CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers the background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, study questions, significance of the study, delimitation of the study, limitations of the study and definitions of terms.

1.0 Background

Homework is a teaching strategy which is used by teachers all around the world (Barnes, 2001). According to Gill and Schlossman (1996), although there have been movements against the use of homework, it remains an important academic activity in schools. Homework is assigned for a variety of academic and non-academic purposes and benefits even though there has been disagreement within the educational community about the value and benefit of homework. One of the best ways for students to learn on their own and to actively engage in learning is homework. The homework habits of students provide us with clues about their achievement. Homework is also a valuable and useful educational tool for teachers, parents and students (Xu, 2005), because it is believed that the more time the learner spends on her/his homework, the more successful she/he can become (Cooper, 1989; Trautwein, 2007). Xu (2007) adds that homework is generally viewed as a positive component of a learner's education outside of classroom.

Homework improves learners' academic achievement particularly in reading. Proponents of homework believe that homework can benefit learners when used appropriately. For instance, the Public Schools of North Carolina (1999) reported that grade 10 students who spent more time completing homework received higher North Carolina High School Comprehensive Test reading and math scores. After adjusting for differences due to gender, ethnicity, and parents' educational level, the study revealed that students who reported spending at least three hours per week doing homework scored above the state average score in both reading and math.

Townsend (1995) conducted a study to determine if homework influenced the acquisition of vocabulary knowledge and understanding. Results indicated that third grade students who completed homework received significantly higher scores on a

teacher-made test designed to assess acquisition of new vocabulary when compared to students in the control group.

According to Bryan and Burstein (2004), learners with Learning Difficulties such as reading difficulties find it difficult to complete homework assignments. Similarly, Polloway, Epstein, & Foley (1992), stipulates that fifty six percent of learners with Learning Difficulties and twenty eight percent of learners without Learning Difficulties have problems completing homework assignments. Given the serious and complex academic difficulties of learners with reading difficulties, it is imperative that teachers construct homework for them and respond to it in ways that maximize its potential academic, social, and emotional benefits and minimize its destructive capacity (Sullivan & Sequeira, 1996). Although this is important for all learners, it is even more so for learners with reading difficulties.

Teachers' homework practices that sensitively respond to learners' needs and functional academic levels can prevent or reduce homework difficulties. Teachers' homework practices could impact learners' motivation and attitudes towards achieving success academically. They could minimize homework difficulties for learners with learning difficulties in general and learners with reading difficulties in particular. For learners with reading difficulties to succeed with and benefit from homework, homework assignments need to be designed, presented, supported, and responded to by teachers and parents in ways that meet the learners' learning needs. Frequently, teachers ignore critical homework practices, such as discussing and reviewing homework assignments, individualizing homework, providing constructive feedback, and involving parents as well as soliciting feedback from parents about their homework preferences (Salend & Schlif£, 1989).

In supporting this, Macbeth (2003) suggests for homework to be effective, it must be part of a carefully devised learning programme. This means that homework should be related to the curriculum, though it may go beyond it, confronting the present limits of learners' knowledge. In addition, for homework to be effective, it should have a purpose. This means that teachers should not set homework randomly. Rather, teachers must reflect upon the place and function of homework in order not to put the learner under heavy stress. Further, for homework to be effective, it should be suited to the capabilities of learners. Teachers need to differentiate and take into

consideration learners, individual differences and domestic circumstances of different families. Furthermore, for homework to be effective, comments and other feedback should be given to learners about their homework. It is important to give praise for good work and help where there are difficulties. Finally, for homework to be effective, parents should be kept informed by teachers about the nature of homework. This may include general information about homework policy, what facilities should be available in the home and how parents can assist. It may include detailed information about particular homework tasks set.

Not implementing effective homework can readily contribute to learners' failure and resistance. Often, negative attitudes engendered by unresponsive, unrealistic homework practices adversely influence other areas of schooling and stress teacher-student and parent-child relationships. Teachers' homework practices and attitude towards homework can have substantial positive and negative effects on student learning. To support this, Xu (2005) holds a view that learners' negative attitudes towards homework and poor academic performance are a result of teachers' poor homework practices.

Teachers' homework practices vary widely. Several researchers (Trautwein, Jiggl., Schnyder, & Ludtke, 2009; & Xu 2005) suggest that not all homework practices are effective. This is backed by Byran, Tains, and Karen Bursein, (2004) who highlighted that teachers' homework practices tend to be based on individual teacher's beliefs rather than on consensually agreed upon research based practices or policy guidelines. This entails that some teachers apply best homework practices up to standards while others may not. For instance, other teachers may collect homework and provide feedback to learners while others may collect homework without providing feedback to learners, and others may involve parents while others may not.

It can be said here that it is not the quantity of homework that determines the contribution of learning but the nature and quality of the teachers' homework practices, and homework assignments that determines the educational value of homework. This implies that the benefits of homework with regard to learners' academic and non academic achievement rely entirely and heavily on teachers' homework practices. Therefore, teachers should endeavour to come up with

homework of good quality by instituting good and effective teachers' homework practices. The need to institute effective teachers' homework practices reside at the core of improving learners' reading levels.

Learning to read is one of the greatest accomplishments in childhood because it is the foundation for learning and academic achievement later in someone's life. Success in reading is gateway to success in other academic areas as well (Villas – Boas, 1998) as it is a foundational skill for learning across content subject areas. According to Gudlaug (2010), it is worth considering that good reading skills and reading comprehension affects student achievements in other subjects as well, since reading is fundamental in almost all subjects.

Therefore, it is not surprising that concerns and debates among educators about how best to help children learn to read have been heated and unsettled for many years (Paris, 2005). For instance in as early as 1970s, considerable national attention has been focused on the reading skills among Zambian school going children (William, 1993). Various stake holders including parents, teachers and policy makers have expressed their concern about the low reading levels among children in primary schools in Zambia as documented by numerous studies (Williams, 1993; SACMEQ, 1998; Kelly and Kanyika, 1999; Kelly, 2000).

For instance in 1991 and 1992, Overseas Development Agency (ODA) commissioned a research to look at reading levels in English in primary schools in both Zambia and Malawi. In the case of Zambia, Williams' (1993) report reflected that there was inadequate comprehension in English among 85% of grade 3 learners, 84% of grade 4 learners and 74% of grade 6 learners. The study proved that learners were reading at two levels below their own grade levels (Williams, 1993). In 1995, a study was conducted by SACMEQ at grade 6 primary education in English. It revealed that 25% of the learners tested were able to read at minimum levels, and only 3% were reading at a desirable level. In 1999, the National Assessment Exercise was done. This was a study by the ECZ at grade 5. It concluded that 25% of school going children were reading at a minimum level and only 3% were reading at a desirable level.

Additionally, the recent studies (Matafwali, 2005; Matafwali, 2005; SACMEQ, 2012; STEP UP Zambia, 2011) have shown that reading levels among Zambian

school going children were still very low. For instance, the study conducted by Matafwali (2005) revealed that only 23% of the children in grade three who participated in the study were able to read at a level expected of their grade. In addition, The Grade 5 National Assessment Survey for 2006 and 2008 reflected learning achievements below 40% in both English and Zambian Languages (35.3% and 39.4% respectively) and this percentage has been stagnating since 1999. The Grade 5 National Assessment Survey and the EGRA survey, both from 2010 have shown poor reading and writing abilities among learners. The South African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ III) of 2010 noted that among Grade 6 learners that were tested in reading, only 27.4% were able to read at a basic competency level. The USAID Strengthening Educational Performance Up (STEP – Up) Zambia (2011) study found that less than 50% of pupils in grades 1 – 4 could read and write. In one extreme case, a grade 9 pupil could not even spell his name.

To reaffirm its commitment to address the situation (Learners not exhibiting the expected reading skills), the Zambian government in 1996 produced a comprehensive policy document for education, called 'Educating Our Future.' According to the National Policy on Education, 'Educating Our Future,' (1996: 34)

> A fundamental aim of the curriculum for lower and middle basic classes is to enable pupils to read and write clearly, correctly and confidently, in a Zambian language and in English and to acquire basic numeracy and problem solving skills. However learning to read and write in English should begin after learners have acquired basic skills in the local language.

The 'Educating Our Future' of 1996 further encourage schools to formulate homework policy by urging every school to produce a school plan with clear specifications of school policies on assessment and homework as it included a number of significant statements about homework. For instance, the education policy document of 1996, MoE (1996: 41), strongly states that

> ... each school, therefore, will be required to have a clear schedule of performance-monitoring activities that check pupils' progress.

> Prominent among these will be homework given to pupils on a regular basis, thoroughly marked, and quickly returned.

MoE (1996: 28), the education policy document of 1996, further states that "...important pedagogic routines, such as careful frequent pupil assessment and feedback, and the regular assignment and marking of homework, need to be institutionalized."

In addition, the Zambian government with support from Britain's Department For International Development (DFID), through the Ministry of Education, even went a step further in the promotion of literacy by designing the Primary Reading Programme (PRP) which was a systematic attempt to improve reading and writing in all primary schools through interventions at each grade level. It incorporated some of the interventions of 'Educating Our Future' of 1996. One of intervention of PRP was the language policy where initial literacy would be taught through a language which was familiar to children in grade one. The other intervention of PRP was that it encouraged schools to formulate school homework policy. MoE (2003: 175), a grade 3-7 'Read On Literacy Handbook,' states that

> the formation of school homework policy will encourage parents and guardians to play an important role by reducing the house hold chores that learners are expected to do and ensuring that they are given enough time for homework.

The introduction of homework policy as a measure to improve performance was furthermore announced in Parliament. During the daily Parliamentary debates for the fourth session of the tenth assembly on Thursday, 11th march, 2010, the then Minister of Education made a ministerial statement encouraging schools to formulate homework policy as one of the measures the Ministry of Education was taking to continue improving the performance of the grades 7, 9 and 12 examination results. Teachers were expected to give homework, regularly, to learners as a way of re-enforcing remedial learning. All parents and guardians were requested to monitor the implementation of the homework policy in schools through their children's exercise book (Zambia, National Assembly, Debates: 2010).

It must be noted that although the MoESVTEE has encouraged teachers to introduce homework policy to remediate the low reading levels, little was known about the teachers' home work practices towards learners with reading difficulties.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Although the Ministry of Education Science Vocational Training and Early Education has put efforts aimed at helping children who have difficulties with their academic work, recent studies (Kelly, 2000; Matafwali, 2005; SACMEQ, 2008; STEP UP Zambia, 2011) have shown that academic achievement particularly reading levels among Zambian school going children were very low. To this effect the Ministry of Education has encouraged teachers to introduce homework policy, among other interventions, to remediate the low reading levels (MoE, 1996; MoE, 2003; Zambia, National Assembly, Debates: 2010). However, little is known about the teachers' home work practices towards learners with reading difficulties. Thus, the study sought to ascertain teachers' homework practices towards learners with reading difficulties.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to establish teachers' homework practices towards learners with reading difficulties in six ordinary primary schools of Sefula Zone, Mongu District.

1.3 Research objectives

The study was guided by the following research objectives;

i) Establish teachers' rationale for assigning homework to learners with reading difficulties.
ii) Determine the extent to which teachers adapt homework to learners with reading difficulties
iii) Ascertain the extent to which teachers involve parents in the homework of their children with reading difficulties.
iv) Ascertain the extent to which teachers give feedback on homework done by learners with reading difficulties

1.4 Research questions

In order to address the four objectives listed above, the study posited four research questions in relation to the objectives;

i) What are teachers' rationales for assigning homework to learners with reading difficulties?
ii) To what extent do teachers adapt homework to learners with reading difficulties?
iii) To what extent do teachers involve parents in the homework of their children with reading difficulties?
iv) To what extent do teachers give feedback on homework done by learners with reading difficulties?

1.5 Significance of the study

At the time when various stake holders including parents, teachers and policy makers have expressed their concern about the continued low reading levels among children in primary schools as documented by numerous studies (Williams, 1993; SACMEQ, 1998; Kelly and Kanyika, 1999; Kelly, 2000; ECZ, 2008; Matafwali, 2005; SACMEQ, 2012; STEP UP Zambia, 2011), a study of this nature was necessary to bring teachers' homework practices towards learners with reading difficulties to the fore. It was therefore hoped that the study may provide valuable information that would help the Directorate of Standards, Curriculum and Teacher Education and Specialized Services, schools and teachers in particular in case of the need of reviewing and devising the best homework policy and teachers' homework practices towards learners with reading difficulties would enhance the quality of homework assigned to learners with reading difficulties in particular and other learners in general. Finally, the study outcomes might form the basis of a much wider study beyond Sefula Zone primary schools and learners with reading difficulties. Thus, the findings of this study may contribute to the body of knowledge and stimulate further enquiries on the topic by other researchers.

1.6 Delimitations of the study

Due to the large number of potential participants in the study population, the population involved in the study focused only on participants which were purposively selected within six ordinary primary schools from Sefula Zone, Mongu district of Western Province of Zambia. Sefula Zone was located in the rural part about 21 kilometres from Mongu town. It had two Secondary Schools, namely Sefula and Namushakande Secondary Schools, and six ordinary primary schools namely Sefula, Nomai, Liunga, Namachaha, Mutwiwambwa and Namushakande Primary

Schools. In addition, it had one special school which was Sefula School for the Visually Impaired in which all the learners were in the boarding. The ordinary schools in the Sefula Zone located in the rural part of Mongu and according to ECZ (2008) low reading levels are more in rural areas than urban areas among learners. Thus, the schools selected were considered to be information rich.

1.7 Limitations of the study

There are a number of limitations which must be taken into account when interpreting findings and making conclusions, and which may also represent opportunities for future research.

First, the study was only limited to five schools and only a small sample of 72 teachers, 24 learners and 24 parents. According to Bron (nd), due to the small sample available for the study, results may not be generalisable beyond the specific population from which the sample was drawn. Indeed, generalisation was not the aim of this research, but rather to understand and illustrate the homework practices experiences of individual teachers. Individuals experience things differently, and interpret their experiences and situations in different ways.

The second limitation was the 'static' nature of the study, that is, the study was based on a one-time view of teachers' homework practices than collection of data at different periods of time like years. That is, the research was not based on data collected at different periods of time thus may not have determined more precisely teachers' homework practices towards learners with reading difficulties.

The third one has to do with accuracy of teachers' self-reporting of their homework practices which formed part of the data collection tool. This was a concern to the researcher because of the under- or over-reporting by respondents. Baron (nd) explains that due to the failure of respondents to answer with candour, results might not accurately reflect the opinions of all participants of the included population. Therefore generalizing and applying the findings to other areas as generalizing this study's findings to the rest of schools in the country would be limited.

1.8 Definitions of terms

The following definitions are provided to ensure uniformity and understanding of these terms throughout the study.

Feedback refers to all post – response information that is proved by an agent (e.g. teachers, parent, peer, self) to a learner to inform him or her on his or her actual state of performance in homework.

Homework policy refers to a plan of action that gives guidelines on how and when, and how many times and of what sort homework should be given to learners of different ages and abilities; its purpose, and what should be expected of both schools and parents in supporting learners.

Homework refers to any academic work or activities which pupils are asked to do outside of the classroom and regular school hours, either on their own or presumably under the jurisdiction of parents or guardians but without the immediate and direct supervision of the teacher.

Learners with reading difficulties refer to learners who have not made satisfactory progress even after being given literacy instructions.

Ordinary primary school is a school at which education from grade one to seven is exclusively provided to learners without special educational needs.

Parental involvement according to Squelch and Lemmer (1994) is the active and willing participation of parents in a wide range of school – based and home – based activities which may be educational or non – educational which extends from supporting and upholding the school ethos to supervising children's homework at home. It implies mutual cooperation, sharing and support.

1.9 Outline of the study

Chapter 1: This chapter covered the background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, study questions, significance of the study, delimitation of the study, limitations of the study and definitions of terms.

Chapter 2: This chapter provides literature review that is relevant to the study. The chapter was divided in sections that include (a) history of homework, (b) teachers' rational for assigning homework to learners, (c) individualising of homework to learners, (d) parental involvement in homework of their children, (e) feedback on homework, and (f) research designs used in studies relevant to the current study.

Chapter 3: This chapter presents: the research design, study population, study sample, sampling procedure, data collection instruments and analysis, and ethical issues.

Chapter 4: This chapter contains the research findings that are organized under the themes derived from the research questions and not the research objectives because the latter have been used to structure the methodology and the manner in which data was presented and discussed.

Chapter 5: This chapter contains the discussion and interpretation of findings

Chapter 6: This contains a summary, conclusion and recommendation

1.10 Summary of chapter one

This chapter covered the background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, study questions, significance of the study, delimitation of the study, limitations of the study, definitions of terms and outline of the study. In the next chapter, a literature review on teachers' homework practices will be given.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents literature review that is relevant to the study. The chapter is divided in sections that include (a) history of homework, (b) teachers' rationale for assigning homework to learners, (c) adaptation of homework to learners with reading difficulties, (d) parental involvement in homework of their children, (e) feedback on homework to learners, and (f) a summary of chapter two.

2.1 History of homework

Gill and Schlossman (2004) examined the history of homework in the United States and found that a homework debate had begun as early as the 19th century. Historically, research has focused on the quantity of homework across time and countries. Though homework was seen as an important aspect of academic discipline at the beginning of the 20th century, it practices have existed throughout the 20th century into the 21st century.

In the early 1900s, many school districts banned homework, especially at the elementary level in an effort to discourage rote learning. By the 1930s, experts used evidence to confirm that in the pre-high school grades, homework had no beneficial effect on student achievement (Gill & Schlossman, 1996). This reinforced the pervasive discourse in education circles that homework represented a serious problem (Gill & Schlossman, 2004). By the 1940s, concerns were raised about homework interfering with home life. It was deemed harmful to health, character and family, as well as considered an ineffective instructional tool (Cooper, Robinson and Pattal, 2006).

According to Gill & Schlossman (2000), and Cooper, Robinson and Pattal (2006), during the 1950s, the USSR's launch of Sputnik satellite generated striking changes to North American education policies and attitudes in general. Part of Sputnik's legacy was an increased call for learners to focus more, and perform better, in school, particularly in science and math. Homework was seen as a necessary condition of guaranteeing learning, achievement, and future national accomplishments.

Cooper (2001) report that from 1960s to 1970s opposition to homework grew possibly as part of a greater backlash against the authority and rigidity of institutional structures. Some perceived homework as simply an added pressure on learners. Opponents began to question the value of homework and its strong link to an ideological focus on achievement and production. Homework assignments again declined, but fears about the country's economic competitiveness created pressure on educators to assign more homework.

The attention to global economic competition in the 1980s and 1990s once again made the argument for homework's necessity fashionable. The majority of the public generally supported assigning homework to learners. By the 1980s, with concern about the rigor of U.S. education, homework was once again on the rise (Cooper, 2001; Gill, 2004).

According to Xu (2007), homework is generally viewed as a positive component of a learner's education outside of classroom. In 1996, the Zambian government produced a comprehensive policy document for education, called Educating Our Future, which urged every school to produce a school plan with clear specifications of school policies on assessment and homework (MoE, 1996). In the year 1999 in Zambia, the Primary Reading Program (PRP) which was a systematic attempt to improve reading and writing in all primary schools through interventions at each grade level. One of the interventions of PRP was encouraging schools to formulate school homework policy (MoE, 2003). In 2010, the then Minister of Education (Ms Siliya) made a ministerial statement in parliament encouraging schools to formulate homework policy as one of the measures the Ministry of Education was taking to continue improving the performance of the grades 7, 9 and 12 examination results (Zambia, National Assembly, Debates: 2010).

2.2 Teachers' rationale for assigning homework

Marzano and Pickering (2007) say that for homework to be effective it should not be assigned simply as a matter of routine, but instead only when there is clear purpose in regard to learners learning. While Cooper, Robinson and Pattal (2006) add that most homework assignments usually serve multiple purposes and that teachers should make the purposes of each homework assignment clear to all learners.

Macbeth (2003: 4) identifies a variety of reasons for setting homework. Some of which are; consolidation of, or practice of, work already done in class; preparation for the next class work; introducing tasks that extend beyond work already done in class, but build upon it; assisting slower children to catch up with quick children; testing learners' understanding of work covered or competence skills; working independently and development of self–discipline; making use of materials and source of information (including parents) which are not accessible in classrooms; strengthening educational partnership between parents and teachers; providing a means by which teachers can encourage parents to become more actively involved in their child's formal education; and providing a means by which parents can see the sort of work which the child is doing in school, and by which they can assess progress.

Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) identified ten purposes for doing homework which included practice, preparation, participation, personal development, parent–child relations, parent–teacher communications, peer interactions, policy, public relations, and punishment. Van Voorhis (2004) categorized these purposes into three groups: instructional (i.e., the first four purposes), communicative (i.e., the next three purposes), and political (i.e., the final three purposes). Cooper, Robinson and Pattal (2006) classified them into two broad categories which were instructional (review, practice, preparation, extension, and integration) and non-instructional (communication between parent and child, fulfilling directives from school administrators, public relation, and punishing students).

