2 reading performance before instruction in English was given. There was a positive correlation between learners' L1 reading performance and L2 reading word reading,  $r = 0.796$ ,  $n = 75$ ,  $p(2\text{-tailed}) < .001$

#### **4.6 Findings on qualitative data**

Qualitative data was collected in order for the researcher to have a better understanding of the phenomena being investigated which in turn supported the quantitative data presented in the previous sections. It is presented according to the instruments that were used which included the semi-structured interview guides, classroom observation checklist, and document analysis as presented below:

##### **4.6.1 Interview data**

Interview data were collected from Grade Two teachers, school head teachers and DEBS office representative, then classroom observation, and document analysis were also conducted.

##### **4.6.2 Interview data from Grade Two teachers**

The first thing the researcher wanted to find out from teachers was their views on the new language policy which stipulates the use of local languages up to Grade Four (4). The findings showed that the majority of the teachers were in support of the current language policy because it helped in the teaching of literacy. The respondents were asked to give explanations for their positive views towards the new language policy. Some respondents had this to say:

*The policy is a good one in that it will be easy for learners to know how to read. But the challenge is that pupils' time to learn English becomes short. This may give a challenge to learners as they sit for their national examinations at grade seven which are given in English except for Nyanja which comes as a subject (Teacher 1)*

*The current policy is a good one and we hope the government will not be in a hurry to change it before its fruits like what happened with NBTL. (Teacher 2)*

However, a few teachers were highly sceptical of the new language in education policy. One respondent whose views were not in support of the policy had this to say:

*The current policy will limit our children from accessing the best education which is acceptable worldwide. All employment in government requires English and we subject our learners to learning in Nyanja. Where will this language take them to?*

The above responses prompted the researcher to ask respondents what differences were there between PRP and PLP. One respondent said:

*The difference is that PRP came with already prepared materials for teaching, but the current program has no materials.*

Another respondent had the following to say:

*PRP allowed learners to learn literacy in Nyanja in grade one only, while in PLP teaching of literacy in Nyanja goes up to grade 4*

This response indicated that some teachers do not understand the demands of the PLP program whose emphasis is based on the synthetic phonics as the method to be used for teaching initial literacy other than the language experience approach emphasized in PRP.

Head teachers were also interviewed on the same issue of the new language in education policy. All the five head teachers recommended the policy and one head teacher had this to say:

*The use of local language is the way to go if our learners are to become literate, especially that reading in Nyanja is done the way we speak. It is easy to learn to read and write in our language.*

Despite all respondents having a similarly positive view towards the language policy which requires using local languages to teach initial literacy, when asked if there was a change in literacy levels, none was sure about the situation. One respondent had this to say:

*The effects of the policy are not known yet as the government is in a hurry to change from one policy to the other. It is difficult to tell whether there is a change or not.*

The head teachers were further asked to give reasons why literacy levels were low despite the change in language policy which was acknowledged as a positive move by the government.

One respondent pointed to the delayed supply of teaching and learning materials by the government. He explained as follows:

*You know that effective teaching comes when teaching and learning materials are in place. How do we expect teachers to perform miracles when they do not have what to use? When the program started, teachers were given another task of translating work to be taught and it's not easy. Things are likely to change provided we are given teaching and learning materials.*

Among other reasons given were pupil absenteeism, parental low educational levels and lack of teacher commitment towards work.

The interviews further inquired on the views on whether the skills acquired in Zambian languages would help learners learn English faster or not. It was interesting that all head teachers explained that children's L1 would promote the learning of English. One head teacher's concern, however, was over the short period between grade five and grade seven at which national examinations are given in English.

In addition, the researcher had interviews with one of the DEBS too concerning his views on the current language policy. From the collected data, the interviewed education officer acknowledged that the policy was so helpful in as far as eradicating low literacy levels was concerned. When he was asked to comment on the prevailing situation in line with the literacy levels in the district, he complained that the literacy levels were low, however, he did not provide the actual data to justify how low the levels were. When he was asked to give reasons for the low literacy levels in the district, he associated it to poor management skills by school managers. He had this to say:

*The low literacy levels are as a result of poor management skills by some primary school heads. I say so because there are some schools which are doing fine, but others are not.*

The study progressed by asking if the low literacy levels could be associated with teachers' qualifications or experience. In response to the question, the respondent denied saying some teachers who hold the lowest qualifications were known to perform well when compared with those who hold higher qualifications.

Teachers were further asked to explain how they teach initial literacy to help all learners acquire the skills. From the data collected, teachers were able to explain that they start by teaching learners letter sounds (phonics) and progress by teaching how to combine or break

words into the sounds and or syllables (syllabification), from which words and sentences are formed.

Another point that appeared to have been misunderstood by teachers was the concept of the learner-centered approach to teaching. When asked to state methods and activities done in literacy teaching, the common response was: *We use a learner-centered method.* The other activities that teachers mentioned were group work, discussion, and phonics.

In order to establish teachers' abilities to help learners acquire literacy skills and later on help them transfer the same skills to English, another thing the researcher was interested in finding out from teachers was the classroom sitting organization. This is important because the sitting arrangement in the classroom is a factor when it comes to acquiring and learning literacy skills. Besides sitting arrangement can either enhance or hinder the learning of literacy skills. One teacher during interviews described the sitting arrangement adopted in the implementation of PLP as a limiting factor in learners' progress. The teacher had this to say;

*Learners are made to sit in a Johabi (bus) way. It is no longer a requirement that pupils should sit according to their learning abilities". This hinders a teacher from attending to individual learning needs.*

The explanation that was given based on the classroom sitting organization prompted the researcher to ask about how learners individual learning needs were met. When teachers were asked on how individual learners' needs were met, one teacher had this to say,

*In order to help slow learners, we give remedial work such as using grade one work to teach them how to read because grade two books are only good for pupils who already know how to read*

However, after probing further on how they manage to offer remedial work amidst other school activities, it was acknowledged that remedial work was necessary, but it was difficult to give due to other school programmes. This was derived from one statement which was given by one teacher who had this to say.

*We all know the importance of remedial work to our learners, however, it is very difficult to find time outside the teaching hours to offer remedial work to the learners. To make matters worse, even when we give them homework to do at their home, most parents do not know how to how to read too. It is a one man's show; the teacher alone.*

The respondents were also asked on how assessments were done with the quest to help learners improve their literacy levels. The finding showed that the majority of the respondents relied on assessment items prepared by the district. One of the main reasons these majority teachers gave for being in favour of assessments from the district was that they motivated them to work hard as indicated by what one teacher said below:

*Sometimes assessments prepared at the district are helpful because they force us to teach and one can easily compare with how other children are performing elsewhere.*

However, a few respondents, apart from assessing their learners using assessments from the district, they indicated that they prepared more assessments. When asked why they did so, one respondent said:

*Sometimes assessments prepared at the district are helpful because they force us to teach and one can easily compare with how other children are performing elsewhere.*

Another teacher had this to say:

*That kind of assessments only forces teachers to cover the syllabus other than following learners' learning pace.*

The researcher wanted to further establish the challenges that teachers face in the teaching of literacy. This was important because, if the challenges teachers faced were to be overwhelming, it would imply the inability of teachers to help learners acquire literacy skills and also the inability to help learners transfer literacy skills from local languages to English. The finding revealed that there were quite a number of challenges that were raised which included absenteeism by both learners and teachers. Teachers' absenteeism was associated with attending other official duties among other things while learners' absenteeism was as a result of parental low education levels. Parental low levels of education further posed a challenge to children's literacy levels because they were not in a position to help their children.

