

**INVESTIGATING STRATEGIES TEACHERS EMPLOY IN PROMOTING
LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN INFANT CLASSES OF MALAWI RURAL
PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A CASE OF ONE PRIMARY SCHOOL IN MULANJE
RURAL DISTRICT**

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

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**UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI
CHANCELLOR COLLEGE**

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DECLARATION

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

Full legal name

Signature

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late Mum, Esner Dominiko Jaluwa, and late Dad, Stanley Sailless Jaluwa. Mum, you were a strong woman who never gave up even in times of challenges. From you, I learnt perseverance and endurance. Most of all, I have learnt to be a strong woman. Dad, it is a loss to me for you departed early before this paper was finished. I know, though untimely, it was God's plan. May your souls Rest in Peace.

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ABSTRACT

Teaching strategies among other factors are fundamental in the teaching of literacy in the early grades of primary education. As such it is very important that teachers employ strategies that help the learners develop literacy skills as early as possible. This study aimed at investigating teaching strategies teachers employed in the teaching of literacy to promote literacy development in standards one and two learners. A case study was the research design that was used in this study. Data were collected using qualitative methods. The findings of the study revealed that teaching strategies used play a role in developing learners' literacy skills to a lesser extent. According to the findings, teachers employed learner-centred approaches and different interactive strategies. Despite the fact that interactive learner centred approaches and strategies were employed, they were less effective for several factors: Firstly, the approaches used were full of activities for the learners to learn in a 30- minute period hence the teachers were unable to finish the lessons. It was also revealed that with English as a second language, it was a challenge for the learners mastering long sentences hence lessons ended in suspense. As such there was a portrayal that development of literacy was achieved at a minimal rate. The study concludes that the strategies will not be effective unless the approaches used are designed in line with the sociolinguistic and cognitive development of the learners in mind, since failing to do will not bring about promotion of literacy development in young learners.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BTL	Break Through to Literacy
BTLM	Break Through to Literacy in Malawi
CBCC	Community Based Child Care Centre
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CORI	Concept Oriented Reading Instruction
DEM	District Education Manager
DVDs	Digital Versatile Devices
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EFG	Education for All
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
ELLs	English Language Learners
GABLE	Girls Attainment in Basic Education
G-R-R	Gradual Release of Responsibility
HDRI	Human Development Report Index
HEART	Health and Education Advice and Resource Team
IEQ	Improving Educational Quality
INSET	In-service Training
LAC	Language Across the Curriculum
LAD	Language Acquisition Device
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MIE	Malawi Institute of Education
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoEST	Ministry of Education Science and Technology

MoGCDSW	Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare
MSCE	Malawi School Certificate of Education
MTPDS	Malawi Teacher Professional Development Support
NESP	National Education Sector Plan
NGO	Non- Governmental Organisation
NRP	National Reading Programme
PCAR	Primary Curriculum Assessment Reform
PEAs	Primary Education Advisors
PIF	Policy and Investment Framework
PSSP	Primary School Support Project
PTR	Pupil Teacher Ratio
QUEST	Quality Education through Supporting Teachers
SHED	Shire Highlands Education Division
S-V-O	Subject Verb Object
TDC	Teacher development Centre
UNICEF	United Nations International Children Education Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Chapter Overview

Despite the fact that literacy was introduced in Malawian education during colonialism, the challenge of illiteracy still exists. To fight against this challenge, the country, development partners, policy makers, as well as other stakeholders, have been trying to change one approach after another in order to get a better strategy of teaching literacy. Furthermore, many teachers have been trained so that they employ effective teaching strategies to teaching reading and writing but still in vain. According to research (Chilora, 2001; Sampa, 2005), learners in Malawi reach standard four or six with reading problems in that many learners are able just to read a single word in standard four. Thus, they reach upper classes while they are still at basic level which is a pitiful state. This chapter, therefore, presents problems prevalent in Malawian primary schools despite initial teacher training which teachers undergo, as well as curriculum reforms in order to improve and achieve high levels of literacy (Chilimanjira, 2012). Interventions by the government of Malawi, Non-governmental Organisations and some development partners such as USAID and World Bank have also proved futile as literacy development promotion in young learners still becomes a challenge. Furthermore, the chapter presents statement of the problem, purpose, research questions, and the significance of the study.

1.2 General background to the study

This section provides a general background to the problem of poor development of literacy levels among learners in Malawi rural primary schools. This section first provides a general background of the Malawi's education system; and then the literacy developments in Malawi.

1.2.1 Malawi's Education system

Malawi follows an 8-4-4 education system. This system consists of eight years of primary, four years of secondary and four years of tertiary education. Transition from one level to the other, especially in examination classes, depends on passing of English during National Examinations (NESP, 2008). Therefore, learners' competence in the language is a key to academic excellence. The competence in language has its basis on good background of literacy. Public primary school system as already stipulated consists of eight years, and official entry age is 6 years however, children who are under 6 or over 6 years old are enrolled in grade 1. The primary school grades are called standards. For instance, grade 1 is standard 1, grade 2 is standard 2; this goes on up to grade 8.

Teachers who teach at the primary school undergo initial training in Primary Teacher Training Colleges. In addition to the initial training the teachers undergo, at the field they also undergo in-service training where they are taught different teaching strategies and techniques. Despite all these initiatives, Malawi faces challenges as regards to literacy promotion in the learners (Kholowa 2007; Health and Education Advice and Resource Team, 2016).

1.2.2 Literacy development in Malawi primary schools

Malawi is striving for quality education by advocating for teaching strategies that make a positive impact on learners especially in the literacy domain. The primary school curriculum in Malawi, for instance, underwent reform with the objective of making it an outcome based curriculum (Ministry of Education Science and technology, 2004). The motive behind this was that the outcome based curriculum would help improving the internal efficiency of the system, which was regarded to be examination oriented (Chilimanjira, 2012). Through curriculum reform, Malawi hoped to achieve high levels of literacy and numeracy. However, the situation on the ground is different (Kholowa, 2007; Chilimanjira, 2012; HEART, 2016) as learners' performance on reading is persistently poor.

Multiple literacy interventions, one of which is to train and expose the teachers to different methods and strategies of teaching language or literacy, have been put in place countrywide. To shade more light, the Government of Malawi in collaboration with development partners and non-governmental organisations go for participatory approaches as learners become active participants in their own learning. This is to ensure that when the learners are immersed in the learning activities they end up developing basic literacy skills (Calkins, 2001).

To implement the participatory strategies in Malawi classrooms, the Government of Malawi in collaboration with the development partners as well as non-governmental organisations is trying to equip teachers with different strategies in literacy instruction to achieve a literate society (MoEST, 2016). Thus, there have been several literacy

projects and initiatives put in place to help eliminate the problems of reading and writing throughout this country (HEART, 2016).

Just to mention but a few, Malawi Breakthrough to Literacy (MBTL), conducted in 2004 was a project that systemised the language experience approach to the process of learning to read and write. The BTL was basically a methodology that was used to help children to learn initial reading and writing skills in their local language much faster. This approach utilised the aural/oral language skills which a child brought into the classroom from home (Sampa, 2005).

USAID/Malawi funded a three-year Malawi Teacher Professional Development Support (MTPDS) Project in 2010. This project intended to improve educational outcomes by building Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) capacity, improving teacher capacity to teach reading, school management and leadership. The project provided continuous professional development (CPD) to 34,000 lower primary school teachers across the country and higher-intensity literacy programming in seven districts in Malawi (Pouzevara, Costello and Banda, 2013, p. 2).

The other project is The Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA) Project which was carried out in 2010 (Pouzevara et.al, 2013). This project was a multifaceted educational development approach which intended to enable sustained literacy. World Vision Malawi as well conducted a project to improve children's learning outcomes by providing early grade learners with quality literacy program in 2015 (Kakande, 2015). The National Reading Panel Program is also under implementation in all primary schools in Malawi. As its name suggests, it targets all primary schools from standard 1

up to standard 4 (MoEST, 2016). The aim of this intervention is to promote literacy skills in English and Chichewa.

Despite all the initiatives put in place, it has been proved a challenge as learners portray that they are still at non-mastery level of literacy development (Chilimanjira, 2012; HEART, 2016; MoEST, 2016). For instance, learners have been showing low performances in several literacy studies: A baseline study conducted in some districts by the Malawi Education Support Activity (2004), as cited in Kholowa (2007), it was found that the majority of the learners were at non-mastery levels in reading, comprehension and writing skills.

In standard 3 for example, 98% of the boys and 99% of the girls were at non mastery level in literacy acquisition. Furthermore, it was observed that 99% of the learners in standard 3 could hardly comprehend what they had just read. The problems prevailed also in writing as “60% of both boys and girls could hardly write any word of their choice among the English most commonly used words. Problems in reading were also noted in standard 6 lessons of English where it was found that about 40% of the learners could not read words taken from their own class textbook” (MESA, 2004, p. 92, as cited in Kholowa (2007, p. 93).

Similarly, Early Grade Reading Assessment (2013) Evaluation on reading assessment conducted by Pouzevara et. al (2013), revealed that only 7.7 % of standard 2 learners and 12.5% of standard 4 learners reached the reading fluency EGRA Coordinating Committee benchmarks for familiar-word reading. The poor reading performance on that subtask was further illustrated by a large number of zero scores. In standard 2; where learners were supposed to read approximately 32 words per minute (calculated

as the midpoint between Standard 1 and Standard 3 EGRA Coordinating Committee benchmarks), 70 % of the children tested across 10 districts were not able to read a single word. Furthermore, the same districts had high percentages of zero scores on other initial reading subtasks such as letter name recognition, syllable segmentation, initial sound identification, and syllable reading.

The scores proved to be very low where 25% of standard 4 learners in another district could not read even a single word. This is worrisome considering the fact that learners should be reading between forty-five to sixty-words per minute in standard 4. On the same portrayal of learners' poor performance, the United Nations' 2015 Human Development Report Index shows that Malawi, despite its effort as a government to improve the quality of education, is below average on worldwide education indices. For instance, Malawi ranks 173rd out of 188 countries for the quality of its education (Human Development Report, 2015, p. 244) which is a shameful state of affairs.

Not putting ideas in practice has been noted to be one of the factors that contribute to low literacy development among learners in Malawi. Ministry of Education and UNICEF (1998), in their studies of free primary education analysis found that teachers used bottom-up approaches to teaching English in Malawi classrooms disregarding the fact that they are teacher-centered. This behaviour of teachers putting teacher-centered strategies into practice was also discovered by Stuart (2000) whereby the teachers paid lip-service to learner-centered teaching, participatory and active learning since it was not happening on the ground.

BTL and LAC Program evaluation Reports (2004) noted that teachers used fewer materials or they did not use any teaching materials to support the teaching and learning of literacy. Thus, despite provision of teaching and learning materials, some teachers were not using them adequately. The evaluators suggested that such a tendency was a portrayal of what was happening in many schools where stacks of books were withheld in offices for future usage while pupils went out without books. In tandem with this sentiment, Povezevara et.al in their EGRA Baseline Report (2013) reveal that on initial sound identification, learners achieved poor scores for teachers were employing syllabic method of teaching. Furthermore, it was also observed that “initial sound identification was not a skill that was currently taught in Malawi classrooms and it was for the first time the evaluation team saw that learners were asked to do that activity” (p.6).

Apart from the challenges highlighted above, research findings also reveal some challenges that are regarded to hamper literacy development in Malawi and these include class size, understaffing, teacher and pupil absenteeism, lack of classroom space, and ineffectual head teachers and teachers’ practices employed in the teaching of literacy (HEART, 2016). To be more explicit, “teachers’ practices that are regarded to hamper literacy development in learners include insufficient time on the task, poor teaching methodologies, and also poor use of teaching and learning materials” (HEART, 2016, p. 6).

The problem of literacy development has been a challenge in Malawi for a long time and that is the reason educationists go for one theory after another in order to bring change which is not forthcoming. Despite the interventions of some projects like

MBTL, LAC and EGRA that equipped the teachers with new ways and skills of teaching; literacy development in young learners still remains a big problem. We still have so many learners who cannot read and write. While there could be many attributes to the cause of this, it is clear that teacher's strategies are playing a central role in the failure of the learners' development of basic literacy skills. However, despite the fact that teachers' strategies have been identified already, they were identified as the cause, haven't been explored in detail or thoroughly as an area of study.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

In Malawi, issues of literacy have been a challenge for a long time for there are problems among learners in developing basic literacy skills throughout the country (HEART, 2016). The Government of Malawi, international as well as non-governmental organisations, such as World Vision International, have been trying to equip teachers with various strategies of teaching or initiating effective literacy interventions in the early grades but have not been successful. It is not known whether the problems are the learners or the teachers. The researcher suggests that despite the many factors to this problem, teachers contribute to the deficiency of literacy development in the young learners. Despite numerous interventions, still the situation is not improving and thus the study intends to investigate how teachers employ strategies in promoting literacy development in learners of the Malawi rural primary schools.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the strategies which teachers employed in literacy instruction in infant classes to promote the development of literacy among learners in Malawi rural infant classrooms.

1.5 Research Questions

The following was the main and specific research question:

1.5.1 Main Research Question

How do teachers promote the development of literacy among learners in Malawi rural primary school infant classes?

1.5.2 Specific Research Questions

Specifically the study answered three sub-research questions:

- What strategies do teachers employ in the teaching of reading in infant classes?
- How do teachers employ literacy strategies and techniques in reading to promote literacy development in infant classes?
- What challenges do literacy teachers encounter in the teaching and learning of reading in infant classes?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The findings of the study would be significant in number of ways: Firstly, the results of the study would enrich the literature on literacy development and thereby fill the knowledge gap. Secondly, the findings of the study would also inform stakeholders and development partners ways and means of enhancing teachers' knowledge about literacy instruction. Finally, the findings would provide insights to teachers on what to include in literacy instruction to promote literacy development in young learners.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Literacy: In this study, literacy refers to the ability to read (Education for All Global Monitoring Report Team, 2006).

Infant classes: Infant classes refer to the first two grades of primary school (standards 1 and 2) (MoEST, 2016).

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): It is 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).

Scaffolding: It is the assistance the learner gets from others, specifically those who are more able, in the learning process in order to move from one level of development to the other (Vygotsky, 1978).

Approach: This is the set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of teaching and learning to read (Kumaradivelu, 2008).

Strategies: These refer to styles which the teacher may use in the teaching of reading (Kumaradivelu, 2008).

Technique (s): These refer to a particular trick or stratagem a teacher uses to accomplish an immediate objective or challenge (Kumaradivelu, 2008).

Multilingual: This may refer to a country in which there are more than two languages spoken; it can also refer to a person who speaks more than two languages (M'mela, 2006). In the current study multilingual refers to a country where more than two languages are spoken.

1.8 Thesis structure

Chapter One presents the introduction and background information, statement of the problem as well as definition of the terms that are used in the current study. Chapter Two presents review of related literature as regards some approaches, strategies and techniques which teachers employ in the teaching of literacy. In addition, it presents how teachers employ strategies and techniques when teaching reading. Finally, some challenges that teachers encounter when teaching literacy in Malawi have also been presented. In the same Chapter Two, there is presentation of the theoretical framework that informed this study. In Chapter Three, the research design and methodology are presented. In the methodology section, sampling techniques, methods of data generation, data analysis and ethical considerations are discussed. The findings and discussions of the study are presented in Chapter Four. The last chapter presents summary of the findings, conclusions, implications, and areas for further study.

1.9 Chapter summary

The chapter has looked at the background of literacy challenge in Malawi; it has also presented initiatives employed by the Government of Malawi in collaboration with development partners in order to curb the challenge of poor development of basic literacy skills in primary school learners. This has been followed by research questions and the significance of the study. At the end, are definitions of terms that have been used in the current study. The next chapter presents literature review.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents a review of related literature on strategies that teachers employ in the process of teaching literacy. It also presents scholarly work and research findings pertaining to the teaching of literacy. The chapter begins with understanding of the term literacy; discusses the importance of literacy followed by discussions of some of the approaches and strategies that promote literacy skills. Finally, there is reflection on the challenges teachers encounter to promote literacy development in young learners in infant classes. The theoretical framework for this study has been presented towards the end of this chapter.

2.2 Understanding Literacy

Literacy is a term that has multiple definitions and even defining it is not easy (Viruru, 2003 cited in Kholowa, 2007). There are many individuals, academicians and different disciplines for instance philosophy, sociology who have defined this term and the definitions vary from basic to complex (Ortiz and Ordonez, 2005 cited in Kholowa, 2007). The different views regarding literacy, have led to controversies among academicians (Gee, 1996). However, this is beyond the scope of this study, because in literacy there are some versions that are ideological in nature rooted in a particular world view which influence domination and marginalisation of others (Street, 1994). Narrowly, literacy is defined as the ability to read and write a text (Education for All

Global Monitoring Report Team, 2006). This term came into existence in the 19th century. Thus, in the past, to be literate required one to know only reading and writing. Popularly, literacy has been defined as the ability to read and write at an adequate level of proficiency that is necessary for communication (EA G Monitoring Report Team, 2006).

The implication of this definition is that an individual should not only know how to read and write but also be capable in applying basic literacy skills and having the potential to communicate, whether verbally or through writing. On the contrary, historically, in English the term literate meant to be familiar with literature or in general it meant to be well educated or learnt (EAG Monitoring Report Team, 2006). Barton (1994) stipulates that the understanding of literacy evolved because literacy varies from social and cultural context. For this reason therefore, debates have been conducted in order to come to the real definition of literacy. Education for All Global Monitoring Report Team, (2006) provides evidence that academics from different disciplines such as psychology, economics, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, philosophy and history have engaged in debates over the meaning and definition of literacy, and its relationship to broader notions of education and knowledge. The following are some understandings of literacy drawn from the debate:

- Literacy as an autonomous set of skills
- Literacy as a learning process
- Literacy as applied, practised and situated
- Literacy as text (Education for All Global Monitoring Report Team 2006, p. 149)

These definitions are not the end in themselves for the evolvement is still there due to contextual factors. Thus, being literate today will not mean the same in future. For example, with this world of technologies, in future being literate would mean something else as defined by those technologies (Lotherington, 2004) stipulates that literacy continues to evolve because of the rapid developing digital technologies that shape communication between or among individuals.

Literacy therefore is not static but flexible as it keeps on changing. Malawian learners in Malawian schools should be exposed to basic literacy skills of reading and writing. This will help them apply those skills in this global village where our literacy has increasingly become image-centred (Kress 1997, 2003, as cited in (Lotherington, 2004) as it is moving steadily away from the print centredness. Early grade primary school teachers are the ones at the centre to equip the learners with the basics of literacy in order for them to have a concrete foundation or background of literacy. This can be possible if the teachers, among other factors, employ strategies that will influence learners' success.

2.2.1 Importance of Literacy

Literacy is very important not only to the individual that acquires it, but also to the entire society. In the first place, literacy is very important regarding the learners' success at school (Oddorer-Hoppers, 2009). Thus, for the learners to perform better at all levels of their education and succeed from one stage to another, it depends on a well-developed foundation of literacy skills and positive attitudes to it (Christie and Roskos 2003, p. 79). Similarly, Winch, Johnson, Holliday, Ljungdahl & Marsh (2001) contend that "students need to have the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and

understandings to engage with all literacy demands of the curriculum and communicate successfully in the wider society” (p. 2). Generally, literacy is very important both to an individual as well as to the nation. Therefore, it enables an individual to acquire basic cognitive skills of which the result of using the acquired skills contributes to socio-economic and social change of the individual and the society (Oddorer- Hoppers, 2009).

Hence, Winch et.al (2001) and Oddorer-Hoppers (2009) imply that literacy is essential if an individual is to participate fully in a literate society, able to take part in the work force, engage in the democratic process and contribute fully to the society. In tandem with Winch et.al (2001) and Oddorer- hoppers (2009), Block (2009) stresses that literacy is the foundation on which the solving of all problems can be built. Block further states that a majority of homeless people present in the society are homeless due to lack of basic skills that could enhance their lives. Actually, what Block is trying to say is that being literate means the ability and chance to improve oneself, the society and also have the capacity to improve the overall living standard of everyone.

It is therefore, worth noting that teachers who teach literacy are shouldering a big responsibility of bringing change to the children they teach, and hence achieve national development. It is with the advanced technology that people must have the basic levels of literacy to begin their lives in society and the nation at large. From the basic level the children are exposed to, can move further and improve their skills in other types of literacy, for instance, academic and technical literacy that will later in life enable them to function easier in society and with this ability, society will also function more efficiently (Block, 2009).

2.3 Literacy teaching approaches and strategies

Literature shows that in the teaching of literacy there are approaches and strategies that teachers employ to promote literacy development in young learners. Others are controversial in nature while others are not. Some of these approaches and strategies are discussed in the following subsections.

2.3.1 Phonics versus Whole language approach

In the field of literacy, there have been many controversies of which one of them is on the time to start teaching phonics to young learners. Phonics is related to sounds and it is fundamental that learners acquire it as early as possible. Nevertheless, this is controversial in regards to when it should be taught to the learners. Different scholars, for instance, have argued differently on the exact time to start teaching phonics. On the one hand, there are the ultraconservative groups such as Phyllis, Schaflly's Eagle Forum and the Coalition of Pat Robertson Christian while on the other side there are Psycholinguistic researchers and some theorists (Weaver, 1998). According to (Adams, 1990; Juel, 1991; Yopp, 1992), sequential Phonics instruction leads to higher word reading and also in spelling. Civil Rights Education reporter comments:

With true phonics, the child is first taught to recognise the letters of the alphabet and then is drilled in the letter sounds first, vowels then consonants, then consonants combinations, so that the child develops an automatic association between letters and sounds. When that is accomplished the child is then given words, sentences and stories to read (Weaver, 1998).

This implies that learning to read is not easy. As such, it requires a gradual or step by step procedure so that learners grasp the concepts easily. Teaching the learners starts

from letters, syllables, words then sentences and the learners would finally be given sentences to comprehend (Abadzi, 2007).

To the contrary, Psycholinguistics researchers are opposing the view of phonics first. They argue that phonics first instruction is not the appropriate approach to teaching reading (Mc Intyre 1990; Winsor, 1990; Morrow, 1992), but whole word approach. The whole word approach advocates claim that phonics first instruction cannot function as far as literacy learning is concerned. They emphasise that children should construct their reading skills through their own exploration with print, not only that but also as they interact with others. On the same note, “whole language classrooms is all about exposing books and other texts to the children so that they recognise words in context and not in isolation” (Morrow, 1992, p. 49). Teachers read long texts to the learners and from the texts the learners identify words and letters. In this approach, the learners’ use of brain is paramount.

Whole word approach has its basis in constructivist view of learning where emphasis is on intellectual and emotional involvement in learning (Weaver, 1998). In this instruction, the learners’ brain learns more effectively, hence, it retains what is learned.

In whole word classes, learners are involved in reading whole texts (Calkins, 2001). Not only that but also writing whole texts for dealing with syllables and words first are limited activities and hence, believed to limit the learning of reading. By involving learners in the reading and writing of whole texts, they are exposed to books and print to read before they are introduced to phonics. Adams (1990) supports the idea of the learners’ exposure to books first before phonics. In her argument, she advocates for

extensive exposure to books and print before the children are taught phonics. She clearly emphasises that for children to learn reading or literacy, they require many hours with written texts before being taught or introduced to phonics in any formal way (Weaver, 1998).

Basically, “the view of whole word advocates on learning to read is that for learners to develop phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge, these come second to learn many concepts about language”(Weaver, 1998, p. 21). Goodman (1973) also is of the same view of Adams as he contends that when learners learn unfamiliar words, it becomes problematic, hence learning more phonics is not the best answer. Goodman further argues that phonics first, encourages readers to deal with each word as it stands in isolation. Using context and prior knowledge when reading the word, is hence believed to be the better strategy.