Homework may be designed to give students opportunities to practice skills taught in class, increase speed, demonstrate mastery, retain skills, review work, and study for tests. Teachers reported that the main reason they assigned homework in the elementary grades is to give students time to practice skills from class lessons (Becker and Epstein, 1982).

Teachers may assign homework to ensure that each student is ready (prepared) for the next lesson. This may include homework that asks the student to complete unfinished classroom activities and assignments. Homework may be designed to help students study and internalize what they learned in school in preparation for the next lessons that will be taught (Paulu, 1995).

Homework may increase each student's involvement in learning, in applying specific skills and knowledge, and in conducting projects. Often in class, some students are hesitant to participate. Homework may be designed to engage all students in active learning, such as conducting and reporting experiments in science, writing essays, critiquing a book, or conducting other projects (Corno, 2000; Epstein, 2001).

Another purpose of homework is to build student responsibility, perseverance, time management, self-confidence, and feelings of accomplishment; also to develop and recognize students' talents in skills that may not be taught in class. Some teachers design homework to help students learn to manage their time, establish work schedules, build study skills, and develop research skills (Muhlenbruck, Cooper, Nye, & Lindsay, 2000). At home, students may control the amount of time they spend on different skills, the books or resources they use, and the number of consultations with parents, siblings, and friends to complete their work (Leone & Richards, 1989). Students also may need to learn to deal with distractions at home (Muhlenbruck, Cooper, Nye, & Lindsay, 2000).

Homework may be designed to guide and promote positive communications between parent and child. Parent–child conversations may help reinforce the importance of schoolwork, homework, and learning, and promote students' understanding of how schoolwork is used in real-life situations. Homework may spark conversations between parents or other family partners and children about what students are learning in class (Van Voorhis, 2000). Some homework may help bring parents and children closer together to enjoy learning and exchange ideas, and enable parents to show their children that they support their schoolwork (Woods, 2000).

Homework may be purposely designed to enable teachers to inform and involve all families in their children's curricular activities. Teachers may organize procedures and assignments to keep families aware of topics taught in class, how their children are progressing, how to support their children's work and progress, and how to connect with the teachers. Some teachers ask parents to sign students' homework agendas or completed assignments (Epstein & Becker, 1982). Some homework may be designed for parents to give extra help to students with specific weaknesses. In addition, teachers may design homework that encourages students to conduct conversations with family partners to complete the assignments (VanVoorhis, 2000).

Homework may also be designed to encourage students to work together, and motivate and learn from each other. Students may work with friends and peers on short-term or long-term assignments, projects, and studying for tests (Corno, 2000). Peer interactions may be formal, with assigned partners and roles, or informal, with friends at home. Research suggests that when adolescents support one another on homework, students have higher report card grades (Cooper, 2001).

Homework may be assigned to comply with district or school policy that directs a certain amount to be given to all students on certain days. Teachers may make assignments to fulfil school or district policies for a prescribed amount of homework. Individual teachers, principals, the whole school staff, district superintendents, or educator–parent teams may decide that students should receive a certain amount of homework each day or each week (Epstein, 2001).

Homework may as well be assigned to demonstrate to parents and to the public that a school has a rigorous academic program and high standards for student work. Homework can sometimes be motivated by the felt or assumed need of the school or the teacher to demonstrate to the families of their community that the school has rigorous standards for serious work; such extra work is assigned to fulfil the public's expectation of high student achievement. When expectations for schoolwork and homework are met, families, businesses, and other community partners may be more likely to support schools and students in other ways (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2000).

Historically, some teachers used homework to try to correct problems with student conduct or productivity. Teachers now report that assigning homework to punish students for inattention or poor behaviour is not a valid purpose (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2000). Some researchers (Xu & Corno, 1998) have described homework, itself, as a punishing activity, referring particularly to poorly designed or overly-burdensome assignments that confuse or frustrate students.

The different purposes of homework are not mutually exclusive; homework may be designed to fulfil one or several purposes. For example, elementary and secondary teachers reported that they assign homework to help students learn, build study skills, and manage time (Muhlenbruck, Cooper, Nye & Lindsay, 2000), thereby recognizing practice, preparation, and personal development as three purposes for homework assignments

Cameron and Bartel (2009) conducted two surveys and many interviews with teachers, parents, and children to find out how homework was perceived in Canada. The first survey included 1094 parents and 2072 children. The second one included 945 teachers with experience ranging from more than twenty-five years to less than five. Both urban and rural schools were represented too. The surveys indicated that teachers assigned homework because they thought parents wanted it.

Gurnam and Chan (2010) carried out a study that looked into the teachers' perspectives and practices in the organisation of homework in Malaysian primary schools. The study comprised 297 teachers from 17 primary schools located in Malaysia. The data collection process included the use of a questionnaire, semi structured interviews and document analyses. Teachers were seen assigning more practice based tasks leaving little room for preparation and extension activities and other fun and engaging real life learning experiences. Though school administrators ensured teachers promptly marked and assessed pupils' homework the implementation of homework practices and teachers' adherence to guidelines provided left much to be desired. Arguably, the findings of this study cast doubts as to the effectiveness of teachers' practices in the organisation of homework in the Malaysian classrooms.

John (2007) did an investigation of the viewpoints on the rationale for homework of 6 teachers of English at junior high level. In order to gain insight to their views, qualitative interviews were utilized. The results show that each of the consulted educators of English utilizes homework as a learning tool in their teaching. The purpose of assigning homework is that it fills the function of giving the students the opportunity to review, to take responsibility in keeping a schedule, planning and for their education, and to train in studying. The conclusion was that if students are to be assigned homework, it is imperative that the homework is interesting for them and that the pupils see it as something that will promote their development in the subject.

Nagla (2012) did a research that examined the perspectives of teachers, working in schools operating in Egypt whether Language or International, on homework. It compares the view points and practices of teachers working in Egyptian Language Schools to those of teachers working in International Schools located in Cairo. Questions were asked why teachers to the purposes of assigning homework. The

results showed that the purposes for teachers assigning homework did not significantly differ except on one. Teachers working in the International Schools put the purpose of complying with school regulations more frequently into consideration than their counterparts. The surveys' results indicated that 35.5% of teachers working in the Language Schools never considered this purpose in contrast to 25.9% of International School teachers. This slight difference is probably because International Schools usually have a homework policy that teachers abide by. These policies are drastically different. They merely indicate the number of times homework should be given weekly, and procedures taken or consequences for not doing the homework.

Sarah and Hannah (2002) did an investigation of Malaysian English teachers' views and practices concerning homework. A sample consisted of 85 English teachers from secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A highly structured questionnaire was used. It asked teachers to rate different types of homework according to how often they used one, from 'very important' (3) to 'unimportant' (0). The ratings of the reasons for assigning homework were as follows; to practice what has just been learnt (2.9), to give the teacher feedback on students' strength and weaknesses (2.8), to complete work started in class (2.6), to provide more individualized programme of learning (2.4), to apply recent learning in creative ways (2.4), to provide preparation for next lesson (2.1), to provide information to parents on students' progress (2.1), to meet school requirements on record-keeping (1.8), to involve parents in the teaching/learning process (1.7), to provide a record of marks (1.5), to provide evidence of the teacher's diligence/hard work (1.3), to meet society's expectation of what a teacher should do (1.2), and to punish learners for poor work in class (0.7).

Xu (2005) conducted a study that discusses the purposes for doing homework from three perspectives, the students, the teachers and the parents. Interestingly, he states there is not a lot of research about students' perceptions of homework. Information about the perceptions of homework from 920 students in grades 5 – 12 was collected. Ten purposes for doing homework with the main one being the practice of concepts taught in the classroom with the expectation of increased student achievement. All ten of the purposes can be divided into two groups, intrinsic reasons and extrinsic reasons were discovered. The main intrinsic reason that students do homework is to better themselves, while the most common extrinsic reason for completing

homework is to please the teacher or parents. It was found that the students who only did homework for intrinsic reasons had a lower rate of incomplete homework.

In conclusion, it can be said that section 2.2 has presented data on teachers' rationales for assigning homework to learners which included practice, preparation, participation, personal development, parent–child relations, parent–teacher communications, peer interactions, policy, public relations, and punishment. Studies have been done in other countries on teachers' rational for assigning homework to learners but little was known on teachers' rationales for assigning homework to learners with reading difficulties in relation to remediating the low reading levels among learners in Zambia. Teachers assign homework for many different reasons, although researchers (Epstein, 2001; Epstein and Van Voorhis 2001) have noted that most assignment serve common and similar multiple purposes. In supporting this, Cooper, Lindsay, Nye & Greathouse (1998) pointed out that the rationale for which teachers assign homework to learners have changed many times throughout the history of education. Hence, the study attempted to establish teachers' rationales for assigning homework to learners with reading difficulties in order to remediate the low reading levels.

2.3 How teachers cater for learners with reading difficulties

Sometimes learners have reading difficulties rendering it extremely important that homework is designed to meet any necessary content goals while not becoming too laborious for learners. In situations where learners have reading difficulties, teachers must ensure that appropriate accommodations are put in place in order for the learners to have the ability to achieve success on the given assignments. Homework should be differentiated based on the learner's unique profile of readiness, ability, interests, learning style, organizational skills and emotional factors such as motivation and persistence. Teachers should assign appropriate homework at instructional levels that match students' skills (Rosenberg, 1989). Moorman and Haller (2006: 2) stated that "Thirty unique children should not be given the same homework assignment. This one-size-fits-all approach to homework is not effective in helping children to learn."

Individualized assignments increase learners' success with homework. When homework is designed at the appropriate difficulty level, learners are able to

complete assignments independently with a relatively high success rate, but still find the assignments challenging (Marzano & Pickering, 2007; Shellard & Turner, 2004). In line with this Epstein &Voorhis (2001) pointed out that differentiating homework according to students' abilities leads to successful homework completion. Howard and Patrick (1994) recommend that teachers should assign homework at or near the learner's independent reading level. At this level students correctly read 99% or more of words and correctly answer 90% or more of items, with reasonable effort. Success is immediately apparent. Cunningham (1996: 53) asserted, "Learners need to read lots of easy stuff." This is how they develop sight vocabulary and fluency and gain confidence in their reading ability.

Heather (2008) did a study whose purpose was to determine the attitudes and uses of homework of staff members; and the effects of differentiated homework on homework completion rates and assessment results at a large suburban middle school. Thirty teachers responded with details regarding homework purpose and importance in their classrooms. Sixty-two eighth-grade students, taught by the same instructor, were given differentiated homework based on their performance on a pre-assessment. Findings indicate that assignment of homework is aligned with content area and quantity of homework is aligned, for example, by adjusting the length of the assignment to fit learners' skill with grade level. The study also finds that differentiated homework increased homework completion rates and student achievement on assessment.

Trautwein, Jiggli, Schnyder and Ludtke, (2009), and Katz, Kaplan, and Gueta (2010) found that most effective homework tasks are prepared with students' abilities and interests in mind. Teachers should consider varying the difficulty level (Dierson, 2000). In addition to giving learners different assignments, the same assignment given to all learners can be individualized or modified the manner in which the assignment is completed.

Mubanga (2010) found out that under the PRP, pupils in class are grouped according to how high or low they have been performing in literacy based on a class teacher's assessment of pupils on the taught items in a given term.

Learners are more likely to complete homework successfully when assignments are matched to their preferred learning styles (Nuzum, 1998; Paulu, 1998). Examples of learning preferences include structured vs. unstructured assignments; quiet vs. background noise; dim vs. bright light; auditory, visual, or tactile learning; and working alone vs. with peers.

Minotti (2005) examined the effects of adjusting and creating homework to suit the learners' learning styles on the academic achievement and performance of middle school students. Two convenient sample-formed groups undertook a pre test to indicate that they were essentially similar at the onset of the study. The controlled group learners were given traditional assignments, while the experimental group of learners used a new approach to homework based on their learning style. The findings indicated that both groups demonstrated higher levels of achievement after treatment, but at considerably dissimilar rates. By examining the post test scores, it became evident that after treatment the experimental group achieved significantly larger gains than the controlled group in reading.

Hong and Milgram (1999) conducted a cross-cultural study on preferred homework styles. Comparisons of students from a western U.S. metropolitan area and students from Seoul, Korea found statistically significant differences in 12 aspects of preferred homework style. U.S. students preferred to work with music or background sounds; eat or drink and move around; and learn with adults. They also preferred auditory learning and were more self-motivated, parent-motivated, and teacher-motivated when completing their homework. Korean students preferred visual learning; a brightly lit room; sitting at a desk and chair; and studying in the same place.

Howard and Patrick (1994) said that learners with reading difficulties such as word recognition and word analysis difficulties become proficient readers if they are extensively exposed to many interesting reading activities and materials. In addition, they suggested that teachers can help parents promote widespread reading by helping learners self-select easy, interesting reading materials (e.g., books, magazines, newspaper stories) to read to their parents.

Elley (1991) found that exposing children to an extensive range of high-interest illustrated storybooks makes them learn the target language more quickly. She also found that when the children are engaged in meaningful text without the constraint of structure and vocabulary, they are likely to learn the language incidentally and develop positive attitudes towards books and school.

However, Capper, Nderitu, and Ogula, (2002) reported that teachers seemed to believe in the value of child-centred teaching strategies but were reluctant to fully adopt these strategies because they felt pressure to ensure that pupils were prepared to take and succeed in the national primary school leaving examinations. According to MoE (1996), National examinations limit what can be included of local context and content.

Peer support programs have been used in many schools to increase homework completion rates. Teachers pair up learners who are at similar achievement levels or ask more advanced students to provide assistance to lower-performing students (Paulu, 1998). The two shall discuss the homework exercise together and it is believed that lower-performing learner will improve in the reading ability.

According to MoE (2003) it is important that learners practise reading aloud right up until Grade 7 and beyond. Learners should read aloud to read to the rest of the class, one –to-one reading where the teachers calls a learner to read with him or her individually, reading in pairs where a teachers pairs learners to read together, and learners reading in groups. However, the old method of calling on individual learners to read aloud from their learners' books, while all the other learners follow in their books, is not recommended. For one reason, it is boring for the rest of the class who may end up neither listening nor following. For another, often only the better readers offer or are called upon to read. This means that weaker learners never improve their reading aloud skills.

McCormick (1977) found that 4th- through 6th-gradares had demonstrated children who read aloud to on a regular basis show significant gains in reading comprehension, decoding skills, and vocabulary. It was also found that all children benefited significantly as compared to the control groups, who were read to only occasionally or not at all.

Williamson (1988) emphasized that teachers should read to their students. Because as the teachers are reading to their students, the students get a better feel for the language and its structure. Teacher's reading to the students is also a motivation enhancer; the reader's enthusiasm and animated mood are infectious. In reading aloud, teachers: condition the child's brain to associate reading with pleasure; create back ground knowledge; build vocabulary; [and] provide a reading role model.

Beck and Mckeown (1999) investigated the relationship between storytelling aloud and reading comprehension. The findings of the study indicated that storytelling aloud positively affected the subjects' reading comprehension.

However, Doff (1988:141) states that "when learners work in pairs or groups it is impossible for the teacher to listen and correct all the mistakes they make and this is not the purpose of the activity. There is the danger that if the teacher divides the class into mixed ability groups the best students in the group will have to do the task while the weakest ones switch off and become disruptive."

Salend and Schliff (1989) hold the view by documenting that a survey of teachers of learners with learning disabilities found that eighty percent of teachers regularly assigned homework but few matched the tasks to students' skills and provided feedback or positive consequences for homework performance.

Naglaa (2012) did a research and examined teachers' perspectives on homework. It compared the points of view of teachers working in Language Schools to those of teachers working in International Schools in Cairo Egypt in an attempt to recognize variations, if any were found. The study addressed the issue of individualizing homework according to learning styles or abilities. The results showed that responses of teachers in both Language and International Schools did not significantly vary when asked if they individualized homework. A total of 82.3% of all the teachers who took the survey either 'never', 'rarely', and 'sometimes' differentiated homework.

Gurnam and Chan (2010) did a study which was set out to explore teachers' practices and perspectives on the organization of homework in Malaysian public primary schools. The study comprised 297 teachers from 17 primary schools located in Malaysia. The data collection process included the use of a questionnaire, semi

structured interviews and document analyses. Respondents were asked if they assigned the same homework to all pupils at the same level. Data obtained from interviews and document analyses indicated that teachers assigned the same homework to a whole class and did not take into consideration the ability of the pupils within a class. Nevertheless a few teachers divulged that they did take into consideration the level of the class when assigning homework.

John (2007) did an investigation of the viewpoints on the rationale for homework of 6 teachers of English at junior high level. In order to gain insight to their views, qualitative interviews were utilized. When asked what teachers do in order to individualize homework thereby taking different learners' needs into account all the teachers said that they inform the students of what they need to work on but do not assign individual tasks due to the lack of time. Although they did not give individual assignments, they did offer the students extra tasks dealing with the area they need to develop but do not offer to correct these tasks. The conclusion was that if students are to be assigned homework, it is imperative that the homework is interesting for them and that the pupils see it as something that will promote their development in the subject.

Mubanga (2010) revealed that pupil-over-enrolment was one of the challenges of teaching reading, and most learners were not breaking through in Grade One (NBTL), so it meant that most of them were progressing to the next grades without acquiring the necessary reading skills. When pupils were many in class, teacher – pupil contact period for teaching reading was not enough. Because of over enrolment, Barrett (2007) point out that teachers tend to employ practices that may be perceived as being 'teacher-centred', because they find them to be relative effective with large classes.

Mubanga (2010) further found that SITE had so many lessons planned for the whole year. Teachers panicked to complete the lessons before the end of the year. Capper, Nderitu and Ogula (2002:107) report that "teachers seemed to believe in the value of child-centred teaching strategies but were reluctant to fully adopt these strategies because they felt pressure to cover the [very full] curriculum."

Scholars (Zillmer, Ruocco, Swirsky – Sacchetti, Chute, Mandel, and Plate, 2008) hold a view that the heterogeneity of learning disabilities has added to the challenges of assigning homework to the interest of learners with special educational needs. The fact that learning disabilities are so diverse makes adaptation to the interest of individual learners very difficult. There are many different types of learning needs and interests which children have and these seem to change with time. In fact, Lipsky and Gartier (1997) have reviewed that there are, by and large, different forms of learning disabilities and their characteristics, interest and learning needs vary.

Research findings have demonstrated that there is an overwhelming connection between literacy resources in the homes and children's reading skills (Sheldon, 2009; Sanders and Sheldon, 2009; Glasgow and Whitney, 2009). Children who come from reading oriented homes, where books are readily available to them and their parents are avid readers, have a tendency to score higher on reading achievement tests than children from less reading oriented homes. It also affects their literacy skills to have their parents read to them. Thus, parents can have positive effects on their children's reading skills and boost their reading comprehension by reading to them and making sure there are always books available. According to MoE (1996), quality education requires the availability and use of textbooks and other educational materials. Suitable materials enable learners to acquire and apply knowledge, to learn at their own pace and to assess their own progress.

Mubanga (2010) found that lack of materials such as pupils' activity and library reading books as the main challenges which hindered the effective teaching of reading and writing. Similarly, MoE (1996) stipulates that although considerable improvements have been made in recent years in the provision of educational materials, these still remain critically short in many schools. Few classrooms have facilities for the storage or display of books and materials, with the result that these items tend to be locked away in storerooms or heads' offices. There appears to be considerable reluctance to make use of books, partly because of fear that the books might be damaged or lost. Additionally, the 2008 National Assessments Survey revealed that textbooks were not enough. For instance, only 10 percent of pupils had enough textbooks in English to share between two, and that over the years the supply of textbooks had also dropped from 45% in 2003 to 15.3 % in English (MoE, 2002).

In summary, section 2.3 has clearly shown that studies have been done on how teachers can adapt homework to learners. Teachers should adapt homework to ability, interest, learning styles, availability of learning materials, and providing individual attention. Even though studies have been done, it was noted after a review of those studies that little was known on the extent to which teachers catered homework for learners with reading in order to remediate the low reading levels among school going children in Sefula Zone Ordinary Primary Schools of Mongu district, Zambia. Schumm & Vaughn (1991) noted that it is not clear whether teachers hold students with disabilities to the same standards as their higher achieving classmates or whether teachers make adaptations and give these students shorter or easier assignments. Regardless, it is clear that many students, with and without learning disabilities, continue to have problems doing homework (Bryan, Nelson, & Mathur, 1995; Polloway, Epstein, & Foley, 1992). Thus, the study to establish the extent to which teachers catered for learners with reading difficulties when assigning homework.

2.4 Parental involvement in homework for their children.

Teachers, parents, guardians and the wider community play an important role in the success of the child acquiring reading skills to the expected levels (MoE, 2003). In line with this, Bronfenbrenner (1986) suggested that children's development is best understood as taking place within nested contexts (e.g., family, school, and community) and that successful educational outcomes are in part a function of effective relationships among these contexts. Similarly, Benett, Finn and Cribb (1999) said that parents remain the child's first teachers and can make an incalculable contribution to formal and informal learning in the home. In view of the above, most policy makers and teachers endorse the need for school – family – community partnerships to improve education (Van Wyk, 2001).