Other challenges included the lack of interest in education among some learners due to a lack of role models in the communities. Learners, as well as parents, attached no importance to education due to a lack of role models. One respondent raised another challenge concerning the design of textbooks used for teaching literacy.

#### **4.6.2 Data collected through classroom observations**

The researcher observed five (5) Grade Two teachers in six (6) grade Two classes performing literacy tasks with students in the five sampled primary schools. The number of classes observed was six because one teacher had a double stream with one class reporting in the morning and the other class reporting in the afternoon. The classes observed had an average enrolment of 40 to 50 pupils in each class.

The classroom observation helped the researcher to see what goes on inside the classroom during the teaching of literacy, language use, the methods that teachers employ and how teachers ensured that learners learned how to read were among the major focus. Observation is meant to aid the researcher to avoid prejudice (Gall et.al, 2007). Maxwell (2005) observed that interviews are mainly helpful if the researcher wishes to understand the participants' perspective, but inferences about this perspective can only be obtained through the use of observation checklist (refer to appendix 7). The teaching of initial reading was a major concern, however, narrative records of everything the Grade Two teachers did during the literacy hour, and how effectively they did it was the goal of the observations. To be noted in the table on appendix 6, the topics of major concern include phonics (teaches sounds that letters record, works on blending sounds; attends to auditory discrimination; works on print/words with attention going to the relationship between sounds and spellings). Accommodations for differences in abilities. One of the two reasons for including interviews in this study was to acquire information about the means used to accommodate the differences in children's knowledge about and abilities in reading. It was assumed, however, that observation would not only contribute to that information but also make it possible to learn whether what was said and what was done to cope with differences were similar.

The first aspect that made the researcher become inquisitive was how one teacher from school A, who did not hold any teaching qualification was able to teach literacy without many difficulties. The teacher managed to teach literacy while demonstrating that he knew very well the needs of the learners and the demands of teaching literacy in a Zambian language. The pupils appeared motivated. He would segment words into smaller units and ask learners to identify the smaller units in the form of phonemes and syllables and later blend the smaller units to form words.

The teacher who taught two classes was observed in two 1-hour literacy lessons with a view to check whether lesson preparation and methods employed differed in the two classes. It was

observed that nothing was changed. The same lesson plan which was used for the class taught in the morning was the same lesson plan that was used for another class which reported in the afternoon.

#### **4.6.3.1 Language factor for both teachers and learners**

The language factor was considered because the researcher assumed that it would contribute negatively to the learning and teaching process if teachers' and learners' language differed from the language of instruction which was Nyanja. Concerning the languages of teachers, the data showed that out of the five teachers observed, all except one teacher had Nyanja as their mother tongue as well as the language of instruction. The only one who had Lozi as her first language did was very competent in the language of instruction too. All learners had their L1 the same as the language of instruction in all the classes observed.

#### **4.6.3.2 Activities/ strategies used to teach literacy**

During classroom observation, it was found that teaching of literacy was characterised with whole class teaching coupled with question and answer, chorus reading and model reading. That indicated that learners' learning needs were not a priority, instead, syllabus coverage was the main focus. During classroom observation, the researcher had taken a keen interest in noting the methods used, activities done, how individual learner learning needs were met and how assessments were conducted and utilised.

All lessons observed were theme based on where a topic and activities to be done were given in the textbook. For example, in one lesson, the topic was, Ngozi za pamseu, 'Road accidents'. The lesson had a picture showing children crossing the road. The exercise required learners to write their own sentences on how to avoid road accidents. The new vocabulary to be covered included words such as dutsa, 'cross', Imani, 'stop', penyani, 'look. All the information was given in the pupil's textbook.

During observation for this particular lesson taught by one teacher, it was noted that the teacher taught using the phonics method to teach literacy. However, it was further noted that analytic phonics was used to teach new words instead of synthetic phonics. For instance, when teaching the new vocabulary, the teacher requested those learners who could read the new vocabulary words to read, thereafter the whole class was asked to read whole words. Another observation to note was how one teacher continuously pronounced the sounds during

the teaching of phonics to the learners. Sounds were pronounced like syllables. One of the sounds noted was the sound /g/ which was pronounced as /gu/ and learners were told to repeat after her. In all the classes observed, the whole class approach to teaching was dominant as explained in section 4.4.2 below:

#### 4.6.3.3 Whole class teaching

The other aspect that was observed was the sitting arrangement of all the classes observed. Whole class teaching was the commonest strategy that was observed that teachers used during the teaching of literacy. Learners sitting arrangement did not follow learning pace groups. Below is the diagram showing the sitting organisation in all the six classes observed.

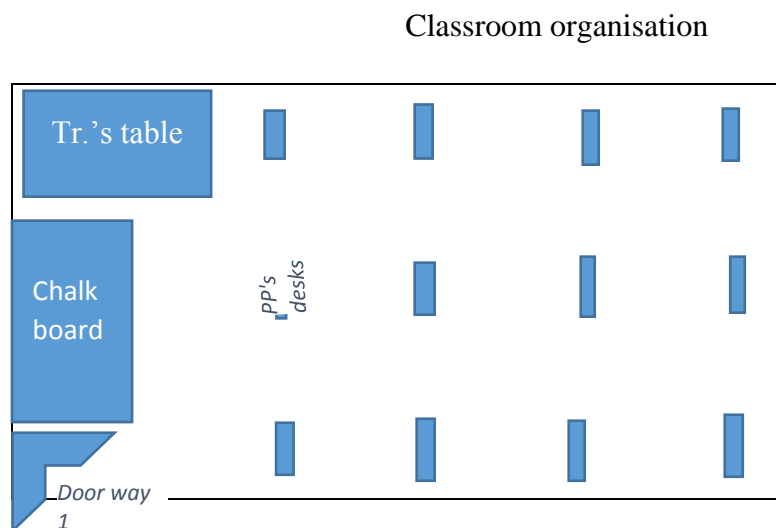


Figure 4.4.1 : Classroom organisation for whole class teaching.

All learners were facing the chalkboard as shown in the diagram in figure 2 above. The next section presents findings from semi-structured interviews with grade teachers.

#### 4.6.4 Document analysis data

A review of documents was another way that supported the study. The documents that were analysed included lesson plans, weekly forecasts, schemes of work and assessment records. These documents were important to this study because they were assumed to be of help in providing information on the readiness and abilities of teachers in helping learners acquire literacy skills and later on help them transfer the skills from L1 to English.

When the assessment record, lesson plans, weekly forecasts, and schemes were checked, it was found that these documents were planned in such a way that they met to the demands of the syllabus which conforms to the grade level competencies. However, the implementation of the planned work did not demonstrate to help learners much because there was a gap between what learners were able to do and the syllabus expectations which were broken down into schemes, weekly forecasts, and daily lesson plans. For example, the National Literacy Framework (2013, p.14) stipulates that, at Grade Two level, "learners will be able to demonstrate basic skills in reading and writing simple and compound sentences and understanding of short written texts". However, most learners for whom these documents were planned were reading at a level far below what was expected of them.

