

**ASSESSING PRACTICES TEACHERS USE TO TEACH READING
COMPREHENSION IN COMMUNITY DAY SECONDARY SCHOOL: THE
CASE OF TWO ZOMBA URBAN CDSSs**

**M.Ed (CURRICULUM AND TEACHING STUDIES-LANGUAGE EDUCATION)
THESIS**

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**UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI
CHANCELLOR COLLEGE**

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By

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work which has not been submitted to any other institution for similar purposes. Where other people's work has been used, acknowledgements have been made.

Full Legal Name

Signature

Date

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis represents the student's own work and effort and has been submitted with our approval.

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my two sons; Given and Yamikani Nyalaya whose challenges in literacy acquisition aroused my interest in literacy.

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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension in English language is a challenge among learners at all levels of education in Malawi. The government of Malawi through MoEST with support from USAID and DFID is implementing a National Reading Programme (NRP) and English Language Proficiency (EPL). NRP and ELP aim at improving literacy skills through building teachers' capacity to teach literacy skills at primary school. ELP programme is a result of studies that have shown that Early Grade reading (EGRA) alone has not helped much in improving literacy acquisition in primary school learners in Malawi (MIE, 2017). However, the focus has been on the basic level of education and little has been done in order to improve learners' reading comprehension abilities at secondary school level. At secondary school level, the problem of low reading comprehension is more pronounced in Community Day Secondary Schools as compared to Conventional Secondary Schools. The current study aimed at assessing the practices that teachers of English use when teaching reading comprehension in CDSSs. This was done to find out if the practices are appropriate for enhancing learners' reading comprehension abilities. A qualitative research design was employed and the schools involved in the study were selected using convenient sampling while the respondents were selected using purposive sampling. The sample comprised two schools, three teachers and forty learners. Data was generated using qualitative methods. Data was analysed qualitatively using thematic approach. The study found that much as the teachers were using the recommended practices which would enhance learners reading comprehension abilities, but, the practices were not used effectively and were inadequate. The study also showed that teachers encountered many challenges in the use of different practices and the solutions the teachers used did not help to enhance learners' reading comprehension abilities to a larger extent. The study concludes that unless teachers start to use the practices effectively and that the challenges they encounter are minimised, learners reading comprehension abilities in the two schools studied will continue to be low.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BLT	Beginning Literacy Programme
CDSS	Community Day Secondary School
CSS	Conventional Secondary School
DEC	Distance Education Centre
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Approach
ELP	English Language Proficiency
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
IEQ	Improving Education Quality
JCE	Junior Certificate of Education
LAC	Language Across Curriculum
MANEB	Malawi National Examination Board
MCC	Malawi Correspondence college
MCDE	Malawi College of Distance Education
MESA	Malawi Education Support Activity
MIE	Malawi Institute of Education
MGDS	Malawi Growth Development Strategy
MoEST	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
NESP	National Education Sector Plan
NRP:	National Reading Programme
ODSS:	Open Day Secondary School
PCAR	Primary Curriculum Assessment Reform

PIF	Policy Investment Framework
PSLCE	Primary School Leaving Certificate of Education
SACMEQ	Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
STR	Student Teacher Ratio
SQTR	Student Qualified Teacher Ratio
USAD	United States Agency for International Development
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Chapter overview

Learners' reading comprehension abilities in English at secondary school level in Malawi is unsatisfactory (MANEB English Paper 111 Chief Examiners Reports, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). However, this problem of low reading comprehension abilities is more pronounced in Community Day Secondary Schools as compared to Conventional secondary schools (MANEB English chief examiners reports, 2012, 2013, 2014 & 2015). This is a worrisome situation considering the fact that majority of learners who have access to secondary school in Malawi learn in CDSSs as compared to CSSs and reading comprehension is key to learners' academic success and functioning effectively in a literate society like Malawi. There is research evidence that one of the key factors that cause low reading comprehension among learners is teachers' practices (Chilimanjira, 2012; Bruwer, 2013). This is why this study assessed practices that teachers use when teaching reading comprehension in CDSSs in Zomba Urban. This chapter provides the general background to the problem, statement of the problem, purpose and significance of the study.

1.2 General background to the problem

This section provides a general background to the problem of low reading abilities of learners in CDSSs. The section first provides a general background to secondary education system in Malawi followed by reasons for studying learners reading comprehension in English and concludes by providing a rationale for studying teachers' practices.

1.2.1 General background to secondary education system in Malawi

Secondary education in Malawi begins after eight years of primary education. Secondary education aims at equipping learners with appropriate skills, knowledge, values and attitudes for survival in a complex and sophisticated socio-economic and political spheres of the world (MoEST, 2013).

Secondary education in Malawi is divided into two sections: junior secondary comprising Forms one and two and senior secondary, comprising Forms three and four. Up to 2015, at the end of junior secondary, students sat for public examinations. Successful candidates were awarded a Junior Certificate of Education (JCE) which was the basis for enrollment into senior secondary education. However, government in 2015 abolished the JCE due to its minimal value. In Form four, students sit for the Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) examinations and the results open a wide range of opportunities for both employment and further education for those who pass.

Secondary schools in Malawi are categorised into two: government and private secondary schools. Government secondary schools are further divided into Conventional Secondary Schools (CSSs) (which include government Day Secondary Schools, Boarding Secondary Schools and Grant Aided schools), Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSSs) and Open Day Secondary Schools (ODSs) (Chimombo, Meke, Zeitlyn&Lewin, 2014). Learners who sit for Primary School Leaving Certificate of Education (PSLCE) examinations are selected either to CSSs or CDSS. ODSs cater for learners who are not selected to CSSs or CDSSs and those who want to re-sit for MSCE. The ODSs are run in CSSs.

There is a big difference between CSSs and CDSSs. The CSSs are best government schools that offer high quality education, they are more selective and expensive unlike the CDSSs which offer low quality education, are least selective and the cheapest (Chimombo et al., 2014). Since CSSs are the first to select on the national merit list and the CDSSs are the last, it implies that the CSSs select the best students and the CDSSs select the low performing learners. The CSSs have good quality infrastructure, highly qualified teachers, good class size and reasonable teaching and learning materials unlike CDSSs which are characterized by poor infrastructure, unqualified teachers and inadequate teaching and learning materials (Chimombo et al., 2014). The great difference between CSSs and CDSSs exists due to how CDSSs were introduced in Malawi.

When Malawi got independence in 1964 there was need for educated Malawians to fill the vacant positions left by the colonial administrators in the middle and senior

management positions. Therefore, the post- independent government embarked on a programme to expand secondary education and as a result government built at least one government secondary school in each district by 1982. In addition, government introduced Distance Education Centres (DECs) under Malawi Correspondence College (MCC) in 1964. DECs were run as part of the Malawi College of Distance Education (MCDE) which replaced the MCC in 1980. The aims of MCDE were to provide: (1) an alternative for the secondary school age population who could not be accommodated by the formal system; and (2) primary school teachers upgrading courses. The MCDE depended on three main modes of instruction, namely; printed materials, radio broadcasts and audio tapes available at designated MCDE centers (Republic of Malawi Appraisal report for support to CDSS, 2001).

In the late 1990s, the introduction of free Primary education policy increased the demand for secondary education. In order to cater for the growing demand for secondary education, the DECs were converted to CDSSs in 1998. The intention was to upgrade DECs with a view to having a unified national system of secondary school education provision. However, this was done haphazardly as government was not well prepared to handle this major change. There were no physical infrastructures, teaching and learning materials, as well as qualified teachers. As a result, CDSSs were poorly constructed by communities and many operated in borrowed primary school premises. Classes were overcrowded and were staffed by primary school teachers who were not prepared to teach in secondary school, and there were inadequate teaching and learning materials (Republic

of Malawi Appraisal report for support to CDSS, 2001). This resulted in poor quality of education in CDSSs as compared to the CSSs.

The Government of Malawi with support from donors and communities has been committed to improve the quality of education in CDSSs. For example, government embarked on the project of upgrading unqualified teachers. Which resulted in an improvement in student qualified teacher ratio (SQTR) from 70:1 to 46:1 and Student teacher ratio (STR) improved from 27:1 to 22:1 (EMIS, 2013). Apart from improving the quality of teachers, government has been providing teaching and learning resources, rehabilitating old and building new school blocks and libraries in some CDSS (Republic of Malawi Appraisal report for support to CDSS, 2001). Despite government efforts in improving the quality of education offered in CDSSs, learners' performance is still poor when compared to CSSs as evidenced by poor results of MSCE at national level.

This is a worrisome situation considering the fact that access to secondary education in Malawi is low for the transition rate from primary to secondary school is below 40% as table: 1 indicates.

Table 1: Primary to Secondary Transition Rates 2010 -2014

Primary to Secondary Transition Rates 2010-2014									
	Enrollment for STD 8			New Entrants in Form 1			Transition Rates		
	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
2010	106,972	95,064	202,036	35,803	31,030	66,833	33	33	33
2011	115,673	101,324	216,997	34,599	30,423	65,022	30	30	30
2012	120,860	103,560	224,420	35,794	31,497	67,291	30	30	30
2013	130,260	111,756	242,016	41,611	37,791	79,402	32	34	33
2014	135,189	114,819	250,008	46,879	42,894	89,773	35	37	36

Source: EMIS, 2015

In addition to low transition rate of primary to secondary, the majority of the few learners who have access to secondary education learn in CDSSs and not CSSs since CDSSs are in majority compared to CSSs. According to education sector performance report (MoEST, 2015), out of 1,094 public secondary schools in Malawi in 2014/15, 686 were CDSSs, 148 were CSS and 260 were ODSSs. This means that CDSSs deserve immediate attention in order to improve the quality of education offered. Thus, although access to secondary education in Malawi remains a major problem, it is imperative to make sure that the few learners who have access to education have access to quality education and succeed at the end of the secondary education since secondary education is key to socio-economic development as well as political development of a nation. It is in a bid to improve quality education offered in CDSSs that this study aimed at assessing the

practices teachers of English use in teaching reading comprehension in CDSSs in Malawi. The next subsection explains why the study focused on reading comprehension in English out of the many literacy skills and languages taught at secondary school level.

1.2.2 Why studying the teaching of reading comprehension in English

English is the most widely spoken and written language in the world. It is used by almost eight hundred million people (Farris, 2001). It is a language of government, law, education and industry in many countries.

In Malawi English is the official language of the country, a language of government and commerce, a means of acquiring information in the scientific technological world, and a determinant factor in the Malawian job market (Kayambazinthu, 1999). Academically, English is the Medium of Instruction (MoI) in schools starting from standard five and above (Kayambazinthu, 1999). In addition, Malawi follows an 8.4.4 education system, which consists of eight years of primary, four years of secondary and four years of tertiary education. Transition from one level to the other depends on passing of English during National Examinations (NESP, 2014) and these tests require a high level of English in terms of text comprehension and writing. Literacy skills in English create the opportunities for success in all subjects since most of the textbooks are written in English.

Apart from being a key to academic excellence, literacy in English is also critical for functioning effectively in a literate society like Malawi. In Malawi, reading and writing

practices are entirely in English. For example, the daily Newspapers are all in English. This means that information on HIV/AIDS, gender, democracy, environment and population are disseminated in English. Therefore, for someone to take an active role in the society must be able to read and write in English. Literacy in English is also essential for occupational purposes. Almost all forms of employment require people who are proficient in English language (Kayambazinthu, 1999).

Looking at the importance of English language in Malawi, it is essential that learners become proficient in the language as early as possible. However, this is not the case, as the acquisition of literacy skills in English in Malawi is a challenge. The literacy levels of learners in Malawi is below average. A number of studies carried at both local and regional level attest to this. For example; Milner, Chimombo, and Mchikoma (2001), MESA (2004), Anza, Harping, Cohen and Leu (2004), Kishindo, Susuwele, Ndalama (2005), Chimombo (2006) and Chilimanjira (2012).

Studies conducted on the teaching of literacy at the basic level of education, that is, primary and pre-school level have revealed factors that contribute to learners low literacy levels. For instance, Kadzamira (1997) cited in Chilimanjira (2012) identified the introduction of free primary education as a contributing factor to low quality of education (including literacy). Banda, Mchikoma and Chimombo's (2001) study found that low literacy levels in primary schools is due to lack of reading materials, overcrowding in classrooms and majority of teachers not being competent in English. Stuart (2002) found the problem of teaching approaches used as another factor contributing to learners' low

literacy levels. Kholowa (2007) found poor literacy background before formal education as a contributing factor to learners' failure to acquire literacy skills.

The Government of Malawi has been committed to improve literacy standards in the country. This is reflected in policies such as Policy and Investment Framework (2001), the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2002), the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (2006) and National Education Sector Plan (2014). In addition, the government of Malawi has been implementing a number of projects in collaboration with donors to help in improving literacy levels. For example, Improving Educational Quality (IEQ), Quality Education through Supporting Teachers (QUEST), Language Across the Curriculum (LAC), Malawi Break Through to Literacy (MBTL), Beginning Literacy Programme (BLP), Early Grade Reading Approach (EGRA), Reading Through Writing (RTW), the introduction of Primary Curriculum Assessment Reform (PCAR) and currently Government is implementing National Reading Programme (NRP) in standard one to four, and English Language Proficiency (ELP) programme in upper classes.

Despite governments' efforts to improve learners' literacy abilities, learners' literacy abilities do not improve to a greater extent. Evaluation reports on some of the interventions on improving learners' literacy in Malawi primary school and some studies show that the interventions do not improve learners' literacy levels to a greater extent due to several challenges that pre- school and primary education in Malawi experiences. For example, the evaluators of USAID projects in Malawi noted that "the challenges in the primary education are so immerse that even excellent projects such as GABLE,

IEQ/Malawi and QUEST have had only minor impact on quality” (Anza, Harping, Cohen & Leu, 2004, p. 23). A study by Chilimanjira (2012) on the extent to which PCAR improves the acquisition of literacy skills in learners showed that the new curriculum does not help much in improving learners literacy skills as literacy levels of learners studied were still low. This implies that many learners graduate from primary school without acquiring the necessary skills that can help them to excel in secondary education. At secondary level very little is done to improve learners’ literacy skills as most of the intervention end at primary level.

Out of the many literacy skills, the study focused on reading comprehension for a number of reasons. The first reason is that reading comprehension in English is key to academic excellence. The ability to read with comprehension in English creates the opportunity for success in all subjects since most of the textbooks are written in English. A learner with well-developed reading abilities is able to read the content of any subject (Winch, 2001). Reading with comprehension helps learners to understand obscure concepts, since in writing some concepts become clear as they may be well explained. In addition, the ability to read helps learners to improve in other skills. For example, writing and critical thinking (1CAS, 2002).

The second reason for studying reading comprehension is that studies conducted worldwide show that many learners struggle to comprehend what they read. For example, a final report of the European Union high level group of experts on literacy (2012) as

cited in Ofsted (2013), shows that there is literacy crisis that affects every country in Europe as follows:

If smart growth is about knowledge and innovation, investment in literacy skills is a prerequisite for achieving such growth... Our world is dominated by the written word, both online and in print. This means we can only contribute and participate actively if we can read and write sufficiently well. But, each year, hundreds of thousands of children start their secondary school two years behind in reading; some leave even further behind their peers... (p. 7).

In Africa, a study carried out under the Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ I, II and III) also shows the problem of low reading standards among learners in different countries in Africa (Milner et al., 2001; Chimombo, Chimuzu, Kunje & Mchikoma 2005; Milner, Chizumu, Chimombo, Mulera, Kunje & Matale, 2011).

In Malawi, some studies attest to the problem of low reading abilities among learners. For example, a baseline survey conducted by Malawi Education Support Activity to assess the literacy and mathematics situation among standards 3 and 6 learners revealed a very big gap in the acquisition of literacy skills. Generally, the majority of learners in both classes displayed non-mastery of reading, comprehension and writing skills for their class level. For example, only 2% of boys and 1% of girls displayed mastery in literacy. However, the majority (99%) of those that managed to read showed no comprehension skills. Thus, they read without understanding what they were reading. Similar results were obtained from the senior class, standard 6. In this class, only 40% of the learners

could read with mastery. Although this could be considered as a success if compared to the standard 3 learners, the worrisome news, however, was that 80% of the learners could not comprehend what they were able to read (MESA, 2004).

Chimombo et al. (2005) analysis of studies carried out under the Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) showed that the overall literacy performance of pupils in both SACMEQ I and SACMEQ II were very poor and that the performance in reading significantly decreased. Many pupils were not reaching the minimum skills and the number of pupils not doing so bad significantly increased between SACMEQ I and II. The studies were carried out in fifteen African countries, and Malawi was the least in both literacy and numeracy. Although SACMEQ III report showed that there was improvement at educational division level, the performance of pupils in both reading and mathematics between 2000 and 2007 remained below the SACMEQ mean score of 500 (Milner et al., 2011).

The other reason for studying reading comprehension is that, there has been a study on the teaching of writing in CDSSs by Mbano (2004) which has showed how teachers teach writing in CDSSs and the challenges they encounter. However, no study has been conducted in the area of reading comprehension despite reading comprehension being a challenge for many learners.

1.2.3 Rationale for studying teachers practices

Out of the many factors that contribute to learners low reading comprehension abilities, this study focused on the teachers' practices for a number of reasons. The first reason is that reading with comprehension is a complex task since it is influenced by many factors and processes. Some of the factors are linguistic knowledge of the reader (phonology, semantic, syntax), content and background knowledge, ability to use strategies that enhance reading comprehension, and reader's interest on the topic. In addition, comprehension involves cognitive processes. Literature shows that for learners to be able to comprehend the text they read, there is need for explicit instruction in comprehension skills. For example, instruction that enhance vocabulary, conceptual knowledge as well as systematic teaching of strategies (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998).

The second reason for studying teachers' practices is that Malawi National Examination Board (MANEB) chief examiners reports for JCE and MSCE English recognises teachers' practices as one of the factors that can help to improve learners low comprehension abilities. For example, MANEB chief examiners report for MSCE English paper 111, each and every year emphasises on the need for teachers to use practices that enhance learners' reading comprehension abilities. Some of the teachers' practices they recommend are: developing a reading culture in students so that issues such as word spellings are improved; encouraging students to use libraries to intensify the reading culture and vocabulary; encouraging students to be resourceful and read widely, giving learners as much practice as possible in writing summaries and note making (MANEB English chief examiners reports: 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014).

Furthermore, in Malawi, schools represent almost the only environment in which children can learn English because there are no English speaking models and no English literacy development materials in an average Malawian child's environment (Banda, Mchikoma, Chimombo, Milner, 2001; Waliwa, 2017). Therefore the practices that teachers use have a greater role in improving learners reading comprehension abilities.

Lastly, although teacher practices have been identified as necessary for enhancing learners' comprehension, studies conducted elsewhere and in Malawi's primary schools showed that many teachers did not teach reading comprehension or spent little time on teaching reading comprehension. Studies have also shown that teachers use practices that hinder acquisition of comprehension skills and sometimes they use right practices but they use them ineffectively and as such hinder comprehension. For example, Pressley (1999, p. 95), as cited in Bruwer (2013), pointed out that "little instruction is occurring in the classroom and 'most teachers seem to operate by the theory that learners can learn how to comprehend by simply doing massive reading'" (p.20). A study in the United Kingdom by Harrison (2004), as cited in Bruwer (2013), states that comprehension is taught less frequently as a set of skills, some teachers use written comprehension exercises simply as time fillers.

Chilimanjira (2012) cited a number of studies that show that teachers practices negatively affects classroom interactions which is one of the factors that contribute to learners' inability to read with comprehension. For example, Paris and Naughton (2010), as cited in Chilimanjira (2012), assert that engaged reading which occurs in interactive

environments is threatened by proceduralised instruction that is common in most classrooms. Such kind of instruction does not provide room for learner engagement with reading or writing materials. On the same, Hardman and Abd-Kadir (2010), as cited in Chilimanjira (2012), after reviewing literature on teacher talk in sub-Saharan Africa concludes as follows:

Overall, the classroom discourse in Sub-Saharan African classrooms was found to be highly ritualised, creating a semblance of curriculum coverage, knowledge and understanding. The most prevalent methods of teaching were teacher explanation punctuated by a question and answer approach, choral responses, pupils copying from the chalkboard, written exercises and teachers marking pupil work. (Hardman and Abd-Kadir, 2010 p. 259, as cited in Chilimanjira 2012).