Proponents of parental involvement in homework have indicated that there are academic and non academic benefits stemming from parental involvement in homework of their children (Herdeson and Mapp, 2002). Similarly, Hamby (1992:76) underscores that the benefits of parent involvement are "better grades, more consistent attendance at school, more positive attitude and behaviour and greater participation in effective academic programme." When teachers frequently use practices to involve families in reading, learners gain more skills in reading than

similar learners whose teachers do not involve families. Researchers (Sheldon, 2009; Sanders and Sheldon, 2009) have provided ample evidence that parental involvement affects achievement in core subjects such as reading, and the behaviour of students, their school attendance and their attitude to school.

According to Xu & Corno (1998) homework assignments require teachers to provide clear guidelines or training so that parents can succeed in the role of "tutor". Parents should be kept informed about all aspects concerning homework such as the purposes of homework, how much homework will be assigned, the consequences for not completing the homework, and also a description of the types of parental involvement that are acceptable. Before parents can become involved in the process, a clearly communicated homework policy must be established (Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock, 2001). According to Epstein (1998), parents had to have sound guidance on how to support their children or problems could be further complicated by incorrect help at home.

A study by Leone and Richards (1989) reported significant findings regarding parents' involvement with homework in that homework done with family members was associated with better academic performance. Also Cooper (2001) took a study to find a relationship between homework and achievement with elementary school learners. He concluded that positive parent involvement in homework was the strongest predictor of grades and learners' academic achievement.

A study of third and fifth grade learners was conducted in an urban school district in the United States in 2001 (Sanders and Sheldon, 2009). After controlling for prior reading achievement, that study suggests that students who have teachers that more frequently involve families with learning activities at home gained higher in reading achievements from one year to the next, compared to students with teachers who less frequently involved the families.

Though studies have shown that students from higher income families tend to do better at school, students from all backgrounds do benefit if their parents become involved (Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Henderson and Berla, 1994). Malecki and Demaray (2006) concluded from their study, that students from a low socio-economic background, achieved more academically if their parents were involved with their school.

Research has suggested that the extent of parental involvement depends, among other things, on how frequently the school approaches parents (Glasgow and Whitney, 2009). The more frequently the school reaches out, the more involved parents become. An American study from 2001 carried out by Westat and Policy Studies Associates (in Henderson and Mapp, 2002) looked at the effect of family involvement on student achievement, by examining student achievement in 71 elementary schools. One of the factors they studied was outreach to parents. This they measured by how much teachers communicated with parents of low achieving students through meeting with them face to face, sending materials home with the students to better equip parents to help their children at home, and telephoning routinely. The study findings suggest that there was a positive relationship between teacher outreach to parents of low-achieving students and improved student achievement in both reading and math. Test scores grew at a rate of 40% higher in schools where teachers reported high levels of outreach to parents, compared to schools where teachers reported low levels of outreach.

A study of 827 African American eighth graders found that how students perceive their family support for academic achievement positively influences their behaviour. The improved behaviour in turn positively and significantly influences their school grades (Sanders and Sheldon, 2009).

Various studies have shown that active parental involvement in their children's education declines the older the children become (Sirvani, 2007; Richardson, 2009). For instance, in 2002-2003, the Department of Educational National Centre released another report on parental involvement in schools in the United States, for Education Statistics in America (in Sirvani, 2007). According to that report, more than 90% of parents with children from kindergarten through grade five participated in their children's education, compared with 75% of parents in middle school, but when it came to grade nine and ten, 59% of parents were involved. However, only 53% of parents with students in grade eleven and grade twelve were involved with their child's education.

Other studies and reports show the same pattern. For instance, according to statistics of the National Center for Education in the United States (in Sirvani, 2007) parental activity and involvement decreases the older their children grow. As an example, in

the years 1996 and 1999, 86% of parents with children in primary schools in America had at least one meeting with their children's teacher, while only 50% of parents with children in secondary school had at least one meeting with the teacher.

In a study by Keith and Keith (1993) they found that families from all socio-economic levels are involved with their children's education at home. However, families with a higher socio-economic status tended to be more involved at school. Lareau and Horvat (1999) addressed these variations on involvement by parents of different socio-economic status in a case study. They observed that white middle-class families appeared to share social and cultural capital with school staff and were therefore more comfortable in communicating with them. These families also use the same vocabulary as teachers and feel entitled to treat teachers as equals and they have culturally supportive social networks. These factors allow the families of a higher socio-economic status to construct their relationship with the school with more trust and comfort.

From their research, Ho Sui-Chu and Williams (1996) maintain that higher income and two parent family households are not necessarily more involved with their children's education than lower-income families headed by one parent. However, involvement is more likely to occur in families with a more educationally and financially stable background, unless the schools make a concerted effort to reach parents (Muscott, Szczesiul, Berk, Staub, Hoover, and Perry, 2008).

The results of the research conducted by Van Wyk (2001) indicates that teachers have a limited understanding of parent involvement in homework, and the benefits and strategies which may be used to involve parents. Thus, involving parents in homework activities does not seem to be common practice, particularly in secondary school. One teacher defended the view of secondary school teachers as follows:

> *In high school, homework is for learners to do on their own.*

In addition, in low socio – economic school communities, teachers argue that parents are uncooperative when it comes to homework activities. One teacher explained,

> *The literate parents are the ones that look at a book, but the illiterate ones don't care.*

The USAID Strengthening Educational Performance Up (STEP – Up) Zambia project (2011) found that there was a notion by teachers that children from high-density areas (shanty compounds or community schools) lower the performance of a new school when they transfer there. One assumption by teachers was that the majority of the parents could not supervise the homework, or that the parents of children from shanty compounds are not interested in their children's education.

Musongole (2010) did the study to investigate the roles of Religious Education in the promotion of girls educational rights in peri–urban in Chingola, Zambia. Data was collected through oral interviews, questionnaires and observation. Sample consisted of 260 girls ranging from grade 5 to 9 and 15 teachers. The evidence seen in the findings was that traditionally people do not value girl-child education. The major burden of household chores and responsibilities fall on the girl. From 260 girls in the study, 220 admitted that they were given a lot of work at home. They were deprived of time to sit and think about schoolwork and even do some homework.

Pauline (2007) conducted a study whose aim was to investigate teacher practices to involve parents in homework in Namibian schools. The problem was conducted by a literature study and empirical investigation. Qualitative design was used and the sample consisted of 22 teachers. The literature review explored the views of teachers regarding the involvement of parents in their children's homework, the need for parent involvement in homework and an explanation of models of effective practices to ensure parent involvement in homework. The findings indicated that although most teachers in the study agreed that parent involvement in homework is important for learners' success, the literature review and the empirical investigation showed little parent involvement in homework in many schools.

Gurnam and Chan (2010) did a study set out to explore teachers' practices and perspectives on the organization of homework in Malaysian public primary schools. The study comprised 297 teachers from 17 primary schools located in Malaysia. The data collection process included the use of a questionnaire, semi structured interviews and document analyses. Data obtained revealed that the communication between the teachers and parents is at a minimum level of 70.3% (sometimes) while only 10.5% of the teachers communicate with the parents at regular intervals (often). A total of 18.7% of the teachers never communicate with the parents in relation to

their children's homework. Only 10.4% of the teachers communicated with parents whilst close to 20% of the teachers never communicated. This clearly indicates the communication between parents and teachers in relation to pupils' homework leaves much to be desired and that parents were very much left out of the homework loop.

Nagla (2012) did a research that examined the perspectives of teachers by comparing the view points and practices of teachers working in Egyptian Language Schools to those of teachers working in International Schools located in Cairo. Teachers working in Language Schools agreed that the different instruction techniques used by parents confuse children (59.9%). Their counterparts seemed to share their view as a total of 55.3% either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed'. When asked whether teachers expected parents to help, teachers were divided among themselves. Half of the teachers in both systems agreed (51.4%, 54.1%) while the other half disagreed (48.6%, 45.9%). Significantly enough, when asked whether they provided instructions for parents to supervise homework, exactly the same number of teachers working in the International Schools who agreed that parents should help (54.1%) also confirmed that they provided instructions (54.1%), while those who did not expect parents to help (49.9%), did not do so. However, this was not the case for teachers working in the Language Schools. The percentage of the teachers who expected parents' help (51.4%) exceeded significantly the number of those who provided instructions to parents on homework (34.6%) which leads to the possibility that some of the teachers working in the Language Schools expect parents to help, but do not provide them with sound instructions on how to do so. When teachers were asked whether they knew children had adequate help at home, a total of 33.65% of the teachers working in the Language Schools and 31.8% of the International School teachers answered negatively, while 66.4% and 68.2% respectively answered positively. Teachers working in the International Schools who provided communication means to parents were more in number by 10% than their counterparts were.

Some teachers view parents as qualified to help their children with homework as they lacked training. To these teachers, parents were regarded as an obstacle to progressive education (Gill and Schlossman, 2004). In the same line, Lemmer (2002) stated that teachers often regard themselves as somewhat superior to parents due to their expertise. Such teachers initiate further parental involvement.

According to Wildman (1968) encouraging parental involvement can be a detriment to learners as not all homes are conducive for learners to learn. Lack of positive effect of homework on achievement scores may also be tied to the learner's parents' negative attitudes (Bempechat, 2004). Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) stated that parents who are not supportive of teachers' homework policies communicate their dissatisfaction to their children, who are then likely to share their parents' negative attitudes.

Homework provides teachers with little information about learners' true educational level or progress. Since homework is not completed under teachers' guidance, teachers are often unaware of mistakes learners make when completing homework and have no control over who actually completes the work (Kralovec & Buell, 2001).

Homework may encourage cheating. Kralovec & Buell (2000) reported on a survey that found 80 percent of high achieving high school learners admitted to cheating by copying other students' homework, downloading material from the internet, or having their parents complete the homework. Similarly, a study by Sarah and Hannah (2002) based on an investigation of Malaysian English teachers' view and practise concerning homework. A sample consisted of eighty five teachers of English from secondary schools in Kuala Lumpar. Teachers were asked whether they were satisfied with their learners' performance in their homework. Sixty percent said they were not satisfied because they felt learners used to copy their homework.

Parents can confuse learners by using different instructional techniques to teachers' or can even undermine their child's academic autonomy (Copper and Valentine, 2001). This implies therefore that parents should be somewhat, but not overly, involved in their children's homework. Both parents and teachers have important roles to play in learners' homework. Their roles should not replace but rather complement and reinforce the other's role. In order for parental involvement to benefit the learner, parents must know the limits of their involvement. For example, parents should monitor homework; offer guidance, not answers, when asked for help; provide a quiet, well-lit place for their children to study; ensure that the required materials (books, paper, and pencils) are available; and help with time and workload management (Bempechat, 2004; Cromwell, 1998).

It can be said here that section 2.4 has shown the positive and negative effects parental involvement in homework. Studies on this issue have been reviewed, however, little was known on teachers' homework practices instituted to involve parents of learners with reading difficulties in order to remediate the low reading levels among learners in Zambia. In spite of these well documented benefits, parental involvement is usually not equally matched with effective site based implementation. Schools frequently fail to establish strong links between school and home and parent participation is not significant in many schools even where parents are invited (Lemmer 2002). It was imperative therefore to do a study to ascertain the extent to which teachers involve parents in homework of their children with reading difficulties which involves all the parties (teachers, parents and learners).

2.5 Feedback on homework done by learners

Feedback is a key element in language learning. It can promote minimal or deep learning. Hattie and Timperely (2007: 18) state that feedback is "information provided by an agent regarding some aspects of one's task performance". Narciss (2008: 127) also defines feedback as "all post-response information that is provided to a learner to inform the learner on his or her actual state of learning or performance". What is clear from these definitions is that feedback is designed to provide an understanding of performance through offering guidance on the knowledge that they possess.

One of the factors which seem to be of great importance in dealing with feedback is that it helps students to reconstruct their knowledge or skill to what is desired. Mory (2003) discusses four perspectives on how feedback supports learning. First, feedback can be considered as an incentive for increasing response rate and/ or accuracy. Second, feedback can be regarded as a reinforcer that automatically connects responses to prior stimuli (focused on correct responses). Third, feedback can be considered as information that learners can use to validate or change a previous response (focused on erroneous responses). Finally, feedback can be regarded as the provision of scaffolds to help students construct internal schemata and analysis their learning processes.

Apart from these perspectives on how feedback supports learning, the type of feedback varies considerably as well. Nelson and Schunn (2009) identified two types

of feedback, namely; cognitive and affective. In cognitive feedback, more attention is given to the content of the work and involves summarizing, specifying and explaining aspects of the work under review. Affective feedback concentrates on the quality of works and uses affective language to bestow praise ("well written") and criticism ("badly written"), or uses non-verbal expressions, such as facial expression gestures and emotional tones.

Feedback corrects misunderstanding, highlights errors in thinking, and lets learners know where they excelled and where they need to work harder (Shellard and Turner, 2004). It means therefore that feedback can potentially be confirming whether a learner's response is right or wrong, pointing a learner in the right direction, or signifying that there may be an alternative approach to understanding a particular task among other things.

Feedback provided to learners must provide information specifically relating to a task or process of learning (Hattie and Timperly, 2007). Paulu (1998) who holds the similar view stated that feedback is most helpful when teachers offer specific suggestions on how homework can be improved and discuss problems and solutions with learners. Effective feedback must contain information that learners can use. Less specific comments written on student work have been less productive in enhancing student understanding.

The use of feedback, according to Leahy, Lyon, Thompson, and Wiliam (2005) is to move the learners forward. Shepard (2000) describes feedback as going beyond checking student work or tests and giving them back. Effective feedback includes giving hints, asking leading questions and intervening with direct questions when needed to guide students' thinking.

Walker (2009) acknowledges that feedback must be useful to learners. He points out that to be useful to learners, feedback must be designed to help students to reduce the gap in their performance and look beyond the assignment just submitted to future work. According to Walberg (1999) student achievement can vary depending on the kind of feedback provided by the teacher. Feedback can have an extremely positive or negative impact on the self-esteem of learners.

In Barron's (1998) research on 111 students using teacher feedback, 77 percent of the students made at least one revision suggested by the teacher. This demonstrated that students had read and understood the feedback given by the teacher.

According to Cooper (1989), teachers can provide four types of feedback: letter grades that evaluate students' performance on the homework; a review of the homework that provides students with ways to improve their work; verbal or written praise or criticism; and nonverbal incentives, such as extra recess. However, it can be pointed from here that feedback can either be verbal or written and/or both.

Verbal feedback is immediate feedback. It does not require much of the teacher's time. It can, however, be difficult to ensure that verbal feedback is meaningful because it will not seem sincere to students if the teacher says "Good job!" or "Well done!" to every student in the room (Siewart, 2011). Verbal feedback tends to have minimal effect on learners retention of information, although, it has been shown that an incorrect answer that was corrected with verbal feedback will most likely be answered correctly later (Bangert-Drowns, 1991).

Teachers provide written feedback on homework in a variety of ways. Many teachers give letter grades, others assign numbers, and others provide written comments. Grading homework motivates many students to do their best work and to learn more, but in some situations grades may not be beneficial. Learners who receive personal, pertinent feedback about their homework errors outperform learners who receive only scores on their homework. According to Cooper (2000), learners should receive timely and specific feedback beyond a check mark or grade that includes imbedded instructive comments on all homework assigned. Cooper (2000) points out that homework not commented on, there is 0.28% academic achievement; homework commented on results in 0.78% academic achievement; and homework with written comments results in 0.83% academic achievement.

Effective learning results from students providing their own feedback, monitoring their work against established criteria (Trammel, Schloss, & Alper, 1994). Peer feedback, which is referred to under different names such as peer response, peer review, peer editing, and peer evaluation, can be defined as "use of learners as sources of information and interactants for each other in such a way that learners assume roles and responsibilities normally taken on by a formally trained teacher,

tutor, or editor in commenting on and critiquing each other's drafts in both written and oral formats in the process of writing" (Liu and Hansen, 2002:1).

Richer (1992) compared the effects two kinds of feedback, peer directed and teacher feedback, on first year college students' writing proficiency in an experimental study with 87 participants. The result indicated that using peer feedback provides a feasible method college student to enhance their writing skills and improve their learning achievement.

Black and Wiliam's (1998) review of classroom assessment includes studies of the effect of training students with learning difficulties in self-monitoring. Students who received feedback through self-monitoring performed better than those who did not experience such feedback, those with self-monitoring performed better than those with feedback only from the teacher.

McDonald and Boud (2003), in what they claimed was a unique study of the introduction of self-assessment across a range of subjects on a large scale, reported positive changes associated with training in self-assessment. In ten high schools in the West Indies, teachers were trained in self-assessment practices and introduced these to a group of students studying for external examinations in a range of subjects. Their performance was compared with that of a matched control group of students, who were not given training in self-assessment. The results showed a significant difference between overall mean scores of the two groups, in favour of those trained in self-assessment, with some variation in impact across subjects. Although there was no comparison between trial and control groups in terms of how the self-assessment influenced their work, the trial students responded positively to the self-assessment training and suggested that it helped them in preparing for the examination.

Boud (1995) investigated the students' abilities to assess themselves and their peers. At the end of the study, the students found it quite useful to compose the assessment criteria, graded themselves higher than their peers and lower than their teachers. Generally high congruity was observed between the assessments of peers and teachers.

Orsmond, Merry, and Reiling (1996) did a study where first students and later teachers graded the same answer sheets without seeing the grades of each other. The

end result of the study showed that there was a significant and medium level (0.54) correlation between the grades of the students and teachers. Also, Fry (1990) conducted a study where teacher assessment and peer assessment were performed together. At the end of the study, he found high correlations between the teacher assessments and the students' peer assessments.

Dochy, Segers, and Sluijsmans (1999) expressed that peer assessment can be valuable as a formative assessment method and hence as a part of the learning process. However, they warned that friendship-biased marking which can result in high scores, and biased grading which ends up in no difference in a group can be observed in peer assessment.

In their studies, Dancer and Dancer (1992) showed that peer assessment had no validity as the students were prone to base their assessments on uniformity, race and friendship if they had no extensive training on peer assessment. In contrast, Topping (1998), in his study where he analysed 31 studies, found that 18 of those studies implemented in different areas had acceptably high levels of validity and reliability and only seven studies had unacceptably low levels of validity and reliability.

Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) (2002) did a research to find out Zambian teachers' attitude to their own profession and to gain a better understanding of the factors affecting teachers' commitment to deliver good-quality education in Zambian basic and secondary schools. The sample consisted of 40 teachers, 4 high school head teachers and one basic school head teacher, 10 VSO volunteers and other stakeholders. It was found that failure by teachers to set and mark homework, especially in rural areas was attributed to poor teacher motivation.

Nagla (2012) did a research that examined the perspectives of teachers, by comparing the view points and practices of teachers working in Egyptian Language Schools to those of teachers working in International Schools located in Cairo. Questions related to what teachers do with homework after assigning it were asked. A total of 85% of the teachers working in both types of schools confirmed marking the homework when handed in. More interestingly, the qualitative data they provided for this question showed mixed methods for correction. Most of the teachers in the Language Schools indicated that they collectively corrected the homework with the students on the board during class. Some teachers working in the International

Schools had policies preventing them from doing individual corrections in class. Other policies allowed a three-day interval for correcting and returning the homework. Some Language and International Schools teachers corrected the homework individually outside classroom then selected only part to do again in class with students. Significantly, a total of 95.8% of all the teachers who took the survey confirmed the fact that they provided feedback on the homework. Some teachers considered giving the right answers as feedback. Others gave incentives and encouragement for work well done in the form of stickers, stars, and sometimes treat. None of the teachers mentioned constructive feedback that is individualized detailed and goal oriented.

Sarah and Hannah (2002) did an investigation of Malaysian English teachers' views and practices concerning homework. A sample consisted of 85 English teachers from secondary schools in Kuala Lumpar, Malaysia. The questionnaire asked teachers to rate different types of feedback they gave according to how often they used one, from 'very often' (3) to 'never' (0). The results were as follows; indicating mistakes/corrections (2.7), giving overall comments to the class (2.4), giving written comments (2.3), giving a grade or a mark (2.2), giving individualised oral comments (2.1), providing extra practice in class (2.0), re–teaching/revising in class (1.9), providing more practices (1.8), providing model answers (1.7), letting learners compare their work (1.4), displaying students' work (1.3), getting students mark each other's work (1.2), asking students to read homework to the class (1.1), and getting students to mark their own work (1.0). When asked to comment on teachers' performance with regard to marking as a sign of satisfactory performance, teachers noted other limitations on their work, for example: *I sometimes give too much work and I am overwhelmed with marking.*

Gurnam and Chan (2010) did a study set out to explore teachers' practices and perspectives on the organization of homework in Malaysian public primary schools. The study comprised 297 teachers from 17 primary schools. The data collection process included the use of a questionnaire, semi structured interviews and document analyses. The results showed that majority of the teachers (94.7%) emphasized that they often checked their pupils' homework. Respondents were also asked how often they marked their pupils' homework and how often they got their pupils to do peer marking. In relation to the first question, a total of 94.7% respondents stated that they

marked their pupils' homework on a regular basis and only 5.3% of them concurred that they only mark their pupils' work sometimes. It was also found that only 31.9% of the respondents often asked their pupils to mark their own/peers' homework while 54.9% agreed that they sometimes ask the pupils to do this. The other 13.2% of the respondents never asked the pupils to either self access or conduct peer assessment. A cursory analysis of feedback on written assignments indicated that a large majority of teachers usually initialled their name and put down the date the assignment was marked. Some teachers provided feedback using grades (e.g. A+, A) whilst others preferred giving marks and percentages. Only a small minority resorted to written comments. Examples of favourable comments were, 'good', 'excellent work' and 'keep up the good work' whilst the unfavourable comments included the following: "complete your work!", 'do your corrections!", "lazy!' and "incomplete work."