Both arguments sound right basing on their justification. However, my stand is in between these two views in regards to helping the learners to read. My stand is based on the argument of Abadzi (2007) whom I quote:

Normal as well as dyslexic students learn to read faster through methods that break words into small segments (phonics). This is the case for Chinese children and makes sense the tendency of the nervous system to start with smaller units and chunk them into larger ones. Composing words from letters or syllables is particularly helpful for languages with simple spelling, such as Spanish, where letter combination consistently represent the same phonemes... The whole word approach (and language approach) seems to improve students’ attitudes towards reading, but the discovery road to reading requires much time, individualised instruction, and teacher expertise. It tends to favor those who are better prepared. It may be effective for middle- class English-

speaking children whose parent support their efforts, but even for the irregularly spelled English Language, Phonic has proved to be more efficient (p.61).

In regard to teaching literacy at national level, both middle- class and low-class (the less privileged) are exposed to the same curriculum. Equality and equity at this juncture is paramount to balance the two types of learners. To achieve this, I suppose, combining both approaches and strategies so that they are introduced at the same time would be beneficial to all learners. I make this claim to avoid boring as well as wasting time of the learners from middle class families who already have exposure to books and phonological skills. Putting much emphasis on phonics first only will yield nothing to them. As such, involving learners in very short texts and phonics at the same time will serve both middle class and less privileged learners. The less privileged, who are in rural areas, have illiterate parents, no books at home and worst of all have never attended pre-school (Kholowa, 2007; Waliwa, 2017). As such can hardly get meaning from the context of a long text. Learning phonics and phonemes would complicate issues if the children encounter the letters within the context. Children living with parents, and relatives at home should not be a guarantee that the children are already exposed to phonics, phonemes or print.

Despite the fact that whole word approach seems to be appealing and sensible, it can put the low income children at risk for failure in promoting their literacy development skills. In reading whole contexts, using analogies is emphasised (Weaver, 1991); however thinking critically, for the less privileged, this cannot work at all. Learners in the rural areas, as Abadzi (2007) puts it, have limitations in vocabulary, phonological awareness as well as working memory. For sure, reading long texts in the end may

prevent the learners in creating necessary analogies between language and reading (Abadzi, 2007). To close the gap between the middle-class and the low- income class, the approaches and strategies need to be combined for balance. Thus, there is need to incorporate strong points from both views and perspectives to the teaching of literacy.

2.3.2 Whole- language approaches versus Code- based approaches to literacy

Based on the two views on the controversy of ‘phonics first, and whole language first’, it clearly shows that literacy is not easy (Wray & Medwell, 1991). Reading English as a foreign language leaves massive learners in a pool of challenges to acquire it. Hence, it requires a favourable environment for more efficient and effective learning. Among other factors, proper teaching approaches, methods as well as teaching strategies are crucial to reading success. There are different methods or strategies that are essential to reading or literacy learning. Expert teachers’ choice of a teaching strategy is based on its effectiveness. Aerbersson and Field (1997) contend that diverse factors influence choice of strategy. Aerbersson and Field (1997) go on to stress that factors such as type of text, learners’ background knowledge, language proficiency and learning are influential in the choice of teaching strategies.

Code-based strategy sometimes known as bottom up strategy focuses on explicit teaching of the structure and function of written and oral language in ways that allow children, regardless of their backgrounds, to reflect on and consciously manipulate the language. Thus, it allows the learners to read in a systematic way. Advocates of this approach emphasise on the teaching of reading from the smallest units. It involves an awareness of phonemes, syllables, phonics, word recognition and alphabetical principle (Winch et al, 2001). Bottom up models involves adapting native language to translate

to make sense of the whole word verbal construction (Merchant, 2008). The belief in bottom-up is not to overload the learners with texts that have confronting words. If words that are difficult for learners to comprehend, teachers translate into the native language for learners to understand. For example, if learners find the word *swimming* in the context and do not actually know what it means, the teacher should translate it in Chichewa *swimming ndi kusambira*. That is, if the learner's native language is Chichewa. If it is Chiyawo, the teachers translate the word in that language for easy understanding.

It is also very important to note that bottom-up strategy is a lower level reading process (Grabe, 1991) and hierarchical for it starts with teaching letters, syllables, words and finally sentences. The learners combine these small units to come up with a meaningful sentence (Merchant, 2008). Advocates of this strategy believe that when learners are taught using this strategy, reading comprehension becomes a success. Focus is readily not on the text as a whole but from morpheme to lexical, up to syntactic levels (Abadzi, 2007).

However, Code-based strategies are claimed to have a high degree of teacher-centred presentation of learning material, with an emphasis on explicit instruction, scheduled practice and feedback (Westwood, 2003; 2004). Putting emphasis on this sentiment, he argues:

Constructivist approaches have been promoted, direct teaching methods have been overtly or covertly criticized and dismissed as inappropriate, with the suggestion that they simply don't work and are dull and boring for learners. The message that most teachers appear to have absorbed is that all direct teaching is old-fashioned and should be abandoned in favor of student- centred enquiry and activity-based learning (p. 5)

Advocates of constructivism from where bottom-up strategy emerges, portray that bottom up is not effective but top-down strategy. Children learn to read by engaging them in reading (Christie & Roskos, 2003) as such it is imperative that learning to read should come naturally (M'mela, 2006). To achieve this, teachers of literacy should employ methods, strategies and techniques that allow learners to choose what they want to read. Similarly, (Vygotsky, 1978) argues that when learners are given priority to choose what they want to read, it boosts their interests to learn and it also allows them to construct new knowledge upon what they already know.

Prior knowledge plays a major role in learners' comprehension (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2016). It is based on what the learners already know (Calkins, 2001). Goodman (1970) asserts that reading is a "psychological game"; it does not need to base on bits by bits of language looking at the text but as a whole and infer meanings. Thus, meaning is contextualised (MIE, 2016). For example, *This is Mada, Mada is a doctor, She gives medicine to sick people. I want to be a doctor like Mada. She gives medicine to people of her village. I wish to be a doctor like Mada.* From this context, as the learners read the text they do not look at the words from phoneme, lexical to syntactic. Instead, they infer the meaning of *medicine*, for example, as they associate a picture of nurse, and the picture of the sick people being given medicine. Readers focus on context, and manage to construct meanings in the text (Abadzi, 2007).

Learners can therefore read so that they comprehend through inferring. The learners encounter the small bits of language like letters, sounds and words to make association with text. Weaver, (1998), states that every beginning reader makes associations between larger orthographic units such as rhymes of words and their sounds. As pointed

out, when reading or writing, concepts are discovered and not presented. This is because discovery is believed to have higher order thinking (MoEST, 2016). For instance, in the passage, after reading the text, the learners can be asked to search for the words with letter sound /i/. And the learners would pick; *this, is, gives, medicine, sick and I*.

Despite the fact that the strategies of code-based and whole word takes different angles, they are employed to fulfill the learners' needs. As such, teaching reading requires a balance of both bottom-up and top-down approaches and strategies. Abadzi, (2007) asserts that balancing the two is influential in the reading success. Abadzi further argues, "Programs should combine phonics instruction with student selection of texts and authentic learning tasks as children learn the basics" (p. 62). This combination of the strengths of bottom-up and Top- down is regarded as interactive approach or strategy of teaching.

2.3.3 Interactive Strategies

Learner-centred approaches and strategies put learners at the centre of the learning process (Freire, 2000). In these instances, the teacher is just the facilitator (Vygotsky, 1978). While this is the case, it is worthwhile that beginning readers as they are exposed to print, teachers need to emphasise on the five components of literacy in their teaching to make the strategies interactive. These are: phonological awareness, fluency, vocabulary, alphabetical principle and text comprehension. These are very important for they are reading blocks that make literacy learning meaningful.

2.3.4 Key components of literacy

Teaching literacy requires teachers to incorporate the key components. As already pointed out, these are reading blocks of literacy learning (MIE, 2016). These are discussed below in detail.

2.3.4.1 Phonological awareness

Phonological awareness is referred to as the ability to recognise that words are made up of individual units (MoEST, 2016). It is “an umbrella term that is used to refer to a learners’ sensitivity to any aspect of phonological structure in language” (p. v). Phonological awareness is broad in such it encompasses not only phonemic awareness but also things like words, rhyme, syllables and onset rhyme (Calkins, 2001). It is for the awareness of the individual phonemes and to develop this skill that a learner has to listen to words and identify the different sounds that make up the word.

Research evidence strongly shows that phonemic awareness is influential in learning to read and this is possible mainly if children encounter with it early. “Level of child’s phonemic awareness on entering school is widely held to be the strongest single predictor of the success children will experience to read or to fail” (1991, p. 13). This implies that for children to succeed in reading or literacy, teachers have to put much effort in phonemic awareness. They require teaching learners to make connections between the sounds of spoken language and the letters that represent the sounds. “Peterson and Haine’s study reveals that teaching children letter/ sound rime analogies in words as well as the initial consonants differences can promote the ability to segment words into onsets, rimes and connections” (Weaver, 1991, p. 52).

Several interactive strategies employed by teachers can assist learners develop phonological awareness. These are: (1) Allow learners work with alphabet sounds, for example, dog can be segmented, /D/, /o/, /g/. (2) Provide activities to make words, for instance, provide with words like; ___at; ___oat; ___ow to substitute. On ___at the learners can come up with words like *bat, cat, hat*. ___oat, the learners can come up with words such as *boat, goat, coat*; likewise on ___ow the learners can come up with *cow, low, and bow*. After mastering this, the learners can read with automaticity, hence no problem in reading for they have boosted their development of phonemic awareness. Apart from the above highlighted techniques of teaching phonemic awareness, “employment of interactive strategies such as singing songs, poem recitation, listening to stories, counting syllables and playing with rhyming words” (MoEST, 2016, p. iv) among others promote phonetic awareness development. These strategies provide room for vocabulary building and in the end children boost their fluency.

2.3.4.2 Alphabetic principle

Much literature on learning to read state that, children come to school with some degree of exposure to the alphabet (Wray & Medwell, 1991; Calkins, 2001; EAG Monitoring Team, 2007). Thus, they encounter it either at home through print exposed to them. For example, the Bible, or text books of their relatives already in school; and sometimes print gathered by parents so that children should practice reading right away there at home. “Sometimes the children are believed to see the alphabet on their way to school on store signs” (MoEST, 2016, p.v). Alphabet is influential to learning to read for several reasons: firstly, if the learner understands the alphabetic principle, is able to know that words are made up of letters; secondly, the learners have the ability to know that letters of the alphabet represent speech sounds and finally, the learner is able to

recognise letter shapes and letter names from which they would later make connections between the letter names and letter sounds (Calkins, 2001).

There is no one approach or strategy to teach alphabet, hence teachers' creativity is an important variable for learners to learn alphabetic principle. Calkins, (2001) argues "that teachers need to decide how they can design phonics work which reflects their beliefs how children learn best" (p. 218). For instance, the teacher can suggest teaching alphabet in an interactive way by using onset and rhyme. (Adams (1990) lists thirty-seven rimes that make up five hundred words through vowel –building. She reports of a teacher, "Karchy who made with a class a list of words by –at. She gave an example, *-at can make cat* and the learners compiled a list; *-at, cat rat, sat, hat, bat, mat*. After a couple of days of doing this as a whole class, Karchy's class had made strip-lists for: *-ot, -in, -un, -ate*" (Calkins, 2001, p. 218).

Teachers are required to use pictures and letters of the alphabet to help the learners develop this skill. For instance, teacher should use the picture of a book just next to the word book. As learners see the picture next to that word, they connect between the letter and its sound /b/ in the word book. Apart from that strategy, teachers need to employ phonics instructional activities such as naming the upper and lower cases, teaching the letter names, their shapes as well as letter sounds. It is of great value if the teachers teach literacy using the alphabet chart as a resource.

2.3.4.3 Fluency

Fluency is also one of the components of literacy. It is all about the ability to read quickly. When a person is said to have fluency, it means that they are able to read

quickly and also makes the reading sound like spoken language. Moore and Lion (2005), as cited in MoEST (2016) assert that reading with fluency is about accurate reading of words and sentences with expression at a pace that is neither too fast, nor too slow. It is also about the knowledge acquired through phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle and background knowledge to decode correctly. Children need a lot of letters, sounds and words to increase their vocabulary. Therefore, mastery of the alphabetical principle can suffice the need. Children struggle because they lack knowledge of print and words (Calkins, 2001). Reading fluently is essential because meaning is not lost. When learners read slowly, and with long pauses as they work with individual words as separate units, they lose meaning and at the same time have difficulty in understanding of what they are reading” (MoEST, 2016).

In early grades, especially standards 1 and 2, teachers need to employ interactive strategies that are able to assist learners build knowledge of spoken language. For example, teachers should read stories to model or demonstrate fluent reading, selecting and providing texts with rhyme, rhythm and repetition among others. When modeling reading, teachers need also to read stories with facial expression or gestures by use of hands, and nodding the head. Good pace as well as natural intonation in dialogue is required to be modeled (Wray & Medwell, 1991) as far as teaching fluency is concerned. Teachers need to involve the learners in activities of both reading and writing letters because these two go together. Learners who read and write letters will repeatedly encounter certain words and develop automaticity with them (Calkins, 2001).

Apart from reading and writing a lot, coaching the learners is beneficial in developing fluency. Coaching for fluency involves learners take in more of a sentence with their eye. To make it clear, teachers should advise the learners that as they start reading a sentence, they should have already an idea of where it is going. It is not proper to use a finger or a book mark when we want children to achieve fluency when reading (Wray and Medwell, 1991).

It cannot be denied that a book or a finger guides the reader; however, they interfere with fluency and phrasing (Calkins, 2001). Pinell and Gay Su (1999), as cited in Calkins (2001, p. 171) contend that “children won’t usually need to use a finger to point unless they encounter difficulty”. He argues further that very few children benefit from books when they read slowly line by line, down the page. Giving children many opportunities to hear beautiful text read aloud promotes fluency and phrasing (Wray & Medwell, 1991).

2.3.4.4 Vocabulary

Despite that learners develop vocabulary right away from home (Calkins, 2001; Wray & Medwell, 1991), it is insufficient. As such learners in the early years of their schooling need to be continually developing a bank of new words which they can understand and use in different contexts. Research shows that students, who read widely or are read to, build a repertoire of diverse vocabulary (Oddorer-Hoppers, 2009; Calkins, 2001; Wray & Medwell, 1991). A teacher of literacy should provide vocabulary instruction explicitly and not implicitly in language classrooms (MIE, 2016). In many situations where vocabulary is taught, teachers’ instruction should not be that of imposition, for example, giving the students lists of words to memorise or

providing the learners with limited practice opportunities (Weaver, 1991). These hamper the learners' ability to acquire vocabulary.

In situations where learners have problems in vocabulary, teachers should employ scaffolding strategies to assist the learners who are less able. Hague (1987) and Carter (1987) argue that "vocabulary learning should not be neglected; hence teachers of literacy should employ techniques such as decontextualising techniques, semi-contextualising techniques and fully contextualising techniques" (p. 22).

Literacy teachers, need to support vocabulary development and this can only be achieved as literacy or language teachers teach by using word-solving strategies when reading continuous text. In the literacy programme, teachers for literacy take initiative to introduce new and unusual words during book introductions, assist learners examine records of oral reading for evidence, the learners to notice new words and searching for meaning, substitute interesting words when talking about texts, pasting new words onto word walls and employ talk with students (Calkins, 2001). Similarly, Irwin (1967) argues that language and vocabulary knowledge also play important roles in a balanced reading method. Irwin further argues that teachers should seek to improve children's vocabularies through experience and this can be done not only by using existing interests, but also by creating new ones. N'Nandi (2005) concurs with Irwin (1967) as he believes that:

Children should be able to learn sight vocabulary in context rather than in isolation. Teachers could use word lists in order to compare and contrast, classify words or use tags and signs as a context for teaching sight vocabulary. Learners may also learn vocabulary in activities such as games and dramatisations that stimulate the imagination, and make reference to children's experiences. (p. 29)

Early assessment of the learners' vocabulary is also a critical issue in the teaching of literacy in early grades. In situations where there are learners who have smaller vocabularies than their counterparts from middle class families, teachers should formally engage the children in interactive strategies such as dialogic reading. (Hague, 1987 & Carter, 1987). Teachers' role in vocabulary learning is to help learners learn unfamiliar words, for example, after the students read a story, the teacher provides an opportunity to look back, identify a word and guide them to find out its meaning. Techniques like memorisation, letter sound association or word meanings are insufficient for vocabulary building (MoEST, 2016).

Teachers therefore, should employ as many strategies as possible in order for the learners are motivated to develop their own vocabulary. However, it requires expertise. It is not a way of giving the learners a list of many words or giving them long texts. Long texts hamper learners' progress to acquire or boost reading skills. It is not possible to teach many words in a fixed period of time but words need to be acquired informally (Weaver, 1991). This can be achieved if learners acquire vocabulary even outside school environment as teachers encourage learners to read many books on their own. Children who engage in a wide range of voluntary reading and other experiences, encounter many words in meaningful context, and learn from many of them (Abadzi, 2007).

The implication is nothing other than teachers taking a leading role to encourage learners reading outside the classroom. Despite the fact that there are claims that schools are independent from the home, advising both learners and parents to take part in the reading program (Abadzi, 2007; MoEST, 2016) is of great value for it enhances success

in the learners. Another effective vocabulary instruction is the teacher's commitment to teach words well. For example, if the teacher fails to differentiate *this* and *these* or *they* and *there*, the learners can develop the same problem because that is what the teacher is modeling. Furthermore teacher's employment of strategies in regards to context matters most (Adams, 1980; Goodman, 1970) to achieve interaction. Teachers should be aware that apart from defining new terms, children also need some examples of the concept as they hear the new words used in different contexts. In scenarios like these teachers should provide opportunity for the learners to give such examples. For instance, a teacher may give a passage or read a passage to the learners. After that he/she should ask them to give other words that are similar to the ones that have been used in the passage.

2.3.4.5 Text Comprehension

Comprehension strategies play a fundamental role in students' learning and they improve the learners' understanding (M'Nandi, 2005). To achieve efficient and effective learning of comprehension, teachers need to apply diverse techniques in teaching (Mtunda and Safuli, 2000). Van Keer and Vagheghe (2005) found that instruction using multiple strategies can create more strategic readers and increase reading comprehension. Paris and Paris (2007) study reveals that comprehension by learners in first grade and learners who have difficulties to decode can be promoted through explicit instruction in reading strategies and text structure. In their study, they found that instruction in narrative was beneficial in regards to students' comprehension of narratives in the picture viewing modality, narrative meaning making in listening comprehension and oral production modalities.

By the end of their study students in the experimental group portrayed better understanding in pictorial information. Furthermore, they also portrayed improvement in listening comprehension and ability to organise main story elements. The students in the experimental group who had lower scores had caught up their counterparts and others surpassed the comparison learners at post-test. According to Paris and Paris' (2007) study, it shows that direct comprehension instruction to early graders with different abilities in decoding is essential as they learn to read. Literacy teachers, therefore, should at an early stage employ reading strategies that foster narrative thinking skills for all learners regardless of their ability.

Effective comprehension instruction is fundamental in literacy development. This is supported by Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, and Rodriguez (2003). Taylor et al (2003) provides evidence that the interactive strategies by which teachers teach comprehension whether mechanically or strategically, are valuable in ensuring the effectiveness of comprehension instruction. In their study in the classroom as they observed teachers several times over the course of a school year, found that teaching variables such as: small-group instruction, skill instruction in comprehension, teacher modeling, and coaching for teachers provided substantial variation in student achievement.

Throughout their study, they observed that the most consistent finding was that teachers who emphasised higher-order thinking promoted greater reading growth. Furthermore, the findings provided evidence that routine, practice-oriented approach to teaching important comprehension processes resulted in a lower growth rate of students' reading comprehension as compared to strategic approaches. Finally, they also observed that

the strategic approaches to comprehension processes, also correlate positively to first-graders' writing growth unlike employing mechanical ones.

2.4 Strategies and techniques employed in the promotion of literacy development in the classroom

There are a number of views that explain how strategies and techniques should be employed to promote literacy development in young learners. This subsection discusses some of these strategies and techniques. These include: creating a classroom conducive for literacy learning, including play in literacy learning, creating meaningful activities, engaging learners in active learning, use of first language, and parental involvement.

2.4.1 Creating Classroom Climate Conducive for Literacy Learning

The classroom environment has a great impact in the learning of reading. The strategies and how they are employed in the teaching creates a good environment for learning of literacy. Teachers have a major role when teaching as they employ most efficient and effective strategies in the classroom so that they create a conducive environment for the learners. Van Hees (2011) for example, examines the classroom in order to see if the teachers are using most effective strategies and also if they are employing most beneficial environment for the learners' literacy development. In his study, Van Hees focused on patterns of instruction and expression in the early grades to identify the overall effectiveness for literacy development of each learner. Teachers teaching grades 1 and 2 and 80 learners from Auckland schools participated in the study. Data was collected in 6 months' time. In addition to that within that period of study, the teachers attended 5 workshops and implemented the interventions they were taught in the workshops in their classrooms. They did this for 10 weeks.

The workshops the teachers attended included linguistic and interactional theory and practice whose main focus was learners' expression in the classroom. The teachers also were trained recommended ways of asking questions to their learners. The aim behind the workshops was to encourage the literacy teachers to implement the practices and behaviors learnt in the workshops as such the teachers employed collective dialogue within their lessons in which the learners were fully involved. The results revealed that more complex conversations between the learners as well as between teachers and students developed.

Furthermore, the results showed that the learners engaged and expressed themselves fully during lessons. On questioning techniques, the teachers prompted, probed and also used contributory statements to enhance the learners' expressive responses. Results from this study revealed that the learners showed profound increase in vocabulary development for all 12 students that were involved in the study, as Van Hees' (2011, p. 56) notes, "it was the changes of the teachers' knowledge and practice and their effort to employ recommended conditions for learners interaction and expression in the lessons which improved the learners' ability in literacy". These results imply that teachers in the classroom have a tremendous role for the learners to acquire basic literacy skills. Furthermore, teachers need to be flexible to use any strategy when one strategy or practice tends to fail. Therefore, it is worthwhile for them to provide optimal classroom conditions for the learners to develop oral expression that lead to their literacy development.

2.4.2 Including Play in Literacy Teaching

For learners in the infant classes to develop more literacy skills, teachers need to include play in their lessons for it is an important and a valuable activity (Bodrova & Leong 2003 a). Nevertheless, play is regarded unimportant as well as a harmful practice (Johnson & Wardle, 2005; Saloni-Pasternak & Ponte, (2005), if the teachers lack the necessary pedagogical expertise. Hall and Robinson (1995) note that very few have considered the relationship between play and literacy-related objects in situation. Hall and Robinson further argue that employing play in literacy lessons offer the learners an opportunity to develop a wider understanding of literacy by allowing them to explore literacy.

Similarly, Roskos (2003) asserts that linking literacy and play is one of the most effective ways to make literacy activities meaningful and enjoyable for children. Play has benefits in regards to literacy development because as learners are involved in play and interact with each other, it leads to vocabulary development and also it makes literacy learning meaningful. General benefits of play in children's literacy development are well documented and they show that a literacy enriched play environment exposes the children to valuable print experiences and lets them practice narrative skills (Christie & Roskos, 2003).

Teachers of literacy need to vary their teaching strategies by employing literacy-in-play strategies, for it is effective in increasing the range and amount of literacy behaviors during play (Roskos, 2003). As Vygotskys' (1978) social constructivism is all about, learners need to receive scaffolding through play. As such, by employing literacy-in-play strategy provides room to the learners to practice their emerging skills and show

what they have learnt (Newman & Roskos, 1992). Social constructivism context ensures empowering learners to initiate their own learning; hence teachers achieve this by assigning the learners tasks such as play and narrating stories.

Play is vital in the sense that it creates its own Zone of Proximal Development of the learner (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 102). Vygotsky contends that when children are involved in play they enjoy, ignoring the regular uses of objects and actions in order to subordinate them to imaginary meanings and situations. Similarly, Monzo and Rueda (2003) study revealed that through play, the students were able to share a variety of stories from their childhood in their language classrooms which allowed the learners to relate their learning with their prior experiences and knowledge. Teachers in this constructivism era need to create a Zone of Proximal Development and provide scaffolding techniques, and play is one of them. It is through play with other peers that makes the children build more vocabulary as well as develop critical thinking. Furthermore through the discussion of the play itself between teacher and students as well as between students and teachers, learners acquire basic literacy skills which they could have not acquired. For example, listening skills, speaking skills, as well as narrating skills which are also essential in literacy development (MIE, 2016).