The researcher also had time to check through the teacher's and pupil's textbooks to see how the lessons were designed. It was found that the textbooks had topics to be covered for the whole week and a revision lesson to be covered on the last day of the week was provided. One thing that was noted about the topics was that a lesson prescribed for a particular day covered only one component of the language skills in each lesson. For example, a lesson could be based on 'Writing', then the other language skills such as listening and speaking, and reading would come as independent lessons. That arrangement demanded a teacher's creativity to cover the other language skills which were not highlighted in the textbook.

#### **4.7 Summary of the chapter**

The chapter has presented findings of the study which followed the research objectives and questions. The chapter provided demographic information about the research participants. Then quantitative data that reflected the reading and writing/spelling abilities in a Zambian language; Nyanja and English decoding abilities among Grade Two learners were presented. Finally, qualitative data collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis has also been presented.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 5.1 Overview

This chapter discusses the findings based on the research objectives and questions. The main goal of the study was to ascertain whether grade two learners were in a position to transfer literacy skills acquired in a Zambian language to literacy in English by the end of second grade. Findings on the research questions which sought to find out on the reading and writing abilities of Grade Two learners in a Zambian language and English decoding abilities will be discussed. Qualitative data which helped explain in detail the quantitative data collected through interviews with grade Two teachers, head teachers and DEBS office representatives and data collected through classroom observation and document analysis will also be discussed in this chapter. The chapter will close with a chapter summary.

#### 5.2 Teachers' and learners background and its impact on the teaching of initial literacy

10 Grade Two teachers and 75 (38 boys and 37 girls) participated in the study. The study found that teachers involved in the study had different backgrounds such as years in service and their qualifications. While it was assumed that the teachers with higher qualifications would demonstrate the best practices in the classroom, it was surprising that one teacher who had no teaching qualification demonstrated good practice in teaching literacy compared to other teachers who had a teaching qualification. For example, the teacher who continuously pronounced sounds like syllables was a well-trained teacher holding a primary teacher's diploma.

This finding supports the assertion by Wray (2006) who emphasizes the importance of teacher's knowledge and how this knowledge can be acquired. In his view, he considers that teachers need subject context knowledge which is an understanding of the main concepts, principles, skills, and content of the areas which a teacher will teach. He advises that one cannot assume that he or she has the required subject knowledge as a result of one's own education, whether at college or university. One needs to audit and top up his or her subject knowledge by reading or attending courses.

The information given by Wray (2006) was practically proven in this study as the teacher who did not hold any teaching qualification performed so well in as far as the teaching of literacy

was concerned. When asked on how he manages to build literacy skills in learners yet he was not trained, he pointed out that he acquired the knowledge from the Teacher Group Meetings, TGMs held termly at the district resource centre and school as well.

### **5.3 Reading and writing abilities among Grade Two learners by the end of second grade**

The first objective of this study sought to assess the reading and writing abilities of Grade Two learners by the end of second grade. Learners were assessed in reading and writing performance in their first language because the study aimed at investigating whether the learners were able to transfer literacy skills from L1; Nyanja to English before instruction in English was given. The National Literacy Framework (NLF) clearly indicates that when learners enter Grade Two, they are introduced to oral English. Reading and writing, that is literacy in English is introduced in Grade Three (3). This aspect, therefore, entailed that the transfer of literacy skills from L1 to English was dependent on the L1 skills that learners have.

To achieve the objective, tests in L1 word reading and writing/dictation tests comprising of 10 words in each test were used. The words used varied in their syllable structure from consonant-vowel CV to CCCV syllable structure were used. The mean score in Nyanja word reading was 5.5 with a standard deviation of 4.3. Out of a total population of 75(100%), 41(56%) scored above the mean score. As can be seen, the mean score was slightly above 50% of the total score with a population that is also slightly above 50% of the total population scoring above the mean score. The situation was worse in Nyanja word writing as the mean score ( $M = 4.4$ ) was below 50% of the total score of 10(100%), with a standard deviation of 3.9. Out of a total population sample of 75(100%), 54% scored above the low mean of 4.4 with a standard deviation of 3.9.

Basing the interpretation of the results of this study on reading and writing performance according to the mean and standard deviation scores, it can be seen that the reading mean score ( $M = 5.5$ ,  $SD = 4.3$ ) and the writing mean score ( $M = 4.4$ ,  $SD = 3.9$ ) were both affected by high standard deviations. The standard deviation for writing ( $M = 4.4$ ,  $SD = 3.9$ ) was smaller which means that writing performance was a bit consistent among learners when compared with reading performance. Since the standard deviation is the measure of variation based on measuring how far each data value deviates from the mean, it means that the standard deviation of 4.3 in reading entails that the scores were highly spread away from the mean.

In normal cases, if the scores are equal, the standard deviation is equal to zero. However, that is not the case in this study. The higher standard deviation in reading which was close to the mean score itself entails that the scores were highly spread and that it was affected by outliers. The outliers of the scores were very important too in this study that the researcher decided to include them in the study. As shown in table 4.3.7, while the cumulative frequency of 21(28%) of the total population got zero scores out of 10, another group of 22(29.3%) out of 75(100%) pupils got 10 out of 10. Then the rest of the population sample was divided in between the outliers which are zero (0) and ten (10).

The finding indicates that pupils reading and writing abilities were generally low. The findings of this study are similar to the findings of other studies that reported low literacy levels among Grade Two learners (Mwanza, 2012, Matafwali, 2010, Zimba, 2007). The baseline study of the Zambian Primary Reading Program conducted in 1999 also noted that among Grade One to Six learners that were tested, the majority of children that attempted to read, read at two grades below grade level in English and three grades below grade level in their own Zambian language. The Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality, SACMEQ (2010) also noted that among Grade six learners that were tested in reading, only 27.4% were able to read at a basic competency level

Based on the assumption that learners could only transfer the literacy skills which they have acquired, the findings on reading and writing in a Zambian language predicted negative English word reading ability among learners. This is in line with Libese and Mtapuri (2014) who questions that 'what will transfer, and to where' if learners are not proficient in their L1. Sibanda (2015) urges that "Once early literacy is founded on a shaky pedestal, it has foundational and lasting effects on later literacy and all future learning." The assertion by Sibanda justifies why it was important to assess literacy levels in L1 prior to ascertaining whether they could transfer the acquires skills. When learners were assessed in Nyanja word reading and writing at the end of their second grade through tests, the results indicated that learners had not acquired the literacy competencies matching their grade level following the guidelines in the National Literacy Framework (2013).

Following Ehri's (2005) model of learning to read which follows four phases of learning to read, the learners could be described as falling under the second phase; partial alphabetic phase in which learners are able to link only some of the letters and sounds usually first and last to read words. The partial-alphabetic phase is characterised by children recognising some

letters of the alphabet and can use them together with context to remember words by sight. The Partial Alphabetic stage uses "Phonetic cue Reading" which later demands the use of some letter-sound cues.

For the learners to be able to learn to read in an alphabetic language, several studies have reported the importance of phonological awareness being a strong predictor of reading (Jongejan, 2017, Stanovich, 1995, Mengmeng et.al, 2017; Hulme, 2013). Writing systems are based on some units of the spoken word: syllables, phonemes or morphemes. The implication for learning to read is that children must discover these phonemes in their language and then associate them with the graphemes used to represent them in writing (Mwansa, 2017).

In this study, results indicated that learners needed more time of instruction in a Zambian language because the inability to read by most learners indicated a lack of this strong predictor of reading.