Salend and Schliff (1989) hold the view by documenting that a survey of teachers of learners with learning disabilities found that eighty percent of teachers regularly assigned homework but few provided feedback or positive consequences for homework performance. Kitsis (2008) further points out that homework is too often completed alone and not discussed in class or meaningfully commented on by the instructor.

It can be stated that section 2.5 has shown the benefits and limitations of different types of feedback which are normally given. Several studies on feedback have been conducted but after a review of these studies, it was noted that little was known on teachers' homework practices, with regard to marking and giving feedback, towards learners with reading difficulties in order to remediate the low reading level among Zambian school going children. Thus, the need for a study to ascertain the extent to which teachers gave feedback to learners with reading difficulties on homework done in Sefula Zone Ordinary Primary Schools.

2.6 Summary of chapter two

This chapter presented a literature review on teachers' homework practices towards learners with reading difficulties. History of homework, teachers' rational for assigning homework to learners, individualising of homework to learners, parental involvement in homework of their children, feedback on homework, and empirical

research designs used in studies related to the current study has also been described and out lined.

After a review of the above and many other studies, it was realised that little was known about teachers' homework practices towards learners with reading difficulties instituted to remediate the low reading levels. Also, it was noted that the experiences described in most of these and other studies only represented 'one side of the coin', which were either teachers' or parents' or learners'. Thus views and experiences of teachers, parents and learners, and document analysis were also needed in a single study to form a complete picture. According to Cooper, Jackson, Nye, and Lindsay, (2001) they all play a vital role in the process of homework. From a methodological point of view the current study is an example for a successful triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods. Precisely because data was collected from different angles thus the results complement each other and yielded a comprehensive picture.

Also, in order to form a complete picture about teachers' homework practices towards learners with reading difficulties, aspects such as (a) teachers' rational for assigning homework to learners with reading difficulties, and the extent to which teachers; (b) adapt homework to learners with reading difficulties, (c) involve parents in the homework of their children with reading difficulties, and (d) give feedback on homework done by learners with reading difficulties, were explored or examined and brought to the fore.

In the next chapter, the research design and methodology will be described.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the research design, study population, study sample, sampling procedure, data collection instruments, analysis, and ethical issues.

3.1 Research Design

The research design was a descriptive survey using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods in the sense that the research questions needed to be answered using objectives that cut across two assumptions driven by the nominalist and realist ontologies representing subjectivist (qualitative inquiry) and objective inquiry (quantitative inquiry). A survey was used for its usefulness in capturing and describing the characteristics of a larger population using a sample.

Qualitative method used focus group discussion while Quantitative method mainly relied on questionnaires. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods was highly useful for the research process because one method enabled the researcher to get information that was not otherwise available using the other method. Patton (1990; 244) says; 'Multiple source of information are sought and used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective on the study.' Silverman (2000) points out that triangulation in data collection can help to explain more fully the richness and complexity of data.

3.2 Study Population

Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) define population as a complete set of individuals, cases or objects with some observable characteristics. The population of this study consisted of teachers and parents of learners with reading difficulties, and grade five and six learners with reading difficulties from six ordinary primary schools in Sefula Zone of Mongu district in Western Province. The researcher chose teachers, parents, and learners to participate in the study because according to Cooper, Jackson, Nye, and Lindsay (2001) they all play a vital role in the process of homework. Grade five and six learners were chosen because of the low reading levels among them (SACMEQ, 2008; STEP UP, 2011). The ordinary primary schools in Sefula Zone were chosen because of Mongu DEB's vision that was shared among schools and other stakeholders led to localised capacity building in schools, such as the implementation of a homework policy, and all of them were day schools in which learners commute to school from home every day. In addition, the Zone is located in

the rural part of Mongu and according to ECZ (2008) low reading levels are more in rural areas than urban areas among grade five and six learners. Thus, the schools selected were considered to be information rich.

3.3 Study sample and sample size

Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) defined a sample as a selection from the population that the researcher wants to study while Kothari (2011) stated that sample size refers to the number of items to be selected from the universe. The size of the sample depends on logistical constraints, such as the availability of appropriate participants, the accessibility of participants and costs of locating and enlisting participation (Lemmer, 1992). The average number of teachers from each school involved in this study ranged from 15 to 25 teachers per school. To this effect, this study consisted of a total sample size of 120 respondents of which 72 were teachers and 24 were parents of learners with reading difficulties, and 24 were learners with reading difficulties from six ordinary primary schools in Sefula Zone, Mongu district. Each school contributed 12 teachers, 4 learners with reading difficulties and 4 parents of learners with reading difficulties.

Table 1: Biographic profile of teachers

Parameter	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	32	44.4
Female	40	55.6
Total	**72**	**100.0**
Highest Qualification		
Certificate	37	51.4
Diploma	35	48.6
Total	**72**	**100.0**
Years taught grade five and six		
5 years and below	25	34.7
6 – 10 years	22	30.6
11 – 15 years	07	09.7
16 – 20 years	04	05.6
21 years and above	14	19.4
Total	**72**	**100.0**
Qualification in Special Education		
Yes	00	00.0
No	72	100.0
Total	**72**	**100.0**

As can be seen in Table 1 above, out of the 72 teachers who were enlisted in the current study, 32 (44.4%) were males and 40 (55.6%) were females. In terms of qualifications, 37 (51.4) had certificates as highest qualifications while 35 (48.6%) had diplomas as highest qualifications. A cursory look at the distribution shows that the sample under study was rather of minimal experience that is 25 (34.7%) had five years and below , 22 (30.6%) had 6 – 10 years, 7 (9.7%) had 11 – 15 years, 4 (5.6%) had 16 – 20 years, and 14 (19.4%) had 21 years and above working experiences. All the participants reported that they had learners with reading difficulties in their respective classes they taught, their schools had homework policies, assigned homework on reading and none of them had any qualification in special education.

3.4 Sampling procedure

Sampling is referred to the method used to select a given number of people or things from a population (Mertens, 1998). Purposive sampling means that the researcher selects particular elements from the population that will be representative or informative about the topic of interest. Thus the researcher selects information rich individuals, that is, those who are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena under investigation (Johnson & Chritensen, 2000). Thus, purposive sampling procedure was used to select teachers and parents of learners with reading difficulties, and learners with reading difficulties. Teachers were asked if they had learners with reading difficulties in their classes and how they identified them. In response, teachers said they had learners with reading difficulties and they identified them through learners failing to read simple words either on the board or in the book. Those learners were selected as part of the sample.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments and procedure

The study employed methodical triangulation. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods was highly useful for the research process because one method enables the researcher to get information that is not otherwise available using the other method. The use of multiple methods give the researcher an opportunity to compare the responses and data collected, hence, producing reliable, valid and accurate data (Pauline, 2010). It is in line with this that focus group discussion interviews (with teachers, parents and learners), questionnaires (for teachers) and review of documents were done.

3.5.1 Focus Group Discussions for teachers and parents, and learners with reading difficulties.

A Focus Group Discussion may be defined as "using a semi-structured group session moderated by group leader, held in informal setting, with the purpose of collecting information on a designated topic (Jonson & Chritensen, 2000). The justification for focus group discussions is that information is checked for accuracy in that members question, complement and corroborate what others say. Focus group discussions were done to evaluate the survey process as well as to stimulate new ideas and to learn more about teachers' ranges of experiences in homework. Furthermore, the focus group discussion consisted of semi-structured questions that allowed the respondents considerable degree of latitude (Bell, 1993). It is very common to use open-ended questions for the interviewer to probe deeper. During an open-ended interview the researcher encourages participants to talk in the area of interest and probes more deeply in order to gain a deeper understanding (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). Focus group discussion was chosen because most parents and children were unable to read and write. Thus, focus group discussions were conducted on three groups of teachers, three groups of parents and three groups of learners with reading difficulties. Pre-planned scripts of specific issues and set goals were followed (Appendix II, III and IV) to get the required type of information.

3.5.2 Questionnaire for teachers

A questionnaire is a set of questions or statements on a form, which is to be completed by the respondent in respect of research project (Koombo and Tromp, 2006). The survey questionnaire of this study was a 36-item self-report questionnaire designed to assess teachers' homework practices of which 26 were based on a five point Likert scale. A Lirket scale is a psychometric scale which is widely used in survey research (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002). A Likert scale was used because it is flexible and easy to construct compared to any other type of attitude scales (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002). Thirty four questions were closed ended and only two questions were open ended. Questions were posed regarding gender, age, education, purpose, differentiation, feedback and parental involvement in homework for learners with reading difficulties. The researcher used questionnaires because of their distinction which has to do with the administration where the researcher would have a chance to collect quantitative data from individual teachers. A questionnaire

enables the researcher to use the same questions items or statements to all respondents, and ensure anonymity.

3.5.3 Document review

Documents like learners' exercise books were reviewed to get practices of homework with regard to differentiation of homework and feedback. Weiss (1998: 260) holds the view that when 'other techniques fail to resolve a question, documentary evidence can provide convincing answer.'

3.5.4 Procedure of Data Collection

Before the researcher visited schools, permission was sought from the District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) to carry out the research and gain entry into the various schools. An introductory letter from the Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies of the University of Zambia was given introducing the researcher to the DEBS as a post graduate student on research. After permission was granted, the researcher visited the head teachers of the selected primary schools with letter of approval from the DEBS.

The sample was selected. The questionnaires were distributed to teachers and were expected to be answered (Appendix I). Focus Group Discussion Interviews with teachers, parents and learners with reading difficulties were done using interview guides (Appendix II, III and IV). Documents such as learners' books were analysed.

3.6 Pre-testing of data collection tools

A pilot study is an investigation of the feasibility or practicality of the planed project, bringing possible deficiencies in the data collection and analysis to the fore. The pre-test is conducted primarily to test the clarity, strengths and weakness of some of the items in the research instruments as well as whether the instruments will get the intended responses. In view of the above, the researcher did pre-testing of data collection tools in selected primary schools in Senanga district. The district and schools were chosen because they had similar characteristics with the district and schools under study. Thirty teachers, six parents and six learners with reading difficulties were purposively sampled.

Pilot study helped the researcher to identify issues which needed to be clarified before implementing the process of investigation. It was found that the participants

had difficulties in understanding certain items of the questionnaire and thus, it took long to complete. It was decided that the researcher should make the items clear by using easily understandable terms. Furthermore, the results of the pilot study enabled the researcher to eliminate and alter some items in the questionnaire so that the respondents could complete it within shortest possible time.

The FGD interview questions were also pretested within a sample of six teachers. It was found that participants experienced difficulties in understanding certain questions. It was decided that the researcher should briefly explain what was required from the participants. The researcher implemented these suggestions during the investigations.

3.7 Reliability and validity

Reliability and Validity are important aspects of any study. Gall et al (1996) defined validity as testing the appropriateness, meaningfulness and usefulness of specific inferences made. Validity requires whether the researcher has determined what she intended to determine. It refers to whether a method employed in research measures what is was intended to measure. Johnson and Chritensen (2000) state that reliability refers to consistence or stability of the responses obtained from data gathering procedures. It ensures that if a later research studies are done all over again following exactly the same procedures as described by an earlier researcher, the later should arrive at the same findings and conclusion.

In this study, in order to ensure that the findings were valid, triangulation was done by comparing different kinds of data from different instruments (a questionnaire, focus group discussion, and document analysis), and also comparing different kinds of data from different sources (teachers, learners and parents, learners books). Also, respondent validation was done by relating the findings with evidence from the available literature.

3.8 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process where the researcher works with the collected data and its meaning becomes clearer. Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data (De Vos et al, 2005). The quantitative data was collected and coded using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Valid questionnaires were entered into SPSS database software version 20. After that,

responses were analyzed for consistency, and summaries of frequency distribution, percentages and tables were generated. The qualitative data collected were analysed manually, coded and processed using emerging themes.

3.9 Research Ethics

Research ethics refer to a set of principles to guide and assist the researcher in deciding which goals are most important and in reconciling conflicting values (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). The following and many other research ethics were put into consideration (Johnson & Christensen, 2000: 69):

- The researcher obtained informed consent of the participants
- No deception was used in the study by either scientific, educational or applied values
- The participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time
- The participants were protected from physical and mental discomfort, harm and danger that may have arisen from research procedures
- The participants remained anonymous and confidentiality of participants was protected

3.10 Summary of chapter three

This chapter presented the methodology used in the study. A descriptive survey using both qualitative and quantitative methods was used to establish teachers' homework practices towards learners with reading difficulties in Mongu district. The study population composed of teachers and parents of learners with reading difficulties, and learners with reading difficulties. A total of 120 respondents (72 were teachers, 24 were parents and 24 were learners) was used as a sample. This sample was selected using purposive and stratified sampling. Three instruments namely; questionnaires, focus group discussion and documentation were used to collect data. Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data and SPSS was used to analyse qualitative data in order to generate frequencies. Lastly, ethical principals were considered in the process of collecting and analysis of data.

In the next chapter, the presentation and interpretation of the findings will be done.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study on 'teachers' homework practices towards learners with reading difficulties in Sefula Zone Ordinary Primary Schools, Mongu district.' The research findings are organised under the themes derived from the research questions because they have been used to structure the methodology and the manner in which data was collected. This framework was selected based on De Vaus's (2001) advice. He advices researchers doing research like this one to organise the responses thematically. Thus, the four themes which are

a) Teachers' rationale for assigning homework to learners with reading difficulties
b) The extent to which teachers cater for learners with reading difficulties when assigning homework
c) The extent to which teachers involve parents in the homework of their children with reading difficulties
d) The extent to which type of feedback teachers give on homework done by learners with reading difficulties

4.1 Teachers' rationales for assigning homework to learners with reading difficulties

To understand teachers' homework practices towards learners with reading difficulties, it was important to begin with information on teachers' rationales for assigning homework to learners with reading difficulties.

In order to have a clear picture as well as support the findings, frequencies and percentages were calculated on why teachers assigned homework to learners with reading difficulties as presented in table 2 below, and Focus Group Discussions with teachers were done. The results were as presented below.

Table 2: Distribution of teachers' responses on 'teachers' rationales for assigning homework to learners with reading difficulties'

Rationale for assigning homework		Responses of teachers					
		N	**R**	**S**	**U**	**A**	**T**
To let learners practice reading at home	n	01	02	13	20	36	**72**
	%	1.4	2.8	18.1	27.8	50.0	**100.0**
To improve learners' reading culture	n	00	05	12	27	28	**72**
	%	0.0	6.9	16.7	37.5	38.9	**100.0**
To comply with the school homework policy	n	03	06	10	18	35	**72**
	%	4.2	8.3	13.9	25.0	48.6	**100.0**
To improve performance of learners in reading	n	01	01	23	17	30	**72**
	%	1.4	1.4	31.9	23.6	41.7	**100.0**
To know the strength and weaknesses of learners in reading	n	05	02	14	25	26	**72**
	%	6.9	2.8	19.4	34.7	36.1	**100.0**
To let learners with reading difficulties prepare for the next lesson	n	02	04	28	19	19	**72**
	%	2.8	5.6	38.9	26.4	26.4	**100.0**
To meet society's expectation that want their children be given homework	n	15	02	33	12	10	**72**
	%	20.8	2.8	45.8	16.7	13.9	**100.0**
To complete the syllabus	n	20	17	19	09	07	**72**
	%	27.8	23.6	26.4	12.5	9.7	**100.0**
To show teachers' hard work	n	27	08	21	04	12	**72**
	%	37.5	11.1	29.2	5.6	16.7	**100.0**
To punish learners with reading difficulties	n	59	05	04	01	03	**72**
	%	81.9	6.9	5.6	1.4	4.2	**100.0**

NOTE: N = Never, R = Rarely, S = Sometimes, U = Usually and A = Always

When teachers were asked whether they assigned homework for learners to practice reading, the responses were that out of the 72 teachers, 36 (50.0%) indicated always, 20 (27.8%) indicated usually, 13 (18.1%) indicated sometimes, 2 (2.8%) indicated rarely and 1 (1.4%) indicated never did that as presented in table 2 above. From table 2 above, it can be clearly seen that majority of the teachers, 56 (77.8%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' assigned homework for learners to practice reading at home.

When teachers were asked if they assigned homework to improve learners' reading culture, it was observed that of the 72 teachers, 28 (38.9%) indicated always, 27 (37.5%) indicated usually, 12 (16.7%) indicated sometimes, 05 (6.9%) indicated rarely and 0 (0.0%) indicated never as shown in table 2 above. Also, table 2 above shows that majority of the teachers, 55 (76.4%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' assigned homework to improve the reading culture.

Teachers were asked if they assigned homework to comply with the school homework policy. The results revealed that of the 72 teachers, 35 (48.6%) indicated always, 18 (25.0%) indicated usually, 10 (13.9%) indicated sometimes, and 06 (8.3%) indicated rarely and 03 (4.2%) indicated never (See table 2 above). It can be depicted from table 2 that most teachers, 53 (73.6%), constantly assigned homework to comply with the school homework policy.

Teachers were further asked if they assigned homework to improve the performance in reading of learners with reading difficulties. It was ascertained, as shown in table 2, that of the 72 teachers, 30 (41.7%) indicated always, 17 (23.6%) indicated usually, 23 (31.9%) indicated sometimes, 01 (1.4%) indicated rarely, and 01 (1.4%) indicated never. It can be deduced from table 2 that majority of the teachers, 47 (65.3%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' assigned homework to improve the performance of the learners.

Furthermore, teachers were asked whether they assigned homework to know the strength and weaknesses of learners in reading. Details of the findings, as shown in table 2 above, were that out of the 72 teachers, 26 (36.1%) indicated always, 25 (34.7%) indicated usually, 14 (19.4%) indicated sometimes, 02 (2.8%) indicated rarely and 05 (6.9%) indicated never. Majority of the teachers, 51 (70.8%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' assigned homework to know the strength and weaknesses of learners.

When asked whether teachers assigned homework to let learners with reading difficulties to prepare for the next literacy lesson, out of the 72 teachers, as presented in table 2 above, 26 (36.1%) indicated always, 25 (34.7%) indicated usually, 14 (19.4%) indicated sometimes, 02 (2.8%) indicated rarely and 05 (6.9%) indicated never. From the presentation in table 2 above, it can be seen that more than half, 41

(52.8%), of the 72 teachers indicated that they either ‘usually’ or ‘always’ assigned homework to let learners with reading difficulties prepare for the next literacy lesson

Asked whether teachers assigned homework to meet society’s expectation who wanted their children to be given homework, details of the responses as provided in table 2 above were that of the 72 teachers, 10 (13.9%) indicated always, 12 (16.7%) indicated usually, 33 (45.8%) indicated sometimes, 02 (2.8%) indicated rarely and 15 (20.8%) indicated never. This entails that less than half of the teachers, 22 (30.6%), indicated that they either ‘usually’ or ‘always’ did that.

When teachers were asked whether they assigned homework to complete the syllabus, it was found (as illustrated in table 2 above) that out of the 72 teachers, 07 (9.7%) indicated always, 09 (12.5%) indicated usually, 19 (26.4%) indicated sometimes, and 17 (23.6%) indicated rarely, and 20 (27.8%) indicated never. This means therefore that only a few teachers, 16 (22.2%), indicated that they either ‘usually’ or ‘always’ assigned homework to complete the syllabus.

Teachers were further asked whether they assigned homework to show that they were hardworking, it was found that of the 72 teachers, 12 (16.7%) indicated always, 04 (5.6%) indicated usually, 21 (29.2%) indicated sometimes, and 08 (11.1%) indicated rarely, 27 (37.5%) indicated never as reflected in table 2 above. Table 2 above further reflects that a handful of teachers, 16 (22.3%), indicated that they either ‘usually’ or ‘always’ assigned to show that they were hardworking.

Teachers were furthermore asked whether they assigned homework to punish learners with reading difficulties. The findings were that of the 72 teachers, 03 (4.2%) indicated always, 01 (1.4%) indicated usually, 04 (5.6%) indicated sometimes, and 05 (6.9%) indicated rarely, 59 (81.9%) indicated never. It can be deduced here that very few teachers, 04 (5.6%), indicated that they either ‘usually’ or ‘always’ assigned homework to punish learners with reading difficulties (See Table 2 above).