2.4.3 Creating meaningful activities

Time, among other factors is a very important variable to consider regarding to teaching literacy. Thus, time management is critical in literacy instruction because time is precious and once lost it cannot be regained. As such the literacy teacher has the capacity to utilise time efficiently and effectively. Teachers of literacy whose responsibility is to produce a literate society require using time wisely by engaging

learners in meaningful learning activities. Rushing in teaching literacy to young learners yields failure or less to grasp literacy concepts. Research also provides evidence that when more time is spent on a task, the children learn more (Brophy & Good, 1986). Similarly, Sanchez (2010) argues that:

We have to maximise our time, so we have to think about how we can best integrate content and language teaching and how we can establish routines and structures that minimise confusion and time away from direct engagement in learning. And the reality is that given our ambitious vision and goals, language learners may need more time — beyond the regular school day, week, and year. But it has to be very focused time, directly aligned and connected to the content, language, and cultural skills and knowledge our language learners must master

(p. 41).

The implication is that since literacy is very complex as well as multifaceted, it requires the literacy teachers teaching it with patience, daily and follow a routine. Teachers should not rush in that they should finish the syllabus quickly but focus on how much the learners are able to do. Furthermore, management of time is all about observing instructional time so the learners utilise all the time allocated to them to learn reading.

2.4.4 Engaging Learners in Active Learning

Teachers among many stakeholders that take part in literacy development are central to improve children's learning and progress. Hootsttein (1994), as cited in M'mela (2006) argues, literacy teaching is a highly skilled professional activity hence improving efficiency and effectiveness of schooling depends on competent teachers. Competent teachers in this communicative era involve learners in active learning. Active learning is based on constructivism theory (Vygotsky, 1978) that puts the learner at the centre to have responsibility of his / her own learning. Active learning is achieved only when

teachers employ literacy strategies such as group work, pair work, and dialogue and shared reading among others. It is not easy to come up with strategies and techniques that engage learners in active learning but “it requires expertise portrayed in teacher’s creativity in using contextually appropriate strategies” (Hootstein, 1994 as cited in M’mela 2006, p. 23).

Teachers who are experts in teaching literacy implement active learning in their classrooms by engaging learners in active learning and have the mindset that children need to be in control of their own learning. Teachers and learners in an active classroom are co-workers and the teachers in such classrooms are not regarded by learners as all-knowing gods for they act as facilitators hence learners regard him/ her as an equal partner (Freire, 2000).

Assisting learners to pass through their Zones of Proximal Development is the teacher’s task as well as bringing in strategies of scaffolding for literacy learning. For instance, teacher’s strategy of providing opportunities to listening to stories, reading to the learners or learners reading to the teachers, reading in groups or individually and using reminders, graphics, illustrations, elaborations, demonstrations as well as encouragement enhance literacy learning (Calkins, 2001). These are the mediation that might also move the learning forward into the Zone of Proximal Development. Failing to include the mediations, learning will end in futility for an individual’s literacy achievement is mediated by supportive interactions with others (Brown & Ferrara, 1985).

As far as interaction is concerned, is a social process which provides the learner roles of both performer and analyser of the activity in progress. In such circumstances, interactions occur between teachers and learners, between learners and teachers and between students and voices of others (MoEST, 2016). Despite that interaction is essential in literacy development; teachers of literacy need to be mindful that not all methods and strategies work for others hamper literacy or language development in other learners. Learner-learner interaction, for example, regarded as nonnative speaker/nonnative interaction, is believed to provide “junk” input data, hence can hardly help on successful L2 learning. However, Yule and Gregory (1989) found sufficient evidence to suggest that the “benefits of modified interaction, in terms of creating more comprehensible input, can actually be obtained in a situation which does not involve native speaking interlocutors” (p. 42).

Studies have revealed that negotiated interaction provides a facilitative role in helping second language learners develop necessary language ability. Seliger’s (1983) study as cited in Kumaradivelu, (2008, p. 34) reported that “learners who maintained high levels of interaction in the L2 progressed at a faster rate than learners who interacted little in the classroom”. “The interactions that are beneficial are those that have the capacity to bring maximum opportunities to learners to explore their ideas, interpretations and reactions as they encounter the ideas, interactions and interpretations of others” (Kumaradivelu, 2008, p. 38).

Despite that interactive environments enhance literacy acquisition; Paris and Naughton (2010) argue that engaged reading, which occurs in interactive environments, is threatened by proceduralised instruction that is common in most classrooms. Paris and

Naughton further argue that such kind of instruction does not provide room for learner engagement with reading or writing materials.

Teachers need to bring maximum opportunities which provide and encourage social interaction even outside the classroom to enhance the construction of interpersonal interactions. This is because participants actively and dynamically negotiate on textual meaning as well as their social relationships (Kumaradivelu, 2008). Paris and Naughton (2010) suggest that groups engaged in social interactions both in and outside the classroom foster the formation of linguistic awareness in learners. Taking a Vygotskian perspective to social processes of language and learning, I argue therefore, for an interactional strategy in which social discourse is central to the teaching-learning relationship.

When learners are given opportunity to participate actively, they take the situation as their own hence maximise their own learning. Ballman (2006) proposes that when learners are involved in the learning activity for example, group-work or dialogue, they are more willing to participate and take risks as they develop their literacy skills. Group method, that is regarded to be non-beneficial to pupils and its failure to assess the learners (Mtunda & Safuli, 1985), provides them with opportunity to participate actively in the lesson, however if well utilised or organised. Similarly, Rivers (1972) argues that learners learn through practice in their groups, hence teachers' involvement of learners in group work, is of great value.

2.4.5 Use of first language

Learning a language is crucial to learners specifically when the language is foreign. When it comes to education, it becomes problematic and this, generally, is crucial when the child's parents are of low-income (Gacheche, 2010). It becomes easy when the learners encounter concepts at school in their native language. Learners are more successful when they are first encouraged to develop concepts and literacy in their native language (Carasquillo & Hedley, 2008). When children have already acquired and can speak and understand their native language, they can easily learn to associate sounds with the symbols they see, hence can lead to success in school. On the contrary, when the children are first exposed to a foreign language at school, it becomes a challenge. When it comes to reading and writing in that foreign language, it is problematic for the children first have to gain familiarity with the sound before they can master with symbol (Gacheche, 2010, p. 6). When children have knowledge in their first language, transferability of concepts from one language to the other becomes easy (M'mela, 2010).

“Transferability of universal language strategies and knowledge from the first language to a new language plays a critical role in bilingual instruction” (M'Mela, 2007, p.17). Native language development can have a positive impact on English Language Learners (ELLs). Hakuta, 1998 and Goldenberg (2008) also assert that the use of the first language would be especially helpful if the ELLs have received some formal education in the first language because it promotes higher levels of reading achievement in English. Empirical evidence from research findings has shown that English language literacy development, for example, is similar in some important and fundamental aspects to ELLs' native language literacy development (NCTE, 2008). NCTE provides

evidence that phonological awareness, inferencing, and monitoring comprehension are related to underlying cognitive developments and are likely to influence acquisition in any language such as oral proficiency and literacy in the first language. These can facilitate literacy development in English (MIE, 2016).

Wigglesworth and Simpson (2008), assert that a child's initial acquisition of language is vital to their learning to think. Cummin's theory (1979) of interdependence, explains positive transfer of skills from first language (L1) and second language L2. In his theory, Cummins strongly argues that level of literacy competence in L2 that a child attains is partially a function of the level of competence the child has at the time L1 begins intensively. This theory, with regards to this study has two implications. The first implication is that for the child to perform better in reading and writing in second language, the first language is the strong determinant. Therefore, teachers and the community at large need to fight hard that a child encounters effective formal first language learning. As such that knowledge could be transferred to English, a second language. If the acquisition of the first language is poor automatically the learner would experience that problem in the second language and at all levels of education.

Secondly it can be easier for the teacher to employ some concepts like strategies and techniques and skills because similar concepts can be employed in both languages; hence the learner is at an advantage to grasp what is taught. While the native language influences learning of the second language, it cannot be denied that there are linguistic differences between or among languages. For example English and Chichewa, the languages studied in the current study, have linguistic features that are different. However, the linguistic features cannot totally limit the importance of Chichewa to

English learning. This is because the same techniques, theories, approaches and strategies that can be used in the teaching of English can be used in the teaching of Chichewa. Therefore, teachers need to teach Chichewa effectively and efficiently with appropriate reading materials so that transferability of knowledge from Chichewa to English can be easy.

2.4.6 Parental Involvement

In the process of accelerating the young children's literacy levels, parental involvement must be fostered. Parents are first teachers hence efforts should be made to encourage and sensitise them in literacy activities with children. Literacy in the home is acquired through conversation (MoEST, 2016). However, a mere conversation cannot really promote children's literacy development, hence, should be purposeful and meaningful. Parent's share of stories or folk tales, for example, with the children boosts the young learners' development of literacy. As parents narrate stories and folktales to their children, the children later bring them into the classroom hence foster literacy development (MoEST, 2016). Vygotsky, (1978) support the role the society plays in the learning of language. Effective teachers provide structure for parents to help their children with reading as the teachers give the parents guidelines and activities to do in relation to literacy learning. Strickland (1989) found that children who come from where story books are read have an advantage over children who are not read at home.

In addition to telling stories, teachers need to sensitise parents to monitor homework, selection and duration of television viewing, listening to radio programs. Not only that but also provide different reading materials as well as establishing reading time at family level. There is strong research evidence which shows that parent' initiatives on

giving children direction has a greater impact on the learners' literacy acceleration (MoEST, 2016). Morrow's (1993) study on children that learnt without direction of the teacher, were assisted by parents at home. The study revealed that parents were involved in literacy activities of their learners. The activities which the parents were involved include: reading to the children, help the children read and write. Furthermore, the parents read a wide variety of materials and they owned books and sometimes borrowed books (Morrow, 1993).

Despite the evidence that parental involvement is crucial in the children's learning, independent producers' view holds that schools are largely separate from the rest of the society. "They argue that teachers are capable of doing their own job well in the absence of much interaction with families, the society and the wider world" (Leithwood, 2005, p. 46). That teachers, are key implementers of the curriculum cannot be denied, however, involvement of parents is a strong determinant that influence learning which shows that the teachers cannot work alone. The researcher therefore, concurs with Morrow (1993) that parents are partners to teachers hence should not work in isolation. There is need to understand one another, develop trust in order to work in harmony. Promotion of literacy development is not a one sided game hence requires interconnection of the home and the school. Thus, parents as well need to play a role in assisting learners developing basic literacy skills at an early age so that the learners should not have problems when they encounter a second language at school. This can mostly be achieved when there is strong home-school partnership and parental involvement.

Studies have shown that learning to read is strongly associated with positive home environments (Canadian Council on learning, 2010; Early Childhood Learning Division, 2011). The quality of interactions children have with parents, guardians and other family members, for example, has a positive impact in the children's reading development. This can be achieved through modeling behaviors from parents. Zygourios-Coe's (2001) and Hutchison's (2008) studies have shown that literacy requirements are much easier for children who come from home where parents model literacy behaviors and use of language that prepares them for classroom discourse.

2.5 Teachers' challenges to classroom literacy development promotion

Literature and some studies discussed in this sub-section review some challenges teachers encounter in the teaching of literacy to promote learners' literacy development. The challenges include: Shortage of reading materials and text books, teachers' inability to apply teaching strategies and techniques, poor infrastructure, and inefficiency of Whole word approach to teaching reading.

2.5.1 Shortage of reading materials and text books

Shortage of reading materials is common in many schools in Africa and beyond. There is much research evidence which state that teachers encounter challenges in teaching literacy. One of the challenges is shortage of text books. In many schools learners share books which leads to teachers failing to teach reading efficiently. For instance, teachers in Kenyan schools, face challenges (Lisanza, 2010) in the teaching of reading for the books are insufficient for the learners. In nine out of ten of the schools in Mwanzi's study as cited in Lisanza, there was shortage of reading materials like class readers and textbooks. This brought challenges when delivering lessons. Similarly, Pontefract and

Hardman's (2005) studies where they studied rural schools in Central and Rift Valley provinces in Kenya respectively, the schools did not have enough resources for English literacy. At Kalimani primary school where Lisanza (2010) conducted her study, there was also a great shortage of English textbooks and readers. In addition, the school did not have a library. This was a great challenge to the teachers as they failed to employ the right strategies in the teaching of reading (Lisanza, 2010).

2.5.2 Many learners in literacy classrooms have low literacy skills

Similarly, in Malawi, there are a number of challenges that teachers face in the teaching of literacy. Some studies that have been conducted show that the standards of literacy in the country's primary schools in general are low. Such challenges put teachers in an atmosphere of having passive classes despite the fact that they follow learner-centred approaches and strategies. Thus, because of poor literacy acquisition in the lower classes, learners reach upper classes with literacy problems as they fail to read passages in both Chichewa and English (Chilimanjira, 2012). There is research evidence that supports this sentiment. The 1991 Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA 1) study that was conducted by Chinapah et al., as cited in Kishindo, Susuwele, Ndalama, Mwale, (2005) for example, showed that very few learners had the required mastery of literacy in English by standard five. Kishindo et al., (2005) study revealed that more than half of the learners in standard five had minimum mastery of literacy skills. The Southern Africa Consortium for Methods and Education Quality (SACMEQ I) study that was conducted by Milner et al., in 2001, revealed that learners' literacy problem persists up to upper classes. In their study, they found that only 0.6 percent of standard six learners in Malawi had the required mastery in literacy. These challenges led the teachers to have poor delivery of the lessons because many learners failed to comprehend what was being taught.

2.5.3 Teachers' inability to apply teaching strategies and techniques

In Malawian primary classes, teachers encounter challenges in terms of how to employ strategies and techniques. Quality Education through Supporting Teachers (QUEST) was a project that ran in this country between 1998 and 2003. During that project, researchers found that teachers had challenges in literacy teaching that were related to how to apply participatory strategies and techniques. The objective of the project was to improve quality of education in the country. At the end of that project, the results showed that the learners' literacy was still very low for learners were just memorizing the concepts. According to a report by USAID (2002) as cited in Anzar, Harping, Cohen and Leu, (2004), learners' performance in literacy was not successful because the learners were asked to read the same passages that they had read during a baseline survey and they seemed to have memorised the passages.

Thus when given a passage, the learners were not able to read specific words. According to the report, teachers who were involved in the study had gained a lot of skills after orientation however; they were unable to apply those skills in the teaching of literacy as well as mathematics for the learners depended on memorisation. Furthermore, due to the nature of the children, it is reported that the teachers failed to incorporate perceived challenges into the lessons and failed to use participatory strategies effectively.

2.5.4 Poor infrastructure

Despite that teachers in Malawi are exposed to interactive strategies, things do not work. This is the case because of poor infrastructure. Thus, poor infrastructure does not provide conducive environment for literacy promotion. Despite the fact that teachers are trained in the use of interactive strategies, the training of teachers to use those interactive strategies is not possible in the midst of severe infrastructural

deficiencies (Anzar et al, 2004). Thus, the severe infrastructural deficiencies severely limit the possibility of effective implementation of the curriculum (Anzar et al 2004, p. 23). There is evidence that infrastructural challenges have negative impact not only to teachers but also to projects that are conducted in facilitating literacy development. For example, projects such as Girls Attainment in Basic Education (GABLE), Improving Educational Quality (IEQ) /Malawi and QUEST had a minor impact on quality (Anzar et al., 2004). QUEST project in its own right was good, however, unsupported by a classroom environment which was not conducive to learning; the creative strategies of teaching it employed had limited impact on learning.

Chilimanjira (2012) in her study which aimed at determining the extent to which PCAR facilitated the acquisition of literacy skills among learners, the results showed that literacy standards were lowered than before. Chilimanjira goes on to say that the literacy performance of the standard four learners who were involved in the study was at basic level. One of the conclusions among others, which emerged from the findings of the study that hampered literacy acquisition among learners, was that the general environment in which the curriculum was being implemented was not conducive for the development of literacy skills. For example, in the schools she studied, she found that learners were learning under a tree. This made the teaching of reading very challenging for the teachers had no classrooms to paste charts and posters to make the classroom print-rich. Furthermore, it was not possible to have literacy corners and class libraries.

2.5.5 Inefficiency of Whole word approach to teaching reading

Another challenge teachers encounter in the teaching of reading is on how to employ Whole word approach to the teaching (Chilimanjira, 2012). Whole word approach was one of the distinctive features of the PCAR. According to its nature, it used constructivist principles of teaching literacy in meaningful contexts. During the study, Chilimanjira (2012, p.105) found that the approach proved to be challenging among teachers. The teachers believed that the whole word approach had brought more harm in literacy teaching and learning. The teachers claimed that the approach had caused the learners' levels of achievement in literacy skills to be lower than it was with the syllabic approach because it was introducing literacy at sentence level. Furthermore, the Whole word approach was pointed out that it was causing problems to the learners for its absence of explicit teaching of syllables in introducing words. Thus, in Whole word, there was no logical and incremental introduction of words and syllables. Because of this challenge, learners reached upper classes with reading problems.

Despite several studies that have been carried out in Malawi on literacy in primary schools, nothing in detail has been done specifically on strategies teachers employ in teaching literacy to promote literacy development in the infant section, standard one and two. As these studies may identify strategies that hamper learners' literacy development, they are insufficient for there are some grey areas in terms of strategies that have not been identified. Secondly, this area has not been chosen by the researchers as an area of study. In bid to fill into the existing gap, this study was intended to investigate strategies teachers employed in teaching literacy to promote literacy development in infant section in Malawian rural primary schools.

In conclusion, the literature review has presented approaches and strategies that can help learners promote the development of literacy skills. Furthermore, it has also presented how those strategies and techniques can be employed in the promotion of the literacy development skills in learners and how they employed them. There is also presentation of teachers' challenges they encounter in the teaching of literacy. The reviewed literature helped the researcher in observing those strategies which teachers employed in teaching literacy and why they fail to improve learners' development of basic literacy skills despite that the strategies are learner-centered.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by Social Cultural Theory from which constructivism is based. Levy Vygotsky (1978) is attributed to this theory. Constructivism refers to the belief that learners construct their own knowledge from their experience (Brown & Ferrara, 1985). Constructivism as a theory has a goal which is that of creating learning communities that are collaborative in nature. According to this theory, learning is achieved through social interaction with the teacher, other learners as well as others even outside the school. Hence, children are regarded to develop as speakers and writers through repeated participation in speaking and writing activities with the help of peers, friends, other learners and parents who are more knowledgeable (Vygotsky, 1978; Brown & Ferrara, 1985).

Levy Vygotsky (1978) asserts that learning is a collaborative process to construct knowledge through shared learning and is possible in social cultural contexts. "Social cultural theory claims that language entirely is constructed from social interaction" (Gower, 2005, p.34) as cited in Wertsch (1990) as there is a view that human intelligence originates in our society or culture, hence individual cognitive gains occur through interpersonal interaction with the social environment. One of the major themes

in Vygotsky's work is the idea that complex types of human activity, such as language and literacy, begin in the social world (Wertsch, 1990). Similarly, proponents of social cultural theory contend that the learning process occurs where all learners are active participants in their learning process. Social constructivism makes the class a social community as learners interact in their activities. Thus, it emphasises the learners to take a responsibility of their own learning where the teacher and the learners are equal partners (Freire, 2000).

Vygotsky (1978) believed that children learn and acquire mental functions through social relationships. "Vygotsky believed that children's perceptions and thinking are largely influenced by the society in which they live hence knowledge construction occurs in the social world" (Menyuk, 2003, p.143). Vygotsky's principle of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) highlights the role of social interaction in learning as well as literacy development. By definition ZPD 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 (Brown & Ferrara, 1985). In other words when a child is in his zone of proximal development the child can hardly solve the problem alone but can be successful under adults or advanced peer guidance.

Thus the learning the teacher provides to the child or the new level of performance the learner is attempting, must be in the zone of proximal development. When the child's learning is below the zone, the learner will not learn anything new for the level of performance is too easy. Similarly, beyond the zone, the learner will not benefit anything because the level of performance demanded is beyond the child's capacity

(Wood, 1985). As such, to help the child learn, the teacher must engage him in a performance of just the right degree of difficulty (Brown & Ferrara, 1985). In Vygotsky's view, if children are to learn they must have the opportunity to try out the new level of performance with the assistance of someone who knows more than they do. This more knowledgeable others may be the teacher, an adult or may be capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

As the child is learning, assistance is given. However, the assistance or help changes over time. Thus more help is needed first and less help is needed later when the child has become more proficient (Wood, 1985). When the amount of support changes to match the needs of the learner, it is called scaffolding (McGee & Richgels, 2000). This is the area which shows that learning has taken place (Wood, 1985). Thus, learning of literacy is a social activity which requires learners to learn by talking and doing things together with his or her surrounding world. Without such social interaction with other more knowledgeable people, it is impossible to acquire social meaning hence literacy learning may end in futility. This, among others may be fulfilled by the teacher who is at the hub of curriculum implementation.

Vygotsky's social-cultural theory and zone of proximal development has several implications for schools and classrooms. As such it can be applied in teaching and learning research by using 'George W. Gagnon Jr. and Michelle Collay Model (Wood, 1985). One principle of this model focuses on "proper selecting of teaching instruction material for students' learning." This is achieved as the teacher provides learners great autonomy over choice of subject matter (Gutter, 2003). Thus in Learner-centred approach, learners have the freedom on what to learn. This principle was applied as the

researcher observed if the teachers of literacy employed interactive approaches to achieve active learner participation through different use of reading materials.

Another principle of this model is about “teacher development of learners’ learning situation”. This involves teachers’ consideration of teaching and learning strategies he/she should employ for students’ learning. For the learning situation to be effective, teachers should provide various teaching and learning strategies to promote learning. For instance, students can work in pairs or groups to share knowledge with each other and with the teacher alongside facilitating, scaffolding, and assisting the learners in negotiating meaning in the target language. Learners can participate in completing tasks mediated by artifacts used in real life situations such as books, visuals, audios or audiovisuals to support the development of language skills. As Dickson (1987, p. 54) argues, “effective strategies promote collaboration among learners upon which language can be acquired”. This principle was useful in this study because the researcher was informed on issues of collaboration and use of Learner-centred strategies employed by the teachers in promoting literacy development.

The last principle of this model to be employed in this study concerns “the teachers’ selection of teaching and learning materials for student’s learning”. The teacher should select instructional teaching and learning materials that will keep the learning to be learner centred as well as keeping them as close to actual practice as possible (Hung & Nichani, 2002).

In conclusion, this model reflects Vygotsky’s principles of social construction of knowledge and of the ZPD in Social Cultural theory. The theory therefore had informed

the basis of the study as the researcher attempted to establish the extent to which teachers used teaching strategies to the teaching of reading. As such this theory helped the researcher in observing and collecting data through FGDs schedules, interview schedules and document analysis.

2.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the understanding of literacy. Secondly it has highlighted the teaching approaches and strategies teachers employ when teaching literacy. Thirdly, it has also presented how strategies and techniques should be employed in the promotion of literacy development in the classroom. Finally, teacher challenges encountered to classroom literacy development as well as a theoretical framework that informed this study has been presented. The next chapter presents research design and methodology employed in the current study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Overview

The chapter presents the research design and methodology that was used in the current study. There is presentation of the design and methods and the reasons why the researcher opted for them. It also provides methods of data gathering, sampling techniques as well as sample size. Finally, the chapter describes the data analysis techniques and provides ethical considerations followed prior to data generation as well as during data generation.

3.2 Research Approach

The current study deployed qualitative method. According to Hart (2005), qualitative method involves generation of extensive narrative data in order to gain insights into the phenomena of interest. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 13), as cited in Cresswell (1994, p.52), “qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. Its practices transform the world as they turn the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews, photographs, recordings and memos to the self”. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) as cited in Cresswell (1994, p.78) further points out that “in qualitative research, researchers study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them”.

