Teachers' Practices in Reading Lessons Towards Helping Learners with Reading Difficulties at Lower Primary: A Case of Selected Primary Schools in Lusaka District, Zambia

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Abstract: *The purpose of the study was to evaluate teachers' practices in reading lessons in helping learners with reading difficulties in the four primary schools of Lusaka district The study employed a mixed method paradigm of an embedded method and descriptive survey design that used purposive and simple random sampling to select 4 Head teachers, 4 senior teachers, 12 teachers and 80 learners. Data was obtained from respondents by means of interviews, questionnaires and classroom observation schedules. Frequency, percentages, tables, graphs and pie-charts were used to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data obtained. Data was then analyzed by use of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) computer package. The findings revealed significant differences in learners' achievement in Reading between the two sets of schools. Findings showed differences in teachers' practices in reading lessons, absence of adequate and appropriate teaching and learning materials in reading, lack of improvisation, inadequate internal and external monitoring, irregular CPD meetings, poor teaching methods and techniques, inadequate assessment and poor record keeping. The study recommended adequate internal and external monitoring, regular and compulsory CPD meetings.*

Keywords: Lower Primary, Reading Materials, Reading Difficulties, Reading Lessons, Teachers' Practices, and Teaching Methods.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

After independence in 1964, Zambia inherited the British type of education but immediately after independence, Zambia had to chart her own destiny in education provision. In 1967, the Zambian Government took a new direction to modify the largely outmoded educational system to make it

more relevant to today's and tomorrow's national needs. MESVTEE (2013) and the Education Act of 1966 was meant to overhaul the whole system in order to meet the aspirations of an independent African country. In 1965, English was officially prescribed as the medium of instruction throughout Zambia's formal education system. The Act also related the contents of the curriculum to the needs of the learners. The Zambia Primary course therefore, adopted English as a medium for initial literacy instruction from Grade 1 to 7levels in all the Zambian Government schools. From 1964 to 1979, most of the Zambian Primary school learners were able to read by the end of Grade 1. The Education Reform of 1977 brought further changes to the education system. The reforms brought in Basic and High school systems and at teacher education level, the Zambian Primary Teachers' Course was renamed Zambia Basic Education Teachers' Course (ZBEC) in order to link it to the school course. These reforms were implemented in the middle of the 1980s and (MESVTEE 1999) explains:

The Ministry of Education, in its effort to improve the delivery of educational services at all levels embarked on major policy reforms in the 1990's starting with Focus on Learning (1992), Educating Our Future (1996) and the Basic Education Sub-Sector Investment Programme (BESSIP-1998). Also, a wider programme, the Primary Reading Programme (PRP), supported by DFID, was thus conceived to take into account the new policy. (MESVTEE 2013), however, the baseline study of the Zambia Reading Programme which was conducted in 1999 noted that among Grades 1-6 learners who were tested in Reading, the majority read at two grades below grade level in English and three grade levels in their own Zambian language. However, the genesis of the problem is that during the 1980's and 1990's, it became increasingly evident that reading standards among the Zambian school children were distressingly low.In the early 1990's, reading levels in the Zambian Primary schools had declined to about 40%. This was according to statistics taken by the Ministry of Education in 2000. (MESVTEE 2013), most of the learners were not able to read by the end of their Zambia Primary Course at Grade 7. Hence, there was concern among stakeholders on this negative development on earners' low reading levels in the Zambian Education System.

Nevertheless, the concern on the declining reading levels among Primary school learners in Zambia led to the adoption of the new National language policy according to which initial literacy instruction was to begin in a familiar local language from Grade 1 before the instruction of English in Grade 2. In addition, the Ministry of Education came up with other initiatives to improve reading levels in the Zambian Government schools. Apart from the introduction of various reading programmes, the Ministry came up with the initiative of teachers' in-service training programmes through Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The other initiative introduced in 2009 was to increase the number of years for the training of Primary school teachers from two to three years, whose aim was to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills not only in Literacy and languages but other learning areas in the curriculum as well. The Government through the Ministry of Education saw the need to raise reading levels among Primary school learners and convened a National Reading Forum which led to the development of the Primary Reading Programme (PRP), a comprehensive seven-year plan of action aimed at improving not only reading but literacy levels among Zambia's school children.

The Primary Reading Programme (PRP), located within the broader Basic Education Sub-Sector Investment Programme (BESSIP) was then established with a mission to improve literacy levels among Zambian school children. One of the successes of the Primary Reading Programme was

the production of Zambia New Breakthrough to Literacy (ZNBTL), a course aimed at introducing initial literacy at Grade 1 through the seven official Zambian Languages (MESVTEE 2013). In 2003, there was an expansion of New Breakthrough to Literacy to every Grade 1 in every Primary school nationwide as well as the expansion of Step in to English (SITE) to every Grade 2 class in every CORE school. Also, there was continued expansion of the Read On Course (ROC) through training via the school programme for in-service training (SPRINT) in-service system.

Through the introduction of the Primary Reading Programme, the Ministry of Education believed that the course had the potential to revolutionalise reading standards among Grade 1 learners in the Zambian Primary schools. This was to lay the foundation for fluent literacy and improved educational standards in all grades throughout the Primary and Secondary schools. It should also be noted that Reading is a foundational skill for learning across subject areas and that children acquire a language while they have to learn to read. (Fletcher et al 2010), to help raise learners' reading standards, guided reading was required which emphasized the correspondence between letters and the sounds associated with them. In order to raise the reading levels of learners, quite a number of things are cardinal, ranging from teachers, learners, teaching and learning materials, infrastructure, and contact hours among other things. In Grade1, learners are expected to be taught reading for one year and are thereafter expected to be able to read by the time they go into Grade 2.

Nevertheless, most of the learners are not able to read by the time they get into Grade 2. This is due to the fact that there are problems in the teaching and learning of Reading which would enable Grade 1 learners to read. It is imperative therefore, to get to know what these problems are if initial reading instruction would help raise reading levels in the Zambian education system. During the 1990's, many low-income countries, Zambia inclusive committed to the United Nations Education for All goals of ensuring universal access to primary education and learners' completion of all Primary grades.

Unless they learn to read at an early age, children cannot absorb more advanced skills and content that relies on reading. Acquisition of reading skills in the early grades is critical to learner performance in all the subjects, successful progression through Primary school. In addition, children who do not learn to read in the early grades risk falling further behind in later years, as they cannot absorb printed information, follow written instructions, or communicate well in writing and speech. (MESVTEE 2013), says, "these challenges, rooted in poor reading skills, lead to low achievements and often early drop out from the education system."The cardinal strategy to address the weaknesses is a change in the approach to the teaching of literacy in the early grades as there is clear evidence also from studies conducted by the Ministry of Education and the monitoring reports by Education Standards Officers that there is little learning taking place in public and community schools throughout the country. The inability by learners to learn content subjects is because many of them are not able to read and write. The New Breakthrough to Literacy (NBTL) programme which has been followed since the late 1990's has not achieved much in terms of imparting reading skills in the learners.