These studies agree with the findings of some studies conducted in Malawi primary schools. For example, Johnson, Hayter and Broadfoot (2000) in their comparative study between Malawi and Sri Lanka observed similar problems. They reported that:

In Malawi the classroom activities observed showed that there was very little teaching of reading. Where reading activity was observed, teachers read to the whole class from text books. Listening to individual children read from fiction and non-fiction readers occurred in a small percentage of the lessons observed, although in most of the occasions observed, teachers were engaged in another activity, usually, marking exercise books, while children were called to the front to read. The rest of the class was asked to follow the text in their books. Only in a very few of the lessons observed did the teachers take an active role in reading. They tended to read ‘with’ children and helped them when they encountered difficult words. Even here though, the teacher was more concerned with correcting reading

errors, rather than helping the child enjoy the book by drawing attention to characters, pictures, print and so on (p.17).

Williams (2002), Stuart and Kunje (2002) as cited in Mmela (2006) also agree that the practices teachers use when teaching reading are a contributing factor for learners' low reading abilities. They pointed out that teachers use inappropriate approaches in teaching reading in English. MESA (2004) found teacher-centred classroom activities as another factor that hinder acquisition of literacy skills among learners in primary schools.

There is poor reading comprehension of learners in CDSSs despite its teaching but not much has been done to find out why this is the case. Looking at the literature presented, the questions that arise are: "Is it possible that the situation in CDSSs in Malawi is the same as presented in the literature above? Are teachers in CDSSs spending little time in the teaching of reading comprehension and use practices that hinder reading comprehension of learners?" This study was carried out to find answers to these questions.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Many learners in Malawi graduate from primary school to secondary school without acquiring the necessary reading comprehension skills that can help them to succeed in secondary education. This is due to the numerous challenges that primary school experience in Malawi (Ministry of Education, 2001). As a result, secondary school teachers have the task of improving the learners' reading proficiency so that they can reach the level which matches the academic demands of secondary school.

On the contrary, despite the teaching of reading comprehension, learners' reading comprehension abilities in CDSSs is poor as compared to their counterparts in CSSs (MANEB English Chief Examiners Reports, 2013, 2014, 2015). Although this is the case, not much has been done to find out why. Most of the studies that have been conducted on the teaching of reading comprehension and interventions focused on the basic level of education. Therefore, it was necessary that a study of this nature be carried out to find out why there is poor reading comprehension abilities among learners in CDSSs despite its teaching.

In order to find out why learners display poor comprehension abilities in English in CDSSs, this study assessed the practices that teachers of English used when teaching reading comprehension. Teachers' practices were selected out of the many possible factors because studies conducted at the primary school level feature teachers' practices as one of the major factors contributing to low levels of literacy skills among learners (MESA, 2004; Lipenga, 2011). In addition, schools represent almost the only environment in which children can learn English because there are no English speaking models and no English literacy development materials in an average Malawian child's environment (Banda et al., 2001; Waliwa, 2017). Furthermore, reading comprehension is a complex cognitive task that is influenced by a number of factors, as such it requires a competent person to model the cognitive process that are involved in comprehension. That competent person being none other than the teacher, that was why the study focused on teachers' practices.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The study aimed at assessing practices which teachers of English use in teaching reading comprehension in community day secondary schools in order to establish their appropriateness for enhancing learners' comprehension abilities in CDSSs.

1.5 Research questions

The study was guided by the following main and specific research questions.

1.5.1 Main research question

Are the practices that teachers of English use in teaching reading comprehension in CDSSs appropriate for enhancing learners' reading comprehension abilities?

1.5.2 Specific research questions

1. What practices do teachers use when teaching reading comprehension in CDSS?
2. How do teachers use the practices?
3. What challenges do they encounter in the teaching of reading comprehension?
4. How do they overcome the challenges?

1.6 Significance of the study

The findings of this study will add knowledge on teaching of reading comprehension in CDSSs thereby filling the knowledge gap which currently exists in the literature. The study will also serve as a springboard for future studies on improving learners' reading proficiency in secondary schools.

The findings will also inform the Ministry of Education- Science and Technology (MoEST) and the Malawi Institute of Education (MIE) on the practices teachers use

when teaching reading in CDSSs in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. This will help the policy makers and curriculum developers respectively on what interventions to be made in order to make sure that the teaching of reading in CDSSs enhances learners' reading comprehension abilities.

Furthermore, the findings will help language teacher educators on how to prepare teachers for the teaching of reading comprehension in CDSSs. To the practitioners, the results will help them know the best practices they can use to enhance learners' reading comprehension abilities.

1.7 Definition of terms

In this study, there are a number of terms that are key to the study and should be understood in the context of the study. Some of the terms and their definitions are as follows:

- **Assessment:** Assessment is the act or process of gathering information about something in order to better understand their strengths and weaknesses (Gillet & Temple, 2000). In this study the word assessment will refer to the process of gathering information about teacher's practices in order to better understand their weaknesses and strengths in the teaching of reading comprehension.
- **Teachers practices:** Teachers Practices are what teachers actually do inside and outside the classroom in order to improve learners' comprehension skills (Gillet & Temple, 2000). For example, the strategies, methods, activities, assignments.

- **Reading proficiency:** Refers to the ability to understand and learn from a grade level text (Torgesen, Houston & Rissman, 2007). In this study reading proficiency refers to the ability to comprehend a grade level text.
- **Reading comprehension:** Reading comprehension is a complex process that has been understood and explained in a number of ways. In this study reading comprehension is a process in which readers construct meaning by interacting with text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience, information in the text, and the stance the reader takes in relationship to the text (Pardo, 2002). The comprehension of language includes linguistic knowledge, background knowledge, making inferences.
- **Linguistic knowledge:** It is the knowledge of the language system; its phonology, semantics (including morphology and word meaning), and syntax, or grammatical structure (Beck & McKeown, 1991).
- **Background knowledge:** This is knowledge of how environments operate that affects what is comprehended as well as how much is comprehended (Goodman, 1967).
- **Inferencing:** Refers to comprehension beyond the word level, requiring the reader to activate what is known and to use it in integrating meaning across sentences, drawing conclusions about causes, relationships, and social meaning. (Pressley, 2000)
- **Explicit instruction:** It is a systematic, structured and direct approach of teaching (Archer & Hughes, 2011).

1.8 Chapter summary

The chapter has presented the general background to the problem by discussing secondary education system in Malawi, the importance of good reading comprehension skills in English and the role of teacher's practices in enhancing learners reading comprehension abilities in CDSSs in Malawi. Furthermore, the chapter has stated the problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions and significance of the study. Finally, the chapter has explained definition of terms used in the study. The next chapter presents review of related literature and theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents a review of literature on teachers' practices that enhance learners' reading comprehension at secondary school level. It presents scholarly work and research findings. The chapter also discusses challenges that hinder enhancement of learners' reading comprehension abilities and solutions used to minimise. The chapter begins with defining reading comprehension.

2.2 Definition of reading comprehension

Comprehension is a complex process that has been understood and explained in a number of ways. According to schema theory, reading comprehension is an interactive process between the text and the reader's prior background knowledge (Rumelhart, 1980). The RAND Reading Study Group (2002) stated that comprehension is "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language" (p. 11). Duke (2003) added "navigation" and "critique" to her definition because she believed that readers actually move through the text, finding their way, evaluating the accuracy of the text to see if it fits their personal agenda, and finally arriving at a self-selected location. Pardo (2002) states that a common definition for

teachers might be that comprehension is a process in which readers construct meaning by interacting with text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience, information in the text, and the stance the reader takes in relationship to the text. The different definitions demonstrate that there are many interpretations of what it means to comprehend a text. The teachers' understanding of comprehension influences his or her choice of practices to use when teaching reading comprehension. The next section presents the practices that enhance reading comprehension.

2.3 Practices that enhance reading comprehension at secondary school level

Literature shows that there are some teacher's practices which enhance learners' reading comprehension at secondary school level. Some of these practices are discussed in the following subsections. The practices discussed are: assessing learners' reading comprehension; scaffolding before, during and after reading; teaching reading strategies; providing sufficient opportunities for reading practice; guiding students on how to choose reading materials and authentic tasks; teaching vocabulary; providing opportunities for wide reading; mediation and providing opportunities for social interaction.

2.3.1 Assessing learners' reading comprehension

Johnston (1985), as cited in Peterson et al. (2000), states that before teachers think of the practices to use they must first assess learners to know their reading problems. Gillet and Temple (2000) states that following the diagnostic instruction principles, the effective teacher begins instruction by assessing the reader to determine strengths and weaknesses without the labels of disability deficit. To provide appropriate support, teachers should know the history of a student's reading difficulties, the interventions made, and the

instruction missed. For example, a teacher can look for evidence of the development of reading proficiency such as phonemic knowledge, background knowledge and strategy knowledge at primary grades. The teacher uses the readers' strengths to approach and build the areas of difficulty. Assessment follows the instruction and in both summative and formative, teachers assess and scaffold students' comprehension at three junctures: before, during and after reading.

2.3.2 Scaffold before, during and after reading

The term scaffold is a Vygotskian metaphor for teacher support of a learner through dialogue, questioning, conversation, and nonverbal modelling, in which the learner attempts literary tasks that could not be done without that assistance. Since the 1970's, a number of specific strategies for building reader comprehension skills were identified and validated. These strategies centre on the notion of providing struggling readers with supports as they learn how to read. Strategies such as questioning, discussion, and writing serves as supports or scaffolds for struggling readers. Teachers should model and students should practice: relating prior knowledge to text and making predictions about the content before reading, interpreting the meaning by constructing mental images and summaries during reading, and asking questions and seeking clarification after reading (Pressley, 2000). Roehler and Cantlon (1997) identified five types of scaffolding. These are: offering explanations, inviting student participation, verifying and clarifying students understanding, modelling of desired behaviour and inviting students to contribute for recovering through an issue or problem. Additional effective scaffolds, especially for

struggling readers are to address the emotional aspects of learning and make learning benefits explicit (Brophy 1999).

2.3.3 Teaching learners reading strategies

Reading strategies are effective tools for comprehending (Pressley, 1999 as cited in Bruwer 2013). They present procedural rather than declarative knowledge, stressing “how” as much more than “what”. Strategies help readers to engage with the text, to monitor their comprehension and fix it when it has failed. Pardo (2002) states that low achieving adolescent readers improve their comprehension performance when they learn to apply strategies. Rather than a single strategy applied in a reading class, secondary students need to have a repertoire of strategies, that they learn and apply them in many contexts and not just reading in class.

Pardo (2002) presents seven general strategies known to promote adolescents’ reading comprehension. The strategies are ones that proficient readers use regularly and across a wide variety of texts. The first strategy identified by Pardo is planning and monitoring. This involves controlling one’s mental activities; it is metacognitive in nature, centering about readers’ awareness and control of their comprehension. When engaged with this strategy, youth are taught planning skills; how to preview texts and how to set a purpose for reading and make predictions. They are also taught how to clarify ideas by using fix-up strategies and how to clarify vocabulary by using context clues and other word-level fix-up strategies.

The second strategy is determining the importance of a text. This involves identifying essential ideas and information. This is the ability to separate the wheat from the chaff in text. Youth are taught how to identify stated and implied main ideas, how to summarise texts, and how to note the personal relevance of ideas and information (Pardo, 2002).

The third strategy is asking questions. This involves interrogating texts for a variety of purposes, such as checking one's understanding, querying the author about his or her writing, and discerning relationships among ideas and information within a text (Pardo, 2002).

The fourth strategy is Making Inferences. This involves linking parts of texts that authors did not link explicitly. Using what one already knows to form links across sentences and paragraphs. Often known as "reading between the lines" (Pardo, 2002, p. 17).

In addition to making inferences is making Connections: using what is known to enrich authors' meanings; taking what has been learned from one's own life experiences, other texts, and cultural and global matters to deepen understandings of what the author presents. Otherwise known as "reading beyond the lines" (Pardo, 2002, p.18).

Another strategy is synthesising. This is putting together ideas from multiple sources; deciding how ideas go together in a way that is new; figuring out how what one is reading and learning fits together in a way not thought of before. Youth are taught how to

draw conclusions, form generalizations, and make comparisons across texts (Pardo, 2002).

The last strategy propounded by Pardo (2002) is Visualising: forming sensory and emotional images of textual contents, especially visual images. This strategy also includes an aspect specifically for teens who do not consider themselves to be readers: the strategy of recognising that one is having an emotional response while reading and to identify what the author did to invoke that response.

This set of seven strategies is based on the reading comprehension strategy research that has been reviewed at length since the early 1990s (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams & Baker, 2001; Pearson, Roehler, Dole & Duffy, 1992) and especially the research that some researchers (such as Gaskins, 1998) have observed that struggling readers need supporting strategic reading, in orchestrating comprehension, and in applying reading across contexts; forms of support remedial programs usually lack.

To learn a strategic approach to reading struggling readers typically must be taught how, why and when to use it. An effective way to teach reading strategy is to follow the Pearson Gallagher “Gradual release of Responsibility” model. This involves teachers modeling through think aloud. Sharing their self- talk about how they strategically approach reading, making their expert thinking visible to struggling readers. Guided practice in the strategy follows the modelling as students attempt the reading strategy in context- of support from peers with the teacher evaluating its effectiveness, adapting it as

needed and generating a consensus as its effectiveness. Cooper (1997) as cited in Bruwer (2013) warns that struggling readers do not need to spend time learning strategies in isolation, which they tend not to connect with real reading and generally fail to apply.

2.3.4 Providing sufficient opportunities for reading practice

As struggling readers, learning strategic reading need frequent, sustained periods of reading connected prose (Hansen, 1987). For example, being provided with opportunities to read uninterruptedly from a book, newspaper, magazine or whole piece of text for at least 15 to 20 minutes. However, literature shows that independent silent reading conducted without guidance or feedback, is not sufficient to build reading improvement (National Reading Panel of America, 2000). This suggests that students also need the opportunities to talk about ideas in the texts, in order to move comprehension beyond the word level (Pressley, 2000). Another practice that is not recommended for improving reading comprehension at secondary school level, is the popular “Round Robin” reading in which student read aloud in turn to the whole class from a common textbook. Not only do students find its purpose unclear, it can also be an embarrassing experience for adolescent readers who lack fluency. It promotes the perception that reading is word pronunciation more than comprehension (Woos & Nichols, 2000). For learners to improve their comprehension abilities teachers therefore need to provide sufficient reading opportunities to learners and must guide them.

2.3.5 Guiding students on how to choose reading materials and authentic tasks

Struggling readers need to know how to choose books for themselves. Block (1999) cited in Bruwer (2013) advocates working with students to help them identify a book that is

comfortable for them to read independently, and then asking them to use it as a template for choosing similar books on their own. Students who choose to read for personal purpose, likely will be more motivated to accomplish that task. For adolescent that purpose will likely addresses their fundamental questions. “Who am I?” “Where and how do I fit?” and “What can or should I do with my life?” Block (1999) cited in Bruwer (2013) states that, students should be helped to articulate their personal learning and reading goals at the outset of any instructional session. This goal directed reading provides purpose and direction, which is inherently motivational and engaging. Teachers should assist learners in the choice of reading materials to make sure that the materials are interesting and authentic.

2.3.6 Vocabulary instruction

There is a strong relationship between vocabulary and comprehension. Word study and explicit instruction that includes orthography, morphology, and spelling can strengthen the effects of vocabulary learning (Templeton & Morris, 2000). Teachers should provide learners with opportunities for active learning of words, for making personal connections, and for exposure to words in multiple sources (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2000). All students benefit from learning about how language works: the cultural connotations of words, changes in spelling over time, and dialect rules and consistencies. Literature shows that providing learners with opportunities for social interaction can also help struggling second language learners acquire linguistic knowledge of English. Additionally, a sight word vocabulary of high frequency words (estimates range from 2,000 to 10,000 words) prepares them to learn English from context (Grabe, 1991). However, not all vocabulary

instruction increases reading comprehension. According to some studies, many widely used methods generally fail to increase comprehension (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986). For example, Templeton and Morris (2000) state that traditional instruction in word definitions has little effect in improving learner's comprehension.

2.3.7 Providing opportunities for wide reading

Wide reading, typically avoided by the struggling secondary reader, builds background knowledge and can be encouraged by allowing self-selection of personally interesting and relevant texts. Wide reading also helps learners to have repeated exposures to words in varying contexts (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2000). The challenge of using this practice in Malawian contexts apart from inadequate resources is that teachers and learners are lazy. Teachers themselves do not read as such it becomes difficult for them to encourage learners to read widely. For this practice to enhance reading comprehension teachers in Malawi need to read widely and find ways to motivate their learners to read as well.

2.3.8 Mediation

Another practice that has been used widely in the past to assist struggling learners is remediation. Remediation refers to correcting or improving deficient skills in specific subjects (Gagen, 2007). In reading comprehension this means the change in instruction that helps remedy a weakness in the area of reading comprehension (Gagen, 2007). However, a consensus seems to be building among researchers that traditional reading remediation is insufficient beyond primary school level.

In their comprehensive review of the literature, Johnston and Allington (1991) concluded that remediation for reading comprehension beyond the primary grades generally has not been very effective in improving student reading performance. This is because associated with failure and adolescent readers feel embarrassed. Struggling readers are not helped when their reading materials are so simplified that the students miss out on complex content ideas. The lack of exposure to the content they are expected to know, just because they cannot read the information, widens the gap between these students and their classmates.

In their review, Klenk and Kibby (2000) concurred, calling for an end to the “remedy” metaphor. Instead, they proposed “mediational process” for both teachers and students (p. 681). Such an approach supports the Vygotskian notion of cursive zones of proximal development and the added consideration of reading contexts outside of school; such as home, church, and workplace—that are important for older readers. In Malawian context, mediation can be difficult to use because of lack of reading culture. Many people do not have books in their homes. Despite the problem of lack of books, mediation can still be used if schools would allow students to take books home and if teachers put to use the old syllabus books that lay idle in libraries or in the head teachers’ offices.

2.3.9 Opportunities for social interaction

Struggling readers benefit from paired reading and group work where they can tackle harder materials with support from their classmates. And more especially, they benefit from solid instruction in small group reading lessons, where comprehension,

interpretation, and personal connections are emphasized and skills are taught in context (Ormrod, 1999). Social interactions can be used in Malawian context and if used carefully they can save time and ease teacher's responsibility. The teacher can use learners with good comprehension abilities to assist their friends by giving them pair or group work assignments. However, the teacher has to explain the reasons behind those assignments so that the abled students should not write the work alone but should explain to their friends the strategies they use to comprehend a text (should model the process of comprehension). When carrying out the study, the researcher was interested to find out if teachers promote social interaction inside and outside classrooms and how they did that in order to understand the learners' low comprehension abilities.

The literature review has shown that there are a number of teacher's practices that can help enhance learners' comprehension abilities at secondary school. The literature has also shown how the practices can be used to enhance reading comprehension. Some of the practices mentioned are used by teachers in CDSS for example, assessment and pair or group work which gives opportunities for social interaction. Therefore, the researcher was interested to find out why there is still low comprehension abilities by observing how they are being used.

In conclusion, the reviewed literature helped the researcher in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the practices teachers used when teaching reading comprehension and at the end explaining if they are appropriate for enhancing learners' comprehension abilities.

2.4. Challenges in the teaching of reading comprehension in Malawi

Literature and research studies discussed in this section review some challenges that hinder facilitation of reading comprehension abilities of learners. The challenges to be discussed are: poor literacy environment, time constraints, dwindling of reading culture among learners and teachers, lack of parental support and lack of knowledge in teachers on how to teach reading comprehension.

