

**GRADE THREE (3) PUPILS' PREPAREDNESS FOR THE READ ON  
COURSE (ROC): A CASE OF SELECTED BASIC SCHOOLS IN  
CHINGOLA DISTRICT OF ZAMBIA**

**BY**

**ANTHONY MULENGA**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA  
IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF  
DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION (LITERACY AND  
LEARNING)**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA LUSAKA**

**August 2012**

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**UNZA**

**August 2012**

## DECLARATION

I, Mulenga Anthony do declare that this dissertation is my own work which has not been submitted for a degree at this, or any other university.

Signature:.....

Date:.....

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late sister, Bana Kangwa and my wife, Matani.

## APPROVAL

This dissertation by Anthony Mulenga is approved as fulfilling the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Education (Literacy and Learning) of the University of Zambia.

Name:.....

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Anthony Mulenga

The University of Zambia

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## ACRONYMS

DEBS	District Education Board Secretary
BASAT	Basic Skills Assessment Test
BESSIP	Basic Education Sub-Sector Investment Programme
PEO	Provincial Educational Officer
PRP	Primary Reading Programme
ROC	Read on Course
SACMEQ	Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality
SITE	Step In To English
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
ZNBTL	Zambian New Break Through To Literacy

## ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to assess Grade 3 pupils' preparedness for the Read On Course (ROC) under the Primary Reading Programme (PRP) in reading and writing in Bemba as a first language and English as a second language.

The study addressed the following main objectives among others: to establish if Grade 3 pupils could read and write at desirable levels in both Bemba as a first language and English as a second language; and to find out factors that contributed to Grade 3 pupils' reading and writing difficulties in the first and second languages.

This study employed a cross-sectional design and both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. There were 75 pupils that were sampled drawn from five basic schools within Chingola district of Zambia. Additionally, 15 teachers who taught Grades 1, 2, and 3 provided information on the pupils' preparedness for the ROC.

The study showed that most pupils faced a number of difficulties in reading and writing in Grade three when Bemba and English began to move simultaneously. Most pupils in Grade three were not able to read and write at the desirable level, including some that had supposedly broken through by the end of Grade two. The study also revealed that the pupils faced difficulties in spelling English and Bemba words especially when words were raised from simple one-syllable to three-syllable words. Pupils could not write simple sentences that were deemed to be at their grade level.

Classroom observations showed that there were a number of factors that contributed to the pupils' poor performance in reading and writing at the beginning of the ROC. Some of these included shortage of teaching and learning materials, absenteeism, and environmental factors such as pupils' poor home environment.

Arising from these findings, it was concluded that the pupils that had not broken through faced most challenges as they had little or nothing at all to transfer from Bemba as a first language into English as a second language by the third grade. The study, among other recommendations, suggested that the time for learning the Zambian languages be extended from one to four years as envisaged in the current education policy document, *Educating Our Future* (1996).



## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0. Overview**

In this chapter, the following issues are presented; the background to the study, purpose of the study, objectives and research questions. The other sub-headings discussed in this chapter are the significance of the study, limitations, delimitation and the operational definitions of key terms as used in the study.

#### **1.1. Background**

The ability to read and write is one of the determiners of pupils' success or failure in school. Krashen (1993) states that we learn to read by reading, not through drill and practice, but by free volition, and in this way we become readers. In this regard reading and writing are

parallel as they are both ways of producing language (Barton, 2007). According to Barton (ibid), reading and writing should not merely be treated as technical skills, but should instead be treated as social practices. Garner (1990) and Wigfield (1991), quoted in Matafwali (2010), have contended that the development of reading involves an interaction or application of many levels of cognitive and non-cognitive processing skills such as the ability to decode individual words as well as having the necessary knowledge of concepts and of the world to comprehend the meanings of a written text. Children who are given appropriate instructions and provided with environments that foster early reading practices learn to read with relative ease. For most children, however, learning to read and write is a formidable challenge they have to encounter throughout their education. Regarding writing, Barton (2007) notes that learning to write involves two basic aspects: learning the mechanics of writing and becoming a competent writer by understanding what one writes about.

Reading is a crucial form of communication through which we get most of the information required in teaching and learning situations and in everyday life. The Child's success throughout formal education depends in large part on the ability to read (Snow, Burns and Griffins, 1998). Central to the issue of literacy development is the crucial role of the language of instruction. The importance of introducing reading and writing in a learner's most familiar language cannot be overemphasised. The process of developing literacy and learning skills and the transition to English as a second language and as a language of instruction needs to be accompanied by appropriate methods and sufficient time (Banda, 1999; Williams, 1998). Thus, the structure of the current Primary Reading Programme (PRP) is to equip the learners in the first years of their school life to be able to read and write with minimum fluency in the Zambian languages and English language. Further, the Read On Course (ROC) under the same programme is intended to enhance and strengthen the grade three pupils reading and writing skills they will have obtained in grades one and two.

However, the reading and writing levels in Zambian primary schools both in the first language (L1) and the second language (L2) are not very satisfactory. The Examinations Council of Zambia evaluation report (ECZ, 2006) showed that learning achievement levels among grade 5 pupils in reading both in Zambian languages and English were still low across all levels. For instance, the percentage of pupils reaching minimum levels of performance in 2006 stood at 29.1% in reading in English and 30.4% in Zambian languages. This meant that

the national target set for learning achievement under the Basic Education Sub-Sector Investment Programme (BESSIP) of 62.2% in reading in English was not met by that time.

Matafwali (2005; 2010) also observed that children experiencing significant difficulties acquiring reading skills by first grade are likely to have reading difficulties by third grade and beyond in both L1 and L2. It, therefore, becomes crucial that pupils attain desirable reading and writing levels after grades one and two in both L1 and L2. Pupils who have passed through Grades one and two without acquiring and developing the appropriate reading and writing skills, will find it difficult to acquire these skills later because the purpose of subsequent grades is not to teach the techniques of reading and writing, but to enable them read and write with comprehension as noted in the report by the Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ, 2005).

From the time Zambia adopted ‘the straight for English’ policy after independence, it was evident that learning to read and write proved to be a challenge for most of the pupils in government schools. This is reflected in the various educational reforms that sought to address the issue of language policy and language of instruction at the lower levels of the Zambian educational system. For example, the Educational Reforms of 1977 and the Focus on Learning of 1996 policy documents emphasised the issue of promoting the use of Zambian languages in the early stages of school.

Teaching and learning in an alien language had meant that, for the vast majority of the pupils, school was unrelated to real life. As a result, rote learning was the only way to approach a situation where understanding was absent from school. Moreover, as Kelly (2000) observed, education in an unfamiliar language is assumed to be an enormous challenge for the young learners because children have to learn two complex skills at the same time i.e. learning the language and learning to read. The consequential effects of this is that failure for the pupils to fluently read and write at their level, greatly jeopardizes good performance in other subjects like science and mathematics.

With this prevailing situation, in the late 1990s, the Zambian government, in collaboration with the United Kingdom’s government Department for International Development (DfID), initiated a deliberate policy to teach children how to read and write through the Primary Reading Programme (PRP). Since 1998, the programme has sought to achieve initial literacy in a Zambian language in Grade one, build on these reading skills in English in Grade two

and consolidate reading and writing skills in both languages in grades three to seven. The main objective of PRP is to provide interventions to improve reading and writing levels in all primary schools through targeted interventions at every grade level.

The *Zambian New Breakthrough to Literacy (ZNBTL)* uses a familiar language to teach initial literacy skills to the pupils in Grade one. Oral English is introduced through *Pathway to English (One)* during the first grade. In the second grade, *Step In To English (SITE)* builds on the Grade one work. Oral English is continued through *Pathway to English (two)*, and the language of instruction in the second grade becomes English. The strategy at Grade 1 is to speed the acquisition reading and writing skills in a local Zambian language, while building spoken English skills to an acceptable level that can allow the skills developed in the local language to be transferred to English in Grade 2 (Sampa, 2003).

### 1.2. **Statement of the Problem**

Reading and writing abilities can be plotted on a continuum from pre-reading, emergent reading, basic reading, reading for meaning, interpretative reading, inferential reading, and analytical reading, right through to critical reading (SACMEQ; 2005). Pupils should show abilities in these reading levels from pre-reading to critical reading in both the first language (L1) and the second language (L2) as they move from one grade level to another. This is the ultimate goal of a subtractive bilingual form of literacy acquisition educational system that Zambia follows. It is assumed that learning to read and write in a Zambian or most familiar language benefits reading in English as a second language (Williams, 1993; Mubanga, 2010; Bus, 2010; Cummins, 2000). It was, however, not clear if pupils were able to move from one stage of the reading level on the reading continuum to the next at a desirable level. This study, therefore, sought to establish whether the claim that after the first three courses of the Primary Reading Programme (PRP), i.e. *Zambian New Breakthrough to Literacy (ZNBTL)*, *Path Way to English* and *Step In To English (SITE)*, pupils were expected to have developed sufficient literacy skills in both Bemba (L1) and English (L2) that they can use in the subsequent course of the programme called the *Read On Course (ROC)*. The statement of the problem put in a question form thus reads; do the pupils read and write Bemba and English at desirable levels by the time they are getting into the *Read On Course (ROC)* in Grade three?

### 1.3. **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to find out if Grade 3 pupils in PRP classes were able to read and write at desirable levels both in Bemba and English. The study also sought to establish how the pupils that do not breakthrough in Bemba cope with the challenges of reading and writing in English as a second language.

#### 1.4. Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. establish if Grade 3 pupils could read and write at the desirable levels in both Bemba as a first language and English as a second language.
2. determine how the pupils that do not breakthrough in Bemba cope with the challenges of reading and writing in English as a second language by Grade three.
3. find out if those that breakthrough were able to read with comprehension in both Bemba and English by Grade 3.
4. explore the most prominent reading and writing difficulties among Grade 3 pupils in Bemba and English.
5. find out factors that contributed to Grade 3 pupils' reading and writing difficulties in the first and second language.

#### 1.5. Research Questions

The study aimed at answering the following questions;

1. do Grade 3 pupils read and write at the desirable levels in both Bemba as a first language and English as a second language?
2. how do pupils that do not breakthrough in Bemba cope with the challenges of reading and writing in English as a second language by Grade three?
3. how do the pupils who breakthrough read with comprehension both L1 and L2 by Grade 3?
4. what are the most prominent reading and writing difficulties among Grade 3 pupils in Bemba and English?

5. what are the factors that contribute to reading and writing difficulties for Grade 3 pupils in the first and second language?

#### 1.6. **Significance of the study**

The study helped in establishing the pupils' performance in reading and writing in Bemba (L1) and English (L1) after the first three courses of the PRP. Further, the study enhanced the growth of knowledge in the area of literacy acquisition and helped in confirming the claim that the first and second year courses in the PRP equipped learners with literacy skills in both L1 and L2. Moreover, the findings of this study could prompt the government, through the Ministry of Education, to re-examine the current language-in-education policy with the view to improving upon apparent weaknesses, if any.

#### 1.7. **Limitations of the Study**

Five schools were sampled in the study, and they were all drawn from one district, a case which could limit the generalisation of the findings. Further, on some occasions during the testing process, some pupils in the sample were not present, as a result, this tended to be a limitation during data collection.

#### 1.8. **Delimitation of the Study**

The study confined itself to assessing literacy levels of Grade three pupils in basic schools within the boundaries of Chingola district of Zambia.

#### 1.9. **Operational Definitions of the Study**

**Breakthrough** -the state of the pupils that had been considered to be able to read and write by the end of Grade two.

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

**Reading**- the learners' ability to recognise and decode the letters and words they read, but it was extended to mean the ability to understand the meanings of the words and sentences and the ability to relate the meanings to the rest of the text that were administered.

*Mother Tongue* - the first language (L1).

*Language of Initial literacy* - the language in which the first attempts of reading and writing of the learners was done.

*First Language or L1*- the local languages the pupils used in the acquisition of initial literacy but not necessarily their mother tongue.

*Second language or L2* - English language, which the learners used as a subject as well as the medium of instruction from Grade 1 onwards.

*Literacy status*- The child's reading and writing abilities by the end of grade two determined by the pace group in which the child was placed in by Grade three.

*Reading at minimum level* - The ability for the learners to read materials a grade or two below their level.

*Reading at desirable level* - The learners' ability to read materials that are deemed to be at their grade level

*Performance* - the Grade three pupils' actual scores in the various tests that were administered to them using the BASAT testing instrument and other reading materials that were used in the study. (See chapter 3 under research instruments and sample and sampling procedure).

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0. Overview

In this chapter, relevant literature related to the study has been reviewed. This chapter has also linked the findings of the related literature to the current study by establishing the connection to Primary Reading Programme (PRP), particularly the Read On Course (ROC).

#### 2.1. The Definition of Reading and Writing

Reading is about understanding written texts. It is a complex activity that involves both perception and thought (Herbert, 2003). Accordingly, Reading consists of two related processes: word recognition and comprehension. Word recognition refers to the process of

perceiving how written symbols correspond to one's spoken language. Comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected text. Readers typically make use of background knowledge, vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, experience with text and other strategies to help them understand written text (Herbert, 2003). This attribution of meaning to the written words is clearly an integral part of reading, and fosters the reading ability of the learners.

In stressing the importance of the above point, Williams (1993) notes that a particularly careful approach is, therefore, needed with learners who have little knowledge of English if they are to learn to read successfully in the language. He further observes that most methods of teaching initial reading assume that the learner knows the language. These methods, therefore, focus on decoding (i.e. identification) of the written words. In initial reading of a second language where the learner may not know the language, this can degenerate into mere "transcoding" i.e. converting the written form into a spoken form without understanding.

The skills acquired in reading can promote and aid the acquisition of language skills like listening and writing. Some of the primary school pupils, however, find it difficult to read and understand despite the fact that reading is indispensable according to Ajibola (2006). One is likely to agree with this because reading is a life-long activity that not only assists pupils in organising their thoughts and jotting down important facts, but also equips the learners to comprehend entire texts (Bruner, 1983; Barton, 2000;). In this vein, Sampa (1999) and the SACMEQ report (2005) noted that the aim of any reading programme, like the one being implemented by the Zambian Ministry of Education currently, is to lay a strong foundation that can benefit pupils throughout their lives and academic pursuits.

Reading as the recognition of printed or written symbols which serve as stimuli for recalling the meanings requires that the readers accrue sufficient past experience (Dike, 2006). In light of this, Gibson and Levin (1975) quoted in Shaffer (1999) have identified three phases in learning to read. First the children equate reading with storytelling, where the child can pick up a story book and read words which may not even be there in the print. Bus et al. (1995) have also noted, in an apparent agreement with this assertion, that reading starts quite early in the child's life. They add that as early as eighteen months of age, children are able to grasp the physical act involved in reading which are gazing, pointing, and monitoring. This early



literacy awareness fosters an orientation to print knowledge that facilitates the children's appropriation of reading. Thus, as Hamunyele (2010) notes, there is great need to encourage literacy-rich home environments for the children in order to inculcate in the children early reading interest. In the next stage, children recognise that the squiggles on the printed page represent words. They may then try to match the spoken words of a familiar story to the symbols on the page. In the third and final phase, children must have become quite skilled at decoding letters and can sound out unknown words by breaking them into individual sounds or syllables. Hence, by the time children are in the third grade, when the ROC is introduced, they are expected to master the rules of translating letters into meaningful sounds and should also comprehend what they are reading about (Shaffer, 1999).

In summary to reading in English, Williams (1993) states that the ability to read in English is not only of economic use, but also of educational importance to individuals, since it is the medium for almost all primary and secondary schooling. He notes that pupils have to move very quickly from a position of learning to read in English, to one of reading English to learn.

The primary reading programme is the final component of PRP. It is structured as a teacher support programme and it provides teachers with guidance and relevant teaching strategies to help their pupils to develop and consolidate the newly acquired skills. The intention of the course is to develop literacy in two languages- Zambian languages and English, (Constable et al., 2001). This is a key component that ought to be put into consideration in the definition of reading and writing.