While the literature point at other predictors of reading such as vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, (Carrol, 2005, Hulme & Snowling, 2013; Wildova, 2014), phonological awareness was pointed out as the strongest predictor of all these predictors of reading. In other words, phonological awareness can be viewed as a prerequisite of the other predictors of reading. Before children can understand how the writing system of their community represents their spoken language, they need to be aware of the relevant units in spoken language. This insight includes children's awareness of phonological units such as words, syllables, onsets-rimes, and phonemes. Several studies have suggested that phonological awareness is highly correlated with word recognition and spelling (Adams, 1990, Goswani & Ziegler, 2006). The findings of this study, therefore suggest that learners were not fully equipped with the much needed phonological skill to enable learners to read and write.

There is a clear indication that grade two learners still needed more instruction in a Zambian language by the end of second grade for them to acquire phonological awareness skill as well as other skills which leads to learning to read in an alphabetic writing system.

The study further investigated whether gender was a factor affecting literacy performance among Grade Two learners at the end of second grade. The next section discusses the findings.

### **5.3.1 Nyanja word reading abilities among Grade Two learners by gender**

When the Nyanja word reading abilities were examined by gender, it was found that there was a statistically significant difference between boys' and girls' reading abilities. When boys' and girls' performance in Nyanja word reading test was compared using the independent sample t-test, it was also found that boys ( $M = 5.1$ ,  $SD = 3.7$ ) statistically significantly performed better than girls ( $M = 3.7$ ,  $SD = 4.1$ );  $t(73) = 1.53$ ,  $p = .100$ . Generally, it can be concluded that boys' performance is better than girls' performance in literacy.

From such findings, there is a need for more research on gender studies on literacy-related issues. Children who are subjected to the same instructional procedures are not supposed to show such significant differences. There is more than just an instructional procedure that can cause such differences. Other studies are needed if gender-related issues in literacy are to be solved.

The following section discusses the findings of English decoding abilities among Grade Two learners at the end of second grade.

### **5.3.2 English reading abilities among Grade Two learners by the end of second grade**

Grade two learners English word reading abilities were tested through a Burt word reading test. The actual age of the learners ranged from eight years to seventeen years. The researcher doubted the authenticity of the learner who reported that he was seventeen years old because the standard age for entering Grade One in Zambia is seven years old. However, after probing further, it was confirmed that the learner was seventeen years old. He was delayed to start school due to cattle herding before he was given a chance to start school.

Following the Education For All (EFA) global movement led by UNESCO to which Zambia is a signatory, education for all is mandatory and the movement aims to meet the learning needs of all children, youths, and adults. Thus, such happenings are not surprising. One concern however about such late school entry is the wonder whether entering school late like that has positive or negative effects in the academic as well as social interactions. Since the current study did not focus on that matter, it is not known how whether age is another factor that contributes to literacy performance.

After collecting data from individual learners, the researcher assessed the learner's English word reading ability by administering a Burt reading test which is an international tool for

assessing English word reading ability. The test was administered following the test guidelines that are provided as explained in the methodology section. This test was suitable for this study because research has shown that literacy skills related to decoding tasks of reading and writing do indeed transfer. Therefore, it was assumed that if learners acquired some literacy skills in a Zambian language; Nyanja reading skills, in this case, they will be able to transfer those skills to read given English words despite not having been instructed in English. To account for results like these, Cummins (1981) proposes the Common Underlying Proficiency model, whereby, skills knowledge and concepts learned in any language can be accessed through different languages. There is no need to relearn acquired knowledge.

It should also be made clear in this study that literacy is defined differently. In this study, literacy has been limited to encoding and decoding skills and functional abilities which involve rather low-level skills and are generally agreed to transfer. These include prereading skills of directionality, sequencing, ability to distinguish shapes and sounds, and knowledge that written symbols correspond to sounds and can be decoded in order to and direction (Lessow- Hurley, 1990). Following this view of literacy, Perkins and Solomon (1989) in Mwansa (2015) defined the term 'transfer' as, "The ability to apply knowledge, skill, and specific strategies from one domain to other novel situations." Mwansa (2017) calls such learning; 'deep learning' as opposed to rote learning. Therefore, developing literacy skills using the learners' first language is not a share waste of time.

After administering the test to the learners, the researcher converted the reading scores following the outlined guidelines of the test. The reading age ranged from zero (0) to nine point nine (9.9) among Grade Two learners whose actual age ranged from eight (8) to seventeen (17) years. From the calculated mean reading age, it was found that Grade Two (2) learners could read at age four (4) by the end of their second grade. This finding did not come by surprise once seen through the lens of Nyanja word reading performance among the learners. From the perspective of language transfer studies, it is all agreed upon to say while reading in a given language, readers have access to the other language that exists in their minds. Therefore, improvement in one language can, therefore, result in improvements in other languages and vice-versa. A clear manifestation of such improvements can be clearly found in the process aspect of reading.

The fact that reading in a Zambian language was low, it indicates that learners had little to transfer from their first language to English by the end of second grade. However, one thing is

clear, that although learners could read at a low level of age four (4), the transfer of literacy skills was evident. This suggests that reading strategies are transferrable across-linguist distance.

These findings of this study further confirm the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis as developed by Cummins (1978) who argues that certain first language (L1) knowledge can be positively transferred during the process of the second language (L2) acquisition. The L1 linguistic knowledge and skills that a child possesses can be extremely instrumental to the development of corresponding abilities in L2. Cummins goes further to point out the condition on which transfer can successfully occur. She says, "An integral component of these facilitative aspects of language influence is that the L1 must be sufficiently developed prior to the extensive exposure to the L2." In this study, the low reading results recorded, therefore, predicted the low reading levels in English

This indicated that grade two learners were not ready to transition from literacy in a Zambian language to literacy in English. There was a need for more instruction in a Zambian language if learners were to be able to decode English words. The finding is in line with other studies such as Rosecrans et al (2012) who reported a correlation between the length of time learners to spend learning in L1 and the effectiveness of their transfer of learning through the second language. The findings of this study, therefore, suggest that two years of L1 instruction is not sufficient to develop the requisite literacy skills to allow for cross-linguistic transfer especially for children from rural places and that the languages involved differ in their orthographic systems.

The findings of this study further commensurate with other studies; (Durgunoghu et.al 2002) who examined the relationships between phonological awareness and reading in Native Spanish speakers learning English as a second language L2. They found that in Grade 1, phonological processing skills in both the first language (L1) and L2 correlated with L2 word recognition. Besides, children who had strong Spanish phonological awareness and word recognition skills performed much better when reading English words and English-like pseudo words than did children who had weak Spanish phonological awareness and word recognition skills.

The conclusion drawn was that phonological awareness training could facilitate children's ability to read a second language (English). In this study, it was not surprising to find that learners could only read at age four in English since their performance in their L1 was low.

Other studies, however, presented results that are interestingly indirectly linked with this study. Wurr's (2014) study indicated that linguistic Knowledge was consistently a more powerful predictor upwards of 30 percent while the first language literacy had an upward 20 percent prediction of second language acquisition. The study examined both the linguistic/grammatical knowledge and first language (L1) reading skills and that either facet, that is L2 knowledge or L1 reading would be the better predictor of second language reading performance. The results indicated that firm first language reading skills could not help learners compensate when reading the second language. A lack of second language knowledge hindered the reading process.