The researcher, therefore, aimed at employing this methodology for the reason that she wanted to study the teachers, learners and the head teachers in their natural settings which were the school and the classrooms. The school as well as the classrooms were studied in order for the researcher to gather the right data. Thus, the methodology was chosen because it is exploratory in nature and produces more comprehensive information (Cohen, et al. 2007) as such the researcher was “asking questions which required extensive explanations” (Bryman 2012, p. 205). In such instances when the researcher had asked a question, and a brief answer was provided by the participant, the researcher probed to get more information.

According to Cresswell (1994), it is very important to conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be explored. Furthermore, we conduct qualitative research because we need “a complex detailed understanding of the issue; and this detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes, or places of work and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in literature” (Cresswell, 1994, p.53). In some instances the researcher had the privilege to chat with some teachers who developed intimacy with her during her period of study and she was able to hear many stories pertaining to the teaching and learning of reading at the school, the relationship between the school and the community in general, as well as the their relationship in promoting literacy in the learners.

Qualitative research, in its own right, has been criticised that it is too subjective and too impressionistic (Bryman, 2009). The researcher held a neutral position to avoid being influenced by social factors as she could not run away from the social environment of

the school. The learners' success or failure in learning to read as Vygotsky (1978) suggests, could best be understood by examining the social world in which their learning was taking place. In this regard, Vygotsky's suggestion on the strategies teachers employed in the promotion of literacy in young learners would be understood only by employing qualitative research where literacy teaching was taking place. In doing so, the researcher aimed to achieve the right data.

3.3 Research Design

The researcher used a case study design to undertake the current study. A case study is regarded as a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle (Nisbet and Watt, 1994, p. 72). O'Leary (2004, p. 115) contends that "a case study is a method of studying elements of the social comprehensive description and analysis of single situation or case, such as an individual, group, episode, event or any other unit of social life organisation". It is also claimed (Cohen, et al. 2007, p. 240) that "in a case study much can be learned from studying just one individual, one classroom, one school or one district". The researcher opted for the case study as she saw that it was an ideal design to her study for it was aimed at investigating strategies teachers employ in the teaching of literacy in the infant classes in order to promote literacy development in learners. The researcher considered the case study as ideal for this study for the following reasons:

Firstly, this study needed time and thorough investigation. Thus, case study observations take place over an extended period of time. As such "it provides ample time for the researchers to develop more intimate and informal relationships with those they are observing in more natural environments than those in which experiments and

surveys are conducted” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 260). Therefore, for the researcher to build such a warm relationship with the observed participants, she had to go for the case study so that during interviews, the participants could be flexible, and that they could not fear anything hence provide what was on the ground. Secondly, the researcher chose a case study because in this research design a single researcher is able to undertake the study without a full research team. Thus, as a single researcher, she was a key instrument who was able to interact with research participants on a one-on-one basis. Furthermore, the researcher thought of conducting a case study because it catches unique features that may otherwise be lost in large scale data (Hart, 2005). Thus, the researcher wanted the unique features which were the key issues to understand the situation under study.

Finally, case studies are a step to action. As such the researcher aimed to bring insights to different stakeholders. This is in line to what Cohen et al. (2007) contends, “...case studies are a step to action. They begin in a world of action and contribute to it. Their insights may be interpreted into use for staff and individual development, for within institutional feedback; for formative evaluation; and in educational policy-making” (p. 260). The researcher therefore aimed to inquire and investigate problems that would then be highlighted so that stakeholders may utilise them for the transformation of the entire community and the nation at large.

3.4 Population and sampling

“Population is the total membership of a defined class of people, objects or events” (O’Leary, 2004, p. 104). Cohen et al. (2007) further explains that the larger group to which one hopes to apply findings of a study is regarded as population. In issues of

population, only a sample is chosen regarding that it cannot be possible to involve all the population in the study. For the current study, the researcher gathered few participants as a sample that she thought was representative enough to the larger population (O'Leary, 2004).

3.4.1 Population of interest

The population of interest for this study included Primary Education Advisor Coordinator, two Primary Education Advisors, one head teacher, one key teacher, two standards 1 and 2 Language teachers, four standards 3 and 4 Language teachers, all standard 1 learners and all standard 2 learners from the school under study in Mulanje rural. Mulanje Education District is located in the Shire Highlands Education Division. The accessible population came from one primary school. Mulanje rural had been chosen for two reasons: Firstly, the district was convenient to the researcher; as such, it assisted the researcher to avoid costly transport for the school was easily accessible. The second reason was that literacy interventions such as Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and READ Malawi had been conducted in that area. Therefore, the researcher was eager to find out what strategies teachers were employing in promoting literacy development in infant classes after the interventions.

3.4.2 Sampling

In research there are many sampling techniques such as snow bow sampling, quota sampling, random sampling, dimensional sampling, volunteer sampling, convenience sampling and purposive sampling (O'Leary, 2004), just to mention but a few. Despite the fact that there are numerous sampling techniques, the choice of sampling is not

arbitrary but it is influenced by research design, usefulness of the study, the purpose of the study, and also the convenience of the sample (O’Leary, 2004).

3.4.2.1 Sample Size

Bryman (2009) describes sampling as involving selection of representative number of units from the population of study. Cohen et al. (2007) describe a sample as a sub-set of the population of study. Thus, in research, it is not possible to study every person hence there is a selection of a sample, from which the data might be collected and studied (Bryman, 2009). Therefore, the sample of this study was one Primary Education Advisor coordinator, two Primary Education Advisors (PEAs); one from the zone where the study was conducted and the other from a neighbouring zone, one head teacher, one key teacher, two language teachers from infant section, four language teachers from standard 3 and 4 classes (junior section) and all infant section learners from the classes studies were conducted. These were selected because they were part of the population under study hence the researcher targeted them in order to gather the right data. The researcher also sampled such a population because she was not looking for representativeness upon knowing that “a qualitative researcher’s goal is often rich understanding of what may come from the few rather than the many” (O’Leary, 2004, p.104)

3.4.2.2 Selection of School

There was one primary school that was studied. The researcher employed purposive sampling technique in selecting the school. Bryman (2009) 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.

Fraenkel and Wallen, (2000) defines purposive sampling technique as a technique in which the researcher selects a sample that will provide the required data. The researcher purposively selected the primary school that had adequate classrooms, text books and enough qualified teachers. Secondly, the school was selected purposefully to avoid high transport costs for it was situated within the reach of the researcher.

3.4.2.3 Selection of classes (Standards 1 and 2)

The researcher also used purposive sampling to select the classes to be used in the study for the reason that the researcher's targets were the infant classes. When she reached at the school, the researcher found that there were streams per class. Due to this, therefore the researcher opted for convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is described as selecting a sample in a manner convenient to the researcher. In the school the researcher observed the classrooms belonged to the teachers the head teacher had introduced to her first that they were standard 1 and 2 teachers. These classes were selected because they were the targeted area of concern by the researcher as her study aimed to investigate the strategies teachers employ in teaching literacy to promote literacy development in standards 1 and 2.

3.4.2.5 Choice of Participants

The Primary Education Advisor Coordinator, The Primary Education Advisors, the head teacher, key teacher, standard 1 and 2 language teachers, standard 3 and 4 language teachers and standard 1 and 2 learners were selected through purposive sampling. This technique was employed because the participants were just the right variables in the study hence would assist the researcher generating the right data. They

were the right variables as they were the ones whom were to be involved in the teaching and learning of literacy.

(a) Teachers

The first group was of the class teachers who were teaching the classes the researcher observed (standard 1 and 2). The class teachers were selected purposively for the reason that they were the teachers who were teaching in the classes where the lessons were observed. The second group of teachers was two teachers from the junior sections, standards 3 and 4. The standard 3 and 4 teachers were selected through convenience sampling. Thus there were three teachers in each class so the one who met the researcher first were selected. The researcher thought of including them in the study for they were the ones who received the learners from the infant classes. They were right variables for they had the capacity to share the researcher the literacy problems they encountered when they received the young learners from the infant section. Thus, the researcher was wondering why the learners reached standard four with reading problems; she thought that may be the concepts in the upper classes were not appropriate to the age level of the learners hence they failed. So she wanted to get firsthand information from the teachers themselves.

(b) Learners

The learners who participated in this study were in two categories. The first one was that which the whole classes were observed during lesson delivery; and these learners were purposefully sampled with regards that they were the targeted participants as they were in the infant classes. Despite the fact that the classes were large, the researcher studied the whole classes for they were in their natural setting. Trimming the population would not provide information of what exactly happened in real situations. The other

group of learners was sampled for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). On this, the researcher employed Snowball sampling technique to select the participants.

Snowball Sampling as O’Leary (2004) contends, is often used when working with populations that are not easily identified or accessed as such the process involves building a sample through referrals. As such, the researcher asked the class teacher to select the right variables in the classrooms and later the children selected their friends whom they knew were capable for a discussion. All the participants who participated in the FGDs were standard 2 learners because in standard 1 learners were young hence, the researcher suggested that they would not be able to express their views. The learners were twelve in total. To avoid gender bias, there were six boys and six girls in the FGD.

(c) Key informants

The head teachers are prominent leaders at an institution and all goes well with a skilled head teacher as he manages and leads the school well. Therefore in terms of promoting literacy development at the school, head teachers are at the fore front to ensure that the learners are receiving the right concepts and support in terms of literacy development promotion. In order to select them in terms of sampling, the researcher used purposive sampling for they were purposively right variables to share the researcher information about the learners’ performance in relation to literacy at the school. Apart from the head teacher, key teacher, who was purposively selected as well, was selected for the reason that he played a major role in the zone in regards to literacy promotion and language curriculum implementation. Thus, he paid visits to schools and coached the standard one teachers in the teaching of literacy.

The PEAs also played a crucial role in ensuring that head teachers and teachers were implementing the curriculum in their zones. The coordinating PEA as well had a crucial role in the district in ensuring the progress of literacy development and curriculum implementation in the district.

3.5 Research Sites

The study was conducted in one school in Mulanje Education District, located in Shire Highlands Education Division (SHED). The school is located to the southern part of Mulanje District. The site was chosen because it was where the researcher resided hence less costly in terms of transport costs. Additionally, transport was problematic for the researcher resided in the typical rural area; during the period of rain as the data was being gathered the road becomes muddy hence very difficult to travel. So to avoid these inconveniences, the study was conducted in the area which was closer to where she resided. Thirdly, it is one of the districts in which it seems literacy studies have never been previously conducted. So the researcher wanted to explore much from this area. Furthermore, literacy interventions, such as EGRA, READ Malawi and Literacy Boost were conducted there in that the teachers were exposed to new and effective methods, strategies and techniques of literacy promotion. Therefore, such teachers' strategies might be worth studying as well as been examined in the classroom which was their natural setting (Cohen, et al., 2007). Thus the natural setting would help the researcher see if the teachers were using the effective strategies when teaching reading.

3.6 Data Generation Methods

The researcher used observations, in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussion and document analysis.

3.6.1 Direct Observation

Observation is a systematic method of data generation that relies on the researcher's ability to gather information through his/ her senses (Cohen et al., 2007). Blaxter, Hughes & Tight (2001) describes observation as "a data generation method that involves the researcher watching, recording and analysing events of interest" (p. 178). Observation as a research process offered the investigator opportunity to gather live data from naturally occurring social situations (Cohen et al., 2007) which provided her with the opportunity to have first-hand experiences with informants, and at the same time she recorded information as it occurred (Creswell, 1994). Observing participants in their natural settings is more reliable for it makes the researcher to have the possibility to see how the participants actually behave. Furthermore, observation can also serve as a technique for verifying or nullifying information provided in face to face encounters. Finally, observation is fundamental when observing the environment for it provides valuable background information about the environment where a research project is being undertaken.

Observation as a data generation method has its disadvantages. First, there is a risk that the researcher may miss out other observations as he/she might be busy writing about other interesting things she might notice. Secondly, the researcher may find his or her attention focusing on a particular event or feature because it appears particularly interesting or relevant and miss other important things hence no recognition and acknowledgement of its importance at that time (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight 2001, p.17). Contrary, Cohen et al. (2007) argues that observation helps the researcher to gain a deep insight and understanding of the phenomenon being observed. As such the current study employed this method in order to generate deep insight and understanding of the

strategies teachers employed in the promotion of literacy development. To make this possible, the observations were actually conducted in the literacy classrooms in the infant classes in the sampled school. The participants that were observed included the teachers and the learners and this occurred during the teaching of reading both English and Chichewa lessons. The researcher studied two subjects so that Chichewa being the learners' first language should guide the researcher gather the right data in terms of transferability of reading skills from the first language to the second language (Cummins, 1999) which was English.

Observation was conducted for five consecutive days at the school in the classroom during reading lessons. The tool that was used was observation schedule (see appendix 3). During this time the teacher recorded every aspect she saw on the observation schedule which had structured questions. On top of that, lessons were also tape-recorded so that it could assist during data presentation. Recording of data and photographing were done with participants' consent (Fraenkel and Wallen 2000). The participants were informed that what they would say, would be recorded so that the researcher would not miss any information. All participants gave their consent. The information collected was then compared to that from Focus Group Discussions and semi-structured interviews.

The researcher had observed 16 lessons altogether. Thus, in both standards 1 and 2, there were 16 observations. The observation period, as stated already was conducted for one week. Each class was observed eight times. Thus the researcher started observing the lessons on Monday until Friday at that school. This was done deliberately because skipping days would not give her the vivid picture of the class environment

and school cultures. The observations were on reading in both English and Chichewa. The researcher was also writing some notes to complement the comments on the observation schedule.

In the observations, both the teachers and the learners were targeted. In terms of the teachers, the researcher was interested in observing their approach to the teaching of literacy, their strategies and techniques they employed in the teaching of reading as learner - centered was concerned. As literacy is grounded on social learning theory on which learners should be the center of focus, the researcher wanted to observe the approaches and strategies they employed in the literacy classrooms. How the strategies and techniques were employed and finally the researcher was interested to observe the challenges the teachers encountered in the teaching of literacy. In all these situations, the researcher put focus on interactive opportunities created by the teachers, availability of literacy materials in the classroom and also if the learners were scaffolded when they were at the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in the process of learning to read.

On the part of the learners, the researcher focused on the learners' participation in class activities as the approaches and strategies were employed; and how they interacted with their peers and with their teachers. The general literacy environment in the classrooms was also observed to establish how print rich the environment was and the challenges the teachers faced in teaching literacy. In conducting the observations, the researcher assumed the role of a non-participant observer (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). The non-participant observer's role was assumed so that the researcher did not interfere with classroom practices otherwise the findings of the study would be influenced in one way or the other.

The study took a whole week in each school, and ended without a problem. The learners looked upon the researcher as a surrogate teacher and were flexible. On the first day, for example, they did not pay attention for they were interested in the researcher. They drove their attention from the teacher to the researcher as they always looked at the back where she was seated. However, with time the researcher was used to the learners hence they behaved naturally. The observations therefore were significant as they assisted the researcher to generate rich data.

3.6.2 In-depth interviews

People are interviewed to explore research findings in ways that cannot be achieved by other forms of research (Cohen et al., 2007). O’Leary (2004, p.160) defines an interview as “a method of data collection that involves researchers asking respondents basically open-ended questions”. Thus to generate the data, semi-structured interviews were used by the researcher and this involved a series of open- ended questions which were based on the topic the researcher wanted to cover. In-depth interviews were employed by the researcher for several reasons. Firstly, it provided opportunities for both interviewer and interviewee to discuss some topics in more detail. As (Blaxter et al., 2001) argues, “If the interviewee has difficulty in answering a question or provides only a brief response, the interviewer can use cues or prompts to encourage the interviewee to consider the question further” (p.45).

Secondly, during in-depth interview, the interviewer has the freedom to probe the interviewee to elaborate and provide an expansion on the original response. For instance, when the interviewee provided a response which might have had several implications, the researcher asked the respondent to explain what he/ she had said in

more detail. That provided room for the researcher to follow a line of thought which were introduced by the interviewees themselves.

Contrary to the sentiments highlighted above, Cohen et al. (2007) argues that interviews are not proper for data gathering because they are expensive in regard to time, they are also open to interviewer bias and also issues of interviewee fatigue may hamper the interview and anonymity may be difficult (p. 349). Despite some drawbacks argued by Cohen et al. (2007), the interviewer opted for in-depth interviews because it was a flexible method for data generation as it enabled multisensory channels such as verbal, non-verbal, spoken and hearing to be used. To achieve this, the researcher planned her time so that the respondents did not feel tired. Thus, the interviews were conducted in the morning hours. This was between 9:00 in the morning and lunch hour because during that time the respondents would not feel hungry or tired. Despite the fact that in-depth interviews are complex (O'Leary, 2004), in relation to peoples' complex behaviour, differences in class or age, the researcher ignored the rules and roles associated with interviews. The researcher did this deliberately in order to establish rapport, gain trust and create a more natural environment that the researcher thought was conducive to open and honest communication.

Furthermore, this was done to close the gulf between the researcher and the interviewee. During the study, the interviews were conducted under a tree. For easy interaction and understanding (Cohen et. al, 2007) the researcher used Chichewa in the interviews for the interviewees said that they would be comfortable using Chichewa. The researcher conducted the face to face interviews with the teachers in order to reflect on what actually happened in the lesson delivery. Thus, after observing the reading lessons in

the classrooms for three days, the researcher interviewed the class teachers to explain what was observed during lesson(s) delivery. The head teachers were interviewed after interviewing the teachers and the key teacher; a teacher who supervised and taught other teachers new teaching strategies and approaches about National Reading Programme. This was done deliberately in order to compare the information provided by the teachers.

The PEAs and coordinating PEA were interviewed later which was the second week of the study. These participants were interviewed on the assistance they provided to teachers in the course of helping learners' literacy development promotion. Furthermore, they were interviewed if they encountered challenges in the promotion of literacy in their schools. On top of that the PEAs and the PEA Coordinator were interviewed on the approaches and strategies teachers were using in the teaching of literacy and whether the teachers were implementing them. Similarly the data from these stake holders was to be compared with that information provided by the teachers as well as the key teacher and the head teacher. The in-depth interviews were important in this study because they helped the researcher getting clarifications on certain issues that were noted during observations. The face to face types of interviews were also worthwhile to the study because the study aimed to investigate from teachers the approaches, strategies and techniques which they employed when teaching reading. The teachers were also asked the reason why and how they used those approaches and strategies; and the challenges they encountered, and also how they resolved them in order to promote literacy development in the young learners.

Apart from the class teachers, standard 3 and 4 teachers were also interviewed to explain more as they were probed to provide information concerning the learning of reading in their classrooms. The participants, as stated above were 6 teachers, 2 head teachers, 2 PEAs, 1 key teacher and 1 coordinating PEA as tabulated in table 1.

Table 1: Designation and number of semi- structured interviews

Designation	Number of interviews
Teachers	6
Head teachers	2
Key teacher	1
PEAs	2
Coordinating PEA	1
Total	12

Source: Researcher, field data from the school under study (2016)

3.6.3 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Focus groups are a form of group interviews or are organised group discussions that are led by a facilitator or moderator who is the researcher (Bryman, 2012). Thus, in “Focus Group Discussion, the reliance is on the interaction within the group which discuss a topic supplied by the researcher” (Morgan 1988, p. 9). Focus Group Discussions (FGD) was also one of the data generation techniques that were used with learners. Twelve learners were sampled for the study at each school. The aim of the interview was to find out the literacy opportunities they had at their school as well as how the teachers taught them reading. The FGDs also sought to find out the feelings of the learners about the level of difficulty and relevance of the literacy materials for their class.

The researcher aimed at employing this method in order to yield a collective rather than an individual view for the participants interacted with each other rather than with the interviewer. As the participants were arguing with each other, it proved to be vital in the sense that it provided the researcher with an opportunity to gather information about the learners' attitudes, emotions and feelings. In addition to that, the participants were much focused on a particular issue, for example, on the role the parents had on their reading. From this, the researcher yielded insights that might not otherwise have been available in a straightforward interview.

For the FGD, the researcher selected twelve learners, six boys and six girls from standard 2 classes to conduct the focus group discussion with them. Standard 2 learners only were selected leaving the standard 1 learners for the reason that they were somehow matured as compared to the standard 1 learners who would not provide valid information to the researcher. As focus group takes the nature of a discussion and an argument, the standard 2 learners were the eligible participants for they fulfilled the researcher's goal, for they argued and at the same time their mood and emotions were read easily by the researcher. Before the FGDs were conducted, consent was sought from the children that were involved in the study. In the first place, the head teacher and class teachers were informed about the children's involvement in the FGDs. Thus, head teachers and teachers who are entrusted with the children's welfare were consulted since they have the mandate to provide such consent (Fraenkel & Wallen 2000). The children then were briefed about the purpose of the FGDs and they were asked if they were willing to participate or not. All of them accepted to participate. The following is the schedule summary for FGDs for the learners:

On 23rd February, 2016 the researcher conducted FGDs with twelve learners from the school which was under study. The FGDs were only focusing on the learners; specifically in trying to find out the learning opportunities they had both at school and outside school, and the strategies their teachers used when teaching them. The researcher also focused on the reading materials their teachers used when teaching and if they had any problems with their text books in terms of appropriateness to their age level. This method proved to be interesting because looking at the learners' emotions; they seemed empowered to speak out their views and in their own words. In generating the data, the researcher used audio tape- recorder and a smart phone to record the data. The equipment was used in order to secure the information in case something would go wrong on one of them (O'Leary, 2004). As it was done in interviews, consent was also taken from the participants before tape-recording.

Furthermore, the researcher also was taking notes as the discussions were in progress. The aim was to take down the mood and emotions of the participants that would hardly be recorded by the tape-recorder and the smart phone. Despite its shortfalls, the researcher suggested to conduct focus groups for they are useful to triangulate with interviews and observations (Morgan, 1988, as cited in Cohen et al., 2007). Hence, the researcher triangulated the data from the Focus Group Discussion and the data gathered through observation and the interviews which she conducted.

3.6.4 Document analysis

Apart from the above mentioned data generation methods, document analysis were also used in the study (Morgan, 1988; O'Leary, 2004). This was the case because the strategies the teachers employed in teaching of reading were informed by the type of

resources used. The documents that were analysed include: Chichewa Teacher's Guide for standard 1; English Teacher's Guide for standard 1; Chichewa Pupil's book for standard 1 and 2; English Pupil's book for standard 1 and 2; and also Chichewa (Sosa) Pupil's book. In both English and Chichewa Teachers Guides the researcher analysed the activities the learners practised per period and per week. She also analysed the level of difficulty of the contents. In English Pupils book for standard 1, the researcher analysed the pictures used in practising reading per period, and how often were the learners exposed to the pictures and sentences from the Guides.

The sizes of the pictures and number of pictures were also analysed in the standard 1 pupils' book. Furthermore, the time when the learners were introduced to smaller units and contexts were also analysed. In standard two Pupils' books of both English and Chichewa, the researcher analysed the content in terms of level of difficulty and size of pictures. The Sosa book for 1991 curriculum standard 1 was analysed in terms of level of difficulty, the time learners were introduced to smaller units and contexts. These materials were significant to this study because they provided the right data as participants were talking about them with regard to how they influenced positively or negatively in the promotion of learners literacy skills.

3.7 Data Generation Instruments

As far as qualitative research is concerned, it uses no single methodology over the other (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In tandem with Denzin and Lincoln (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) assert that qualitative researchers rely on four methods for gathering information. Therefore the researcher employed four methods to achieve the right data. As such, the methods that were used in gathering data were direct observation, in-depth interviews,

Focus Group Discussions and document analysis. The four methods were triangulated in order to ensure generation of rich data (Cohen, et al. 2007). Thus, the researcher needed to compare and contrast information got through interviews, observations and focus group discussions.