## **2.2. The Importance of Oral Language to Reading and Writing**

To make sense of written words, children must not only differentiate among letters, but must also learn which letters correspond to which sounds in the spoken language (Shaffer, 1999; Bus, 2010; Matafwali, 2010). And detecting letter-sound correspondence seems to depend heavily on the phonological awareness and oral language, which leads to the realisation that spoken words can be decomposed into basic sound units or phonemes (Smith, Simmons, & Kameenui, 1995). This is why it is important to introduce reading and writing to the learners in the most familiar language or preferably, the mother tongue, primarily because of the importance of oral language in early reading. This is so crucial for the child even in the aspect of writing. Barton (2000) notes that learning to write involves two aspects: learning the mechanics of writing and understanding what one wishes to write about. Sometimes, the act

of writing takes an excruciating amount of time and effort because the thoughts expressed may differ from what one writes about, especially if the language is not the writer's familiar language.

According to Clay (2001) reading and writing are closely related. Developing reading skills through writing is an effective strategy in teaching initial literacy as rightly observed by Clay. For young children, learning to write and spell helps to develop their awareness of print conventions. This obviously makes the learners to be aware of the symbolic nature of print. This means that the pupils in preparing to enter into the ROC classes, are supposed to be acquainted with these skills that have been mentioned if they are to cope with the challenges of reading with comprehension as expected by the beginning of grade three. Furthermore, these skills help the learners establish the connection between oral and written language in a subtractive bilingual education system as the one obtaining in the Zambian education system. Language experience makes concrete the connection between reading and writing through oral language as noted by Adams (1990). From the foregoing, one can deduce that children are expected to attain these skills by at least the third or fourth grade.

It is against this background that in bilingual situations, learning to read and write is encouraged to take place in the learner's most familiar language before the transition to the second Language as the learner can easily transfer linguistic knowledge from the first language (L1) to the second language (L2). Further, bilingual literacy has been hailed as a very good way to acquire reading and writing. This is the point Cummins (1979: 22) has highlighted in the quotation below:

*Although the surface aspects (e.g. pronunciation, fluency, etc.) of different languages are clearly separate, there is an underlying cognitive academic proficiency that is common across languages. This common underlying proficiency makes possible the transfer of cognitive / academic or literacy-related skills across languages.*

According to Campbell (1996), who apparently agrees with Cummins' views, there are many cognitive and linguistic benefits of being a fluent bilingual. In the U.S.A., for example, several studies have shown that children who are fluent bilinguals actually outperform monolingual children in school on metalinguistic skills. Campbell has, however, observed that many children that are not native speakers of the English language are put in English speaking classrooms where they understand nothing of what is being taught. In this 'swim or

sink' situation, many pupils flounder. This illustrates that the idea of 'the more English, the better', is fallacious and can actually slow down the children's learning considerably. Hence, this shows that the transfer to English should not be rushed so as to give children adequate time to attain sufficient literacy skills in their first language (L1) to transfer into the second language (L2).

In the same vein, Thomas and Collier (1998) argue that because most children are not given enough time to learn their native languages, they flounder, not as a result of having language learning difficulties, but because they are put in difficult situations in the school environment. The duo further observe that in order to overcome such situations, children must be given up to 90% of the time to learn their first language in kindergarten and grade one, with only 10% dedicated to learning English. Gradually as they learn more English, they would be taught in their first language 50% of their time and 50% in English, the second language, up to the sixth grade before making the full transition to English.

It is clear then, that children in ideal bilingual learning situations are likely to perform well because they understand what they are hearing and are able to build their underlying conceptual-linguistic foundation. Further, encouraging and supporting children's first languages and culture encourages them to quickly learn to read and write without any language impingement (Campbell, 1996). This is supported by Stubbs (2000) who has noted that language teaching has to start from where the child is, because there is, logically, nowhere else to start.

This is the ideal situation. However, there seems to be a rush in the current status quo in the PRP. The time children reach grade three, they will have been introduced to English almost on a permanent basis and this tends to push the mother tongue aside. The shifting from mother tongue as language of initial literacy to English is what is referred to as the transitional phase (Banda, 1999). As Williams et al. (1990:44) put it; this transfer entails building on what pupils already know in their mother tongue to teach new skills in the second language. This implies a continuous process of making connections between the mother tongue and the second language.

### **2.3. Phonological Awareness and Alphabetic Knowledge**

Learning to read is, therefore, heavily dependent on mastery of a number of basic perceptual, cognitive and language processes, including phonological, orthographic, syntactic, semantic, and comprehension skills (Biemiller, 1999; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). Before children begin to learn to associate the written form with speech, they need to learn the vocabulary, grammar and sound system of the oral language. Research has shown that there is a close connection between oral vocabulary and early reading ability (Matafwali, 2010; Tambulukani and Bus, 2010). The ability to attend to the individual sounds within words (phonological and phonemic awareness) is also an oral skill that is closely associated with reading ability.

Therefore, a powerful predictor of reading achievement that has garnered much attention in the recent past is phonological awareness (Blachman, 1984, Bradley & Bryant, 1983). Phonological awareness refers to an individual's implicit and explicit sensitivity to the sub lexical structure of oral language. Running speech comprises various phonological units ranging in size from large (words, syllables) to small (morphemes, phonemes). Children gradually become aware of the phonological composition of spoken language, with awareness moving from larger to smaller units. The most sophisticated level of phonological awareness represents the ability to analyze oral language at the level of the phoneme (Lane, Pullen, Eisele, & Jordan, 2002; Lonigan et al., 2000).

A lack of this awareness may impede an individual's ability to acquire accurate and fluent word reading skills. This, it is noted, is a primary source of difficulty for children with reading disabilities (Torgesen, Wagner, & Rashotte, 1997). Research evidence has also shown that phonological awareness is critical to the acquisition of early decoding skills in children. If there is lack of these skills especially when the young learners make the transition to learning and reading and writing with comprehension in the ROC, there is a likelihood that the pupils may flounder. This point has been noted by Matafwali (2005; 2010) in which it has been revealed that lack of phonological skills are contributory factors to pupils' lack of reading.

Although phonological awareness is necessary to the development of skilled decoding, it is not sufficient for acquiring the ability to read words. In addition to phonological awareness, understanding of the alphabetic principle is necessary for developing word recognition and decoding skills. However, the alphabetic principle makes little sense to children with deficits in phonological awareness. The alphabetic principle refers to the systematic relationship

between letters and sounds. Children must understand that the individual phonemes in words are represented by letters and that those sounds can be analyzed and synthesized in the decoding process (National Reading Panel, 2000). Children without this understanding are unable to develop adequate word recognition and decoding abilities. This is one of the goals of the current study, as it aims to assess the performance of the children in this regard in bilingual classrooms with respect to Bemba as the first language and English as a second language.

The development of phonological awareness occurs along a continuum reflecting a transition from shallow to deep levels. In other words, children gradually move from shallow to more heightened levels of awareness, with awareness of the phoneme representing the most sophisticated level of skill (Stanovich, 1992).

Additional indicators of the advent of phonological awareness include word awareness (understanding that sentences contain words) and syllable awareness (understanding that words comprise syllables). Promoting the development of these foundational aspects of phonological awareness in young children may help avoid "a causal chain of negative effects" initiated by the absence of phonological sensitivity (Stanovich, 1986).

It can, therefore, be stated that the pupils preparing for the ROC, must have acquired and developed these phonological skills to the desirable levels. This would greatly assist the pupils by the time they reached grade three to read and write new words in both languages.

#### **2.4. Children's Learning in Bilingual Classrooms at the Global Level**

Pedagogical issues relating to language and literacy have received concerted concern in many parts of the world. For example, Saxena (1997) reports that Indian children who are forced to seek formal education in schools where curriculum and language of instruction has no relationship with their home language, or mother tongue, perform poorly in the acquisition of reading and writing skills. According to this study, the principle reason for low language skills is that the child is forced to unlearn his/her mother tongue to learn a language that is alien to him/her milieu. This realisation has, however, led to the reiteration of the pedagogical principle that the mother tongue should be the medium of instruction for the early childhood education (Saxena, 1997).

Additionally, Pattanayak (1981) is of the view that in countries where multiple languages and cultures co-exist, the notion of one dominant language, such as English, as the medium of instruction, leaves thousands of children illiterate in the mother tongue or first language and fosters low achievement levels in the dominant language itself. In this respect, the National Advisory Committee that was appointed by the Indian government to look into the language issue in the pupils' books concluded that the language used in pupils' books failed to convey the centrality of the child in the world constructed by the school. The words and expressions commonly used by the children in their everyday milieu were absent, and thus reinforcing the tradition of distancing school knowledge from life and further deepening the sense of burden attached to all school related knowledge.

A study done by UNESCO (2003) in 30 African, Asian and Latin American countries recommended the use of local languages or the mother tongue in formal and non-formal education for the initial stages of the child's years in school. This shows the importance attached to the use of the learner's first language in learning to read and write even by major decision formers in education. In other words, this precisely shows why it is important to conduct initial literacy in the first language of the learners to give them a head start in reading and writing while recognising the value and significance of English as the official language of our country.

In Africa, several studies have indicated the prevalence of low reading and writing levels among school-going children. There have also been several calls to enhance bilingual education and particular stress has also been given to the importance of introducing early childhood literacy in the learner's most familiar language. Adekola (2007) has observed that there are low reading and writing levels in Nigerian primary schools. Results from three National Assessments on reading carried out between 1996 and 2003 are far from expectations and very low by international standards. The study did, however, note that the major contributing factors to low reading and writing levels among primary school pupils are the poor conditions of the classrooms, inadequate distribution of the essential textbooks and instructional aids and the limited opportunities for the teachers to develop their language teaching skill. These trends are similar to those obtaining in Zambia as noted by Luangala (2008) who reported that most of the basic schools funded by the Christian Children's Fund (CCF) lacked essential teaching and learning material like books. But this does not, in any

significant way, take away the fact that the language of instruction and initial literacy are crucial in the infancy of learning to read and write which is at the core of this current study.

There are many factors that prompted the Zambian government to come up with PRP and its various components. Core among these were factors emanating from the studies that have been cited above. The PRP has changed the language for initial literacy from English to the L1 at least up to Grade 1 and therefore, influencing the behaviour of the learners, which may then be described as a regulatory policy. The ROC will enhance the status of the pupils' abilities, and thus, may be classified as a symbolic policy (Banda, 1999). The MoE, on the other hand feels that this communicative innovation will improve the general quality of education being provided to the pupils, which may be seen as an administrative policy.

### **2.5. The Bilingual Education in the Zambian Situation Today**

In outlining the importance of the bilingual form of literacy to the Zambian situation, Tambulukani et al. (1999) note those pupils that participated in the Molteno project, where teaching of initial literacy was in the mother tongue, made substantive progress in their literacy abilities when compared to the children who were receiving more traditional instruction, starting with English. In light of this, the conclusion by Williams (1993) was that it seemed clear that the then Zambian policy of instruction in English from Grade 1 had a negative effect upon literacy in the mother tongue. The situation in Malawi, where CiChewa was the medium of instruction for the first four years, suggested that children could achieve reasonable literacy in their mother-tongue with no adverse effect on their English. The study found that Malawian children outperformed their Zambian counterparts in reading. As a result of this evidence, Zambia put into place a primary reading programme consisting of four courses, namely: the Zambian New breakthrough to Literacy (ZNBTL), Path Way to English, Step In To English (SITE) and the Read on Course (ROC). The first course focuses on teaching initial literacy in the learners' first language (Zambian language) before English is introduced through the Path Way to English and the other subsequent courses of the PRP. This initiative sought to build up English skills in a way that would make English learning more effective in the Zambian schools, while recognising that Zambian languages were the foundation upon which a durable bilingual programme could be built (Tambulukani et al. 1999; Williams and Mchazime, 1998).

The Southern African Consortium on Monitoring of Educational Quality report (SACMEQ, 2005) observed that Zambian pupils in the upper primary schools performed below the desirable levels in reading and writing, with about 68% of the pupils performing very lowly at Grade 6 level. The report further noted that only 25% of the grade 6 pupils could read and write at defined minimum levels and only 3% could read at defined desirable levels. Similar findings by Matafwali (2005) show that among the Grade 3 pupils in Lusaka, only a small proportion of children were able to read at comfortable grade level in English and performance in all the aspects of reading and writing was generally poor with no significant difference between rural and urban schools. This warrants conducting another study to assess the performance of Grade 3 pupils in other parts of the country in L1 and L2. Worth noting here is the fact the studies by the SACMEQ were conducted to evaluate the efficacy of the NBTL after the programme had been running for a number of years.

The PRP evaluation report by the examinations council of Zambia (ECZ; 2006) equally reported that reading levels among school pupils in Zambia in both Zambian languages and English were not satisfactory. The results indicated that learning achievements among Grade 5 pupils in reading were still low across all levels.

Further, according to the Zambia Demographic and Health Survey (2002), education data survey, literacy levels among children aged 7-10 were low. Children were asked to read a sentence in a language in which they were likely to be literate. Only 19% of the children were able to read part or all of a sentence. In assessing these literacy results, it is important to bear in mind that pupils in the age group 7-10, are not likely to have progressed beyond Grade 4. This is important as the focus of this current study looked at Grade 3 pupils' performance in reading and writing at this particular period.

These results show that special attention from education authorities, and implementation of specialised programmes to improve pupils reading and writing levels in the first and second language, at the grassroots is needed to address these literacy deficiencies. It is crucial that the pupils attain desirable reading and writing levels after grades one and two both in the Zambian languages and English. This is so cardinal because pupils who have passed through grades one and two without acquiring and developing the appropriate reading and writing skills will find it very difficult to acquire these skills later because the purpose of the subsequent grades at primary schools is not to teach the techniques of reading and writing,



but to read and write with comprehension, in order to consolidate the literacy skills acquired in the first two grades (SACMEQ, 2005).

However, several studies have questioned the one year time frame allocated to the teaching of initial literacy in the first language. Studies by Banda (1999), Mubanga (2010) and Bus (2010) all indicated that there were a lot of errors that pupils made in the second grade because of the quick and sudden transition that pupils make in grade two to English.

There have also been concerns raised on the plight of those pupils who do not breakthrough in literacy in the first grade and questions have been asked about the skills they bring into grade two, the time they change the language of instruction to English because they will not be in a position to transfer anything from the L1 into the second language (Banda, 1999). If the one year dedicated to the teaching of initial literacy in L1 does not bear fruit, this brings to the fore a lot of deficiencies in the implementation of the PRP with respect to the three courses under review in this study.

## **2.6. Conclusion**

As we study the preparedness of grade three pupils in reading and writing in the ROC, it is clear that a number of related issues need to be critically analysed. This chapter has given a bird's eye-view of the whole process of looking at the pupils' readiness for the ROC, beginning with definition of reading and writing coming down to understanding the importance of phonological awareness to the pupils' preparing to start reading with comprehension in the ROC. The chapter has also given an extensive reveal of related literature in order to bring an understanding that the Zambian PRP was not developed from isolation, but is a reflection of global phenomena and aspirations that have been situated to the Zambian context. For instance Banda (1999) in his evaluation of the programme has indicated that it (PRP) had a number of challenges including the duration of the time allocated to the teaching of the children in the mother tongue.

Matafwali (2010) in the longitudinal-cross sectional study involving grades one and two found that grade two pupils did not outperform grade one pupils in basic skills and reading

proficiency. The study also indicated that reading development seems to discontinue in grade two when a shift is made from practising reading and writing in the *Zambian languages* towards practising in English. It is in this line that the current study sought to consider the pupils' preparedness as they move into grade three to start the Roc after the first two courses of the PRP. In light of what has been highlighted in the reveal of literature, the study analysed the pupils' performance in reading and writing in both Bemba and English after pupils had been exposed to both languages and when the two languages were used simultaneously. The current study has also endeavoured to link all the majored themes in this chapter the current issues being talked about in order to show the relevance to the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0. Overview**

This chapter considers the detailed issues concerning research design, population of the study, sample and sampling procedure, research instruments, data collection procedure, data analysis, and ethical issues in data collection. The choice of research methods will be described, as well as the techniques used and sample selected.