2.4.1 Poor literacy environment

Literature and research show that rich literacy environment facilitate acquisition and improvement of learners literacy skill while poor literacy environment poses challenges in acquisition and improvement of the same. According to Armbruster and Osborn (2002), rich literacy environment refers to a classroom, school and home in which literacy is fostered and nurtured. It is an environment that offers learners the opportunity to engage in literacy activities. A rich literacy environment looks at a number of aspects. Some of the aspects are: a print rich and an interactive environment. The absence of the aspects mentioned characterise an environment as a poor literacy environment.

A study conducted by Chilimanjira (2012) on the extent to which PCAR facilitate acquisition of literacy skills showed that PCAR did not help to improve learners' literacy skills to a large extent. Some of the factors that contributed to this result were unavailability of reading materials, lack of access to the inadequate reading materials which were available in the school. Chilimanjira (2012) argued that reading is about print and no matter how hard, how good and how much reading is done to children they can

never become literate unless they themselves have the chance to interact with books and read.

Literature shows that learners improve their reading comprehension skills when given opportunity to interact with textbooks, teachers and fellow learners. The role of interactive environment in enhancing reading comprehension is also explained in social constructive theory of learning by Levi Vygotsky through the concept of Zone of Proximal Development. ZPD explains how learners advance in learning through support they receive from teachers and other capable learners. Teacher to learner or learner to learner support are possible in interactive classrooms (Hayter & Broadfoot, 2000). However, findings from different research studies on the teaching literacy show that there is no or little interaction taking place in literacy classes. One of the challenges that has been identified in use of interactive activities in literacy lessons is large class sizes. For example, Chilimanjira (2012) study reported that lack of interaction in the lessons which she observed and attributed the lack of interaction due to large number of learners in class. Chilimanjira (2012, p. 144) reports that; “the teachers were unable to engage learners in guided reading due to high pupil teacher ratio.”

Lipenga's (2011) study on teachers' practices for developing learners' speech proficiency identified use of teacher centered methodologies as one of the factors that hindered improvement in learners' fluency in English language.

2.4.2 Inadequate time spent on reading comprehension

Time spent with literacy materials play a role on how a learner acquires reading and writing skills. For example, it is argued that learners should have repeated exposure to text. This helps to ensure that the learners build vocabulary quickly since the more they are exposed to a word the higher the chances of the word becoming their active vocabulary. According to the findings of studies by National Reading Panel of America (2000), there is a positive correlation between time spent on reading and learners performance in reading. However, several studies conducted on the teaching of literacy depict limited time allocated for the teaching of literacy as one of the challenges that hinder effective teaching of literacy. A study by Mmela (2006) showed that teachers declined using supplementary reading materials which were discovered in the school storeroom because they believed that using the supplementary materials was going to waste their time and they would not be able to finish reading the English Curriculum books prescribed for their classes. Chilimanjira's (2012) study also showed that limited time allocated for literacy was a challenge in the teaching of reading. The teachers in Chilimanjira's study claimed that limited time for literacy classes hinder them from using other resources such as supplementary reading resources, content area books in literacy lessons.

2.4.3 Dwindling of the reading culture

Another challenge in the teaching of reading comprehension is the dwindling of reading culture in both teachers and learners. Literature shows that many teachers do not read widely as such they also fail to motivate learners to read (Mmela, 2006; Bruwer, 2013).

Lack of reading culture is escalated with lack of access to reading materials on the side of the learners.

2.4.4 Lack of parental support

Literature shows that there is a positive correlation between parental support and learners' success in literacy skills. Studies show that children who are successful in reading and writing at school tend to come from homes in which literacy is valued, have plenty of print materials readily, and academic achievement is encouraged. For example, research conducted by Morrow (1993) in United States of America on learners who were able to read without direction from teachers revealed that their parents were involved in the children's literacy activities. The research revealed that "parents read to them (the children), help them read and write and the parents themselves read a wide variety of text materials; magazines, newspapers, work-related information. The parents own or borrow books" (Morrow, 1993, p. 43).

Despite the fact that parental involvement in learners' literacy activities facilitates learners' success in literacy skills, studies conducted in Malawi reveal that many parents are not involved in the development of their learners' literacy skills. The whole responsibility is left in the hands of teachers and this poses a challenge in development of learners literacy skills as learners spend much of their time at home than at school. Some of the factors that prevent parents from assisting learners in their literacy development are poor literacy environments in most Malawian homes and parents who are illiterate themselves. A study by Waliwa (2017) showed that even in homes where parents have

reading materials and are literate they do not assist their learners with literacy activities, they hide reading materials to avoid getting damaged and do not read when their children are around to avoid disturbances from the children. These kinds of practices hinder learners' literacy acquisition and goes against the social constructive theory of learning which advocates for scaffolding and use of cultural tools in learners learning.

2.4.5 Inadequate knowledge of teachers on how to teach reading comprehension

Research shows that teachers lack knowledge on how to teach reading comprehension effectively. Some studies have shown that instead of teaching learners reading comprehension teachers focus on assessing comprehension. Classes are dominated by reading passages with the purpose of answering comprehension questions and not helping learners with skills on how they can comprehend text. Studies on the teaching of reading strategies to learners features teachers' lack of knowledge on reading comprehension strategies that enhance reading comprehension as a challenge in the teaching of reading comprehension (Bruwer, 2013; Pennington, 2009; Hagaman & Reid, 2008). For example, Bruwer's (2013) study on teachers' and learners' knowledge and application of reading comprehension strategies in selected primary schools in Khomas region reveals that out of the six reading comprehension strategies recommended for enhancing learners' reading comprehension abilities teachers involved in the study were aware of only two strategies and those are the strategies learners were acquainted with.

The challenges discussed helped the researcher in conducting the study in identifying challenges that the teachers in the two CDSSs encountered in the teaching of reading comprehension. After identifying the challenges the researcher was interested to find out how the teachers dealt with the challenges when teaching.

2.5 Solutions used to overcome challenges in the teaching of reading comprehension

Literature presents a number of ways on how to overcome challenges in the teaching of reading comprehension. Some of the ways are: using learner centred methods of teaching, conducting continuous professional developments, improving literacy environment and promoting adult literacy.

2.5.1 Promoting the use of learner centred methods of teaching

One of the ways identified for overcoming some of the challenges in the teaching of reading comprehension is for MoEST to encourage teachers to be using learner centred approach of teaching. This is because studies have revealed that the poor literacy levels in Malawi is because teachers pay lip services to the use of LCA of teaching (Lipenga, 2011). Ministry of Education Science and Technology reformed its education curricula from teacher centred to learner centred in order to improve the quality of education in Malawi. The expectation in the use of learner centred approach in the teaching of English language is to produce learners who have sufficient knowledge and skills to enable them function effectively in English (Kabula, 2011). However, the situation on the ground is

different as teachers continue using teacher centred approaches (Stuart 2002 & Lipenga, 2011).

2.5.2 Conducting continuous professional developments

The second solution is conducting continuous professional developments (CPDs). Professional development is defined as any teacher's learning activity whose objective is to improve teaching practice, which ultimately improves learning in the classroom (MMela, 2006). Lack of expertise on the part of teachers is detrimental in any education system. Teachers are entrusted with the responsibility of facilitating learning and they can do so only if they are knowledgeable and comfortable with what they are doing.

A number of studies conducted on the teaching of literacy recommends conducting continuous professional developments as one of the solutions to the problem of low literacy (Chilimanjira, 2012; Bruwer, 2013). For example, the study by Chilimanjira (2012) recommended that MoEST through MIE should come up with a working but cost effective school based CPD model and that MoEST should make deliberate effort to complement school based CPD model with In-Service Education and Trainings (INSET) at national level. This solution agrees with a social cultural theory which states that children need support of knowledgeable adults to advance in their construction of knowledge. In schools teachers are the competent adults therefore, it is imperative that the teachers should be competent in content, methodologies and classroom management when teaching reading comprehension.

2.5.3. Improving literacy environment in the schools

In addition, literature and research have shown that rich literacy environment facilitates acquisition and improvement of learners' literacy skill while poor literacy environment poses challenges in acquisition and improvement of the same. For example, a study by Chilimanjira (2012) revealed that acquisition of literacy skills in schools studied was a challenge because learning was taking place in poor literacy environments. One of the recommendation made in her study was that government should continue working on improving literacy environment in schools by providing more teachers, building enough classroom blocks, providing enough materials for literacy development and giving professional support to teachers.

2.5.4 Promoting adult literacy

Another solution to the challenges in the teaching of literacy as identified by Chilimanjira (2012) is to promote adult literacy. Chilimanjira (2012) argues that parents should be sensitised on the need for their own literacy and be encouraged to enroll in adult literacy schools. The parents may not necessarily achieve literacy levels that could enable them to offer direct help to the children, but if the children see their parents reading or writing they would be interested to read along with them.

2.6. Views of the reading process

There are a number of views that explain the reading process. This subsection discusses the views that explain the reading process.

2.6.1 The traditional or bottom up view of the reading process

The traditional or bottom-up view of reading holds that the text possesses coded meaning or information in the form of graphic symbols which the reader has to decode. Reading comprehension in this view is basically a matter of decoding a series of written symbols into their aural (sound) equivalents in the quest for making sense of the text. Novice readers are believed to acquire a set of hierarchically ordered sub-skills that sequentially build toward comprehension ability. Knowledge of sound-graphic symbol or letter relationship, knowledge of syllables, then to that of whole words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and ultimately whole texts (Nunan, 1991). This view of reading comprehension states that meaning resides in the text and the reader has to reproduce/decode meaning that was put down by the writer. This means a reader is a passive recipient of information from the text. Thus, to get meaning from the text the reader has to identify or read the printed material from its smallest to the largest linguistic units.

In this view, failure to comprehend a non-defective communication is always attributed to language-specific deficit; perhaps a word was not in the reader's vocabulary, a rule of grammar was misapplied, an anaphoric cohesive tie was improperly coordinated, and so on. Instructors who uphold bottom-up processing view when teaching comprehension focus on how learners extract information from the printed page, and on whether or not learners deal with letters and words in a systematic fashion. The focus is never the meaning of the whole text, but detailed linguistic forms; from phoneme to lexical, syntactic levels. Therefore, the goals of the bottom-up approach are automatic word

recognition and rapid reading rate. To reach the aims, explicit instruction in phonics and spellings is crucial; learners should not be “word-bound” in bottom-up processing.

Scholars have criticised this view of reading due to its over reliance on the text, however, the knowledge of linguistic features is necessary for comprehension to take place. I think this view of reading is the most appropriate view in the teaching of reading in the infant section of primary education (beginners). However, it cannot be ruled out in the teaching of reading comprehension at CDSS because teachers might have learners who fail to read fluently and this might contribute to poor comprehension of text.

2.6.2 Top down view of the reading process

The Top down view of reading states that readers bring a great deal of knowledge, expectations, assumptions and questions to the text, and given a basic understanding of vocabulary they continue to read as long as the text confirms their expectations (Goodman, 1967). The top down theory of reading argues that readers fit the text into knowledge (cultural, syntactic, linguistic, and historical) they already possess, then check back when new or unexpected information appears (Aebersold & Field, 1997). In this view of reading the reader plays an active role of creating meaning from all possible sources and not just decoding meaning from the text.

A teacher who holds top-down view of the reading process works on activating learners’ prior knowledge in order to enhance comprehension. This view of reading is criticised for

neglecting linguistic knowledge which is also vital for comprehension and this brings us to the third view of reading.

2.6.3 Interactive view of the reading process

The third view of the reading process is called the Interactive view/school of reading process. This school views reading as involving both the Bottom- up and Top- down processes. That is both processes occur either alternately or at the same time (Aebersold & Field, 1997). The process of reading comprehension therefore, is the interaction of the reader and the text, depending on a particular situation (type of text and readers background knowledge, language proficiency level, motivation, strategy use and culturally shaped beliefs about reading).

The interactive view of reading has been well recognised and researched. Most experts accept some version of the interactive model as the best description of the reading process. For example, Carell (1988) asserted that “reading is a receptive language process...in that it starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning which the reader constructs” (p12). Such a cognitive view of reading puts both the text and reader at the heart of the reading process. In reading, automatic word decoding is the prerequisite for meaning-construction to come; afterwards, readers decode a message that a writer has encoded into a text. An accurate, successful word-decoding upgrades readers to the stage of connecting information with prior knowledge, so as to reach textual meanings/comprehension eventually (Bramford & Day, 2004).

Reading comprehension should be the result of readers' decoding language to thought. Kern (2000) defined reading as a dynamic, interactive process which produced meanings and derived discourse from texts. Reading is an active, constructive, and meaning-making process. Therefore, reading comprehension is generally associated with the ability to read, and to construct meanings as well (Fielding & Pearson, 1994). Iser (1980) developed the cognitive view of reading to reader-response theory. In reading process, readers stand at the center; readers' prior knowledge and textual reading interact. Meanings are thus eventually incited in this way. There is a dynamic relationship between reader and text, in which reading is a creative process rather than textual decoding only. The reader is therefore granted an authorial role. Therefore, the interactive model for teaching and reading refers to the dynamic relationship between bottom-up and top-down, between decoding and interpretation, and between text and reader.

I think the interactive view of reading is the appropriate view to inform teaching of reading in CDSSs since it combines both the top down and bottom up views of reading. I make this claim bearing in mind that acquisition of literacy skills is a challenge in primary schools in Malawi. Many learners graduate from primary schools to secondary schools without mastering basic reading skills and secondary education demands learners to encode meaning from the text and to construct meaning beyond the text. For this to happen, learners need both the linguistic knowledge and the content and background knowledge. However, good linguistic, content and background knowledge alone is not enough for learners in CDSSs to be able to comprehend texts they read and this takes us to the fourth model of reading.

2.6.4 Metacognitive view of the reading process

Metacognitive is another view of the reading process. Metacognition has been defined as the knowledge of one's own thinking processes and strategies, and the ability to consciously reflect and act on the knowledge of cognition to modify those processes and strategies (Baker & Brown, 1984). This view moves away from the bottom-up and top-down debate and suggests that what matters is not whether the reader is relying more on the text or on his/her background knowledge but rather the reader's knowledge or understanding of the purposes of his reading and the effective use of the reading strategies at his or her disposal. Thus, metacognition involves a conscious realization on the part of the reader as to why, what, and how he or she is reading and makes necessary adjustments to achieve the goals that were set for reading. Readers consciously make social and cognitive assessments of their reading and search for the most appropriate reading strategies that will improve their comprehension. Klein et al. (1991) identifies some strategies that readers who fall into the category of the metacognitive view possess and utilise. These have been discussed in details in the section of practices that enhance reading comprehension.

The foregoing discussion shows that reading is a complex cognitive process that cannot be explained using one view since inability to comprehend a text can be caused by different problems in different learners (one view cannot fit all learners and all situations of reading). Therefore, this study adopts the interactive and metacognitive views of reading as the best views that explain the process of reading comprehension together.

These two views present the process of comprehension for different people depending on a particular situation (type of text, readers background knowledge, language proficiency level, motivation, strategy use and culturally shaped beliefs about reading). Teachers need to be aware of both views of reading and when learners have comprehension problems the teacher has to assess the root cause of the learners' inability to comprehend because some problems could be due to lack of linguistic knowledge, lack of background knowledge or failure to use appropriate reading strategies.

The interactive and the metacognitive views fit well with the teaching and learning context of CDSSs in Malawi. As stated in the statement of the problem that learners graduate from primary to secondary without attaining the basic comprehension skills that can help them to excel in secondary education due to the numerous challenges that the primary education sector face. Therefore, some of the learners' comprehension problems in CDSSs might have their roots in linguistic aspects of the language, background knowledge of the text and failure to use appropriate strategies that correspond with the purpose of reading. As such, sticking to one view can hinder acquisition of comprehension skills of some learners in the class, as such teachers are supposed to know all the two views of reading. The knowledge of the views of reading will assist the researcher in assessing the practices that teachers use in teaching comprehension to see if their practices address the different sources of poor reading comprehension in learners as indicated in the two views.

2.7 Theoretical framework

The study was guided by a constructivism theory of learning by Levi Vygotsky (1896-1934) known as social cultural theory of learning. Constructivist theory of learning emphasises the learners' critical role in constructing meaning from already existing knowledge (Omrod, 1999). The social-cultural theory explains how children learn and advance in their learning.

According to the social cultural theory, children learn language through social interaction with adults or other children and also through the use of cultural tools. The theory explains how the child advances in learning through the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Griffith et al., 2008). The Zone of Proximal Development refers to "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 85-86, as cited in Hamilton & Ghattalla, 1994, p. 265). The ZPD explains the role that adults play in the cognitive development of the child. Children have the ability to perform according to their level of development but have the potential to develop further through assistance from others. The support that adults give to help a child to reach a potential level of development is called scaffolding (Hamilton and Ghattalla, 1994). Examples of scaffolding activities are verbal prompts, rephrasing, demonstrations, gestures and many more. Scaffolding can be reduced when learners take over guidance and learning can be said to have taken place.

Vygotsky's Social-cultural theory is an appropriate theory to this study, as Malawi has adopted the Outcome Based Education (OBE) model for its secondary education (MoEST, 2013). In OBE models, the curriculum materials and classroom practices are learner centred. Learner centred approaches entails that learners are at the centre of learning experiences. In OBE learners are involved in activities that would facilitate discovery of knowledge. The learners also collaborate with others in the learning process. Thus the learners construct meaning and knowledge in collaboration with others. Such teachers are supposed to use practices that help learners to construct knowledge and practices that promote collaboration. The theory therefore, formed the basis of the study as the researcher wanted to assess the practices the teachers use in teaching reading comprehension.

The implications of this theory to the teaching of reading comprehension are as follows: Firstly, learners must be involved in the activities that are intended to improve their comprehension abilities as the constructivist theory emphasises on the learners' critical role in knowledge construction and the activities must relate to learners already existing knowledge. At secondary school level, the already existing knowledge on comprehension can be the knowledge the learners acquired in primary school and their everyday experiences.

Secondly, for learners to improve their comprehension abilities, there must be interaction between the teacher and the learners and learners themselves. This promotes collaboration upon which comprehension skills can be acquired and improved. Children's

ZPD's are not uniform and may differ from activity to activity; hence they may assume different expert-novice relationships at various tasks in their interactions. Teachers should provide opportunities for learners to interact meaningfully. Students can work in groups to share knowledge with each other with the teacher alongside facilitating, scaffolding, pointing students in the proper directions, and assisting learners in negotiating meaning. Teachers have also a crucial role in providing support to learners so that they can improve their comprehension abilities. For example, modelling appropriate behaviours, supporting learners in selection of reading materials, teaching learners reading strategies, providing list of vocabulary and background/content information, and putting learners in reading groups).

Lastly, for learners' comprehension abilities to improve, teachers should make sure that learners have access to cultural tools. For example, teachers should give learners opportunities to participate in completing tasks mediated by artifacts used in real life situations such as books, visuals, audios or audiovisuals to support the development of comprehension skills. The teacher should plan instruction that will keep the learning as close to actual practice as possible (Hung and Nichani, 2002).

2.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has reviewed literature related to the teaching of reading comprehension. Specifically the chapter has defined reading comprehension. The chapter has also discussed practices that enhance learners reading comprehension abilities at secondary school level. Furthermore, the chapter has presented challenges in the teaching of reading

comprehension. Lastly, the chapter has provided a theoretical framework that guided the study. The next chapter discusses the research design and methodology.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter overview

The chapter describes the research design and methodology that were used in this study. The chapter in particular describes the sampling, data generation and analysis techniques employed in the study. The chapter further presents how credibility and trustworthiness of the results were ensured, how data was managed and limitations of the study and how they were dealt with.

3.2 Research approach

The study used qualitative research approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p.3) describe qualitative research as:

A situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their

natural settings attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Cresswell (1994) states that qualitative research approach is used when a researcher wants to explore, explain and describe an issue in detail. Since the study aimed at exploring learners' low comprehension abilities in CDSS by assessing the practices teachers of English use when teaching comprehension, the qualitative approach was ideal for the study.