Instruments that were used during data generation included: observation schedules, interview guides, focus group discussion guides, standard one teachers' English and Teachers' guides, English and Chichewa pupils' prescribed text books, standard two English and Chichewa pupils' prescribed text books and 1991 Sosa book for standard one. The data that were collected were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Data gathering was conducted in the second year of the Master of Education programme for two weeks.

3.8 Data Analysis

As Cohen et al. (2007) put it, qualitative data analysis involves organising, accounting for and explaining the data. He further describes it as "a way of making sense of the data in terms of participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, categories and regularities" (p. 480). It is worth noting that in qualitative data, the analysis is mostly inevitably interpretive, hence, the data analysis took an interpretivism stand.

Basically, data analysis was an ongoing process for it started right away at the beginning of data gathering. As such content and interpretational analysis was used. The information generated through observations, interviews as well as focus group discussions were put together and the data was analysed by using common themes and patterns and also differences in participant's responses. The data that was generated during interviews was listened to several times so that the researcher would familiarise

herself with the data before combining them. After listening to the recordings of the interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) several times, the researcher transcribed them verbatim.

Likewise, the data generated through observation was transferred from the observation schedules and those that were developed through note-taking onto another paper, were well detailed. After that, the researcher wrote everything on paper and then developed codes. The codes were generated from related questions, similar problem areas, the key concepts considered in the study and the possible answers from the respondents. In cases where respondents did not provide answers to some questions, one code was assigned. The themes and overlaps then were developed which resulted into headings and subheadings. Finally the findings were tabulated and the explanations and descriptions were done according to the themes generated (Fraenkel, 2000).

3.9 Credibility and Trustworthiness

Credibility and trustworthiness in research are concerned with the acceptability of research findings. Basically, credibility and trustworthiness in the current study was to establish what made the findings trustworthy and credible. Therefore these issues in the current study were dealt with through piloting. Piloting helped the researcher to refine the work of study and the tools for data gathering in order to come up with a good study. Secondly, direct quotations from participants were added in the data analysis so as to strengthen the data. These direct quotations were gathered through tape-recording. Apart from tape-recording, note-taking and photos were also used which were captured by the researcher during class observations. Finally, credibility as well as trustworthiness was achieved through use of critical friends. In the schools where

piloting was conducted the researcher asked consent from the head teacher through the letter of introduction from the District education manager (see appendix 2). The head teacher introduced the researcher to the teachers as well as the learners who accepted the researcher to conduct the study.

3.9.1 Triangulation

Triangulation refers to the use of various data generation techniques (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). With regards to the current study the researcher used observation, semi-structured interviews, Focus Group Discussions and document analysis to triangulate the data generated. This technique of using several data generation techniques helped the researcher avoid bias.

3.9.2 Piloting

Piloting is the process whereby the researcher tries out the research techniques and methods which s/he has in mind to use during study. Thus, the aim is “to see how well the techniques as well as the methods will work in practice and, if necessary, modify them” (Blaxter et al., 2001, p.136). In the study, the researcher piloted the instruments. Thus, before data generation for the current study, the researcher piloted observations, interviews and focus group discussions in two rural primary schools in Mulanje district. The researcher piloted observations in standards 1 and 2 classrooms and conducted interviews with standard 1 and 2 teachers, the head teachers of those primary schools and also all learners from the infant section from two schools. In terms of the school having more than one stream, only one class was piloted.

Before piloting, the researcher presented the letter of introduction from the District Education Manager to the head teachers asking them to assist her conducting studies in their schools. The head teachers asked consent from the teachers, learners and key teacher who later accepted the researcher to do the piloting.

The pilot study was worthwhile to the current study in that it helped the researcher extending the days of observations. Thus, instead of observing for four days as planned, observations were conducted for a week in order to exactly see what the teachers would do in revising what the learners had failed to read for all the concepts learnt in whole week proved challenging to the learners. Furthermore, the interview schedules were revised for there was a new program of National Reading and questions about the NRP were not initially included on the interview schedules. Furthermore, the piloting helped the researcher to add one more interviewee, the key teacher who had the responsibility of coaching fellow teachers in the implementation of the National Reading Program.

3.10 Data Management

The data that was generated was properly organised and well kept. Thus, after data generation and transcription of interviews and focus group discussions, jotted notes were kept in a transparent plastic envelope and labelled folders. The tape-recorded data was transferred and stored in separate files in flash disks and a computer. These helped the researcher to easily access and analyse the data. The information was later transferred and stored in separate files in a computer, flash disks, tapes, Digital Versatile Devices (DVDs) and was also sent to the researcher's e-mail account. There were also printed hard copies from soft transcripts and hand written information that were kept as back up.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues as Bryman (2012) contends are all about how we should treat the people on whom we conduct research. He further states that “it concerns activities in which we should or should not engage in our relations with them” (p.130). According to (Cohen et al., 2007; O’Leary, 2004) in ethical issues concerning every area of research regarding to data generation, the following should be observed÷ informed consent, confidentiality, privacy and anonymity. These were observed right away from asking for permission to conduct the study, class observations, interviews and during FGDs.

3.11.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent has been defined by Diener and Crandall (1978) as 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 research, the researcher asked for consent from top officials at Mulanje District Education Office as well as the people whom the researcher thought would be participants. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992), as cited in Cohen et al. (2007, p. 52), suggest that “informed consent is particularly important if participants are going to be exposed to any stress, pain, invasion of privacy, or if they are going to lose control over what happens”. Consent, thus protects, respects the right of self determination and places some of the responsibility on the participant should anything go wrong in the research. As part of the right to self-determination, the participant has the right to refuse to take part, or to withdraw once the research has begun (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992) as cited in Cohen et al, (2007). Thus, informed consent implies informed refusal.

During this study, the researcher asked the supervisor for an introductory letter from the college so that it should accompany her in asking for consent from the District Education Manager (DEM) (See Appendix 1) to conduct a study in Mulanje Education District. This is in line with what Cohen et al. (2007) state:

The first stage thus involves the gaining of official permission to undertake one's research in the target community. This will mean contacting, in person or in writing, an appropriate official and/or the chairperson of the governors if one is to work in a school, along with the head teacher or principal (p.55).

Before conducting the study, the researcher requested permission from the District Education Manager (DEM) to provide her the opportunity to study in Mulanje Education District. The District Education Manager accepted and wrote a letter to Primary Education Advisor (PEA) of the zone in which the school under study was located (See Appendix 2) to ask them to provide the researcher assistance to study in the zone. The researcher further visited the PEA with the identification letter and she accepted to conduct the study in the zone. After being provided with acceptance letter to conduct the study at the selected school, she went to the school to submit the letter to the head teacher and also seek their stand on the study. After being accepted by the head teacher, she further asked consent from the respective teachers to be involved in the study.

Consent was also sought from the PEA coordinator for her to participate in the study. Furthermore, consent was also sought from the children that were involved in the study. In the first place, surrogate parents, head teachers and class teachers were informed about the children's involvement in the study. This was done so that they should give informed consent on behalf of the learners. This does not mean that the parents were

sidelined as they were not consulted but it was one way of simplifying the process as many parents, as they were living typically in rural areas, would not understand that being a participant is voluntary. For that reason, teachers and head teachers who are entrusted with the children's welfare were consulted since they have the mandate to provide such consent (Fraenkel & Wallen 2000). The children then were briefed about the purpose of the study and they were asked if they were willing to participate in the study or not. All of them accepted that they were ready to participate.

Recording of data as well as photographing was done with participants' consent (Fraenkel and Wallen 2000). The participants were informed that what they would say would be recorded so that the researcher could not miss any information. All participants gave their consent.

Generally, the researcher was open to inform the participants about the purpose of the study, their role in the study, what would be involved, intended outcomes and benefits of the study as a basis for volunteering to participate in the study. The researcher did this to ensure that the participants should be clear, hence understand what they would be involved in.

3.11.2 Confidentiality

Another way of protecting a participant's right to privacy is through the promise of confidentiality (Blaxter, 2001). Confidentiality is all about that participants should not be exposed to harm or danger of any kind whether physical or psychological. This can, among other things, be achieved by not disclosing the identities of the participants under study. Thus, despite the researcher's knowledge of participants who had provided

the information, he would in no way disclose to the public. In this study, confidentiality was assured or achieved by keeping the data anonymous. What the researcher did was to give all the participants codes. Thus, she coded them teacher A and B. Similarly, the PEAs were coded A and B.

3.11.3 Privacy

Privacy refers to how private information or issues will be handled during and after the research (Cohen et al., 2007). Privacy, as Cohen et al. (2007) note, is more than simple confidentiality. In this study, the right to privacy means that a participant has the right not to take part in the research or not. For instance, not to answer questions, not to be interviewed, not to have their home intruded into, not to answer telephone calls or emails, and to engage in private behaviour in their own private place without fear of being observed (Blaxter, et al., 2001). Researchers, therefore have an obligation to inform participants of their rights to refuse to take part in any or all of the research, to get permission to conduct the research and to limit the time needed for participation during this study, therefore, as a researcher, access into the schools and classrooms, and the conduction of focus group discussion was done with permission from the head teachers, teachers as well as pupils. The pupils, however, as young as they were, were not asked directly in regard to their age hence, consent was taken from their head teachers and teachers who were their surrogate parents and have mandate to give consent in place of parents (Cohen et.al, 2007).

3.11.4 Anonymity

Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992), as cited in Cohen et al. (2007) underline the need for confidentiality of participants' identities, and that any violations of this should be made with the agreement of the participants. The essence of anonymity is that information provided by participants should in no way reveal their identity. A participant is therefore considered anonymous when the researcher or any other person cannot identify the participant or subject from the information provided. As a researcher, therefore, the researcher deployed ways of achieving anonymity, for example, the use of codes for identifying people and the use of password-protected files.

3.12 Limitations of the Study

The first limitation was of financial constraints to conduct this study. To overcome that situation the researcher conducted a case study because the researcher was able to conduct it individually as it does not require a research team. The other limitation was that first periods for English lessons were affected with the feeding program in the school. Learners received porridge soon after morning assembly; because of that classes started late everyday resulting into first and second periods being affected. To overcome the limitation, those periods were replaced with those allocated for *Tikwere*¹ program since they were not been utilised.

The standard 1 teacher was hesitant to accept the researcher to observe her lessons for she thought the researcher was an officer from Malawi Institute of Education or

¹ A radio programme which was sponsored by USAID/ Malawi's Ministry of Education in 2008 to improve teaching and learning in primary school lower classes.

Ministry of Education to assess her on how she implemented the National Reading Program. So the researcher talked to her and made it clear that the intention was to conduct a study as a student from Chancellor College and the information generated was for academic purposes and had nothing to do with the National Reading Program, after that the teacher accepted to be observed

3.13 Chapter summary

The chapter has presented the research design and methodology used to conduct the study. It has also presented sampling techniques employed, and how the research site was accessed from different authorities and prospective participants. Last but one, there is discussion of how the data was generated and managed. Finally, limitations of the study have been presented. The next chapter discusses the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Chapter overview

The study explored strategies which teachers employed in the teaching of literacy to promote literacy development in learners in Malawian rural infant classrooms. This chapter presents the context of the school and the results and discussions of the data that was generated. The results are generally based on the three research questions.

4.2 Context of the school

This section provides a description of the school involved in the study which include; the geographical position, school structures, classroom space and language teaching, enrolment and number of teachers and their qualifications. The study was conducted in standards one and two at one primary school in Mulanje District in the Southern Region of Malawi. By definition, a full primary school is a primary school which consists of all primary classes from standard one up to eight.

4.2.1 Geographical position

Geographically, the school is situated in Mulanje district; specifically in the Shire Highlands Education Division. The school is located in the South of Mulanje District. It is almost seven kilometres from the boma. It is surrounded by tea plantations of Sayama Tea Estate to the East, Lauderdale Tea Estate to the north and Esperanza Tea Estate to the west. Many people or families are employed in these tea plantations.

4.2.2 School structures

There were seven school blocks and one structure which was the head teacher's office. Each and every block had two classrooms. The classrooms were designed inside with a special room which was found vacant by the time the researcher was conducting the studies. The head teacher's office had three rooms; one which was the head teacher's office and the other rooms were a staffroom and storeroom respectively.

4.2.3 Classroom space and language teaching

The classes were divided into three sections, namely: Infant, Junior and Senior sections. Standards one and two made the Infant section while standards three, four and five made the Junior section. The Senior Section consisted of classes six, seven and eight. English and Chichewa languages were used as mediums of instruction. These were also subjects in the curriculum. From standards one to four, Chichewa was the medium of instruction while from standards five to eight English was language of instruction. On the other hand, English was a language of instruction from standard one up to eight but a medium of instruction from standards five, six, seven and eight.

In the context of this study, both English and Chichewa were studied on the strategies teachers employed in teaching literacy. Teaching periods were not the same; they differed basing on the sections. In the infant section they had a 30- minute period while in the junior and senior sections had a 35- minute period. On the time table, languages were allocated more time as compared to the other languages. Thus, in standard one English and Chichewa were taught twice daily.

4.2.4 Learner enrolment

The school had a large number of learners. Thus, there were 2,579 learners. The reason for this large enrolment is that the school is surrounded by a vast catchment area. Learners walk long a distance to the school.

4.2.5 Number of teachers and qualifications

The school had nineteen teachers; with seven males and twelve females. All of them were qualified. Despite the fact that all the teachers at the school were qualified, they differed in terms of teaching experiences with regard to years of service.

4.3 Approaches and strategies teachers employed in the teaching of literacy

The first specific research question was on the approaches and strategies teachers employ in the teaching of reading to promote literacy development in infant classes. Follow up questions were asked to teachers, head teachers and key teacher (See appendices 4 and 5). Furthermore, observation technique helped the researcher to gather the data (See appendix 3). This section, therefore presents the findings on the question. These are interactive approaches and strategies.

4.3.1 Interactive approaches and strategies

The researcher was interested in finding out the interactive approaches and strategies the teachers employed to achieve social interaction among the learners. Thus, she looked at the existence of interaction and collaboration between the teacher and all the learners, between learners, and between the teachers and individual learners during lesson delivery.

4.3.1.1 Learner – centred approach -Gradual Release of Responsibility

In standard 1 the teacher employed Learner-centred approach known as “Gradual Release of Responsibility” (G-R-R). This is also known as *I do, We do, You do* Approach. In this approach the teacher modelled a skill or an activity (I Do), then practiced it with the learners (We Do) and finally the learners practiced on their own (You Do). In both English and Chichewa the teachers used this approach. In Chichewa it was *Ndipanga ine, Tipanga tonse, Mupanga nokha*. During a particular lesson, the teacher modelled an activity or skill to the learners. Secondly, she asked the whole class to practice the activity together with her. For instance, teaching *Hh*, the teacher modelled by repeating the sound /h/ three times. Then she asked the learners to say together /h/ with her for three times. Finally, the teacher let the learners practice on their own as a class. When teaching English, the learners were introduced to smaller units as well as whole units at the same time. Thus words, syllables and contents were exposed at the same time in that they encountered word and letters in the context of reading. In Chichewa they followed ANIMUKOLE whereby learners encountered contexts with the words they are first familiar with when they learn a language. In Chichewa they were exposed to sounds, syllables words and then a passage. These were taught in one unit which took two days of a week.

4.3.1.2 Learner- centred (Whole-word) and teacher-centred approaches

In standard two, the teacher combined teaching approaches. Thus, she used modified Whole- word (PCAR) and teacher-centred approaches. This was determined by the context the lesson was taking place. Thus, it was deliberate because some learners had challenges to grasp the concepts because in Whole-word they were exposed to content before being exposed to smaller units like words and letters. So she was trying to drill

with the learners so that they could internalise the concepts that seemed challenging to the learners. The combination of approaches was successful than using one approach.

4.3.1.3 Learner- centred strategies and techniques

Standard one and two teachers employed learner-centred strategies in promoting literacy development. The strategies including songs, read-aloud, dialogue, games, story-telling, question and answer, group-work and pair-work. Despite that both teachers used Learner-centred strategies sometimes the standard two teacher was employing the teacher-centred strategies because the learner-centred strategies seemed challenging to employ because of the Whole-word approach from which the strategies emerged.

The Whole word Approach as well as learner- centred strategies that were employed were viable because the learners were involved in the lesson. The learners' participation would therefore promote their literacy development. However, this was not the case because the Whole-word Approach, though modified, seemed to be inappropriate to the learners of the school under study. The learners were unable to read or grasp concepts. The researcher suggests that it was because the learners were living in a rural area and had encountered the language for the first time. Literature states that most children in Malawi are enrolled in the primary school without any previous exposure to ECD (Kholowa, 2007; NESP, 2008; MoGCDSW, 2017, Waliwa, 2017). Consequently, the majority of the learners do not have any access to English; hence they encounter it for the first time in standard one. This is the case because there are only a few Early Childhood Centers in Malawi with only 45.36% of eligible children attending school in the form of ECD (MoGCDSW, 2017).

For that reason, in standard one, both teachers and learners encountered problems using the Whole-word (G-R-R) Approach and learner-centred strategies. The teachers encountered the problems because they started on a blank slate. It is worth noting that during the research, reading problem was aggravated by the approach of Gradual Release of Responsibility that was just introduced in standard one with regard to its nature. The approach, was viable, only that the context mattered most as far as learning of language was concerned. The G-R-R Approach was overloaded with activities which learners were required to master by the end of that lesson. The activities were hardly practised in the 30- minute period because learning English, being a second language, was challenging.

According to the researcher's observation, the activities in G-R-R approach were too much for the learners to bear with them. For instance, in standard one, there were six activities to be practiced in one period. When the teacher and the learners were on activity 3, the learners were exhausted, started making noise and were asking for permission to go outside the classroom; and would never return. It was also problematic when they reached the *You Do* Phase. Learners hardly practised the skills on their own. The teacher went back to *We Do* "phase" and practised together with the learners. The period ended while they were still on *We Do* phase.

Though the lessons in English were oral, the sentences were long as a result the learners hardly practised the skills. The learners' failure to capture the first concepts and skills created inefficiencies that reverberated throughout the pages of the book. In rural areas, for example the rural school in which the researcher conducted her study, giving that overload to newly admitted learners was hard. The learners showed that they needed to

learn by being introduced step by step before the actual conversation or reading which is code-based approach. The overload of activities could explain the reason of the learners' failure to grasp what the teacher was teaching.

Furthermore, the learners showed that they required to be exposed to smaller units before the larger units. The researcher hence suggests that an approach and strategies of exposing the learners to smaller units first would be better in promoting the learners' literacy development. Abanzi, (2006, p. 134), supports code-based approaches and strategies as he argues that "instruction is most effective if small steps are used to build high-level skills. Without sufficient practice, the learner must always build answers out of small units rather than larger assemblies, small facts are learned and then integrated into large facts".

Without mincing words, it was portrayed that the content was too much to be retrieved by the young learners; hence the researcher's argument is that the content was developed without considering Chomsky's UG theory as well as Piaget's cognitive development theory whereby emphasis is centrally on the stages of development in the capabilities of children (Wood, 1988). In addition to that, the overloaded approach was put in place sidelining the sociolinguistic context of the learners in relation to the society the learners were coming from as well as their English language background. Williams (2002, p.135) supports the fact that context matters most when we come to foreign language learning. "The introduction of English is a complex issue which requires policy to be informed by a contextualised understanding of the sociolinguistics and classroom realities which exist today."

Apart from English, teaching Chichewa reading was also a challenge. The Whole-word approach used was inappropriate to the age levels of the learners pertaining to the strategy where ANIMUKOLE was emphasised instead of the alphabet. In following the principle of ANIMUKOLE, learners were exposed to reading a story right away in the first week. This was also challenging for the learners were coming from homes where they had never been exposed to any letter despite the fact that it was a vernacular language. This showed that the learners required to be exposed first to smaller units than being exposed to larger units.

Although the head teacher, PEAs and the coordinating PEA reported that the approach was appropriate to the learners' level of ability, the researcher refutes that claim hence she is in support of the teachers and the key teacher that the approach did not facilitate the learning of reading Chichewa since it encouraged memorisation. Memorisation was evident as the researcher observed the learners reading in the *We Do* phase (tipanga tonse), but when they were asked to read on their own, they did not manage. Similarly, when asked to point where the word was written, the learners pointed to a different word altogether. The researcher therefore, can not hesitate to argue that the learners were still at basic level and such scenarios did not promote the development of literacy in the young learners.

Another point that is worth noting is that the approach allowed scaffolding at a minimal rate. In using the Whole-word approach, a few learners internalised the concepts. Firstly, in G-R-R it was because of long sentences. The Learners failed to grasp the whole sentence as such they only read a single word. Others completely failed to articulate even a single word. Secondly, in whole word learners had challenges to

encounter new vocabulary in a context. So to scaffold all the learners who had challenges was problematic. This, at all cost is contrary to Vygotsky's Social Cultural Theory where the Zone of Proximal Development is highly emphasised. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) claims that children learn literacy from the lower level to the upper level when the more knowledgeable adults, friends and peers provide support to them. It was then revealed that when employing the approaches, scaffolding was entirely minimal and this for sure is a serious variable that should not be overlooked. Because of the long passages and long dialogues present in the approach, it was challenging for the teachers to put the learners in pairs or groups for further practice. No learner was able to assist peers. This was the case because most of the learners had a reading problem. Levy Vygotsky (1978) believed that mental functions are acquired through social relationships and these mental functions, during the study, were not acquired during teaching.

According to Vygotsky, social learning was lacking for the learning of reading using G-R-R and PCAR Whole-word approaches. Griffiths et al. (2008), as cited in Chilimanjira (2012, p.60) argue that "while interacting with others, children create understanding or knowledge that is shared between them". The implication is that, knowledge can only be acquired through interaction as well as collaboration between or among learners in their setting. Social interaction need not be undermined since it is an instrumental variable to language learning because language is both mediated and inseparable from the setting in which it is carried out (Hall & Walsh (2002) as cited in Lisanza (2011). Classroom interactions are central to learning. Hence, classroom instruction should be designed to foster a social and material environment where learners are encouraged to negotiate participation in meaningful activities.

It is quite true that children come to school with a great deal of knowledge about language, and it is this knowledge base that they use as they learn to read and write (Weaver, 2001). However, this should not be regarded as a guarantee for the learners have different backgrounds (Waliwa, 2017). Care must be taken during the early years as they learn to read both in English and Chichewa. On the (G-R-R) approach, the interviewees had different views with regards to teaching reading.

Teacher A claimed that the G-R-R was not effective to standard 1 learners. According to her during an interview, she reported that she faced several challenges which she considered hampered the learning of reading. Furthermore, she reported that the G-R-R encouraged memorisation because the learners are not first exposed to smaller units.

mavuto alipo, tingoyerekeza ngati nkhani mu Chichewa, nkhani ija ukumayamba kuti iwe uyiwerenge ndiye ngati pali mwana wina yemwe samatha kuwerenga alibe nthawi yoti akatha kuwerenganso chifukwa ngati iwe wawerenga amangotchera khutu ndikumvetsera ndiye kuti azingoloweza zomwe wawerenga zijaaa. Ukamapanga nawo limodzi kuti uziwachita polish up, ukamawerenga nawo limodzi, awerenga ngati akhoza koma kuti utuluke umpatse bukhu mwana kuti aloze, atha osaloza chifukwa chomwe wadziwa ndi chakuti tikamawerenga timalozanso. Koma kuti umpatse mwana umufunse ichi ndi chiyani sangakwanitse. M' buku mwao mumakhala nkhani ndiye nkhani ya m' buku mwaoyo ndiye kuti aaa sangapindule nayo kwenikweni pogwiritsa ntchito njira imeneyo chifukwa chakuti ndi nkhani yayitali kuti anawo sangathe kuyiwerenga koma angoloweza kuti ana akusesa chani chani. Nkhani zikuchuluka ndi msinkhu wawo sizikugwirizana. Sizikubwera mwa kachiganizo kuti ukalimbikire kamene kaja. Monga paragraph kuti iweyo uyiwerenge, kenako uwerenge nawo limodzi, kenako awerenge okha. Ndiye ngakhale oyendera atabwera akumaona ngati lesson ija ili successful chifukwa aona kuti ana aja akutha pogwiritsa ntchito njira ya guided model koma indeee, anawo akutha

koma pa iwo okha kumbali zitalembedwa m'bukhu lina, atha osazitha chifukwa sangathe kuchita identify. Ku Englishinso mmm kuchuluka ma activities. Sitikuchita base pa ntchito imodzi, tikachita introduce ichi, asanachite master tikuwachita introduce china. Mwanayo kumafunika akhale wa nzeru chifukwa tikumachita mix-up zinthu. Kuchuluka kwa ma activities komanso kukhala ndi maperiod awiri ana akumaoneka otopa.

