

**THE IMPACT OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT ON  
LEARNERS' LITERACY SKILLS ACQUISITION: THE CASE OF GRADE FOUR  
LEARNERS IN SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MZUZU DISTRICT, IN  
NORTHERN MALAWI.**

**BY**

THESIS  
M.ED  
MSA  
2010  
C-1

**AUDEN SHORTKINS JOHN MSANGO**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA IN  
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE  
MASTER OF EDUCATION DEGREE IN LITERACY AND LEARNING**

**UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA**

**2010**



## **DEDICATION**

To God and to my parents to whom I owe my existence in this world. I thank my wife and children for their patience and support throughout the period of my studies in Zambia. Their perseverance made it possible for me to complete my studies.

## APPROVAL

This dissertation, by Auden Shortkins John Msango, is approved as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Master of Education in Literacy and Learning degree of the University of Zambia.

Signed: .....

Date: .....

Signed:  .....

Date: 26/7/11 .....

Signed: .....

Date: .....

## **COPYRIGHT**

All rights reserved. No part of this dissertation may be reproduced, stored in any retrieval systems, or transmitted, in any form or by any means; electronic, photocopying or otherwise without the written permission of the author or the University of Zambia.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My profound thanks go to all those who patiently guided me in developing my research proposal and in writing this dissertation. I wish to particularly thank the following:

Firstly, to my Supervisor, Dr J.T. Phiri, who patiently led me through the writing of the dissertation.

Secondly, to my Lecturer, Mr W.W. Chakanika, who guided me in developing the research proposal.

Thirdly, to the Norwegian Government for the scholarship which facilitated my studies.

Finally, to the Coordinator and to all the staff on the Master of Education in Literacy and Learning degree programme at the University of Zambia.

## **ABSTRACT**

The study investigated the impact of teaching and learning environments on standard Four learners' literacy skills acquisition in selected primary schools in Mzuzu City in Malawi. The objectives of the study were to determine the impact of school factors, classroom factors and teacher factors on learners' literacy skills acquisition. The research used a case study design. The target population for the study included all primary schools and all standard Four learners and teachers and all teachers who had once taught literacy lessons in primary schools in Mzuzu. Teachers of other subjects were also targeted.

Findings from the study revealed that the learning environment impacts on learners' literacy skills acquisition and that the impact is either positive or negative depending on the school being studied. The findings also revealed that school factors, classroom factors and teacher factors contribute towards the total sum of the learning environment and have a bearing on how learners acquire initial literacy skills.

The following recommendations were therefore made:

- (a) The Ministry of Education should build modern structures to replace all grass-thatched primary schools and rehabilitate existing primary schools.
- (b) The Ministry of Education should provide appropriate furniture in primary schools to provide for a conducive teaching and learning environment.
- (c) The District Education Manager should ensure that all primary schools

receive adequate teaching and learning resources.

- (d) The District Education Manager should ensure that Inspectors go round primary schools to help teachers in handling literacy lessons.
- (e) Primary school head teachers should ensure that literacy classrooms are equipped with adequate literacy materials.
- (f) Teachers play a critical role in promoting literacy skills in children. Based on this, it is recommended that at both pre-service and in-service levels, teachers should be trained in literacy teaching.
- (g) Literacy teachers should ensure that their classrooms are rich in print, textbooks, posters, displays, etc.
- (h) Literacy teachers should ensure that they practice individualizing instruction so that all learners acquire initial literacy skills.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration .....	i
Dedication .....	ii
Approval .....	iii
Copyright .....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Abstract.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	viii
List of Tables.....	ix
<b>CHAPTER ONE-Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Overview.....	1
Background to the Study .....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Purpose of the Study.....	4
Objectives of the Study.....	4
Research Questions.....	4
Significance of the Study.....	5

Definition of Key Terms in the Study.....	5
Conclusion.....	6
<b>CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Overview.....	7
The Learning Environment.....	7
School Factors.....	8
Classroom Factors.....	10
Child-by-instruction Interaction Factors .....	16
Conclusion.....	20
<b>CHAPTER THREE: Methodology .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Overview.....	21
Research Design.....	21
Target Population.....	21
Sample Size.....	22
Sampling Procedure.....	22
Research Instruments.....	23
Data Collection Procedure.....	24

Limitations of the Study.....24

Data Analysis.....25

Conclusion.....25

**CHAPTER FOUR: Presentation of the findings.....26**

Overview.....26

Responses from Checklists Administered to Teachers .....26

Findings from Interviews with Teachers.....39

Findings from School, Classroom and Child-by-Instruction Interaction Observations....42

Findings from Literacy Tests Administered to Literacy Learners.....44

Conclusion.....46

**CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion of the findings.....47**

Overview.....47

The Impact of School Factors on Pupils’ Literacy Skills Acquisition.....47

The Impact of Classroom Factors on Pupils’ Literacy Skills Acquisition.....49

The Impact of Child-by-Instruction Interaction Factors on Pupils’ Literacy Skills Acquisition.....52

Conclusion.....59

<b>CHAPTER SIX: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations</b> .....	60
Overview.....	60
Summary.....	61
Conclusion.....	61
Recommendations.....	62
Suggestions for Future Research.....	63
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	64
<b>APPENDICES</b> .....	67
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	22
<b>Table 1:</b> Gender distribution of the respondents.....	22
<b>Table2:</b> Responses from School A teachers on the impact of school factors on learners' literacy skills acquisition.....	27
<b>Table 3:</b> Responses from School B teachers on the impact of school factors on learners' literacy skills acquisition.....	29
<b>Table 4:</b> Responses from School A teachers on the impact of classroom factors on learners' literacy skills acquisition.....	31
<b>Table 5:</b> Responses from School B teachers on the impact of classroom factors on learners' literacy skills acquisition.....	33
<b>Table 6:</b> Responses from School A teachers on the impact of child-by-instruction interaction on learners' literacy skills acquisition.....	35

<b>Table 7:</b> Responses from School B teachers on the impact of child-by-instruction interaction on learners' literacy skills acquisition.....	37
<b>Table 8:</b> Views of School A teachers on whether school, classroom and child-by-instruction interaction were factors on learners' literacy skills acquisition.....	39
<b>Table 9:</b> Views of School B teachers on whether school, classroom and child-by-instruction interaction were factors on learners' literacy skills acquisition.....	41
<b>Table10:</b> School A learners' literacy test scores.....	44
<b>Table 11:</b> School B learners' literacy test scores.....	45

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Overview**

This chapter presents the background of this study. The chapter also presents the statement of the problem; the purpose of the study; the objectives of the study; the research questions; the significance of the study as well as the definition of core terms used in the study.

#### **1.1 Background to the Study**

It is axiomatic that the nature of the environment under which teaching and learning take place determines how instruction occurs. Teaching and learning environments in Malawi vary considerably from the rural primary school to the urban primary school. The acquisition of initial literacy skills is very significant. In order to formally learn, one has to initially know how to read, write and calculate. Being literate adds value to a person's life (EFA Global Monitoring Report; Literacy for Life: 2006). Literacy is instrumental in the pursuit of development at personal, family and community levels as well as at macro-levels of nations or regions of the world. A child denied quality primary education is denied not only as a child: they are handicapped for life, unable to cope with situations requiring reading, writing and arithmetic or calculation unless given access to educational opportunities while young. Illiteracy is strongly correlated with poverty, both in an economic sense and in a broader sense of deprivation of capabilities

(EFA Global Monitoring Report; Literacy for Life 2006: p.30). Literacy strengthens the capabilities of individuals, families and communities to access health, educational, political, economic and cultural opportunities and services. It is during initial literacy when the foundations of literacy are laid in an individual. We do not know how the teaching and learning environment impacts on learners' initial literacy skills acquisition. So the standard Four class was deliberately targeted for the study, given that this is a junior class where learners are in the process of developing initial literacy skills, the skills which help them learn better other subjects. In such junior classes, children are still young and their language acquisition device, abbreviated 'LAD', is still malleable and therefore still very responsive or active in acquiring language skills, (Chomsky;1965).The acquisition of initial literacy kills is at the base of all formal learning.

The education system in Malawi insists on literacy instruction, given that in order to formally learn, one has to properly know how to read, write and numerate - the principal definition of a literate person according to Barton (2007). One has to know how to read, write and calculate in order to properly learn other subjects at school. In the Malawian context, we do not know how the teaching and learning environment impacts on the way learners acquire initial literacy skills in particular, hence this study.

There seems to be lack of recognition on how the teaching and learning environment impacts on the way learners acquire literacy skills (School Zone Resources; 2005). The

term "environment" here refers to the sum of all conditions an organism is exposed to and therefore which influence the organism in a particular direction (Merril et al. 1989). As human beings, we operate in an environment, and are influenced or shaped by it. We do not know how the acquisition of initial literacy skills is influenced by the teaching and learning environment. The layout of a classroom affects the behaviors of all those in it. The environment should be dedicated to promoting feelings of well-being in both the teacher and the literacy learner, thereby promoting the motivation and focus to learn literacy skills, which are at the core of all formal learning, as stated in the preceding clauses.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The teaching and learning environment which obtains at a school greatly influences learners' well-being as well as their academic performance in the school. There are school, classroom and teacher factors which play a vital role in shaping the teaching and learning environment, yet the importance of these particular aspects of school life has often been overlooked. We do not know the impact of the teaching and learning environment on learners' initial literacy skills acquisition, particularly in Malawi.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to find out the impact of the teaching and the learning environment on learners' initial literacy skills acquisition.