3.3 Research design

According to Durrhein (2006, p. 34), “a research design is a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research.” A study design is determined by a number of interrelated aspects of the study such as why it is being undertaken, the theoretical stance or paradigm that informs the study, the context in which the study is carried out and the techniques to be employed in the study.

The type of qualitative research design that was used in this study was a case study. According to Merriam (1988) and Yin (1989) as quoted in Creswell (1994):

a case study is a research design in which the researcher explores a single entity or phenomenal “the case” bounded by time and activity (a program, event, process, institution or social group) and collects detailed

information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period of time” (Creswell 1994, p. 12).

Fraenkel and Wallen (2000, p. 537) further explain that “in a case study much can be learned from studying just one individual, one classroom, one school or one school district” A case study was ideal for this study because the purpose of the study was to assess the practices that teachers of English use when teaching reading comprehension in community day secondary school in order to explain why learners have low comprehension abilities. Therefore, there was need for a thorough assessment of teachers’ practices. This included finding out from teachers and learners the strategies, methods, assessments and activities the teachers use when teaching reading comprehension, why they use them, their strengths and weaknesses and how best they can improve their practices to enhance learners’ comprehension. In addition, doing actual observation on what goes on in the classroom.

A case study was ideal for this type of study because “in a case study, you examine attitudes, behaviours, and the environment all together in a natural setting, to give an understanding of how things work” (Kane, 1995, p. 175). In this case using a case study allowed the researcher to have an in depth analysis of the issue under study since the case study allows the use of multiple sources for data collection (Fraenkel&Wallen, 2000; Drever, 1995). Besides a case study was ideal considering time and other constraints since the study was conducted within the time limits of the course programme and limited financial resources at the disposal of the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher did not intend to generalise the findings, rather, aimed at studying a single case whose findings

could be applied to similar cases as is the case with case studies. As a result, the researcher does “not aim to cover whole population and extract common factors, but to provide an in-depth picture of a particular area of the educational world” (Drever, 1995, p. 7) in this case the two CDSSs in Zomba Urban.

3.4 Research methodology

Bryman (2012), defines a research methodology as a technique used in a study for sampling, data generation and data analysis. This study used qualitative research methods. The qualitative methods for sampling were purposive and convenient, for data generation were: semi- structured interviews, focus group discussions, observations and document analysis and data was analysed using thematic approach. These have been discussed in detail under sections 3.5, section 3.6 and section 3.7 respectively.

3.5 Population and sampling

Population refers to the larger group to which one hopes to apply findings of a study (Cohen et al., 2007). Factors such as expense, time, and accessibility frequently prevent researchers from gaining information from the whole population. Therefore, researchers often need to be able to obtain data from a smaller group or subset of the total population in such a way that the knowledge gained is representative of the total population (however defined) under study. This smaller group or subset is the sample. This section looks at the population of interest, the sample and the sampling procedures that were used in the study.

3.5.1 Population of interest

The population of interest for this study was community Day Secondary Schools in Zomba Urban. Zomba Urban has three CDSSs, out of these three CDSSs, one was used for piloting and two were used for the actually study. The two CDSSs used in the actually study were selected using convenient sampling. In convenient sampling, a sample is selected on the basis of its accessibility (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). Therefore, the two CDSSs were selected because were close to where the researcher lived.

3.5.2 Sampling

There are several sampling techniques that are used in research. Choice of sampling technique depends on the purpose of the study and usefulness of the sample and convenience of the sample to the researcher (Cohen et al., 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). A number of sampling techniques were employed in the selection of samples at different levels of the study.

3.5.2.1 Selection of Schools

Two CDSSs were involved in the study and convenience sampling technique was used to select the two schools. Convenience sampling is where the researcher chooses participants available by virtue of its accessibility (Bryman, 2012). The two CDSSs used in the study were selected because they were close to the researcher's area of residence. The research used two schools in order to compare the practices that teachers in the two schools were using since the school had different characteristics. One was located just close to the city, majority of the learners came from within the school campus and most of them their parents were educated and the school had no library. The other school

though located in urban but majority of learners came from rural area and walk long distance to school, majority of the learners' parents were uneducated and the school had a library.

3.5.2.2 Selection of forms

The researcher used purposive sampling to select Forms to be involved in the study. Purposive sampling technique is a sampling technique in which the researcher selects a sample that will provide the required data (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000, p. 114). Bryman (2012) defines purposive sampling as a selection of individuals and sites for the study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and a central phenomenon in the study. The researcher purposively selected one junior and one senior forms. These were purposively selected in order to check if the teachers from these two different levels use the same or different practices and if the challenges they face are the same. The researcher purposively selected form one and form four classes from each school. The researcher believes that these were the right forms to be used because secondary education is divided into two Junior and senior and the two forms represented these two levels. Form one was selected because it is the entry point of secondary education, and form four is the exit form for secondary education.

3.5.2.3 Selection of teachers

The researcher purposively selected teachers who teach form one and four and were qualified to teach at secondary school level. The right qualification for a secondary

school teacher, according to Malawi standards, is someone who has a diploma, degree in education or university certificate of education.

3.5.2.4 Selection of learners

The selection of learners was done using purposive sampling technique. The researcher purposively selected all learners in the sampled forms to be involved in the observations. Observing all learners in the selected classes made the observation natural since they were done in the natural context of teaching and learning. Then the researcher with the help of the class teacher selected ten learners from each form to take part in the focus group discussions. The learners were selected based on their performance. The focus group discussions included top, average and low performers. Each form had its own FGDs. There were four FGDs, two from each school.

3.6 Data generation techniques

Data was generated using observation, semi- structured oral interview, focus group discussions and document analysis.

3.6.1 Semi-structured oral interviews

Semi-structured oral interview is a type of interview where there is no standardized form. The interviewer has an interview guide which serves as an agenda for the interview but does not have predetermined answers (Drever, 1995). The advantage that a semi-structured oral interview has over the other forms of interviews and techniques is that the interviewee” can answer at some length in his or her own words and the interviewer

responds by using prompts, probes, and follow up questions to get the interviewee to clarify or expand on the answer” (Drever, 1995, p. 3).

This type of interview was ideal to this study because the study intended to find out from teachers the practices that they use when teaching comprehension, why they use such practices, the challenges they meet and how they deal with them. In addition, semi-structured interview was an ideal data generation technique because the researcher did not give the interviewee predetermined answers. This was good considering the fact that people tend to tick an answer because it has been provided or tended to select the one they fill is more correct than others and not because they use it.

The semi-structured interviews were used to generate data from teachers. There was one to one interview with the teachers at the beginning of the research that took almost thirty minutes and short interviews at the end of each lesson observation, in total the researcher conducted three main interviews and sixteen short interviews. There were three main interviews instead of four because at school B it was the same teacher who was responsible for teaching form one and four. The first set of interviews were conducted prior to lesson observations for the purpose of obtaining a general impression of the topic under study. The second set of interviews were done after lesson observations to check accuracy, and to verify or to refute the impression researcher gained through observation in order to reduce biasness and get the teacher’s perspective. One challenge that the researcher experienced with the use of this technique was that teachers were dishonest. Teachers explained things that they do not do in their classrooms just to impress the

researcher. This challenge was dealt with through the use of other techniques of generating data where the researcher was able to cross check what the teachers said with what actually happened in their classroom.

3.6.2 Observation

An observation is a data generation technique that involves the researcher watching, recording and analysing events of interest (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2001, p. 178). The distinctive feature of observation as a data generating technique is that it offers an investigator opportunity to gather “live data from naturally occurring social situations”(Cohen et al., 2007, p. 397) which provides the researcher with the opportunity to have “first hand experiences with informant, and can record information as it occurs” (Creswell, 1994, p. 150). Observation as data generation technique provides the context which is necessary for a deeper understanding of issues under study. The observation was chosen to provide deeper understanding on learners’ low comprehension abilities in CDSS by observing practices teachers used when teaching comprehension.

The observations were conducted in the classroom which was the natural context of teaching and learning. The non-participant observer role was assumed by the researcher in order to avoid interfering with classroom practices for fear of influencing findings of the study. The observations involved tape recording and taking down notes of the whole lesson. The tape recording was done in order to capture more details. Notes were taken down to be used as backup in cases where the voice of a learner or teacher was inaudible or in case something happened to the tape recorder.

The observations were semi-structured and the researcher used an observation schedule for recording observations. This guided the researcher on areas of focus in order to achieve uniformity in data generation. The researcher found the observations helpful because apart from observing what had been planned, the researcher had the chance to take note of other things that could have not been captured through the use of interviews and FGDs which had an impact on the learners' comprehension abilities. For example, the researcher was able to note that during silent reading activities some learners face in the opposite direction of the book which made reading impossible, some learners not taking an active role during group discussions, and teachers not supervising group activities.

The observations took a period of six weeks. The planned duration for observation was four weeks, one observation for each class per week. However, it was extended to six weeks because at school B the teacher was not teaching comprehension every week in form four. The length of observation depended on the comprehension periods for each class. At school A, for both forms it was forty minutes, single period. For school B, it was eighty minutes, double periods for both forms. Each teacher was observed four times, in total there were sixteen observations.

The sixteen observations yielded enough data for a deeper understanding of the problem and also the data was manageable for analysis within the period of study. The main challenge the researcher encountered in the use of observation as a data generating technique was that, the first lesson observed in all schools and classes learners were a bit

uncomfortable with the presence of a stranger in the classroom. This was noted as the classes were so quiet than normal and there was less participation. This challenge was dealt with by having a number of observations per class. The total number of observations were four per class.

3.6.3 Focus group discussions

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) technique was used with learners after classroom observations were completed. Ten learners were purposively sampled for the study from each class, and these were involved in the focus group discussion at each school. The aim of the focus group discussions was to find out from the learners the practices the teachers used when teaching reading comprehension and the challenges they encountered. FGDs was used for their convenience in terms of the time required. The researcher had little time to conduct one to one interviews with all the sampled learners. In addition, group interviews provided room for a wide range of responses as the participants had the chance of “challenging and extending their colleagues’ ideas and had the opportunities for introducing new ideas into the discussion” (Cohen et al., 2001, p. 287). Furthermore, FGD was also a flexible tool to use with learners. The learners felt empowered by their colleagues. Since the FGD consisted of learners of mixed abilities the researcher faced a problem where the capable learners were dominating and the less capable ones were shy to contribute once the more capable ones had explained. The researcher dealt with this problem by first directing the questions to the less capable learners.

3.6.4 Document analysis

The last data generating tool that was used is document analysis. This technique involves collection, review and analysis of various forms of text as a primary source of research data (O’Leary, 2004). The documents that were analysed in this study were: MANEB English chief examiners reports, Junior and senior English syllabi, teachers’ schemes of work, mark books and learners exercise books.

Accessing some of the documents and unreliable data in some documents were the challenges the researcher encountered in the use of this data generation technique. For example, access to chief examiners report was a challenge. The chief examiners’ reports are sent to schools every year but when the researcher went to school where she teaches she did not find them. It was reported that teachers did not return them after borrowing. When she asked a colleague from another school she got the same response that the reports were not available at their school. Then the researcher decided to access them through MANEB, this also took two weeks.

The researcher had difficulties to access teachers’ schemes of work as well because teachers involved in the study were unwilling to show them to the researcher. This was the case because what teachers wrote in the scheme of work was not usually what they were teaching in class. Two teachers reported that they write schemes of work for formality sake but that does not guide their teaching all the time as they are concerned with teaching examinable content. However, after explaining why the researcher was interested to see the schemes the teachers understood and released the schemes. The

researcher dealt with this challenge through triangulation of techniques. The researcher compared the data generated through document analysis with the one obtained through lesson observations. For example, the researcher compared what the teachers wrote in the schemes with what they actually taught in the classroom.

3.7 Data analysis

Data analysis involves organising, accounting for and explaining the data, making sense of data in terms of participant definition of situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 147). Data was analysed qualitatively using thematic approach. This involved: familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, ideas from the data, generating categories or patterns from the codes/ ideas, searching for themes from the categories or patterns, reviewing themes, defining and renaming themes and lastly reporting the results. In this case, data of different teachers, learners and documents from the two schools was analysed in relation to the research questions and upcoming themes and categories which answered the research questions. This was done in relation to literature reviewed in the study and theoretical framework used. Data analysis was a continuous process, starting from the first day of data generation. This was the case considering the huge volume of data associated with qualitative data (Cohen et al, 2007). Familiarising with data involved listening to the recorded data several times and transcribing the data. Thereafter, initial codes were generated then patterns were identified and reviewed.

Data analysis was not an easy task due to the volumes of data that was generated. However, the researcher overcame this problem by making sure that the generated data did not pile up. She made sure that each week she completed transcribing and analysing the data that was generated before another data generation.

3.8 Ethical consideration

“Ethics are about being clear about the nature of the agreement you have entered into with your research subjects or contacts” (Blaxter et al., 2007, p.158). It has been indicated that research of any level gives rise to a range of ethical issues around informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy (Blaxter et al., 2001; Cohen et al., 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). The researcher considered all ethical issues to ensure that the study did not violate subjects’ rights.

3.8.1 Informed consent

According to Diener and Crandall (1978) as cited in Cohen et al. (2007, p. 51), informed consent is the “procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions.” Before conducting the study, the researcher ensured that the participants understood what they would be involved in. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, intended outcomes and the value of the findings to them and to the nation as a whole. They were also informed on how data was going to be generated. There was no deception. The participants were given true information about the study. The participants were also made aware of their role in the study and that participation

was voluntary. Consent was also sought from the learners that were involved in the study. In the first place, surrogate parents (head teachers and class teachers) were informed about the learners' involvement in the study and what their role would be. This was done so that the authorities should give informed consent on behalf of the learners.

3.8.2 Confidentiality

Research literature encourages that participants should not be exposed to harm or danger of any kind; physical or psychological. This can, among other things, be achieved by not disclosing the identities of the subjects (Cohen et al., 2007; Fraenkel&Wallen, 2000; Blaxter et al., 2001). In this study confidentiality was ensured by keeping the participants anonymous. The schools and the teachers were coded. As a researcher, I was committed to protect the participants such that no names were used throughout the study.

3.8.3 Privacy

This refers to how private information or issues were handled during and after the research (Cohen et al., 2007). It is concerned with what information and how much a participant may be able to give out to a researcher (Blaxter et al., 2001; Drever, 1995). As already indicated, access into the schools and classrooms was done with permission. Schools are public places but they are protected and the people have their privacy too which has to be respected. The researcher obtained a letter of introduction from Chancellor College. Then used the letter to seek permission from Education Division Office before going into the schools. The EDM granted permission and wrote letters to the head teachers of the schools in question. Upon seeing the letter, the head teachers

from both schools welcomed me and informed the head of English department about the research. The HOD directed the researcher to the class teachers. The researcher explained to the teachers the purpose, what would be involved and their role in the study. Teachers agreed to take part in the study and arrangements were made on dates for interviews, observations and FGDS. No participant was forced to answer questions they felt uncomfortable with. Recording of data was done with participants' consent (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). The participants were informed that what they said would be recorded so that the researcher did not miss any information.

3.8.4 Anonymity

The participants' identity were concealed. No names have been used for the schools and teachers. Rather the schools and teachers were given codes such as A and B for schools and XYZ for teachers. Anonymity would ensure that the participants are unidentifiable and ensure them of confidentiality. The participants in the face- to face interview were asked to provide their names to the researcher in case there would be need for a follow up but their actual names were not used in the report.

3.9 Management of data

The data generated was properly organised and well kept. This helped the researcher to easily access and analyse the data. The audio data from the interviews, observations and focus group discussions was kept in the phone, in a folder in the computer and on a flash disc. The back-up interviews, observations and FGD forms were kept in a file and the

transcribed data was also kept in another file. Data was also managed by saving it into the researcher's email account.

3.10 Credibility and trustworthiness

Credibility and trustworthiness in research are terms that are concerned with acceptability of research findings. The terms seek to establish what could make the findings credible and trustworthy such that they can guarantee to be a reflection of what actually happens (Cohen et al., 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). In this study, the issues of credibility and trustworthiness were dealt with through triangulation, piloting, and use of critical friends.

3.10.1 Triangulation

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the study, the researcher used triangulation. Triangulation in this study refers to the use of various data generation techniques (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). As already stated under data generation techniques, the researcher used semi- structured interviews, observations, focus group discussions and document analysis. Using a number of instruments together helped in checking, verifying and refuting biased impressions made.

3.10.2 Piloting

Secondly, the researcher ensured credibility and trustworthiness through piloting. Piloting involves trying out techniques and methods to see how well they will work in practice in order to modify them accordingly (Blaxter et al., 2001). Before the study, the researcher piloted all the data generation instruments at one of the CDSSs in Zomba Urban. The

researcher found the piloting of the data generation instruments helpful because it was out of the piloting interviews with the teachers and the FGDS with the learners that the researcher decided to change some closed questions to open ended questions since the closed questions generated short answers and most of them were rhetorical.

3.10.3 Use of critical friends

In addition to triangulation and piloting, the researcher ensured creditability and trustworthiness through use of critical friends (Blaxter, et al., 2001). The researcher explained the purpose of the study to some colleagues at work who were later given the data generation tools to comment on, and after analysis they were also given the work to read and advice was given on different sections of the presentation. This helped the researcher to refine the work and come up with a good study.

3.11 Limitations of the study

The first limitation of the study was unwillingness of teachers to participate in the study. The teachers were unwilling to take part in the study for a number of reasons. The first reason was that people always want to be paid in order to take part in a research and they become unwilling to participate if there are no payments. The other reason was that teachers shun teaching comprehension. They think that teaching comprehension is time consuming and always opt to teach grammar and literature, especially with the form fours. For example, during the interviews with teacher Z at school B, the teacher explained that he does not teach comprehension frequently in form four because what matter in form four is drilling the learners for examinations since grades matter. During

observations, it was difficult for this teacher to follow the observation schedule. The researcher would go for lesson observation for comprehension just to discover that the teacher had changed and is teaching grammar. This happened on two occasions.

The researcher managed to overcome the limitations, firstly by informing the teachers the purpose and importance of the study and secondly by following the teachers' convenient time for observation. For example, with teacher Z the researcher instead of doing the four observations in four weeks, it took six weeks but at the end the researcher had the four observations as planned.

The last limitation was to do with the researcher. Being a language teacher who is aware of the practices used in the teaching of reading comprehension and the challenges that are faced in their implementation, she faced temptations of influencing the response of the participants. Despite this temptation, the researcher managed to overcome the temptation through bracketing and taking the position of non-participant observer.

3.12 Chapter summary

The chapter has described the research design and methodology that were used in the study. In particular the chapter has described the sampling, data generation and analysis techniques that were employed in the study. The chapter has also presented how credibility and trustworthiness of the study was ensured and how data was managed. Furthermore, the chapter has explained the limitations of the study and how they were dealt with. The next chapter presents and discusses research findings.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Chapter overview

The study aimed at assessing the practices that teachers of English use inside and outside classrooms when teaching reading comprehension in two CDSSs in Zomba Urban. This chapter provides analysis of the results and discussion. The presentation of the results and the discussion will be based on the four research questions that guided the study. These are: what practices teachers use when teaching reading comprehension, how they use the practices, what challenges they encounter in using the practices and how they overcome

the challenges. The chapter begins with a description of the research area in order to provide context to the findings.

4.2 Description of the research context

This section presents a description of the research context which includes the location of the two schools, literacy environment of the school, teacher qualification and duration of teaching experience.

4.2.1 Location of study area

The two CDSSs from which this study was conducted are found in Zomba district. Zomba is one of the districts found in the Southern Region of Malawi: In terms of education division, Zomba is found in the South Eastern Education Division (SEED). Schools are classified into urban and rural, and this study was conducted in Zomba urban. Zomba Urban had four CDSSs but one of the CDSSs was upgraded to CSS in 2015, remaining with three. Out of the three, one was used for pilot study and the remaining two were used for the main study. School A is located in the south eastern part of the city, some three to four miles away from the city centre. School B is located in the north eastern part of the city and is very close to the city centre and along the Zomba- Blantyre M1 road. Most of the learners that attend school A come from rural areas and walk long distances to school while most learners who attend school B live within the school campus.