[There are problems for example in Chichewa, it is the teacher who starts reading; so if there is a child who does not know how to read, has no time that he will know how to read. This is because, when I read, they just listen attentively in order to memorise what I have read. If I read with them so that I polish them up as we read together; they read as if they are reading correctly. But if you use a different context and give the child a book to point to what he/she was reading, cannot manage because what he/she only knows is that when we read, we point as well. But if you give the child a book and ask “What is this?” She/ he cannot manage. There are stories in their book and they cannot really gain anything from the stories. This is because they are long in that the learners cannot be able to read but just memorise; “the children are sweeping” but if one ask: “where is the word, sweeping?” They will just point anyhow because I point when I am reading with them. On their own, they cannot read. For instance, if you read a paragraph, then you read together with them, then on their own, and the supervisors come, they would think that the lesson was successful because they have seen that the children were able to read using that approach of Guided Model. But, yes the children are able to read, however, when the concepts are written in a different book; they cannot be able to identify. In English as well, mmm there are too much activities. We do not base on one activity. When we introduce one thing, before they master it, we introduce them to another one. What is required is that for the child to learn using G-R-R, it requires to be intelligent because we just mix up concepts. Too many activities as well as having two periods per day, the learners seem to be exhausted]

(Teacher A). 17th February, 2016

Despite the fact that teacher A claimed the shortfalls of Whole word (G-R-R) approach, the key teacher commended the approach to be viable . Nevertheless, he concurred with teacher A that the problems come in when we consider the time to do all the activities. The activities were many in one lesson and were supposed to be finished in that particular period. Now looking at time limit given, challenges arose. Each and every activity had been allocated its specific time, so if the teacher happened to take much time on one activity, other activities were affected for they were not taught. This then gave the teacher the liberty to have a make-up class the same day which was hardly conducted.

When the PEAs, coordinating PEA and the head teacher were interviewed, they were in support that the the Whole-word approach was viable and was utilised to save the needful. They reported that learners were able to develop reading skills within a short period of time because the activities were repeated before the learners were introduced to new topic or concepts.

Regardless of the different views, the researcher concurs with Teacher A that the approach was challenging. The researcher therefore claims that the approach was a factor that contributed to the learners' failure to promote the basic literacy skills in the school she studied. Standard one teacher hardly did otherwise to make it possible for learners to develop the basic literacy skills for they were confined to G-R-R which proved to be problematic in applying social learning strategies. This is because of its nature of having many activities.

Realising that learners are different and understand concepts differently, it is good to give teachers freedom to employ another approach when one approach or strategy does not work. This is because the latter might be effective. For instance, teacher B solved the problem as she incorporated the two approaches and they were a success, for the learners were reading the text after been exposed to vocabulary before interacting with the text. Regarding that the standard one teachers were implementing the G-R-R in the classrooms, they were confined to it; hence did not employ another approach to make things work. As a consequence, the learners' literacy levels were still at basic.

4.4 How strategies and techniques were employed in the promotion of literacy development in the classroom

The second specific research question was on how teachers employed strategies and techniques in the teaching of reading to promote literacy development in infant classes. This section, therefore presents the findings on the question. Thus, it presents results generated through classroom observations and one-on-one interviews with head teachers, class teachers and key teacher (See appendices 3, 4, 5 & 6). First, the section presents how teachers employed strategies and techniques in the teaching of literacy. Finally, there is presentation of how the school created relations with the community with regards to literacy promotion among the learners.

4.4.1 How teachers employed strategies and techniques in the teaching of literacy

The researcher was interested to observe the strategies and techniques the teachers employed in the teaching of literacy. Focus was on how interactive the strategies were and how they were employed to promote literacy development in the young learners. Table 2 shows how often the teachers used the strategies.

Table 2: How often teachers employed the strategies in the promotion of literacy development

Strategy	Standard 1	Standard 2
Songs	XX	XX
Games	XX	X
Dialogue	XX	X
Story telling	XX	X
Reading aloud	XX	XX
Question and answer	XX	XX
Comprehension	XX	XX
Putting learners in groups	X	XX

Key: Used frequently=XX ; Not frequently used= X

Source: Researcher's observation data from schools under study, 2016

In both classes, teachers employed different strategies such as songs, games, question and answer, comprehension, predicting stories (kulosera nkhani, in Chichewa), reading aloud, dialogue and story telling. Nevertheless, the teachers differed in how often they used the strategies as Table 2 illustrates.

4.4.1.1 Songs

In standard one, songs were used at the beginning of the lesson to prepare the learners for the lessons. At the end of the lesson the songs were sung to consolidate it. Mostly, the songs employed were related to the activity or the concepts that were learnt on that particular day. When the lesson was being concluded, then the song was sung

mentioning the words that were learnt on that particular day. The song was allocated two minutes in the lesson, so the song ended while other learners had not yet mastered the concepts in the song. This happened especially when teaching English.

In standard two songs that were employed were those that were related to the lesson that was taught on that particular day. As in standard one, songs were mostly employed after an English lesson. For example, the teacher employed a song about days of the week after teaching *the calendar*. Sometimes the songs were employed in order to keep the learners silent when they were making a lot of noise during lesson delivery. Such songs did not have any relevancy to the particular lesson on that particular period.

4.4.1.2 Games

Games were used mostly when learning letter sounds and there was one game that the researcher observed was frequently played in standard one. This was *thumb up* and *thumb down* in English while in Chichewa, it was *chala m'mwamba, chala pansi* game. In both English and Chichewa, the teachers employed the game when introducing new words. It involved initial sound identification. For example, in Chichewa, when the teacher was teaching words which had an initial letter /h/, she came up with words such as *hamala, chala, sonyeza, hema, wala, Hana, habu* and *yoyamba*. So, when doing this game, if the teacher mentioned the word that started with sound /h/ the learners put their thumbs up and when she mentioned a letter that did not start with /h/ sound, the learners put their thumbs down. In the word *sonyeza*, the learners put their thumbs down because its initial letter did not start with /h/ sound. The teacher was the commander and the learners were there to follow the commands by putting their thumbs up or down as the teacher mentioned different words. In both Chichewa and English, the game that

dominated was initial sound identification. Thus, each day this game was used in both English and Chichewa in that some learners portrayed boredom as it was taken as a routine. This was evidenced as other learners were not obeying the instructions of *Thumb up, Thumb down*. Teachers did not employ other games for the learners to identify the initial letter sounds.

In standard two the game that was observed being played was a competition game of choosing a word among several words written on reading cards. The teacher wrote several words on reading cards in Chichewa and asked a pair to go in front and compete by choosing the word that she wanted the learners to choose among the other reading cards. The one who first selected the right word was considered the winner. He/ she picked the word and showed it to the class while reading it. The winners were motivated by clapping hands for them. Sometimes the class mentioned the winner's name and gave him a word of encouragement, “*Takunyadira Tamandani*”. This game favoured those who were able to read. However, it was helpful because the one who failed to select was given a chance to read the word with his/ her competitor.

4.4.1.3 Dialogue

Dialogue was employed in standard one and was mostly used during the teaching of English. Firstly, the teacher modelled the dialogue, then practiced it together with the learners and finally asked the learners to practice on their own as a class and in large groups. Thus, the teachers divided the class into two groups; one group spoke to the other group and then the other group responded. After that, the groups exchanged roles to practice the dialogue in small groups or in pairs. In the *You Do* the teacher was still there scaffolding the learners for the learners hardly stood on their own to articulate

everything required as demonstrated. The learners were stuck, hence, the teacher was found in all phases even in phase three where the learners were supposed to practise on their own. From the look of things it portrayed that the sentences in the dialogue were long, so the learners as young as they were, were unable to master the dialogue. Below is an example of a dialogue the researcher observed:

Can you ride a bicycle? Yes, I can ride a bicycle.

Can you drive a car? No, I can not drive a car.

Can you fly like a bird in the sky? No, I can not fly like a bird in the sky.

Can you swim like a fish in water? Yes, I can swim like a fish in the water.

Can you jump like a frog on the ground? Yes, I can jump like a frog on the ground.

(MIE Teachers' Guide for standard 1, page 165)

The learners had to internalise this and it was difficult because they failed to internalise the first question and response. As such they failed to internalise the questions and responses that followed. In standard two, a few learners were able grasp what the teacher modelled as such two or three pairs were able to practice in pairs.

To help the learners grasp some concepts, the teachers employed repetition technique. In standard one, the teacher was repeating in teaching the dialogue in order for the learners to master the content or concepts. Similarly, the standard two teacher used repetition technique. She achieved this by fragmenting the sentences so that the learners could read them well. For instance, this sentence: *I brush my teeth everyday* was fragmented like this: *I brush / my teeth / every day*. The teacher repeated for three times on her own; then read with the learners and finally the learners practiced on their own and it was successful.

4.4.1.4 story telling

Story telling was also another strategy employed in both Chichewa and English. In standard one, the teacher was the one telling stories and the learners listened. After the story telling, the teacher asked the learners comprehension questions that emerged from the story in order to check their understanding. The learners answered orally under the guidance of the teacher. Thus, the teacher asked the question; she modelled the correct response. Then she repeated the question so that the learners could answer. The learners responded together with the teacher and finally on their own. The learners were not given an opportunity to tell their stories. The stories told by the teacher were already set in the teacher's guide and the questions from those stories were already formulated in the teacher's guides. Thus, the teachers did not tell the learners their own stories which they had for they always relied on the stories from the guide. The learners were just listeners for they were not given an opportunity to narrate their stories they brought from home. In standard two the teacher narrated her own stories and asked questions to check the learners' understanding. When the learner failed, the teacher scaffolded him or her. Like in standard one, standard two learners were not given an opportunity to narrate their stories.

4.4.1.5 Read-aloud

In both English and Chichewa, in standard one, reading aloud was prominent. However, there was a slight difference between the two. In Chichewa, during reading, teachers of both standard one and two used text books, reading cards or the chalkboard. Thus, syllables and words were written on the reading cards or chalkboard and the learners read from there. Sometimes the learners read the letter sounds, letter names, words and a passage from the learner's text books. In standard one, the teacher modelled reading,

then read together with the learners and finally the learners read on their own. A few were able to read on their own.

Likewise, in English there was reading aloud which was oral reading throughout. There was no reading of words from reading cards or the chalkboard as it was in Chichewa. In English, there was use of pictures where oral reading came from. The pictures used were the ones drawn in the prescribed books. In standard two learners also read passages. After being modelled by the teacher, the learners were asked to read on their own in groups and individually. Three quarters failed to read even a single word because they were encountering words right away in the context. Thus, they first read a passage. Then they were asked to identify words from that passage. This was challenging to the learners because they encountered the words in the passage for the first time.

4.4.1.6 Question and answer

Question and answer was employed by both standard one and two teachers. This strategy was employed differently in teaching Chichewa and English reading. In Chichewa, it was before reading the story, this was observed especially during *kulosea nkhani (predicting a story)* whereby the learners were asked what they thought the story was all about. The teachers drew pictures on the chalkboard and asked what the learners thought would happen according to what the pictures illustrated. The learners suggested what would happen. Another time when question and answer was employed was after the teacher had read the story. Thus, she asked the learners if what they had predicted was true or not. The teacher also asked some more questions from the story to check if the learners had comprehended it.

In English lessons as well, question and answer was employed in standard one when doing oral reading. After the oral reading, the teacher asked the learners some questions and the learners responded but with the guidance of the teacher. Thus, the teacher first gave the answer in the way of modelling, then the teacher said the right answer together with the learners and finally the learners gave the answer as a class. However, this was problematic as the learners hardly gave the answer on their own, though modelled because the responses seemed too long for the learners to internalise. In standard two, in both English and Chichewa reading lessons, comprehension questions were asked after reading a passage. However, the learners were not modelled in answering questions as in standard one. The learners who were selected gave correct responses. Hence, a few failed to give correct responses.

4.4.1.7 Putting learners in groups

Putting the learners in groups was also employed by the standard one and two teachers. Thus, in standard one after the *We Do* phase, the learners had to practise the activity as a class. Thereafter, the teachers asked the learners to practise in groups when the classes were divided into two parts. The learners were put in large groups mostly during dialogue lesson whereby the learners had to practise it. Sometimes groups were employed when reading a Chichewa passage from the book. The teacher had challenges to identify individual problems of the learners because the groups were large. Figure 1 illustrates the class in session.



Figure 1: A large class in standard two

Source: Photo taken by researcher, 2016

In standard two the learners were asked to read in groups of ten. This time the learners read under the guidance of a group leader. The group leaders were selected by the teacher from those she knew were somehow capable to read. Those leaders were permanent. After reading in groups, several groups were invited to stand up and read together as a team. When the group had failed the teacher sent another leader to that group whom she thought was capable to scaffold the group. The teacher then asked that group to read as it was led by the newly appointed leader in that particular period. This time around the group practised reading by reading after the newly appointed leader. The learners already knew each other as fellow members of a particular group. Thus, the groups had names such as Mulanje, Thyolo, Machinga, Balaka, Mangochi, Ntchewu and Mwanza

.

4.4.1.8 Comprehension

Comprehension was also another strategy employed by teachers of both classes. In standard one the teacher gave the learners a passage from the book to read. Thus, she followed the G-R-R Approach. After that, basing on the story, she asked oral questions

to check the learners' degree of comprehension. In English, it involved listening and speaking skills. The teacher narrated a story and then developed questions from there. Then she modelled responses and presented to the learners through G-R-R approach. The learners practised providing answers to the questions. Finally the teacher asked them to give the answers on their own. At this phase, many learners failed to practice giving the answers. Standard two teacher developed questions from the passage that was read by the learners. The passages were taken from text books.

Sometimes comprehension was challenging in that a few learners were able to respond to comprehension questions correctly. In these instances, the researcher observed that the teachers were translating using the native language, Chichewa so that the learners could understand the English concepts better. For example, in standard one the learners had a problem to differentiate between a square and a rectangle. The teacher used the native language to describe the concepts and this is what she said so that the learners could understand the English concepts.

Mbali ziwiri za rectangle zimakhala zofanana ndipo mbali imodzi imafanana ndi inzake yomwe yayang'anizana nayo. Mbali zoyang'anana zotalikirapo ndipo zina zoyang'ananso zofupikirapo. Square ndiye imakhala ndi mbali zonse zofanana kutalika kwake.

[Two opposite sides of a rectangle are similar in length. One side is similar to the one on the opposite side. The square has all sides equal in length]. (Teacher A) 18th February, 2016.

The current study shows that teachers indeed employed interactive strategies in order to achieve interaction, however, the interaction was minimal. When participatory strategies are used, they create an interactive environment and this environment provides room for support from peers and the teachers. It is worth noting that the learners in

standards one and two were still at basic level because after the teachers' model, they failed to practice the skills on their own. Reference is made to one of the principles of the theory that formed the Theoretical framework for the current study known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to the ZPD, learners move from their level of actual development to the level of potential development with support from more capable peers or other knowledgeable adults and even teachers. Therefore, since the learners in this study were failing to reach the stage to practice the text independent of their teachers, they did not reach the stage of scaffolding.

When the learner portrays that she or he has grasped the concepts, it shows that learning has taken place. The long texts as already stated in section 4.2 can be factors that led to learners' failure to move from one level to the other. Despite the teachers' efforts and support to ensure that learning should take place in the learners, it did not work for the concepts were beyond the learners' Zone of Proximal Development. "When the child's learning is below the zone, the learner will not learn anything new for the level of performance is too easy. Similarly, beyond the zone, the learner will not benefit either because the level of performance demanded is beyond the child's capacity" (Wood, 1985 p. 65). As such, to help the child learn, the teacher must engage him in a performance of just the right degree of difficulty (Brown & Ferrara, 1985). The long texts could explain why most of the learners had problems to grasp what the teachers were teaching despite that they were employing interactive strategies. Thus, the concepts were beyond the learning ability of the learners.

Apart from the Learner-centred strategies discussed above in this chapter, relationship with the community in promoting literacy was also another strategy found out by the researcher. This is discussed below in detail.

4.4.1.9 Relationship with the community in promoting literacy

The researcher wanted to find out the relationship between the school and the surrounding community in regards to literacy development promotion. The head teacher from the school under study reported that the relationship between the school and the community was strong in that the parents took part in teaching the learners how to read when they were at home. He also added that the parents did not hesitate to turn up when they were called for meetings related to literacy. When the researcher conducted FGDs with the learners, the learners reported that most of the times the parents did not help them to read. One participant reported that her parents were not able to help her read for they were illiterate. The other interviewees reported that their parents claimed to be tired in such a way that they did not teach them. Others said that their parents arrived late in the evening from work in the tea plantations. As such they did not teach them for they had no time as it was already dark. With these findings, the researcher concludes that the parents' low level of education is one of the contributing factors for the poor promotion of the learners' literacy development.

The USAID/ Malawi (2013) Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA) baseline study found that for each additional level of education completed by someone in a learner's household, the learner's reading fluency scores increased. Those learners who lived in where at least one member of the household had graduated from secondary school level scored higher on their reading fluency subtask than did those from other households. These findings suggested that better education households are likely to provide homework support to learners. Secondly, they suggested that better educated households are more likely to model the importance of good education which influenced them for higher education expectations of their learners. The researcher

concludes that learners' inability to have their literacy promoted can be influenced by the level of education of their parents. As we have already seen in section 4.1.3, most parents work in tea plantation as labourers. Such parents do not take children's literacy as a priority.

Similarly, Waliwa's (2017) study which aimed at exploring home literacy environment in Malawian homes and its contribution to literacy development in pre-school children revealed that children involved were born in homes where literacy environment was poor. Parents did not take children's literacy as a priority and that the CBCC the children were attending failed to compensate for the missing literacy environment in the CBCC was also poor. The study further revealed that "there was no link between the children's literacy environment and practices at home and those at CBCC because the parents thought that their role in their children was only limited to material support" (P. vii). Parents need to take a role in the development of their children's literacy. Failing which, it affects the learners negatively in all levels of their education. This current study suggests that the parents' low level of their education has an impact on their children's literacy levels. This is portrayed as they denied teaching the children. Regarding to Social Cultural Theory, parents or relatives have a major role in teaching the children how to read. In Vygotsky's view, if children are to learn they must have the opportunity to try out the new level of performance with the assistance of someone who knows more than they do. This more knowledgeable others may be capable elder brothers, sisters and parents (Vygotsky, 1978). The 2002 synthesis of research also found that the earlier parents become involved in their child's education, the more powerful the effects. The most effective forms of parental involvement are those that engage parents in working directly with their children on learning activities at home.

4.5 Challenges to classroom literacy development

The third specific research question was on the challenges teachers encounter in the teaching of reading to promote literacy development in infant classes. This section presents results generated through classroom observations and one-on-one interviews with head teachers, class teachers and key teacher (see appendices 3, 4, 5 and 6). This section, therefore, presents and discusses challenges teachers encounter in teaching reading. The results including learners failing to take books to school, lack of opportunities to practice reading, unavailability of supplementary reading materials, insufficient supporting reading materials, and absence of school library and choice of books, challenges on literacy prescribed reading materials (books), lack of Curriculum Professional Development (CPD) and Inset trainings and lack of curriculum implementation.

4.5.1 Learners failing to take books to school

The researcher was also interested to find out if the learners had received prescribed text books and also if they were given opportunities to take those books home for reading practice. Reports from all the learners, teachers and the head teacher at the school under study show that the learners received both chichewa and English text books and had the opportunity to take the books home. The disappointing thing was that it was reported that some of the learners did not take the books to school. The reason that was given by the learners was that their parents were denying them to take the books to school for fear that they might get lost or torn. So with the message the parents got from the head teacher that when the books got lost, parents would be responsible for the missing books, they feared to replace the books as they would be told to buy a book for replacement. Therefore they opted for keeping the books in

suitcases so that when returning them at the end of the academic year, they would return them in good condition. When interviewed, Teacher A stated that learners complained that their parents denied them bringing the books to school so that they should not lose or tear them.

Eeee mabuku onse a Chichewa ndi English anabwera okwanira chabe kuti anawo saamatenga ku sukulu; makolo awo akuti amawaletsa. Popereka mabuku makolo amawuzidwa kuti mukawasamale; ana asakataye kapena kung'amba. Akataya adzagula kuti bukulo libwezeretsedwe. Ndiye mawu ogulawoo, amatengano nkukasunga kuti tsiku lozabweza adzabweze liri la bwino. Ana ambiri akhala akumadandaula: "Mayi angatu asunga m'chikwama mabukuwotu".

[... yea sufficient Chichewa and English books were dispatched only that the learners don't take the books to school. They say their parents deny them to bring the books to school. When distributing the books to the learners, parents are advised to take care of the books; children should not lose or tear them. If the books get lost, the parents will be responsible to buy for replacement. So those words of buying have scared them. They now take the books and keep so that they should return them in good condition. Many learners have been complaining, "My mum has kept the books in a bag"] (Teacher A, standard 1). 24th February, 2016

Similarly, in standard 2 some of the learners did not take the books to school but the teacher reported that the learners were not serious with their learning because she had been urging them to bring books to school but they did not. It could be the parents who told them not to take the books to school as observed by teacher A.

It is worth noting that the school had sufficient prescribed textbooks; despite the fact that the learners had the opportunity to take the books home, many were not bringing

them to school. The reason for not bringing the books to school was that their parents denied the learners to take them to school for fear of being lost. Hence, they would buy another book for replacement. This brought challenges in the class during reading. Those who brought their books to class refused to share their books with their peers who left books at home considering the fact that it was deliberate. In such scenarios, the teachers did not take any effort to urge those with books to accept their friends to share the books. Consequently, when the teacher was reading with the other learners, those without books were looking outside or mumbling because they were not looking at the book. Others were just playing and could hardly grasp what their friends together with the teacher were reading.

The current study therefore has revealed that both teachers and parents did not support the learners in the promotion of their literacy levels. This also reveals that the parents did not assist the learners to read at home for they wanted the books not to be torn. This is contrary to the expectations of the Government of Malawi, and Vygotsky's Social Cultural Theory where parents are supposed to take part in the teaching of children. The researcher cannot hesitate to argue that sour relationship between parents and teachers in relation to promoting the children's literacy is another variable that impinge development of literacy in the young learners. Thus, both the teachers and parents have a critical role to ensure that the learners are receiving the right support in order to promote the basic literacy skills. What the researcher is communicating is that parents and care givers are important variables of effective literacy instruction; they have a big role to play as they share information about their child and help reinforce skills and concepts taught at school. Likewise, teachers have the capacity to inform the parents

and caregivers everything pertaining to their children's behaviour in class. However, at this school, this was not happening.

So taking the books and keep them so that the learners should not have access to them is nothing other than counterproductive to the learners, the education system, as well as the nation at large. Teachers should work cooperatively with parents for the betterment of the learners. Research demonstrates that when parents and teachers partner together, achievement increases (Abadzi, 2006). So denying the children to take books to school can be one of the reasons why learners had difficulties to grasp the concepts in class. Therefore, teachers need to communicate with the parents on a regular basis at higher priority and this would be a priority to ask if they really keep the books and the impact this might have on the learners if they are not exposed to the books. There are many things parents can do at home to reinforce what is taught in class, but they need to be shown by the teacher how to help.