It is for this reason that the Ministry of Education has reviewed the approach to come up with a new approach called Early Grade Literacy Programme (EGLP). The approach has been developed in collaboration with local and internationally recognized methods of teaching literacy based on initial sounds, phonics, word building, sentence building, comprehension, writing, punctuation and

fluency. This is because children have latent potentiality to learn a language and to confirm this, (Aitchison2012) states that: "but this latent potentiality can be activated only by long exposure to language which requires careful learning."

In March 2013, the Ministry of Education through the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) produced the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework to provide the curriculum guidelines as well as the structure at all the levels of education. In the same year 2013, the Ministry of Education came up with the National Literacy Framework (NLF) to provide a strategy for literacy instruction. The policy on education recognizes the use of familiar Zambian languages as the official languages of instruction in the Pre-school and early grades (Grades 1 to 4). All the teaching and learning in all the learning areas at the Lower Primary level is to be in familiar Zambian languages. English is to be offered as a subject, upwards. (MoE, 1996), this is because the rationale for teaching in a local language is rooted in scientific research which supports developing a learner's language abilities; vocabulary, intrinsic knowledge of grammar rules, and use of one's own language, in order to develop reading and writing skills. While many factors affect education quality, the language of classroom instruction fundamentally impacts on a child's ability to read and learn and also, the speed and ease at which a learner can do this in his or her own language far surpasses that at which a learner can in a foreign language.

In spite of the numerous reforms in the Zambian Education system since 1965, both at school and teacher training levels and the change of policies on the language of instruction in the teaching and learning and change in approach to the teaching of literacy, still most of the learners in the Zambian Primary schools cannot read by the end of Grade 1. Apart from reforms, the teaching and learning environment is cardinal for learners to acquire linguistic skills. Major finding indicates that a conducive environment created by the teacher helps learners to enhance their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Physical environment is also important in learning a language and a place is needed where learners can have an opportunity to share their ideas closely (MoE, 2002).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Learners in the Lower grades of Primary schools are taken through Reading programmes starting in Grade 1 but still, learners in our schools continue to exhibit low reading achievements at the end of Grade 1 of the Zambian education system. Learner achievement in reading could probably be attributed to many home and school based factors as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1:Learner Performance in Reading in the Last Four Years

SCHOOL	2019	2020	2021	2022
Woodlands A	63%	60%	57%	56%
Chibelo	61%	63%	56%	54%
Kalingalinga	60%	55%	53%	50%
Desai	56%	54%	55%	53%

SOURCE: Lusaka Debs Office statistics 2022

1.3. The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the teachers' practices in reading lessons towards helping learners with reading difficulties at Lower Primary in the four selected primary schools in Lusaka District.

1.4. Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- Determine the availability and suitability of lower primary reading teaching and learning materials in the six schools in order for learners to achieve high levels of Reading competences.
- Evaluate the suitability of reading teaching methods and techniques used in the teaching of Reading in the four lower primary schools to help raise learners' reading competences.
- Assess whether strategies teachers use in the four Primary schools help teachers' practices in reading lessons towards helping learners with reading difficulties in reading achievement.

1.5. Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by second language acquisition theory by James Cummis and according to the common underlying proficiency model (Cumminis, 1981), as children acquire academic knowledge and skills in their first language, they also acquire language-independent information about those skills that can be applied when learning a second language.

1.6. Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the findings of the study would be useful in creating awareness amongst all the stakeholders interested in education in Zambia such as policy makers, to modify the educational system and make it more relevant and responsive to today's and tomorrow's national needs. The findings arising from the study would also enable the Ministry of Education to continuously review educational programmes at school and teacher training levels so as to come up with appropriate interventions not only in Reading but other learning areas in the curriculum, education administrators at Provincial, District and school levels to create local initiatives and policies on the administration, teaching, in-service teacher training, procuring suitable reading materials to sustain and reinforce reading skills, assessment and monitoring of learner Reading achievements as well as integrate the schools more meaningfully into the life of the local communities. Teachers would plan lessons adequately, assess learners regularly, participate in teacher group meetings and be equipped with linguistic knowledge and linguistic skills necessary to teach Reading in lower primary schools.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Reading Knowledge, Linguistic Skills and Language in General

Linguistic knowledge and linguistic skills are essential elements in the teaching of initial Reading. A teacher of Reading and initial Reading in particular should therefore be well versed with speech sounds, the organization of sounds, general information on Reading and initial instruction in Reading among other factors, (MoE 2002).

Language is a complex and dynamic system of conventional symbols that are used in various modes, thoughts and communication and can be defined as, a socially shared code or conventional system for representing concepts through the use of arbitrary symbols and the rule governing combinations of these symbols, (Fletcher et al, 2010). Therefore, language has a vital role to play in the education process and hence, the attainment of language skills during the initial education

stage is extremely important in the education system and also, communication is essential in teaching and learning.

Reading is a skill by means of which human beings look at written words and understand through them the writer's meaning, (Lyster 1995). It is an activity which involves sight, intelligence, knowledge of the writer's language and knowledge of the world. Like writing, reading is a thinking skill and is triggered by print or some other visual stimulus as without thought, there is no real reading. Also, reading is an essential tool rather than a subject and is a series of interlocking and interconnected skill dominated by the eyes and brain. Reading is the foundation skill to other learning activities in the classroom. The purpose of reading is comprehension and the aim of comprehension is learning (NICHD, 2000).

2.2 The Mother Tongue

Mother tongue is the child's first language. When a child is born, he or she is exposed to a language that is spoken by the parents. It is this language that a child learns first and is able to speak at the age of two onwards. This language is the child's parents' language through which a child is able to learn customs and traditions. It is the child's mother tongue, (Lunt, 1994). Mother tongue play a special role in people's lives as they reinforce and express a certain emotional intimacy among native speakers. The mother tongue is important because it is part of the learner and it is the language that builds an individual. It shapes one's personality and mannerism. It is deeply rooted and it represents the child and also, the learner's thinking is based on the mother tongue since language and thinking cannot be separated, (Medwell et al 2012). The mother tongue helps the learner to understand and interpret the world and above all, the child organizes the world through a language and one's beliefs, convictions, attitudes, and so on are influenced by the mother tongue. Learners feel more confident and therefore, respond better to learning, if that learning is taking place in a language with which they are familiar.

2.3 Phonics

It is important that a teacher of initial reading understands what phonics is and why it is important in the teaching of Reading, (Chall, 1967). However, phonics is different from phonetics and nevertheless, phonics is the teaching of the relationships of sounds to letters and that it gives learners the ability to translate the written symbol, the letter, into the correct sound, and in this way, to sound an unfamiliar word, using the various phonic rules that they have been taught. This is why phonics is also called the word attack or 'crack-the-code' skill. It offers a rule-based approach to learning to read and Neaum (2012) says: "Phonics is a method of teaching reading based on learning letter sounds and their corresponding letters, and blending and segmenting them into words.".