4.2.2 School structures

At school A, there were four main building blocks and three small ones. The first main building block was administration block which encompassed the head teacher's office, deputy head teacher's office and staffroom. The second main structure was a library. Inside this building was a spacious room with few chairs and tables and a store room where books were kept. The library was not functioning during the time this study was conducted. Learners were not allowed to use the library as a way of protecting books which were being stolen by learners. There was no librarian at the school but one teacher was assigned to be issuing books to fellow teachers. The two other main buildings were classes, each block was divided into two classes. The three small buildings were toilets for teachers, female learners and male learners.

At school B, there were three main structures and three smaller ones. The first block at school B was composed of two classes; form two and form three. The second block was also semidetached, one side was form four class, the other class was used as an administration (that is, the same room was used as head teacher's office, bursar's office and staffroom). The third block was divided into three: head teacher's office which was not used as it was being renovated during the period of the study; the second room was used as a library. In this room which was used as a library there were desks, chairs and tables but no books. The last room was used as form one class. The first small building found at this school was used as a storeroom where books were kept and it was also used as a kitchen. Behind the storeroom there were flush toilets for teachers. The second small structures were female students' toilets and the last one was male students' toilets.

4.2.3 School literacy environment

School literacy environment looks at a number of aspects within the school that would facilitate the acquisition of literacy skills such as: availability of school library, reading materials and teachers (Chilimanjira, 2012). The following are the findings on the school literacy environment of the two schools studied.

4.2.3.1. Availability of school library

School A had a school library which was non-accessible to learners at the time of the study. Learners were not allowed to use the library as a way of protecting the books which were being stolen by learners. The library had few chairs and no shelves for keeping books. Books in the library were kept in the store room of the library. The school had no librarian. School B had no school library, books were kept in a store room which was also used as a kitchen. The books were kept in cartoons. There was a messenger who was responsible for issuing books to teachers and preparing tea. There was one classroom which was used as a study room but in the classroom there were no books. Learners who wanted to read would go to the study room with their notes or books that they brought from their homes.

4.2.3.2 Availability of reading materials

Both schools had inadequate prescribed books. It was reported in both schools that the situation of inadequate books was worse in the junior section due to the introduction of the new curriculum. Teacher X from school A, who was teaching form one complained

that they received only ten books against sixty learners. At school B, teacher Z reported having twenty six prescribed books against one hundred plus students in form one.

A look in the school library of school A and store room of school B showed that they had inadequate prescribed books but there was a reasonable number of books for the old curriculum and many books for the science department.

4.2.3.3 Learners access to books

The only time learners had access to books in both schools was during lesson time and study cycle time. Lesson observations showed that even during lessons not all learners had access to books since the prescribed books were inadequate. At both school A and B in form one, books were shared at an average ratio of 1: 6, and in form four at school A, it was 1:4, while at school B it was 1: 6.

In both schools teachers claimed that learners were allowed to borrow books but through subject teachers. However, most learners denied having access to take books home. Learners reported that there was a lot of favouritism in issuing of books by subject teachers as some students are denied access while others are given books frequently.

4.2.4 Teacher qualification and duration of teaching

Both teacher X and Y from school A had Diploma of Education obtained from Domasi College of education. Teacher X had been teaching English at secondary school for three years while teacher Y had been teaching for seven years. Teacher Z had Bachelors

Degree in Education obtained at Chancellor College and had been teaching English at secondary school for ten years.

4.3 Findings and discussion

This section presents results generated through classroom observation, focus group discussions with learners, one to one interviews with teachers and document analysis. The section is divided into four parts. The first part discusses practices teachers use when teaching reading comprehension. The second part discusses on how teachers used the practices. The third part presents the challenges which teachers faced when teaching reading comprehension and the last part discusses how teachers overcame the challenges.

4.3.1 Practices teachers used when teaching reading comprehension.

The researcher wanted to find out the practices teachers used when teaching reading comprehension in CDSSs. Table 2 summarises the practices used by the teachers in the two CDSSs and in two forms studied. The two schools used similar practices for forms one and four.

Table 2: Summary of findings on practices teachers used

Number	Practice
1	Assessing learners reading comprehension abilities
2	Teaching reading skills
3	Teaching reading comprehension strategies
4	Providing learners with opportunities to practice skills and to read widely
5	Supporting learners who have challenges in reading comprehension

Source: Researcher's analysed data, 2016

4.3.1.1 Assessing learners reading comprehension abilities

One of the practices that all the teachers in this study used was assessment. During interviews with teachers all the teachers claimed that one of the practices they use when teaching reading comprehension is assessment. It was confirmed during lesson observations, FGDs with learners and document analysis that teachers really used assessment as one of the practices for teaching reading comprehension. The teachers reported that they assess their learners reading comprehension in order to know their reading comprehension abilities and reading problems. Teachers assessed learners using class exercises, assignments and terminal tests. For example, the class assessment exercises were: reading aloud, answering comprehension questions and finding meanings of difficult words.

When the teachers were asked the comprehension abilities of their learners, they all reported that their classes have learners of mixed abilities but categorised them as average performers. When the teachers were asked the sources of learners' comprehension problems, all the three teachers identified dwindling of reading culture as one of the sources. Teacher X who was teaching form one at school A explained the problem of lack of intensive reading as follows:

Ineyo ndikuona kuti bvuto lenileni comes in because of lack of intensive reading. Ana masiku ano sakhala ndi chidwi chowerenga paokha, as such when it comes to reading ndiye kuti ma practices ambiri ndiomwe mumapanga mkalasimo. Kuwapatsa penapake kuti awerenge for pleasure they do not do it. So kulowa pansi kwa reading culture ku Malawi kuno ndikumene kukulempheretsa ana kuchita bwino in comprehension (Teacher X, 12/10/2016)

[I think the real problem comes in because of lack of intensive reading. Learners these days do not have interest in reading on their own. The only practice to read during class time. If you give them reading assignments to read for pleasure they do not read. This is why they do not do well in comprehension] [Teacher X, 12/10/2016]

The second source of the poor comprehension abilities of learners mentioned was poor background in primary school. Teacher Y from school A, who was teaching form four explained the problem as follows:

Understanding of the English language itself is a challenge. This is because their background in primary school in the use of the language was not good. They failed

to acquire the necessary skills and if you look at how learners are selected to CDSSs, we are given the bad ones so although we try as much as possible to make it work but it does not work (Teacher Y, 12/10/2016)

The other sources which were cited by the teachers were lack of fluency and efficiency when reading, poor pronunciation of words and limited vocabulary. None of the teachers mentioned lack of knowledge of reading strategies and lack of access to books but during lesson observation it was shown that these were also sources of learners' poor comprehension abilities.

On assessment as a practice for teaching reading comprehension, the researcher was also interested to find out type of assessment tools the teachers were using to assess learners. On this area, teacher X and Y reported that they use both oral and written comprehension questions, giving meanings of words and summary writing. Teacher Z from school B added reading aloud and silent reading as other assessment tools used.

Sometimes I just give them a passage to read either loudly or silently *nde ambiri sawerenga bwino* could see *kuti* they lack skills for reading aloud and silently (Teacher Z, 07/10/2016)

[Sometimes I just give them a passage to read loudly or silently so the majority do not read well one could see that they lack skills for reading aloud and silently].

Lesson observation showed that teachers used more oral comprehension questions as compared to written comprehension, and summary writing was rarely used.

Assessment is one of the practices which literature recommends for enhancing learners' reading comprehension abilities. For example, Johnston (1985) as cited in Peterson et al., (2000) states that before teachers think of the practices to use, they must first assess learners in order to know their reading problems. Almost all teachers involved in the study, assessed learners' reading comprehension abilities. This means that the teachers in the two schools were using the right practice that could enhance learners reading comprehension abilities since assessment of learners reading comprehension abilities helped the teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses of their learners. Knowing strengths and weaknesses of their learners could help the teachers provide appropriate support to learners which addresses the learners' needs.

4.3.1.2 Teaching reading skills

The second practice which teachers used when teaching reading comprehension in the two CDSSs was teaching reading skills. All the three teachers said that they teach their learners reading skills. During FGDs with learners, their response agreed with their teachers' response on teaching reading skills. During lesson observations, teachers were seen teaching reading skills. Table3 gives a summary on the reading skills teachers were teaching in the two CDSSs.

Table 3: Summary on reading skills teachers were teaching

Pre-reading skills	- predicting content of a text - previewing - skimming
During reading skills	- reading aloud - silent reading - pronunciation
After reading skills	- vocabulary - answering questions

Source: Researcher's analysed data, 2016

Out of all the reading skills presented in the table, reading aloud was used frequently unlike the other skills.

Teaching learners reading skills has also been documented in literature as another practice that enhances learners' reading comprehension abilities. Literature has shown a positive correlation between learners' knowledge on reading skills and their comprehension abilities. Carell (1988) states that, in reading, automatic word decoding is a prerequisite for meaning construction to come. An accurate and successful word decoding upgrades readers to the stage of connecting information with prior knowledge so as to reach textual meaning or comprehension eventually. Some scholars have shown

that, apart from automatic word decoding vocabulary knowledge is also crucial for comprehension to take place. For example, Anderson and Freebody (1981) argued that:

The proportion of difficult words in a text is the single most powerful predictor of text difficulty, and a reader's general vocabulary knowledge is the single best predictor of how well that reader can understand text (p. 263)

The teaching of reading skills was necessary as it was reported that some of the sources of learners low comprehension abilities in the two CDSSs was poor reading skills such as; lack of fluency when reading, limited vocabulary, lack of and inability to use reading comprehension strategies.

4.3.1.3 Teaching reading comprehension strategies

The third practice teachers said they used when teaching reading comprehension to learners was teaching learners reading comprehension strategies. The strategies that teachers claimed that they were teaching are presented in table 4.

Table 4: Summary on comprehension strategies teachers claimed to be teaching

1	Strategies for deciphering meanings of words - Word formation - Word inference - Reading context in which the word appeared - Consulting the dictionary - Asking friends/ teachers
2	Strategies for summarising a passage - Using signaling words to identify major & minor supporting points - Paragraph analysis (topic sentence & supporting sentences) - Making generalisation - Paraphrasing - Looking at story structure
3	Strategies for answering comprehension questions - Reading a passage three times - Paraphrasing answers - Asking 5Ws & an H questions when reading

Source: Researcher's analysed data, 2016

The table indicates that teachers were teaching a variety of strategies. For example, on strategies for deciphering meanings of words, teacher X from school A reported that she teaches learners to consider the context in which the word appears “*I advise learners to use the sentence in which the word is found and consider how it has been used*”. Teacher Y claimed that he teaches learners word formation and word origin in the following words: “*I explain to the learners how they can find meaning of difficult words which they meet by looking at how the word was formed and word origin*”. Teacher Z from school B mentioned word inference and using the context in which the word occurs as strategies he teaches for deciphering meanings of words.

The teachers also claimed to be teaching strategies for summarising a text. Teacher X and Y from school A mentioned strategies for identifying main and supporting points like using signaling words and story structure. Teacher Z from school B reported that he teaches learners paragraph analysis: topic sentence and supporting sentences, making generalisations and paraphrasing as additional strategies to those identified by teacher X and Y.

Teacher Z explained that he also teaches strategies on how to understand a text and answering questions such as reading the text three times, answering the 5Ws and an H questions (what, which/who, when, where, why and how) when reading and paraphrasing answers when writing comprehension questions.

The results obtained from FGDs with learners did not differ much with results obtained through interviews with teachers. Additional strategies that learners mentioned were; using dictionary and asking teachers or friends when a dictionary is not available as strategies for deciphering meanings of words. During lesson observations, teachers were observed teaching strategies such as predicting the content of a passage by looking at pictures and titles and reading the text three times before answering questions.

The teaching of reading strategies is also another practice which has been widely researched and recommended for enhancing learners reading abilities. Pressley, (1999) explained that reading strategies are effective tools for comprehending. Strategies help readers to engage with the text, to monitor their comprehension and fix it when it has failed. The findings of this study show that teachers were teaching learners a variety of strategies as shown in Table 4. This was a good practice for enhancing learners reading comprehension ability in the two CDSSs since classes were overcrowded and this would made learners to be independent as they would be able to monitor their own comprehension and repair it when broken.

Although it has been argued in this study that teachers were using a variety of reading comprehension strategies, the strategies were inadequate as some other strategies recommended in literature were not taught. For example, strategies for making inferences, making connections, asking the text questions, synthesising and visualising the content of the text.

Another weakness which was identified in the use of strategies was that although teachers claimed to be teaching learners different strategies, during lesson observations most of the strategies mentioned by teachers and learners were never used even in situations where the use of such strategies was necessary. For example, use of word formation and word inference for deciphering meanings of words and paraphrasing of answers were not used by learners and teachers did not try to help the learners to use the strategies.

4.3.1.4 Giving learners opportunity to practice skills and to read widely

Another practice teachers claimed to be using when teaching reading comprehension was providing learners with opportunities to practice what they learn and opportunities for them to read widely. Teachers reported that they give learners opportunities to practice reading aloud, silent reading, giving meanings of difficult words they encounter during reading, answering comprehension questions, paraphrasing and summarising passages.

During lesson observations the researcher noted that the teachers provided learners opportunities to practice predicting content of passages using the titles and pictures, reading aloud and silently, answering comprehension questions and writing summary. Reading aloud and answering oral comprehension questions were the most used activities. However, these activities did not involve all learners but selected few who were willing to participate. During the period of the study, learners were never given reading assignments. All reading activities were done in class in all the two schools except summary writing at school B which was given as home work. Summary writing activities were given only in form four. In both schools summary writing was given once

during the entire period of the study. In school A, it was a class activity done in groups while in school B it was given as an individual assignment.

On providing opportunities for learners to read widely, teacher Z from school B explained that:

Ana onse pano pandawachita encourage kuti they should have ma card for National Library kuti soon after classes azipita kumalibraries kaya ndi weekends. In addition, ndimawapatsa reading passages to read during studies circles.

[I have encouraged all learners to be going to the national library soon after classes or during weekends. In addition, I give them reading passages to read during study circles]

During FGDs with learners from school B, it was discovered that they had not been given any reading passage to read during study circles but literature questions to discuss.

Teacher Y from school A, on encouraging learners to read widely, reported that he instructs learners to go and search for past papers to read comprehension passages and practice answering comprehension questions.

Giving learners opportunity to practice what they learn and to read widely is another good practice for enhancing learners' comprehension abilities. Literature states that comprehension is a skill like any other skill and learners need practice to master it. According to Hansen (1987), struggling readers learning strategic reading need frequent, sustained periods of reading connected prose. Such opportunities to read uninterruptedly

from a book, newspaper, magazine or whole piece of text for at least 15 to 20 minutes. The use of the practice was not only good because it is recommended in literature but also because it addressed some of the sources of learners' poor reading comprehension in the two CDSSs studied. For example, the study has shown that some of the sources of learners' poor reading comprehension abilities is lack of intensive reading or what teacher Z called dwindling of the reading culture, poor vocabulary and lack of fluency which could be enhanced with much practice.

Although teachers in this study claimed to be using the practices mentioned to enhance learners reading comprehension abilities, the results showed that what they were doing was not adequate. For example, the results have shown that during the entire period of the study, summary writing was done once in both schools and it was done in form four only. The results have also shown that teachers never gave learners reading assignments they depended only on class time which was never adequate considering the number of students in the two schools. Furthermore, the study has shown that the most practiced skill was reading aloud. However, literature shows that reading aloud in class is not a good practice for adolescent readers who lack fluency as it is a source of embarrassment. Therefore, to improve learners reading comprehension abilities teachers in the two CDSSs needed to provide learners with adequate time to practice the skills and find other ways of assisting struggling readers, apart from using reading aloud in class.

4.3.1.5 Supporting learners

The teachers reported that they supported learners who have reading comprehension problems in the following ways: they gave the learners extra reading activities, provided remedial lessons, encouraged them to read widely, corrected learners reading errors, encouraged learners to ask when they have problems, used pair work, group discussions and study circles.

Providing support to struggling learners is another practice that is supported by literature as a good practice for enhancing learners reading comprehension. The practice is even supported by the theory that informed this study, the social constructive theory by Levi Vygotsky. The theory explains that learners advance in learning through use of support they get from adults or capable peers.

In conclusion, the findings of this study have shown that teachers used good practices that are recommended for enhancing learners' reading comprehension abilities at secondary school level and are supported by the theory that informed this study. In addition, the practices that the teachers used were appropriate as they addressed some of the sources of learners' poor reading comprehension in the two CDSSs. Although teachers were using good practices, one of the weaknesses that was noted in the use of the practices was that they were inadequate for enhancing learners reading comprehension at secondary school level.

4.3.2 How teachers used the practices

The researcher wanted to find out how the teachers were using the different practices mentioned when teaching reading comprehension. This was done in order to find out how teachers were using the practices contributed to learners low comprehension abilities.

4.3.2.1 How teachers assessed learners reading comprehension

Teachers assessed learners' reading comprehension abilities by using different kinds of assessments, to achieve different purposes and at different times. One way through which teachers assessed learners' reading comprehension abilities was through asking oral and written questions. For example, teacher Z from school B explained that he assesses the learners using both oral and written assessment in the following words:

Tool imene ndimakonda ku user ndipenapake ndimathaku mmm by giving them questions. These questions can vary some are rather given orally some are given in written form and the way they actually write tells kuti pali mavuto.

[The tool I like using is by giving learners questions. These questions can vary some are rather given orally some are given in written form. The way they actually write tells that the learners have problems]. [School B, Teacher Z, 07/10/2016]

Although the teachers claimed to be using both oral and written assessment methods, lesson observations showed that the most frequently used type of assessment was oral assessment. The oral assessments were either done as a class discussion or group discussions. When done in groups, the findings were later presented to the whole class.

The written assessment were either done in groups or individually but group activities dominated in most of the lessons observed in both schools and forms.

Analysis of learners' exercise books confirmed that teachers did not give learner written comprehension activities frequently. Most of the written and marked exercises in learners' exercise books were on grammar and not comprehension. For example, an analysis of form one learners exercise books at school A showed that teachers do not give written activities frequently as there were only two comprehension exercises. One was on answering comprehension questions and the other was on giving meanings of words. The activity on giving meanings of words was not marked. In the exercise books for the form fours there were exercises on answering comprehension questions, giving meanings of words and one summary writing exercise which was seen in few learners' exercise books. Most of these activities were given during the course of the study.

At school B, the results of the analysis of form one exercise books were not different from those of school A but the analysis of form four exercise books showed activities on answering comprehension questions, activities on giving meanings of words, one summary writing and one note making activity.

Another thing that the researcher noticed during learners' exercise books analysis was that some of the written exercises in the learners' exercise books were unmarked. For example, at school B in the form four learners' exercise books, there were two unmarked exercises on answering comprehension questions.

The results obtained from analysing teachers' mark books agreed with the results obtained through lesson observations, FGDs with learners and those obtained from analysing learners' exercises books. The only grades which were recorded in teachers' mark books were midterm tests and end of term tests results. However, the mid-term test scores were only seen in teacher Z form four mark book while the mark books for teacher Y showed only end of term results and mark book for teacher X showed one continuous assessment but it was on grammar not comprehension.

On when and why teachers assessed learners, the study showed that teachers asked questions at the beginning of a lesson to assess learners' background knowledge on the topic. For example, teachers gave learners assessment tasks on predicting content of a reading passage using title of a passage or pictures. Teachers also asked questions after reading to assess learners' comprehension of the passage they read. For example, during the study after reading, teachers were observed asking learners comprehension questions, discussing difficult vocabulary from the text read and sometimes asking learners to provide a summary of the text read. Teachers never asked learners questions during reading.

Assessing learners' reading comprehension abilities is one of the recommended practices for enhancing learners' reading comprehension, however, there were a number of weaknesses which the researcher identified on how teachers used assessment.