4.5.2 Lack of opportunities to practice reading

The researcher also wanted to find out if the classrooms had literacy corners or class libraries. The results revealed that all infant classes that were observed had no literacy corners and class libraries. Within the classrooms, there were small rooms functioning as book storages or class libraries but teachers used the rooms to store their hand bags when at work. The researcher hence, argues that the classroom was not effective for literacy promotion for an effective classroom needs to be print-rich. Literacy corners as well as a classroom library are instrumental in fostering the young learners' ability to promote the basic literacy skills. It is only at this foundation level where the learners should be exposed to a variety of books to boost their literacy levels. In contrary, class

libraries that were expected to be present in the classrooms were not available despite the fact that the classrooms were designed in a fashion that they had a special room for a library.

Reutzel and Fawson (2002) contend that the hub of an effective classroom is the classroom library. With this lack of library, therefore, the researcher cannot hide to argue that this tendency could be one of the factors that negatively affect the promotion of the learners' literacy development since the learners lacked opportunities to practice reading in the classroom libraries. Hiebert (2009) contends that exposing different books to children is paramount in promoting literacy development.

According to Hiebert (2009, p. 1) "children can learn a great deal about the language and the content of texts through listening to experienced readers read texts aloud. This can only be achieved when books are available. Research findings support the fundamental role that print-rich environments play in facilitating the promotion of literacy development in learners. Studies conducted on access to reading materials show that there is a high correlation between access to a variety of reading materials and learner reading success. Neuman's (1999) study as cited in (Reutzel & Cooter, 2003), on examining the effects of "flooding" local-care centres in inner city Philadelphia, showed that the children's reading ability improved significantly because they were exposed to numerous books to read.

A related study that produced results because learners were exposed to a wide variety of books was the Beginning Literacy Project (BLP) conducted in Malawi. This project was under the Primary Schools Support Project (PSSP) in Malawi. Apart from the

prescribed literacy text books, the project also exposed the learners with big books and posters. The project found that by the end of that project, the infant class learners were able to read stories and wrote poems.

Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, a theory which informed this study, emphasises on the principle of social learning whereby learners need to interact with others. This social learning would be achieved only if the learners were given a chance to read together in pairs or in groups during that library (*Tikwere*) period. A classroom library should not be overlooked by teachers and all stakeholders for it promotes literacy development. It is a rich resource that is integrated into daily literacy resource instruction. Reutzel and Fawson (2002) support the fundamental aspect of the classroom library as they contend that "It is a place for peer assistance or independent reading" (p. 79).

4.5.3 Unavailability of supplementary reading materials

The researcher also was eager to find out about the availability of supplementary reading materials and how they promoted the development of literacy among the young learners. It was reported that both standards one and two learners had no supplementary books for the ones they received sometime back were torn and nothing was left. Despite the fact that the supplementary readers were not available, it was reported that there were abundant text books of 1991 curriculum which were kept in a storeroom and they did not use them in place of supplementary readers. At that school, the opportunity to borrow books was open to the learners from the senior section only; from standard five to eight because they thought they would take care of the books unlike the young ones.

When interviewed, teachers reported that the school did not lend young learners books for fear that they would tear them. Similarly, the head teacher said that young learners were not given the books because they had already received text books. Hence those text books were enough regarding the learners' age level. Denying young learners to numerous books is detrimental to literacy promotion. It is important to note that one of the serious challenges in literacy promotion is influenced by undermining the young learner's intellectual capabilities that they cannot read a variety of books. There is much literature that has been documented on the importance of exposing a variety of books to young learners. Findings from the works of Pressley and Hampston (1998) as cited in Abadzi (2006) have shown that learning to read occurs best in classrooms where children are provided multiple opportunities to read.

Providing one book to the learners is insufficient for the learners to promote their basic literacy skills. Thus, it needs a variety of print such as books, newspapers and magazines. Supplementary reading materials, as the name suggests, supplement the prescribed reading materials the learners have already been exposed to and effective use of the supplementary reading materials would consequently fulfill the purpose of learning to read, failing which, would suppress literacy development in the learners. One quality of a teacher is resourcefulness. However, the teachers lacked this quality. Thus, since there were no supplementary readers, they failed to use the 1991 pupils' books in place of the supplementary readers. Surely they would perform the same function. Those books would promote literacy development because they would bring interaction between or among the children as they read the books.

4.5.4 Insufficient supporting reading materials

Another area of concern from the researcher was on the presence of supporting reading materials and how the teachers utilised them to promote literacy development in the learners. In the school studied, the researcher observed that in standard one, text books were mostly used. Realias and reading cards were used at a minimal degree and the time they happened to be used, they were insufficient for the learners. For the entire period of data collection by the researcher, posters and charts were not used. Use of reading cards was prominent, however, occasional. On the contrary, the standard two teacher used charts, reading cards, however, insufficient. The standard two teacher was also observed using realias; a calendar, onion and an orange.

Reading materials such as text books, reading cards, charts, posters and realias are fundamental in classrooms as they enhance learning to read. Lack of supporting reading materials impedes the learning of literacy hence the researcher argue that many learners of the school she studied were left behind in terms of learning because the supporting learning materials were insufficient. The nature of the prescribed pupils' books as well supported the teaching and learning of literacy at a minimal rate. In standard one, the main resource for teaching oral reading comprehension and dialogue were text books. The use of these books was challenging because they had very small pictures which were hardly seen by the learners who were sitting at the back. Only those sitting close to the teacher were able to see the pictures the teacher was pointing to. Thus, when the teacher pointed to picture one, the learners had also to point to that picture and say together with the teacher.

In these instances many learners did not see properly for the pictures were very small. To solve the problem, the use of charts or posters would have sufficed the purpose. However, the books were not accompanied by those materials. The researcher admits that there were posters in some of the classrooms, however they were insufficient and they were found in standards two only. Figure 5 shows typical posters in the classroom.



Figure 2: Posters pasted on the wall in standard two at the school

Source :Photo taken by researcher at the school under study, 2016

If posters were available, the teachers would use those because each and every learner would see clearly, hence learning could take place. As far as teaching of literacy is concerned, learners' needs require critical attention for learning to be meaningful. Teaching strategies on their own can not work without the support of reading materials. Reading materials as such should be sufficient, of good quality and also should be of different types. (ADEA, 2012) support this idea:

Reading materials of sufficient quantity, quality and variety serve a significant role in successful early grade literacy acquisition. In particular, materials with appropriate stories to read aloud to children, and those which are used for shared and paired reading, enhance

language and literacy development. Such materials not only guide the student through learning of essential reading and writing skills, they also provide the student with a crucial link between skills acquisition and meaningful use of literacy throughout the student's life. (p.22)

In teaching literacy, care is paramount to ensure that supporting reading materials are enough for the young learners. Not only that, but also of good quality and should be of different types (Mtunda and Safuli, 2000). In the current study, learning was difficult for supporting materials were not available. As a result, though teachers employed reading aloud and dialogues it was not effective. At the same time it was difficult for the teacher to see the picture the learners were pointing to since the classes were crowded. To solve the problem sometimes teachers tried to draw pictures to use in place of the books. However, the pictures were inaccurate, hence, misleading. The picture below illustrates this.

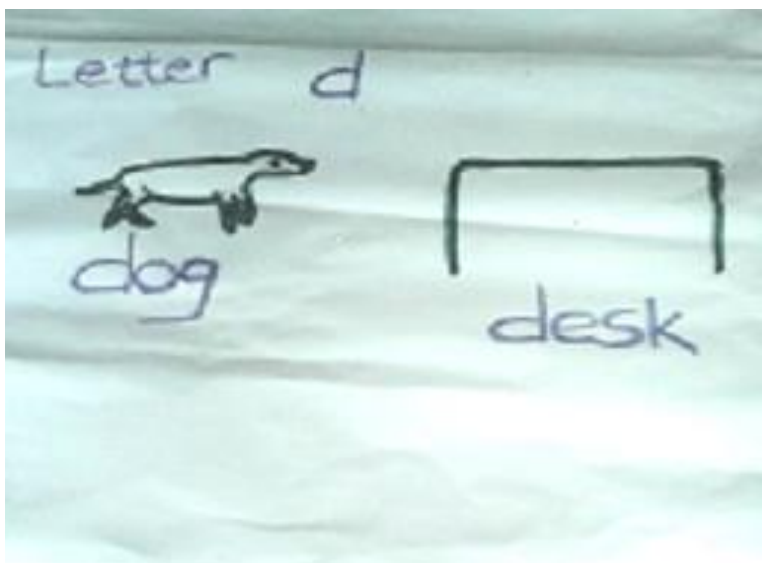


Figure 3: Picture of a dog and a desk at the school under study in standard 2

Source: Photo taken by researcher, 2016

Teaching and learning materials play a major role in the teaching and learning of reading; at the same time, if poorly designed, they hamper literacy development. Mtunda and Safuli (2000) stipulate that, “It is advisable to prepare and use aids which are simple and of good quality in order to draw attention of the pupils and that each aid he uses should have a purpose and be accurate, clear and attractive”.

What Mtunda and Safuli (2000) contend is that children or learners learn well only if teachers use materials that have an attribute of drawing attention of the learners. As pointed out, there was a chart with drawings of a *dog* and a *desk*. The pictures hardly conveyed the message because the picture of the dog without that label, seeing it, you would think it was a cow. Similarly, the desk looked like a football goal post. The researcher’s argument here centres on that learners were confused with pictures like those because English, apart from being a foreign language, the children learn the language and at the same time learn to read in that language. Expert literacy teachers need to be clear in presenting illustrations for the children may suggest that a cow (*ng’ombe* in Chichewa) in English is a dog and a football goal post is a desk. With what the research revealed, therefore, the researcher argues that the environment did not favour the promotion of literacy development. This was evident by inaccurate and unclear designed illustrations which were used in the teaching of reading. These, for sure could be one factor that suppressed the promotion of literacy development in the young learners.

Vygotsky believed that children’s cognitive development is influenced through interaction with others. Vygotsky also believed that children use cultural tools to internalise thinking. In support to this sentiment, Lantolf and Thorne (2007, pp. 202-

203) contend that “these cultural tools serve as a buffer between the person and the environment and act to mediate the relationship between the individual and the social material world.” For example, a child lives in that material social world where she learns and develops language or literacy. The more able surrounding the child use different tools to scaffold the child, he / she learns the language. These tools include books, charts pictures, just to mention but a few. The tools can be used for easy understanding and internalisation of literacy concepts in language learning (Morrow, 1993).

The importance of using supporting materials like pictures and posters has been considered producing better results in literacy development of young learners. There is research evidence which support this sentiment. The Malawi Break Through to Literacy (MBTL) project for example, found that pictures and posters produced better results in boosting young learners’ literacy development. During the project teachers were provided with posters, reading boards, sentence makers and talking walls. At the end, it was reported a success for the learners acquired literacy skills (Sampa, 2005).

4.5.5 Challenges on literacy prescribed reading materials (books)

The researcher was also interested to find out the challenges with regards to the prescribed text books. This was subjective as it depended on an individual’s views or perspectives. The data was gathered through observation, interviews and document analysis. The PEAs, head teachers and learners supported that the reading materials were the right ones as they were appropriate to the cognitive development of the learners. However, teachers and the key teacher claimed that both Chichewa and English text books were not appropriate to the learners. Chichewa books were said to

have long texts which hindered the transferrability of skills from L1 to L2 hence reading and acquiring English was a challenge to both learners and the teachers of language.

The PEA for Zone A reported that the books were good and appropriate to the age levels of the learners. She went on saying that the books were written in the way that there was much repetition so that the learners were able to master the concepts within a short period of time. In the interview, this is what the PEA stated:

Contentiyo siyambiri koma challenge ina imene ikuchita affect teaching ndi absenteeism of both learners and teachers. Mphunzitsi yemwe anganene kuti content siiri bwino ndiye kuti sanabwere ku ntchito. They are supposed to introduce two letters pa week ndiye ngati anajomba Monday akufuna aphantikize ntchito ya Monday ndi lachiwiri. Ayenera aphantikize maperiod awiri a Monday ndi Tuesday kuti akhale mu line limodzi ndi anzake. Akumanena kuti ntchito ikumachuluka koma ayi; mphunzitsi amene amazitsatira bwinobwino, akumabwera ku ntchito; ntchitoyi siyambiri. Eee chifukwa kaya kuyambira Monday mpaka lachiwiri ukuphunzitsa /a/ ndiye kuti malessen onse a Monday ndi lachiwiri is about that letter; mawu onsewa akukhudza that letter koma kungoti amajomba.

[The content is not too much but the other challenge that affects teaching of literacy is absenteeism of both learners and teachers. A teacher that would say the content is not appropriate, it means he/ she was absent from work. They are supposed to introduce two letters in a week so if the teacher was absent on Monday, he/she wants to combine Monday's and Tuesday's work. He/ she is supposed to combine two periods of Monday and two of Tuesday in order to be in line with his/her colleagues. They say that the work is too much but that is not the true. The one who follows what is required and reports for work; the content is not too much. Yea because from Monday up to Tuesday they learn /a/ it means two Monday lessons and Tuesday lessons are about that letter.

All words are about that letter.....But they absent from work.] (PEA Zone A) 2nd March, 2016

The PEA from Zone B also reported that the content was just appropriate to the age level and cognitive ability of the learners in both standards one and two. In standard one, the teachers seemed to underrate that the contents were repetitive in nature but the motive behind that repetition was for the learners to familiarise with the reading material or text. In an interview, the PEA from zone B reported that the books were appropriate to the age level of the learners.

Kumbali ya mabuku content 'yo itha kuoneka ngati pa level ya ana ngati kuti siili bwino koma ngati mphunzitsiyo ataphunzitsa bwino, kupereka nthawi yokwanira komanso potsata "Gradual Release of Responsibility" ndiyabwino. Komanso mphunzitsi ngati angaone kuti aazi ndizobwerezabwereza, ndinawaphunzitsa kale, ndizingobwerezabwereza? Ndizingotere. Chifukwa mutati muwaone mabuku a NRP'wa amakhala ngati akubwerezabwereza ndiye kubwereza bwerezako ndi cholinga choti achite consolidate mwa ana aja. Ndiye pali aphunzitsi ena amati dzulo ndinaphunzitsa zomwezo, dzana ndinaphunzitsa zomwezo, ndiye amakhala ngati akutayilira koma kwa amene sakundaula kuti akubwerezabwereza by the end of the week imeneyoyo ana aja amakhala atachita nawo.

[On the part of the books, in considering to the level of the children the content seem not appropriate; but if the teacher can teach properly, giving the learners ample time and also follows the "Gradual Release of Responsibility", it is superb. Additionally, if the teacher thinks that this stuff is repetitive, I already taught the learners, should I keep on repeating the same concepts? I should just do like this. Because if you happen to have a look at the NRP books they seem to be repetitive and the nature of that repetition is to consolidate in the children. So there are some teachers who say, yesterday I taught this concept, the day before yesterday I taught the very same concept. Then they seem to practice

laisse faire. But to those who do not complain about the repetition, by the end of that week. They end up achieving the goals with the children].(PEA Zone B) 4 th March, 2016

The Coordinating PEA reported that the content was appropriate to the age level of the learners in both standard one and two. In standard two, the content was then simpler in the sense that it was revised from whole-word approach to modified Whole-word approach and it was more like code- based. So the children were able to read without any difficulties. She also reported that in standard one, the content was appropriate to the learners for the previous Whole-word approach was not employed in reading.

The head teacher had similar views as he reported that the contents of the books were appropriate to the learners' age level and cognitive ability. Thus, in both standards one and two. To the contrary, the Key teacher for literacy education said that the books were not appropriate to the age levels and cognitive ability of the standard one and two learners. He pointed out that there were challenges in both English and Chichewa. However, the Key teacher reported that English had more challenges as compared to Chichewa because of having more activities in one period.

Poti taziyaamba kumene mwina sitinaphunzitse mpaka pa mapeto koma kumene tayambiraku ku Chichewa kulibe vuto kwenikweni koma ku English tikumangodandaula kuti koyambako kunali ma pictures; amakhalamo folo ndiye pamene timafika teremu two mapictures akumakhalamo six koma onsewa akumakhala ndi story yoti ayiphunzire. Story yeniyeni itha kukhala imodzi koma kukumafunika kuti part inayo ayiphunzire mmawa, inayo ayiphunzire later in the day. Ndiye akumapezeka kuti ana akumaonetsa zizindikiro zotopa usanamalize kuphunzitsa. Makamaka pamene tikupanga comprehension timati "telling a story". Ndiye imeneyo ndaona kuti ndi vuto. Atha

kupitirizabe 4 pictures yomwe ija kapena ayichepetsebe kufika two olo three pictures per day chifukwa ana aja akuoneka otopa. Chifukwa extended dialogues ndi mastories akuoneka a little longer. Ndaona kuti ana sinanga ndi second language interest alibe ndipo tikuwapatsa zinthu za nyuwani ndiye sakumva kwenikweni nkhani ija ndiye ukapanga nawo picture one, ndikupanga picture two, ukamafika picture three ayamba kuonetsa kutopa; kulongolola, kutsanzikatsanzika kupita panja. Ngakhale uyimbe nyimbo. Zosakoma. Pamene ukuyambiranso aaaa zosakhala bwino, upeza kuti sizikukoma.

[As we have just started teaching and we have not yet reached the end. But where we have started, in Chichewa we have no much problem; but in English initially we had four pictures. When we started term two, there are six pictures. And all these pictures have a story which require to be taught in a period. A main story can be one but the requirement is that the first part should be taught in the morning; the other part to be learnt later in the day. So the learners show fatigue signs before the teacher finishes the teaching process. Especially when doing comprehension, extended dialogue with the learners. Sometimes is called story telling. I have seen that this strategy is challenging. It would be sound if they continued with the four pictures or else they should minimise the pictures to two or three per day because the children seem exhausted. For the reason that extended dialogues and stories show that they are a little longer, I suggest that the children as it is their second language, they don't have interest and we give them new stuff so it becomes problematic to understand the story. Therefore, when we practice picture one with the learners, then picture two, when we reach picture three, the learners show signs of tiredness and they start making noise. A lot ask for permission to go outside. If you try to sing a song mmm, it still does not work. When you restart the lesson, mmm it does not work at all.] (Key Teacher). 5 th March, 2016

Teacher A, who was a standard one teacher had a view quite different from the other interviewees but concurred with the Key teacher. This teacher, reported that according

to her, the prescribed books' level for standard one learners was not appropriate to the age level as well as their cognitive abilities. To her, both English and Chichewa books were not appropriate for the young learners. She commended that books that were written considering learners' ability were the 1991 Sosa books because they were written in an incremental manner. In the interview, this is what she stated:

Mabukuwatu ndi level ya ana saali bwino kwenikweni. Ntchito ikumakhalamo yambiiiri; mastories alimowo ndi mwana wa wani mmm ayi chifukwa bukhu la Sosa lija nthawi ija analikonza bwino. Mumakhala target ndi meaning, nkhaniyo ndi bukhulo m'mene liliri, anawo amatha kuwerenga. Nkhani imakhala yochepa ndi mwana wa wani zimagwirizana, koma pano nkhani ikumakhala yambiri. Achulutsamonso zochitika; page imodzi kuti awerenge, maphatikizo, mawu, nkhaninso awerenge within two days. Chifukwa two days ndaphunzitsa nkhani zatha. Ndiye kuti pa week pakumakhala nkhani ziwiri za m'bukhu. Imodzinso yoti ndiwerenge ine, maphatikizowo, mwina sikisi, adziwe maliwu, maphatikizo, aphantikize apange mawu. Ndiye iii sizikugwirizana. Zachuluka. Kuchuluka kwa ma activities. Ku Chichewa zikumakhala kawiri, ku English kawiri. Komano ku English zikumakhala zosiyana chifukwa utha kuphunzitsa ngati m'mamawa titenge ngati inalirree. Utha kuphunzitsa: This is a man, woman, boy and a girl; first lesson. Anawo apita ku break; akamabwera ku break uziwauza kuti: This is mother, father, brother, sister, ndiye ana amakhala confused moti tinavutikana nawo kwabasi. Moti kumufunsa mwana date lalero kuti who is this one? Amatha kukuwauza kuti brother kapena kuti boy chifukwa saadziwa kwenikweni kuti uyu ndi ndani.

[The books are not really appropriate with the learners' level of cognitive ability. There is too much work in the books. The stories that are in the books, compared to a standard one child, mmmm not appropriate. Because the Sosa Book was well written. There was a target and meaning, the story and the book in considering to how it was written, the child could read. The story was short and to a standard one child, it

was appropriate. But currently, the story is too long. There are also a lot of activities. On one page there are words for the learners to read, to read syllables, many concepts within two days . Because in two days I have taught two stories and I have finished. It means in a week there are two stories from the book. There is also another one for me to read. Sometimes six syllables, they should know sounds as well. Therefore mmm, not appropriate for the learners. There are too much activities. In Chichewa there are two of them. But in English there is a difference. Because in the morning let's imagine you have taught: This is a man, woman, boy and girl. That is a first lesson, the learners go out for break and when they come from the break, you tell them: This is mother, father, brother, sister. So the learners become confused in that it gave us many problems when we were teaching that topic. As a result, if you ask the learner today, "Who is this one? He tells you that he is brother or boy because he/ she does not actually know who this really is.] (Teacher A). 24 th February, 2016

Standard two learners who participated in FGD reported that the stories were appropriate to all of them and the length of the stories was not a challenge at all. However, a standard two teacher, when interviewed, reported that she had problems in regards to the prescribed books she was using in the teaching of reading. Despite that the books were revised they were not wholly appropriate to the age level and cognitive ability of the learners for they still used Whole word approach. Thus, there were some areas the teachers saw that they were appropriate to the learners while others were not.

M'mene ndimaonera ndimwakuti mu mabuku muli zina zazikulu koposa msinkhu wa ana aja koma malo ena zinthu ziri bwino. Amene anavuta kwambiri koyamba ndi mabuku oyamba. Monga poyamba tinachita kupempha ndiye anachita revise ndiye revised edition ilikobe bwino koma ikusowa ma supporting materials monga ma chart or pictures especially English. Ana aja kuti andigwire I have to use gestures, I have

to use pictures. Without those things anawo samvapo kanthu. Chifukwa mwana wamng'ono kumuuzza kuti: "Stand up". Angathe kudabwa akakhala kuti akuyamba kumene. Koma umuuzze Ukumuonetsa kuti : Stand up (using gestures). A dog akhoza kudabwa koma Umuonetse kapena kuloza chithunzi chija akhoza kuchita relate koma zochitira relate'zo ndi zomwe palibe. Kuyesa kumujambula galu iye ali ndi pusi aaah.

[In the way I observe, I assume there are some areas that have tough concepts in relation to the children's age level and ability. However, in other areas the concepts are appropriate. Before, the books that were more difficult were the first ones. Initially we requested for change and they revised the books. The books now are somehow appropriate but they have no supporting materials such as charts or pictures; especially English. For the learners to understand in the reading process, I have to use gestures, I have to use pictures. Without those things the children cannot understand. Because to tell a young child; Stand up, she can be surprised when she is introduced to the stuff for the first time. But you should tell the child while modelling as you say, stand up (using gestures). The child cannot be surprised with a dog when you are showing him/ her. Pointing to that picture he/ she can relate but the materials for relating are not there. Trying to draw a dog, it does not resemble the dog. If you ask the child, he responds that it is a cat aaa.]
(Key teacher).17 th February, 2016

Thus, the teacher complained that the pictures found in standard two books were not learner friendly regarding their sizes. The pictures were very small therefore claimed that it would be sound if the books were accompanied by charts that would help accomodate all the learners since the classes were very large. Furthermore, the teachers argued that due to Whole-word approach, the books started with stories that were long and later the learners were exposed to words, syllables and letters. As such they complained that this made the books not appropriate for the level of the children as they

encountered the words in a context. In an another interview, this is what Teacher B said÷

Kuwerenga kumakhala kotani? Kumakhala kovuta, anawa ali two inde, komabe a e i o u; ba,be bi bo bu zinafunika.Ndiye ana ngati awa tikanakhala kuti mabuku akale a Sosa aja tinali nawo ndiye kuti nkhani ya Chichewa ana ambiri akanatha kuwerenga. Chimodzimodzi English ku standade two anangowabweretsa mabuku aja ndi chinkhani ndiye mwana woti English ndi second language , chiyankhulo choti mwana sanachizolowere, sachidziwa ndiye kumangomubweretsera mwana whole language. Monga ndayambira week ino ndi calendar. Then calendar ana amangoyimba koma kuti tatola mwezi wa January, sautani? Sautola. Angoona komanso omwe akuzindikiranso ndi ochepa. Tabwera ku January, February, mpaka December. Kenakono tibwera ku alphabet then ku letter o. Then ana aja aphunzira sound, ma word atchule. Kenako apitenso ku nkhani ina yake then letter ija. Monga ana a two eti tikanakhala kuti nkhani zija asaziyambe koma tizingopanga ma letter sounds ndi ma word komanso ndi mawu a ma letter aja, oyambirira a mawu, initial letter imene ija. I think anawo pena pake bwenzi akumatola kuti chakuti. English ija bwenzi ana akumatola ti masimple sentence pang'onopang'ono. Koma tsopano nkhani zija mmm.Chimodzimodzi mwana sadziwa kuwerenga Chichewa angofikira kumpatsa chinkhani?.