#### **3.1. Research Design**

A research design has been described by Patton (1990) as the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure. In other words, research design involves the statements of the procedures through which information can be gathered that addresses the core purpose

of the research in a simple, elegant and systemic way. Therefore, the choice of the research methods mainly depends on the purpose of the study. In this study, the design employed was a cross-sectional descriptive study. This was in relation situation as it obtains in the government Basic Schools in Chingola district, with special emphasis on the pupils' preparedness in reading and writing in Grade three after the first three courses of the PRP. Descriptive studies are also called observational, because you observe the subjects without otherwise intervening. In cross-sectional studies, variables of interest in a sample of subjects are assayed once and the relationships between them are determined (Busk, 2005).

The study used both quantitative and qualitative research paradigms. Quantitative research sought to establish relationships and explain causes of changes in measured social factors. The Qualitative design on the other hand, was more concerned with understanding the social phenomenon from the participants' perspective. This study was however, more tilted towards the qualitative paradigm as the researcher's main aim was, and as Myers (2002) puts it, to offer a perspective of a situation and provide a well-written research report that reflects the researcher's ability to illustrate or describe the corresponding phenomenon. Myers (ibid) further adds that one of the greatest strengths of the qualitative approach is the richness and depth of explorations and descriptions. Suffice to say that some quantitative techniques were used to augment the qualitative data and this was presented through the use of graphs and other charts.

### **3.2. Population**

White (2003) defined a population as the universe of units from which the sample is to be selected. The population comprised all the Grade three pupils enrolled in all the PRP schools in Chingola district. There were also 15 teachers that taught grades 1, 2, 3 and administrators were used as informants.

### **3.3. Sample and sampling procedure**

Random sampling was used to select five basic schools within Chingola district. Fifteen pupils were purposively picked from each school. This brought the total sample to seventy five (75) pupils. The sample was intended to include pupils that had broken through in Bemba and English and those that had not at the end of Grade two. There were 38 boys and 37 girls representing 50.7% and 49.3% respectively. Meanwhile, out of the 75 respondents, 32 had broken through to reading and writing while 43 had not broken through by the end of

Grade two. Among those that had broken through, there were an equal number of boys and girls which was at sixteen each. Twenty-two and twenty-one boys and girls had not broken through, respectively.

The respondents' literacy status was identified by the pace group in which they were placed by the start of the third grade. A pace was described by the teachers as the group of pupils with similar academic performance over a given period of time. The pace groups were identified by several colours or names of fruits as follows; Blue and Orange consisted of those that were presumed to have broken through. Those that had not broken through were placed in either the Yellow or Red group. However, in two schools, the pupils that had broken through to reading and writing in Bemba and English were put according to the ability in groups that were assigned fruit names such as Mango and Banana for those that were considered as not having broken through by Grade two. While those pupils who had showed sufficient knowledge in reading and writing by Grade two were placed in either Orange or Apple groups depending on the level of reading and writing ability.

#### 3.4. **Research Instruments**

The following instruments were used to collect the data:

- a) **Subtests from the Basic Skill Assessment Tool (BASAT).** **BASAT** is an individual Assessment instrument developed by the Ministry of Education, Zambia, primarily to assess basic reading and writing skills in grades one and two. The instrument was validated in 2003 and it has since been translated into seven local languages (Matafwali, 2005). **BASAT** measures the following basic language skills: alphabetic principle, phonological awareness, working memory, and reading comprehension. The instrument was appropriate for use in this study as the pupils were tested in the first term of the school calendar. It was, therefore, specifically concerned with those skills that pupils will have acquired in grades one and two. However, other reading materials for grade 3 level were used, as complementary instruments. This was done to find out if the pupils could read and write at the desirable levels in both Bemba and English at Grade three level after they had supposedly broken through in reading and writing.
- b) **A group administered spelling test** consisting of 10 words given to the respondents to assess their spelling abilities in English. Another set of spellings was given in Bemba consisting of four-one syllable to three syllable words.

- c) **Matching of the pictures with correct sentences.** This was intended to assess the respondents' ability to correctly read and write sentences on a given picture and briefly describe the situation depicted in the picture.
- d) **Focus Group Discussion with the Teachers.** Focus group discussions were used to find out from teachers, their views about what they regarded as some of the most significant factors contributing to the pupils' preparedness in reading and writing in both Bemba and English by Grade three. The teachers were also asked to give their views about the grade three pupils' preparedness for the reading and writing challenges for the Read On Course (ROC). These groups of teachers consisted of the teachers that handled the ZNBTL and SITE classes, including the teachers that taught the Grade three pupils, from which the pupils that participated in the study were drawn.
- e) **An interview inventory** was used to capture the following information:
- Personal data of the participants' name, age, sex, literacy status, English and Bemba reading, and alphabetic knowledge.
  - Teachers' views about Grade three pupils' performance in reading and writing in both Bemba and English.
- f) **Lesson observation schedule** for grade three classes. This was used to collect data on how reading and writing was taught in Grade three classes. This instrument was mainly useful for collecting qualitative data.
- g) **Document Analysis.** This was used to gather information about the pupils' tests and other information pertaining to the pupils. These were also used to pick the pupils that had broken through in reading and writing in Bemba and English.

### 3.5. Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected in the follows order:

- a) Firstly, the **BASAT** was used to collect data in basic skills in alphabetic knowledge, phonological awareness, initial and ending sounds both in English and Bemba. The tests were given to all the pupils individually one after the other. The data were collected as follows; firstly, the pupils were called one by one to identify and name the letters of the alphabet. The number of correct responses was recorded for each pupil. Secondly pupils were also asked to read a set of ten English and Bemba words. Again, their performance was recorded for each pupil.

- b) Then, the **Picture comprehension** was administered by writing the sentences describing the pictures on the board and the respondents were asked to match the correct sentence with the corresponding picture that they had been given. There were four pictures and the sentences were given both in Bemba and English.

The exercise was designed in such a way that the pupils would write their own sentences from the pictures given. Most pupils, however, were not able to do that. The researcher, therefore, working together with the teachers, wrote the sentences on the board and the children were asked to choose the correct sentence that described the pictures that they had been given. The sentences on the board were not written in the order they were appearing on the pictures. The pupils did the work individually albeit this exercise was done at the same time by all the pupils. This exercise was given in both Bemba and English at different times.

- c) After that, **Oral English Comprehension** was given. The test was intended for the pupils to read and answer on their own. However, as this was not possible, the researcher read the passage and asked the questions orally.
- d) A **group spelling test** was then administered which consisted of 10 English words and 12 Bemba words. The words were first written on the board and erased while the pupils put their hands on their heads. The pupils were then asked to write each word after it had been erased. These words ranged from the simple to difficult but all the words were drawn from materials befitting the appropriate grade level.
- e) **Rearranging Jumbled words to form meaningful sounds in both Bemba and English.** A set of five words, whose letters had been jumbled, in both languages, was presented to the respondents and a word to be formed was identified and told to the pupils. They were then asked to write that word using the set of jumbled letters given to them. This was repeated for all the five words in both Bemba and English.
- f) **Lesson observation schedule** for grade three classes. This was done precisely to collect data on how reading and writing was taught in Grade three classes. Particular attention was given to the methods and techniques that the teachers used in teaching reading and writing in both Bemba and English. Other prominent points of observation included the way the lessons took on board both the slow and fast learners. During the observations, materials used during the lessons and how appropriate they were to the grade three learners were also taken into account.
- g) There were also **Focus Group Discussions with the teachers.** The focus group with the ZNBTL and SITE teachers was conducted in all the schools. In some schools, however, the

ZNBTL, SITE and ROC teachers were interviewed together. Two instances where the later was done, was at school two and five. These FDGs were meant to collect data from the teachers concerning the pupils' preparedness to read and write in Bemba and English by Grade three. The other issues that teachers were asked to discuss were their views on possible hindering factors to pupils' progression in reading and writing by Grade three.

- h) **Document Analysis.** Finally, documents were also analysed because, as Weiss (1998) states, documents are a good place to search for answers because they provide a useful check on information gathered in an interview. Another view shared by Hammersley & Atkinson (1995) about documentary evidence is that it would be hard to conceive of anything approaching ethnographic account without some attention to documentary material in use. In the current study, documentary materials ranging from Education Policy Document to Evaluation Reports of the pupils, various articles on PRP were used to help strengthen the study as secondary sources of information.

### 3.6. **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for social Sciences (SPSS). Quantitative data was in form of figures, percentages, and frequencies. Qualitative data was in form of opinions, feelings, and suggestions as expressed by the informants in each school: teachers, managers and some pupils in some cases. Moreover, in this study, constructs, themes, and patterns were identified from the interviews, marked scripts and class observations with the aim of using them in the description of the phenomenon being studied. These data were interpreted in terms of the significance of what was being said and observed in relation to the performance of the pupils in reading and writing in English and Bemba

### 3.7. **Ethical issues in data collection**

The researcher adhered to all the set rules and regulations. No pupil was forced to take part in the study without the prior knowledge of the school management and District Educational Board Secretary's office (DEBS). While at the various schools, all the ethical issues were followed and no actual names of the school have been indicated in this report. Instead pseudo names have been used and all the information has been treated with the outmost confidentiality and the data has only been used for academic purposes.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

#### **4.0. Overview**

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study. The findings are presented to address the research questions under the following sub-headings: respondents' alphabetic knowledge, reading knowledge in English and literacy status, spelling knowledge in Bemba and in English language, respondents' ability to match pictures in Bemba and English, phonological awareness in Bemba and English, respondents' ability to identify initial and ending sounds in words in both Bemba and English, respondents' ability to rearrange jumbled letters in both Bemba and English to form correct words, and the respondents' ability to answer correctly an oral comprehension exercise in English and comparison of sentences in Bemba and comparison of reading and writing in L1 and L2. Finally, the teachers' views about the Grade three pupils' preparedness to read and write in the two languages and some of the issues that they regarded as prominent factors that were likely to contribute to the pupils' reading and writing challenges, have been discussed under separate sub-headings.



#### 4.1. **Alphabetic Knowledge in English**

This exercise tested the respondents' ability to name and identify the letters of the alphabet correctly. Of the 75 respondents that were sampled, 27 (36%) were able to identify and correctly name at least 20-24 of the letters of the alphabet. There were only twenty-four letters as the testing instrument contained 24 letters instead of the usual 26. Meanwhile, there were 15 (20%) respondents that could identify and name at least nineteen letters correctly, while 13 (17%) were able to name and identify between 15-19 letters, whereas 15 (20%) respondents failed to name and identify more than four letters of the alphabet.

Of the 27 (36%) respondents that named and identified between 20-24 letters of the alphabet, 14 were girls and 13 were boys. Meanwhile, there were 7 boys and 8 girls that could name and identify less than four letters. The number of pupils that had broken through was 21 compared to the six pupils that had not broken through among those that had identified and named between 20-24 letters of the alphabet.

One point of interest that came out of this study was that the pupils who had problems in this task could not identify and name the letters of the alphabet as they appeared on the testing instrument. To illustrate this, pupils were asked to randomly name the letters of the alphabet but it was noted that pupils were reciting the letters from memory and not from the way the letters appeared on the testing instrument. This confirmed the claim that sometimes teaching and learning proceeded as telling and did not elicit cognitive thinking on the part of the pupils as contended by Luangala (2008) and Williams (1993). This meant that the pupils did not fully comprehend the letters of the alphabet although they could orally recall these letters.

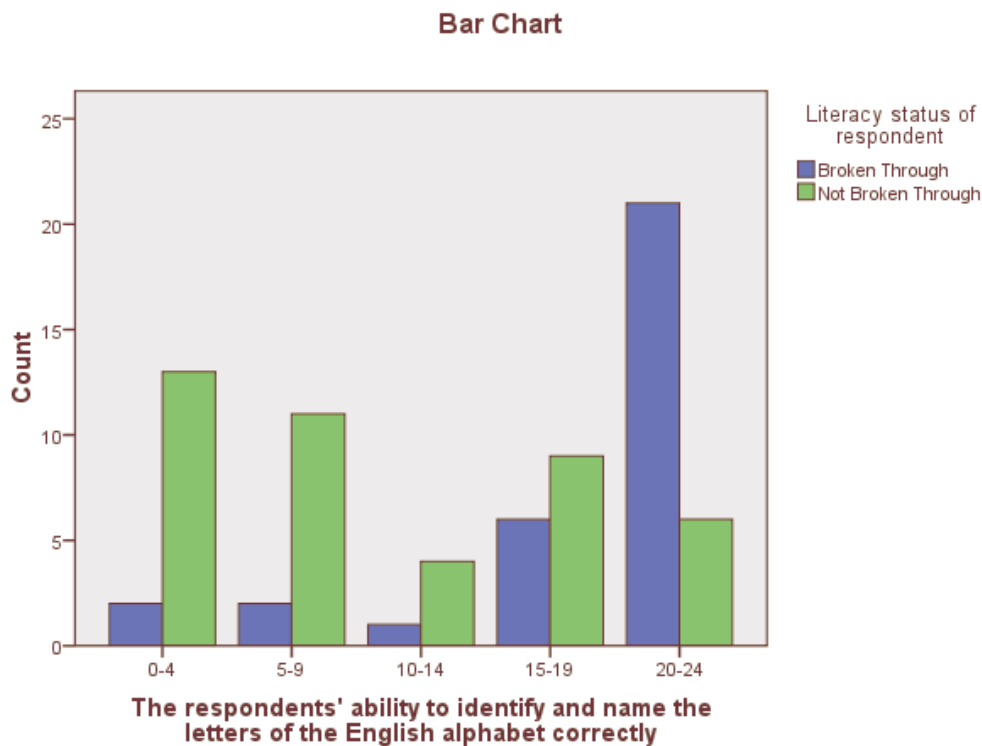
In other words, when the children that showed this trend were asked to sing the alphabetic song, they did that effectively but still could not properly identify and name the letters from the song. The pupils could still retain the sequence of the letters in a fairly fluent manner despite failing to identify the letters correctly. The contributory factor here could be that the learning of letters of the alphabet through singing is one of the first activities that children do in Grade one, and it appears that by the time they reach Grade three, they will have automated this activity quite effectively. However, 20 (26%) of the pupils had difficulties with the letters 'p' and 'q', 'b' and 'd' 'i' and 'l'.

It can be stated that children expressing difficulties with letter knowledge may also find challenges in reading activities later in their academic life. This is because reading depends, to a very large extent, on the pupils' ability to name and identify the letters of the alphabet. The pupils' ability in reading a set of ten English words was thus marred by a lot of inconsistencies as will be discussed later under the respondents' ability to read a set of ten English words.

The majority, 25 (83%) out of the 30 respondents that were unable to read the words given were those whose performance in the alphabetic knowledge was also poor. Reading in English can thus equally be tied back to the pupils' ability to name and recognise the letters of the alphabet. These results are similar to those shown by Matafwali (2005) and Mubanga (2010) where both have indicated that one of the contributory factors to poor reading is lack of proper alphabetic knowledge in English.

The graph below summaries the above information

**Figure 1**



#### 4.1.1. Reading Knowledge in English and Literacy Status

The respondents were asked to read a set of ten English words that were arranged according to their level of understanding. Thirty 30 (40%) out of the 75 respondents did not read any word correctly. Out of these 30 respondents, 25 (83%) had not broken through, while 5 (17%) had broken through. When we further look at the results of this exercise in detail, we see that over 63 (84%) of the total number of respondents read less than five of the ten words correctly. There were more boys, 33 (52%) than girls 30 (48%), who read less than five English words. The pupils that read six words and above were 12 (16%). However, all the four (5%) respondents that spelt all the ten words correctly were boys who had all broken through to literacy in English.