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

To find out the impact of:-

- i. school factors on learners' initial literacy skills acquisition;
- ii. classroom factors on learners' initial literacy skills acquisition; and,
- iii. child-by-instruction interaction factors on learners' initial literacy skills acquisition

### **1.5 Research Questions**

What is the impact of:

- i. school factors on learners' initial literacy skills acquisition?
- ii. classroom factors on learners' initial literacy skills acquisition?
- iii. child-by-instruction interaction factors on learners' initial literacy skills acquisition?

## 1.5 Significance of the Study

Findings of this study may guide policy makers and implementers of initial literacy programs in that they may understand that there are school, classroom and child-by-instruction interaction factors that influence the way learners acquire initial literacy skills. Secondly, the findings may be helpful to primary school head teachers in shaping their school environment in a sure way that promotes the acquisition of initial literacy skills in their learners, as a super infrastructural environmental additive in promoting initial literacy instruction. Thirdly, the classroom teacher may use the findings to understand the implications of individualizing instruction in order to promote or foster initial literacy learning. Lastly, the findings of the research may provoke further research into how other factors might affect learners' initial literacy learning.

## 1.6 Definition of Key Terms in the Study

In this study, the following terms were used to mean as follows:

**Literacy skills acquisition:** the ability to read, write and numerate or calculate conventionally.

**Achievement gap:** the difference in performance between learners who achieve high and those who achieve low in initial literacy lessons.

**Child-by-instruction interactions:** individualizing or differentiating instruction in order to suit learners' individual learning capacities in learners in order to determine how they individually acquire initial literacy skills and therefore how to properly instruct them in initial literacy. (Connor et al., 2007, & Schunk, 2009 ).

**Classroom factor:** the classroom environment per se in terms of how it impacts on literacy learning, given all the connotations of a literacy classroom environment.

**Learning environments:** conditions, climates or atmospheres which prevail inside the classroom as well as outside the classroom vis-à-vis the pedagogy of initial literacy.

**Learners' literacy skills acquisition:** how learners acquire the abilities to read, write and calculate conventionally as a function of the teaching and learning environment that obtain at their school.

**School factor:** conditions which obtain at a school in relation to teaching and learning such as staffing levels, the physical infrastructure of a school, the availability of text books as well as the leadership quality at a school.

### **1.8 Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to introduce the nature of the study to the audience of the report. The background of the study established the link between the teaching and learning environment and the acquisition and growth of initial literacy skills in the literacy learner. This was reflected in the statement of the problem, the research objectives and the research questions that guided the study. The purpose and significance of the study high lightened the link between the teaching and learning environment and the learning of initial literacy skills. Core terms that had been used vis-à-vis the teaching and learning of literacy were operationally defined to further facilitate comprehension of the report.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Overview**

This chapter explored literature on the impact learning environments have on learners' initial literacy skills acquisition. Review of literature meant to put the research questions and objectives into focus in order that the existing knowledge should be added to in an organized way, after tracing or establishing the lacuna that obtains in us vis-à-vis the impact of the teaching and learning environment on learners' initial literacy skills acquisition.

#### **2.1 The Learning Environment**

Most children, no matter how well or how poorly they perform in the classroom, may at a time complain about the fact that they may have to go to school due to conditions that prevail at the school they frequent. It might be the hours they sit in the class each day, the number of days per week, their teachers, or even other pupils they interact with. The school building inspires the people inside it. Pleasing surroundings lead to better attendance, improved concentration and to a healthy dose of motivation and self-esteem in the initial literacy learner. It is equally important for the staff to have a good environment which is convenient to their day-to-day professional needs vis-à-vis initial literacy instruction (<http://www.education.gov.uk>). Learning environments are complex. To understand literacy learning in particular, one has to take into

consideration many school, classroom and teacher factors, and then define how these impact on the way learners acquire initial literacy skills.

Hitherto, a number of schools in Malawi have grass-thatched roofs, uncemented floors, crumbling walls and limited resources in terms of furniture and text books. Only a tiny proportion of today's primary schools in Malawi have been built since the 1980s. Many of these buildings are fast approaching the edge of their life span. Pupils' learning needs in initial literacy have changed recently, as have the skills that teachers need to properly instruct initial literacy. Basic aspects of the school environment often need rethinking into. Decent lighting, air conditioning or even comfortable or at least well shaped chairs contribute to concentration levels of learners in a literacy classroom.

## **2.2 School Factors**

School factors strongly impact on what happens in the classroom. According to Coburn (2004) and Taylor et al. (2000), one of the main tenets of a literacy-rich learning environment is that no matter what is being studied, learners should read, write and speak about it every day and in a variety of ways, with the implication that what is being learnt in literacy means to those who intend to be literate.

Recent research studies have supplied significant insights into school environmental factors underlying learners' literacy skills acquisition in terms of how learners can be better served in classrooms, and how to prepare teachers to offer more effective literacy instruction to initial primary school literacy learners.

Research findings by Pressley et al. (2001) show that schools that are effective share common school factors. These shared common school factors are a safe and an orderly environment, strong leadership, high expectation for student achievement, uninterrupted time devoted to literacy instruction, assessing learner progress and providing guidance and good class management. The number of teachers at a school, as well as their qualifications, also impact on learners' initial literacy skills acquisition. The physical infrastructure of a school in terms of the state of the school buildings, availability of water and toilets, sanitation, relationship amongst teachers, textbook availability and the availability of a library were seen as environmental factors that impact on learners' initial literacy skills acquisition. This study intended to find out how such environmental factors impact on the way children acquire initial literacy skills.

Tharp and Gallimore (2004) state that school factors encapsulate certain psychological and social aspects that influence literacy learning. Learners are influenced by participants in a setting. The participants referred to here act as social and psychological sources that supply information through interactions. Vygotsky, (1978), asserts that participants in a setting have the potential to help learners perform at a higher level, a phenomenon he calls 'scaffolding'.

With regard to the social environment of teaching and learning, Fox (1966) remarks that pupils who feel comfortable and loved are likely to develop their academic abilities more. These remarks comply with those of Abraham Maslow, a humanist psychologist who, amongst other needs that a person requires to realize their full potential, mentions

the need for love, affection and belongingness. Related to the need for comfort are the physiological needs which Maslow calls biological needs. They consist of the need for oxygen, food, water and a relatively good body temperature. These, Maslow asserts, are the strongest human needs. They impact on learners' literacy skills acquisition. This study tried to establish if such factors impact on children's literacy learning in selected primary schools in Malawi.

### **2.3 Classroom factors**

Ambiance of a learning environment leaves a straight impact on the learning intensity of learners. It is therefore imperative to pay considerable attention over the devising of a literacy classroom. How a classroom has been set for learners reflects a great deal about the success rate of the objectives that have to be met through teaching processes. It influences the learners' ability to concentrate, devote attention and evoke information from previous learning. A literacy classroom has to be neither very hot nor very cold. The surrounding areas of a literacy classroom should be free from any loud or blaring noise, otherwise learners will get distracted very often, which may compromise literacy instruction and learning.

A literacy classroom that has a poor lighting system might create a poor learning environment as learners might be having difficulties in reading and writing their literacy lessons. A literacy classroom should be airy, bright and spacious enough so that fresh air, ample light and enough space could make it easier for learners to study literacy

with concentration. The walls of a literacy classroom should not be bare or patchy. Instead, they should be equipped with bright and colorful charts that shall not only make the room look attractive, but also give vital information to literacy students about various subjects. Educational and literacy oriented posters and charts of literacy might intellectually stimulate learners, making them more attentive towards their literacy studies and less drawn towards other distractions.

Learning oriented ambiance and other fine facilities in a literacy classroom play an important role in making literacy learning easier and interesting. Many experts and connoisseurs have associated learners' responsiveness to physical conditions of a literacy classroom and its surrounding ambiance. A suitable literacy classroom environment indeed brings great comfort for learners, making them more interested in their lessons (<http://www.literacyclassroom.com/>).

Recent research findings have shown that factors that obtain in a classroom have a bearing on learners' literacy skills acquisition. Classrooms are generally active places where teachers explain and ask learners questions, provide feedback, provide rewards and punishment, praise, criticism and respond to pupils' questions (Schunk, 2009). These are what are called teacher-learner interactions that also impact on learners' literacy skills acquisition.

Classrooms include factors that can affect learners' perceptions, motivation and learning. Schunk (2009:256) summarizes some of these factors in the acronym "TARGET", which means Task design, distribution of Authority, Recognition of learners, Grouping arrangements, Evaluation practices and Time allocation.