Lastly, an open ended question in the questionnaire was asked to teachers if there were any other rationale for assigning homework to learners with reading difficulties. Teachers wrote in the questionnaire that they assigned homework to; keep learners busy with school work at home, establish the effectiveness of the teaching and

learning methods, cement the skills required in reading, make learners realise that learning continues even at home. One teacher wrote in a questionnaire: *"To keep them (learners) busy with school work when they are at home"*

The findings from the Focus Group Discussions with teachers corroborated what has been presented in table 2 above. When teachers were asked as to why they assigned homework to learners with reading difficulties, they said that the rationales were to; consolidate the learnt material, let learners be assisted by parents at home, make learners understand better what was learnt in class when at home as they can be assisted by people at home, involve parents, and to keep learners busy with school work which are a good practice. A female teacher at Sefula primary explained.

> *One of the rationales I assign homework to learners with reading difficulties is to improve their performance because they will be assisted by parents at home. Some of these children understand their parents better and their parents understand them better as well.*

Teachers said that they assigned homework to learners with reading so that they consolidate the materials learnt in class. A female at Liunga primary school had this to say: *"I assign homework to learners with reading difficulties so that they consolidate the learnt materials in class through practice."*

Teachers further said that they assigned homework keep learners with school work when they were at home. a female teacher at Nomai primary school noted: *"I assign homework to learners to keep them busy with school work only when at home so that they have good reading culture."*

On the whole, the findings indicated that teachers in this study instituted sensible and good practices in terms of rationales of assigning homework to learners with reading difficulties

4.2 The extent to which teachers cater learners with reading difficulties.

The second main aspect investigated in this study was the extent to which teachers in the study catered for learners with reading difficulties when assigning homework. In order to have a clear picture as well as support the findings, frequencies and percentages were calculated as presented in table 3 below. Focus Group Discussions were done with teachers and learners, and document analysis of learners' books was

further done. The results were as presented below. The narratives to explain the figures in table 3 below have been presented under themes 4.2.1 to 4.2.7

Table 3: Distribution of teachers' responses on 'how teachers catered for learners with reading difficulties'

How teachers cater for learners with reading difficulties		Responses of teachers					
		N	**R**	**S**	**U**	**A**	**T**
Assess the reading abilities of learners with reading difficulties	n	05	12	20	16	19	**72**
	%	6.9	16.7	27.8	22.2	26.4	**100.0**
Differentiate homework according to reading abilities of learners	n	01	04	15	25	27	**72**
	%	1.4	5.6	20.8	34.7	37.5	**100.0**
Consider the interest of learners with reading difficulties	n	10	05	30	09	18	**72**
	%	13.9	6.9	41.7	12.5	25.0	**100.0**
Teachers read aloud on one – to – one to and with a learner	n	03	11	27	13	18	**72**
	%	4.2	15.3	37.5	18.1	25.0	**100.0**
Provide one – to - one assistance to learners with reading difficulties	n	25	16	18	08	05	**72**
	%	34.7	22.2	25.0	11.1	6.9	**100.0**
Learners with reading difficulties practice reading aloud in class	n	05	09	26	19	13	**72**
	%	6.9	12.5	36.1	26.4	18.1	**100.0**
Provide reading materials to learners with reading difficulties	n	04	18	27	08	15	**72**
	%	5.6	25.0	37.5	11.1	20.8	**100.0**

NOTE: N = Never, R = Rarely, S = Sometimes, U = Usually and A = Always

4.2.1 Assessment of learners

It was deemed imperative to first establish whether teachers used to assess learners to determine and supply homework interventions to improve reading levels. The findings, as shown in table 3 above, were that of the 72 teachers, 19 (26.4%) indicated always, 16 (22.2%) indicated usually, 20 (20.7%) indicated sometimes, 12 (16.7%) indicated rarely and 05 (6.9%) indicated never identifying and assessing learners with reading difficulties. Less than half of the teachers, 35 (48.6%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' assessed learners to determine and supply appropriate homework interventions.

In affirming the above findings, the FGD with teachers observed that few teachers constantly assessed the reading levels of learners. It was noted that most teachers

only used to assess learners at either the beginning of the term or year in order to identify their reading levels so that they place them in appropriate pace groups as required by PRP teaching method. This was attributed to over enrolment, inadequate time and too much work load.

Teachers were further asked how they used to assess learners' reading levels. In response, teachers revealed that they assessed learners' reading levels by reading one-to-one with each learner individually. A book was normally selected from a range of books that were graded from very easy to very difficult (Books were according to five levels of difficulties or reading abilities). One female teacher from Mutwiwambwa primary explained

> *We assess pupils when we want to group them according to their reading ability. We normally do this at the beginning of either each term or year. We don't carry out on going assessment because of inadequate time and too much work load.*

4.2.2 Considering the reading ability of learners when assigning homework

A question was asked to teachers to the extent to which they considered the reading ability of learners when assigning homework. The survey found, as presented in table 3, that of the 72 teachers, 27 (37.5%) indicated always, 25 (34.7%) indicated usually, 15 (20.8%) indicated sometimes, 04 (5.6%) indicated rarely, and 01 (1.4%) indicated never. The findings of the study, as presented in table 3 above, further revealed that most teachers, 52 (72.5%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' adapted homework according to the ability of learners.

Document analysis of learners' exercise books and FGD with teachers were done and affirmed that most teachers constantly differentiated homework according to the reading abilities of four groups of learners. When asked why they did that, most teachers said that the PRP teaching method required them to do so. An observation below by a male teacher with 6 to 10 years teaching experience attests so

> *We do differentiate according to the ability of learners in grade 5 and 6 because the PRP teaching method requires us to do so. For grades 1 to 4 we do not do that because the new teaching method of teaching in local languages does not demand so.*

Focus Group Discussion with learners further confirmed that teachers differentiated homework according to four reading ability groups of learners. Those reading ability groups were normally given names and mostly names were those of fruits. A grade six learner at Nomai primary had this to say: *"Teachers give us homework according to our groups, lemon, orange, grape and mango."*

4.2.3 Considering the interest of learners

Teachers were asked whether they differentiated homework on reading according to interest of learners. It was found, as depicted in table 3, that of the 72 teachers, 18 (25%) indicated always, 09 (12.5%) indicated usually, 30 (41.7%) indicated sometimes, 05 (6.9%) indicated rarely and 10 (13. 9%) indicated never. As depicted in table 3, few teachers, 27 (37.5%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' differentiated homework on reading according to interest of learners.

Findings from FGD with teachers further corroborated with the above findings in that it was noted that few teachers constantly differentiated according to the reading interest of learners. When asked to elaborate more, most teachers pointed out that they did not give reading materials according to the interest of learners because of the heterogeneity of the classes they were teaching. A male teacher at Nomai primary school said: *"There are so many learners with reading difficulties with different interests. So it is difficult to cater for each individual learner."*

Most teachers observed that there was a lot of work that teachers were doing and lack of time to plan. Thus, did not take the interest of learners into consideration. A female teacher at Sefula primary school observed: *"There is inadequate time to plan according to the interest of learners."*

4.2.4 Teachers reading one-to-one to and with a learner

A question was asked to teachers whether they read aloud to and with a learner. A teacher reading one – to – one to and with a learner might have provided opportunity for teachers to help learners with reading difficulties when they encounter problems. It is during one – to – one reading that the strength and weaknesses of learners would be known by teachers. It was found that of the 72 teachers, 18 (25.0%) indicated always 13 (18.1%) indicated usually, 27 (37.5%) indicated sometimes, 11 (15.3%) indicated rarely, and 03 (4.2%) indicated never reading one – to – one to and with a learner as illustrated in table 3 above. A further look at table 3 above shows that

reading on one-to-one to and with learners was not constantly done by majority of the teachers, 41 (57%).

In supporting the above findings, the FGD with teachers noted that most teachers did not either 'usually' or 'always' read on one-to-one to and with learners. It was further identified that teachers only read one-to-one to and with an individual learner at the beginning of either the year or term when carrying out an assessment to place learners according to their ability groups. When asked to elaborate further on their responses, teachers attributed this to over enrolment, fear of not completing the syllabus, lack of adequate time, and a lot of work that teachers had. A comment below made by female teacher at Mutwiwambwa primary attests to this

> *You would find that out of the total number of about 54 pupils in each of the classes we teach only about 3 pupils are doing well. It means therefore that almost all the learners need one to one assistance.*

Another male teacher at Nomai primary school had this to say: *"Time given is not enough to provide one to one assistance to all learners considering that there are a good number of pupils that need that attention."*

4.2.5 Provide one – to – one assistance to learners with reading difficulties

Teachers were asked whether they provided one – to – one assistance to learners with reading difficulties. It was revealed that of the 72 teachers, 05 (6.9%) indicated always, 08 (11.1%) indicated usually, 18 (25.0%) indicated sometimes, 16 (22.2%) indicated rarely and 25 (34.7%) indicated never provided one – to – one assistance to learners with reading difficulties. Very few teachers, 13 (18.0%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' provided one – to – one assistance to learners with reading difficulties. (See table 3).

FGD with teachers found similar findings that few teachers either 'usually' or 'always' provided one – to – one assistance to learners with reading difficulties. When asked to elaborate further on their responses, teachers attributed this to over enrolment, a huge number of learners with learning difficulties teachers had in their classes, lack of adequate time, and a lot of work that teachers had. Teachers said that the average class size was 55 learners, and from that only 3 learners were doing fine in reading. A female teacher from Sefula primary school had this to say: *"Most of the*

classes are overcrowded with pupils so it is difficult to provide one – to – one assistance with the inadequate time." Yet another female teacher at Mutwiwambwa primary school noted this: "*You would find that out of the total number of about 54 pupils in each of the classes we teach only 3 are doing well. It means therefore that almost all the learners need one to one assistance."*

4.2.6 Learners with reading difficulties practicing reading aloud

A question was asked to teachers whether they provided opportunities for learners with reading difficulties to practice reading by reading aloud to the whole class the homework on reading done at home. The findings were that of the 72 teachers, 13 (18.1%) indicated always, 19 (26.4%) indicated usually, 26 (36.1%) indicated sometimes, 09 (12.5%) indicated rarely and 05 (6.9%) indicated never. We could say that less than half, 32 (44.5%), of the 72 teacher indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' provided opportunities for learners to practice reading by reading aloud to the whole class the homework on reading done at home (see table 3 above).

FGD with teachers revealed that few teachers said that they either 'usually' or 'always' provided opportunities for learners to practice reading by reading aloud to the whole class the homework on reading done at home. When asked to elaborate more on their responses, most teachers said that they did not either 'usually' or 'always' provide opportunities for learners to practice reading by reading aloud to the whole class the homework on reading done at home because they wanted to show monitors that learners knew how to read by giving opportunities to learners who were able to read to read aloud. Teachers further attributed this to learners with reading difficulties making a lot of mistakes which needed to be corrected by the teacher as such more time was consumed. A male teacher at Nomai primary school explained

> *Learners with reading difficulties skip words and mispronounce some words. So as a teacher you have to correct them. But the more you correct them the more time is consumed. That is why we give pupils who are able to read to read the work.*

Furthermore, teachers claimed that it was boring, and difficulty to follow and understand for other learners listening to learners with reading difficulties who made a lot of mistakes when reading. A female class teacher at Sefula primary school

commented: *"It becomes boring, and difficulty to follow and understand for other learners listening when learners with reading difficulties are given chance to read because they make a lot of mistakes when reading."*

4.2.7 Providing learners with reading materials

A question was asked in order to determine whether teachers provided learners with reading materials. The data in table 3 above clearly shows that of the 72 teachers that participated in the research, 15 (20.8%) indicated always, 08 (11.1%) indicated usually, 27 (37.5%) indicated sometimes, 18 (25.0%) indicated rarely and 04 (5.6%) indicated never. This implies that most teachers, 23 (31.9%), indicated that they did not either 'usually' or 'always' provide learners with reading difficulties with reading materials.

FGD with teachers confirmed that most teachers said that they did not either 'usually' or 'always' provide reading materials to learners. Most teachers said that reading materials were not enough, and that learners were stealing and losing them us such did not constantly provide them to learners. A female teacher at Namachaha primary school commented: *"Text books are not given to pupils because they are not enough."* Yet a male teacher at Namachaha primary school intruded and added: *"In addition to what she has said, we don't give text books to pupils because they either lose or steal them."*

FGD with learners further confirmed that most teachers did not either 'usually' or 'always' give reading materials to learners to read at home because some of their peers used to lose or steal them. Earlier, learners were asked whether they had books to read at home. Most learners responded that they did not have books to read. A female learner at Sefula primary school said: *"We don't have books to read at home. Teachers do not give us books to read at home because they say we might lose them or our friends might steal them."*

4.3 Extent to which teachers involve parents in homework of their children with reading difficulties

The third objective of the study was to ascertain the extent to which teachers involved parents in homework of their children with reading difficulties. In order to have a clear picture as well as support the findings, frequencies and percentages were calculated as presented in table 4 below. Focus Group Discussions with teachers,

parents and learners were done. The findings were as presented below. The results were as presented below. The narratives to explain the figures in table 4 below have been presented under themes 4.3.1 to 4.3.7

Table 4: Distribution of teachers' responses on 'How teachers involve parents in homework'

How teachers involve parents		Responses of teachers					
		N	**R**	**S**	**U**	**A**	**T**
Teachers believe that parental involvement in homework on reading is important	n	01	06	15	20	30	**72**
	%	1.4	8.3	20.8	27.8	41.7	**100.0**
Teachers communicate homework policy to parents of learners with reading difficulties	n	03	24	17	17	11	**72**
	%	4.2	33.3	23.6	23.6	15.3	**100.0**
Teachers give guidance to parents on how they should help their children with homework on reading	n	05	23	16	16	12	**72**
	%	6.9	31.9	22.2	22.2	16.7	**100.0**
Teachers assign homework that requires parents reading to and with their children	n	06	13	20	16	17	**72**
	%	8.3	18.1	27.8	22.2	23.6	**100.0**
Teachers communicate or call parents when their children are not doing fine in homework on reading	n	03	20	31	11	07	**72**
	%	4.2	27.8	43.1	15.3	9.7	**100.0**
Teachers organise literacy lessons for adults	n	72	00	00	00	00	**72**
	%	100	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	**100.0**
Teachers make home visits to learners with reading difficulties	n	07	14	19	15	17	**72**
	%	9.7	19.4	26.4	20.8	23.6	**100.0**

NOTE: N = Never, R = Rarely, S = Sometimes, U = Usually and A = Always

4.3.1 Perception of teachers and parents on parental involvement in homework

It was deemed imperative to establish the perception of teachers and parents on importance of parental involvement in homework. Teachers were asked whether they believed that parental involvement in homework of their children was important. Table 4 above shows that of the 72 teachers, 30 (41.7%) indicated always, 20 (27.8%) indicated usually, 15 (20.8%) indicated sometimes, 06 (8.3%) indicated rarely and 01 (1.4%) indicated never, as shown in table 4 above. It can be deduced from table 4 above that most teachers, 50 (79.5%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' believed parental involvement in homework on reading was important.

FGD with teachers confirmed that most teachers believed parental involvement in homework on reading was important. When asked for reasons during FGD, most teachers said that parents could help children who had challenges in understanding concepts in class. Parents and their children understood each other better hence it would be easier for parents to assist their children, and that their children would easily understand what they were told by their parents. A female teacher with less than five years teaching experience said: *"Children understand better when at home as they can be assisted by people who they know and understand."*

Teachers noted that children would put much effort in learning if they knew that their parents were interested in the homework they did. Involvement of parents would make children be aware of the values of education since they did not know the importance of school. A Senior Teacher at Liunga primary school revealed: *"Children do not know why they go school or the importance of school. However, the involvement of parents may make them realise that education is of value."*

Parents were further asked on the importance of their involvement in homework. Most parents agreed that parental involvement was very vital. When asked to elaborate why they believed so, most parents said that children were close to parents and freer to parents than teachers and as such made learning more easily to children. In addition, parents said that they needed to know what their children were doing at school and help their children. The following was a comment made by a male parent of Maswanyana Village in Nomai area: *"Children are close to us parents and know us parents better, and as such are free to participate when helped by us parents."* Another parent who was a retired Secondary school teacher who stayed in Namushakende area had this to say: *"...because parents must assist their children more especially if they know how they should assist their children."*

4.3.2 Communicating the school homework policy to parents

It was deemed imperative here to first ask teachers if their schools had homework policies. It was noted that all the ordinary primary schools in Sefula Zone had homework policies.

Later, a question was asked to teachers to establish whether they communicated the school homework policy to parents. Parents should be kept informed about all aspects concerning homework such as the purposes of homework, how much and

when homework would be assigned, and a description of the types of parental involvement that are acceptable. As can be seen from table 4, out of 72 teachers, 11 (15.3%) indicated always, 17 (23.6%) indicated usually, 17 (23.6%) indicated sometimes, 24 (33.3%) indicated rarely and 03 (4.2%) indicated never communicating the school homework policy to parents. From table 4 above, it can be clearly seen that few teachers, 28 (38.9%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' communicated the homework to parents of learners with reading difficulties.

On how parents were informed, it was discovered that this was mostly done during the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) Annual General Meetings (AGM) and by telling learners to inform their parents. It can be seen that 44 (61.1%) teachers indicated that they did not either 'usually' or 'always' communicate homework policy. When asked why it was so, teachers said that only a few parents attended PTA AGM and went to school when called upon by teachers. A female teacher at Mutwiwambwa primary school said: *"Very few parents attend PTA AGM meetings where they are supposed to be told how to help with homework. And you will find that a few that attend these meetings, their children are doing fine in class."*

Parents were further asked whether they were told about the homework policy by teachers. FGD with parents found that teachers did not usually or always communicate the homework policy, and they did not know what it really entailed. A male parent who was a clinical officer at Sefula clinic made the following observation:

> *They have not told us which days they will be giving our children homework. There is no clear pattern that is seen when it comes to homework and that is why it is even difficult to help our children with homework.*

4.3.3 Giving guidance to parents on how to help children with homework

Teachers were asked whether they gave guidance to parents on how they should help their children with reading difficulties in homework such as reading comprehension, when a parent was reading aloud to and with a child, a child was reading alone, and syllable, word, and sentence formation. Findings, as shown in table 4 above, were that of the 72 teachers, 12 (16.7%) indicated always, 16 (22.2%) indicated usually,

16 (22.2%) indicated sometimes, 23 (31.9%) indicated rarely, and 05 (6.9%) indicated never. As shown in table 4 above, more than half of the teachers, 28 (55.5%), indicated that they did not either 'usually' or 'always' give guidance to parents on how they should help their children with homework on reading.

FGD with teachers further revealed that most of the teachers did not either 'always' or 'usually' give guidance to parents on how they should help their children with homework on reading. It was discovered that guidance was mostly given during the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) Annual General Meetings (AGM). When asked why that was so, teachers said that only a few parents attended PTA AGM and went to school when called upon by teachers. In addition, teachers said that most parents in the area seemed not to value education and that they were not serious with the education of their children. Thus, did not come when called upon to be given guidance. One female teacher at Namachaha primary school commented

> *It is not like in town where most of the parents are literate. Most of the parents here are illiterate and do not value education. That could be the reason they don't come to PTA meetings or come when called upon.*

Parents were further asked if they were given guidance by teachers on how they should help their children with homework on reading. FGD with parents affirmed that most teachers did not either 'usually' or 'always' give guidance to parents on how they should help their children with homework. A male parent who was a retired Secondary school teacher explained

> *It is only that I have been a teacher before and I know how what to do when it comes helping my child with homework. I am not supposed to give answers but guide and monitor. Otherwise teachers do not give us guidance.*

Another male parent whose child was a grade six pupil at Mutwiwambwa primary said: *"They just tell my children to tell me to help them with homework without really telling me how I should help."*

The views from the learners during FGD when they were asked how parents helped them with homework furthermore confirmed that teachers did not usually or always

give their parents guidance on how they were suppose to help their children. A male learner at Sefula primary school said: "*My parents help me with homework on reading comprehension by telling my elder sister to write answers on the pieces of papers and then tell me to transfer the answers from the pieces of papers to my book."*

4.3.4 Parents reading aloud to and with their children

Teachers were asked whether they assigned homework to involve parents of learners with reading difficulties reading aloud to and with their children. Details of the findings were that of the 72 teachers, as illustrated in table 4, 17 (23.6%) indicated always, 16 (22.2%) indicated usually, 20 (27.8%) indicated sometimes, 13 (18.1%) indicated rarely and 06 (8.3%) indicated never. All in all, less than half of the 72 teachers, 33 (45.8%), indicated that they either 'always' or 'usually' told parents to be reading one – to – one with their children.