2.4 General Information on Reading and Initial Instruction

Reading is the foundation skill to other learning activities in the classroom and the basic reading skills necessary to become literate do not develop naturally as they require the learner to learn to adapt the part of the brain that recognizes images, to be able to recognize written letters and words. As has been confirmed by scholars, working to understand reading acquisition in multiple languages, in almost any alphabetic language in which the print can be decoded into sounds, being to read well requires a grasp of five basic skills of Phonic awareness, which focuses on manipulating, breaking apart and putting together sounds orally (Ibid, 2012). Phonics, which involves linking written letters to their sounds and forming spelling patterns; Fluency-which

involves achieving speed, accuracy and expression in reading; Vocabulary-which involves knowing words both oral and written and their meaning and lastly, Comprehension-which involves understanding the concepts read or heard.

Wells & Claxton (2002) say that the assessment components are aligned with the essential and teachable reading skills such as letter recognition, phonemic awareness, phonics, oral reading fluency, listening and reading comprehension so that results provide clear guidance for changing instruction methods and offer hope of improvement. Measurements of how quickly and accurately children can read a text out aloud, and how much of it they understand, also align with a scientific and a popular understanding of what it means to be able to read.

(Medwell et al 2012), brings out reading developmental stages and the first three phases focus on the foundation skills of learning to read. Once learners learn to apply the foundational reading skills as early as when they are in Grade 1, they can move beyond the task of decoding the text. From Grade 2, learners begin to derive meaning. As learners learn sounds that link to form words, they begin connecting these sounds to printed words, thereafter, they start to identify letter sounds, form syllables and words and link words to form sentences, paragraphs and stories. It is at these crucial early stages that learners' transition from learning to read to reading to learn emerge.

Learning to read is one of the Grade 1 learners' major task and therefore, much time and patience must be spent helping the learners and they will also all need as much individual attention as possible. (Beck & Juel, 2002) point out that it is not obvious, to the young learner, especially one in a rural area where printed materials are not readily available to know that meaning can be got from the printed word. If the teacher does not first establish with the learners that meaning can be got from the printed pages, either from pictures or from words, they will not understand what the task is all about and so will not be motivated to learn. (Townsend & Konold, 2010), learners need to be allowed to look at their books in their own time and discuss the pictures in a familiar language with friends. There should also be labels attached to objects all over the classroom so that learners get the idea what the written word, the symbol, tells about the object, or idea, it is associated with.

2.5. Reading Problems

Edwards (2004) say that a teacher of initial reading should be able to know as well as identify the causes of reading problems if learners were to be helped in class to read with less difficulties. The learner may have visual difficulties as some learners are not able to see the difference between reversible letters such as b and d, u and n. This can however, be remedied by giving the learner an extra practice in matching shapes. (Sampa 2003), failure to keep on the line is also a cause of reading problems as learners find it difficult not to mix words on one line with those in another. For this, a learner can be asked to place a piece of card under the line as he or she reads.

Peer & Reid (2000) explain that poor visual memory is another problem. Here, the problem is that learners can remember large units in the 'look and say' or whole word method, meaning that, learners cannot recognize and retain what they have seen. For example, words of more than three letters confuse them and this may be due to poor eye sight. However, this can be corrected by giving learners plenty of play in building up words with syllable cards and letter cards or by playing the memory game with objects. (Shanahan, 2006), the other reading problem is regressive eye movement. Instead of moving the eyes along the line from word to word, the learner's eyes would go back, sometimes from right to left hence, the learner would repeat words or syllables and get

them in the wrong order. This problem can nevertheless, be prevented by using a card under the line and a pointer going along the line as the learner reads.

Snow, et al (1998), defective hearing is yet another reading problem. Some learners find difficulties in distinguishing between words of similar sounds such as ship and sheep pin and pen, simply because the learner does not hear the sounds correctly. This problem may be due to something wrong with the learner's ears or may be due to the fact that the learner does not listen carefully enough. (Neaum, 2012), hence, the teacher should avoid teaching words of similar sound at the same time but let the learners identify different sounds heard about from adults, friends, on the radio, television, and so on.

(Gove & Cvelich 2011), the problem of articulation also affects the learning of reading as some learners find difficult with certain words in their familiar language. For example, Bembas have problems with v and pronounce it as f and z as s, while the Tongas replace r with l, th with d and for instance say, "Dis is de boy", and so on. With the familiar language, this may be due to retaining 'baby talk' or simply lack of practice and experience in using the sounds. With foreign or second language, it is generally the latter and also, with bad listening or defective hearing as added causes. Cremin. et al, (2008), for practice, the teacher should use rhymes and jingles with simple tongue twisters such as, "She sells sea shells on the sea shore" and in Icibemba, can use," Tulekashoola aka pa kakoopo"-we shall eat what is on the tin and these should be said quite faster.

The last reading problem is difficulties due to poor knowledge of language. Some learners have poor knowledge of their own language, having spoken little with adults. (Aitchison 2012), consequently, when they come to learn to read, they try to read words they do not know well. This can also happen with reading in a second language where a learner may be transferred from an old fashioned school during the course of the year. (Ibid, 2008), learners must never in the early stages be asked to read words which they cannot pronounce, and which they have not already used orally. Learners who are poor at their own language must be given more practice.

2.6 Reading Readiness and Pre-Reading Activities

Reading specialists throughout the world agree that it is essential to have a proper and thorough programme of reading readiness activities and training. Torgeson. et al (2006), this stage should never be left out and never be taken for granted. If the groundwork is not properly covered in the first weeks in Grade 1, and if the teacher does not check that the learner is ready to begin learning to read, much harm may be done. Many later difficulties in reading can be tracked back to too early an introduction to this formal type of learning, before the learner is properly ready. In reading readiness, the teacher should have a checklist of questions he or she should ask himself or herself about each learner to establish whether the learner is ready to begin formal reading or not. The checklist falls into three categories namely, readiness in language development, readiness in physical and sensory development and readiness in social and emotional development.

Some learners who have attended Pre-school may be ready to begin reading as soon as they enter Grade 1 but many, especially in rural areas will not be and those that have not attended Pre-school are most unlikely to be ready to read straight away. (Neaum 2012), pre-reading activities are not a share waste of time and should not be abandoned even though the language of instruction is familiar. At the Pre-reading stage, some learners will need the same activities repeated over and over again before they are ready to start readin (Wearmouth. Et al, 2003). It is also important that the teacher identifies these learners who need more practice than the exercises given and make up

more of the teacher's own exercises along the same lines. Before learners are ready to learn to read, they must have developed certain skills. However, the Pre-reading activities are divided into six different skill areas and these are language development, visual, sequencing, auditory or listening, tactile and motor skills.

2.7 Teachers' Support to Learners with Reading Difficulties in the Classroom

It should be noted that good and well-planned lessons usually may result in effective classroom practice although not all that has been planned will always be taught in the exact way. Usually there is a link between what has been planned and the actual implementation in the classroom.