The Task dimension involves the design of learning activities and assignments. The Authority dimension refers to whether learners can assume leadership and develop independence and control over their learning activities. The Recognition dimension refers to the use of rewards, incentives and praise in order to motivate learning. The Grouping dimension focuses on the learners' ability to work with others. Vygotsky (1968) refers to this social factor of learning when he states that learners learn well in a social setting and when they interact with others therein. Schunk (2009) reminds us that in a literacy classroom, teachers should use heterogeneous groups and peer interaction where possible to ensure that learners' differences in ability do not translate into differences in motivation and learning in literacy. The term heterogeneous group reminds us again of differentiating instruction. Low achievers especially, benefit from small group work because contributing to the group's success engenders feelings of self-efficacy. In addition, small group work allows more learners to contribute in the responsibility for learning, so that not only a few learners do all the work. Independent learning is significant as it provides for clear indicators of learning progress in the learner. Literacy teachers are thus capable to detect individual learning uphill and able to group literacy learners accordingly in order that learners who learn slowly can be

grouped with those who learn faster, in order that the former can benefit from the latter through scaffolding, Vygotsky (1968).

Evaluation in the acronym involves methods for monitoring and assessing individual learner progress. Time in the acronym involves the appropriateness of the workload, pace of instruction and time allocated for the completion of each task (Epstein, 1989). Effective strategies for enhancing motivation are to adjust time and task requirements for those having difficulty and allowing learners to plan their schedules and timelines for making progress. Group work gives learners more control over their time and promotes self-regulatory strategies and self-efficacy for literacy learning.

In a literacy rich classroom, space should be organized to encourage individual involvement and interaction amongst learners. Desks could be placed in small groups for use during cooperative learning activities. There are tables allocated for specific content areas such as reading, writing and science centers. Other tables may be used for currently featured books, author study, word banks from current units of study which can be used to nourish the learners' vocabulary and spelling stature.

In an article on Learning Environments, Theresa (2006:49), remarks that:

Apart from the physical location, the learning environment also encompasses teaching delivery and approaches to learning. Examine these from the perspective of disabled learners and consider how you can adapt your practice to facilitate the participation of these learners and ensure an inclusive learning experience. Think about the skills a

learner requires to take part in various learning environments. These may be visual, auditory or tactile skills. They may be related to language, perception, concentration and other attributes that are easily taken for granted. A lack of, or a difficulty with any of these may affect knowledge acquisition, construction, assimilation and internalization. This will, in turn, affect teaching delivery.

School Zone Resources (2005) observes that the layout or the physical infrastructure of a classroom affects the behavior of all those in it. It is argued that there seems to be lack of recognition given to how the physical environment impacts on the behavior of teachers and learners and therefore on teaching and learning, particularly on the teaching and learning of literacy. The whole environment should be dedicated to promoting the feeling of well-being in the teacher and the learner, and the motivation and focus to teach and learn. This school of thought complies with Abram Maslow's philosophy of the hierarchy of needs.

Clayton (1965) remarks that the setting of a school encourages certain behaviors on the part of both the teacher and the learner. When John Dewey was organizing his experimental school, appropriate furniture was sourced to provide for the kind of environment that was conducive for an active learning class. The nature of the super infrastructure of a school, or leadership, is another environmental factor that influences teaching and learning. The literacy teacher must deal with all these factors in order to create a fertile

teaching and learning atmosphere for learners who are being initiated into literacy.

The availability of teaching and learning materials is another dimension of the teaching and learning environment. Whether the teaching and learning materials are adequate is one factor that affects learners' initial literacy skills acquisition. An additional factor to this is whether learning materials mean to the literacy teacher and to the literacy learner.

Fernie (1985), Neuman and Roskos (1990) state that materials for literacy teaching and learning should be meaningful to the literacy learner. Such materials support more sustained activity than materials which do not mean to the learner. Equally, materials that involve learners in more sustained and constructive activity tend to generate more language learning. Independent learning tasks support such an approach to literacy teaching and literacy learning.

Petty (2004) recounts that as he was walking along a school corridor one day during his first term of teaching, he noticed that one of the classes was in uproar. Learners were bellowing at each other. Books were flying in the air and two boys were fighting in a corner. He stormed into the class and bellowed at the learners to sit down, keep quiet and wait for their teacher! There was a roar of laughter in the class from the learners: they gleefully pointed to their teacher who was tucked into a corner with two learners,

helping them on some work. Petty then remarks that some teachers have serious problems in class management while others create an environment in the classroom that is conducive to literacy instruction with little effort. Class management, also called stage management, is one other important aspect in the teaching arena. When a teacher is unable to properly manage their literacy classes, it is a factor that compromises literacy learning. Class management in literacy lessons was therefore looked at as one of the environmental factors that influence literacy learning. Class management was one of the environmental factors this study was looking at as impacting on the way learners acquire literacy skills.

#### **2.4 Child-by-instruction interaction factors**

On the definition of teaching and learning, Obanya (1980), remarks that it would be a fallacy to define these two solely in terms of what a teacher does in the classroom. The teaching process is a cyclic chain of activities, and that the teacher's meeting with pupils in the classroom is only one point in the chain. Therefore, there are factors other than those in the classroom which affect teaching and learning. This leads us to the third objective of this study.

Child-by-instruction interaction means individualizing or differentiating instruction when teaching (Neal et al. 2007). It means differentiating teaching strategies, given that learners learn differently since they have different or, individual learning capacities. Learners need to be treated differently, therefore, not equally, as has always been the

norm. The term individualizing instruction relates very well to what Greenleaf (2005) calls accommodation. Accommodation is defined as one aspect of the social environment under which pedagogy takes place, and as what a teacher does differently to ensure that no learner fails to succeed in learning due to an inherited condition over which they have no control. Two learners never learn in exactly the same way. Learners learn individually. They have individual differences, whence the term individualizing or differentiating instruction. What one learner needs in order to learn differs abundantly from what another learner needs in order to learn. Teachers may feel it is unfair to treat learners differently because the norm has always been that learners should be treated equally. Fairness in teaching means treating individual learners differently, given that individual learners have individual endowments and differences on which they learn. This has been termed individualizing or differentiating instruction. It encapsulates literacy instruction.

Organizing independent studies is another dimension of the child-by-instruction interactions, or of individualizing or differentiating instruction. Perrot (1982:110) states that the child-by-instruction interactions, "recognizes the fact that in any class..., there is bound to be a wide range of abilities and interests and individualizing instruction caters for them". Independent study refers to occasions where learners work independently and individually on individual tasks that suit their varying abilities and interests. Schunk (2009:255) calls this "multidimensional instruction". He further states that "structures become differentiated (and classrooms become multidimensional) when

learners work on different tasks independently at the same time". In fact, while independent study caters for individual differences, it often fails to run smoothly because of the diverse demands made on the teacher. While some pupils will respond well to working independently, others will need closer attention and will constantly demand help from the teacher. If the majority of learners make such claims, the teacher is put under strain and will find it difficult to meet adequately such a variety of learner needs. This is in circumstances, for instance, where classrooms are overcrowded.

In adult literacy campaigns, Freire (1970) categorized people into cultural circles in order that cultural homogeneity should be respected. Cultural homogeneity is an ethnographic aspect of the environmental factor of first knowing the learner, in order to properly teach them according to their cultural acumens. Accommodation is thus one aspect of teaching and learning factors which refers to the ability of the teacher to accommodate individual differences of learners, and teach them according to their individual differences. To individualize instruction therefore means to contextualize the learner, in order that each learner be treated differently given that learners have individual learning endowments. There has been lack of recognition of this very important factor as it relates to literacy instruction and literacy acquisition according to Barton (2007). As well as Schunk (2009:268) remarks that "learners have different strategies, approaches and capabilities for learning that are a function of prior

experience and heredity in the learner, ... and that learning is most effective when learners' linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds are taken into account".

The National Committee on Reading (2006) published the first explicit reference of the concept of reading readiness. The introduction of the term reading readiness gave rise to two lines of thought on preparing children for reading and writing. One school of thought believed that reading readiness was the result of biological maturation or nature. The other school of thought believed that appropriate experiences or nurture could accelerate reading readiness. We see that the latter school of thought puts emphasis on nurture, which is synonymous with environmental factors, as having a bearing on literacy learning.

The way literacy is defined influences the goals and strategies adopted and the programmes designed by policy makers in the educational structure of a state. Schunk (2009) remarks that constructivism stresses contextual specificity and notes the importance of taking the context of learning environments in attempting to explain learning behavior. A topic highly relevant to constructivism is the organization and structure of learning environments. The five elements in Schunk's acronym 'TARGET' deal with how learners are grouped for instruction, how instruction work is evaluated and rewarded, how authority is managed and how time is scheduled for lessons. This encapsulates literacy instruction.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the aim was to review literature that relate to teaching and learning environments. Specifically, the focus was on what school factors, classroom factors and child-by-instruction interaction factors are, and how they impact on learners' literacy skills acquisition. These three factors were looked at as school environmental factors that impact fundamentally on learners' literacy skills acquisition.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Overview**

This chapter presents the research methodology. Various aspects are dealt with under the following headings: the research design used, the target population, the sample size, the sampling procedure, the research instruments used, the data collection procedure employed and how the collected data were analyzed.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The study was qualitative on the grounds that the researcher did not have any hypotheses to prove, validate or refute. The study was thus data driven. Being qualitative, the study was approached with an open mind. The researcher was investigating how learning environments impact on the teaching and learning of literacy and therefore on learners' literacy skills acquisition. Being a case study and therefore qualitative, the study focused on soliciting pertinent beliefs, practices, feelings and opinions of the research participants and then describe and interpret the findings in consonant with the topic, objectives and research questions that guided the study.