During FGD with teachers, it was further noted that most teachers did not either 'usually' or 'always' assign homework to involve parents of learners with reading difficulties reading aloud to and with their children. When asked to elaborate more on their responses, most teachers said that most of the parents in Sefula Zone were illiterate and not concerned with their children's education. As such parents could not read aloud to and with their child. A female teacher with more than ten years of teaching experience said

> *Most of the parents in this area are not concerned with their children's education. Even if you tell them to read aloud to and with their children, they do not do so. This could be because they also do not know how to read.*

Further, teachers said that not every reading aloud homework required parental involvement because most of the learners with reading difficulties were not staying with their parents. At Mutwiwambwa primary school, a 29 year-old male teacher had this to say regarding parents reading aloud to and with children: *"We do not do that because some of the learners are not staying with their parents. Children are staying in the upper land near the school while their parents are staying in the plains."*

Parents were further asked whether they read aloud to and with their children. Very few of them said they did read aloud to and with their children. Majority of the parents did not read aloud to and with their children because they were illiterate and that their children refused to be helped by them because parents seemed to confuse their children. A female parent whose child was a pupil at Nomai primary school had this to say: *"When I read with my child, sometimes he refuses saying 'no my teacher does not read it that way' as such he refuses to be helped."*

Parents said that they only involved themselves depending on their understanding of how to read the words or stories as homework assignment given. A male parent who was a lozi by tribe said: *"I do read with my children homework in Silozi excerpt for reading in English because I am not good in English."*

In addition, parents said that homework on reading given to children was erratic and that children did not bring homework. A male parent noted: *"Our children are rarely given homework on reading and as such it is a bit difficult to be involved."*

Lastly, parents said that their children used to leave books at school as such could not easily monitor if children were given homework. A female parent observed: *"Children leave books at school and as such it is difficult to know whether they have been given homework or not."*

Learners were furthermore asked whether there was anyone who helped them with homework on reading. Learners said that people at home such as brothers, sisters, mother and father to mention but a few helped them with homework on reading aloud but this was mostly when they wanted them to do some chores like selling at the market. Mubita a grade six learner at Liunga primary said: *"Sometimes our brother and sisters read with us homework ...they do not always read with us. They only read us with when they want us to help them with fetching water."*

4.3.5 Contacting or calling parents regarding homework

Teachers were asked if they contacted or called parents when ever there was a problem with homework on reading or that the child was not doing fine on reading homework. Table 4 above indicate that out of the 72 teachers, 07 (9.7%) indicated always, 11 (15.3%) indicated usually, 31 (43.1%) indicated sometimes, 20 (27.8%) indicated rarely, and 03 (4.2%) indicated never. Further, it was noted that most

teachers, 54 (75.1%), indicated that they did not either ‘usually’ or ‘always’ contact or call parents whenever there was a problem or that their child was not doing fine in homework on reading.

It was disclosed during FGD with teachers that most teachers did not constantly call parents when a problem was noted with regard to the performance of their child. When probed to elaborate, the reasons given by teachers for not most often contact or call parents was lack of seriousness among parents, parents seemed not to value their children’s education. A male teacher at Namachaha primary school elaborated

> *I had a case when I told the child who was not doing well in homework in grade 5 to come with parents so that we discuss, the parents refused. So as a teacher, I showed no concern since parents do not show any concern.*

Further, teachers noted that parents were not going to see them when called upon no matter what measures were put in place and that led to pupils dropping out of school. A female teacher with above twenty one years teaching experience explained

> *I used to tell my pupils who were not doing well to come with their parents and that if they don’t come with their parents to school, they would not be allowed to enter my class. But I have stopped doing this because this contributed to drop out since parents never used to come and those pupils have stopped school.*

Parents were further asked whether teachers called or contacted them. The FGD with parents confirmed that most of the teachers did not always contact/call on them. Parents added that they did not attend or come to school when called upon because they were called at the time that they were supposed to be in the doing some income generating activities. A male parent said: *“I don’t remember when the teachers last called me to school for the past 15 years over the homework or performance of my children.”*

Yet a female parent observed

> *It’s not every teacher, some teachers call on us while others not. I remember the teacher who used to teach my child in grade one used to*

call on me but those in grades 2 to 6 they have never called me over my child's performance.

4.3.6 Literacy classes for parents

Teachers were asked if they organised literacy classes for parents that did not know how to read or those that wanted to improve their reading skills. In here teachers were supposed to let parents decide what they wanted to learn, and talk about. One or two hours during weekends of the term, or during holidays, may be appropriate. The findings of the study were that all of the 72 teachers indicated never organising literacy classes for parents that did not know how to read or for parents that wanted to improve their reading skills. No teacher indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' or 'sometimes' or 'rarely' organised literacy classes for parents that did not know how to read or for parents that wanted to improve their reading skills (See table 4 above). This implies that no school organised the adult literacy lessons.

Focus Group Discussions with teachers corroborated the above findings in that all of them said that they did not organise such classes. When probed to elaborate more, teachers attributed this to lack of adequate time, lack of seriousness among parents as they were illiterate and a back log of work that teachers needed to do. A male teacher at Nomai primary school commented: *"Most of the parents here are illiterate and are not serious with education. So it is a bit difficulty to encourage them to be coming for lessons on reading."* While a female teacher at Liunga primary noted: *"The work load is too much for us to have reading classes for teaching parents."*

Further, parents were asked how the literacy levels among parents were in Sefula Zone. It was noted that a lot of parents did not know how to read. It was noted that most parents did not go beyond grade seven level of education. One female parent at Liunga area said:

Most of us parents do not know how to read and write as we stopped school in grade seven. This is because schools were very far from our homes and that our parents did not have money to pay to school.

Comments from FGDs with teachers further revealed that the reading levels among parents in Sefula Zone were exceptionally low. A female teacher at Namachaha primary school explained: "*Most of the parents here are illiterate and do not value*

education. That could be the reason they don't come to PTA meetings or come when called upon".

A male teacher at Nomai explained further: *"Most of the parents here are illiterate and are not serious with education. So it is a bit difficulty to encourage them to be coming for lessons on reading."*

Furthermore, parents were asked whether teachers conducted reading lessons for parents. It was ascertained that teachers did not conduct such classes. Parents claimed that they were not informed of such classes. One female parent whose child was a learner at Namachaha primary school commented: *"We don't know that teachers were supposed to teach us how to read. Teachers have not told us."*

4.3.7 Home visits

Teachers were asked if they made home visits particularly to those learners with reading difficulties. These home visits were to check how homework was done at home such as how parents were reading to and with their children and discuss with parents the challenges faced with homework on reading if any. The findings, as reflected in table 4 above, were that of the 72 teachers, 17 (23.6%) indicated always, 15 (20.8%) indicated usually, 19 (26.4%) indicated sometimes, 14 (19.4%) indicated rarely, and 07 (9.7%) indicated never made home visits particularly to those learners with reading difficulties. Only a few teachers, 32(44.4%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' made home visits particularly to those learners with reading difficulties. Thus we could say that most teachers, 40 (55.6%), indicated that they did not either 'usually' or 'always' made home visits to learners with reading difficulties.

FGD with teachers further noted that most teachers did not either 'usually' or 'always' make home visits particularly to those learners with reading difficulties. When asked to elaborate more on their responses, most teachers said most learners were staying far away from their parents. It was noted that learners stayed in the upper land where schools were found and their parents stayed in the lower land (plains) for farming and fishing activities. There was a case where the oldest person in some homes was in grade six. Meaning therefore that distance was also a contributing factor. A female teacher from Namachaha primary noted: *"Some pupils do not stay with their parents. How do you make a home visit to parents who are staying far away from their children and the school? It is not possible."*

Other notable factors that contributed to teachers not visiting homes for learners with reading difficulties were too many work that teachers were supposed to do and inadequate time. A female teacher from Nomai primary school made the following observation*: "We have a lot of work to do. So it is difficult to make visits to homes of these learners who are not doing fine."*

Further, parents were asked if teachers visited them at their homes. It was noted from FGD with parents confirmed that teachers did not make home visit to learners with reading difficulties. One male parent whose child was a grade six of Sefula primary school said: *"I have not seen any teacher visiting us because he wanted to talk about homework or anything related to school."*

4.4 The extent to which teachers gave feedback to learners with reading difficulties on homework done

The final aspect of teachers' homework practices investigated in this study was the extent to which teachers gave feedback to learners for their homework on reading that requires writing such as reading comprehension. Frequencies and percentages were calculated as presented in table 5 below. Focus Group Discussions with teachers, and document analysis were done to support the findings. The narratives to explain the figures in table 5 below have been presented under themes 4.4.1 to 4.4.5

Table 5: Distribution of teachers' responses on 'the type of feedback they gave'

Types of feedback teachers gave to learners with reading difficulties		Responses of teachers					
		N	**R**	**S**	**U**	**A**	**T**
General verbal feedback to the whole class	n	00	02	05	11	54	**72**
	%	0.0	2.8	6.9	15.3	75.0	**100.0**
Written feedback indicating praises such as 'good', 'excellent.'	n	29	18	10	08	07	**72**
	%	40.0	25.0	13.9	11.1	9.7	**100.0**
Written feedback pointing out mistakes and areas of improvement	n	23	15	15	15	04	**72**
	%	31.9	20.8	20.8	20.8	5.6	**100.0**
Peer feedback	n	22	14	15	15	06	**72**
	%	30.6	19.4	20.8	20.8	8.3	**100.0**
Self feedback	n	30	19	17	04	02	**72**
	%	41.7	26.4	23.6	5.6	2.8	**100.0**

NOTE: N = Never, R = Rarely, S = Sometimes, U = Usually and A = Always

4.4.1 General verbal feedback to the whole class on written homework

A question was asked to teachers as to whether they provided general verbal feedback to the whole class on homework on reading that required writing such as reading comprehension, and syllable, word and sentence formation. It was ascertained, as reflected in table 5 above, that out of 72 teachers that participated in the research, 54 (75%) indicated always, (11) 15.3% indicated usually, 05 (6.9%) indicated sometimes, 02 (2.8%) indicated rarely, and 0 (0.0%) indicated never giving general verbal feedback to the whole class on homework that required writing. The findings reflected in table 5 above further revealed that most teachers, 65 (90.3%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' gave general verbal feedback to whole class.

FGD with teachers confirmed that most teachers preferred to give general feedback verbally to the whole class on homework on reading that required writing. It was noted that this was mostly done when it was homework such as reading comprehension. When probed to elaborate more on their responses, most teachers disclosed that they did that because of over-enrolment, too much work load, too many learners with reading difficulties and limited time that was available to do other aspects of teaching. Teachers said that they would not finish the syllabus if they spent time giving detailed responses to learners. A female teacher at Mutwiwambwa primary school said: *"General verbal feedback to the whole class is more convenient given the huge work load, over enrolment and inadequate time."*

4.4.2 Written feedback pointing out mistakes and areas of improvement

Teachers were asked if they gave feedback by marking and writing comments that pointed out mistakes and areas where a learner needed to improve on homework on reading that required writing such as reading comprehension, and syllable, word and sentence formation. It was found that of the 72 teachers, only 07 (9.7%) indicated always, 08 (11.1%) indicated usually, 13.9% indicated sometimes, 25.0% indicated rarely, and 40.3% indicated never giving feedback in terms of marking and writing comments that pointed out mistakes and areas where the learner needed to improve as reflected in table 5 above. Generally, very few teachers, 15 (20.8%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' gave feedback by writing comments in learners' books pointing out mistakes and areas of improvement or weaknesses on reading comprehension such as spelling difficulties.

Furthermore, document review of learners books and FGD with teachers confirmed that most of the teachers in some instances gave comments in learners' books such as 'see me,' 'checked,' 'wake up,' 'work hard,' 'too playful,' 'pull up your socks,' 'make corrections' and 'be serious' that did not really reveal mistakes, weaknesses and areas of improvement in homework such as reading comprehension, and word and sentence formation (See figure 1 below).

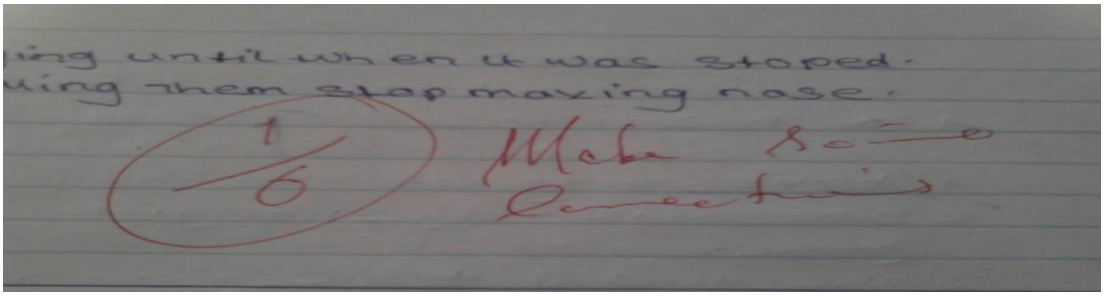

Figure 1: Teachers' feedback that did not point out mistakes made by a learner with reading difficulties

In other instances, teachers just marked and wrote a date without giving any written comments as shown in figure 2 below.

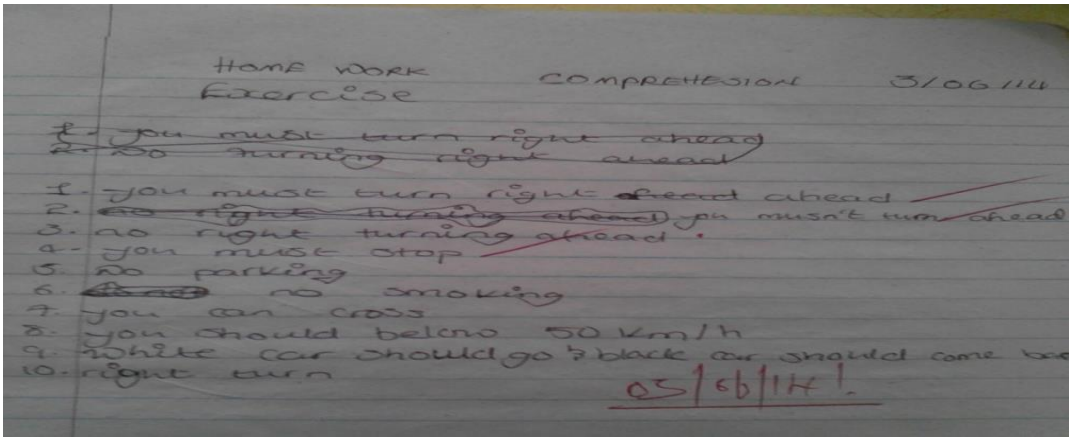

Figure 2: Teacher's written feedback without any written comments

Teachers attributed not giving feedback by writing comments in learners' books pointing out mistakes and areas of improvement or weaknesses on homework on reading to over enrolment, and a lot of books that they needed to mark. A male teacher at Namushakande made the following observation: *"Because of over enrolment it is a bit difficult to mark all the books and make comments where each pupil has gone wrong or made a mistake."*

Time to write mistakes or areas of improvement was limited. Teachers said that it was time consuming to write comments indicating mistakes made by every learner and areas where each learner was supposed to improve. If they spent much time marking, it meant that there would be no time to teach as such teachers feared that they would not do other aspects of teaching and in turn not complete the syllabus. An observation below by a female at Mutwiwambwa primary attest to this

> *There is limited time given to teach. So if I spend most of the time marking and putting critical comments in almost all the books, it means that there will be little time to teach and complete the syllabus. If I don't complete the syllabus I will be queried by the management.*

Further teachers said that there were many subjects that teachers taught per day which translated in them having too much work to mark in a day. A female teacher with from Namachaha primary school explained:

> *Even when the teaching load and enrolment is ok, this requires time. I teach a grade 5 class with 38 pupils. They learn 7 subjects in a day. It means therefore that I have to mark and put critical comments in 7 times 38 books plus 59 books for homework in a day. Where do I get that time?*

Too many learners with reading difficulties in one class was another reason why teachers did not give feedback by writing comments pointing out mistakes and areas of improvements by learners. When a lot of learners were not doing well in reading homework, it meant that there were many books that the teachers needed to make written comments pointing out mistakes and areas of improvement. A teacher at Nomai primary explained

> *You would find most of the children are not doing fine in reading. So what this means is that even if you give homework on reading comprehension, almost all of them would not do well. This further means that as a teacher, I will have more books to make such comments which are too involving.*

Furthermore, teachers attributed this to learners not understanding the comments given. A male teacher at Sefula primary school said: *"Pupils do not understand these*

comments and very few parents check in their children's books to help pupils understand."

It was noted that learners were tearing pages from their books if given such comments, and that learners seemed not to like the comments given. As such, teachers avoided giving such comments. A female teacher from Namachaha primary school noted: *"Some pupils remove pages from their books if I write comments for not doing well in homework. Because of that, nowadays I just write 'checked' as comments."*

Yet another female teacher at Namachaha primary school also noted

> *These pupils remove pages from their books if you have given them a comment that they feel is not good. So to avoid pupils removing pages from their books, I just write my signature if they have not done well in that homework.*

Another female teacher at Liunga primary school commented: *"Other pupils cross out such comments written in their books by teachers."*

4.4.3 Written feedback praising learners on written homework

A question was asked to teachers as to whether they marked and gave written praising comments to learners for quality reading comprehension homework done or any other reading homework that required writing such as sentence formation. It was noted that of the 72 teachers, 4 (5.6%) indicated always 15 (20.8%) indicated usually, 15 (20.8%) indicated sometimes, 15 (20.8%) indicated rarely, and 29 (31.9%) indicated never marked and gave praise to learners for quality work done as indicated in table 5 above. On the whole, the findings revealed that few teachers 19 (26.4%) most often gave feedback by writing praising comments in learners' books for the quality homework on reading done.

Document review of learners' homework exercise books, and FGD with teachers confirmed that few teachers gave feedback by writing praising comments in learners' books for the quality homework on reading done that required writing such as reading comprehension. When asked to elaborate why that was so, most teachers revealed that there was a lot of cheating by learners such as parents writing for their children. A male teacher from Namachaha primary school explained

I had a case where the handwriting in one the books for my pupils was not his when I gave them a homework on reading comprehension. It was the elder brother at home who wrote for him. When I made the child to re – do the homework exercise, he failed all the questions. That is why I have stopped giving any praising comments to these learners.

Teachers observed that some learners were copying from their peers and that homework did not show the true reflection of the learners' performance. This was reflected in a female teacher's responses, at Nomai primary school, as follows: *"I give 'very good' to the first ten pupils because the other pupils copy from their peers whose work I have marked."*

Teachers further said that they knew who (learners) was supposed to do well and not. As such, most teachers did not give praising written comments for the quality homework done. A male teacher at Nomai primary made the following observation; *"We know pupils who are supposed to do well. So it's either their parents wrote for them or they copied from fellow pupils. Even pupils themselves tell us when a fellow pupil was coping from them."*

Document review of learners' books showed that teachers did not give praising comments even if they did well on homework as shown in figure 3 below.

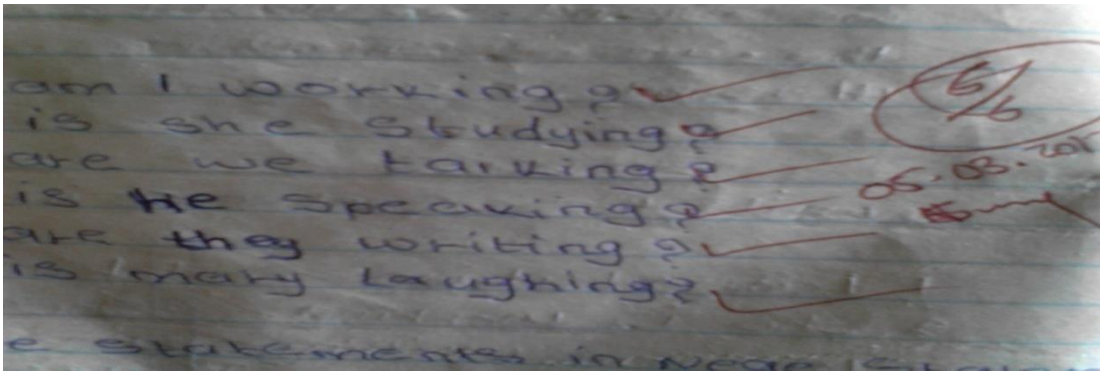

Figure 3: Feedback without praising comments even when a child with reading difficulties did well on homework

Document review of learners' books for homework further found that 'good', 'keep it up', 'excellent', 'very good' were some of the comments given by a few teachers

to learners for the quality reading comprehension homework done as shown in figure 4 below.