The pupils' ability to read the ten English words was not good as only 12 (16%) of the respondents read more than six words correctly. Further, out of the 75 respondents only four boys read all the ten words correctly and all had broken through in English. It is clear then that reading is still a formidable challenge to the Grade three pupils as over half of them failed to read at least half of the words given to them correctly.

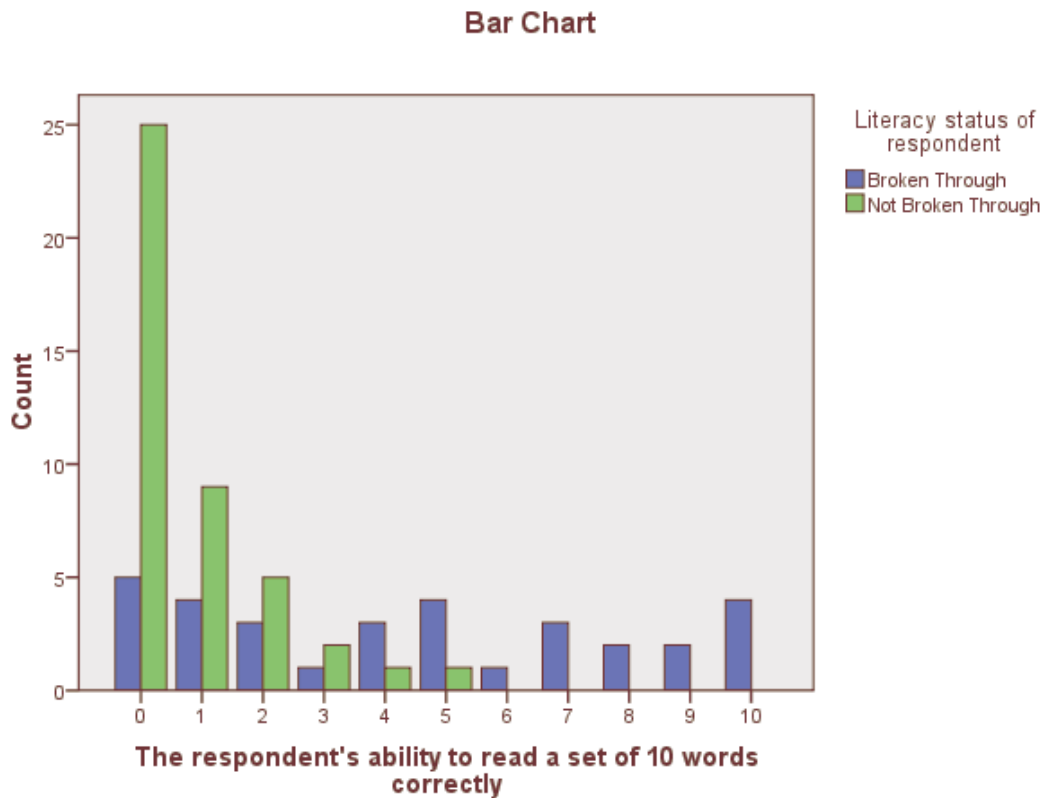
This poor performance in reading single words can be said to have an impact on the pupils' ability to read sentences, comprehension and further even on writing. It seemed that the pupils had more challenges when reading two and three syllable words than when reading one syllable words. For example, some pupils could correctly read the one-syllable words in English like 'on' and 'at'. These findings are consistent with those reported by Matafwali (2005) in a study that was looking at the nature and prevalence of reading among third graders in Lusaka province, where it was shown that the pupils read one syllables words with less problems but had difficulties with multi-syllable words. Similar findings were reported by Mubanga (2010) who also noted that Grade two pupils' reading difficulties in English included poor reading abilities in two and three-syllable words. In this regard, we can see that the preparation of the pupils for the ROC is still insufficiently done.

The reading inability in English of Grade three pupils in PRP classes in Chingola district is a cause for concern. It is difficult to see how such limited ability in reading in English can enable pupils to 'read to learn' in other subjects seeing that English is not only a subject, but also the language of instruction for the other subjects. Out of the total number of 75 respondents, 30 (40%) were unable to read any word correctly, while only four (5%) could read all the words correctly.

These findings are in line with an earlier research by Sharma (1973) quoted in Williams (1993) who found that on a recognition test of 40 words taken from course books for grades 1, 2 and 3, only 5% of Grade 3 pupils were able to read all the words correctly, while only 7% of Grade 3 pupils could read all the Grade 1 and 2 words correctly. The majority of pupils in Grade 3 had considerable difficulty with material deemed appropriate for their level. Therefore, we can conclude that pupils in the third grade are still not in a position to read at desirable level even with massive and concerted efforts by the Ministry of Education through the PRP.

Figure 2 below shows this information.

**Figure 2**



#### 4.1.2. Spelling Knowledge in Bemba

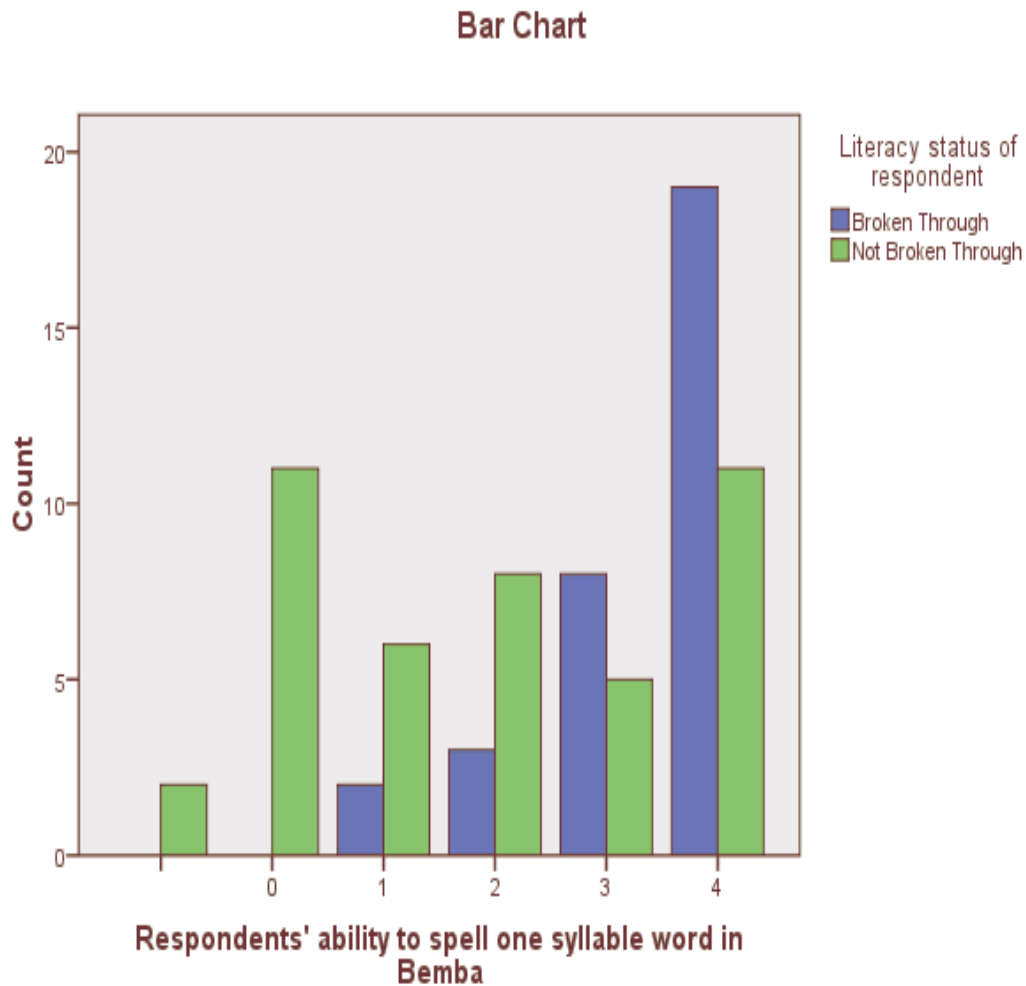
The spelling knowledge in Bemba was divided into three segments as indicated below.

##### 4.1.2.1. Spelling Knowledge in one-Syllable words in Bemba

In this task, the children were asked to spell a set of four one-syllable words. As indicated in figure 3 on the page 30, the respondents performed well, with 43 (59%) of the 75 spelling between three and four words correctly. One notable thing is that pupils seem to have done well because one-syllable words were easier for the pupils as most of the words only had two letters. However, 20 (46%) of the 43 respondents that scored above three had broken through while 23 (53%) had not broken through in Bemba.

Figure 3 on the next page gives this information in graphical form.

**Figure 3**



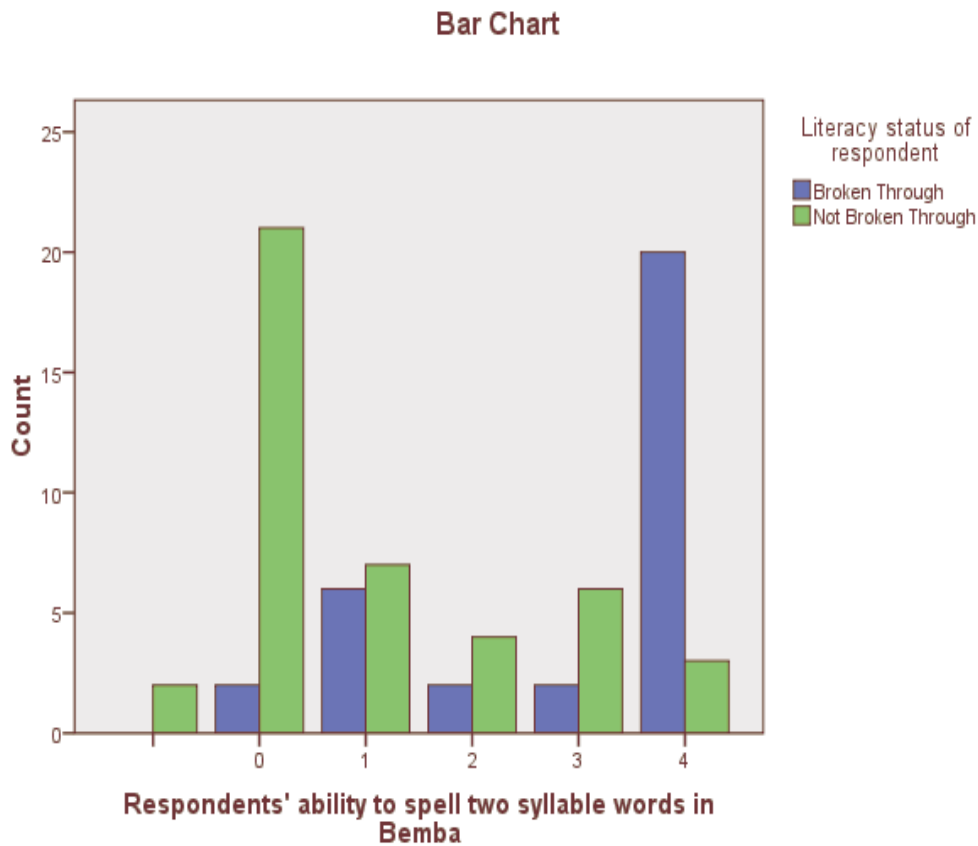
#### 4.1.2.2. Spelling Knowledge in two-Syllable Words in Bemba

It was noted that there was a reduction in terms of overall performance in this task.

In this task, 36 (49%) respondents of the 75, representing 18 boys and girls each, scored between zero and one. This shows that there was no difference in terms of performance between boys and girls. Among the respondents that scored less than two, 28 (78%) had not broken through and the rest, 8 (22%) had broken through in Bemba. These findings seem to suggest that there is a negative trend in pupils' progression rate in the spelling of Bemba words that have more than one syllable.

Figure 4 summaries this information.

**Figure 4**

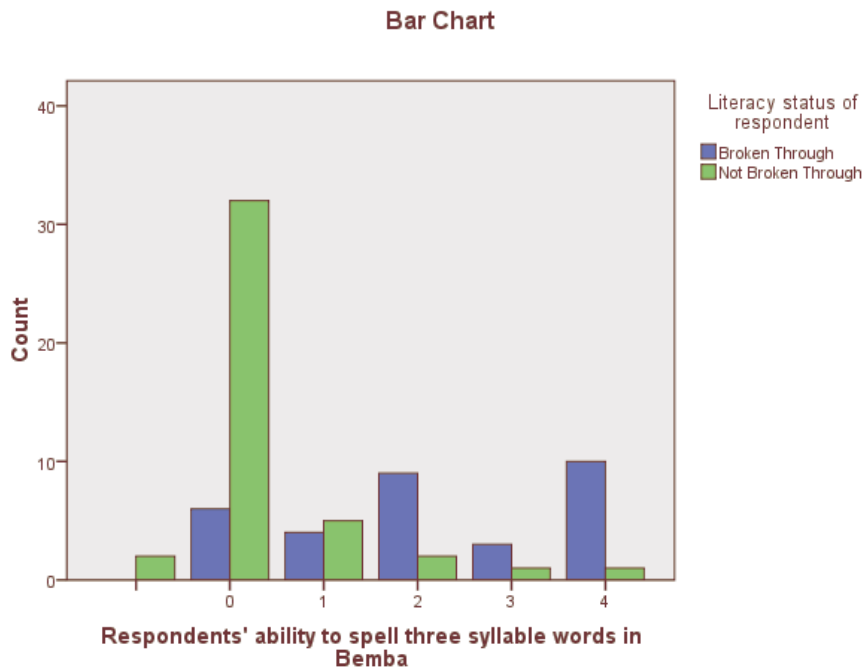


**4.1.2.3. Spelling Knowledge in three-Syllable words in Bemba**

The pupils' performance in this task went further down as compared to the other two similar tasks. The performance moved from average in the first task to poor in this task. Only 11 (14%) of the 75 respondents managed to spell all the words correctly. More than half (51%) of the respondents failed to score any mark in this task. Of the respondents that spelt all the four words correctly, 7 (64%) had broken through and 4 (36%) had not broken through.

The graph on page 31 summarises this information.

**Figure 5**



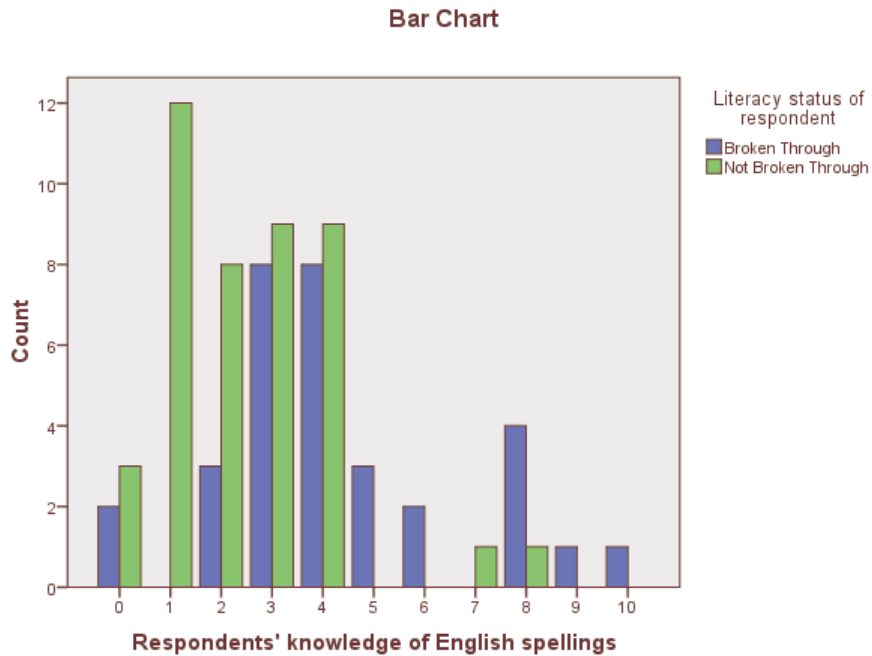
The pupils faced more challenges as the length of the words was raised from one-syllable to two and then to three-syllable words. The pupils' spelling performance in Bemba progressed from average to poor as the spellings level moved from one-syllable word to three-syllable words. Figures 3, 4 and 5 show the spelling performance rate from one to three-syllable words. This performance shows the pupils' rate of progression is similar to that observed under the reading test. The performance moved from average in the one-syllable spelling test to poor in the three syllable test. As the performance on this task diminished, so did the number of errors that the pupils made increase. Again the highest performers on this task were those that had broken through. It was noted that the pupils that had not broken through were still struggling even on simple one-syllable words. The teachers for ZNBTL, therefore, need to do a lot of work in improving these tasks in Bemba. This is because the pupils are expected to have grasped this information at the time they start the ROC as this work is supposed to have been done by the end of the second grade.