#### **3.2 Target Population**

In a study, the word population refers to the entire set of people or objects, including even those not under study. As such, all standard Four primary school learners and all

primary school teachers in Mzuzu city in Northern Malawi constituted the population of the study.

**3.3 Sample Size**

Two primary schools were purposefully selected to provide the sample for the study. For the sake of anonymity, the two schools were named School A and School B. Sixty (60) grade Four learners (30 per school) were selected for the study. Forty (40) primary school teachers were also selected from the two schools (20 per school) to purposefully and triangularly supply data for the study.

**3.3.1 Table 1: Gender distribution of the respondents**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Teachers	11	29	40
Learners	30	30	60

The distribution of the sample by gender shows that more female teachers took part in study than males. On the other hand, there was gender parity in the learners' sample.

**3.4 Sampling Procedure**

Two primary schools were purposively sampled. The Researcher purposively selected one school located in an urban area of the city (School A) and another one located in the rural area far from the city (School B). Purposive sampling is a non-probability

sampling procedure in which the respondents or units of a study are intentionally selected. This sampling procedure has an advantage in that the purpose of the study can be fulfilled even with a small sample which has been strategically picked.

### **3.5 Research Instruments**

The following qualitative research instruments were used to gather data: a lesson observation checklist, three literacy tests and an interview guide. Checklists were used to solicit information from teachers because they were found to be more economical in terms of available resources and time. They also allowed the respondents to express their views freely.

Lesson observations were used to understand the school and classroom factors that would affect learners' literacy skills acquisition. Interviews were used to get additional information and clarifications from teachers resulting from the checklists and observations, in order to triangulate data. Literacy tests were administered to learners in order to have an understanding of their current literacy skill levels. The literacy tests comprised reading comprehension, speed reading, word attack, dictation, word completion and sentence construction. All the literacy tests were in English in order to establish initial literacy levels in English in the sampled literacy learners. This told how teaching and learning environments impact on the way learners acquire initial literacy skills. It should be remembered that a junior literacy grade was chosen for the study.

### **3.6 Data Collection Procedure**

Before starting the process of collecting data, the Researcher reported at the office of the Mzimba District Education Manager who also oversees primary schools in the Mzuzu city. The idea of doing so was to deliver the letter introducing the Researcher from the University of Zambia and to seek permission to conduct the study in the selected schools. The Researcher then personally visited the selected schools to explain to the school authorities the purpose and significance of the study he was going to do. Checklists were then administered to teachers and collected the following day. The Researcher then embarked on literacy lesson observations which were immediately followed by interviewing the teachers whose literacy lessons had been observed. After a week of observations and interviews, literacy tests were administered to the sampled standard Four learners in order to establish their initial literacy levels.

### **3.7 Limitations of the Study**

The following were the foreseeable limitations in this study. In a qualitative enquiry, the researcher is rarely sure as to whether a different observer would arrive at the same findings of what the gathered data tell. The Researcher therefore foresaw that literacy teachers would be aware of the presence of the Researcher observing them and thus be tempted to feign in initial literacy instruction. They, therefore, would have taught initial literacy lessons in a fashion aimed at impressing the Researcher, thus compromising the validity of the findings. Learners might also have been conscious of the presence of an outsider in their classroom, and might perhaps have behaved

artificially. Some teachers were perhaps withholding certain information for fear of ridicule upon publication of the findings. The reliability of the information supplied by the informants was another concern. Triangulation, therefore, intervened in the process of collecting data for the research. The findings may therefore be generalizable to all primary schools in Malawi, rural and urban.

**3.8 Data Analysis**

In this study, data were analyzed qualitatively. Descriptive statistics in the form of numerical summaries and tables were also used in reporting the findings of the study. Responses from research respondents were analyzed through categorization and coding of themes that were reflecting on both the specified research questions and objectives of the study.

**3.9 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the aim was to build the process of the study. The following aspects were dealt with under the following headings: the research design used, the target population, the sample size, the sampling procedure, the research instruments used, the data collection procedure employed and how the collected data were analyzed. The next chapter presents the findings of the study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS**

#### **4.0 Overview**

The essence of any study is to gather data that will represent the problem in the study and that the findings should be applicable to other contexts in order that society benefits from the study. It is imperative, therefore, that the data collected are not only analyzed and tabulated, but also that they sincerely represent the responses of the subjects that were strategically sampled for the study, in order that the generalizability of the research findings apply. This chapter presents the findings of the study. The findings have been presented in harmony with the research objectives and the research instruments that were used in the study. The objectives of the study were to find out: (a) the impact of school factors; (b) the impact of classroom factors; and (c), the impact of child-by- instruction interaction factors on learners' initial literacy skills acquisition.

#### **4.1 Responses from checklists administered to literacy teachers**

To borrow from Ary, (2006, p:630), a checklist is a genre of survey questions that present a number of possible answers, of which respondents are asked to check those that apply.

**Table 2: Responses from primary school teachers of School A on the impact of school factors on learners' literacy skills acquisition**

	Whether the school:		
		Yes	No
1	Was safe and had an orderly environment to foster literacy learning	19	01
2	Had a strong leadership that would support literacy learning	15	05
3	Had high expectation for pupil achievement in literacy learning	16	04
4	Emphasized very much on the importance of learners acquiring literacy skills	20	00
5	Had uninterrupted time devoted to literacy instruction	20	00
6	Used assessment to evaluate progress in literacy learners	20	00
7	Had instituted MBTL Program to improve pupils' literacy skills acquisition	20	00
8	Had an adequate number of classrooms that were spacious enough to comfortably accommodate the number of literacy learners	16	04
9	Had adequate teaching and learning resources for reading and writing	17	03
10	Had a teacher-pupil ratio that would affect literacy instruction in a direction	20	00
11	Had a higher proportion of pupils reading and writing grade expectations	20	00
12	Had recorded improved pupil outcomes in literacy learning	20	00
	<b>Total</b>	<b>223/240</b>	<b>17/240</b>
	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>7%</b>

Findings in Table 2 above show that 93% of teachers stated that school factors were in place while 7% of them said school factors were not in place. School A therefore was

providing a safe, orderly and strong leadership. The school also had high expectations for higher pupil achievement because of the emphasis it was putting on academics. Instruction and assessment were strengthened by good infrastructure and the recommended teacher- learner ratio of one teacher to forty learners. From the Researchers' search of records, there was a high proportion of learners' grade reading, writing and calculation achievement. It showed that school factors impact on learners' literacy skills acquisition and growth.

**Table 3: Responses from teachers of School B on the impact of school factors on learners' literacy skills acquisition.**

	<b>Whether the school:</b>		
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1	Was safe and had an orderly environment to foster literacy learning	05	15
2	Had a strong leadership that would support literacy learning	02	18
3	Had high expectation for pupil achievement in literacy	03	17
4	Emphasized very much on the importance of learners acquiring literacy skills	16	04
5	Had uninterrupted time devoted to literacy instruction	16	04
6	Used assessment to evaluate progress in literacy learning	04	16
7	Had instituted the MBTL Programme to improve pupils' literacy skills acquisition	20	00
8	Had an adequate number of classrooms that were spacious enough to comfortably accommodate literacy learners	05	15
9	Had adequate teaching and learning resources in literacy	02	18
10	Had a teacher-pupil ratio in literacy classrooms that would affect literacy instruction in a way	04	16
11	Had a higher proportion of pupils' grade reading and writing expectations	06	14
12	Had recorded improved pupil outcomes in literacy progress	03	17
	<b>Total</b>	<b>86/240</b>	<b>154/240</b>
	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>64%</b>

Findings in Table 3 above show that 36% of the teachers stated that school factors were in place according to the observation made by the teachers of the school and by the Researcher himself, while 64% of the teachers reported that school factors were not in place. School B therefore was providing a relatively poor school environment and a relatively demoralized super infrastructure due to the environment they were operating in. Instruction and assessment were compromised by a poor infrastructure and overcrowded classrooms. Expectations for higher pupil achievement was low because of discouraging conditions that were obtaining at the school. From the Researchers' search of records at the school, the proportion of learners' reading grade level was low. This showed that school factors impact indeed on learners' literacy skills acquisition and growth.

**Table 4: Responses from School A teachers on the impact of classroom factors on learners' literacy skills acquisition.**

<b>Whether the School:</b>			
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1	Had a bright and well organized classroom to support literacy learning	18	02
2	Had resources and working areas clearly labeled.	19	01
3	Had resources that reflected the range of families and cultures in Malawi, such as stories as well as pictures in learners' textbooks and pictures mounted on classroom walls reflecting the Malawi culture	20	00
4	Had children's names and high frequency words displayed at children's reading height	15	05
5	Had days of the week displayed in both English and Chichewa	16	04
6	Had an alphabet, in both English and Chichewa, that was attractively displayed on walls at children's height	20	00
7	Had children's poems, songs, and other related literacy items displayed on walls at children's reading height	20	00
8	Had displays on children's literacy learning that included both typed and handwritten texts	20	00
9	Had teachers who were supporting and encouraging children to read literacy print displayed in classroom	20	00
10	Had displays in literacy learning that referred to both children and adults	18	02
11	Had teachers who were encouraging and supporting children to read literacy material around the classroom	20	00
	<b>Total</b>	<b>206/220</b>	<b>13/220</b>
	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>6%</b>

As reflected in Table 4 above, the findings indicate that 94% of the teachers stated that classroom factors were in place while 6% of them stated that classroom factors that impact on learners' literacy skills acquisition were not in place. The school had bright and organized classrooms with typed and handwritten displays that reflected the range of families and cultures of Malawi. The displays referred to both adults and children. Children were being encouraged to read around the classroom. An alphabet was attractively mounted on the walls of the classroom. The alphabet was both in English, an opaque language, (A, B, C, D, E, F,G, H, I;...Z), and in Chichewa, a transparent language, (KA, KE, KI, KO,KU: MA, ME, MI, MO, MU; ...). School A therefore had classroom conditions that were fostering literacy learning more than School B. From the findings in Table 4 above, classroom factors impact on learners' literacy skills acquisition.