2.6.1 Strategies Teachers Use to Support Learners During Lessons

A number of practices were seen such as the following: lessons characterized by phonics instruction and some emphasis on phonemic awareness. The teachers also use a number of strategies to support the learners such as direct group teaching, dividing learners into ability groups, use of question and answer technique, one-on-one teaching and scaffolding of learners, paired and group reading, chorus reading and repetition, role sharing and presentation of tasks, love and care and achievement of the stated learning outcomes.

2.6.1.1 Direct Teaching to Small Groups

Another practice in the teaching of reading among the six teachers was direct teaching of sounds by dividing learners into small groups according to ability levels. Teachers divide the learners according to their performance in the assessment given. The learners are called to the front of the classroom in the first 15 minutes of the lesson to learn the phoneme(s) of the day. Thereafter, independent learning activities are given while a small group receives direct teaching for 20 minutes in the teaching station. Only two groups are seen at the front of the classroom for 20 minutes each while the last 5 minutes is for feedback. This instructional strategy has been supported by researchers (Ford and Opitz, 2008; NICHD, 2000 and Shanahan, 2006). For instance, Shanahan cites a number of advantages for teaching phonemic awareness to small groups of learners as opposed to whole class. Direct teaching to small groups leads to more effective learning as it allows the teacher to receive more attention of learners. It also allows learners to see the teacher's mouth and how sounds are produced since they are seating near the teacher. He adds that it allows quick feedback from the teacher to the learners as areas of concern and the intervention needed are given as soon as they are needed to those learners who need them. (Ford and Opitz 2008) similarly add that small groups allow the teacher to model to learners what they are learning. The teacher can also scaffold the learners by providing the support that they need. They further say it helps to strengthen the relationship and build a positive relation between the teacher and the learners, which are necessary ingredients in the learning process. However, the two authors recommend combining both whole class and small groups by starting with whole class and ending up with small-group follow-up teaching to individual groups. Some researchers also argue that direct instruction leads to more controlled tasks by the teacher (Gipps, 2002).

Despite teachers using direct teaching to small groups as recommended by some researchers, it can be argued that the benefits are overshadowed by other conflicting factors such as over enrolment. Instruction that is centered on small groups is time consuming. This may explain why two of the respondents complained about time not being enough for teaching reading. They are

supposed to see two groups for 20 minutes each. One may argue that small groups should be working very well in Zambia where some classes have more than 70 learners. But it must be understood that some 'small groups' are just too large thereby defeating the very purpose for which small groups should be used. Learners are denied the opportunity for explicit teaching, modelling and application of what they learn (McIntyre. et al, 2011). Also, (Foorman and Torgesen 2001) underline the importance of explicit instruction in reducing incidence of reading failure. But in large classes, time may not be enough to have each child practise the phonemes. Such classes also make it difficult for the teacher to have one-on-one teaching to individual children. It was observed that the teachers had to labour in maintaining calm and ensuring that the learners were focused on the activities. From time to time the teachers were being interrupted by noise makers. The teachers had challenges of setting adequate and challenging tasks especially for fast learners. (Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2010) confirm the findings that class size has an impact on student performance.

There is also a need to question the effectiveness of dividing learners according to ability level based on an assessment given. From the observed teachers, there is justification to speculate that the slow learners were perceived in a negative way rather than for them to benefit from the small groups. Some teachers were focusing on the so-called fast learners while others were warning fast learners to work hard or else, they would be taken to the slow group. It is such labels that could lead to low self-esteem among slow learners thereby leading to lack of interest in reading. As stated above, the learners are not assessed regularly. So, some of them have been assigned the label of 'slow learner' probably the entire term if not year. This is why some scholars argue for the need to have flexible and fluid groups that may also be grouped according to needs rather than to ability level (NITC, 2011). Another matter of concern is a situation whereby some of the teachers have made these groupings permanent and they use them even in other subjects. These groups should not be permanent.

Apart from labelling, the idea of 'slow learners' grouped alone equally raises other questions.

How do learners considered 'weak' learn from each other when segregated alone as a small group? Could they not have learned better if they were put together with the so called 'fast learners'? This to some extent defeats the idea of the sociocultural principles where more capable learners are helping the less capable ones. Mixed groups could enable learners with difficulties learn from their peers since the teacher may not be able to assist each and every learner due to over enrolment. This is another subject attracting debate and each side may have its positives and negatives as argued by (Chorzempa and Graham 2006).

2.6.1.2 Scaffolding the Learners

It was also observed that teachers use other techniques to scaffold the learners such as question and answer and one-on-one teaching though to a less degree. According to (Foorman and Torgesen 2001), "Scaffolded instruction involves finely tuned interactions between teacher and child that support the child in accomplishing a task that he or she could not do without the teacher's help". Teachers were seen asking questions to the whole class, or to a group or to individual learners. They were seen helping some individual learners having difficulties during the lesson. These too could be said to be good practices in the teaching of reading especially towards off-track readers but teachers needed to do more. Going by the sociocultural perspectives on children with reading difficulties, there are several dimensions necessary to understand why some children have reading difficulties. Two of these dimensions are: (1) "all actions including reading are mediated by tools,

of which language is the primary; and [2] a learner's development occurs through assisted performance" (McIntyre, et al., 2011). In this regard teachers are supposed to use tools to mediate reading. This can be achieved through asking well phrased questions to elicit the sounds that make up the words. The reading of a story at the beginning of the lesson and asking questions to check learners' attention and comprehension are equally good strategies. But teaching aids of all sorts are necessary for this to succeed. It is also vital to state that reading development among learners with reading difficulties can be achieved through assisted performance. The teacher needs to have one-on-one interaction with individual learners to help them move from one level of performance to the next in line with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development.

It is also important to state that although the strategies such as these discussed above were seen during some lessons, they were not adequately applied due to other factors. For instance, one-on-one instruction was used rarely in spite of having many learners that needed assistance. This is understood. The same factor of over enrolment comes in again. It seems impossible for one teacher to have a one-on-one interaction with learners in 20 minutes when there were about 12 learners in a group. According to (Rogoff 2003), the learner is seen as an "Apprentice alongside the teacher". (McIntyre, et al., 2011) add that the teacher therefore, needs to know the learners so that he or she can engage them in their ZPD. Even the planning of lessons should be based on the teacher's knowledge of each learner. In line with this, (Torgeson. et al, 2006) recommends two types of scaffolding: careful sequencing of remedial tasks as well as teacher-learner dialogue in order to help the learner know what and how they are learning. However, when the number of learners is too big, it becomes very difficult to know each learner well enough to scaffold them as individuals.