The first weakness was on frequency: the teachers did not assess their learners frequently as there were few exercises on comprehension in the learner's exercise books in both schools. These assessments are not enough to enhance learners' reading comprehension abilities. Assessments help learners to practice the skills they learn and informs both the learner and the teacher of the weaker areas that need to be improved. Teachers need to give learners many assessments so that they can have time to practice and improve their reading comprehension skills.

The second weakness was on the nature of assessment the teachers used. The study showed that teachers used oral and group assessments more than written and individual assessments in both forms. The teachers also loved comprehension questions that demanded short answers unlike questions on summary writing or note making. Some of the weaknesses that the researcher observed in the use of these types of assessment are: only few learners participated in the activity and they were mostly dominated by capable learners; they were shunned by less capable learners. This implies that the use of these kinds of assessments do not give a true picture of the learners' performance.

One of the reasons teachers mentioned for using the assessments mentioned was class size and work load. Teacher Z from school B explained that he has a large number of learners and too much work load which make marking of individual learners' exercise books a challenge. The use of group assessment in this situation can be considered as the best alternative which is also supported by the social constructive theory of learning, the theory which informed this study. The social constructive theory promotes the use of

group activities as they optimise learning as less capable learners are assisted by more capable peers and later on the less capable learners transfer the knowledge when doing individual activities. However, the way teachers used the group assessments did not optimize the learning of reading comprehension.

When teachers gave out group exercises during the lesson, they did not go around to supervise what the learners were doing. As a result, some learners were doing their discussions in Chichewa, others were not doing the activity at all while in some groups only few learners could be seen doing the activity while others were busy chatting. In general, the activities were dominated by capable learners. Since the group assessment were being dominated by capable learners and shunned by the weaker learners because of lack of supervision or guidance from the teacher the groups did not serve their intended purpose. Of course the teacher could not manage to supervise all groups due to the nature of class size, however, the researcher is of the view that if the learners had seen the teacher supervising, they could have been more focused on the activity unlike in the situation where the teacher is seen to be busy with other things.

In addition, it could have made much sense if form four learners were given adequate individual work so that they could transfer the knowledge they learned from capable peers in doing individual activities. This could have helped learners to be more independent and could give teachers correct feedback on areas to work on in improving learners' comprehension since this is the last class at secondary school.

The third weakness was on feedback. When teachers gave out written exercises they did not provide feedback on time and sometimes they did not provide the feedback at all as they sometimes did not mark learners' work. During FGDs with learners, learners identified lack of feedback as one of the problems that hinder their improvement in reading comprehension and wished that their teachers could provide feedback. For example, some learners from school A expressed the problem in the following words:

Azitiitanitsa anthu amene tikulephera ndikutifotokozero mwapadera komanso kumatifunsa mavuto anthu

[They should call those of us who fail and explain to us and also ask us our problems] [School A, learner 1, 10/11/16].

The second learner wanted that their teachers should be doing corrections on written activities. The learner expressed his wish in the following words:

Tizipanga makolekishoni a maekisaizi amene timalembe.

[We should be doing corrections of the exercise that we write] [School A, Learner2, 10/11/16]

Another learner wanted that the teacher should be writing difficult words from the passage on the chalkboard and they should be discussing their meanings.

Tikawerenga mau ovuta adziwalembe pa board ndipo tidziwakambirana kuti tsiku lina tidzawakumbukire. Eya mwachitsanzo tsiku lina anangotipatsa mau mpakana pano sitinawakambirane ndezikumakhala zovuta.

[When reading, difficult words should be written on the chalk board and we should be discussing them so that we can remember them next time we come across them. Yes, for example one day we were given words but up

today we have not discussed them so its difficult] [School A, Learner 3, 10/11/16]

During interviews with teachers, teacher Z from school B also explained that the giving feedback to learners on time was a challenge for him. He attributed it to nature of class size and too much work load as follows:

Because of overcrowding *umatiukapereka ntchito ija* when it comes time for marking *kuti ana aja uwachongere* and you should give them feedback at a right time *zimakhala zovuta. Ndikayamba kuwachongere ndekuti ndimanyamula zina kunyumba nanga ndimapitanso kukalasi ina. Nde feedback siimakhala ya serious umangoti ndithane nawo awa ndiwapatse.*

[Because of overcrowding in our classes when you give out a written activity it is a challenge for the teacher to mark and give learners feedback on time. When I start marking I even take some learners exercise books home since I also have other classes to teach. Due to that challenge we do not give serious/detailed feedback [Teacher Z, 07/10/16].

Lack of feedback seemed to contribute to learners' low comprehension abilities in the two CDSSs. Literature showed that one of the functions of assessment is that it informs the teacher the problems of learners and this knowledge help teachers to modify and direct his instruction towards assisting learners. On the part of learners, it helps them to know which areas to work on. All this is possible if teachers mark learners' work and provide detailed feedback on what learners should improve.

The other weakness was on how the information obtained through assessment was used. Gillet and Temple (2000) state that, following the diagnostic instruction principles the effective teacher begins instruction by assessing the reader to determine strengths and weaknesses, without the labels of disability deficit. Stroke (1982) states that improving the reading skills of any students begin with identifying his weaknesses and then implementing appropriate methods for strengthening those skills. The aim of assessing learners reading comprehension abilities is to identify problems and provide appropriate support to learners. However, this was not the case in some lessons observed. Teachers assessed their learners but never used the information to guide their teaching.

Questions teachers ask before reading of a passage are meant to help the teacher establish or activate learners' background knowledge on the topic. If the learners lack background knowledge, the teacher is supposed to find a way of activating the learners' background knowledge before reading of the passage. However, this was not the case in some of the lessons observed. For example, in one lesson at school B, the teacher distributed books, instructed learners to open on page 19 and informed the learners that they were going to read a passage titled "Quicksand." Then asked the learners their understanding of the term "Quicksand." The learners provided answers such as "*a land which has quicksand,*" "*a place where sand was running over.*" The learners' responses showed that they lacked background knowledge on the topic but the teacher instead of trying to activate learners' background knowledge may be by drawing attention of the learners to the picture on the passage or asking learners to skim through the passage the teacher went on and selected a learner to start reading the passage aloud.

Activating learners' background knowledge is crucial as it enhances learners' comprehension abilities since learners are able to connect what they read to what they already know. One of the sources of learners' low comprehension abilities mentioned by some learners during FGDs was lack of background knowledge and unfamiliar topics. Therefore, activating their background knowledge was crucial in enhancing their comprehension of the text.

The weakness of not using information obtained from assessment to guide the teaching was also observed even with the written activities. For example, many learners failed the summary writing but both teachers in school A and B did not bother to reteach the topic. At school B, the teacher just provided the learners with points which they were supposed to use in their summary without explaining how he identified the points. At school A, the teacher did not even provide a follow up lesson. The lesson ended with marking of learners exercise books.

Although assessment is one of the practices literature recommends for enhancing reading comprehension, the way it was used in the two schools could not enhance learners reading comprehension abilities to a greater extent. The researcher therefore concludes that how teachers used the assessment contributes to learners' low comprehension abilities in the two CDSSs in this study.

The findings of this study agree with other studies. For example, Harrison, 2004 who found that teachers use written comprehension exercises as time fillers and Hardman and Abd-Kadir (2010) cited in Chilimanjira (2012,) who after reviewing literature on teacher talk in sub-Saharan Africa concluded that “Overall, the classroom discourse in Sub-Saharan African classrooms was found to be highly ritualised, creating a semblance of curriculum coverage, knowledge and understanding.” The researcher makes this claim because teachers did not usually revise the exercises they give to learners even when the majority of learners fail the exercises and sometimes they did not even mark the learners work. Teachers did not use the information they obtained from assessment to guide their teaching. In addition, how teachers in this study used group assessment showed that group activities were just given to fulfill syllabus requirement on use of learner centred activities and not to promote learning since learners were not guided or supervised.

4.3.2.2 How teachers were teaching reading skills

All the teachers claimed that in order to improve the reading comprehension of their learners they teach them reading skills. The skills that the teachers reported to be teaching have been summarised in table 4. When asked how they teach learners the reading skills, teacher X from school A, explained that she first thinks of the reading skill to teach. Then she develops activities that are relevant and could motivate learners. Before giving learners a passage to read, she identifies difficult words so that she could help learners when they face difficulties.

Teacher Z from school B reported that he gives learners books in groups outside class and ask them to read and he goes about supervising them and observing how the learners are reading. He identifies good and poor readers. When it comes to reading in class, he selects a learner he knows does not read well and ask her or him to read then ask fellow learners to evaluate if the reading was good. Then he would select one who reads well to read. After the reading he encourages the other learners that they can also read well like their friend if they practice. However, learners' responses during FGDS at school B differed from what their teacher reported. The learners denied being given reading passages to read in groups or during study circles. The learners said that most of the times during study circles they are given work on literature and not language.

During lesson observations, the researcher noted that in some lessons teachers asked pre-reading questions based on the title and pictures, if available, before reading while in other lessons the teachers did not ask pre-reading questions, they just went straight to do reading activities. Discussions on pictures and titles of passages were not frequently done. This happened many times at school A. Out of the eight lessons observed at school A, only in two lessons did the teachers take time to discuss the pictures and titles and ask learners to predict the content of the passage using the picture or title. These two lessons were first lessons observed for the two teachers involved in the study at this school.

During the reading activities, the researcher observed teachers selecting learners to read aloud while the others were listening or all learners were asked to read silently. After reading, teachers asked learners meanings of some difficult words which the teacher

identified or asked learners to identify and then the teacher would ask the learners to provide meanings of the words. When learners failed to give the correct meaning, the teacher provided the meaning of the word. Thereafter, they would answer comprehension questions either orally or writing in groups and rarely individually. The teachers used oral and group activities more than individual and written activities due to the nature of their classes. They had large classes, which made marking of individual learners' exercise book impossible. In some lessons, the teacher would start with answering comprehension questions after reading and then discussion of difficult vocabulary. Sometimes teachers could write some difficult words to discuss but failed to discuss due to limited time.

The way the teachers were teaching the reading skills had some strengths and weaknesses in enhancing learners reading comprehension abilities. The researcher will first discuss the strengths and then the weaknesses. The first strength which the researcher identified was that teachers were writing on the chalk board or explaining to learners the purpose of the lesson. For example, in one of the lessons observed at school B, before the teacher started teaching he wrote the topic, "comprehension", on the chalkboard and explained what he expected the learners to know by the end of the lesson as follows:

By the end of this lesson I expect you as students of school B to be in a position to read silently and then aaaah by the end of this day I expect you as students of form 1 at school B and very proud indeed that you are form one students here, to answer the question that I will actually give you [Teacher Z, form 1 lesson, 24/10/16].

This was a good practice for teaching reading comprehension because it helps learners to know what to focus on when learning and it is easy for teacher to assess whether or not learning has taken place at the end of the lesson.

The other strength that the researcher identified was that the teachers were teaching learners a variety of reading skills that were necessary for enhancing reading comprehension. The teaching of pre-reading skills was important since these skills help in activating learners' background knowledge which was one of the source of learners' low comprehension abilities.

Although the teaching of reading skills was a good practice for enhancing learners' reading comprehension, its teaching in the two CDSSs observed, had some weakness which the researcher believes hindered the improvement of learners' comprehension abilities. The first weakness was the frequency of the teaching of the reading skills. The study showed that teachers in all the schools were teaching comprehension once a week. At school A, both in form one and form four the teachers allocated a single period for comprehension and at school B they allocated a double period for comprehension. Although the teacher at school B allocated double period, the teacher sometimes used the comprehension periods to teach grammar aspects and literature, more especially in form four class. For example, two times the researcher went for observations at school B just only to find out that teacher has decided to teach grammar and not comprehension. This teacher admitted not teaching comprehension frequently during one to one interview before observations started. He had this to say:

Ku form 4 pano pa it's not that much chifukwa tinapanga kwambiri ku form 3. Ku form 3 it was almost every week pamene ku form 4 ndimalumpha mwina for 2-3 weeks kenako ndiwapatsa ka comprehension. Knowing kuti ku form 4 kawirikawiri imakhalano drilling for exams.

In form four right now it is not that much because we did a lot when they were in form three. In form three it was done almost every week while in in form four we do it at intervals sometimes after two or three weeks then we give them comprehension knowing that in form four it's about drilling learners for examinations [Teacher Z, 07/10/16].

Teaching reading once a week is inadequate to enhance learners reading and comprehension skills since reading comprehension is a complex task which is influenced by several factors that learners need to master with support from teachers. Although teacher Z claimed that he was not doing much comprehension with the form fours because they did much of that when the learners were in form three, the learners' performance was not good. This means that the teaching of reading comprehension in form three was not adequate.

Teacher X from school A acknowledged that teaching comprehension once a week was inadequate as follows:

Once a week is not enough because it means you do a reading activity this week and you will wait for next week. This promote a relaxant attitude in the learners.” [12/10/16]

Although teacher X recognised that teaching reading once a week was not enough she complained that there is nothing she could do since English had only five periods per week at their school and she is supposed to teach other language skills, grammar and literature too.

The second weakness was that the skills were not taught effectively. For example, silent reading was not done effectively to enhance reading comprehension. In both schools there was a problem of inadequate books. At both school A and B students to book ratio in form one was 1: 6 while in form four at school A was 1: 4, and at school B was 1:6. Despite the problem of inadequate books, teachers were still giving learners passages to read silently. This was a challenge to learners who were facing opposite the book to practice the skill since it was not possible for the learners to read. As a result, only learners who had direct access to the book were the ones reading while those who faced opposite the book were chatting or engaged in other activities. Although silent reading is one of the reading skills that enhances comprehension, the way it was conducted in the two schools leaves a lot to be desired.

Another reading skill the teachers were teaching frequently in both schools was reading aloud. When teaching this skill, teachers would select learners to read aloud while their friends were listening. One of the weaknesses in the teaching of this skill was the selection of learners. Teacher Z from school B reported that he selected both good readers and bad readers. After reading, he asked the learners to comment on how their friends

were reading. Then he encouraged the bad readers to improve their reading abilities and used the good readers as models.

Using good readers to model reading and act as examples to bad readers is a good practice but making bad readers to read in class in the presence of their friends was an embarrassing experience to the poor readers as they were being laughed at by their friends. This made some learners to shun the reading when selected to read. The findings of this study agreed with what Woos and Nicholas (2000) wrote that using reading aloud to less fluent learners does not improve learners reading comprehension at secondary school level as its purpose is unclear and it is an embarrassing experience for adolescent readers who lack fluency.

The other weakness which the researcher identified on the use of reading aloud was correction of errors. Teachers were fond of correcting learners' pronunciation errors while the learners were reading. Although assisting learners to pronounce words correctly was a good idea, I feel it was not handled well as it confused the learner. According to Woos and Nicholas (2000), correcting learners' mistakes while they are reading promotes the perception that reading is word pronunciation more than comprehension. I think the best way was to take note of mispronounced words when a student is reading and write them on the chalkboard and later the teacher or capable learners model the correct pronunciation.

In addition, only few learners were given opportunity to practice the skill of reading aloud due to limited time. At school A, the teachers were selecting volunteers and most of the time these were dominated by capable readers while the less capable shunned the activity. Therefore, using reading aloud frequently during lesson was not enough as it denied some learners opportunity to practice the skill.

Teachers explained that they used reading aloud frequently because of inadequate books. Although it is true that there is problem of inadequate books in CDSSs, the researcher is of the view that teachers are supposed to complement the reading aloud in class with peer guided reading after classes which was not done in both schools although teachers claimed to be doing it. In Peer guided reading, the teacher forms small groups of learners and identifies fluent readers and allocate them in each group. The fluent reader model reading to the less fluent readers and later the less fluent readers are given opportunity to practice while the fluent peer is listening. Using peer guided reading after class can help to ensure that less fluent learners have opportunities to practice reading and to be helped by their capable friends. Peer guided reading after lessons can also save less fluent learners from the embarrassment that is associated with reading aloud in class since this activity is done in small groups. However, the teachers are supposed to explain the purpose of the activity to learners, supervise and guide the learners so that it serves its intended purpose. The peer guided reading can easily be done with the study circle policy which is being implemented in schools.

The other weakness on how teachers in the two CDSSs were teaching reading skills was that lessons were dominated by teacher explanations. For example, one of the reading skills teachers were teaching was identifying meanings of difficult vocabulary. The weaknesses which were identified in the teaching of this skill was that it was dominated by teacher explanations and lack of practice by the learners. As a result of the weaknesses in the teaching learners failed to apply the skills taught which led to overdependence on the teacher or dictionaries. For example, during interviews with teachers, they mentioned word formation, word inference, reading the context in which the word appears as some of the skills they teach learners for deciphering meanings of words. However when learners were asked what they do when they encounter difficult words, most of them said that they look at the meanings in dictionary or they ask their friends or teachers if a dictionary is absent.

During lesson observations, it was noted that teachers were fond of explaining to the learners the skills they can use without giving learners chance to practice them. It was the teachers who were giving meanings of words to learners when they failed to provide right answers without explaining how they arrived at the right answers. This made learners to fail to apply the skills and to be very much dependent on the teacher. This kind of practice goes against the social constructive theory of learning which informed this study. The social constructive theory states that learners learn better when they take an active role in the learning process (Omrod, 1999).

4.3.2.3 *How teachers were teaching reading strategies*

Apart from knowing the reading comprehension strategies that teachers were teaching, the researcher was also interested in finding out how the teachers were teaching the strategies. The lesson observations showed that teachers did not teach the strategies explicitly. The teachers concentrate on teaching ‘the what’ and not ‘the how’, why and when to use the strategies. For example, in one lesson observed at school B, the teacher was teaching summary writing. During the lesson the teacher focused on teaching the strategies the learners could use when writing a summary. The strategies he listed were:

- Identify the key words in the summary passage. These key words tell you what is required
- Identify what boundaries of the summary passage are. This means deciding what part the passage is relevant. The summary task may or may not involve the whole passage.
- Identify the required information in the passage and list this information in brief point form.
- Write your summary in continuous prose form. Linking up the points you have made from the passage.
- Use the following techniques to save words:
 - (a) Generalise a sequence of events or action in one word or phrase e.g. we sat counting coloras, Nissans and Fords which passed on the road. This became: we sat counting the passing cars.
 - (b) Use one word or phrase to cover similar items or a list of examples.
 - (c) Link up related points in one sentence e.g. for all their notoriety,
 - (i) Houseflies have protein
 - (ii) Bees contain 81% protein
 - (iii) Bugs infamous for bloodsucking have 91% proteinThis becomes: houseflies, bees and bugs have a high percentage of protein

- Check the length of your summary. If it is too long it means you have included irrelevant points
- Use past tense when writing a summary. [Teacher Z, form four lesson, 15/11/16]

After providing to learners the strategies for summarising a passage, the teacher gave the learners an individual assignment on summary writing. Looking at this lesson, the teacher focused on teaching the “what” rather than the “how, “why” and “when” to use the strategies. The teacher did not explain to the learners how they can identify key words or exemplify using a paragraph. Even in instances where the teacher could model on how to use the strategy or give the learners chance to practice the skill being taught, the teacher did not. The teacher just copied the notes and read out to the learners. The learners during the lesson were just busy coping the notes and even when the teacher was reading out the notes some learners were still busy copying the notes. As a result, many learners failed the assignment. When doing revision on the assignment, the teacher just provided the major points that the learners were supposed to provide in their summary without explaining how he identified the points.

At school A in one lesson, teacher Y was also teaching summary writing in form four. In this lesson, the teacher wrote on the board the topic, and then distributed books and asked learners to open page 38. Thereafter, he instructed learners to read the passage silently and informed them that after reading they would be required to summarise the passage. After reading the passage, the teacher instructed learners to write the summary of the passage in groups. Then the lesson ended with the teacher marking learners’ exercise

books. The overall performance of the learners on this task was very poor; one group got six out of ten, another got five out of ten while the rest of the groups got below five. Although this was the situation, the teacher never revised the lesson to explain why learners failed the summary exercise.