What should be considered about such findings is that instances of negative transfer in word recognition and spelling performance are inevitable (Geva & Wang, 2001). For instance, when learners were asked to read English words, those who could read, read English words as they read in Nyanja words. They interchanged words between Nyanja and English. For example, words like 'some' were read as though one was reading a Nyanja word. Therefore, it can be concluded that languages have some differences as in sounds, letters, grammatical surface structure, and many others and some areas overlap. Reading strategies fall in the area of overlap between languages as claimed in the linked-languages model, making languages in one mind.

Pedagogically, it can be implied that it does matter from where L1 or L2 we begin teaching learners to read. The effects will be seen in other languages while doing the reading as the reading strategies are known to be transferrable.

Durgunoghu (2001), therefore, advises that if language learners LLs have certain strengths in their first language L1, and those strengths are known to transfer across languages, then we can expect that the language learners will develop those proficiencies in their L2 as their L2 proficiency develops. The fact that learners were able to read English words though at the level far below their age indicated that transfer occurred from Nyanja to English.

In this study, grade two learners indicated through test scores that they had not acquired much reading and writing skills a Zambian language by the end of their second grade. Some studies showed that phonological awareness, decoding skills, and many other skills are transferrable across languages (Durgunoghu et.al 2002). They observed that aspects like decoding are transferrable from L1 to the target language. In this study, those learners who could read in Nyanja proved the assertion put forward by these studies.

The study by Cummins (2005) goes beyond what other researchers suggested that other linguistic components defy linguistic transfer. Cummins explains that, "... Although the surface aspects, for example, pronunciation and fluency of different languages are clearly separate, there is an underlying proficiency that is common across languages." This common underlying proficiency makes possible the transfer of cognitive or academic literacy and related proficiency from one language to another. Cummins clarified further that for the dissimilar languages, the transfer is on conceptual and cognitive elements, whereas for cognate languages, it is both linguistic and conceptual elements (Cummins, 2005, Jiang, 2011, Heugh, 2006). According to Cummins and other scholars, there are five possible cross-linguistic transfers that a learner can benefit from once L1 competency is fully acquired. They include conceptual, metacognitive and metalinguistic, for example, vocabulary acquisition strategies; pragmatic such as non-verbal communication strategies, specific linguistic elements, for instance, word formation and phonological awareness (words representing particular sounds). This assertion, therefore, entails that inadequate development of L1 can cause an inability for transfer of linguistic abilities (Cummins,2005; Perfetti & Hart, 2002).

For all these assertions put forward by Cummins to be fully investigated, it requires learners whose L1 proficiency is well grounded which were not the case in this study. Learners needed more time for L1 instruction. At this point, teachers need to strategise on how they can help learners acquire literacy skills in their L1 and how they can improve on the already acquired skills for learners to become proficient in their L2. The next section discusses the findings on the qualitative data that helped to explain in detail the quantitative data discussed above.

#### **5.4 Qualitative data**

Qualitative data presented in the presentation of the findings chapter was collected in order to have a clear understanding of the phenomenon under discussion. The investigator wanted to understand why certain things were done in a certain manner and what was done by who and for what purposes. Therefore, a number of methods were used. They included interviews with Grade Two teachers, school head teachers and DEBS office representative, classroom observation, and document analysis. The next section discusses the findings following the data collection procedure that was used.

#### **5.4.1 Interview data**

The respondents who participated in providing qualitative data in this study included 10 Grade Two teachers, five head teachers, and one DEBS office representative. The findings collected are discussed here below:

Among the issues which the researcher wanted to find out from teachers was their views on the new language policy which stipulates the use of local languages up to grade four. In particular, the research was interested in their knowledge of the NBTL, PRP and PLP programs aimed at improving literacy levels in lower primary schools. The findings showed that the majority of the teachers were in support of the current language policy which mandates the use of local languages in the teaching of initial literacy from preschool up to Grade Four (4).

The acknowledgment by teachers on the positive impact of the current language policy which mandates the use of learners' L1 to teach literacy and other subjects is in line with so many studies that have reported advantages of using mother tongue education (Cummins, 1981). The reported advantages include the prevention of delays in learning because children learn better and faster in the language they can understand. Children enjoy school more as they feel more at home and pupils tend to show increased self-esteem. Not only that, but parents also can participate fully in their children's education regardless of their educational level. Banda (2005) also wrote that Zambian languages have a one-to-one correspondence between spelling and pronunciation. This means that once Zambian languages are used for four (4) years, they would provide the learner with an extra advantage in reading and writing abilities.

Cummins's (1979) Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis further posits that the acquisition of a second language is partly a function of L1 linguistic skills. Hence, a strong foundation in a child's L1 is believed to contribute positively in the second language learning process. MOGE (2013) through the National Literacy Framework which is a guiding tool for the implementation of the Primary Literacy Program, indicates that instruction in the local language will give learners a strong foundation on which to build literacy and language skills in English later.

Despite these well-acknowledged benefits of using mother tongue in teaching and learning of initial literacy, some teachers view this approach as causing language interference and that it delays learners from learning a second language. Such views contradict Cummins theory (1991, 1994) that points out that when children that learn through their home language; they

are not only learning this language in a narrow sense, they are learning concepts and intellectual skills that are equally relevant to their ability to function in a second language. For example, learners who know that nouns have plurals in their mother tongue understand the concept of plurals of nouns. In order to give plural forms of nouns in the second language, they do not need to re-learn the concept of plurals, they simply need to acquire new labels for an intellectual skill they have already acquired. It is from such an understanding that Perkins and Solomon (1989) in Mwansa (2015) defined the term 'transfer' as, "The ability to apply knowledge, skill, and specific strategies from one domain to other novel situations." Mwansa (2017) calls such learning; 'deep learning' as opposed to rote learning.

Apart from Cummins theory that justifies the benefits of teaching initial literacy using learners L1, scholars in reading acquisition in multiple languages have found that learning to decode print that is breaking apart or "sounding out" written words into letter sounds can be done in almost all alphabetic languages (Linan-Thompson and Vaughn, 2007). From what has been discussed on the matter of the language policy, it indicates that the language policy being implemented under the PLP should be maintained to realise its benefits.

The other question that was directed to the head teachers sought to investigate reasons why literacy levels were low despite the change in language policy which was acknowledged as a positive move by the government. The challenge of a lack of teaching and learning materials were pointed out. According to the head teachers, the pointed out that when the Primary Literacy Program was introduced, there were no books that matched the program. Instead, teachers were demanded to translate the work for particular grades in order to meet the demands of the policy before going to teach. Head teachers lamented that translation in work from one language to another is not a simple task and this made the whole process of teaching a tedious activity for the teachers.

The answer given by the head teachers is an eye-opener to policymakers. In most cases, policies are well focussed, but the planning is defective, making implementation difficult. Resources available for the implementation of a given educational policy are often overestimated and thereby elicit unrealistic expectations that fail to materialise. The NLF (2013, p. 11) also acknowledges that the success of any literacy program depends on the availability of suitable reading materials to sustain and reinforce literacy skills.

Teachers were further asked to explain how they teach initial literacy to help all learners acquire the skills. From the data collected, teachers were able to explain that they start by

teaching learners letter sounds (phonics) and progress by teaching how to combine or break words into the sounds and or syllables (syllabification), from which words and sentences are formed.