#### 4.1.3. Spelling Knowledge in English

This information is represented in figure 6 below.



**Figure 6**



The results show that the pupils' performance in English spelling was below average with only one of the 75 respondents managing to spell nine and all the ten words, respectively. Of the 65 (87%) respondents that scored between zero and five, 41 (63%) had not broken through in English, with the remainder 24 (37%) having broken through in English. Those that obtained scores above six had all broken through except for two. It was also observed that there were seven boys and only three girls among those who got above six. This means that the boys performed slightly better than the girls in the spelling exercise of English words.

One of the core aims of the Primary Reading Programme (PRP) is to promote the understanding that spelling, writing, reading and oral competences are all aspects of language and are interdependent. Therefore, all these aspects are inextricably intertwined in a special way and cannot be separated. It was, nonetheless, noted that the pupils' performance in English spelling was poor. The spelling knowledge in English was inadequate and insufficient for the rigour of the Read On Course (ROC) which begins from the third grade. This is in line with the findings of Matafwali (2005) in the study that revealed that third grade pupils were not adequately prepared for the challenge of writing in English for the grade three and subsequent grades of the PRP.

These findings are also similar to those recorded by Mubanga (2010) whose findings suggested that there seemed to be conflict between Bemba and English in terms of the way spellings are formed which tend to confuse the pupils' reading and spelling performance in the latter. The fact that the pupils' first attempts in writing are done in their first language brings about a challenge for the pupils to make a sudden shift into English at Grade two level because at that time, the literacy levels will not have been harnessed to acceptable levels which can allow the pupils to transfer the literacy attained into another language as observed by Banda (1999).

The point we can draw from Campbell's argument in relation to this current study is that it is imperative that the teachers of young learners of English as a second language should understand the normal processes and phenomena of second language acquisition to avoid making false positive identifications. Second language learners may manifest interference or transfer from their first language (L1) to English (L2). This means that a child may make an English error due to the direct influence of the L1 structure. For example, children may face difficulties with new ways of forming English spellings like 'jump' which may be spelt as 'jampu' by the learners of English as a second language. Some of the pupils would write 'run' as 'lan' because in Bemba, the sound 'r' is non-existent. However, these are direct translations of writing these words in Bemba. This is a normal phenomenon as it is a sign of a language difference, not a language disorder. The point to note here is that the challenges the pupils are facing here arise from the differences in phonological systems in the two languages.

This challenge is exacerbated by the fact that Bemba and English have quite different forms of forming spellings. In this regard, it can be stated that there is insufficient time given to the pupils to develop reading and writing in the local languages which can help them perform well in English spellings.

Whoolly-Wade and Geva (2000) noted that biliteracy acquisition often entails that the challenges of learning new information and the learners' ability to adequately grasp this information and align it to the appropriate graphical representation is problematic. In this case, we can see that the challenge of learning spellings in two orthographies simultaneously or immediately one after the other is a big challenge especially in the initial grades of

acquiring literacy. This explains why there is so much poor performance in writing with reference to spelling knowledge in English.

However, some of the errors that the pupils made showed that they simply could not relate the words English words with the knowledge which they had. For example, the words that pupils wrote could not make sense and we can thus state that the pupils had no idea of what they were writing, and that in the words that they wrote there was no language interference but lack of cognitive development. For instance, some of the words like 'thergou' for 'thank you' this suggests that pupils are trying analogy to form words. This further, shows the differences in pronunciation of words in the two languages.

This is a similar point by Boroditsky (2007) that learning a new language, especially one not closely related to that which someone knows is never easy. It seems to require paying attention to a new set of distinctions. Further, it can be deduced that languages are not merely tools for expressing our thoughts, they actually shape our thoughts. This argument is also supported by Brunner (1983) who has argued that proficiency in oral language provides children with a vital tool for thought. Without fluent and structured oral language, children will find it very difficult to think.

The findings of the current study also agree with a study by Bradley and Bryant (1983) where it was found out that children with spelling difficulties had significant problems making connections between the phonological structure of the word and its visual form. This also illustrates the assertion that phonemic awareness skills and orthography are strong predictors of success with reading and spelling simple and multiple syllable words. Worth noting here, however, is the fact that some of the pupils' spelling inadequacies may not be attributed to lack of consistence in the phonological and phonemic awareness of the two languages and differences in pronunciation of the two languages.

Below is an illustration of some of the pupils' work in English spelling words.

Jampu – for jump

Wanring –for wearing

Kintn- for kitchen  
Than yat- for thank you  
Pleman-policeman  
Televgl- for television  
Chilbre- for children

This shows that the pupils are on the right path to literacy acquisition albeit certainly below their grade level. This is what the pupils are supposed to know by the end of grade two as they prepare to get into the ROC programme in grade three.

It was observed that some of the children had such significant challenges in writing that most of those that had not broken through could not even spell their names correctly. In this regard, it becomes very difficult for the pupils to ‘read with understanding’, which is the expectation from Grade three onwards. This is a challenge not only for the pupils, but also for the teachers that teach them. As noted by the Examination Council of Zambia evaluation report (ECZ; 2005) on the performance of grade five pupils in the PRP schools, the pupils’ poor performance in writing vis-à-vis the spelling in English, gives rise to greater concerns on the quality of education being provided especially at critical foundation levels of early learning. It was clear that school children in Grade three in Chingola district in PRP classes were not writing well enough to succeed at school especially when the pupils are expected to understand what they write about.

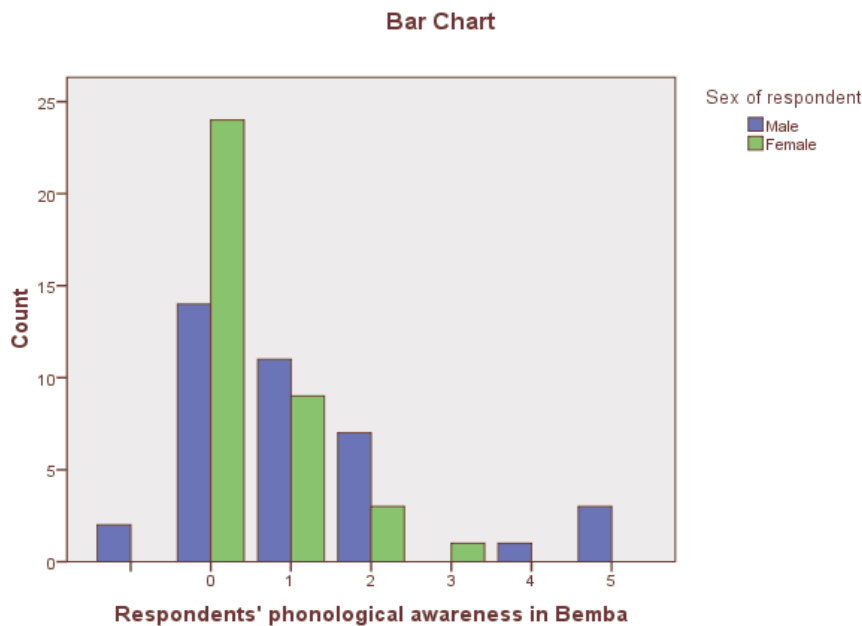
#### **4.1.4. Phonological Awareness in Bemba**

In this task, children were required to correctly detect syllables in the given words, discriminate initial and ending sounds in Bemba. There were five words for syllable segmentation in Bemba.

##### **4.1.4.1. Syllable Segmentation in Bemba**

The graph below gives summarised information about this.

**Figure 7**



Children’s performance on this task was generally poor. For example, figure 7 shows that more than half of the 75 respondents, representing 38 (51%) that attempted this exercise, failed to correctly segment syllables in the words given. And among those that failed to answer anything correctly, 11 (29%) had broken through and 27(71%) had not.

The pupils’ phonological awareness is one of the factors that determine reading and writing ability at the lower grades of their school life. The biggest challenge that the pupils faced in this task was their inability to identify the syllables and the individual letters of the words. It is believed that the more pupils attain the phonological skill, the higher the chances for them to develop appropriate reading and writing skills. Matafwali (2010) stated that across beginning reading development in the first language, familiarity with phonological skills becomes very important. It is most effective when children have acquired alphabetic skills and practise reading new words and sentences. In this study, it was observed that children could not decipher the syllables effectively and, therefore, could not write the correct syllables in the words that were given to them.

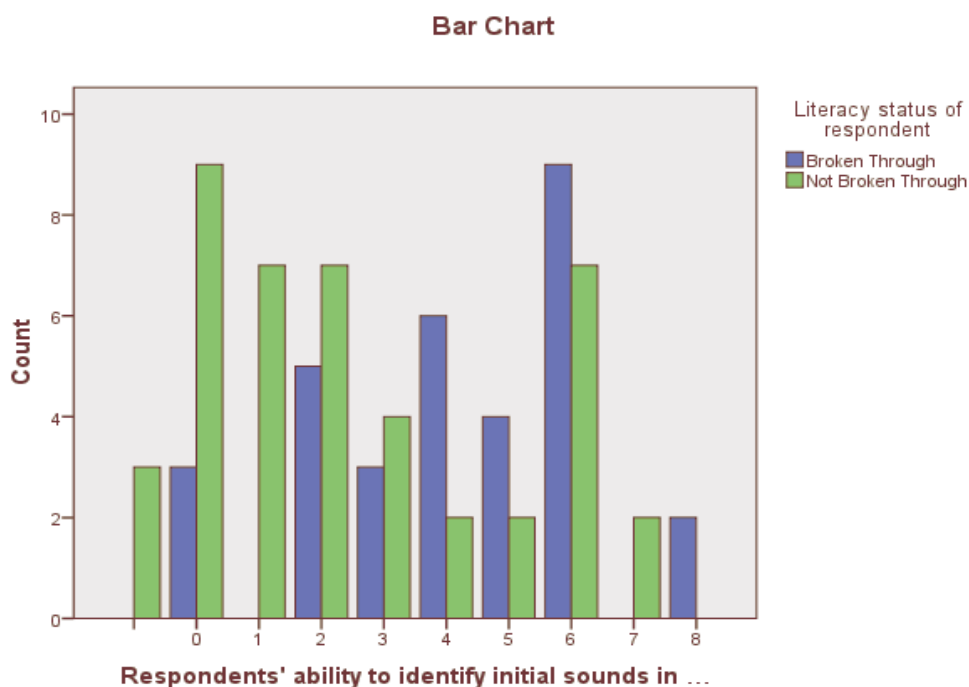
In emphasising this point, Butler (1995) has noted that phonics instruction is supposed to be used for: instruction as needed to assist pupils to identify the unknown words; use a more

systematic approach if a learner can benefit from phonics to recognize unknown words; use phonics in an informal way to make learning enjoyable; use phonics as a functional approach in recognizing unknown words and not phonics for its own sake. Phonological awareness is very important to the learners in any language in the sense that it also acts as an aid to pupils' reading and writing in words that they have not heard before. However, the current study reveals that the pupils' phonological awareness in Bemba is not yet developed to levels that can help them read and write at acceptable levels in Bemba.

#### 4.1.4.2. Recognition of Initial Sounds in Bemba

The figure below gives this information in graphical form.

**Figure 8**



There were no pupils that obtained more than eight from the ten words that were given. There were 52 (72%) respondents who got between zero and five. And of these, 20 (28%) scored between six and eight. This showed that the pupils were still struggling in syllable identification in Bemba. This made the reading and writing of these words in Bemba quite

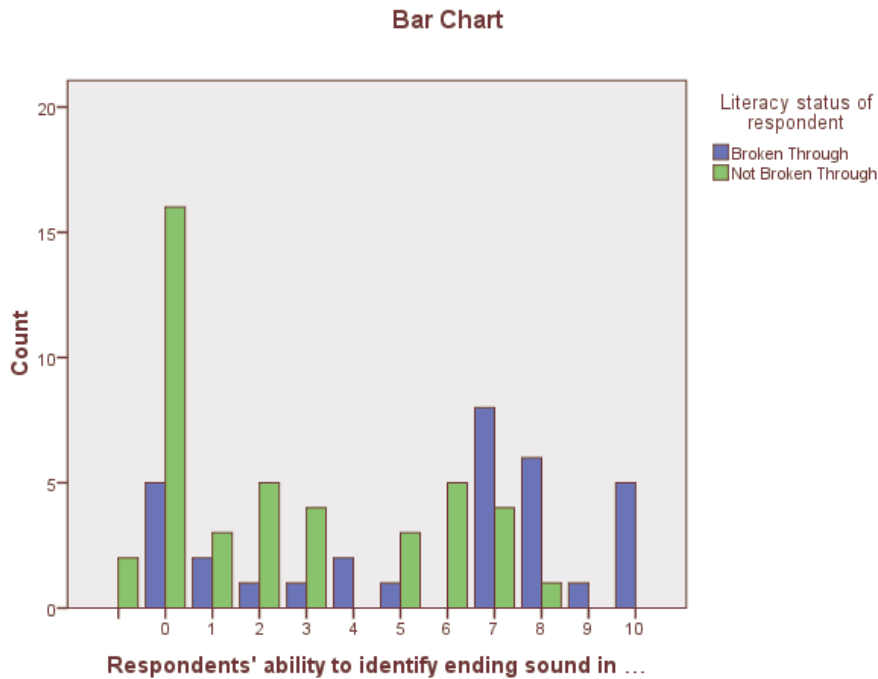
difficult. It can, thus, be stated that one of the reading difficulties in L1 is lack of recognition of initial sounds among the pupils in that particular language.

#### 4.1.4.3. Recognition of Ending Sounds in Bemba

The number of the respondents that obtained between zeros to five was 43 (58%). Among these, 30 (75%) had not broken through with the other nine (25%) having broken through in Bemba. Of the 30 (40%) respondents that obtained scores between six and ten 20 (67%) had broken through and 10 (33%) had not broken through in Bemba.

The summary of this information is presented in the figure that is shown below.

**Figure 9**

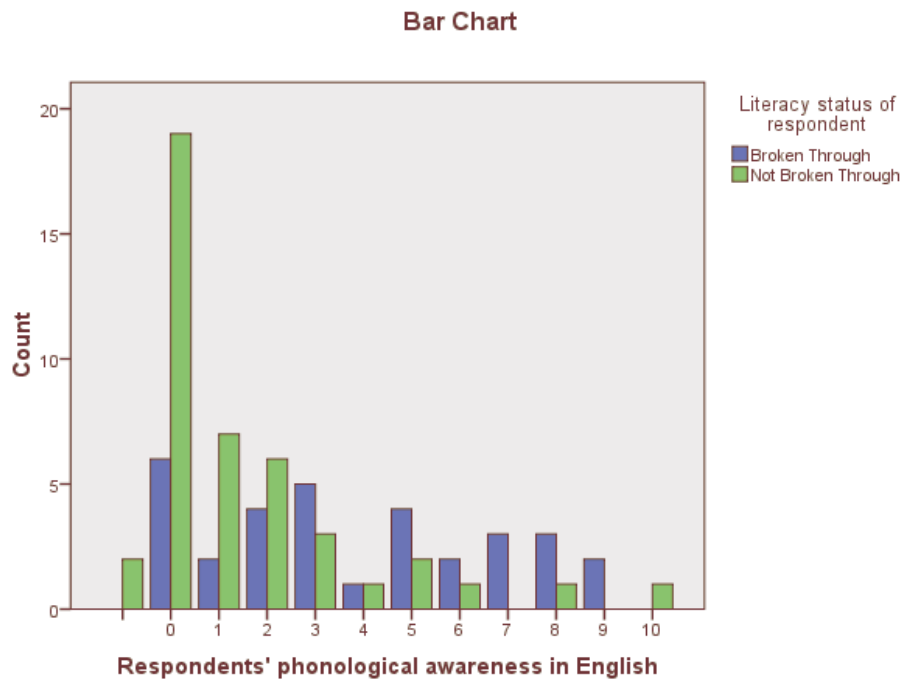


The point we can draw from this exercise is that the pupils' lack of recognition of the end sounds in Bemba made reading and writing yet still more difficult. One significant thing that is clear here is that most the pupils could not distinguish between the ending sounds and the ending letters. Thus, pupils wrote the ending letters and not the ending sounds. For example, in the word 'abalumendo', some pupils wrote 'o' as the ending sound instead of '/ndo/', or in the word 'ubwali', the pupils would write 'i' instead of '/li/'.