2.6.1.3 Paired, Group and Chorus Reading

Paired, group and chorus reading characterized the lessons observed. The use of paired and group reading is one of the strategies recommended by the NRP (NICHD, 2000) because they enable learners to work together and learn from one another. However, when learners with reading difficulties are doing paired or group reading, they need the teacher to monitor what they are doing (Shanahan, 2006). Shanahan adds that paired reading is a very good strategy to use in classrooms where there are no teaching assistants. Therefore, teachers who use this strategy for learners with particular needs and during the teaching station time, this may be necessary and successful. Whereas in the late 1990s when 'new' methodologies for teaching reading and writing were introduced in Zambia it was not recommended for learners to answer in chorus (MoE, 2001; 2002), during this study many teachers used chorus reading. In this context, chorus reading includes reading aloud which according to (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001) is rooted in the reader response theory of Rosenblatt (1978). This may be beneficial since they cannot involve every learner due to over enrolment. It was the only way all the learners could be involved. On the other hand, this makes it very difficult for the teacher to ascertain the involvement of all the learners as well as to reinforce what has been taught.

2.6.1.4 Feedback

Apart from the above discussed strategies, the teachers seemed also to value immediate feedback both to themselves and to the learners. The idea of the teacher sampling learners' work done and allowing learners to comment on it seems to be a very good practice. It allows the learners to see whether they have done the work correctly. It also gives an opportunity to the teacher to assess how effective the reading instruction has been. Since the teacher is only able to be with one group

at a time, there is need to have a time when learners report what they were doing in their independent learning activities. The teacher will be able to identify the needs of learners and prepare appropriate remedial activities in the next lessons. Constructive feedback is said to be one of the important aspects of a literacy teacher (Vygotsky, 1978). The use of group leaders to help the teacher manage the groups while the teacher is engaged with one group is equally very good. It is only through feedback time that the teacher can evaluate the effectiveness of peer tutoring among groups.

Despite there being provision for feedback, time allocated for it – 5 minutes (sharing time) does not seem to be enough. As a result, the teachers had to rush through the few learners' exercise books sampled. Time for feedback should be adequate so that the teacher can help learners that need help although much of the help could be given outside the literacy hour. It can also be argued that feedback should be given in an on-going manner so that the teacher does not depend on the 5 minutes to understand the needs of the learners. Feedback can be given at each stage of the lesson. Again the issue of over enrolment comes in. It is usually difficult to engage the learners with reading difficulties when they are seated with other learners in the teaching station to give feedback to the teacher. These learners, according to (Torgeson. et al 2006) need "more intensive, more explicit and more supportive" feedback other than the general feedback for all learners.

In connection with feedback, there is need for teachers to show love and to care for the learners. In her 'Curriculum Relation Model' (Befring, 2001) shows that learning depends on basic human needs which include love and care for the learner. When teachers love and care for their learners, they will be able to give them constructive feedback as they need it. Although nearly all the teachers observed seemed to have good rapport with the children, it was clear that they had difficulties due to high enrolment levels in the classes. One teacher however, seemed frustrated. She harassed the learners almost throughout the lesson and threatened to beat them for their failure to participate in the lesson. Her frustrations may be tolerated but teachers need to show that they love the children. They should also realize that children do not become off-track readers by choice. It is the duty of teachers to develop good rapport with their learners so as to motivate the learners to learn to read. If teachers can use games and other strategies that make learning more interesting, children can participate in the learning process (Shanahan, 2006).

Lastly, the teacher gets feedback also by looking at the stated learning outcomes. The stated learning outcomes act as pointers for the teacher to know whether the lesson has been successful. These must be adapted to the learning needs of the learners. In this way, the teacher can assess the learners' knowledge, skills, learning potentials and needs (Crowe. et al, 2009). Although all the lessons observed had learning outcomes, some of the outcomes were not clearly stated. This makes it difficult for the teacher to assess his or her teaching. None of the teachers felt confident as to whether the learning outcomes had been achieved. Their lack of confidence shows honesty on the part of teachers concerning their reflexivity but it may also be helpful to the teachers to relook at how they state their learning outcomes.

2.8 Teaching and Learning Materials/Aids in Reading

Teaching and learning materials are essential to a teacher in order to effectively teach initial Reading. According to (MESVTEE 2013): "the success of any literacy programme also depends on the availability of suitable reading materials to sustain and reinforce literacy skills." The teacher has therefore to use a variety of teaching and learning materials, some of which are already made

but, in the absence of these, the teacher has to improvise. The materials used in the teaching of initial Reading are the teacher's guide, learners' books, conversation poster, readers and the teacher's created materials.

Teaching and learning aids are extremely useful to both the teacher and learners in a Reading lesson and Lunt (1994) says: "Teaching aids are an essential part of the learning process." They make teaching and learning easier. Backing up teaching with such visual support as objects, pictures and drawings, posters and flashcards and by using the chalkboard, makes it easier for the teacher to explain new words and structures, conduct activities using all the reading skills, reinforce the meaning of the new words being taught, attract attention of the learners, make lessons more attractive and interesting and enables one to teach the class well, even if there is a shortage or lack of textbooks. (Neaum, 2012), teachers in rural schools have difficulties in accessing aids and materials to improvise.

Useful teaching and learning aids for the Reading class include the chalkboard, common objects, learners in the class, posters, pictures and drawings, authentic materials such as pictures, maps, magazines or newspapers, postcards, word and picture flashcards, work cards, worksheets, and so on. These teaching aids can be used for various reading-learning activities. The chalkboard is the most obvious teaching aid but often, it is not used to its full potential. According to Medwell et al (2012): "the blackboard is perhaps the most useful of visual aids and the majority of teachers would feel hampered in a classroom which did not have one." Common objects are useful teaching aids and the teacher should not only use objects found in the classroom and on using objects, the teacher should decide in advance what objects are needed for a lesson and should also bring useful things from home such as baskets, food items and so on. Objects can be used to teach a number of lessons in Reading. A teacher should not also forget that learners are a very useful teaching aid! They can be used to show actions, to compare sizes, to demonstrate questions and answers, to introduce a new reading item, to teach parts of the body and for many other useful purposes.

2.9 Methods and Techniques Used in Teaching Reading

Bursuck & Damer (2007) narrate that there are different approaches to teaching initial Reading and the common ones used in teaching Reading are the Phonics, Look and say, Whole Language experience approach and the Syllable approach. It is important that a teacher of Reading, more especially the one for initial Reading gets to know and familiarize himself or herself with the five of them and these are phonics, look and say, whole language, language experience approach and syllabic approach.

2.10 Steps Used in Teaching Reading

Reading is about getting meaning out of print. It is not merely calling out words. Therefore, learners have to understand what reading is and what its purposes are (Birnbaum. et al 2004). The teacher on the other hand, should understand that teaching initial Reading involves introducing sounds to learners and showing them how to blend these sounds together to form words and eventually, learners should then be shown how words are combined to form sentences. The steps the teacher should adopt are the phonemic awareness, phonics, the word, and lastly the sentence.

Teaching initial Reading involves introducing the sounds to learners and showing them how to blend these sounds together to form words, and then show them how words are combined to form sentences. In this case, the teacher needs to use various strategies to help the learners develop the required reading skills.