The researcher also observed that during discussions on meanings of words, all the teachers were fond of giving answers to learners when they have failed without probing or explaining to them how she or he arrived at the answer. As a result, many learners failed to apply the strategies they learnt. For example, during FGDs, learners were able to mention strategies that they could use to decipher meanings of words such as reading the context in which the word is used, using word inference and looking at how the word was formed (affixes and roots). However, when the learners were asked what they do when they encountered difficult words when reading alone, most of them reported that they checked the meaning in the dictionary. If a dictionary is not available, some learners explained that they just write the word in their exercise books to ask their teachers later. Others reported that they ask friends while others told the researcher they stop reading when they encounter many difficult words when reading. During lesson observations the researcher observed that many learners failed to give meanings of words yet the meanings could be found in the same paragraphs the words were taken. For some words, the learners could even use the knowledge of word formation.

Although teachers were teaching learners reading strategies which literature recommends as a good practice for enhancing reading comprehension, their teaching had some

weaknesses. For instance, teachers did not teach the strategies effectively. The teachers concentrated on teaching ‘the what’ and not ‘the how, when, where and why’ as a result learners failed to apply the strategies they learn. In some lessons teachers did not even teach ‘the what’ they just gave learners exercises without teaching them the strategies to use to do the exercise. When learners failed the exercise, the teachers did not bother to explain to learners why they had failed or the strategies they could have used.

Literature states that reading strategies are effective tools for comprehending. They present procedural rather than declarative knowledge, stressing “how” as much more than “what”. Strategies help readers to engage with the text, to monitor their comprehension and fix it when it has failed (Pressley, 1999). Pardo (2002) explained that low achieving adolescent readers improve their comprehension performance when they learn to apply strategies. Cooper (1997) warns that struggling readers do not need to spend time learning strategies in isolation, which they tend not to connect with real reading and generally fail to apply. Although literature recommends stressing on how when teaching reading strategies, the results of this study showed that teachers were focusing on the ‘what’ and not the ‘how’ and this perhaps explains why there was low comprehension abilities of learners in the two CDSSs. The way teachers were teaching reading comprehension strategies made learners not to know the strategies to use to enhance comprehension or to know them but failed to apply them.

The social constructivist theory of learning emphasises the learners’ critical role in constructing knowledge (Omrod, 1999). This means that for learners to be able to

comprehend text, they are supposed to be involved in the process constructing meanings. For example, learners were supposed to be involved in the process of constructing meanings of difficult vocabulary and given chance to practice applying the strategies they learnt. Teachers were therefore, not supposed to give answers to learners but they should explain and model to learners on how to do it and the learners should be given chance to practice. The findings on how teachers teach comprehension strategies, showed that teachers did not follow this principle and this perhaps explains why there is low comprehension abilities of learners in the two CDSSs.

4.3.2.4 How teachers provide opportunities to learners to practice comprehension skills

The first way teachers provide learners with opportunity to practice reading comprehension skills was to give learners opportunity to read during lessons and answer comprehension questions or write a summary. The reading was done aloud in turns or silently but reading aloud was frequently used. The second way teachers mentioned was giving learners books in groups to read after classes but learners during FGDs denied being given books after classes to read. The other way mentioned was by encouraging learners to read widely on their own. On encouraging learners to read teacher Z from school B remarked:

Ana onse panopa ndawachita encourage kuti they should have ma card for National Library kuti soon after classes azipita kumalibraries kaya ndi weekends.

[I have encouraged all the learners to have National Library membership cards so that soon after classes they can go or during weekends]
[07/10/16].

On encouraging learners to read, teacher Y from school A reported that he instructs learners to go and search for past papers and read comprehension passage and practice answering questions. However, during the study period the researcher did not hear teachers encouraging learners to read after lessons or giving them reading assignments. The only time learners were given an opportunity to read was during lessons in class.

The weaknesses which were identified in the use of this practice were: teachers did not provide enough time to learners to practice the skills. As already stated, the teaching of comprehension once a week whether single period or double was not enough. This did not give adequate time to all learners to practice the skills as there were large number of learners in one class. In addition, depending on reading activities during class time alone was inadequate as Hansen (1987) argued that struggling readers learning strategic reading need frequent, sustained periods of reading connected prose. Such opportunities to read uninterrupted from a book, newspaper, magazine or whole piece of text for at least 15 to 20 minutes.

Secondly, giving learners extra reading activities was not effectively done. Teachers did not put in place measures to motivate learners or to ensure whether learners were practicing whatever they gave them to practice. This contradicts with Dustein and

Gambrell (2009) who found that motivation of learners play a key role in the reading process. Teachers could motivate their learners to read if they gave learners opportunities to share what they read in class or during study circles.

Thirdly, teachers did not guide learners on what to read, as such the learners did not read. Hall (2011) states that teachers inspire learners to read more by providing literature suitable for the learners. Teachers in two CDSSs should be guiding their learners on how to choose reading materials and they should also encourage learners to read a lot for pressure. Reading should not only be associated with assessments.

4.3.2.5 How teachers support learners

The researcher wanted to know how the teachers supported the learners who have reading comprehension problems. All the three teachers reported that when they come across learners with reading comprehension problems they encouraged the learners to see them and when they met, the teachers gave them reading activities. For example, Teacher X from school A reported that:

“Once I come across such kind of learners I encourage them to see me. When they come I give them a passage to read. Comprehension goes together with summary writing so sometimes I do give them summary work and I give them specific number of words that they should come up with.” [Teacher X School A, 07/10/16]

Teacher Y from the same school claimed that he gave learners passages from past papers and asked them to read and answer comprehension questions and he also explained that

sometimes he does not even give learners past papers but he asks learners to go and find past papers themselves and practice reading and answering comprehension questions.

Learners' responses during FGDs showed that the learners do not go to ask to teachers whenever they have problems for various reasons as explained in the following learners' responses:

Timakhala ndimantha. Aphunzitsi amaoneka kuti ndiokwiya ukangolakwa pang'ono amakupatsa chimbalo.

[We are afraid. The teachers seems unfriendly just a little mistake they give you a punishment.][School A, Learner 4, 10/11/16].

Learners from school B also stressed on the same point in the following words:

Timachita mantha kupita muofesi kukawafunsa amphunzitsi chifukwa ziphunzitsi alimo ambiri.

[We are afraid to go to office because there are a lot of teachers] (Learner1, School B, 15/11/16).

Timaopa kuti tikapita atha kutifunsa kuti ine mmene ndimaphunzitsa mkalasi muja simunamve?

[We are afraid that they can ask us that didn't you understand when I was teaching in class?](Learner 2, School B, 15/11/16)

Amatiuza kuti tiziwerenga kwambiri chifukwa ku college amangokusiirani mabuku. Ndenthawi zambiri samatithandiza.

[They tell us to read a lot because at college learners are just given books as such most of the time they do not help us.](Learner 3, School B, 15/11/16).

Amatiuza kuti tikuzitenga ku part time ndikumabwera nazo kuti tizisokoneza kalasi.

[They tell us that what we asking we are getting them from part time classes and we bring them to class to confuse others](Learner4, School B, 15/11/16).

Nthawi zina amayankha kuti ukawafunse anzako.

[Sometimes they say we should ask our friends] (Learner 5, School B, 15/11/16).

Apart from calling learners and giving them extra reading work, teacher Z from school B said that he gives the learners remedial work. He explained how he does that in the following words:

I just dedicate my time kumawaphunzitsa anawo paokhapaokha amene ndikuwaona kuti awa ali weaker. Knowing kuti class ndiyayikulu so aliyense payekhapyekha class sindingathe kuwafikira so ndimawaitana at my own time ndikuwauza kuti inu muli ndivuto ili so to encounter it muzipanga chonchi.

[I just dedicated my time to giving remedial lessons to learners who are weaker. Knowing that our classes are too big and I cannot manage to assist each learner in class so I call them at my own time and explain to them their weaknesses and how they can improve them.][Teacher Z, 07/10/16]

During FGDs with learners, it was discovered that learners are not given remedial lessons as all the learners in the FGDs denied being assisted as individuals but once in a while when majority of learners fail an exercise then the teacher sometimes did revision.

Modelling the right behaviour is another way how teachers support learners. Teacher X from school A reported that whenever she noticed that a learner was failing to pronounce words correctly she helped the learner by modelling the correct pronunciation of the word and asked the learner to read the word again. When the teacher was asked when she corrects the students errors, while the learner was reading or after the learner had finished reading. The teacher stated that she did that while the learner was still reading. During lesson observation the teacher was observed correcting learners reading pronunciation errors whenever a learner made one.

Lastly, all the three teachers mentioned use of group work as another kind of support they provide to learners on reading comprehension. When teachers were asked how they allocate students in groups, teacher X and Y from school A reported that, during lessons they used the seating plan. Teacher X further explained that although she used the seating plan it was advisable that teachers should make groups based on learners' abilities. Fast learners and slow learners should be combined to form one group.

When teachers were asked on how they ensured that the group activities benefited both the fast learners and slow learners all the teachers reported that when they gave learners work in groups whether class, or outside class they supervised the learners. Teacher Z added that when allocating the learners in the groups he explained to the most capable learners that he had placed them in those groups so that they should be helping the less capable learners.

When learners were asked how their teachers formed groups in their class, they explained that they used seating plan. During lesson observations it was noted that teachers used the seating planning when forming groups in class and they did not supervise the group activities as they claimed. During lesson observations, the teachers were seen doing other activities while learners were doing the group activity.

The weaknesses which were identified on the kind of support teachers gave to learners were: although teachers encouraged learners to feel free to go to them whenever they had problems the teachers did not create a conducive atmosphere, as such learners did not feel free to go and ask their teachers whenever they had problems. This hindered interaction between teachers and learners.

Secondly, the teachers reported that they supported learners by encouraging them to read widely. Literature shows that independent silent reading conducted without guidance or feedback, is not sufficient to build reading improvement (National Reading Panel, 2000). Students also needed the opportunities to talk about ideas in the texts, in order to move comprehension beyond the word level (Pressley and Wharton-Mc Donald, 1997). In addition, encouraging learners to read widely without providing them access to books hinders improvement of learners reading comprehension in the two CDSSs. The study has revealed that in CDSSs there is a challenge of inadequate books plus lack of access to the inadequate books on part of the learners. Lack of access to books contributed a lot to low comprehension of learners in CDSSs involved in this study. The researcher makes this claim because literature shows that denying learners access to books undermines the

critical role played by cultural tools in facilitating learning as proposed in the social cultural theory which informed this study. According to Vygotsky, the cultural tools gives learners opportunities to practice reading skills. In Malawi, having access to books in schools is a crucial step towards improvement of learners low comprehension abilities as many learners do not have books in their homes (Waliwa, 2017).

Thirdly, teachers reported that they support learners by giving weaker learners extra reading activities or remedial work. Although the teachers used this as a form of support to weaker learners, Johnston and Allington (1991) argues against the use of remediation beyond primary school. This is because remediation is associated with failure and adolescent readers feel embarrassed. Klenk and Kibby (2000) concurred with Allington and Johnston (1991) by calling for an end to the “remedy” metaphor. Instead, they proposed “mediational process” for both teachers and students (p. 681). However, mediation cannot work in the two schools studied since for it to work there is need for learners to have access to books. In the two schools, learners did not have access to books.

Lastly, the teachers used group work or study circles in the teaching of reading comprehension. Use of group work is another practice that is recommended for improving learners’ reading comprehension abilities in secondary school. Effective use of group activity is said to promote interaction. An interactive literacy environment facilitates social construction of knowledge. According to social-cultural theory of learning, Knowledge is socially constructed as learners interact with their friends and

teachers (Vgotsky, 1978). The learners are helped to understand things that would have been difficult to understand on their own. Then learners could use the skills acquired during the group activity in their independent activities.

Effective use of group work could have helped much in the two CDSSs because of high pupil ratio in class and inadequate books. Putting learners in small groups could have saved time and reduced teacher's workload as capable learners would be used to assist less capable students. However, the results of this study showed that group work was not used effectively as such failed to promote learning. For example, most of the times teachers put learners in pairs or groups not to do group work but to share books. Furthermore, most of the times teachers did not supervise the group work and did not train the more capable learners to assist less capable learners. The group works were not beneficial to the weak learners as capable learners dominated the group activities and less capable learners shunned the group activities.

4.3.3 Challenges teachers faced when teaching reading comprehension

The study revealed the following as challenges to the teaching of reading comprehension in the two CDSSs: poor literacy environment, lazy students and absenteeism, inadequate time, lack of support from other subject teachers, and English being difficult language for most learners.

4.3.3.1 Poor literacy environment

One of the major challenges in the teaching of reading comprehension in the two CDSSs was poor literacy environment. The literacy environment of the two schools were characterised by lack of / non- functional school library, inadequate reading materials and large number of learners per class.

In both schools, library was a challenge in the teaching of reading comprehension. School A had a library while school B had no school library. Although school A had a library by the time this research was conducted, the library was not functional. Learners were not allowed to go and read in the library. At school B, there was one class which was used as a library. Students would go in the classroom to read their exercise books or books they brought from somewhere else because there were no books in the classroom which was used as a library. Teachers mentioned lack of library in school B and nonfunctional library in school A as a factor hindering the teaching of reading comprehension. Teachers explained that they fail to use some practices that could enhance reading comprehension such as giving learners reading assignments.

In addition, to lack of library or non- functional library the two CDSSs had the problem of inadequate books which posed challenges to the teaching of reading comprehension. The teachers complained that the problem was even worse in the junior classes due to the introduction of new curriculum. Teacher X from school A reported that the Ministry of Education changed the curriculum for the secondary school but they did not provide schools with adequate prescribed books. When asked whether they use the old curriculum

books which they said are of reasonable amount as compared to the new books the teacher reported that they do not use them because they are afraid that if supervisors found them using the old curriculum they will be regarded as people who want to frustrate the implementation of the new curriculum. During lesson observations the researcher observed learners sharing books on the ratio of 1:4 and sometimes 1:6. This made teaching and learning difficult because during reading some learners faced opposite the book as a result failed to read.

Apart from having inadequate books there was problem of access to books by learners after lessons. In both schools learners were not allowed to borrow books to study at school after lessons or to take them home. They said this was done for security purposes to protect the books because learners were stealing books. However, teachers claimed that learners were allowed to borrow books through their subject teachers. During focusing group discussions with learners it was revealed that even access to books through subject teachers was not easy as there was favoritism from teachers on how they issued books to learners.

Lack of library and lack of access to the reading materials contributed to learners' low comprehension abilities in the two schools. The researcher makes this claim because literature shows that books are crucial in improving learners' literacy abilities. For example, Vygotsky social cultural theory of learning states that access to cultural tools like books is crucial in teaching reading comprehension (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). Having adequate books and giving learners access to the books was crucial step in the

process of improving learners' comprehension abilities in the two CDSSs studied. Availability and access to books has the potential of motivating learners to read unlike when books are unavailable. In addition, as already stated school is the only environment where learners can access books in Malawi since most students come from homes which do not have reading materials, and where reading resources are available, reading is not encouraged (Waliwa, 2017).

Another literacy environment problem that posed challenges in the teaching of reading comprehension in the two CDSSs was large class size. School B had over 100 learners in each class while School A had between 50 and 60 in each class. Teachers argued that the class size determined the nature of activity they gave to learners for practice. Teachers reported that large class size prevented them from giving learners written individual exercises frequently. The teachers explained that the size of the classes made them to shun activities that demanded a lot of time when marking such as summary writing, note making. Such kind of activities are not given as individual work but group work and as such the teachers failed to assist learners adequately and to give feedback on time.

The large class size created an uncondusive learning and teaching environment for reading comprehension in the two CDSSs. For example, some learners laughed at their friends when reading and answering comprehension questions and that demotivated those who were laughed at. There was also too much noise which also hindered learners' comprehension. For example, a learner from school B explained the problem of noise in the following words:

...komanso tikamawerenga ena amalongolola kapena ukuwerenga wina amakuuza iwet andibwereke chakuti ndeumalemphera kutsatira zimene ukuwerenga.

[Another thing is when we are reading some learners make noise or they interrupt you by saying can you borrow me this or that as such you fail to understand what you are reading] [School B, Form 1 learner, 15/11/16].

The last literacy environment factor that the researcher observed was lack of interaction between learners and teachers and among learners themselves. During lesson observations the researcher observed that there was lack of interaction as teacher centred activities dominated most lessons. For example, during reading activities teachers interacted with learners only when asking them questions to predict content or study pictures before reading the text. Then during actual reading there was no interaction between the teachers and the learners. The teacher did not try to ask learners questions while reading that would facilitate their understanding. Questions were asked after reading and when learners failed to provide right answer the teacher provided the answer without explaining how he did that.

When teachers used learner centred activities they were not used effectively to facilitate interaction between teachers and learners or among learners themselves. For example, group work was used for learners to share books since books were inadequate. When teachers gave learners activities to do in groups they were not supervising the activities. The result was that there was less interaction among learners as the group activities were done by the most capable learners while the rest of the group members were busy chatting or doing other things.

According to the Social cultural theory, children construct knowledge and meaning through interaction with friends and more knowledgeable adults. It is through this interaction that the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) comes into play. According to ZPD, children move from their level of actual development to the level of potential development when they have support from more knowledgeable friends and adults (Griffiths, et al., 2008).

In conclusion, the literacy environment for the learners in this study displayed lack of application of the principles of the Social cultural theory. Learners were denied access to books which are detrimental to improvement of their reading comprehension. There was also very little interaction among the learners and with the teachers. Such a literacy environment did not provide room for the learners to learn from friends and the teacher and to be supported by cultural tools such as books. The study showed that poor literacy environment in the two schools contributed to the poor performance of learners in reading comprehension in the two schools studied.

4.3.3.2 Inadequate time

Both teachers and learners mentioned time as another challenge in the teaching of reading comprehension. During FGDs with learners in school A and B they attributed their failure to comprehend text to limited time. One learner from school B explained the effect of the problem of inadequate time as follows:

Tikamawerengam'kalasi aphunzitsi amatiuza kuti pangani zachangu ndekumakhala kovuta kuti umvetse zimene ukuwerenga.

[When we are reading in class the teacher tells us to read fast as such it becomes difficult to understand what we are reading] [15/11/16].

Teacher X from school A, commenting on time agreed with what learners from school B reported. The teacher commented that she teaches comprehension once a week and most of the times it is a single period and that is not enough to enhance learners' comprehension skills. She continued to explain that limited time promote relaxant attitude in learners since the learners do not have the interest to read own their own. Classroom observations showed that time was indeed a challenge. The time teachers were allocating for comprehension was not enough some teachers even shunned teaching comprehension and preferred to teach grammar aspects. Some teachers felt that comprehension wasted much time. For example, teacher Z from school B explained that he does not focus much on reading comprehension in form four but drilling learners on grammar and literature as they prepare them for MSCE examinations since grades matter a lot. During class observations it was hard for this teacher to stick to the agreed schedule of once a week. Sometimes the researcher would go to school just to discover that the teacher has decided to teach grammar e.g. clauses instead of comprehension and this happened a number of times. Teachers also reported that they do not give individual or activities that demanded much time when marking because they do not have adequate time for marking as they have others classes to teach as well.

The finding of this study on inadequate time as a challenge for improving learners' reading comprehension abilities agrees with the findings of Mmela (2006) and Chimanjira (2012) studies. Mmela (2006) found out that time was a barrier to learning to implement integrated literacy approaches in schools due to the fixed timetables that guide teaching in the primary school which do not allow for opportunities for professional growth and, the teaching overload that inhibited some teachers from spending time on learning new practices. A study by Chilimanjira (2012) on the extent to which PCAR curriculum facilitated the acquisition of literacy skills in learners found out that one of the challenges responsible for low levels of literacy development in the schools involved was limited time allocated for literacy lessons. The researcher feels that for teachers to improve learners' comprehension abilities in the two CDSSs study there is need to dedicate extra time outside class time where learners can have ample time to practice the skills they learn. This could be possible with the study circle policy which is being implemented in secondary schools. Study circles should not only be used for literature and grammar but for comprehension as well.