#### 4.1.5. Syllable Segmentation in English

Figure 10 shows this information.

**Figure 10**



The results show that 60 (82%) of the 75 respondents got between zero and five. Of the respondents that scored less than six, 22 (37%) had broken through in English while the remaining 38 (63%) had not broken through. Of the 13 that had obtained scores above six, 10 had broken through while the other three had not broken through.

The results in this exercise, as indicated above, suggest that the pupils were unable to adequately segment the English words correctly. Some of the words that were given to the pupils to segment proved a challenge to them as it was noted that most of them could not distinguish between the syllables and individual letters that constituted those words. Thus, some of the prominent difficulties for the pupils in reading and writing could be tied to lack of well entrenched phonological awareness in that particular language. Since the pupils' phonological awareness was weak in Bemba at Grade three level, ultimately, their



phonological awareness in English was also quite poor. It was clear then that pupils had very little to transfer from the Bemba into English by the third grade.

This apparently seemed to be in the same line with the findings by Banda (1999) which indicated that the learners in the second grade had very few skills to take with them in reading and writing when the language of instruction changed from their L1 to L2. Matafwali (2010) in the longitudinal-cross sectional study involving grades one and two pupils found that Grade two pupils did not outperform Grade one pupils in basic skills and reading proficiency in English language. The study also indicated that reading development seemed to discontinue in grade two when a shift was made from practising reading and writing in the Zambian languages towards practising in English, which had also been confirmed in this study.

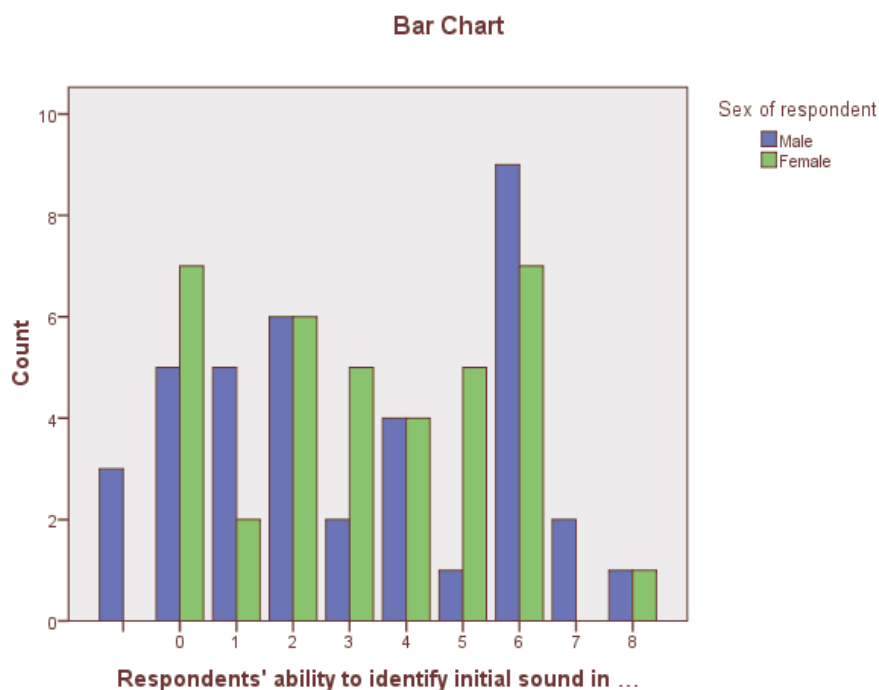
#### 4.1.5.1. **Recognition of Initial Sounds in English**

The pupils' responses in this exercise showed that there were 20 (27%) of the 73 respondents that got scores between six and eight. The results further showed that 29 (56%) girls obtained scores between zero and five while 23 (44%) boys got similar scores.

There seems to be a suggestion here that the pupils still have little to transfer into the second language as the results show that their performance in this task was not so different from that recorded in a similar task in L1. It was observed that there was a correlation between the levels of proficiency in L1 and in L2 by the end of Grade two as the results indicate almost a stagnation of recognition of initial sounds in Both L1 and L2. For example, in a similar task in both Bemba and English, there were 56 (72%) of all the respondents scored between zero and five. In the study by Banda (1999) it was found that the children whose L1 skills were not yet fully developed in certain aspects, like the recognition of initial and ending sounds of words, exposure to a second language like English, in the initial grades, like Grade 2 in the case of PRP, is likely to impede the continuing development of L1. This, in turn, exerted a limiting effect on the development of English in the subsequent grades.

Figure 11 on the next page summarises this information.

#### **Figure 11**



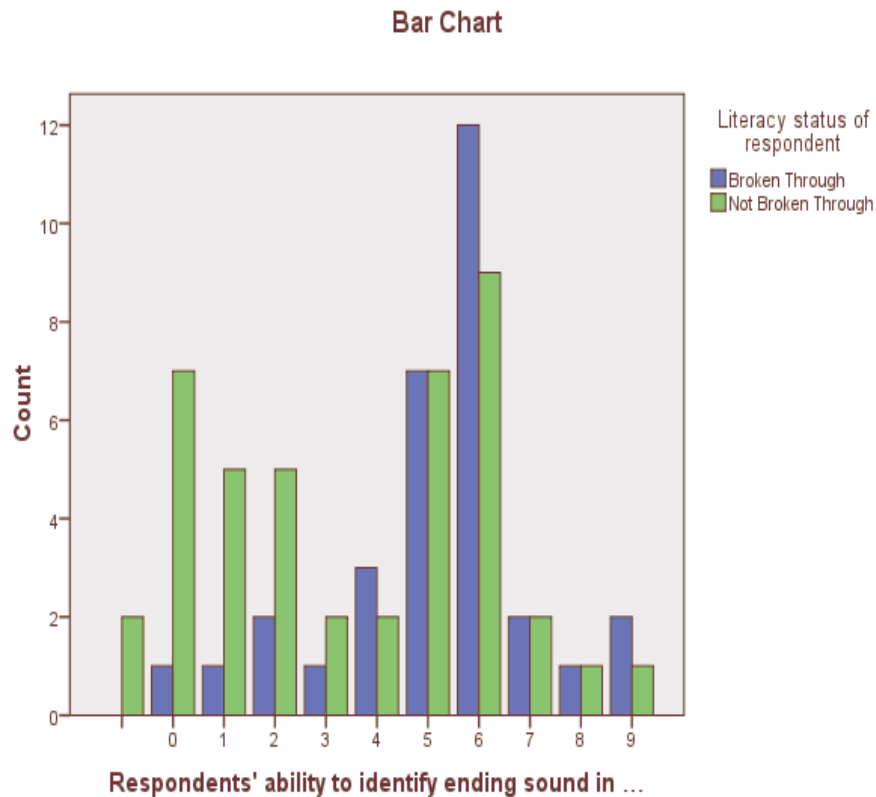
#### 4.1.5.2. Recognition of Ending Sounds in English

The performance in this task showed that the pupils had still difficulties in identifying the ending sounds in the English language. Among the 43 (59%) of the 73 respondents who got five and below, 28 (65%) had not broken through and 15 (35%) had broken through in English. There were 30 (41%) respondents who scored between six and nine. However, only three pupils got nine out of ten and of this number, two had broken through in English while one had not broken through in English.

The ability to identify ending sounds in English as a second language makes children become effective readers. The most important feature to note here is the children’s inability to distinguish between the sounds and the actual ending letters. For instance, in words such as ‘much’, ‘life’, and ‘stove’, pupils had difficulties in writing the ending sounds as they usually wrote the last letters rather than the sounds. The pupils wrote ending letters and not the ending sounds like ‘h’ in ‘much’ instead of the sound ‘/chi/’ or ‘e’ in life as the ending sound in ‘life’ instead of ‘/f/’, or ‘e’ in ‘stove’ instead of the sound ‘/v/’. These words proved problematic to almost all the pupils including those that had presumably broken through in L2.

Figure 12 summaries this study's findings in regard to this aspect.

**Figure 12**

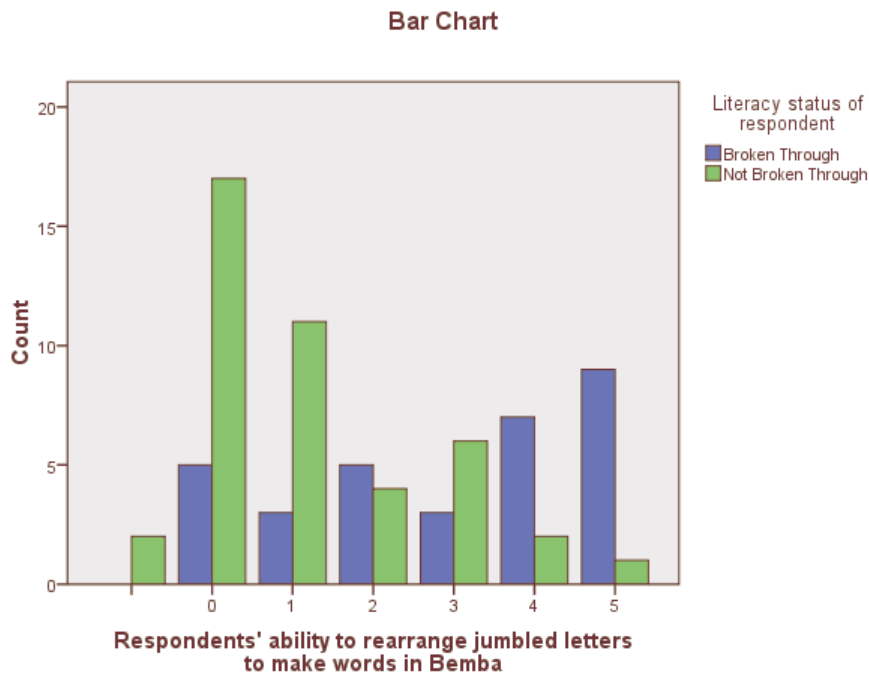


#### 4.1.6. Ability to rearrange Jumbled letters in Bemba

Children had difficulties with the task to combine the letters given to come up with the required words. There were 22 (29%) respondents that did not make any correct word. Among them, 17 had not broken through while five had broken through in Bemba. Fourteen (19%) managed to score one. There were three that had broken through with 11 did not break through. There were nine (12%) respondents that scored two, three and four, respectively, one less than those that made all the five words correctly, who were ten (13%).

The information contained in figure 13 on the next page is the summary of this presentation.

**Figure 13**



The results here indicated that the pupils that had not broken through in Bemba faced major challenges. Nine of the ten respondents who made all the words correctly had broken through. The point to note is that because the children who had not broken through in Bemba were still struggling in word recognition, it was very difficult for them to make words from jumbled letters.

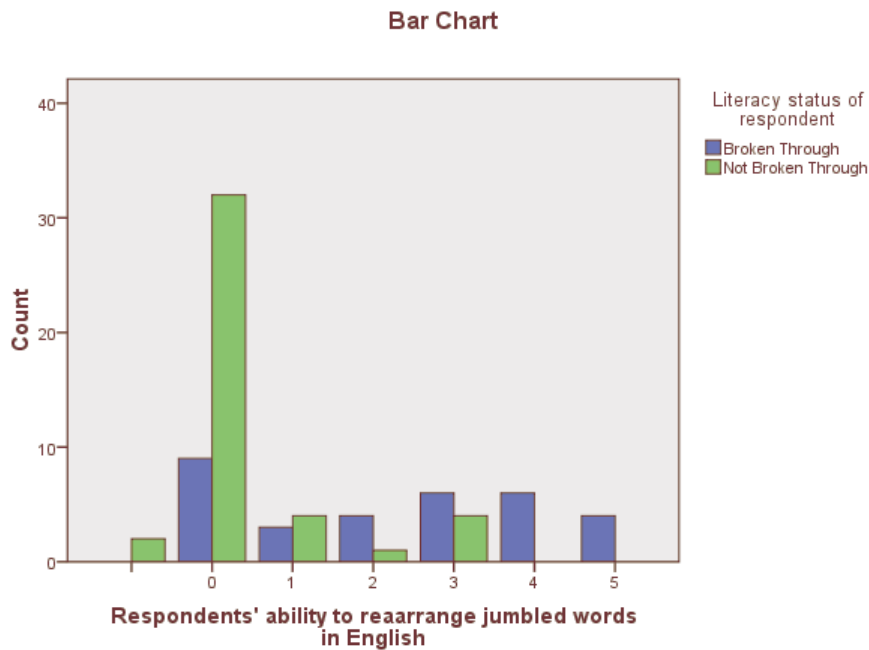
#### 4.1.6.1. Ability to rearrange Jumbled letters in English

The task was basically two fold. Firstly, pupils were required to recognise the letters. Secondly, pupils were required to make sense of those letters by making meaningful words from them.

Figure 14 shows that there was a further decline in performance in this task in English. The number of those that got zero in this task almost doubled from 22 (30%) respondents in Bemba to 41 (56%) in English. Thirty two of the forty one (54%) respondents that could not make any word in English had not broken through while nine had broken through.

The summary is presented in the figure below.

**Figure 14**



This is consistent with other findings like those by Tan and Nicholson (1997) that carried out a study that revealed the importance of word-recognition instruction to the point of fluency. In their study, struggling primary-level readers were taught 10 new English words, which was the pupils' first language, with instruction either emphasizing word recognition to the point of fluency (they practised reading the individual words until they could recognize them automatically) or understanding of the words. Following the instruction, the students read a passage containing the words and answered comprehension questions about it. The students who had learnt to recognize the words to the point of automaticity answered more comprehension questions than did students who experienced instruction emphasizing individual word meanings.

It can thus be concluded that development of fluent word-recognition skills can make an important difference in Grade three pupils' understanding of what they read. Word-recognition skills must thus be developed to the point of fluency if word recognition and writing benefits are to be maximized.

This poor performance in English can be attributed to the points already alluded to earlier in the discussion of the importance of letting first language literacy be developed to a point of full understanding so that the pupils can have enough skills to go with as they change the language of instruction to English in the second grade. This is so crucial because as the SACMEQ report (1995) indicated the purpose of the subsequent grades after the initial stages of grades one and two is not to teach the basic skills of reading and writing, but to read and write with understanding especially in the second language.

The prominent words that pupils found difficult in writing were ‘seat’, ‘move’, and ‘draw’. The table below gives a summary of the pupils’ performance in these words.