Learners should first be introduced to the daily routine and then taught specific Pre-reading skills and the teacher should in the first weeks of the first term in Grade 1 concentrate on developing Pre-reading skills. The teacher has to introduce learners to print concepts and functions, (Neaum, 2012). The teacher should therefore, devote much time in term 1 to Pre-reading activities such as visual, tactile and motor skills and, these activities will train learners for example, to use their eyes, and so on, in the ways necessary for beginning to read.

2.11 Teachers Inclusion of Learners with Reading Difficulties in their Planning

In the interviews the teachers said they give the following support to the learners: extra teaching in form of remedial work, homework, planning of independent learning activities based on group ability level (optimal pace and differentiation), and displaying of learners' work. Other aspects noted from the reviewed documents were: lesson plans, weekly forecasts and records of work, and lesson evaluation. It is important to acknowledge some of the good practices on how these teachers support learners with reading difficulties. Looking at these responses from a general point of view, one would say the teachers are doing a commendable job as they seem to take care of these learners in their planning before actual teaching of the lessons. For instance, learners that have not yet grasped the alphabetic principle in learning to read need well planned extra instruction (Shanahan, 2006). They may also need independent learning activities that match their ability. Above all, these learners need to have their work, at times, displayed in the classroom as a way of motivating and reinforcing what they previously learned. This is supported by other researchers (Bursuk and Damer, 2007; Ford and Opitz, 2008). It is also good to note that some of the teachers had planning documents such as lesson plans, weekly forecasts with records of work. It was even interesting to note that some of the teachers were able to take note of learners with reading difficulties by mentioning their names. They were also able to show in their lesson plans the group activities to be given during the lesson. Additionally, a few of these teachers had their planning documents checked by their supervisors as a monitoring strategy for the benefit of learners.

In spite of all these good practices, a number of issues raising questions were also noted. Even if the teachers said that they support learners with reading difficulties by giving extra instruction in form of after-school remedial work and homework, the records and documents analyzed did not show these activities and programmes. It must be noted though that the investigator did not spend long time to study the trend. However, typically these teachers would have shown either already done extra teaching or planned teaching for these learners. No extra teaching was observed or had been recorded to have been taught; homework had been planned once or twice in a week and no reflections had been made on individual learners. Yet researchers say: "these students must receive instruction in the basic elements of word reading" (Cremin. et al, 2008). So, teachers said what they knew should be done but were not doing. With the emphasis on dynamic assessment where learners are assessed in an on-going manner, there is great need for teachers to support learners with reading difficulties in their planning and evaluation. The plan needs to take into account the weaknesses, strengths and needs of learners observed and recorded in the continuous assessment. It is the assessment result that should inform planning of subsequent reading lessons.

(Shanahan 2006) adds: "it is important to be diagnostic, adjusting the amount of teaching to meet the learning needs of the individual child". So, the weekly forecasts should show what the teacher is doing or planning to do about the learners' needs. This was not the case in this study. What the investigator learned in this study is that these teachers seem to know what to do but may be

overwhelmed by the overenrolled classes. The teachers are too busy as some of them have to meet two classes per day thereby being busy the whole day to an extent of having no time for extra teaching or individualized attention to scaffold the learners. Most teachers do not seem to display learners' work except in one case. Although displayed work should be changed from time to time on the walls of the classrooms, it may not be coincidence that five classrooms did not have any learners' work displayed. Some teachers prefer displaying other kinds of work but (Anderson. et al, 1985) argues that the classroom should have more of the learners' work displayed as they may spend more time looking at their own relevant work. This will motivate the learners and "the more motivated children are to read; the more practice they will get in reading".

The peri-urban teachers' documents such as lesson plans and weekly forecasts were not checked by their supervisors. Checking of teachers' planned work helps supervisors to see what and how the teachers are teaching. The benefits of this will eventually trickle down to the learners as they may be taught effectively. Unsupervised teachers may become relaxed and do shoddy work especially in environments that have all sorts of challenges like these schools visited. Again this may be due to lack of visits by the district education office to all the schools especially those in the rural areas. While the school head teachers in schools that are in or near town may be expecting standards officers (formerly inspectors of schools) to visit them any time, those in rural schools may relax as it may take long before they can be visited by the district education officials. In this regard, it can be argued that unless teachers are supported by the education system, they may find it hard if not impossible to support learners with reading difficulties. The Zambian methodologies for teaching reading and writing in the primary school sector: NBTL, SITE and ROC do emphasize the need to have teachers supported so that they too can support the learners (MoE, 1996; 2002). Supporting teachers is not only about giving them words of encouragement or providing them with necessary teaching and learning resources but it is also about supervising their teaching. According to Bantu, (Baccus, (2004) there is significant correlation between teacher supervision and quality of teaching in primary schools. Supervision includes checking teachers' planned teaching before the actual teaching has taken place as well as after the lesson has been taught. Unfortunately, this has not been achieved well in the schools studied.

2.12 School-Based Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

The school-based Continuing Professional Development (SBCPD) is one of the effective ways of improving education as far as teaching is concerned as it targets self-development, group and eventually institutional development. (MoE, 1977), enhancing the teaching skills is not only desirable in the interest of teaching the child, but also essential for sharpening one's personal development and each other in issues pertaining to professional development. Continuing Professional Development is aimed at not only providing appropriate teaching skills, but also to deepen the teacher's knowledge and skills using the experience based on the school-based continuing professional development project. Furthermore, it helps in the improvement of the teaching skills for practicing teachers at school level and enhances lesson planning, lesson delivery, questioning, teaching and learning materials and aids and also, lesson evaluation. (MoE 2007), Continuing Professional Development is an important tool for enhancing the quality of education as it helps to build the knowledge base and competences of teachers.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
3.1. Study Design

The study adopted a mixed methods approach which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Exploratory and descriptive designs were as well considered appropriate as they also allowed for more flexible strategies of data collection in order to answer the research questions. The research design was a descriptive survey. The study incorporated both qualitative and quantitative aspects of research. It was aimed at collecting information from respondents on the learner achievement in reading knowledge and linguistic reading skills in the district, to what extent do teachers and administrators contribute to these achievements and some possible solutions to address low linguistic achievement levels. Structured open-ended interviews were conducted and questionnaires were used to respondents. The internet also supplemented data for the study.

3.2. Research Site

The study was conducted in four Primary schools (Woodlands A, Chibelo, Kalingalinga and Desai) in Lusaka district using two sets of schools-low and densely populated settlements.

3.3. Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

The population for the study was purposefully drawn from the two zones and six schools and the District education office while the simple random sampling procedure was used to select the learners and teachers. The sample size comprised of 100 respondents: 4 Head teachers, 4 senior teachers, 12 teachers and 80 learners. Also, the primary data was complimented by the secondary data which was derived from government policy documents, ministerial reports and relevant literature on the teaching and learning of initial reading. In the sampling of institutions, the study adopted the stratified cluster random sampling technique. Sampling was done zone by zone. Schools were clustered by zones. Two zones were purposively selected based on types of settlement and initial language of instruction. The sampling was done at three levels: Sampling zones and schools- level 1, Sampling learners-level 2, Sampling lower primary school teachers, lower primary senior teachers and Head teachers -level 3.