The answers given by teachers on how they help learners to acquire literacy skills in L1 to enable them to transfer the skills to English indicated clearly that teachers know how to impart literacy skills into the learners. When teachers were asked individually on how they teach literacy to help learners acquire literacy skills, they explained the process so well. However, what was practiced during actual teaching did not demonstrate the knowledge they had in the teaching of literacy. The finding is in line with Wray (2006) who contends that knowing how to make the knowledge, skills, and understandings of subjects accessible and meaningful to children – how best to represent particular ideas; what examples to draw; what kind of explanations to offer; how to relate what needs to be taught to children's experiences or interest and so on is very important in the teaching and learning process.

While all teachers reported that they taught literacy using learner-centered methods, there was an indication that they misunderstood the concept of the learner-centered approach to teaching. When asked to state methods and activities done in literacy teaching, the common response was:

The other activities that teachers mentioned were group work, discussion, and phonics. However, what was reported in the interview did not match with the classroom practices observed during a classroom observation. One of the characteristics of learner-centered teaching is that teaching includes explicit skill instruction. This characteristic was not observed during classroom teaching. For instance, in a lesson whose theme was 'Reading' one of the teachers observed introduced the new vocabulary by simply asking those learners who could read the words while the rest of the class was asked to repeat after the friends. The researcher's expectation was that the new vocabulary words were supposed to be segmented into smaller units by either the pupils or the teacher and then blended to form the words so that learners could see how those words were formed. Such explicitness of teaching reading was missing.

When teachers were asked why they conducted reading lessons the way they did such as the teacher reading the texts for the pupils most of the time other than involving the learners, the teachers confirmed that pupils' reading performance was so poor. The given responses support quantitative data that has been reported in the 'presentation of the findings chapter. The

results of this study are similar to the findings of Tambulukani (2015) who focussed on the importance of the language in which initial reading is taught and reported low reading levels. Similar results were also reported by Matafwali (2005) who sought to find out the initial reading performance levels of pupils to whom Chichewa was not their first language compared with pupils to whom Chichewa was their L1 in multi-ethnic classes in selected Chipata Urban Basic schools.

From results on pupil's reading performance in both Zambian language and English from both quantitative and qualitative results shows that learners were still in their second phase of learning to read according to Ehri's (2005) phases of learning to read. The second phase is the partial-alphabetic phase in which children recognise some letters of the alphabet and can use them together with context to remember words by sight. Children under this phase use 'Phonetic cue reading' in which the reader uses a combination of reading some letters in the words and using these to attempt a pronunciation. The first and final letters in the words are the most important during this phase. If teachers are to help learners break through this phase to the next phase which is the full alphabetic phase, there is a need to use a lot of teaching aids that can aid learners to get engaged in reading.

During classroom observation, the researcher noticed the common classroom sitting organisation. The researcher paid particular attention to this aspect because the sitting arrangement in the classroom is a factor when it comes to acquiring and learning literacy skills. Besides sitting arrangement can either enhance or hinder the learning of literacy skills.

Some literature has indicated that the teacher's educational philosophy will be reflected in the layout of the classroom. The teacher should be able to justify the arrangement of desks and chairs on the basis of certain educational goals (Sommer, 1977). The author went on to give a few examples: The traditional row and column style with all seats facing the front lends itself to 'sit – and – listen to teaching, for group work where students share tasks and cooperate, 'cluster tables are best'. The fact that learners were made to sit in the traditional way in all the classes observed, defeats the response given by teachers that they taught using a learner-centered approach.

The other issue the researcher sought to find out was on how assessments were done with the quest to help learners improve their literacy levels. The finding showed that the majority of the respondents relied on assessment items prepared by the district. One of the main reasons

these majority teachers gave for being in favour of assessments from the district was that they motivated them to work hard

However, a few respondents, apart from assessing their learners using assessments from the district, they indicated that they prepared more assessments. From what was reported as well as observed, teachers conducted daily informal formative assessments which were intended to spot check on learners' learning, through questioning, demonstrations, and observations during lessons. However, schools were not conducting weekly assessments following the National Literacy Framework (2013) guidelines. The framework assessment scheme guide emphasises on the need for schools to conduct a series of formative and summative assessments that will measure learners' achievement of the literacy outcomes. It is from such school-based assessment programs that learners progress can be determined so that further action is instituted. The answers given on how the assessment was done did not show that the assessments that were done achieved the intended purpose. The Framework further indicates that head teachers have a role in supporting literacy assessment activities such as monitoring and supervising the assessment process. The fact that some teachers administered assessments prepared at the district only confirms what was reported by the DEBS representative that the low literacy levels recorded in the district were as a result of poor management skills by the school administrators.

During the interview session with the Grade Two teachers, the researcher found out how on how teachers met the learners' individual learning needs. Teachers demonstrated the need for the provision of remedial work as one of the best options. However, after probing further on how they manage to offer remedial work amidst other school activities, it was acknowledged that remedial work was necessary, but it was difficult to give due to other school programs.

There is enough research base that has indicated that children who have problems in phonemic awareness and phonics require individual support or remedial work. When teachers were asked how they attend to individual learners needs in classes that were characterised with whole class teaching, the general consensus was that remedial work was needed. However, when teachers were asked how they manage to offer remedial work to meet learners needs, teachers were open to mention that remedial work was difficult for teachers to offer due to the numerous duties assigned to them. Torgersen (2002) however, states that children who have problems in reading require remedial work that focuses on phonemic awareness and letter-sound knowledge. The assertion by Torgersen (2002) needs to be considered so

seriously if the reading and writing abilities are to improve and later help learners transfer the skills from Zambian language to English.

Teachers were further asked on the importance of assessment in the teaching of literacy. In response, all the teachers attested to that assessment was an important aspect of the teaching and learning process. When they were asked how often they assess learners, they said they assess learners three times in a term; that is in week five (5), week ten (10) and end of the term. When asked to provide evidence for that information, only one teacher produced the previous end of term results. The response given was that the tests were set at the district and once the results were compiled, the record was taken to the district.

From the information given, the researcher inferred that teachers who were interviewed assess learners summatively after a period of time as opposed to formative assessment. NICHD (2000) urges that understanding of the developmental benchmarks is vital in the teaching and learning process. The understanding can be reached through a better understanding of strategies for assessing and monitoring learners progress. In a situation where teachers indicate a deficiency in such knowledge gives some reasons for learners' performance in reading. It is well known that formative assessment helps in making informed decisions about how learners can be helped. The absence of formative assessment can be said to have impacted the performance of learners negatively in reading and writing.

To achieve this, formative assessment should be done by teachers to investigate learners reading problems so that those who demonstrate reading problems such as lack of letter-sound knowledge and phonemic awareness are helped (NICHD,2000). It was heart-breaking to learn that teachers interviewed only assessed learners in week five, ten and end of term from which the assessment records did not mean anything more to the teaching and learning process. NICHD (2000) highlighted that it is a good practice to use assessment results to plan remedial work.

Another aspect where the researcher sought clarification from the teachers observed was on 'why teachers took the active role of reading during teaching and yet one of the responses on methods of teaching used was the learner-centered approach to teaching reading. While it is recommendable to model how to read to learners, research has demonstrated that successful teachers of elementary students in their early stages of reading understand how students learn to read and how to provide support. Teachers who adopt a student-centered approach to instruction increases opportunities for student engagement (NICHD, 2000).