**Table 1 - Word formation in English from jumbled letters.**

Word to be made	No. of pupils who answered correctly	No. of pupils who answered wrongly
seat	15	58
draw	12	61
move	14	59
rat	27	46
dig	23	50

#### **4.1.7. Ability of the Respondents to Match Pictures with Corresponding Sentences**

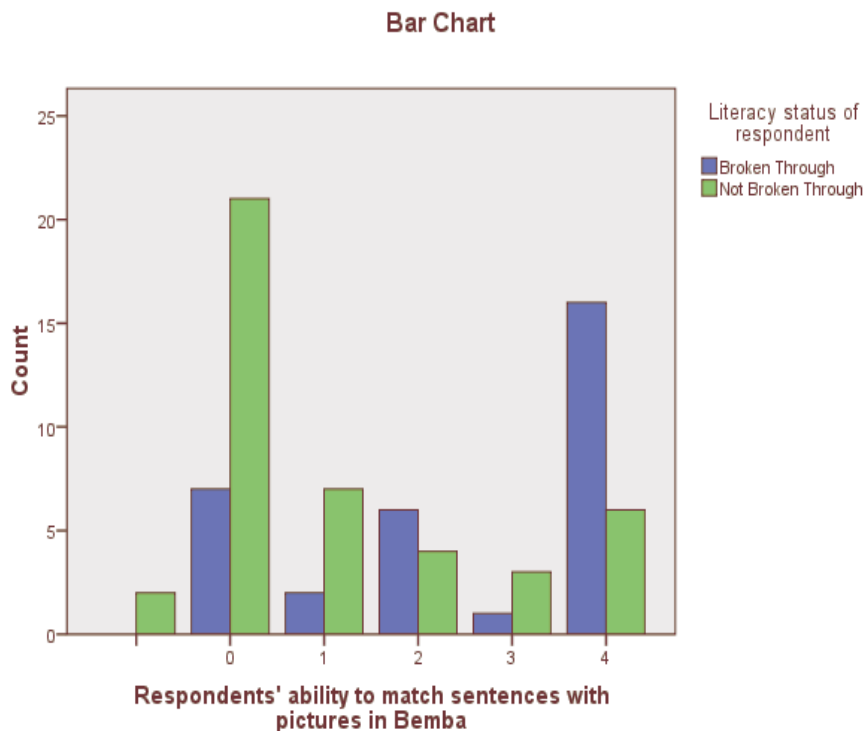
The respondents were required to correctly match pictures with corresponding sentences in both Bemba and English. As explained in the preceding chapter, this exercise was designed in such a way that the children were to write their own sentences from the pictures given, but it was discovered that they could not write the sentences on their own. Therefore, the sentences were written on the board and the children were then required to choose the correct sentences that matched the pictures that were given to them.

#### 4.1.7.1. Ability of the respondents to match pictures with Bemba sentences.

In this task, there were 26 (36%) respondents that had broken through in Bemba who matched between three and all the four pictures with their correct sentences. This number consisted of 15 boys and 11 girls. Among the 47 (64%) pupils that matched less than two pictures with their corresponding sentences, 21 were boys and 26 were girls. This means that girls performed better than the boys as the figures here had suggested. However, of the 28 (38%) of the respondents that scored zero, half were boys and the other half were girls.

The figure below gives a graphical presentation of this information.

**Figure 15**



As can be observed from the results shown above, the pupils that had not broken through were the ones that faced difficulties on this task. For these pupils, being expected to be a ROC class is an academic exercise in futility because they have a lot to catch up with. The biggest challenge that was noted was that the pupils were asked to read and write the sentences on their own. Therefore, it was a big challenge for the pupils that had not done well

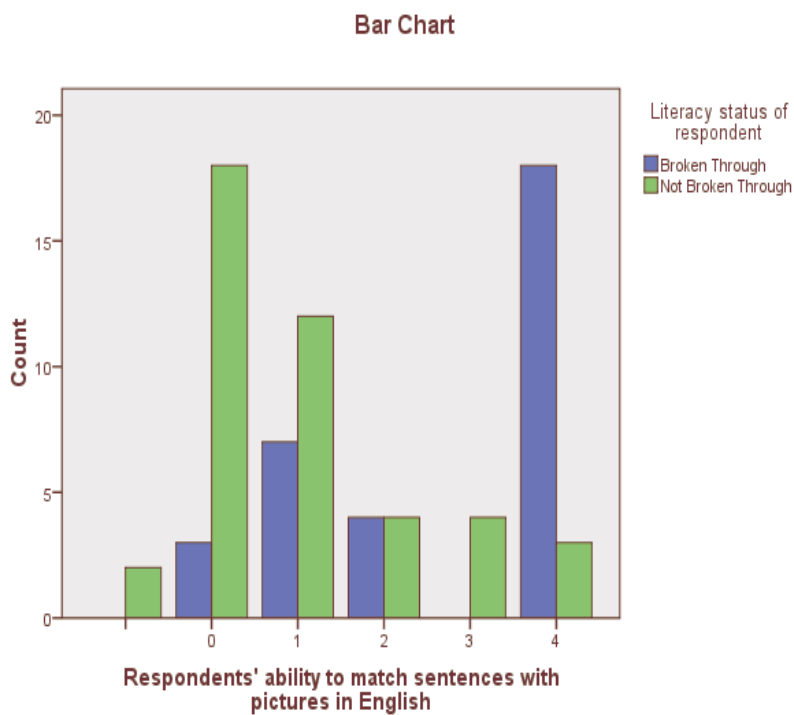
in the other reading and writing exercises to do well in this task. The main aim of this task was to see if the pupils could read and write their own sentences. Some of the prominent difficulties the pupils faced in this task included lack of proper spellings and most significantly, the inability to read the correct words and sentences, and, therefore, failing to match the sentences with the pictures.

#### 4.1.7.2. Ability of the Respondents to Match Pictures with English Sentences.

The results of this task showed that 48 (66%) respondents got scores less than three while the others, 25 (34%), got between three and four. There were 21 respondents that matched all the four sentences with corresponding pictures and 18 had broken through and the other tree had not broken through in English. There was little difference between the respondents by gender as there were 13 boys and 12 girls who got below three and those who got above three, respectively.

This information is summarised in the graph below.

**Figure 16**





Comprehension, be oral, written or picture, is the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected text. Readers typically make use of background knowledge, vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, experience with text and other strategies to help them understand written text. The performance in picture comprehension was below average with no significant difference between Bemba and English as 26 (36%) respondents got above three out of four in Bemba and 25 (34%) got above three out of four in English.

The results suggested that the pupils who had not managed to match the pictures in Bemba could not do any better in English. It can also be stated that the pupils who had broken through in reading and writing in the two languages had less challenges when it came to matching sentences with their corresponding pictures in either of the two languages.

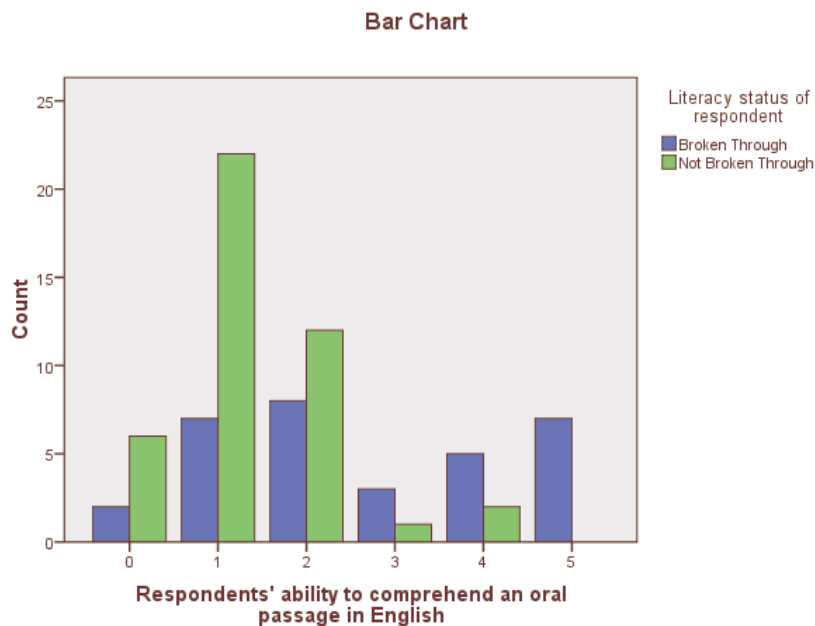
Additionally, it can be stated that language explains more for higher achievers than lower achievers. This means that those who know and read many words possess the background knowledge to comprehend what the words mean and are likely to learn more words and world knowledge later on. While those who do not know and read fewer words in early grades fall further and further behind in later grades in the aspects that require the pupils to understand either word or picture comprehension (Bus, 2010; Matafwali, 2005; 2010).

#### **4.2. Ability of the respondents to answer an oral comprehension exercise in English.**

This exercise was indented to assess the respondents' ability to answer and retain specified information from a piece of prose text. From the results shown in the graph (17) on the next page, the pupils' rate of retention of information in the prose texts by the pupils was below average. Six out of eight respondents that failed to recall any question correctly had not broken through while 2 (25%) had broken through. Of the 75 respondents, 29 (38%) got one question correct. Among this number were 22 (76%) had not broken through and 7 (24%) had broken through. Meanwhile, there were 12 (16%) respondents that scored two in this task and four had not broken through while eight had broken through. The results further show that 7 (9%) of all the respondents scored four. Worth noting here, however, is the fact that among the 7 (9%) respondents that answered correctly all the questions none had not broken through.

For the summary of the above information, see figure 17 on page 49.

**Figure 17**



The Zambian primary reading programme has acknowledged the need to develop literacy developmentally, starting with basic skills and gradually moving to consolidating and extending these skills in higher grades to the level of reading with understanding. The Zambian programme calls the two levels as 'learning to reading', which is basically concerned with the initial literacy and 'reading to learn' that concentrates at consolidating and developing the reading skills (MOE, 2002).

In this study, it was assumed that the pupils that were in Grade three were able to read and write with comprehension by Grade three in English because they will have been learning through that language. Therefore, the comprehension exercise in English was given to the pupils against this background. The results indicate that only 9% of the respondents could comprehend the entire text in the second language. Further, of all the respondents that were able to answer all the comprehension questions, all had broken through. On further observation, it was noted that the question that posed less difficulty for the pupils was number two which required them to indicate Mainza's age. 57 (76%) of the respondents answered this question correctly. The observation here is that pupils answered this question correctly because it was clear to see the answer which was in figure form (see question two in

appendix three). Question three (a) and (b) and question four posed most difficulty to the pupils because these questions required the pupils to indicate the answers from the passage by reading and writing them down. This could be attributed to the pupils' poor reading and writing skills as discussed earlier. The results of the comprehension suggested that the reading comprehension ability in English of most pupils is lower than that needed to cope with their English course books, and lower than their teachers' estimation.

#### 4.2.1. Sentences in Bemba and Comparison of Reading and Writing in L1 and L2

The sentences were orally given to the pupils. The sentences were also written on the board and erased before the pupils were asked to write on their own. The results from sentence construction in Bemba were worrying. None of the respondents that had not broken through in Bemba managed to write the given sentence correctly. Even among those that had broken through in Bemba, only 5 (7%) could write the full sentence. In some of the pupils' scripts, respondents just managed to write single words which were not clear in most cases or wrote nothing at all. The Scripts from the pupils that had broken through show some levels of proficiency being achieved, as the learners were able to construct the sentences given correctly in Bemba, though with difficulties. The sentence that the pupils were given to write was 'Musa na Maliya baleya ku sukulu'.

Some of the pupils written sentences were as recorded below.

Some wrong sentences by the pupils

'Nausanamiyr kusaruspe'

'Namanye nabusrwe'

'Musana moyin msaonmy'

'Musa namaliya baleye kusukulu'

One of the correct sentences by the pupils

'Musa namaliya baleya kusukulu'

There was no significant difference in performance in picture comprehension in English and Bemba as there were 40 (55%) and 37 (51%) out of the 73 respondents that scored between zero and one in this exercise, respectively. In this exercise, however, the pupils could not copy the sentences correctly. Some of the pupils just wrote down the sentences the way they appeared on the board without matching them with the correct pictures in either of the two

languages. Broadly put, the pupils' writing skills were not yet developed to levels where they could write their own sentences independently as it was observed that they could not construct meaningful sentences from the given pictures.

At this stage, pupils in the ROC classes are expected to have mastered enough literacy skills to be able to write a simple sentence from a picture. The other point to note here is that some of the pupils were literally unable to write anything meaningful even from the sentences that were written on the board for them to copy. In line with these findings, SAQMEC (1995) reported from a survey that aimed at measuring the literacy levels among Grade 6 pupils in Southern African Countries of Swaziland, Lesotho, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa that results for Zambia indicated that 25% of the respondents were able to read at minimum levels while 3% were able to read at desirable levels in English. Further, Zambia was ranked almost at the bottom level of the Southern African Countries. From the results of this study, we can put it that Grade three pupils in ROC in Chingola district are still not able to read and write Bemba and English at the desirable levels.

### 4.3. Teachers' Views on Factors Contributing to Pupils' Reading and Writing Performance

#### 4.3.1. The Language of Instruction

One of the objectives of this study was to find out the teachers' views on the pupils performance on several reading measures including the language of instruction and language of initial literacy. Most the teachers expressed similar views on the use of the language of instruction and the language of acquiring initial literacy. In Grade three, the language of instruction had become English for all the subjects except Zambian languages. However, the teachers said that it was very difficult to exclusively use English as a language of instruction because most of the children will not have broken through in reading and writing by this time in English. Therefore, they mostly code switched between Bemba and English in teaching in all the subjects. One teacher expressed the following views;

*We find it difficult to teach the pupils in English throughout the lessons because most of them cannot fully understand the language. When we are teaching, there is always need to switch between English and Bemba. We do that especially if we are explaining new and difficult concepts. Asking questions is also done in both languages. It is not rare for the pupils to give responses in Bemba even when the questions are asked in English.*

The teachers said that they constantly explained most of the new concepts using Bemba in order for the pupils to grasp the new concepts with a clearer understanding. The teachers further stated that even when questions were asked in English, most of the pupils responded in Bemba. This is the point highlighted by Williams (1993) when he noted that pupils were not consistent with the English language use. This is the observation that seems to resonate with the views expressed in the Zambian education policy of (1996) Educating Our Future that:

*There is strong evidence that children learn literacy skills more easily and successfully through their mother tongue and subsequently they are able to transfer these skills quickly and with easy to English or another language. Successful first language learning is, in fact, believed to be essential for successful literacy in the second language (MoE, 1996:39).*

The teachers noted that by this grade, the pupils were expected to read and write a simple sentence in Bemba. However, the current situation shows that most of pupils could not read and write a simple sentence in Bemba. The teachers revealed during the focus group discussion that when they used pictures, mostly, some pupils were able to orally construct

sentences in Bemba but found it very difficult to write those sentences. One of the Grade three teachers had the following to say on this issue:

*Pupils are able to orally narrate a story from the picture. However, when they are asked to write those sentences, they find it difficult and fail to construct and write proper sentences based on the pictures.*

#### **4.3.2. Learning and teaching materials**

In all the schools visited, literally every aspect of teaching and learning materials was found in short supply, either in terms of not being there at all or being in insufficient quantities in relation to the numbers of the pupils for which they were intended. For example, in some schools, there were literally no reading materials for the Grade three pupils to use during the literacy lessons. The class libraries were inadequately stocked and pupils had to share the books in one school, for instance, in the ratio of six pupils to one reading book. In schools one two and three, it was noted that the reading materials for the PRP had not been replaced since the programme was introduced in 2002. Most of the reading materials for the Read On Course (ROC) had either worn out or had been lost altogether. In all the five schools that were visited, it was found that there was dire need of teaching/learning materials.

The words of one first Grade teacher are recorded below:

*The reading materials for the NBTL are very inadequate. We have not received any new materials for NBTL since the programme was launched at this school in 2002. We also do not have the phonic flip charts and other materials for teaching syllables to the pupils. Most of the time we just have to provide our own materials in order to teach phonics to the pupils in Grade one. This becomes difficult because we have to come up with materials that will have to cater for the pupils that are fast learners and slow learners.*

Lack of reading materials at home was also cited as one of the contributory factor that made the pupils not to be able to read at the desirable level at grade three. This point was also noted when the pupils were asked whether they read any books at home. Out of the 75 respondents that were asked whether they had any reading materials at home 60 (80%) indicated that they did not have any reading materials at home and, therefore, they were unable to keep pace with the challenges of reading at school. Even the pupils that said they had some reading materials at home, it was clear from the discussion that they were not sure if those were suitable for their grade level. The pupils also said they did not receive enough help from the parents and guardians or their peers at home. But as noted by Bus and Tambulukani (2010), children 'learn to read by reading'. These sentiments were also expressed by Krashen (1993)

who contended that children learn how to read by reading. So the observation we can make here is that the pupils' lack of reading practice makes it difficult for them to read and write adequately by the third grade.