3.4. Data Analysis

In this research, data was analyzed qualitatively as the semi structured interviews and observation schedules were used as data collection instruments. Thematic approach was used, where data analysis started with the categorization of themes from the semi structured interviews and observation schedules. Charts and graphs were used to analyze the data. The data gathered was analyzed according to the themes of the study, the order of the research objectives. Data generated from the interview guide was analyzed manually and also, a combination of software MS Access, SPSS and MS Excel was used to analyze data. Analysis was mainly descriptive, that is, mean, median, mode, range, and standard deviation. Related statistics were applied where possible. Statistical testing took the form of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), correlation and regression both simple and multiple.

3.5. Ethical Issues

The study avoided pressuring respondents to take part in the research. Alternatively, permission consents, assents were obtained from respondents involved in the research and the research topic was strategically selected to ensure that there was no harm whatsoever to the research respondents. In this research, the study was fully conscious of the need to abide by the ethical rule of respecting the privacy of individuals taking part in the research. In the same way, all the respondents of the research were to remain unidentified to the public as all their

valuable views, opinions and perceptions were only known by the researchers for use only in the research and participant's identities will forever remain hidden. The study got permission from the District Board Secretary (DEBS) to interview Head teachers and from the Head teacher to interview senior teachers, class teachers and learners in the selected schools. The names of respondents would remain anonymous for the sake of confidentiality. However, the identity of respondents was concealed in the thesis but for identification in the thesis, eighty learners were allocated numbers 1 to 80, teachers were allocated ordinal numbers 1st to 12th, senior teachers were letters A to D while Head teachers were allocated primary colours Blue, Black, Green and Red.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following findings and discussions were presented according to set research objectives:

4.1. Availability and Suitability of Lower Primary Teaching and Learning Materials in Reading

According to study results, teachers used the following resources to teach: chalkboard (98.6%), textbook teaching (69.7%) and learners' exercise books (68.5%) while least used or available resources were supplementary reading resources (7.7%), manipulatives or real objects (15.4%) and worksheets (7.7%). Study results also indicated that 79% of the teachers made their own teaching and learning aids against 72.6% who were able to show examples of what they had made. This is illustrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Showing The Distribution of Teaching and Learning Materials/ Aids

Teaching materials/aids	Actual	Percentage	
		Yes	No
Manipulatives (real objects)	2	15.4	84.6
Pictures and drawings	5	38.5	61.5
Posters	5	38.5	61.5
Flashcards	3	23.1	76.9
Charts	5	38.5	61.5
Work cards	2	15.4	84.6
Worksheets	1	7.7	92.3
Supplementary readers	1	7.7	92.3
Teachers' Guides	6	46.2	53.8

During teacher interview, the analysis showed that Grade 1 teachers had ably answered questions on phonic teaching but during classroom observation of a Reading class in session, it was discovered that some of the sampled teachers could not correctly teach certain consonant sounds as (Charles Lwanga College of Education, 2010) alludes to. For example, teacher 'E' confused some pairs of consonants whose sounds were similar, that was, /b/ and /p/, /s/ and /z/ and /f/ and /v/ while teacher 'D' was adding a vowel whenever sounding a consonant sound and the sound /p/ sounded as /puh/ while sound /b/ sounded as /buh/. This therefore clearly showed that these teachers were not well acquainted with the fact that some consonants such as /b/, /d/, /g/, and so on involved the vibration of the vocal cords and were voiced consonants whereas other consonants

such as /p/, /t/, and so on do not involve the vocal cords and were called voiceless consonants. In addition, teachers also seemed not to be aware that not all consonants were easy to hear, sound or to discriminate from one another. The study also revealed that teacher 'F' had no adequate ability on syllables and could not correctly identify the sounds at the beginning of syllable /ma/ as /m/ and /ta/ as /t/ and that /m/ and /a/ as these were sounds while /ma/ was a syllable.

4.1.2 Suitability of Teaching Methods and Techniques in Reading

Interactive teaching methods and techniques are important in teaching and the teacher should vary the methods and techniques. Also, teaching methods and techniques need to place greater emphasis on self-initiated and self-sustained learning because teaching methods and techniques used in teaching initial Reading are critical to the success of Early Grade Reading programmes. Regarding teaching methods, survey results as illustrated in Table 2 below, showed that teachers scored highly on look and say or whole word method of teaching (78.4%), followed by phonics or letter sound at 73.6%, syllabic method (69.7%), whole language approach at 53.6% and the least used method was the language experience approach at 49.6%. On the use of the language experience approach.

Table 3: Showing The Distribution of Methods Used When Teaching Reading

Teaching Method	Percentage	
	Yes	No
Look and say or whole word	78.4%	21.6%
Phonics or letter sounds	73.6%	26.4%
Syllabic	69.7%	30.3%
Whole language	53.6%	46.4%
Language experience	49.6%	50.4%

On frequency of teaching, the results showed that the most common frequency of teaching Reading in sampled schools was daily (99.2%) and weekly (0.8%) while the frequency for specifically teaching phonics was 53% daily and 47% weekly. The most common method used to teach Reading was sounding out words (37.1%), followed by reciting words (19.4%), reading as a group or pair (18.6%), teacher reading to learners (11.3%), other (7.0%) and lastly memorizing (5.6%). Teaching and learning materials are essential to a teacher in order to effectively teach initial reading and this is in line with literature as (UN, 1994) indicates that teaching and learning materials enhance effective teaching and learning. The analysis showed that teachers did not organize the classroom to suit the teaching of Reading (34.3%), most teachers failed to create a good Reading teaching and learning environment (33.3%) and most teachers failed to organize learners into reading groups (32.4%). During the class observation and teachers' interviews, 68.2% of teachers did not display learners' work and flashcards, word cards and posters on the wall to help build or raise learners' reading levels. This may be due to the fact that Grade 1 classrooms were also used by other learners due to inadequate classroom space in some schools. According to study results, teachers used the following resources to teach: chalkboard (98.6%), textbooks (69.7%), and learners' exercise books (70.2%) while the least used or available resources were supplementary reading resources (14.2%), manipulatives or real objects (17.4%) and worksheets (16.1%). From the study, the six sampled schools did not have adequate and

appropriate teaching and learning materials for initial Reading instruction and the absence of adequate and appropriate teaching and learning materials deprived learners the opportunity to learn effectively. According to (MESVTEE 2013): "The success of any literacy programme also depends on the availability of suitable reading materials to sustain and reinforce literacy skills".

4.2 Teachers Reading Knowledge and Linguistic Skills in Zambian Languages and Their Effect on Initial Reading Instruction

Baseline results indicated that teachers had adequate linguistic knowledge and linguistic skills in Zambian Languages being the initial language of instruction and also, they had a fair amount of knowledge on how to teach Reading as evidenced by high scores on questions related to how much they knew about sounds. For example, over 75% of teachers showed considerable good knowledge in letter sounds, letter sound blending and formation of syllables   and   other requirements necessary to teach Reading. Despite this knowledge, some teachers failed to sound some letters properly (46.8%) while many teachers (76%) failed to successfully transfer knowledge to learners.