**Table 5: Responses from School B teachers on the impact of classroom factors on learners' literacy skills acquisition**

<b>Whether the classroom:</b>			
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1	Had a bright and well organized setting to support literacy learning	05	15
2	Had literacy resources and working areas clearly labeled in print.	04	16
3	Had literacy resources that reflected the range of families and cultures in Malawi, such as stories and pictures in books	06	14
4	Had children's names and high frequency words displayed at children's reading height	00	20
5	Had days of the week displayed in both English and Chichewa	01	19
6	Had an attractive alphabet, both in English and in Chichewa, that was attractively displayed on classroom walls at children's reading height	04	16
7	Had poems, songs, children's writings displayed at children's reading height to support literacy learning.	06	14
8	Had displays on children's literacy learning that included both typed and handwritten texts	02	18
9	Had teachers who were reading and referring to print displayed in the classroom	00	20
10	Had displays in literacy that referred to both children and adults	02	18
11	Had teachers who were encouraging and supporting children to read literacy staff around the classroom	00	20
	<b>Total</b>	<b>29/220</b>	<b>191/220</b>
	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>87%</b>

Table 5 above indicates that 13% of the teachers stated that classroom factors were in place while 87% of them lamented that classroom factors were not in place. Classroom settings were neither bright nor well organized. There were no displays in the classroom due to cracked and patchy walls and a leaking grass-thatched roof of a class block built with planks. So there was nothing for the learners to read around in the classroom.

**Table 6: Responses from teachers of School A on the impact of child-by-instruction interaction on learners' initial literacy skills acquisition**

	Whether the teachers:		
		Yes	No
1	Recognized the concept of child-by-instruction interaction when conducting literacy lessons	16	04
2	Had remedial literacy lessons in place	18	02
3	Recognized learners' learning differences during literacy lessons	20	00
4	Encouraged children to participate actively in group work during literacy lessons	20	00
5	Helped learners choose literacy books that interested them in literacy and learning	20	00
6	Provided a non-threatening learning atmosphere when conducting literacy lessons	20	00
7	Could help learners see the real purposes of being literate	16	04
8	Treated learners equally during literacy lessons	20	00
9	Treated learners differently during literacy lessons	20	00
10	Encouraged activities in which learners were working independently during literacy lessons	20	00
	<b>Total</b>	<b>190/200</b>	<b>10/200</b>
	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>5%</b>

Findings in Table 6 above reflect that 95% of the teachers stated that child-by-instruction interactions have an impact on learners' literacy skills acquisition. Recognizing the impact of individualizing instruction on learners' literacy skills acquisition, a majority of teachers were putting in place teaching strategies that could individualize learners' learning abilities. During group work, groups were composed of, at most, four learners. This helped to maximize learner participation in group discussion, so that as the teacher was moving around the groups, they could establish the learning disparities amongst the learners and differentiate instruction accordingly. That is why there were remedial literacy lessons as one way of individualizing or differentiating instruction. The majority of teachers therefore knew how individualized instruction impacts positively on learners' literacy skills acquisition.

**Table 7: Responses from teachers of School B on the impact of child-by-instruction interaction on learners' literacy skills acquisition**

<b>Whether the teachers:</b>		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1	Recognized the concept of child-by-instruction interaction in literacy instruction	13	07
2	Had literacy remedial lessons in place	02	18
3	Recognized learners' learning differences during literacy lessons	14	06
4	Encouraged children to participate actively in literacy group work sessions	12	08
5	Helped learners choose literacy books that interested them	00	20
6	Provided a non-threatening learning atmosphere during literacy lessons	18	02
7	Helped the learners see the real purposes of literacy learning	16	04
8	Treated learners equally during literacy lessons	11	09
9	Treated learners differently during literacy lessons	11	09
10	Encouraged activities in which learners were working independently to foster individualized instruction	12	08
<b>Total</b>		<b>109/200</b>	<b>92/200</b>
<b>Percentage</b>		<b>54%</b>	<b>46%</b>

Findings in Table 7 above indicate that at School B, a rural school, 54% of the teachers knew how child-by-instruction interaction impacts on learners' literacy skills acquisition. On the other hand, 46% of the teachers said they did not fully recognize how individualizing instruction impacts on literacy learning. It was observed however, that learners' learning differences were being recognized by the teachers and learners were being treated differently. Activities in which learners were working independently on literacy lessons were being encouraged and the learning atmosphere was good. Remedial lessons in literacy were not in place because of the large number of pupils. Group work was encouraged but due to the large number of pupils and due to the

shortage of textbooks, each group was having ten pupils sharing a text book during group discussion, which literally minimized and compromised pupil participation in group work during literacy lessons. It was inhibiting literacy instruction.

## 4.2 Findings from interviews with teachers.

Views of School A teachers were sought on the impact of school, classroom factors and child-by-instruction factors interaction on learners' literacy skills acquisition. Table 8 below indicates their views.

**Table 8: Views of School A teachers on whether the school, classroom and child-by-instruction interaction were factors on learners' literacy skills acquisition**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
The impact of the school factor on learners' literacy skills acquisition	16	04
The impact of the classroom factor on the way learners acquire literacy skills	14	06
The impact of child-by-instruction interaction on the way learners acquire literacy skills	15	05
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>25%</b>

Findings in Table 8 above show that 75% of the teachers stated that all the three factors had a positive impact on learners' literacy skills acquisition. Only 25% of them felt that the factors negatively impacted on learners' literacy skills acquisition. Many teachers attributed the positive impact on learners' literacy skills acquisition to the poor standard infrastructure of the school. The school had fully furnished classrooms as well

as other necessary infrastructure such as piped water and toilets. They stated that the school, being in the middle of the city, meant that it was receiving adequate and suitable teaching and learning materials and qualified teachers due to its proximity to the Ministry of Education provincial headquarters. They also stated that the majority of their learners were coming from high social status homes where parents could be helping the learners with their school work.

### **4.3 Findings from school, classroom and lessons observations**

Views of School B teachers were sought on the impact of school, classroom factors and child-by-instruction interaction factors on learners' literacy skills acquisition. Table 9 below indicates their views.

**Table 9: Views of School B teachers on whether the school, classroom and child-by-instruction interaction were factors that were impacting on learners' literacy skills acquisition**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Impact of the school factor on how learners acquire literacy skills	05	15
Impact of the classroom factor on how learners acquire literacy skills	02	18
Impact of individualizing instruction on how learners acquire skills in literacy learning	04	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>11/60</b>	<b>49/60</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>81%</b>

Table 9 above shows that 19% of the teachers felt that all the three factors had a positive impact on learners' literacy skills acquisition while 81% of them felt that the factors impacted negatively on learners' literacy skills acquisition. Many teachers attributed the negative impact the factors had on learners' literacy skills acquisition to the poor infrastructure of the school and to the shortage of textbooks. The school had poorly furnished classrooms which were also inadequate in terms of space and numbers. Learners were receiving literacy instruction while squatting on a dusty floor in a grass thatched wooden built classroom. There were just four toilets for the whole school and no piped water. Teachers also stated that the majority of the learners were coming from low social status homes where parents rarely help the learners with their

school work. The scarcity of teaching and learning resources in literacy made teaching and learning even more difficult. Individualizing instruction as well as using group work during literacy lessons was difficult to put into effect in the circumstances that were obtaining at the school.

### **4.3 Findings from school, classroom and lesson observations**

#### **4.3.1 Observations on School A**

From the Researcher's observations, the school infrastructure at School A was modern and therefore conducive for literacy teaching and learning. The school had an adequate number of classrooms to meet the number of learners from standards One to Eight. Classrooms were well furnished except for standards One to Four where learners were receiving instruction while squatting on the floor. The school had a stable management which was managing the school very well. The school also had a Parent- Teacher Association which was performing well in helping the super infrastructure of the school in running the school.

Classrooms at School A were spacious enough, which allowed group work to be done in a comfortable way. The walls of the classrooms were well painted and it could be said that they were speaking walls. This was so because there were a number of visual aids on all classroom walls. This was especially so for the standard Four classroom. When it came to textbooks, the number was adequate and catered nicely for the number of learners in the classroom. During literacy lessons, each pupil had a text book. Each classroom had two teachers who were taking the learners in all the school subjects. The

teachers appeared enthusiastic about their work and highly motivated to help the learners. From the lessons observed by the Researcher, the teachers' enthusiasm and motivation were very vivid. Classroom management was excellent and individual learner attention was key in the way they handled the classes. The pupils too showed that they enjoyed the lessons from the way they were responding to the teacher's prompts. It was obvious that the lessons were interactive and learner-centered.