The ROC teachers also cited the lack of reading and teaching materials for the Grade three pupils. The teachers stated that the responsibility of replacing the worn out and lost materials in the schools was left to the individual schools. For example, at school three and four, all the six teachers interviewed stated that they had to rely on their own materials to teach because the schools had fewer materials to cater for all the pupils in the classes. However, the school managers at the schools indicted that the schools had too many competing activities. They, therefore, found it difficult to replace and buy reading books for the pupils because they lacked funds. The purchase of materials was ultimately affected because the schools did not receive adequate funding for the buying of PRP materials especially those for the lower grades. The other teachers said that this problem was worsened by over-enrolment making it difficult to share the available few books among the pupils in a class. In some instances, it was observed that the Grade three pupils had to share books in the ratio of one book to six pupils.

Consistent with these findings, are those recorded by Luangala (2008) in the study conducted on behalf of the Christian Children's Fund (CCF). In this study, it was reported that most of the schools funded by the CCF did not have sufficient learning and teaching materials. Similarly, Adekola (2008) had also found that a significant contributory factor to pupils' reading difficulty in the English language in Nigerian primary schools is the lack of reading and learning materials. Other observations revealed that the class libraries were inadequately stocked and the pupils had to share the reading materials much to the detriment of enhancing effective reading through equitable distribution of the reading/learning materials. Some of the classrooms did not have conversation posters and talking walls. In instances where these were present, they were in inadequate supply and poorly distributed and displayed.

#### **4.3.3. Time Allocated for Teaching Reading**

Seven of the 12 teachers expressed concern on the time allocated to teaching of reading. They stated that the one hour that was dedicated to teaching of reading was not enough as it could not cater for the several activities that the teachers had to do with their pupils. This was so because the pupils had to be divided into several groups and all the groups had to be given

adequate and equal time. However, this was not usually the case as the teachers tended to spend more time with one group at the expense of the others. During the class observations, it was noted the teachers spent more time with one group in the teaching corner and this tended to offer little chance for the other groups to be attended to. This problem was compounded by the fact that the reading materials in most of the schools were in short supply. This meant that the pupils had to share the few books and other learning materials that the teachers gave to those pupils that had not remained in the teaching corner. Further, marking of the pupils' work also proved to be a big challenge to the teachers as the time was inadequate to teach, mark and give remedial work to the pupils that had not done well in the various exercises that were given to each group. However, it was acknowledged that sometimes, marking of the pupils' books was done outside the classroom time.

The sentiments expressed by one of the teachers were that:

*The time we are given to teach literacy in Grade three is not sufficient. At this stage, the pupils need to be given enough attention because some find it difficult to understand things. This is so especially among those that have not broken through in reading and writing in Bemba and English by the end of the second grade. If we dedicate more time to literacy lessons, other subjects are affected and this brings about problems because we have to give adequate time to those other subjects, too.*

This is similar to what Banda (1999) also noted during classroom observations. The observation made was that teachers had problems in helping the weaker pupils who had not yet 'broken through'. In this study, it was further noticed that teachers seemed to be at a loss on how to go about assisting these pupils other than repeating the same activities that they had done before.

#### **4.3.4. Home Environment**

Poor performance was also attributed to the lack of parental help/guidance at home. Eight teachers stated that the pupils were not accorded enough support by their parents and guardians, while the other four stated they thought the pupils did not receive support from the parents and guardians. The other three teachers said they could not tell whether the pupils received enough help in reading at home. This was evident from the fact that most of the times the teachers gave home work to the pupils, it was not done. In cases where the work was done, it was wrongly done and it was not signed, a reflection that the parents or guardians had not gone through the work. Further, it was noted that when the teachers gave reading words to the pupils during the holidays, most of the pupils did not adequately read



the words suggesting that they had not received support from the More Knowledge Others (MKOs).

Most of the homes where the pupils were coming from had few or no reading materials. The pupils talked to stated they had no reading materials at home. Others further said they received very little help in reading at home because some of their parents were too busy or were unable to read and write themselves.

#### **4.3.5. Over-enrolment**

The enrolment levels in the schools visited were above that of the average of 40 pupils per class recommended by the Ministry of Education (Educating Our Future, 1996). The teachers stated that these high levels of enrolment of the pupils were one of the contributing factors to poor performance in reading and writing. During class lesson observations, it was noted teachers had a tough time in controlling the classes and marking the pupils' work.

The furniture was also not enough to accommodate all the pupils. Therefore, the learners had to share the desks in the ratio of one desk to four pupils. In two schools (school 2 and 3) some pupils were seen sitting on the floor.

It was also very difficult for the teachers to do remedial work for the pupils that were facing challenges and for the slow learners who could not move at the same pace as their colleagues who are fast learners. Further, during the observations, the researcher noted that the teachers failed to finish the lessons within the time allocated as it was very difficult for them to accommodate all the pupils in their various pace groups in the class.

The number of pupils per sampled class was as follows: school one had 59 pupils, school two had 57 pupils, school three had 48, school four had 52 pupils and school five had 67 pupils. It should be noted that these figures only represent those classes from where the sampled pupils were drawn. However, another important observation made was that these figures seemed to be uniform across all the other Grade three classes in the schools that were sampled. This information is summarised in the table below.

#### 4.3.6. Assessment and Feedback

Assessment and feedback is an essential part of any learning activity. However, because of the problem of over-enrolment as mentioned above, it was observed that the assessment process was not adequately attended to. The learners did not perform as expected in the work that was given to them and this posed a great challenge to the teachers. In one class it was observed that the teachers had problems in marking the work of the learners because she was simply overwhelmed by the amount of work. She had to mark over 20 books for one group in 30 minutes. However, she also had to ensure that she attended to the other groups, correct their work and give more work to the other groups.

In this regard, marking was not done completely and comprehensively as the learners were in pace groups that meant that they were given different pieces of work and, therefore, the learners finished writing at different times. Remedial work was therefore, quite difficult to conduct with the majority of the learners whose performance was below expectation.

In this regard, one of the Grade three teachers had this to say:

*Marking the pupils' books is very difficult. Sometimes I have to mark 50 books in a day in one subject. I am forced to give less work so that I give myself chance to mark the books. The problem, however, is with the slow learners. They do not read and write well, especially in English and it is difficult to give the pupils individual attention.*

Table 2 **Number of class streams and the number of pupils per sampled class.**

School	No. of Grade three classes	No. of pupils per class	No. sampled per class
1	4	74	15
2	5	57	15
3	4	58	15
4	6	52	15
5	4	62	15

During the focus group discussion with the teachers, who included those that taught grades one to three, many of them stated that most of the pupils could not read and write at desirable level at the end of grade two although they progressed into the third grade. Some teachers stated that they had suggested to the parents of the pupils that had not broken through in reading and writing in Bemba and English by the end of grade two to repeat, but this advice usually was not taken by the parents and/or guardians. The school administration also could not do anything as the pace of the pupils' progression was entirely up to the parents/guardians. One of the teachers said the following:

*I once advised one parent to have their child repeat Grade one because the child was not making satisfactory progress in reading and writing by Grade two. However, the parent said he did not mind the child's performance as long as the child was progressing from one grade to the next. The parent said all he wanted was for the child to complete school at a tender age.*

#### **4.3.7. Absenteeism**

The teachers expressed concern about the level of absenteeism in the schools visited. Most of the pupils that were inconsistent with the class attendance were the ones who usually did not perform well as compared to the others that consistently attended classes. The pupils' poor attendance in school was one of the factors that the teachers cited as one of the major drawbacks to attaining desirable reading and writing levels. One of the teachers at school three who was interviewed in this regard said that:

*The pupils' school attendance in this community is very bad. The parents do not strictly monitor their children's attendance in school. You would find that the pupils can only attend class two or three times a week. As teachers, we have very little control over this issue.*

#### **4.4. Observations of Reading Lessons**

Of the five lessons observed, almost all the teachers found it difficult to use learner-centred methods. The methods observed were those using the behaviourist oriented teacher-dominated classroom procedures of telling, on the part of the teacher, and rote learning by simply listening, on the part of the pupils. It was further noted that teachers tended to give too much prominence to 'look and say' methods which stressed accuracy of reading aloud, and which do not promote reading as a process of acquiring meaning from the text. Classroom observation indicated that much teaching of reading proceeded through repetition of the text with insufficient attention being paid to the presentation of meaning and checking of understanding. These findings are in line with the findings of Williams (1993) and Luangala

(2008) who also established that learner-centred learning was absent in most Zambian schools and learning was mostly teacher, rather than learner-centred.

However, there were exceptions in some instances during the lessons where the teachers used the learner-centred methods quite well. The teachers were observed asking questions as the lessons proceeded and the pupils, who were mostly in groups, were actively participating in the lessons. Further, most of the questions were those that required ‘yes or no’ answers or those that entailed pupils to regurgitate what was learnt during the lesson.

#### **4.4.1. Re-training of Teachers in PRP Courses**

The teachers stated that they were not availed training opportunities in order for them to keep abreast with the new trends in the teaching of the PRP courses. Some said that when training opportunities came up, the teachers that handled those grades were not given chance to go and attend. The views of one of the grade two teachers are quoted below:

*The teachers that teach in the NBTL and SITE classes are not given chances to go for further training or refresher courses whenever such opportunities come. Instead of picking the teachers that are responsible for those classes, the school authorities pick different people to attend such workshops. Sometimes, the head teacher would go and attend a SITE workshop instead of those teachers that teach the pupils. Even after the workshops, the teachers that attend these workshops cannot even share the information acquired with their colleagues. This is bad because teachers are not provided with new and important information and they are not even motivated.*

#### **4.5. Conclusion of the Findings and Discussion**

The quantitative findings revealed that Grade three pupils’ performance in reading and writing in both Bemba and English is below par. The figures in the reading and writing tests have shown that only a small percentage of the Grade three pupils in Chingola district were able to read at desirable level by the time they were entering into the ROC. The findings, as revealed in the various qualitative data, had also shown that pupils’ poor reading and writing levels in the schools visited can be attributed to several factors. Some of these factors as indicated by the teachers included lack of learning and teaching materials, inadequate time allocated to the teaching of literacy in the first two years during ZNBTL and SITE, and the ROC and over-enrolment among others.

Therefore, the assumption that the first two years of the PRP equips learners with adequate literacy skills to be able to read and write in both English and familiar Zambian language, is a fallacy.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0. Overview

The main objective of this study was to find out grade three pupils' preparedness in reading and writing in Zambian languages, Bemba in this case, and English as a second language. This was done in order to confirm the claim that the first three courses of the PRP, i.e. ZNBLT, Path Way to English and SITE equipped learners with sufficient skills that the learners can use in grade three in order to read and write with comprehension in the final course of the PRP called ROC. This chapter presents the conclusion drawn from the study and the recommendations that have been proposed.

#### 5.1. Conclusion of the Findings

The reading and writing skills in the two languages were found to have been insufficiently developed. The conclusion in this aspect is that children whose L1 literacy skills are not yet fully developed and early transfer to a second language like English, in the initial grades, like Grade 2 in the current form PRP is being implemented, is likely to impede the continuing development of literacy skills in L1. This, in turn, exerts a limiting effect on the development of pupils' literacy skills in English by the time they are entering into the ROC.

Although the PRP stipulates that the pupils must acquire sufficient literacy skills in both Zambian languages (Bemba in this case) and English by the end of Grade two, the study had revealed that the pupils' levels of reading and writing in both languages were insufficient. Several reading and writing tests given to the pupils drawn from the BASAT and other reading and writing materials from Grade three reading materials had shown that the pupils were still not able to read and write at a desirable level.

One finding worth of mentioning is that from the various tests used in the study children who were considered to have broken through, as claimed by their teachers, in some cases had poorer performance than those that had broken through. This is cause for concern as it can raise questions about the efficacy of the methods used to assess the reading abilities of the pupils by the teachers. However, as claimed by one of the teachers, sometimes, pupils that had broken through were placed in groups of those pupils that had not broken through and vice visa. This, the teacher said, encouraged the pupils that were placed in the lower performing groups not to feel completely out place during lessons.

Similarly, the study had further shown that there were many factors that could be cited as contributing to the observed poor performance by the pupils in reading and writing by the time they reach Grade three. For example, classroom observations had revealed that the schools are inadequately equipped and lacked most essential teaching and learning materials like reading books, phonic flip chart, conservation posters, talking walls and so on. Time allocated for the teaching of literacy was cited by the teachers as being inadequate. It can be concluded that the teachers failed to properly utilise their time in class because the learners had several needs, like individual attention, proper assessment and feedback and immediate and adequate correction when they showed signs of lacking behind in reading and writing. However, this study has shown that this was lacking in the schools visited.

This study has shown that the process of reading and writing on several parameters is not always an easy undertaking to the pupils. This is especially when they move from practising reading and writing in Bemba in the first year into English at the second grade and further when they are expected to move from ‘learning to read’ to ‘reading to learn’ in Grade three and other subsequent grades. We can say, then, that the Grade three pupils in Chingola district are not adequately prepared for the Read On Course (ROC).

## 5.2. **Recommendations**

The recommendations arising from this study were twofold. These are divided into recommendations to the policy makers and the recommendations to the school authorities.

### a) **Recommendations to the Policy Makers**

Arising from the findings of this study, it is clear that the reading programme put into place by the Ministry of Education is not yielding the most desirable results that can accelerate Grade three pupils’ reading and writing abilities both in Bemba and English. Therefore, the following recommendations are made to the policy makers:

- i. Extend the time of using the instruction in the L1 from one year to at least four years as stated in *Educating Our Future* (MoE, 1996). This will give the learners, sufficient time for them to have enough literacy skills to transfer into the second language. This is from the realisation that most of pupils in PRP classes do not breakthrough in the first language and second language by the time they reach Grade three. Under the current arrangement, the pupils proceed into Grade two without acquiring enough literacy skills in the L1 which they

are expected to transfer to L2. Consequently, the pupils proceed to subsequent grades (i.e. Grade 3 with insufficiently developed skills in both Bemba and English.

- ii. The government should consistently supply teaching and learning materials in all the schools proving the PRP. Reading materials were found to be in short supply and contributed to the pupils' poor reading in both languages.
- iii. In the light of this, it is recommended that re-training workshops be organised every so often so that the teachers are kept abreast with new techniques of teaching the pupils. This may help to improve the pupils' performance in reading and writing skills by Grade three in both languages.
- iv. Consider having the same teacher (s) to continue with the ZNBTL and SITE. This is because it is assumed that those teachers will have built a rapport with the pupils from the first grade. This can make teachers identify the pupils that may have been facing difficulties in reading and writing in L1 from the time that pupils are enrolled in school.
- v. The government should consider building more classrooms in order to reduce over enrolment in schools.
- vi. Time allocated for teaching literacy should be increased from one hour to two hours in order to allow the teachers to have enough time to teach and conduct assessments.

**b) Recommendation to the School Authorities.**

- i. It is recommended that school authorities should organise in-house training workshops/seminars (CPDs) in order to exchange information on the teaching of the reading and writing to the pupils in lower grades.
- ii. Local initiatives should be put in place by different schools that can allow teachers come up with local resources to use in improving reading and writing among the pupils in both Zambian languages and English.
- iii. It is recommended that the teachers come up with teaching aids such as pictures and posters that can be used in the classrooms.
- iv. The teachers should engage the parents/guardians of the pupils in order to encourage them to take more interest in the pupils' school work.



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