Table 4: Distribution of Teachers by Linguistic Knowledge and Linguistic Skills in Zambian Languages.

Teachers' linguistic skills and linguistic knowledge	Observed and not observed		
	Observed	Not observed	TOTAL
Teacher's knowledge on basic Zambian languages sounds or vowels	75%	25%	100%
Teacher's knowledge on Zambian languages consonants	70.5%	29.5%	100%
Teacher's knowledge on Zambian languages consonant clusters	40%	60%	100%
Teacher's knowledge on Zambian languages short and long syllables	55%	45%	100%
Teacher's knowledge on syllables	85%	15%	100%
Teacher's knowledge on sounds	76.5%	23.5%	100%
Teacher's knowledge on proper sounding of some letters	46.8%	53.2%	100%
Teacher's knowledge on identifying letters	83.5%	16.5%	100%
Teacher's knowledge on letter sounding	81.5%	18.5%	100%
Teacher's knowledge on matching sounds	40.5%	59.5%	100%
Teacher's knowledge on correct letter name	89.5%	10.5%	100%
Teacher's knowledge on formation of syllables	76.2%	23.8%	100%
Teacher's knowledge on blending different letter sounds into syllables and words	59.7% 59.7%	40.3%	100% 100%

Teacher's knowledge on teaching sounds	89.5%	10.5%	100%
Teacher's methodology in lesson delivery	40.4%	59.6%	100%
Teacher's transfer of knowledge to learners	24.0%	76.0%	100%

Literature reviewed that techniques carry out a method that is consistent with an approach whereas, an approach on the other hand, is a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language teaching and learning, (National Reading Panel, 2000). According to (MoE, 1996) "teaching methodologies need to place greater emphasis on self-initiated and self-sustained learning." Other studies (Allan, 2011) advised that the teacher should use methods that encourage learners to reflect, think and do rather than reproduce from rote learning. The common methods used in teaching initial Reading as reviewed by findings from this study were phonics, look and say, whole language, language experience and the syllabic approach. Above all, children learn more effectively if a teacher uses a variety of teaching methods and according to (Sampa, 2003): "before you choose a particular teaching method think about the knowledge and skills of your pupils, their ability and the kind of experience they can bring to the lessons." Teaching methods and techniques should be used according to learners' experience and must vary if effective teaching and learning has to be encouraged especially in Early Grade Reading. Overall Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) results reviewed that reading skills were low on the sub-tasks assessed among Grade 1 learners in the targeted schools. Very few learners in the sample could read with enough fluency to allow for real comprehension. The study also revealed learners who were unable to sound a single letter or read a single syllable or word or read words in a passage correctly (53.5%). Literature, showed that learners should be able to read early or by the end of the end of their first grade in Primary school if they were to succeed in their future education development (Bantu et al, 2012). It should be noted that learners' inability to read was therefore, a reflection on teachers' poor pedagogical practices.

4.3 Strategies to Support Learners with Reading Difficulties

Overall, strategies to support learners with reading difficulties were low on the six sub-tasks among Grade 1 learners in the four selected primary schools. Very few teachers in the sample could give support learners with enough reading difficulties to allow for real comprehension and fluency. Most teachers were unable to use direct teaching to small groups or scaffolding the learners or paired group or chorus reading or feedback for correct reading intervention. Table 5 below give more details concerning strategies teachers use to support learners with reading difficulties where, direct teaching to small groups, scaffolding the learners, paired group reading, chorus reading and feedback had the lowest mean scores.

Table 5: Distribution of Strategies in Support of Learning Difficulties Mean Scores Segregated by Zone

SUB TASK	Miluke Zone		Lwitikila Zone		Possible Total Score
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	
Direct teaching to small groups	1.6	1.0	1.0	0.95	5
Scaffolding the learners	0.7	0.65	0.3	0.2	5

Paired group reading	0.97	0.55	0.43	0.35	5
Chorus reading	1.97	1.5	2.1	1.5	5
Feedback	0.34	0.5	0.6	0.5	3
Reading comprehension	0.27	0.2	0.07	0.05	4
Listening comprehension	0.67	0.6	0.6	0.5	3

4. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that in primary schools, especially at early grade level, teachers' linguistic knowledge and linguistic skills are critical in teaching initial Reading. Further, teachers' pedagogical practices, use of teaching and learning materials, innovativeness and greater devotion of greater portion of teaching learners to read are essential in initial Reading instructions. Findings from the study showed that overall, learners did not have foundational skills in reading and results of the study clearly showed manifestation of low Reading linguistic skills in the initial language of instruction during class session which was as a result of inadequate and inconsistent practice in aspects like letter sounds and discrimination especially that of consonants. Lack of explicit awareness of the syllable posed difficulties in syllable identification and discrimination, distinction between sounds and syllables, syllables, word and sentence formations due to teachers' lack of phonological awareness and caused problems to teachers during class sessions. Most teachers showed or rather exhibited poor sounding and weak linguistic knowledge and linguistic skills specifically in letter sounding and letter decoding, identification of Zambian languages consonant clusters, letter mastery sounds, letter identification, letter sound matching, formation of long vowels from short vowels, identification and sounding of consonant clusters and many other linguistic aspects and there were inadequate and inappropriate teaching and learning materials, inappropriate teaching methods and inadequate internal and external teacher monitoring, inadequate CPD programmes and lack of teacher training in diagnostic assessments in reading so to identify learners with reading difficulties.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are actions that should be taken on the basis of the findings of this study:

- The teacher-pupil ratio must be reduced so as to enable individual attention especially when it comes to assisting pupils with reading difficulties. In this regard, government has to employ more teachers and build more schools.
- Government through the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders must provide more teaching and learning materials in schools where these items are lacking.
- Head teachers should organize teacher training through CPD on methods of conducting diagnostic assessments in reading so that they are able to identify learners with reading difficulties.
- Teachers should have adequate and consistent practice in letter sounds and discrimination syllable identification and discrimination and other phonological and linguistic aspects.
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is needed in specific instructional strategies and methods focused on Reading.

- Zambia should insist on value addition to raw materials, empower citizens to own industries and mines as well as exploration of minerals and should set up industries for the production of machinery, equipment and spare parts to be used in industry.

- Administrators should encourage team work in the production of teaching and learning materials at school and zone levels as well as hold teaching and learning aids exhibitions at these levels so as to inculcate the spirit of innovativeness in teachers.

- Head teachers should ensure that teachers are encouraged to familiarize themselves with Zambian languages orthography, letters, sounds, syllables, vowels and consonants and should at all times, use local official language in the teaching of initial Reading.

- Schools should focus on phonic based approach to the teaching of Early Grade Reading as well as re-introducing phonics based approaches to early grade classrooms to enhance early reading acquisition. Further, schools should roll out phonic-based interventions in every early grade (Grades 1-4) classrooms.

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