4.3.3.3. Lazy students and absenteeism

Teachers also mentioned student's laziness and absenteeism as another challenge in enhancing learner's reading comprehension. Teacher Y from school A explained that they do reading comprehension on Wednesdays first period which is 7:30am and many learners do not attend the class because they come to school late. This was confirmed during observations as the class was always half empty. Apart from lack of punctuality, the teachers from both schools complained that learners do not read and do not do

assignments when they are given. When they ask them why they do not write assignments some say they forget, others say they are given a lot of household chores and they do not have time to study at home.

4.3.3.4 Lack of support from other subject teachers

Another challenge that teachers experienced when teaching reading comprehension is lack of support from other subject teachers. The teachers complained that most of the times it was the teachers of English only who insisted that any discussion in class should be done in English while teachers of other subjects like humanities, do their discussions in vernacular language. Teacher X from school A explained the problem as follows:

I am strict with learners that this is English lesson and any discussion must be in English. Then I go out and a social studies teacher gets in and discuss their lessons in vernacular. It can't work as comprehension requires a lot of practice. You find that humanities teachers like to teach in vernacular so it happens that learners like them because they are free to use any language they want [Teacher X, 12/10/16].

4.3.3.5 Poor background in the use of English language at primary school

Poor background of learners in the use of English language was also another challenge that was identified by both teachers and learners as contributing to low reading comprehension levels among learners in CDSSs. Teacher Y from school A reported that, “understanding of the language is difficult.” Teacher X from school A told the researcher that many learners did not understand passages that they read or listen to most of the time they need the teacher to interpret the passages in Chichewa. The learners reported that

they were used to learn in Chichewa in primary school, their teachers used to explain in both Chichewa and English and it was easy to understand while in secondary school most of the times the teachers do not explain the stories in Chichewa.

4.3.4 How teachers overcame the challenges

The last research question aimed at finding out what teachers do to overcome different challenges they encountered in the teaching of reading comprehension. The study showed that teachers do the following to overcome the challenges discussed: encouraged learners to be members of national library, working together with parents in motivating learners to read and use study circle groups.

4.3.4.1 Encouraging learners to be members of national library

Teacher Z from school B which had no library reported that he overcomes the challenge of lack of library at the school by encouraging learners to be members of national library so that after knocking off they could be going to the national library and be borrowing books from there. When the teacher was asked how he ensured that learners are really going to the library he explained that, he asked the learners to show him books they borrow. During FGD with the learners, most learners reported that they do not go to the National library to read because the library is too far from the school and most of the prescribed books are not available.

Encouraging learners to read without guidance does not help much to improve the ability of learners who have reading comprehension problems. The teacher for school B encourages learners to become members of National Library without guiding them on which books to read as such when learners go to the library and they do not find the prescribed text they use in class they get discouraged. Literacy research has demonstrated that when teachers encourage and guide children to engage in extensive reading and

writing, they get a wider scope of literacy, strengthen their reading skills, vocabulary, and content knowledge, and increase the level of imagination (Ohanian (2001) as cited in Mmela, (2006). This shows that the solution used here does not help to improve the reading comprehension of the learners.

4.3.4.2 Use of study circles

Teachers from both schools explained that they overcome the problems of inadequate books, limited time and large class sizes through use of study circles. However, when learners were asked if they are given books to do reading comprehension activities during study circles, learners denied. Learners from both schools reported that most of the times what they do during study circles is literature and grammar not comprehension.

Study circle is policy by MoEST which was introduced in secondary schools in 2015. The term “study circle” refers to “a small group of students who meet multiple times for academic purposes to discuss educational topics” (MoEST, 2015). Study circle policy was introduced in order to improve secondary school learners’ performance. The composition of study circle group is between seven and eleven members per group. Teachers are advised that the total number of members per group should be an odd number, members for each group should come from the same class and must be learners of mixed abilities and mixed gender in case of co-education schools. It is recommended for study circles to be conducted twice a week for a minimum of one hour thirty minutes, with at least 30 minutes break and be conducted after classes. It is recommended that

during study circle discussion topics under discussion should be based on learners needs (MoEST, 2015).

Analysis of how study circles were conducted in the two school left a lot to be desired as far as improvement of learners' reading comprehension is concerned. The first weakness on the use of study circle was how they were formed. When teachers were asked how they allocated students in study circles groups, all teachers said that form teachers are the ones who were responsible for coming up with study circle groups and they did not know what criterion is used to form the study circle groups. Teacher Z from school B claimed that they consider learners' abilities when forming groups. They make sure that groups have learners of mixed abilities. However, during FGDs when learners were asked how their teachers formed study circle groups in their class, learners from both schools reported that the study circle groups were made in class. Their form teachers asked them to count one to ten. Then all learners with similar numbers were put in one group. The way teachers formed the groups is contrary to what is stipulated in the study circle guide on how to form groups for study circles.

The study circle guide stipulates that groups must consist of learners of mixed abilities so that capable learners can be assisting less capable learners. The way the groups were formed in this two schools can result in less capable learners or capable learners being in one group thereby making study circles to be less beneficial to learners. Although teachers were forming groups in this way, they were aware of the right way to form the groups and the advantages of forming groups using learners' abilities. This makes one wonder why were they doing the opposite.

The second weakness was on how teachers conducted the study circles. When teachers were asked on how they ensure that the study circles benefit both the fast learners and slow learners, all the teachers said that when they gave learners work to be done during study circle they supervise the learners as such they make sure that both learners benefit. Teacher Z added that when allocating the learners in the groups he explained to the most capable learners that they have placed them in those groups so that they should be helping the less capable learners. However, learners reported that most of the times the teachers did not supervise the work but they leave the responsibility in the hands of the group leader who write down names of members who attend the study circle and give it to the teacher the following day. Learners who did not attend are usually punished.

The last weakness on the use of study circles in improving learners' reading comprehension abilities was over dependence on the study circle as the only time to give learners work outside class time. With the coming of study circle policy it was learnt from learners that most of assignments are given to be done during study circle time. Depending on study circle time alone as the time for learners to practice different comprehension skills was inadequate. As already explained it is recommended that study circles must be done at least twice a week. In the two CDSSs the study circles were conducted three times per week. The three times per week translates to twelve times per month and thirty six times per term. The thirty six times is supposed to be divided among the nine to ten subjects that are offered at secondary school level. This shows that depending on the study circles alone is inadequate to enhance learners' performance let

alone learner reading comprehension abilities. As reported by learners, most of the time teachers gave learners activities on grammar and literature and not reading comprehension.

4.3.4.5 Working with parents

Encouraging parents to give their learners time to study at home and supervise their studies. Teacher Z from school B explained that during Parents Teacher association (PTA) meeting they encouraged parents to be giving their learners adequate time to study at home by not giving them too much house hold chores and by controlling the use of televisions in their houses. This is a good practice to improve learners reading comprehension abilities however it cannot help to a large extent as research has shown that most Malawian parents are illiterate and most learners come from homes with poor literacy environment (Chilimanjira, 2012).

In conclusion, the study has shown that teachers tried to find solutions to encounter the challenges they faced in the teaching of reading comprehension. However, the results had shown that the solutions that were used in the two CDSSs studied did not help much to improve learners reading comprehension abilities due to some challenges encountered in implementing them.

4.4 Chapter summary

The chapter has presented the results of the study. In particular, the chapter described the research context of the two schools studied, it has also presented the findings and it has discussed the findings based on the four research questions. The next chapter discusses the conclusions and implications drawn from the findings of the study on the teaching of reading comprehension.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Chapter overview

The current study was carried out to assess the practices teachers of English use when teaching reading comprehension in CDSSs in order to find out their strengths and weaknesses in enhancing learners' reading comprehension abilities. In order to assess the practices, the researcher posed four specific questions. The first question was on the kind of practices teachers use when teaching reading comprehension. The second question was on how the teachers used the practices. The third question was on the challenges teachers faced in the use of the practices, while the last question was on how the teachers overcame the challenges they encountered. Chapter four presented the results and discussion on the findings of this study and answered all the research questions. This chapter discusses some of the conclusions that have been drawn from the findings of the study based on the research questions. The chapter also discusses the implications of the conclusions drawn. Finally the chapter makes suggestions on areas for further studies.

5.2 Conclusions and their implications

This section presents some of the conclusions and their implications in the teaching of reading comprehension in the two CDSSs involved in the study.

5.2.1 Teachers used good practices but they were inadequate

The conclusion based on the first research question is that teachers in the two CDSSs used good practices which are recommended in literature for enhancing learners reading comprehension abilities at secondary school level. In addition, the practices used were appropriate as they addressed some of the sources of learners reading comprehension problems. However, the problem was that teachers allocated very little time for the teaching of comprehension and the practices used were inadequate. Teachers did not use some practices which are also crucial in enhancing reading comprehension in secondary school learners.

The implication of this conclusion is that learners' reading comprehension abilities in the two CDSSs will continue to be low until teachers begin to give adequate time and use a variety of practices when teaching reading comprehension.

5.2.2 Teachers did not use the practices effectively

Although teachers used good practices that are recommended for enhancing reading comprehension at secondary school level, the practices were not effectively used to enhance reading comprehension. The results and discussions presented in Chapter 4 have shown that lessons were dominated by teacher explanations, learners were not given enough time to practice the skills and teachers focused on teaching the 'what' and not the 'how'. Therefore, it can be concluded that how teachers used the practices contributed to learners' low comprehension abilities in the two CDSSs involved in this study.

The implication is that if nothing is done to improve on how teachers use the practices they use when teaching reading comprehension in the two CDSSs, learners reading comprehension levels will continue to be low. Low comprehension levels of learners in the two CDSSs means high failure rates at MSCE examinations. These learners will also fail to perform effectively in the social-economic development of the country since comprehension is key to academic excellence as well as functioning effectively in a literate society like Malawi. Hence, there is need to do something to improve the situation in the two CDSSs. For example, encouraging schools to be conducting In-Service Trainings where teachers can share knowledge on the effective ways of teaching reading comprehension. Conducting frequent supervisions to monitor how teachers are teaching reading comprehension, how they are using the learner-centred approach and how they are using the study circle policy in teaching reading comprehension.

5.2.3 The teaching of reading comprehension in the two CDSSs faced challenges

The teaching of reading comprehension in the two CDSSs involved in this study faced a number of challenges which prevented teachers from using some practices which could enhance learners' reading comprehension abilities. The results in chapter 4 have shown that the two CDSSs faced the following challenges: inadequate books, lack of access to the inadequate books on the side of the learners, the classes were overcrowded, teachers had big workloads, teachers of English lack support from other subject teachers and there were high absenteeism

of learners. All these challenges prevented teachers from using some practices that could enhance learners' reading comprehension and they also prevented learners from acquiring the reading comprehension skills that the teachers were teaching.

The implication of this conclusion is that learners' reading comprehension in English in the two schools will continue to remain low unless the challenges that hinder improvement of learner's reading comprehension are addressed. For example, unless MoEST builds school libraries, in schools where they are not available and ensures that where libraries are available they are functional. MoEST, must also ensure that the libraries are stocked with adequate prescribed textbooks and supplementary reading materials. Lastly, content teachers must be encouraged to be using English as language of instruction.

5.2.4 How teachers overcame the challenges they encountered did not help much

The results in chapter 4 have shown that teachers used different ways to overcome the challenges they encounter in the teaching of reading comprehension such as they encourage learners to be members of the national library, they use study circle time and work with learners parents. However, most of these ways did not work to enhance learners reading comprehension abilities as they were not used effectively.

The implication of this situation is that the chances of teachers improving learners' reading comprehension abilities in the two CDSSs studied was slim since even the

solutions teachers used to overcome the challenges did not help in enhancing learners reading comprehension abilities.

5.3 Areas for further research

There are other areas around the teaching of reading comprehension that need to be given special attention which may not have been researched thoroughly in the current study.

The areas are presented in this sub-section:

- In this study it was found that one of the factors that contributed to low reading comprehension in the two CDSSs was dwindling of the reading culture in learners. Therefore, there is need to carry out a study to find out how teachers motivate learners to like reading.
- Ministry of education Science and Technology is implementing study circle policy in secondary schools in Malawi, therefore, there is need to conduct a study on teachers' perception and views on the study circle policy and assessing how teachers are using the study circle policy in teaching reading comprehension.

5.4 Chapter summary

The chapter has presented the conclusions drawn from the findings of the study and their implications. The chapter has shown that teachers used good practices that could enhance learners' reading comprehension abilities but the practices were not used effectively and they were inadequate. The chapter has also shown that teachers encountered many challenges in the use of different practices and the solutions teachers used did not help to

enhance learners' reading comprehension abilities to a larger extent since they were also not used effectively. The implication of the findings was that unless teachers are trained to start using the practices effectively and the challenges they encounter are minimised learners reading comprehension in the two schools studied will continue to be low. Lastly the chapter has presented areas for further research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Letter of Introduction from Chancellor College



CHANCELLOR COLLEGE
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Introducing Ms Dolica Chiyembekeza

I have the pleasure to introduce to you Ms Dorica Chiyembekeza our MEd [Language Education] student in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching Studies, Faculty of Education. Her student Registration number is MED/LED/17/14.

To fulfill some of the requirements for the programme, Ms Chiyembekeza intends to carry out a study around language teaching and learning in secondary schools.

I therefore write to kindly ask for your support towards her study as she collects the appropriate data for her Masters thesis.

I thank you in anticipation for your cooperation and support.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Foster Kholowa".

Foster Kholowa (PhD)
DEAN OF EDUCATION



Appendix 2: Letter of introduction from education division manager

REF. NO. SEED/ADM/VOL. II/478

27th September, 2016.

FROM : THE EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER, SOUTH EAST EDUCATION DIVISION,
PRIVATE BAG 48, ZOMBA.

TO : THE HEADTEACHER,

**AUTHORITY TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS ON ASSESSING PRACTICES TEACHERS OF
ENGLISH USE WHEN TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION : A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN SEED.**

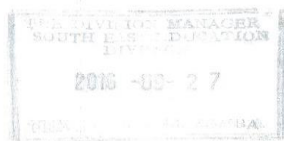
I write to kindly request your office to allow Ms. Dolica Chiyembekeza, currently a post graduate student at Chancellor College the University of Malawi – to carry out a research related activity for her Med faculty of Education, as a last stage of her study in collecting the appropriate data for her Master's thesis.

I will be most grateful if Ms. Chiyembekeza is given all the necessary support and guidance so that her data collection exercise is carried out successfully.

I look forward to your usual support and hoping at the same time that you will accord this request all the attention and urgency that it deserves.


M.S.D. ALUFANDIKA

EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER



Appendix 3: Interview form for teachers

Bio-Data

Teacher's Code _____

Sex _____

Academic qualification _____

Duration of teaching _____

School Code _____

Form _____

Part 1: sources of learners reading comprehension problems

1. In generally terms, what can you say about the levels of reading comprehension of your learners?

What are the sources/causes of reading comprehension problems in your learners?

How did you know the sources/causes of the learners' reading comprehension problems?

Part 2: The teaching of reading comprehension

2. In generally terms, explain how you teach reading comprehension?

How much time do you allocate for reading comprehension per week and why?

Part 4: Reading activities

3. What kind of reading activities do you use when teaching comprehension?

Pre-reading

During /while
reading

Post

reading

Among these activities which ones do you use frequently and why?

What roles do your learners play in the activities?

Part 5: Teacher's support

4. How do you support learners with reading comprehension problems in your class?

When do you provide the support?

What kind of activities have you done or planned to do specifically to enhance reading comprehension to learners who have difficulties with reading comprehension?

How do you encourage teacher - students and students to students' interactions in your class and outside class?

What criteria do you use to allocate learners into reading groups and why?

How do you ensure that the reading group activities benefit both the capable and less capable learners?

Part 6: Reading opportunities

What kind of reading opportunities do you provide to your learners and how frequent?

What measures have you put in place to ensure that learners read widely?

Part 7: Reading strategies

What kind of reading strategies do you teach your learners?

How do you teach the strategies?

Part 8: Challenges in teaching reading comprehension

Does the teaching of reading comprehension help to improve learners' reading comprehension abilities? If yes/ no why?

What challenges do you face in the teaching of reading comprehension?

5. How do you overcome the challenges?

6. What do you think should be done in order to improve learners reading comprehension abilities in CDSSs?

Appendix 4: Classroom observation form

School Code

Date

Form

Topic

Sub-Topic

Number of

Students

1. School and classroom literacy environment

School and Class Literacy Environment	Yes	No
Does the school have a library		
Reading materials: Prescribed books and Supplementary materials		
Does the teacher bring reading materials in the classroom		
Student book ratio		
Others (specify)		

General comments

2. Sources or causes of learner's reading comprehension problems

Possible sources	Yes	No
Pronunciation		
Fluency/ reading rate		
Vocabulary		
Content knowledge/Background knowledge		
Reading strategies		
Others specify		

General comments

3. Teaching of reading comprehension

Part A: Learner assessment	Yes	No	Comments
Does the teacher assess learner's reading comprehension			
Part B: Methods used			
Explanation			
Question and Answer			
Pair/Group Discussions			
Part C: Activities used			
Reading aloud			
Silent reading			
Peer guided reading			
Answering Questions			
Asking questions			
Summary writing			
Note Making			
Part D: Strategies taught			
a. Planning and monitoring			
Previewing			
Setting reading purpose			
Making predictions			
Clarifying ideas using fix-up strategies			
Clarifying vocabulary using context clues, affixes			
Recognizing story structure and organization			
Semantic and graphic organisers			

b. Determining importance of text			
Identifying main ideas: stated and implied			
Summarising			
Note personal relevance of ideas and text			
c. Asking questions			
Checking one's understanding			
Querying the author about his/ her writing			
Identifying relationships among ideas within a text			
d. Answering questions			
e. Visualising			
f. Making inferences			
g. Synthesing			
Others (specify)			

General comments(how and when the methods, activities and strategies used; learners role)

4. Teachers support

Part A: Teacher- learner interaction	Yes	No	Comments
Does the teacher create a conducive environment for teacher - learner interaction (how)			
Possible teacher support to learners			
Questioning			
Discussion			

Modelling desired behavior			
Guiding students on how to use strategies			
Summarising			
Providing reading opportunities			
Guiding students how to choose reading materials			
Vocabulary instruction			
Others (specify)			
Part B: Learner – learner interaction			
Does the teacher provide opportunities for learner – learner interactions			
Examples of learner –learner interactions			
Pair/ group work			
Peer guided reading			
Others (specify)			

General comments

5. Challenges in the teaching of reading comprehension

Possible challenges	Yes	No	Comments
Teaching and learning materials			
Class size			
Time constraints			
Others (Specify)			

Appendix 5: Interview form for learners' FGDs

School Code _____

Number of participants' _____ **Boys**____ **Girls** _____

Date _____

1. What components of English do you learn?

2. Which component do you find interesting and easy and which one do you find difficult?

3. What makes reading comprehension a difficult task?

4. How does your teacher teach reading comprehension?

How frequent do you do reading comprehension in your class?

5. What activities does the teacher use in teaching reading comprehension? How do the activities help you to improve your comprehension abilities?

6. How does your teacher promote teacher- student interaction and student to student interactions?

What criteria does your teacher use to put you in pairs or groups?

Does your teacher explain to you why they use the activities they use such as pair/group work?

7. What kind of support does the teacher provide to learners who have difficulties in understanding a text when teaching reading comprehension?

8. Does your school have a school library? If yes are there enough prescribed and supplementary reading materials in the library?

9. Are you allowed to use the Library and take books home?

10. What Kind of reading opportunities does your teacher give you? How frequent does the teacher give reading opportunities?

11. What kind of reading materials do you use? Who decide on the reading materials to use?

12. What reading strategies does your teacher teach you?

13. How does s/he teach the reading strategies?

What strategies do you use when you are given a passage to read?

14. What would you want your teachers to do to improve your reading comprehension abilities?