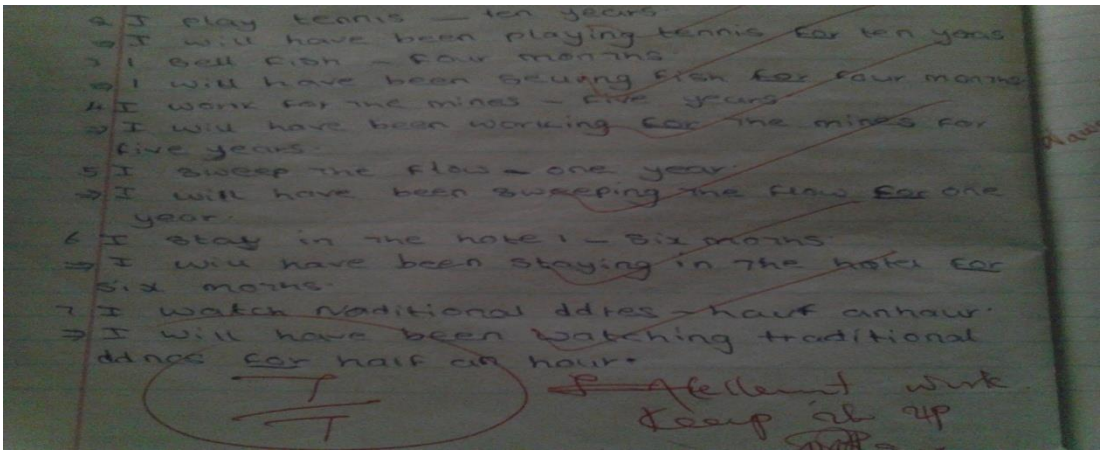

Figure 4: Some of the praising comments given to learners with reading difficulties

What was noted was that even when learners got a few questions wrong, praising comments were still sometimes given without pointing where the learner had gone wrong in those few questions (See figure 5 below).

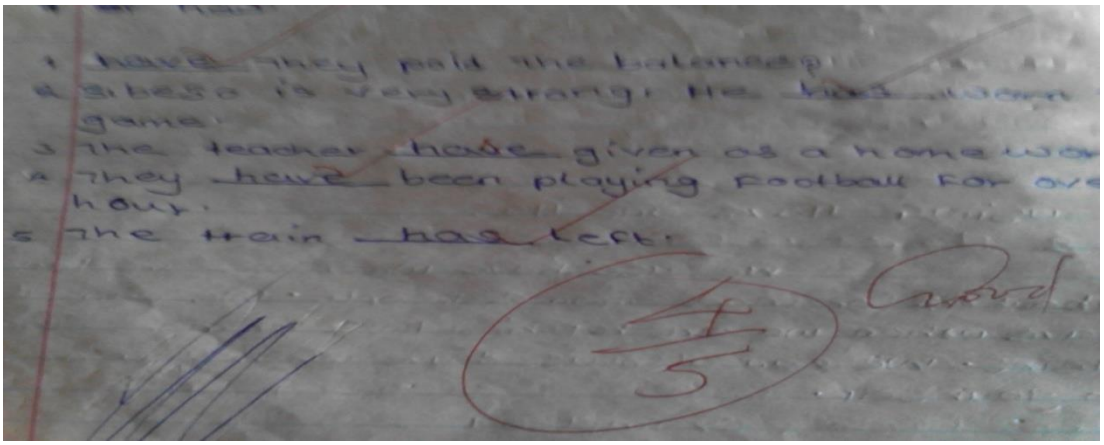

Figure 5: Even when a learner got a few questions wrong, praising comments were still sometimes given without pointing where the learner had gone wrong in those few questions

4.4.4 Peer feedback on homework

Teachers where asked whether they provided opportunities where learners had peer. Peer feedback could be on written homework such as reading comprehension or homework that required learners reading aloud. Table 5 above depicts that of the 72 teachers, 6 (8.3%) indicated always 15 (20.8%) indicated usually, 15 (20.8%)

indicated sometimes, 14 (19.4%) indicated rarely, and 22 (30.6%) indicated never providing opportunities where learners had peer feedback. As depicted in table 5 above, most teachers (29.1%) indicated that they did not either 'usually' or 'always' provide opportunities for peer feedback on either reading aloud and comprehension homework.

The above findings were affirmed by Focus Group Discussion findings with teachers that most teachers did not constantly provide opportunities for peer feedback. When probed further, most teachers said that learners complained when teachers did not mark as learners always wanted teachers to mark their work and that learners felt proud when teachers marked as compared to themselves or their peers. A male teacher from Sefula primary who did not provide opportunity for peer feedback explained: *"Pupils feel good when we teachers mark their work than their peers. That is why I do not give pupils opportunities to mark their peers' homework."*

In addition, teachers said that the reading ability level of their learners was another constraint in that they felt that learners would not give constructive feedback. Finally, teachers said that it was difficult to assess learners' progress if they were given opportunities to mark their own or each other's homework as there would be a lot of cheating. The excerpt below by a male teacher from Namachaha primary school attests to this: *"It will be difficult to monitor the progress of pupils because they will be writing correct answers as you tell them the answers or when answers are suggested by themselves."*

4.4.5 Self feedback on homework

Teachers where asked whether they provided opportunities where learners had self feedback. That self feedback could be on written homework such as reading comprehension. Table 5 above depicts that of the 72 teachers, 02 (2.8%) indicated always 04 (5.6%) indicated usually, 17 (23.6%) indicated sometimes, 19 (26.4%) indicated rarely, and 30 (41.7%) indicated never providing opportunities where learners had self feedback. As depicted in table 5 above, most teachers, 49 (68.1%), indicated that they did not either 'usually' or 'always' provide opportunities for self feedback on written homework such as comprehension homework.

The above findings were affirmed by Focus Group Discussion findings with teachers that most teachers did not constantly provide opportunity for self feedback. When

probed further, gave the exactly the same reasons they gave as on peer feedback. A male teacher at Sefula primary school said: *"As I said earlier, pupils feel good when we teachers mark their work than themselves."* In summary, yet another male teacher at Sefula primary school said: *"In summary, let me say the reasons we do not give pupils to mark their friends' homework exercise are the same reasons we do not give them to mark their own homework exercises."*

Generally, it can be deduced here that teachers' homework practices towards learners with reading difficulties in relation to giving feedback were not good practices at all in that feedback was more teacher-centred than learners-centred.

CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research findings presented in the preceding chapter. The discussion is structured along the same themes or headings under which the findings were presented. These are; (a) teachers' rationale for assigning homework to their learners with reading difficulties, and the extent to which teachers; (b) catered for learners with reading difficulties in homework, (c) involved parents in homework, and (d) gave the type of feedback to learners for their homework.

5.1 Teachers' rationale for assigning homework to their learners with reading difficulties

One of the main aspects investigated in this study was the teachers' rationales for assigning homework to their pupils. The study found that 56 (77.8%) of the 72 teachers consistently assigned homework to learners with reading difficulties to enable them practice reading at home. Only one (1.4%) teacher indicated to have never assigned homework to let learners to practice reading at home. Teachers seem to have realised that homework needed to be assigned to give more time to learners with reading difficulties to practice reading. Constant practice of reading at home was important because of inadequate time during school hours. In line with this, Becker and Epstein (1982) echoed that the vast majority of homework assigned by teachers is for purpose of practicing skills taught in class or review material that has already been presented in class. Similarly, Cooper (2001) agree that most teachers want their learners practice the skill learnt in class on a particular day in order to help master that skill.

On whether teachers assigned homework to improve the reading culture, the study noted that majority of the teachers, 55 (76.4%), indicated that they constantly assigned homework to improve the reading culture of learners with reading difficulties. Thus the researcher feels that the reading culture among learners with reading difficulties would improve since teachers assign homework to let learners practice reading constantly at home. In the same line, Hellesten (2005) make a salient point that most people need practice when developing self-discipline, in managing their work tasks and defining the borders between work and leisure time.

The study revealed that majority of the teachers, 53 (73.6%), indicated that they constantly assigned homework to comply with the school homework policy. Assigning homework to comply with the school homework policy was not a good practice because teachers might have set homework assignments for the sake of giving homework or abiding with school homework policy. Thus we could conclude that homework set by teachers might have not been effective for learners with reading difficulties to acquire reading skills. Researchers (Brock, Lapp, Flood, Fisher, and Han, 2007) discussed the similar idea that teachers may assign homework for reasons that may not benefit their students. More specifically, they believe that some educators may actually assign homework, regardless of its effectiveness, to fulfil district homework policies such as requirements for a specified amount of daily or weekly homework.

On whether teachers assigned homework to improve reading performance of learners with reading difficulties, the findings of the study revealed that most teachers, 47 (65.3%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' assigned homework to improve the reading performance of learners with reading difficulties. This suggests that teachers assigned homework to learners with reading so that they practice reading and reading skills learnt in class, as such improve their reading skills. In the same view, researchers (Xu, 2005; Cooper, 1989; Trautwein, 2007) contend that homework is also a valuable and useful educational tool for teachers, parents and students, because it is believed that the more time the student spends on her/his homework, the more successful she/he can become. Thus, the then Minister of Education in 2010 made a ministerial statement in parliament encouraging schools to formulate homework policy as one of the measures the Ministry of Education was taking to continue improving the performance of the grades 7, 9 and 12 examination results (Zambia National Assembly Debates, 2010).

The study found that most of the teachers, 51 (70.8%), indicated that they constantly assigned homework to know the strength and weaknesses of learners with reading difficulties. This entails that teachers were able to use homework to constantly identify and monitor the strengths and weaknesses of learners with reading difficulties in relation to performance in reading. In supporting this, MoE (1996), and Cooper, Robinson and Pattal (2006) have clearly stated that homework serves as a diagnostic tool that allows teachers to regularly monitor their students' progress.

The study revealed that more than half of the teachers, 38 (52.8%), indicated that they regularly assigned homework to let learners with reading difficulties prepare for the next literacy lesson. In view of the above finding, the researcher feels that teachers assigned homework as a preparatory measure for learners with reading difficulties to have a pre-understanding of reading materials to be taught in the following lesson. Teachers assigned homework to ensure that each student were ready (prepared) for the next literacy lesson. When learners have an understanding of the materials before a lesson, they would participate in the lesson discussion fully. In the same view, Macbeth (2003) delineated that homework should be assigned to let learners prepare for the next lesson.

It was noted that few of the teachers, 22 (30.6%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' assigned homework to meet society's expectation who wanted their children to be given homework. The researcher attributes this to the location of the schools where the research was done in which a lot of parents were illiterate, not serious and had negative attitude with the education of their children. Illiterate parents would in most cases not demand that their children be given homework. These findings conform to the findings of Mubanga (2010) who found that most of the parents could hardly read and write, and dealing with such parents was not easy because they had a negative attitude towards their children's education. Such parents did not care whether their children are given homework or not.

The study found that most of the teachers, 56 (77.8%), indicated that they did not consistently assign homework with the rationale to complete the syllabus. The study further revealed that exactly the number of teachers, 56 (77.8%), indicated that they did not consistently assign homework to provide evidence that they were hard working. Teachers seem to have known that showing off that they were hard working and assigning homework to complete the syllabus did not benefit learners in acquiring reading skills because the homework set might have not been effective but for the sake of showing off, and completing the syllabus. The study furthermore found that 68 (94.4%) teachers indicated that they did not regularly assign homework to punish learners. Similarly, the researcher feels assigning homework to punish learners was not a good practice because teachers might have set homework assignments for the sake of giving homework of which some may not be effective but for the sake of punishing learners.

Researchers (Epstein and Van Voorhis 2001; Van Voorhis 2004) are of the similar view that teachers may assign homework for reasons that may not benefit their learners. More specifically, teachers may actually assign homework, regardless of their effectiveness, such as assigning homework to complete the syllabus, provide evidence of teachers' hard work and punish learners are not good practices since they may not benefit learners.

5.2 The extent to which teachers cater for learners with reading difficulties

The second main aspect investigated in this study was the extent to which teachers catered for learners with reading difficulties when assigning homework.

The study found that less than half of the teachers, 35 (48.6%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' assessed learners to determine and supply appropriate homework interventions. It was noted that most teachers only used to assess learners at the beginning of either the term or year in order to identify their reading levels so that they place them in an appropriate pace groups as required by PRP teaching method. Regular assessment of learners was important so that teachers knew the strength and weaknesses of learners in reading to enable them plan appropriate homework interventions. In affirming the above findings, Mubanga (2010) found out that under the PRP, pupils in class are grouped according to how high or low they have been performing in literacy based on a class teacher's assessment of pupils on the taught items in a given term.

Teachers revealed that they assessed learners' reading levels by reading one-to-one with each learner individually using PRP has the Rainbow Reading Ladder, which has books divided in five levels difficulty to assess learners.. The researcher feels that children with reading difficulties were not properly assessed since teachers did not use the required and appropriate assessment instruments and procedures. The procedure and instruments did not assess the cognitive deficit areas and major skills that determine the reading success in children with reading difficulties when they are learning to read.

In supporting this, Matafwali (2010) observed that children who experience substantial difficulties in learning to read and spell may constitute a special group within the education system that may, unfortunately, go unnoticed within the current educational provision in Zambia. She further argues that in spite of the Zambian

government putting emphasis on the equity of access to education for children with special educational needs (Ministry of Education, 1996), there are currently no systematic procedures that have been put in place to ensure early identification and assessment of children who may be at substantial risk of developing reading and spelling difficulties.

The study found that most of the teachers, 52 (72.2%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' considered the ability of learners with reading difficulties by differentiating homework according to their abilities. This was a good practice because when learners are given work that is to their reading ability, they tend to improve their reading skills at their own pace. In line with this, Epstein and Voorhis (2001) point out that differentiating homework according to students' abilities leads to successful homework completion. However, the finding of this study is in contrast with Salend and Schliff (1989)'s survey of teachers of students with Learning Disability (LD) which found that eighty percent of teachers regularly assigned homework but few matched the tasks to students' skills and provided feedback for homework. This contrast could be attributed to the PRP teaching method that required teachers in this study to be assigning class work in reading according to the ability of learners. An observation from a male teacher at Namachaha primary school with 6 to 10 years teaching experience assert so

> *We do differentiate homework according to the abilities of learners in grades five and six because the PRP teaching method requires us to do so. For grades one to four, we do not do that because the new teaching method of teaching in local languages does not demand so.*

It was found that only a few teachers, 27 (37.5%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' differentiated according to the interest of learners. This entails that the interest of learners with reading difficulties was not constantly considered when ever teachers were setting homework, and that homework set might have not been effective. In that case, the reading levels of learners with reading difficulties would not improve. In supporting this, Howard and Patrick (1994) said that learners with reading difficulties become proficient readers if they are extensively exposed to many interesting reading activities and materials. Similarly, scholars (Trautwein,

Jiggli, Schnyder and Ludtke, 2009; Katz, Kaplan, and Gueta, 2010) revealed that the most effective homework tasks are prepared with students' interests in mind.

Teachers did not constantly consider the interest of learners with reading difficulties because there were so many learners with different individual interests. In affirming the above findings, scholars (Zillmer, Ruocco, Swirsky – Sacchetti, Chute, Mandel, and Plate, 2008) hold a view that the heterogeneity of learning disabilities has also added to the challenges of assigning homework to the interest of learners with special educational needs. Similarly, Lipsky and Gartier (1997) have reviewed that there are, by and large, different forms of learning disabilities and their characteristics, interest and learning needs vary.

The study noted that less than half of the teachers, 31 (43.1%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' provided one to one assistance to learners with reading difficulties. We could say that learners with reading difficulties continued progressing to the next level with their individual reading problems since they were not constantly attended to on individual basis. One to one assistance could have provided opportunities for teachers to help individual learners with reading difficulties who needed extra support with all aspects of homework.

Teachers did not constantly provide one to one assistance due to over enrolment, a backlog of learners with reading difficulties and inadequate time. When learners are many in class, and also those with reading difficulties are many, teacher-learner contact is not so much and the one-hour period for teaching literacy is not enough as well. An excerpt below by a female teacher at Mutwiwambwa primary school attests to this: *"You would find that out of the total number of pupils in most of the classes we teach only 3 are doing well. It means therefore that almost all the learners need one to one assistance."*

The above findings are consistence with the findings of Mubanga (2010)'s study in which teachers mentioned pupil-over-enrolment, pupils' failure to break through from Grade One and too much work in the PRP as the main challenges which hindered the effective teaching of reading.

The study revealed that few teachers, 31 (43.1%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' read aloud to and with a learner with reading difficulties. This entails that

teachers did not constantly help individual learners with reading difficulties when they encountered problems. Further, teachers did not model important reading skills, and know the strength and weaknesses of individual learners in reading. In supporting this, Needlman (2004) asserts that there are many good reasons to read aloud to and with students in that reading aloud is especially important if your child is having difficulty learning to read, and when teachers read with their students, they are modelling an important reading skill for them.

Failure by teachers to read aloud to and with individual learners with reading difficulties was attributed to over enrolment and inadequate time to do other aspects of teaching such as completing the syllabus. We could contend that over enrolment and many learners with reading difficulties in classes made it difficult for teachers to read to and with individual learners with reading difficulties in that it would take time to do other aspects of teaching to enable them complete the syllabus. The findings above are affirmed by Barrett (2007), who pointed out that teachers tend to employ practices that may be perceived as being 'teacher-centred', because they find them to be relative effective with large classes. Capper, Nderitu, and Ogula (2002:107) add that "teachers seemed to believe in the value of child-centred teaching strategies but were reluctant to fully adopt these strategies because they felt pressure to cover the (very full) curriculum."

It was noted that less than half, 32 (44.5%), of the teachers provided opportunities for learners with reading difficulties to read aloud to the whole class the homework on reading done at home. It can be said here that learners with reading difficulties were not only provided with opportunities for practicing reading aloud, but also their problems were not attended to such as mispronunciation of words and punctuation difficulties, and feedback such as peer feedback was not given. This means that learners with reading difficulties do not improve their reading skills. In supporting this, MoE (2003) assert that since learners would be reading aloud, the teacher can support their fluency and reading aloud skills, and help them when they have difficulties.

Most teachers in the study preferred to give opportunities to learners who were able to read to aloud to the whole class. This was because teachers wanted to show monitors (Standard Officers) that learners knew how to read, and that it was boring

listening to learners with reading difficulties who made a lot of mistakes when reading. In corroborating the above findings, MoE (2003) notes that the method of calling on individual learners to read aloud from their learners' books, while all the other learners follow in their books, is not recommended. For one reason, it is boring for the rest of the class who may end up neither listening nor following. For another, often only the better readers offer or are called upon to read.

The study revealed that most of the learners with reading difficulties did not have books to read at home. Since most of the learners in the study did not have books to read at home, the researcher expected that teachers would constantly give learners with reading difficulties reading materials such as magazines, news papers, and any other relevant reading materials to use at home. However, the study found that few teachers, 23 (31.9%), indicated that they constantly provided reading materials to learners with reading difficulties so that they can use at home. Giving reading materials to learners could have enabled them to learn how to read at their own pace so as to acquire reading skills since they would have had reading materials to use at home. In supporting this, researchers (Sheldon, 2009; Sanders and Sheldon, 2009; Glasgow and Whitney, 2009) have demonstrated that there is an overwhelming connection between literary resources in the homes and children's reading skills.

The reasons why teachers did not constantly give reading materials to learners with reading difficulties were that the materials were inadequate, and that learners used to lose and steal the books. In affirming the above findings, MoE (1996) stipulates that although considerable improvements have been made in recent years in the provision of educational materials, these still remain critically short in many schools, and that there appears to be considerable reluctance to make use of books, partly because of fear that the books might be damaged or lost.

5.3 The extent to which teachers involve parents in homework

According to Pauline (2007), there are mixed feelings among parents and teachers towards parent involvement in homework. In view of the above, it was imperative to establish the perception of both teachers and parents on the importance of parental involvement in homework.

It was found that most teachers, 50 (69.4%), indicated that they constantly believed that parental involvement in homework on reading of children was important.

Similarly, most of the parents indicated that they constantly believed that parent involvement in homework in reading was important. The importance of parent involvement was seen in both teachers' and parents' sentiments. A female grade six teacher at Namushakande primary school said: *"Children understand better when at home as they can be assisted by people who they know and understand."* Yet a male parent explained: *"Children are close to us parents and know us parents better, and as such are free to participate when helped by us parents."*

The findings above are in agreement with Brooker (1997) who highlights that nowadays teachers generally agree about the importance of parent involvement with regard to the child's success and efforts to involve parents more fully in their children's education is well documented. Similarly, Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong, and Jones (2001) indicated that parents decide to become involved in learners' homework because they believed that involvement in children's schooling was a normal requirement and responsibility of parenting, and they believed that their involvement would make a positive difference for the child.

Marzano, Pickering and Pollock (2001) suggest that a clearly communicated homework policy must be established before parents can become involved in homework. The study found that all the schools had a homework policy. However, 44 (61.1%) teachers indicated that they did not constantly communicate school homework policy to parents. It could be underscored that most parents were not informed about all aspects concerning homework on reading such as the purposes of homework on reading, their role, and when homework on reading was assigned. In supporting this, Lemmer (2002) reported that most of the parents were unaware of a homework policy for the school.