#### **4.3.2 Observations on School B**

The Researcher observed that many pupils were walking long distances to school due to the fact that primary schools are widely located in rural Mzuzu. This meant that many pupils arrived at school late and were either denied entry into the classroom or allowed into the classroom and punished later because of late coming. The long distances they were walking to school signify that they reached school tired which compromised their concentration on, inter alia, literacy learning. The school infrastructure was composed of very old learning blocks, some of which were grass thatched. The teacher-learner ratio was more than the recommended 1:40. Many classes had more than 70 learners. Teachers of literacy were well qualified but many of them expressed dissatisfaction with the working environment. They complained about the poor state of their classrooms and lack of textbooks. During literacy lessons, one textbook would be shared by not less than five pupils. Due to the large number of pupils in the class, teachers said that it was difficult to create a conducive learning atmosphere and individualize instruction. In fact, many of the teachers lamented that their school was one of the least in terms of passing rate at standard Eight due to environmental factors.

### 4.3.3 Findings from literacy tests administered to the learners

All the literacy tests were in English. The Researcher felt that literacy tests be in English as a function of the topic of this study because it was the medium of instruction in other subjects from grade Four at primary school level in Malawi. The acquisition of initial literacy skills in English by learners was therefore considered a prerequisite in formal learning.

**Table10: School A learners' literacy test scores**

Test item	% of learners	
	Able	Unable
Dictation test	68	32
Reading comprehension	85	15
Word attack	65	35
Speed reading	60	40
Word completion	46	54
<b>Total</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>35%</b>

As reflected in Table 10 above, 65% of the sampled learners at School A were able to answer correctly, while 35% of them gave wrong answers. In all the literacy tests, the percentage of learners who passed the tests was higher than those who failed the tests except in the word completion test where only 46% of the learners passed.

**Table 11: School B learners' literacy test scores:**

Test item	% of learners Able	% of learners Unable
Dictation test	39	61
Reading comprehension	20	80
Word attack	55	45
Speed reading	50	50
Word completion	46	54
<b>Total</b>	42%	<b>58%</b>

Scores in Table 11 above indicate a generally poor performance by literacy learners at School B. Only in the word attack and speed reading tests were the learners able to perform well. In the former, 55% of the learners passed while in the latter, 50% of the learners passed. In total, 42% of the learners passed while 58% failed the literacy tests at the School.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

From the findings, responses to the checklists by teachers showed that the three factors had impacted positively on learners' literacy skills acquisition at School A while at School B, the impact was negative.

Findings from interviews with teachers at School A showed that all the three factors impacted positively on learners' literacy skills acquisition while at School B, the impact was negative. The Researcher's observations as well as the learners' test scores at the two schools supported the findings.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

#### **5.0 Overview**

This chapter discusses the findings on the impact of the teaching and learning environment on learners' literacy skills acquisition. The discussion is based on the objectives and research questions of the study.

#### **5.1 The impact of school factors on learners' literacy skills acquisition**

The first objective of the study was to determine the impact of school factors on learners' literacy skills acquisition. Schools that are effective share common school factors. According to Presley et al. (2001), these shared common school factors include a safe and orderly environment, strong leadership, high expectation for learner achievement, uninterrupted time devoted to literacy instruction, assessing learner progress and providing guidance and good class management. The qualification of teachers and their staffing levels are other school factors that impact on learners' literacy skills acquisition. It goes without mention that this encapsulates literacy learning.

Responses from teachers on whom a checklist on the impact of school factors on learners' literacy skills acquisition was administered showed that the impact of this factor differed from school to school. At school A, teachers were asked whether at their school, there was a safe and orderly environment, strong leadership, high expectation

for learner achievement, uninterrupted time devoted to literacy instruction, learner progress assessment, provision of guidance and good class management. Responses showed that 93% of the teachers agreed that their school had a safe and orderly environment, strong leadership, high expectation for learner achievement, uninterrupted time devoted to literacy instruction, was assessing learner progress, and was providing guidance and that there was good class management. The Researcher's check on the school revealed that all grade four teachers at the school were well qualified and that the staffing levels were adequate (with a teacher-learner ratio of 1:35). In addition, the social environment of teaching and learning made learners feel comfortable and loved. This environment made it possible for the learners to develop their academic abilities more. The learners were also influenced by their teachers who scaffolded their learning through the child-by-instruction interaction, which was the third objective of this study. The findings at this school are supported by Tharp and Gallimore (2004), Fox (1966) and the works of the humanist psychologist Abraham Maslow who asserts that certain psychological and social aspects influence certain learning behaviours and that learners benefit from interaction with others in a setting. Additionally, learners who felt comfortable and loved were likely to optimize the development of their literacy abilities.

At school B, teachers were asked whether their school had a safe and an orderly environment, a strong leadership, high expectation for learner achievement, uninterrupted time devoted to literacy instruction, assessment in learner progress and providing guidance and good class management. Responses showed that 64% of the

teachers disagreed that their school had a safe and orderly environment, strong leadership, high expectation for learner achievement, uninterrupted time devoted to literacy instruction, monitoring of learner progress, provision of guidance and good class management. The Researcher's check on the school revealed that all the grade four teachers at the school were qualified and that staffing levels were adequate (but with a high teacher-learner ratio of 1:70). In addition, the social environment of teaching and learning was not suitable because of overcrowding of learners in classrooms. This made learners feel uncomfortable. This environment did not make it possible for learners to develop their academic abilities fully. Learners were not influenced by their teachers who rarely their learning through interactions. Findings at this school were contrary to findings of Tharp and Gallimore (2004), Fox (1966) and the works of the humanist psychologist Abraham Maslow which assert that certain psychological and social aspects influence learning habits and that learners benefit from interaction in a setting. Additionally, learners at this school were uncomfortable and found it difficult to optimize the development of their academic abilities in literacy.

## **5.2 The impact of classroom factors on learners' literacy skills acquisition**

The second objective of the study was to find out the impact of classroom factors on learners' literacy skills acquisition. Responses from teachers on whom a checklist on the impact of classroom factors on learners' literacy skills acquisition was administered showed that the impact of this factor differed from school to school. At both schools, teachers were asked whether their school had bright and well organized classroom settings; literacy resources and working areas that were clearly labeled; resources that

could reflect the range of families and cultures in Malawi; those that had children's names and high frequency words displayed at children's height; had days of the week displayed in English; had an attractive alphabet displayed at children's reading height; had poems, songs, children's writings displayed; displays included typed and hand written texts; the teacher was reading and referring to print displayed in the classroom; had displays referred to both adults and children; and whether learners were being encouraged and supported to read around the classroom.

Responses from the teachers showed that the impact of this factor varied from school to school, just like the impact of the school factor on learners' literacy skills acquisition did.

Responses from school A teachers, as well as the Researcher's observations, indicated that school A literacy classroom settings were airy, bright and spacious. The walls of the rooms were equipped with bright and colorful charts. Educational and subject oriented posters and charts were also visible. Rooms were therefore well organized with resources and working areas clearly labeled. This agrees with what Petty (2004) states that in a literacy rich classroom, space should be organized in a way that encourages movement and interaction amongst learners. This fosters literacy learning.

Displays in the rooms were mostly in English. They were attractive, displayed at children's reading height and included both handwritten and typed texts. The Researcher learnt from teachers that it was necessary that most of the displays were in English because it was a language that was alien to the learner and to which the

learner therefore required maximum exposure. They argued that the displays helped to maximize learners' exposure to print and therefore to familiarize themselves more with the written word in a language foreign to them. This promoted remembering and vocabulary growth in the literacy learner.

The school had resources that reflected the range of cultures and families in Malawi. This was important because it made learning meaningful to the literacy learner. This finding is in tandem with Fernie (1985), Neuman and Roskos (1990), who found out that materials for literacy teaching should be meaningful to the literacy learner as well as to the one who instructs literacy. They added that some literacy teaching and learning materials support more sustained literacy learning than others. Teaching and learning materials that have meaning to the learner engage them more in constructive activity and tend to generate more effective language learning than materials that do not reflect the culture of the learner, since they will mean little to the literacy learner.

Responses from school B teachers, as well as the Researcher's observations on the same school indicated that only 13% of the teachers responded that classroom factors were in place while 87% of the teachers said that the classroom factors were not in place. The latter explained that the walls of their literacy classrooms were bare and patchy. This was because teachers failed to use the walls to put up charts or posters and displays in order to create a literacy rich classroom environment. In addition, the rooms had no lighting which made it difficult for pupils to read, write and calculate properly. The researcher also observed that although classrooms seemed to be well organized, they were dull and poorly ventilated. The resources were well labeled but

the working areas could not be labeled due to cracked and patchy walls. School B is an old school and located in a rural area of Mzuzu. It was built during the colonial days and had not been renovated since then in spite of the rapidly growing population of learners that frequent the school.