#### **5.4.2 Classroom observations**

It was surprising to see the daily attendance of pupils whose average total enrolments ranged between forty (40) to fifty (50) and above in classes observed. However, all the classes observed never had pupils more than thirty-five (35) during the time of classroom observation. Absenteeism was so prevalent. The finding is in line with the contents of the National Literacy Framework, NLF (2013, p. 11) which contends that "One of the challenges and threats to literacy instruction is that contact time between teachers and learners is not sufficient. ...the amount of time teachers and learners are engaged in learning is reduced due to ...absenteeism." It was therefore not surprising to see how learners performed in literacy tests. With the high prevalence of absenteeism, literacy levels are likely not to improve despite the good educational policies in place. William (2000) posits that valuable information cannot be repeated when the teacher reteaches lessons to absent student.

Another thing that was noted during classroom observations, was the classroom organisation. All classes observed were characterised with whole class teaching as indicated by the sitting arrangement. From some studies reviewed, it was found that the way teachers teach and how learners get exposed to learning opportunities contributes to learner achievement. The use of teaching instruction coupled with different classroom interactions such as whole class, group work and co-operative among others produce different outcomes (Hardman et. al, 2009).

The findings of this study are consistent with this literature. When teachers were observed teaching the one-hour literacy lessons, it was observed that a whole class approach to teaching literacy was common with a few instances of group work. The whole class approach to teaching is known to be detrimental as individual learners' learning needs become difficult to look after (Hardman et.al, 2009). Other strategies such as group work, collaborative learning, one to one have been shown to produce positive results.

During classroom observation, another area of focus was how the teachers employed the methods of teaching initial literacy. It was observed that teachers used the phonics method to teach literacy. However, they were not consistent in using the recommended synthetic phonics. The finding is in line with Sihatschneider (2005) who contended that classroom instruction is one of the most important sources of children's performance in reading. The author explained that children fail to achieve proficient reading skills because they do not receive appropriate amounts of particular types of literacy instruction during primary grades.

Early literacy instruction that is balanced between phonics and more meaningful reading experiences has been shown to be more effective than the instruction of others (Sihatschneider 2005).

In this study, the researcher was made to hold a view that teachers had sound knowledge of how to teach literacy, but its practical aspect was questionable. The teaching of reading in languages that are transparent such as Zambian languages demand the usage of explicit phonics that show emphasis on sounds to build syllables and blending the syllables to form words and so on. The findings from classroom observations demonstrated that teachers do not fully understand that there are some elements in teaching reading which are key and that their mishandling can negatively affect learners learning to read. The key elements include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Curriculum framework, 2013).

Another finding worth noting was how one teacher continuously pronounced the sounds when teaching literacy. The individual letter sounds were pronounced like syllables. The finding was not in tandem with what NRP (2000) encourages on how best to teach literacy.

National Reading Panel, NRP, and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, NICHD (2000) reported that children who were successfully learning to read had a working understanding of how sounds are represented alphabetically, with sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency. It was further reported that instructional measures taken by teachers had a great impact while citing on explicitness in phonemic awareness and phonics which were reported to improve learners' reading, spelling, decoding, and comprehension. An approach called systematic phonics instruction was identified as a key means of building essential skills.

From the results obtained from reading and spelling tests in the Zambian language, it was predicted that decoding of English would be negatively affected. The next section discusses the findings on assessment.

### **5.4.3 How teachers plan in order to help learners acquire literacy skills**

Planning what to teach and how to teach lessons has a bearing on helping learners acquire literacy skills. Some literature has indicated that good planning may yield good and effective

classroom teaching (Woolfolk, et. al 2008). During interviews, teachers were asked how they teach literacy to help learners acquire literacy skills. The question was answered in a way that indicated that literacy lessons were taught excellently. However, the review of documents revealed some degree of contra view from what was reported verbally.

#### **5.4.4 Lesson plans, weekly forecasts, and schemes of work**

All the six teachers had schemes of work which were prepared from either the syllabus or textbooks. When asked to provide weekly forecasts and lesson plans, only two teachers had the requested documents. three teachers had neither weekly forecast, lesson plans nor teaching locally made teaching aids. They taught using textbooks. The finding has helped explain some of the causes of learners' poor performance in literacy, as Ackers & Hardman (2001) wrote that frequent and relevant use of visual aids and locally produced learning materials beyond the use of the textbooks promote interactive pedagogy and learning from students. The common trend found in schools was that teachers did not have daily lesson plans as well as teaching aids. Instead, they taught using textbooks. This finding confirms the response which was given by the DEBS representative that low literacy skills were partly as a result of poor management skills by school managers as the saying goes; 'failing to prepare is preparing to fail'.

#### **5.4.5 Strategies used in the classroom to teach literacy**

During classroom observations, the activities used when teaching literacy that was seen included question and answer, syllabification, picture discussion, storytelling, reading and writing which were recommendable activities. These activities promote literacy learning, however, activities such as reading were in most cases done by the teachers themselves as the learners listened passively. Research has demonstrated that engaging learners in the learning process increase their attention and focus, motivates them to practice higher level critical thing skills and promotes meaningful learning experiences. Teachers who adopt a learner-centered approach to instruction increases opportunities for learners' engagement, which helps everyone more successful to achieve the course of the program or learning objective, in this case being able to read and write (Acker and Hardman, 2001). The next section provides a summary of the chapter.

## **5.5 Summary**

The chapter has presented the discussion of findings that followed the research objectives. Findings from tests on reading and writing in Zambian language and reading in English has been discussed. Differences in reading ability among boys and girls have been presented. In English word reading, the findings show that learners were reading at age four. Qualitative data from classroom observation, document analysis and interviews with Grade Two teachers, head teachers, and DEBS representative have also been discussed. The discussion followed the research objectives.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 Overview

This chapter sums up the entire study. To do that a reminder of the goal of the research study with questions that were derived from the research objectives will be presented and the conclusion of the study will follow. The chapter will close with recommendations. The study sought to investigate whether grade two learners were ready to transition from literacy in Zambian language to literacy in English. The research questions that guided the study were as follows; **1.** Are grade two learners able to read and write in Nyanja by the end of second grade? **2.** Are grade two learners able to decode English words by the end of second grade? **3.** Is there a relationship between Nyanja word reading performance and English word reading among Grade two learners by the end of second grade?

#### 6.2 Conclusion and implications

This section outlines the conclusions and implications of the research objective that sought to find out the reading and writing abilities of grade two learners by the end of second grade.

##### 6.2.1 Grade Two learners reading and writing abilities in Nyanja and English decoding abilities

It has been shown in this study that that grade two learners reading and writing abilities were low ( $M = 5.5$ ) in reading and ( $M = 4.4$ ) in writing by the end of grade two. It was found that there was a significant difference between reading and writing abilities among grade two learners by the end of second grade. The paired sample t-test performed between Nyanja word reading mean score and writing mean scores produced a significant difference of " $p < .001$ ."

The implication for this finding is that while both reading and writing need practice, there is a need to pay particular attention to writing due to the significant difference between the two skills among learners. More practice is required in writing/ spelling if learners are to improve.

The general picture from the findings on learners reading and writing in a Zambian language and reading in English was that learners were not ready to transition from literacy in a Zambian language to literacy in English. The low reading and writing levels obtained in a

Zambian language signals that more time for L1 instruction is needed before English is introduced in Grade Three.