The study found that 44 (61.1%) teachers indicated that they did not either 'usually' or 'always' give guidance to parents on how to assist their children with homework. Since parents were not constantly given guidance, this suggests that they did not have adequate information on how to help their children with reading difficulties with homework on reading. Hence, they did not adequately help their children. Parents needed guidance from teachers on how to help their children with homework on reading such as comprehension and reading aloud. Xu and Corno (1998) hold a similar view that homework requires teachers to provide clear guidelines or training

so that parents can succeed in the role of "tutor." While, Van Voorhis (2003) maintains that during the middle school years, teachers provide little information to parents on how to work on homework with their children.

When asked how they used to communicate the homework policy and give guidance to parents, most teachers said they did that through the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) Annual General Meetings (AGMs) which were poorly attended by majority of the parents of learners with reading difficulties. This is the reason why teachers indicated that they did not either 'usually' or 'always' provide guidance and communicate school homework policy. Poor PTA AGM attendance is attributed to a lot of parents that were not literate and serious with education of their children, and as well long distance from schools to villages. An observation by a grade five female teacher attests to this: "*Very few parents attend PTA AGM meetings where they are suppose to be told how to help with homework. And you will find that a few that attend these meetings, their children are doing fine in class."*

The findings above are similar with the findings of Pauline (2007) who found that majority of the teachers communicated with parents about homework by organising open days. She, however, states that the effectiveness of large parents' meeting as a means of communication with parents was dubious because the attendance was usually poor. In addition, Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004) reported that while most schools (95%) in a study held regular general meetings, attendance was poor. Only a third of the schools in the research (35.9%) estimated attendance of half or more of the parents' body at general meetings. The remainder estimated the attendance that fell under 20% of the parent body.

On whether teachers assigned homework for parents to aloud to and with children with reading difficulties, the study noted that less than half of the teachers, 33 (45.8%), indicted that they either 'always' or 'usually' assigned homework that required parents reading aloud to and with their children with reading difficulties. The researcher feels that most parents did not constantly have opportunities to model important reading skills, and help children with reading difficulties who found it difficult to read materials alone. In supporting this, Needlman (2004) asserts that there are many good reasons to read aloud to students in that reading aloud is

especially important if your child is having difficulty learning to read, and when teachers read with their students, they are modelling an important skill for them.

Most teachers did not constantly assign homework that required parents reading aloud to and with children with reading difficulties because of low literacy levels among parents, not every homework required parental involvement and that most of the parents were not staying with their children. Pauline (2007) found similar results that majority of the teachers indicated that they never gave homework which required parental involvement or parent child interaction. The reason given for this practice was that parents were not staying with their children, and that homework was given to see whether learners understood the work done in class, and this depended on the difficulties the children faced.

The study further found that few teachers, 18 (25.0 %), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' contacted or called parents when ever there was a problem with homework or that their child was not doing fine in homework. The researcher feels that most teachers and parents did not constantly meet to discuss matters relating to homework problems, performance of children and how to help. Homework problems continued since parents, teachers and learners did not constantly meet to resolve them. MoE (2003) justifies this by pointing out that when parents are called to school, teachers should talk to them about their children's progress and strength and weaknesses, and offer advice on how they can help at home. Similarly, Epstein (1998) is of the view that parents had to have sound guidance on how to support their children or problems could be further complicated by incorrect help at home.

The reasons for not calling or contacting parents were that most of parents in Sefula Zone were illiterate and uncooperative, and did not value their children's education. Teachers said that parents never used to come whenever they were called by teachers as such teachers were reluctant to constantly call parents. In agreeing with the above findings, Van Wyk (2001) indicates that teachers involving parents in homework activities do not seem to be a common practice. In low socio – economic school communities, teachers argue that parents are uncooperative when it comes to homework activities.

The study furthermore found that less than half of the teachers, 32 (44.4%), indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' made home visits particularly to homes of

learners with reading difficulties. This entails that there was no strong relationship between parents and teachers that could have made parents become more involved in homework since most illiterate parents do not voluntarily involve themselves. In line with this, scholars (Muscott, Szczesiul, Berk, Staub, Hoover, and Perry, 2008) contend that parent involvement is more likely to occur in families with a more educationally and financially stable background, unless the schools make a concerted effort to reach parents. In the same line, Glasgow and Whitney (2009) ascribe that the more frequently schools contacted parents, the more involved parents become.

Since majority of the parents who participated in the study in Sefula Zone did not know how to read, the researcher expected teachers to organise adult literacy classes aimed at helping parents who did not yet knew how to read to acquire and improve their reading skills. Thus, could have enabled them to successfully help their children with reading difficulties. In line with this, MoE (2003) stipulates that schools can organise literacy classes aimed at helping parents who do not know how to read and write or those who would like to improve their reading skills. However, the study found that no teacher (zero percent) or no school indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' organised reading classes for parents that did not know how to read or for parents that wanted to improve their reading skills.

All the teachers who participated in the study indicated that they did not either 'usually' or 'always' organise adult literacy classes due to inadequate time, a lot of work that teachers needed to do, and illiterate and uncooperative parents. Teachers said that most of the parents in Sefula Zone were illiterate who did not value education. In corroborating the above findings, Pauline (2007) reported that most of parents in rural areas are unable to read and write. This affected their involvement in school activities including homework.

Despite all what teachers in the study said for not involving parents, the researcher agree with Kruger (2002: 44) who stated, "parental involvement does not happen by itself, principals and teachers are responsible for bringing it about," and Epstein (1995) who noted that even with the most difficult-to reach parents can be reached through the appropriate school and teacher practices. This implies that the quality and amount of parental involvement in this study relied heavily on the skills of teachers to plan appropriate activities.

5.4 The extent to which teachers gave feedback to learners for their homework

The final aspect of teachers' homework practices was the extent to which teachers gave feedback to learners for their homework on reading that required writing.

It was found that all the teachers at one point or the other had given general verbal feedback to the whole class pointing out mistakes, corrections and areas where learners needed to improve on homework that required writing such as reading comprehension. Most teachers, 65 (90.3%), indicated that they constantly did that. They preferred to be giving general verbal feedback to the whole class because it was easier for them given inadequate time, over enrolment (class size of about 55 learners) and many learners with reading difficulties. However, this was not a good practice that was done by most teachers. The implication is that learners with reading difficulties did not receive personal, pertinent feedback that would have helped them improve on their homework errors, and in turn improve the reading skills.

To corroborate the above findings, Bangert-Drowns (1991) point out that verbal feedback tends to have minimal effect on learners' retention of information, although, it has been shown that an incorrect answer that was corrected with verbal feedback will most likely be answered correctly later. Similarly, Siewart (2011) documented that verbal feedback is immediate feedback and does not require much of the teacher's time. Thus, most of the teachers employ it.

Few of the teachers, 15 (20.8%), constantly gave feedback in terms of marking and writing comments pointing out mistakes and areas where the learner needed to improve. It could be said that most teachers preferred to be marking learners' homework but did not mostly provide constructive or learner centred feedback to learners with reading difficulties. Feedback given was not helpful because teachers did not provide specific suggestions on how the mistakes and other problem areas done in homework could be improved. The researcher feels that learners with reading difficulties were often left without a concept of what was wrong about the wrong answer. In line with this, Cooper (2000) suggests that learners should receive timely and specific feedback beyond a check mark or grade that includes imbedded instructive comments on all homework assigned. Similarly, Shepard (2000) describes feedback as going beyond checking student work or tests and giving them back.

The factors that led to teachers not to provide written comments pointing out mistakes and areas of improvement were inadequate time, over enrolment and too many learners with reading difficulties. Over-enrolment of learners and having so many learners with reading difficulties meant that the teachers would make written comments in many books and the one-hour period for teaching literacy was not enough to do other aspects of teaching and learning. Thus, most teachers resorted to either giving general verbal feedback or grades only but not giving critical comments. A female teacher said: *"General verbal feedback to the whole class is more convenient given the huge work load, over enrolment and inadequate time."*

Yet another teacher said

> *Even when the teaching load and enrolment is ok, this requires time. I teach a grade 5 class with 38 pupils. They learn 7 subjects in a day. It means therefore that I have to mark and put critical comments in 7 times 38 books plus 59 books for homework in a day. Where do I get that time?*

In supporting this, Sarah and Hannah (2002) have underscored that teachers sometimes gave too much work and were overwhelmed by the marking. They further assert that giving feedback generates enormous workload because teachers who go home every day with a pile of books to be corrected have correspondingly less time to think about other important aspects of their teaching.

On marking of homework and giving feedback by indicating a grade and written praises, it was noted that majority of the teachers, 53 (73.6%), indicated that they did not either 'usually' or 'always' practice that. The researcher feels that lack of supportive written praises from the teacher on quality homework made learners with reading difficulties to be frustrated, have mistrust, reduce confidence, demotivated and not work hard hence impairing performance in reading. Paulu (1998) hold the view that comments like "Good first draft of your book report!" or "You've done a great job" can go a long way towards motivating students to complete homework. This way, the pupils' self confidence increases and they become more motivated to do homework.

Teachers did not constantly give written praises mainly because of cheating by learners. Teachers claimed that learners with reading difficulties used to copy from their peers and that their homework was done by other people at home. In line with this, Buell (2000) in his survey reported that found 80 percent of high achieving high school learners admitted to cheating by copying other students' homework and having their parents complete the homework. In John's (2007) study, one teacher stated that, *"Results from homework cannot be the sole basis for grading because you are never sure that it is the pupil who has done the work."*

According to researchers (Trammel, Schloss, and Alper, 1994; and Wiggins, 1993), effective learning results from learners providing their own feedback. Paulu (1998) holds a view that in instances where teachers do not have time, they can provide opportunities for self and peer feedback. He adds that peer and self feedback teach learners how to evaluate their own and others' effort. Since teachers in the study claimed that they did not have enough time to give extensive feedback, the researcher expected teachers to provide opportunities for peer or self feedback that could have provided constructive feedback. However, few of them indicated that they either 'usually' or 'always' provided those opportunities.

Teachers said they did not constantly provide opportunities for peer or self feedback because learners always wanted them to mark their work, and teachers felt that learners would not give constructive feedback since most of them had reading difficulties. In line with the above findings, Hong Kong, Tsui and Ng (2000) found that all students prefer teacher feedback than peer feedback. The main reason is that they assume teacher is the one who is qualified to provide them with useful comments.

Teachers in the study said it was difficult to monitor and assess learners' progress as they would be a lot of cheating. In affirming the above findings, Abson (1994) observes that there are concerns that may influence the validity and reliability of peer or self feedback. Learners will have a tendency to award everyone the same mark and may be reluctant to make judgements regarding their peers, though this can be reduced if learners can submit their assessments independent of the group. In this case, Edgerton and McKechnie (2002) add that teachers need to fully prepare and

equip learners for peer or self feedback. This entails that teachers should train learners on how to provide self or peer feedback in as early as the first grade.

5.5 Summary of chapter five

This study generated lots of information on teachers' homework practices towards learners with reading difficulties in Sefula Zone Ordinary Primary Schools, Mongu District. Finally, it was discovered that most teachers either 'usually' or 'always' gave feedback to learners with reading difficulties that was more teacher centred than learner centred. Teachers' homework practices was attributed to over enrolment, huge number of children with reading difficulties, inadequate time, cheating by learners, illiterate parents and parents not staying with their children.

It was clear from this study that teachers faced difficulties in implementing homework. This information may be needed by teachers themselves as well as curriculum specialists when there may be a need for revising the implementation of homework in schools.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.0. Introduction

This chapter concludes and offers recommendations based on the findings. The recommendations are policy based and research based. The objectives were (a) to establish teachers' rationale for assigning homework to learners with reading difficulties, and To ascertain the extent to which teachers; (b) catered for learners with reading difficulties when creating/assigning homework; (c) involved parents in the homework of their children with reading difficulties, and (d) gave feedback on homework done by learners with reading difficulties

6.1 Conclusion

This study has explored teachers' homework practices towards learners with learning difficulties in Sefula Zone ordinary primary schools, Mongu district. Little was known regarding the homework practices towards learners with reading difficulties that were instituted by teachers and this was highly questionable by the researcher. It can be concluded that teachers instituted sensible and good practices in terms of rationale for assigning homework to learners with reading difficulties. However, teachers did not cater for learners with reading difficulties by considering their interest, letting them read aloud in class, giving them learning materials and providing individual attention. Although most teachers and parents in the study agreed that parental involvement in homework was significant, parental involvement in homework in all the schools involved in the study was not good. In addition, teachers' feedback was more teacher - centred than learner - centred. As such it was not beneficial and not constructive to learners with reading difficulties.

These findings could be an indication that very 'little' in terms of learning and teaching is happening in general and homework in particular. This situation predicts that learners are likely to face even more reading difficulties in their later academic life. It is for this reason that the implementation of homework in relation to teaching of reading skills should be adequately supported by MoESVTEE through provision of enough and appropriate literature materials, continuous monitoring and evaluation, controlling over–enrolment, and strengthening continuous professional development. Without such support, implementation of homework would be poor and the

acquisition and mastery of reading skills by learners may be greatly hindered and most likely derailed. As a result learners will continue to lag behind in their academic work. In the final analysis, the education system in the country would not equip individuals with the most needed academic and functional reading skills.

6.2 Recommendations of the Study

The recommendations are policy based and research based which are as follows

6.2.1 Policy based Recommendations

The study results show that teachers' homework practices towards learners with reading difficulties leaves much to be desired. There is need to consider strategies of helping the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MoESVEE) as well as the management of ordinary primary schools in Sefula Zone in Mongu district to find the right solutions. Thus, this study recommends that:

- **Teachers to give constructive and learner centered feedback**

  The type of feedback given to learners should be more constructive and learner centered by suggesting where learners have gone wrong and how they should improve. This may lead to learners acquiring appropriate reading skills. Feedback should be designed to provide guidance on the knowledge that they possess

- **Learners who do not acquire reading skills should repeat a grade**

  Learners that are not doing well in class particularly in reading should repeat a grade or not progress to the next grade until they improve. This is in order to regulate the number of pupils who are not doing well in progressing to the next grade. Consequently, reducing on the backlog of learners not doing well and in turn help teachers cater for learners with reading difficulties and give learner centered feedback.

- **Teachers to involve parents in homework**

  This can be done by communicating homework policy to parents so that they know what it entails and as well give guidance to parents on how they should help their children to avoid confusing learners. In addition, teachers should be assigning homework that requires parents reading to and with their children at home. In instances where parents do not know how to read, schools should

organize reading lessons to help parents who do not know how to read to enable them adequately help their children. Finally, teachers should make home visits particularly to where learners with reading difficulties stay.

- **Peer support programs.**
  Peer support programs have been used in many schools to increase homework completion rates. Teachers should ask more advanced learners to provide assistance to lower-performing learners (Bafile, 2005; Shellard & Turner, 2004; Paulu, 1998). This may help those learners whose parents do not value education, and learners who are not staying with their parents to have someone to help them with homework.
- **Control over-enrolment in classes**
  School administrators (head-teachers) should ensure that over-enrolment of pupils in lower grades is controlled to keep class sizes within the set national benchmark of 45 pupils per class at primary level through the introduction of shifts (morning and afternoon classes). This may help teachers cater for learners with reading difficulties more easily.

6.2.2 Research based Recommendations

In considering this study, a variety of additional questions arose that could be the impetus for future investigations. The following are some suggested research ideas the researcher feels would be of value.

- The design of the questionnaire did not focus on causal and effect phenomena and as such, there were numerous unmeasured exogenous variables that could have been studied that may affect the implementation of homework. For example, variables like marital status, age, ethnicity, and social economic status. Thus, it would be significant to consider examining such variables.
- It is suggested that this study be replicated on a national scale and that include a large sample of respondents from preschool to secondary school, both private, grant aided, community and government schools, and specific disciplines like Mathematics, Science, and Geography among other subjects to have a national picture and elevate the generalizability of findings.

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APPENDIX I

Serial number…….

TEACHERS QUESTIONAIRE

I am Mulonda Mukubonda, a master student pursuing a Degree of Master of Education in Special Education at the University of Zambia in the School of Education. I am conducting a research on teachers' homework practices towards learners with reading difficulties in Sefula Zone ordinary primary schools of Mongu District. You have been selected to take participate in the research study. Be informed that the information you will provide will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

1.Sex**:** a) Male [ ] b) Female [ ]

2. What is your highest qualification?

a) Certificate [ ] b) Diploma [ ] c) Degree [ ]

3. Do you any qualification in special education?

a) Yes [ ] b) No [ ]

4. For how long have you saved in teaching?

a) 5 years and below [ ] b) 6 – 10 years [ ] c) 11–15 years [ ]

d) 16 – 20 years e) 21 years and above [ ]

5. Do you have learners with reading difficulties in your class?

a) Yes [ ] b) No [ ]

6. If your answer to question 5 is yes, how did you identify them?

……...

.....

7. Do you assign homework on reading to your learners?

a) Yes [ ] b) No [ ]

8. Does your school have a homework policy?

a) Yes [ ] b) No [ ]

Use the scale below to guide your responses for the following questions. Circle your responses

A = Always

U = Usually

S = Sometimes

R = Rarely

N = Never

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
9. Teachers assign homework to meet parents/society's expectation who say they want their children to receive homework.	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
10. Teachers assign homework to instill important values in learners with reading difficulties such as study skills, independence and responsibility.	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
11. Teachers assign homework to improve the performance of learners with reading difficulties.	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
12. Teachers assign homework to involve parents in education of learners with reading difficulties.	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
13. Teachers assign homework to punish learners with reading difficulties.	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
14. Teachers assign homework so that learners prepare for future for next lessons.	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
15. Teachers assign homework to comply with school regulations/policy/admin.	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
16. Teachers assign homework so as to know the strength and weaknesses learners with reading difficulties.	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
17. Teachers assign homework so that learners get to practice reading learnt in class.	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*

18. Teachers assign homework to enable them complete the syllabus.	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
19. Teachers assign homework to provide evidence of their (teacher's) hard work.	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
20. Teachers assign homework to (please add other reason(s) that have not been included above if any)---------- ---------- ----------					
21. Teachers assess learners to determine their reading levels and plan appropriate homework interventions.	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
22. Teachers differentiate homework according to reading abilities of learners with reading difficulties	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
23. Teachers differentiate homework according to the reading interest and learning styles of learners with reading difficulties	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
24. Teachers read on one-to-one to and with a learners with reading difficulties	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
25. Teachers provide one to one assistance to learner with a learner with reading difficulties to do homework on reading together	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
26. Teachers provide opportunities for learners to practice reading by reading aloud to the whole class the homework on reading done at home	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
27. Teachers provide reading materials to learners to use at home when doing homework	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*

28. Teachers believe that parental involvement in homework on reading is important	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
29. Teachers communicate homework policy to parents of learners with reading difficulties	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
30. Teachers give guidance to parents on how they should help their children with homework on reading	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
31. Teachers' assign homework to learners with reading difficulties that requires parents reading to and with their children at home.	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
32. Teachers communicate or call parents when their children are not doing fine with homework on reading	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
33. Teachers organise reading lesson classes whose aim is to help parents who do not know how to read to enable them adequately help their children	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
34. Teachers make home visits particularly to those learners with reading difficulties	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
35. Teachers mark and give general verbal feedback to the whole class on homework that required writing.	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
36. Teachers mark and give feedback by indicating a grade and written praises such as good, excellent on homework that required writing.	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
37. Teachers give individualised verbal feedback to learners with reading difficulties on homework that required reading aloud.	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*

39. Teachers mark and give feedback by writing comments pointing out mistakes/areas of improvement on homework that required writing.	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
40. Teachers provide opportunities where learners have peer feedback on any homework done.	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*
41. Teachers provide opportunities where learners have self feedback on any homework done.	*N*	*R*	*S*	*U*	*A*

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

APPENDIX II

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSION INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

1. What are your purposes for assigning homework to learners with reading difficulties?
2. Do you adapt for learners with reading difficulties when creating/assigning homework so that they also benefit? If so, elaborate how/ if not, elaborate why not
3. Do you believe that parental involvement in homework on reading activities is paramount? If so, elaborate why/ if not, elaborate why not
4. Do you involve parents of learners with reading difficulties in the homework of their children? If so, elaborate how/ if not, elaborate why not
5. Do you provide feedback on homework to learners with reading difficulties? If so, elaborate how/ if not, elaborate why not

APPENDIX III

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR LEARNERS WITH READING DIFFICULTIES

1. Do teachers give you homework on reading?
2. Who helps you with homework on reading at home?
3. How do they help you with homework on reading? Elaborate more
4. Do you have books to read at home?
5. Do teachers give you books to read at home? Elaborate more

APPENDIX IV

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARENTS

1. Do you believe that parental involvement in homework on reading activities is paramount?
2. Do you involve yourself in your child's homework? Elaborate how/ why not
3. Do teachers communicate school homework policy or homework routine to you so that you know what it entails? Elaborate more
4. Do teachers contact you if there are problems with your children's performance? Elaborate more
5. Do teachers give guidance on how you should help your children with regard to homework? Elaborate more
6. Do teachers teach you how to read? Elaborate more
7. Do teachers visit you in relation to homework? Elaborate more