Literacy resources at School B reflected the range of cultures and families in Malawi, just like at School A, only that the resources at School B were not enough to cater for the huge number of learners. There were no displays in the classrooms since the walls were cracked, hence compromising literacy learning, since the classroom was poor in print. Classroom walls were thus poor in print, hence relatively inhibiting literacy instruction in a way. Clayton (1965) states that the setting of a classroom influences certain behaviors on the part of both the literacy teacher and the literacy learner. The classroom environment at School B therefore negatively impacted on the academic progress of learners as compared to the classroom environment at School A. The classroom environment at School B does not correlate with the idea attributed to Dewey (1933) who asserted that there is need for a school to have appropriate furniture in order to provide for an environment that is conducive to learning.

### **5.3 The impact of child-by-instruction interaction on learners' literacy skills acquisition**

The third objective of the study was to find out the impact of child-by-instruction interaction on learners' literacy skills acquisition. The checklist asked teachers whether in literacy learning, they knew the concept of child-by-instruction interaction; had

remedial lessons in place; recognized learners' learning differences; encouraged children to participate actively in group work; helped learners in choosing books that interested them; provided a non threatening learning environment; helped learners see the real purposes of literacy learning; were treating learners equally or differently; and whether they were organizing independent tasks for literacy learners.

Responses from the teachers on whom a checklist on the impact of individualizing instruction on learners' literacy skills acquisition was administered showed that the impact of this factor differed from school to school.

Findings from School A revealed that 95% of the teachers knew the concept of individualizing instruction in literacy learning. Individualized instruction was being practiced at this school during literacy lessons. For instance, remedial lessons were in place in order to cater for individual learners' challenges in literacy learning. Most teachers said they recognized learners' learning disparities in literacy learning, and therefore, treated them differently in literacy learning. One way of doing so was through organizing remedial lessons in literacy for learners who had difficulties in literacy learning. According to Neal et al. (2007), individualizing instruction is very important in a literacy classroom. It denotes differentiating teaching strategies vis-à-vis learners learning disparities. This is done because learners learn differently since they have different or individual learning capacities. Perrot (1982) also explains that individualizing instruction means organizing independent learning tasks where learners work independently on different tasks. The findings at school A were in consonance with what Greenleaf (2005) terms 'accommodation', a social element of the



environment under which instruction takes place. Greenleaf defines accommodation as what a teacher does differently to ensure that no learner fails to succeed in literacy learning due to an inherited condition over which they have no voluntary control. The argument is that learners never learn in exactly the same way. They have individual or different learning capacities, hence the term child-by-instruction interaction, also referred to as individualizing or differentiating instruction, the third specific objective of this study. What one learner needs in order to learn differs generously from one learner to another. This aspect was observed by the Researcher at School A where, *inter alia*, learners were being helped by teachers to choose books that were of interest and meaning to them.

At school A, independent learning activities were being encouraged by teachers during literacy lessons. According to Perrot (1982:110), organizing independent studies is another dimension of individualizing literacy instruction and that, in his diction, "this type of organizing instruction recognizes the fact that in any class..., there is bound to be a generous range of learning abilities and interests and organizing independent literacy instruction therefore helps to cater for them". Independent study refers to occasions where literacy learners work independently and individually on individual literacy tasks that suit their varying literacy abilities and interests, and the teacher has to reach out to individual pupils in order to individualize and differentiate literacy instruction. Schunk (2009:255) calls this multidimensional instruction in that "structures become differentiated (and classrooms become multidimensional) when students work on different tasks at the same time". Individualizing instruction therefore, ensures that

literacy learners are taught according to their literacy learning capacities in order that there is uniform progress for all literacy learners (Cirino 2006). A further demonstration that at school A there was progress for most learners is exemplified from the learners' scores which they obtained in literacy tests administered to them. Learners were tested on dictation, reading comprehension, word attack, speed reading, and word completion. Scores of the literacy tests indicated that 65% of the sampled learners performed well on all the literacy tests. The pass rate at this school showed that the use of child-by-instruction interaction, also called individualizing instruction, was helping many pupils. The idea of administering literacy tests was to gauge how the findings would indicate on the findings on primary schools A and B.

Findings from School B differed substantially from findings from School A. Literacy teachers said they understood the concept of child-by-instruction interaction factors in literacy learning but that its practice was being compromised by the teaching and learning environment at the School. This meant that individualizing instruction was being minimally practiced at this school. Individualizing instruction is a very significant factor in learning as it ensures that literacy learners are taught according to their individual literacy learning capacities in order that there is progress in literacy learning for all literacy learners. At School A, there were independent study sessions during which the literacy teacher could see and define individual literacy learning challenges in individual pupils and address them accordingly. Lack of its practice at School B therefore was compromising literacy learning. Lack of its practice at this School also disagrees with Perrot (1982) who states that individualizing instruction recognizes the

fact that in any class, there is likely to be a generous range of abilities and interests in literacy learners, and that this type of literacy instruction caters for them. Independent study, which is another dimension of differentiating instruction, refers to occasions where learners work independently and individually on individual literacy tasks that suit suiting their varying literacy learning abilities and varying literacy interests. This was lacking at School B. Teachers said they recognized learners' learning differences but had no remedial literacy lessons in place to cater for struggling literacy learners. Organizing remedial literacy lessons is another aspect of differentiating instruction as it recognizes the fact that some learners require additional instruction in order to succeed. This aspect, present at School A, was lacking at School B, which goes against Greenleaf's (1965) idea which defines accommodation as what a teacher does differently to ensure that no learner fails to succeed due to an inherited condition over which they have no control. Active group work was encouraged at this school, but group work was made difficult to conduct because of the large number of pupils per literacy class, which was not less than seventy. The situation was worsened by the inadequacy of literacy textbooks where seven pupils were seen by the Researcher sharing one textbook during group work in reading and writing sessions. This was limiting pupil participation in group work during literacy lessons.

To find out literacy skills in the learners, the learners were tested in dictation, reading comprehension, word attack, speed reading, and word completion. Scores of the literacy tests indicated that only 42% of the sampled learners performed well on all the literacy tests. The pass rate at this school showed that the practice of individualizing

instruction was not being fully practiced, hence negatively affecting the learners' literacy skills acquisition.

A fuller analysis of the literacy tests which were administered to literacy learners showed that individualizing instruction, as a child-by instruction interaction strategy, has an impact on learners' literacy skills acquisition, and that this impact differs from school to school.

At both Schools, thirty learners participated in all the literacy tests. In the dictation test that was given to learners at School A, 68% of the learners were able to spell correctly while 32% failed the test. In the reading comprehension test, 85% of the learners passed while only 15% of them gave wrong answers. In the word attack test, 65% of the learners passed the test while 35% of them failed the test. In the speed reading test, 60% of the learners passed the test while 40% of them failed the literacy test. In the word completion test, 46% of the learners passed the test while 54% of them failed to pass. The general performance at School A was that 65% of the learners passed the tests while 35% of them failed.

At School B, 39% of the learners passed the dictation test while 61% of them failed. In the reading comprehension test, only 20% of the learners passed the test while 80% of them failed the test. In the word attack test, 55% of the learners passed the test, 45% of them failed. In the speed reading test, 50% of the learners passed the test. In the word completion test, 46% of the learners managed to complete the words correctly while 54% of the learners could not complete the words correctly. The general

performance in the literacy tests at School B was that 46% of the learners passed the tests while 56% of the learners failed.

Results from the learners' test scores indicated that the teaching and learning environment at School B impacted relatively negatively on learners' literacy skills acquisition. The performance of pupils at this School was poorer than the performance of learners at School A. The good performance of learners at School A correlated well with the good teaching and literacy learning environment that was obtaining at that school. The poor performance of the learners at School B correlated very well with the poor teaching and learning conditions that were obtaining at that school. At School A, learners were positively influenced by a conducive teaching and learning environment while at School B, learners were negatively influenced by a poor teaching and learning environment. The findings agree very well with Clayton's (1965) idea that the setting of a school influences certain behaviors on the part of both the teacher and the learner. The findings also agree very well with Dewy (1933) who asserts that there is need for a school to have appropriate furniture in order to provide for an environment that is conducive to learning. Corbun, et al. (2004) also state that schools factors strongly impact on what happens in the literacy classroom.

Current findings also show that the way a literacy classroom is structured predicts a great deal about the success-rate of objectives that are to be met through teaching processes. It influences the learner's ability to concentrate, devote attention and evoke information from previous learning. A literacy classroom having poor lighting will make for a bad place. Learners will face difficulties in working not only on their literacy

lessons, but on other lessons too. Bright and colorful charts in a classroom do not only make the room look attractive, but also give significant information to learners on various subjects. The charts may also intellectually stimulate learners, making them more attentive to their studies and less drawn towards other distractions.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to discuss and analyze the findings of the study. The findings were analyzed in harmony with the research objectives and the research questions. The findings were also analyzed in consonant with the literature that had been reviewed.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.0 Overview**

The chapter covers the summary of the study, conclusions that were drawn from the study and the recommendations.

#### **6.1 Summary of the study**

The aim of this study was to investigate the impact of learning environments on learners' literacy skills acquisition in Mzuzu City in Malawi. A case study was conducted on two primary schools in Mzuzu. Sixty learners and twenty teachers were sampled to provide data for the study.