### **6.2.2 Nyanja word reading and writing abilities by gender**

The findings on reading and writing between boys and girls revealed a significant difference between boys and girls. Mean score for boys ( $M = 6.7$ ,  $SD = 4.0$ ) and girls ( $M = 4.2$ ,  $SD = 4.3$ ) in Nyanja word reading performance; " $p < .01$ ". These results suggest that there was a significant difference between boys' and girls' performances in reading. The boys ( $M = 6.7$ ) outperformed the girls ( $M = 4.2$ ). Research into factors leading to such results is recommended.

### **6.3 The relationship between Nyanja word reading performance and English word reading ability**

The findings under this section indicated there is a positive correlation between Nyanja word reading performance and English word reading ability among Grade Two learners even before instruction in English is given. The result can be summarising as follows: There is a positive correlation between learners' L1 reading performance and L2 reading word reading,  $r = 0.796$ ,  $n = 75$ ,  $p(2\text{-tailed}) < .001$ . The results suggest that English word reading is dependent on learners' L1 reading performance.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study has a number of recommendations for the different stakeholders:

**The schools,** need to create space and see value in professional learning opportunities as cardinal aspects.

**Teacher educators;** should promote early reflection and adopting teacher education models that will train teachers to theorise practice even when materials available do not much the context.

**Teachers;** to be actively engaged in continuous professional development CPDs meeting to seek knowledge on literacy teaching

**Learners;** need more instruction in L1 before English is introduced with more practice in writing than reading.

Finally, girls' literacy education needs further research and attention to curb the low literacy levels as the study revealed.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1: Consent letter**

UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Dear sir/ madam,

#### **REF: LETTER OF CONSENT**

Am currently a student at the University of Zambia who is studying Applied Linguistics. I am carrying out a research on 'Analysis of first language learners' transition abilities to English.

The main aim of this research is to investigate whether learners can transfer the literacy skills acquired in Nyanja to English by the end of grade 2.

Am kindly requesting for your active participation in this research. The information you will provide is only meant for academic purposes only and your identity will be kept confidential in the report of the study.

Your cooperation will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

Banda Mtiose

**Appendix 2: (Nyanja Dictation)**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA**  
**DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**TEST 2 (Nyanja Writing)**

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**NAME:**

**GRADE:**

**SCHOOL:**

**SEX:**

**AGE:**

The researcher dictates words which vary in length from comprising of cv syllable structure to cccv syllable structure for sampled pupils to write at the same time but individually. The researcher ensures that pupils are sparsely seated to avoid coping from each other.

1. Kale
2. Pasa
3. Funsu
4. Pakati
5. Nswala
6. Mphatso
7. Akondwera
8. Mwayi
9. Pikitipinda
10. Nkwangwa.

**Appendix 3: Test 2 (Nyanja Reading)**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA**  
**DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**NAME:**

**GRADE:**

**SCHOOL:**

**SEX:**

**AGE:**

The researcher asks individual learners sampled to read the Nyanja words which are the same words as those in a dictation test. No time limit is to be given.

Kale, pasa, funsa, pakati, nswala, mphatso, akondwera, mwayi, pikitipinda, nkhwangwa.

**Appendix 4: Document Analysis**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA**  
**DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**GRADE:**

**SCHOOL:**

**SEX:**

**QUALIFICATION:**

**YEARS IN SERVICE:**

The researcher to ask for the following documents as a point of reference during and after the classroom observation session; the scheme of work, weekly forecast/s, lesson plan/s and teaching/learning aids.

**Appendix 5: Burt Reading test**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA  
DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES  
DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**NAME:**

**SCHOOL:**

**SEX:**

**AGE:**

The researcher calls one respondent /pupil at a time and presents them with the ‘Burt Word Reading Test (1974 Revised)’. Individual pupils are asked to read the words from left to right without any time restriction and record all the correct responses. The test is intended to assess learners English decoding abilities.

## **Appendix 6: Interview Guide**

### **Semi-structured Interview Guide**

#### **THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA**

#### **DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES**

#### **DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

#### **PART ONE (Background information)**

**Teacher:**

**Sex:**

**Grade/s Taught:**

**Teacher's qualification:**

**Language/s competent in:**

#### **PART TWO**

1. What is your opinion over government's decision to bring a policy of local language use in primary schools?
2. What challenges does this policy pose over the teaching of literacy in primary schools?
3. Do you plan for literacy lessons? If yes, what kind of preparations and or documents do you prepare in readiness of teaching literacy?
4. What materials do you use when planning?
5. Do you find any challenges in teaching preparations? If yes specify.
6. What do you do for pupils to attain the literacy skills?
7. Do you have measures put in place to meet pupils' individual learning needs? What are those measures?
8. Are the learners able to read and write in Nyanja with the measures put in place?
9. Do you think skills attained in local languages can enable learners to read in English before instruction in English is introduced? If yes, explain why and if the answer is no, give reasons for your answer.
10. What challenges do you expect learners to face as they transition from local languages to English?

11. How best can literacy be taught to learners in order for them to acquire the skill in local language and later transfer the acquired skills to English?
12. What recommendation can you give on how best literacy can be taught?
13. Give your final remarks over the current language in education policy and teaching of literacy.

## Appendix 7: Lesson observation checklist

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA**  
**DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**PART ONE (Background information)**

**Teacher:**

**Grade:**

**Sex:**

**Years in service:**

**Qualification:**

**Language/s competent in:**

**Number of pupils in class:**

### **LESSON OBSERVATION CHECK LIST**

The researcher introduces herself and talks about the purpose of the visit while guaranteeing the participants of the confidentiality accorded to the results.

Item	Domain/Indicator or Activity	1-2	3-5	6-7	comment
01	1. Teaching preparation				Teacher has scheme of work
	2. Teacher has weekly forecast.				
	3. Teacher has daily lesson plan				
	4. Teacher has teaching/learning aids.				
02	Language competence				
	1. Check if the teacher/ learners are competent in the language of instruction (Nyanja)				
03	Teaching using phonics method.				

(PHONEMIC AWARENESS)

2. Teacher is able to model correct letter sound.

(PHONICS)

3. Teacher reviews previously learned sounds, syllables and words adding the new sounds to create words.
4. Teacher/pupils are able to manipulate sounds by blending, segmenting using onsets, and rimes (Adding/removing initial letter to stem) to predict reading and writing abilities of learners.

04 Teaching reading instruction

(FLUENCY, VOCABULARY and COMPREHENSION)

1. Teacher teaches new words using relevant strategy/strategies e.g. actions, pictures, and explanations to ensure that learners show understanding.
2. Teacher ask pupils to predict story from the title and picture.
3. Teacher asks comprehension questions.

How teacher meets individual learners' abilities

4. Teacher uses appropriate pace to cater for learners learning abilities.

- 05
5. Teacher varies class organization (e.g. group work, pair work, and individuals sharing work)
  6. Teacher supervises and supports learners.

Assessment

7. Teacher uses teaching, learning and assessment resources effectively.

8. Teacher assigns class exercises/ homework

Class management

06

07

**Scoring guide:**

- 1 – 2 is given when the indicator or activity being observed is low.
- 3 – 5 is given when the indicator being observed shows a mixture of effective interactions with periods when interactions are not effective or are absent
- 6 – 7 is given when there are effective teacher-child interactions consistently

## **Appendix 9: Document Analysis**

**UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA**

**DIRECTORATE OF RESEACH AND GRADUATE STUDIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Researcher to analyse teaching documents such as lesson plans, weekly forecasts, and teaching aids to see how literacy activities are planned and implemented.