The study was divided into six chapters. Chapter one consisted of the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the objectives of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study and the definition of the core terms used in the study. Chapter two was a review of related literature while chapter three contained the research methodology. Chapter four presented the findings of the study while chapter five was a discussion of the findings. Chapter six summarized the study, drew conclusions from the study and suggested recommendations given the research findings.

Data was collected using checklists, observations, interviews and literacy tests. Checklists and interviews were administered to teachers while literacy tests were

administered to learners in order to gauge their literacy levels. Observations were also made by the Researcher on the school and classroom situations, child-by-instruction interactions and how these impact on learners' initial literacy skills acquisition.

Findings from the study revealed that the learning environment has either a positive or negative effect on learners' literacy skills acquisition. On School A which was an urban school, the learning environment was conducive for literacy learning. The school, classroom and teacher factors supported learners' initial literacy skills acquisition. On the other hand, School B which was a rural school, the learning environment did not support very much learners in the acquisition of initial literacy skills.

## **6.2 Conclusion**

Findings from the study indicate that the learning environment impacts on learners' literacy skills acquisition. There is considerable evidence from the data collected that school factors such as the physical infrastructure, learning resources and leadership have an impact on the way learners acquire literacy skills. There is considerable evidence that classroom factors such as facilities available in the classroom, classroom management and teacher-learner ratio have an impact on the way learners acquire literacy skills. So too are factors related to teaching and learning processes such as how teachers handle learners' individual differences in literacy learning.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

In view of the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- (a) The Ministry of Education should build modern structures to replace all grass-thatched primary schools and rehabilitate existing primary schools.
- (b) The Ministry of Education should provide appropriate furniture in primary schools.
- (c) The District Education Manager should ensure that all primary schools receive sufficient teaching and learning resources.
- (d) The District Education Manager should ensure that Inspectors go round schools to help teachers in class management and in handling literacy lessons.
- (e) Head teachers should ensure that literacy classrooms are equipped with adequate literacy materials.
- (f) Teachers play a critical role in promoting literacy skills in children. Based on this, it is recommended that at both pre-service and in-service levels, teachers should be trained in literacy teaching.
- (g) Literacy teachers should ensure that their classrooms are rich in print, textbooks, posters, displays, etc.
- (h) Literacy teachers should ensure that they practice individualized instruction so that all learners acquire literacy skills.

## **6.4 Suggestions for future research**

For further research in this area of study, it would be worthwhile to find out the impact of the learning environment on either urban primary schools or on rural primary schools in a survey study, given that this one was a case study. The two types of schools on which the study was conducted differed in many respects. They had different literacy learning environments whose variables affect learners' literacy skills acquisition in different directions.

## REFERENCES

Ary, D., Jacobs, L.C., Razavieh, A. & Sorenson, C. (2006). **Introduction to Research in Education**. Thomson Wadsworth: Australia.

Barton, D. (2007). **Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of the Written Language**. USA: Blackwell Publishing.

Bull, S. & Solity. (1987). **Classroom Management: Principles to Practice**. London: Croom Helm.

Chomsky, N. (1968). **Language and Mind**. New York: Harcourt & Brace.

Cirino, P. T., Pollard-Durodola, S. D., Foorman, B. R., Carlson, C. D., & Francis, D. J. (2006; In press). **"Teacher characteristics, classroom instruction, student literacy and language outcomes in bilingual kindergarteners."** *Elementary School Journal*.

Coburn, C. E. (2004). **"Beyond Decoupling: Rethinking the Relationship Between the Institutional Environment and the Classroom"**. *Sociology of Education*, 77(3), 211-244.

Clayton, E. T. (1965). **Teaching and Learning: A Psychological Perspective**.

Boston: Prentice Hall.

Cohen, L., Manion & Morisson K. (2007). **Research in Education**. London and New York: Routledge.

Dewey, J. (1933). **How We Think**. New York: D. C. Heath.

Epstein, J. L. (1969). **Family Structures and Student Motivation: A Developmental Perspective**. San Diego: Academic Press.

Fox, R. et al. (n.d.). **Diagnosing Classroom Learning Environments**. USA: Science Research Associates Inc.

Freire, P. (1970). **Cultural Action for Freedom**. Harmondsworth: Harmond Books Ltd.

<http://dcsf.gov.uk>

(<http://www.literacyclassroom.com/>).

Luangala, J. R. (2006). **Research Ethics**. CYP: Lusaka, Zambia.

Neal, D., & Schanzenbach, D. W. (2007). **Left behind by design: Proficiency**

**Counts and test-based accountability**. Retrieved July, 2007, from [http://www.aei.org/docLib/20070716\\_NealSchanzenbachPaper.pdf](http://www.aei.org/docLib/20070716_NealSchanzenbachPaper.pdf)

Perrot, P. (1982). **Effective Teaching**. Longman & New York: Longman.

Petty, G. (2004). **Teaching Today**. UK: Nelson Thornes Ltd.

Pressley, M. & Harris, K. R. (2006). **Cognitive Strategy Instruction: From Basic Research to Classroom Instruction.** Mahwah NJ: Erlbaum.

Richmond, W. K. (1953). **The Rural School: Its Problems and Prospects.**  
London: Sage Publications.

Schoolzone Resources (2008). ***Redesigning Classroom Environments.***

Schunk, D. H. (2009). **Learning Theories: An Educational Perspective.** London:  
Pearson Prentice Hall.

Tharp, R.G. & Gallimore, R. (1988). **Rousing Minds to Life: Teaching, Learning  
and Schooling in Social Contexts.** New York: Cambridge University Press.

Therassa, (2006). **Organizing Teaching and Learning Environments.** The Open  
University.

Tivnan, T. & Hemphill, L. (2005). "Comparing four literacy reform models in  
high-poverty schools: Patterns of first-grade achievement." *Elementary  
School Journal*, 105 (5), 419-441.

Weaver, C. (1990). **Understanding Whole Language: From Principles to  
Practice.** Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

[www.mhhe.com/santeduze](http://www.mhhe.com/santeduze).

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Checklist for literacy teachers.

	<b>Teachers were asked whether their school :</b>
1	Had an orderly and a safe environment to foster literacy learning
2	Had a strong leadership towards literacy teachers and learners so that literacy teachers did not miss literacy lessons, and in order that literacy learners could not loiter around during literacy lessons, or absent themselves from literacy lessons.
3	Had high expectation for pupil achievement in literacy learning
4	Was emphasizing on the importance of learners acquiring literacy skills
5	Had uninterrupted time devoted to literacy instruction
6	Used assessment to evaluate learner progress in acquiring literacy skills
7	Had instituted the MBTL Programme to improve pupils literacy skills growth
8	Had an adequate number of classrooms that were spacious enough to comfortably accommodate literacy learners
9	Had adequate teaching and learning resources in literacy
10	Had a reasonable teacher-pupil ratio that would affect literacy instruction in a proper direction
11	Had a higher proportion of pupils grade reading and writing expectations
12	Had recorded improved pupil outcomes in reading, writing and calculating

## Appendix 2: Interview schedule.

Teachers were asked whether they:

1	Knew the concept, and the importance of teacher-by-child instruction interaction factors in literacy learning
2	Had remedial lessons in place for literacy learners
3	Recognized learners' learning differences in literacy lessons
4	Encouraged children to participate actively in group work during literacy lessons
5	Helped learners choose books that interested and meant to them
6	Provided a non-threatening learning atmosphere during literacy lessons
7	Helped learners see the real purposes of literacy learning
8	Treated learners equally during literacy lessons
9	Treated learners differently during literacy lessons
10	Encouraged activities in which learners worked independently during literacy lessons

### Appendix 3: The Researcher's literacy classroom observation guide

	<b>Whether the classroom :</b>
1	Had a bright and well organized setting
2	Had resources and working areas clearly labeled.
3	Had resources that reflected the range of families and cultures in Malawi
4	Had children's names and high frequency words displayed at children's reading height
5	Had days of the week displayed in English
6	Had an attractive alphabet displayed at children's reading height
7	Had poems, songs, children's writings properly displayed
8	Had displays that included typed and handwritten texts
9	Teacher was reading and referring to print displayed in classroom
10	Had displays that were referring to both adults and children
11	Had displays and whether learners were being encouraged and supported to read around the classroom

## **Appendix 4: Literacy tests for literacy learners**

### **a) Dictation test**

Listen to this short text, children, as I read it to you. After the second reading, I will slowly read the text to you and I will require you to write the text down as I will be slowly reading it to you.

*We are advised that after visiting the toilet, we have to always remember to wash our hands. When coughing, we are equally advised not to face those sitting near us for fear of infecting them. Also, we are advised to drink a lot of water.*

### **b) Reading and writing comprehension test**

Read the following text and respond to the questions that follow:

Our head teacher, Mrs. Moyo, introduced Mr. Chikwakwa to us. This is what Mr. Chikwakwa had to say:

The head teacher, members of staff, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls. The reason for my visit to your school is to share with you how we can take care of our bodies.

Now answer the following questions:

i. What was the name of the visitor?

ii. Why did he visit the school?

iii. What is the opposite of the word 'him'?

**c) Word completion test**

Fill in the missing letters in the following words in a manner that the word should mean:

Sch..l

Fam..y

Ru..r

Wa...ng

H...me

**d) Word Attack**

In a fast way, please read to me the following words as they will be shown to you in a

flash:

God

Home

Why

Tell

Explain