[Reading is difficult. Yes, the learners are in standard two however, a e i o u and ba be bi bo bu were required. So,as young as they are, it would be better if we had the Sosa, old books. The issue of reading Chichewa would be simple, many children would be able to read. Similarly, standard two English they just brought the books with long stories. As a result, a child to whom English is a second language, a language that the child is not familiar with, s/he does not know it. Bringing him/her whole word is not proper. It is very difficult for the child understand the story.We start with a passage, then letters and sounds at the end.The calendar for example, the children were just singing but if you ask him/

her to pick the month of January, he can not pick. They just see and the children who have the ability to know are rare. We are on January, February up to December. Then I will teach the alphabet, then letter o. Then the children will learn letter sound. Then they will read a different story] (Teacher B) 24th February, 2016

The study revealed that the attribute of the prescribed text books was a contributing factor to the learners' failure to read in both standard one and two. Text books play a crucial role in the teaching and learning of reading and they are one of the most important teaching and learning resources required in learning to read. Regardless the fact that the books were published to facilitate teaching of reading, they facilitated in the impediment of the learners' ability to promote the development of basic literacy skills. Thus, the prescribed books as observed were inappropriate regarding to the age levels and ability of the children. Despite the fact that both PEAs, PEA coordinator and the head teacher reported that the prescribed books were the right books for the children to learn reading, the researcher totally refute that statement.

Thus, the researcher shares the same view with the standard one and two teachers as well as the key teacher as she claims that the books were not on the standard to be used to teach standard one and two learners. Thus, in terms of cognitive development, the designers overlooked the development level of the learners as well as their sociolinguistic context. Basing on what the researcher observed in both classes, there is reason to support her argument. Upon hearing the teachers supporting the 1991 curriculum books, the researcher made an analysis in the books and this is what the researcher found. The standard one English prescribed text books had five or six pictures from which the learners had to learn in a 30- minute period. The pictures were

accompanied with content taken from the teachers' Guide. In the teachers' Guides there were questions and responses which were required to be internalised by the end of a 30-minute period. This was not possible. In the learning process, the learners practised the skill with the teachers up to picture two, but when they reached picture three, the learners portrayed that they hardly bear the burden to read orally with the teachers.

There were signs which showed that they were exhausted; they became very noisy, as most of them drew away their attention from the teacher. Others were asking for permission to go outside, and they did not return to the classrooms. Consequently, with such a noise and the massive going out of the learners, many did not have chance to grasp what was taught or learn at all. Mostly it was hard to reach a conclusion as the learners failed to grasp the long sentences in English. The quantity of the content indirectly deprived the learners to learn. For sure, learners did not develop their basic literacy skills, hence were still at basic level of literacy. Similarly, in Chichewa text books for both standards one and two were inappropriate for the fact that they had long stories as compared to the young learners' age and levels of cognitive ability.

The book for standard one has started with stories without the learners first being introduced to sounds, syllables, words and simple sentences. As the reading was based on ANIMUKOLE, the learners were not exposed to the alphabet. Reading lesson started during the first week of first term. This time they were introduced to *aA* and *nN*. Thus, they learnt letter sounds /a/ and /n/, letter *n* and syllable *na*. The second reading they read the word *ana*. From, there, as the book increased in pages, the syllables, words and sentences increased in number. In unit 3 (Mutu 3), there are two words *ana*, *ina* as first reading on the unit and then syllables: *ma*, *mi*, followed by words, *amama*, *anama*, *aima* and finally sentences, *Ana anama*; *Amama aima*. Similarly, in

unit 19 the period this research was being conducted, according to the prescribed book in that week the teacher had to revise *chu, sa, wo, nu, lu*. After that, the learners had to learn the letter sound /kw/ and syllables *kwe, kwi, kwa*, from there they read the words; *kwawa, kwawo, kwanu*. Finally, they had to read a passage, the following day:

Awa ndi ana akwanu. Iwo akukukwera chulu
mokwawa. Chuluchi ndi chakwawo. Kwina
sawkawa pokwera chulu.

Source: Malawi Primary Education Chichewa Buku la ophunzira la sitandade 1, 2016, p.70

Thus, all these were taught in two days' time, Monday and Tuesday. On Wednesday, they were exposed to other concepts. They revised *pe, yu, ke, su, sa*. Practised sound /ts/ then read *tsu, tsa, tse, tso, tsi*; words: *tsitsi, tsuka, tsekula, tsiku, tsata*. The following day they read a passage:

Uyu ndi mwana wasukulu. Iye amatsuka
mano ake tsiku ndi tsiku. Amatsata malamulo
asukulu. Iye amapesa tsitsi lake

Source: Malawi Primary Education Chichewa Buku la ophunzira la Sitandade 1, 2016, p 72.

In one week, the learners were required to read in total two letter sounds, ten syllables, ten words and two stories. On Friday, the teacher did revision on the work that was challenging in that particular week. During the reading lesson, the learners stopped looking at the book and started playing. Others who seemed to read together with the teachers were just memorising what was being read as they were reading together with the teacher during *You Do* phase. Memorisation was revealed when the learners were asked to read on their own or individually. They were unable to follow the lines. They

read line one and then read line three skipping line two. Sometimes when they were asked to point to a word, the word they pointed to when reading was not the word they referred to. Sometimes other learners just read the first two or three lines but did not read beyond that.

The teachers claimed that Sosa books which were code-based were the right books for standard one. The researcher did a document analysis of that reading material and found that the learners were first exposed to two words, *baba* and *ababa* in unit 19 (mutu 19). By then they were not yet introduced to sentences. They were still revising *a e i o u*; *letter name y syllables ya ye yi yo yu*; *yu yi yo ye ya*; *yo ya yu yi ye*; *ye, yo ya yu yi*; *yi yu ye ya yo*. Then words *gaya, yaka, yala, maye, moyo papaya, yesa, siya, taya* (MIE, 1991, p. 41). Looking critically at the Sosa books and PCAR, and NRP books, they all follow the reading in a gradual and natural way. However, in the NRP as well as the standard two books under modified PCAR, the learners were not given ample time to master the, vowels, words, syllables, sentences and then passages. Thus in standard one, they were exposed to smaller units as well as larger units at the same time. Similarly, in standard two, the learners were first exposed to whole words before the smaller units. This consequently made it hard for the learners in both classes to master the concepts.

The Sosa books on the other hand, the learners were exposed to words and sentences after mastering letters and words. In the revised standard two text books, it was also hard for the learners to read the passages and they showed that they were still at basic level. In their books the learners were first introduced to the content before the exposure of smaller units like, letters, syllables, words and sentences. Thus they followed a modified Whole-word approach known as ANIMUKOLE whereby the learners were

encountering letters after being exposed to a passage. The researcher therefore, concurs with the teacher and the key teacher that the Whole-word and ANIMUKOLE are indeed quite good approaches and strategies respectively. However, rushing to give the learners passages made it hard for the learners to master reading for they were not yet familiar with the words. Therefore, the researcher's argument is that the books were produced disregarding the learners' cognitive development levels. This could explain why the learners had problems in reading.

Wood (1988) stipulates that the curriculum should not surpass the learner's level of development. It has also been noted that giving children books that are inappropriate to their age level or grade level, gathers nothing in the end. Calkins (2001) points out that doing so is denying the children to read for they spend a lot of hours of which are useless for the children have not yet mastered to read such a material. Wray and Medwell (1991) stipulate that "The problem is that children don't get to be stronger readers by holding heavier books' (p. 12). If the books are inaccessible to the child, holding a heavy book does no more for a child's reading than holding a cinder block (Calkins, 2007, p. 35). Allington 1980 argues:

Instead, in classrooms in which children especially dire needs, they either do ditto sheets and exercises or the other teacher walks whole groups of children through a story together, the children bobbing their fingers along the text to accompany the teacher's reading. What they extentionally do with these inappropriate texts may look like reading but it is in fact quite different (cited in Calkins, 2001, p. 36)

Similarly, the researcher suggests that the designers overlooked the cognitive development of the learners as the books, which are drawn from the curriculum contained long texts. Thus, it is a need that prescribed books should be designed basing

on stages of development, characteristics and age of the learners rather than rushing to stories before they master sounds, phonemes, syllables, words and sentences. This made the learners unable to interact with their peers in the classroom for the text books made literacy learning difficult. Vygotsky's social cultural theory emphasises on social learning as learners interact with others. Griffiths et al. (2008) assert that "while interacting with others, children create understanding, or knowledge that is shared between them. Thus, active knowledge construction occurs in the social world. As children become sure of their knowledge, it becomes their own and they are able to use it independently" (p. 3). This sentiment supports the idea that Vygotsky believed that children's cognitive development is influenced through interaction with others. Interaction would be possible when the learners were able to understand what they were reading.

Apart from the whole-word the participants claimed to be challenging, the researcher also observed that the learners' challenge in learning English was compounded by their failure to read in their first language. Thus, the learners were unable to read given passages in Chichewa because of the Whole word approach as already stated in the above sections. As such it was very difficult to grasp concepts in English. Similarly in standard one, the learners were exposed to both Chichewa and English concurrently. In standard two it showed that because the learners were exposed to context in Chichewa before exposed to smaller units, hence the first language was still a problem despite that they were in standard two.

According to the findings of this study, the literacy challenges in English were compounded by the fact that the learners were experiencing challenges in literacy in Chichewa which was a familiar language to all learners. By the time the researcher was conducting her studies at the school, the learners had not acquired literacy skills in the

first language which could be transferred to the second language, English. A lot of research findings support the fact that “both children and adults learn to read and write a second language better after becoming literate in their mother tongue” (Bangbose (1976) as cited in Kayambazithu (1999:15).

Dorolina (2001) is in support of this idea that learning a second language is challenging if the learners are deficient in the first language. In her (2001) study on use of familiar language among six marginal communities in the Phillipines, it was revealed that the learners who were taught to read first in the familiar language performed better in English and other languages, than their counterparts, who had literacy in all the languages introduced concurrently.

Similarly, Chilimanjira’s (2012) study where she studied the extent PCAR facilitated the acquisition of literacy by standard four, she found that the learners had not yet acquired enough English language skills to enable them acquire literacy in the language. This was revealed as the learners failed to answer questions, read and write in English. The conclusion was that the learners’ oral English proficiency was very low because the learners had not yet mastered reading in Chichewa, which was their native language. With such research evidence, the researcher suggests that the other factor for the challenges the learners had in English in the current study, could be attributed to the low acquisition levels of literacy skills in Chichewa.

4.5.6 Lack of curriculum Professional Development

Interviews of head teachers, PEAs and teachers on CPD revealed two key areas of concern with regard to continuing Professional Development (CPD) namely: lack of CPD and inset and issues around lack of curriculum implementation.

4.5.6.1 Lack of Curriculum Professional Development (CPD) and Inset trainings

Another area which the researcher was eager to learn was about CPD and Inset trainings for the teachers.

The head teacher reported that the teachers attended the CPD at zone level as well as at school level some time back. In the past when PCAR was about to be implemented, all teachers were attending the inset at TDC and the teachers were trained by PEAs. However when the implementation of PCAR Curriculum started in schools, there were no trainings or insets conducted at zonal level. Thus, they conducted at school level. At school level the teachers were trained on methodologies, techniques as well as use of teaching and learning materials. The head teacher and some other teachers who were experts on that particular aspect trained fellow teachers. The head teacher reported that they met every term but sometimes they met when there was need.

Although there was need, the training was not conducted because the school did not have funds to run the training. Thus, the head teacher called for the training but when the teachers learnt that there were no funds, they did not attend that training. As a result, it was very difficult to convene trainings at the school because of unavailability of funds. By the time the study was conducted, it was reported that CPDs at school level, were conducted some years back. The head teacher reported that he was willing to

convene the training for there were many teaching problems they were encountering. However, it was impossible because teachers refused to attend the training without getting any incentive.

All the teachers reported that all were oriented on PCAR at TDC level, however, poorly oriented for the fact that the information reached them while diluted for it was a three tier cascade model. The results revealed that after receiving the first CPD training at TDC level, they were supposed to conduct those trainings at school level once a term or sometimes when there was need; however, trainings were not conducted for financial constraints. Thus, whenever, the head teachers called for a meeting, the teachers asked in advance if the meeting had an incentive. After learning that they would only be trained and funds were not available, they said they would attend when the funds would be available. Furthermore, the head teacher reported that some teachers tended to undermine their fellow teachers to train or orient them for the fact that their colleagues had no enough knowledge to train them. They wanted someone from another school or from the TDC like the PEA to train them.

The implication is that teachers were not able to employ appropriate strategies for teaching literacy as they depended on the old strategies they were taught during initial training. Refusing to attend the CPDs led to lack of exposure to new ways of implementing the curriculum or new techniques to employ in teaching literacy. This is detrimental in the teaching of reading because the teachers still employed old strategies and old techniques which hampered the learning of literacy. With such instances, the researcher claims this to be one of the contributing factors to why learners fail to read despite the fact that they are taught by qualified teachers.

Teachers reluctance to attend CPDs as the head teacher calls for it, is a detrimental factor to the education system because the teachers should not only rely on the knowledge they obtained during their initial training for it is insufficient. National Strategy for Teacher Education and Development (2009) supports this argument: “The point is that initial trainings will never be sufficient insofar as it simply launches one into an ever changing and developing profession. It is Continuing Professional Development (CPD) which enables a teacher to go on teaching effectively” (NSTED, 2009). The teaching of literacy is a lifelong learning hence teachers should persistently learn to teach language. M’mela supports the idea that teaching is a life long learning and does not end after college:

Learning to teach is analogous to a seed that is planted, germinates, gradually grows and matures, and finally produces fruits in its lifetime through continuous nourishment. Initial teacher education is like the seed that is planted, germinates and matures. Improved teaching practices result in the fruit the teacher produces during a lifetime in the teaching profession, and continued learning is the nourishment required throughout this growth process (p.25).

Another point to argue is that the head teacher was one factor that contributes to learners’ poor achievement in literacy. For a school to be literacy-rich, head teachers should be at a leading role to accomplish it. This is through taking an initiative in developing the teachers at school level. Despite the fact that funds are most times a constraint to invite expertise from a neighboring school, convening a meeting and providing an opportunity to share new knowledge is of great importance. Consequently, this would work because such a school-based teacher development meeting has no costs when it takes place at the school. Additionally, head teachers, could employ less formal

ways in which teachers could work together through various forms of team work such as observing and supporting each other when teaching.

The research also revealed that despite the report that teachers never attended CPD at school and at zone level, teachers of standard one, underwent CPD training together with head teachers and heads of infant department. However, not on PCAR Curriculum but were trained on the new reading program known as National Reading. The training was conducted at zone level and the teachers were trained on the Learner-centred approach of Gradual Release of Responsibility (G-R-R) and how they would employ it when teaching reading in standard one.

In the researcher's observation, she claims that this program, with regards to its mode of training had a negative impact to the education system. There are several reasons to why the researcher argues like that. Although the teachers were trained, the training was insufficient for the fact that it was partial. Thus, the training which the PEAs underwent was for three weeks of which the same content was delivered to the head teachers for one week. When interviewed, the head teacher reported it was problematic for him to implement G-R-R at the school for he lacked knowledge of other concepts. The evidence for his argument was found right when the researcher observed that the head teacher was failing to implement the approach in standard one class when the trained teacher was absent. On top of that, the insufficient knowledge he acquired denied him to convene trainings at school level for the fact that he had little information of the concepts.

Generally, the system of training standard one teacher only was an influential factor to failure of learners to promote their literacy development. Thus, the system aggravated problems in the teaching of literacy when the standard one teacher or teachers were absent or went on posting. It was problematic for the untrained teachers to teach the learners for they had no knowledge of how to go about the teaching of reading using the new approach. Consequently, the learners spent the language periods without being taught. Replacement of teachers when they had gone on posting became a challenge as well because the learners required a teacher who also underwent training of the new program. Such scenarios are very critical and unsupportive in the learning of literacy in the lower classes and the entire education system.

This is contrary to the Malawi Government's goal to promote literacy. Therefore, the researcher cannot hesitate arguing that selecting a few teachers to undergo training of a reading program sidelining other teachers is at all cost destructive to learning. This was shown as the teachers claimed to be left behind when only standard one teacher was trained on the new approach. This system of targeting standard one teachers only was further proved a futile procedure as teachers refused to teach the learners when the trained teacher was absent.

Teaching per se, needs teachers who are professionals, committed to lifelong learning. Therefore, ensuring that all teachers move together with changes is of great value to the entire nation because as curricula or approaches change, they keep pace with the changes and whatever demand is placed upon them. For this reason, therefore, teachers should not only learn about how to teach effectively but also be life long learners to remain relevant and effective (NSTED, 2009, p. 15). N'Nandi (2005) contends that all

teachers at primary level must be teachers of teaching. He further argues that it is worrisome that not all teachers are trained in the techniques of reading.

Training one teacher, the researcher admits is a right procedure in considering financial constraint. However, without exposing the new approaches and strategies to the other teachers, the implementation of the curriculum or the approaches is hard to take place. One cannot teach without undergoing any orientation. The researcher therefore is in support of the teachers, head teachers and the key teacher that the procedure that was used to orient only selected teachers was totally detrimental to the teaching of reading. All in all, denying teachers opportunity to attend CPD is contrary to the Malawi Government's vision because each teacher is entitled to at least three days of zone based professional (INSET) per year (NSTED, 2009, p. 21), however, it's only on paper and lip - service.

Without attending INSET teachers cannot grow professionally hence lack new knowledge of scaffolding the young learners. Vygotsky's (1978) Social cultural theory advocates emphasise that children need support from more knowledgeable adults. The knowledgeable adults at school are the teachers. Therefore it is very important that teachers are well equipped with knowledge in methods, approaches, strategies and techniques. Lack of CPDs leaves teachers in a pool of challenges when teaching. Chilimanjira's (2012) study for example, revealed out that CPDs that were conducted in schools she studied were not scheduled rather they came up as need arose. The conclusion was that the teachers were encountering many challenges in the teaching process which resulted in the low literacy achievement levels in the standard four learners.

4.5.6.2 Challenges encountered by teachers in curriculum Implementation

Another area of concern was about challenges encountered in curriculum implementation with regards to literacy development promotion. The PEAs as well as the key teacher reported that there was implementation of the curriculum at the school and teachers had no challenges as literacy teaching was concerned. The head teacher and the teachers reported that the PEA and the key teacher visited the school and coached the teachers wherever there was a need. In the classes specifically standard one, all the teachers employed the G-R-R Approach and ANIMUKOLE to literacy teaching which were learner- centred in nature. The head teacher reported that the teachers of standard two still implemented the PCAR Curriculum however, with struggles. This made the teachers sometimes go back to traditional strategies of teaching so that at least a few learners should grasp some concepts.

Generally, the researcher found that the teachers were implementing the curriculum, though to a lesser extent. The implementation was portrayed when they were trying to employ the required approaches and strategies as well as techniques as discussed in the above sections. Despite that the teachers were implementing the curriculum; the researcher suggests that the implementation was partial. There were some factors worth mentioning. As already stipulated above, the standard two teachers were using teaching strategies they learnt during initial training as they were not exposed to new insights in terms of how to employ the new approach and new strategies. The challenge for this was financial constraints.

In standard one, implementation of the curriculum was partial for the reason that the approach was challenging to employ. Thus, it was overloaded with activities to be practiced in a 30-minute period. Due to the nature of the learners at the school the researcher studied, they grasped the stuff very slowly in that the 30 minutes were exhausted with some activities not tackled. With the pre-determined lessons, it was very difficult for the teachers to teach the remaining activities for they wanted to move together with their fellow teachers in other streams or schools. This, as a result, led the curriculum to be implemented at a lesser extent.

Lack of supporting reading materials such as posters or pictures led the implementation of the curriculum challenging. The researcher has a reason for her argument regarding to the nature of the prescribed books. The standard one oral reading and dialogues based on pictures and activities emerged from the prescribed books. The pictures were very small in that many learners did not see when the teachers were pointing to them. When a teacher was pointing to picture three, other learners especially at the back were pointing to picture two or four. Others opened a different page and rarely the teachers noticed this. The teacher was supposed to move round the class helping the learners to point at the right pictures but failed to do so because of high PTR.

In standard one, it was also not easy to implement the curriculum due to teachers' absenteeism as they went for salary collection or when a teacher went on posting. When the teacher went for salary collection, she lost two periods for both Chichewa and English. Since the lessons for the whole term were already scheduled, it was problematic to teach the following lessons without teaching those that suffered the previous day. The teacher did not skip those lessons because the lessons that followed

were developed from there. The teacher therefore, to avoid skipping the lessons just combined lessons of two days. This was not healthy in regards to the teaching of literacy to young learners.

No doubt other concepts were skipped so that the teacher could be in line with his / her colleagues from other schools. Similarly, it was very difficult for other teachers to teach the learners when a teacher went on posting. The teachers employed the old strategies and approaches for they were ignorant of the new approach and strategies of G-R-R. Such instances could be a factor which suppressed the development of literacy in the young learners.

Apart from the factors mentioned above, it was also revealed that the use and wastage of instructional time was a challenge at the school. Learners lost an hour outside due to school feeding program. Standard one, as allocated on the timetable, had 4 hours 30 minutes but every day they lost one hour, hence, the learners remained with 3 hours 30 minutes of instructional time. Likewise, in standard two, the time they were allocated was 5 hours but they spent only 4 hours at school. There was not even a single day when the classes began at the normal time. Languages which were allocated more time on the time table were found that sometimes were taught once per day; hence they had less instructional time. As a result, teachers found it hard to provide the basic literacy skills under such circumstances, hence partial curriculum implementation. Social Cultural Theory which informed this study emphasises that adults have the responsibilities to help the young ones move from one level to another level as the learners are in their level of Proximal Development (Brown & Ferrara, 1985). Therefore,

teachers with the help of head teachers need to take their time seriously to help the young ones promote their literacy development.

Losing instruction time is contrary to the Malawi Government Policy whereby throughout this county, weighting to languages surpass all subjects. Chilimanjira (2012) comments on the importance of language:

Emphasis on literacy was further displayed by allocating more number of periods to languages in 1982 and 1991 curricula (Ministry of Education) 1992 PCAR also has more periods allocated to languages. All these signify the important position that literacy was accorded in Malawi curricula over years (p. 12).

Despite the fact that the languages were allocated more numbers of periods it proved to be a failure because most instructional time was lost at the school where the study was conducted. As such, the learners did not develop basic literacy skills as the teacher might not be able to cover the curriculum.

4.6 Chapter summary

The chapter has presented the results and discussion of the study. The results have been presented and discussed relating to the three research questions. Furthermore, it has presented challenges that hamper the promotion of the learners' literacy development. The next chapter presents the conclusions and implications of the findings.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Chapter overview

The current study was conducted in Mulanje rural. The aim of this study was to investigate strategies teachers employed in the teaching of literacy to promote literacy development in the learners of Malawi rural infant classes. The main research question which the study answered was on how teachers promote the development of literacy among learners in Malawi rural infant classrooms. From the main question the researcher developed three specific research questions which have been answered in Chapter 4. The first question was on approaches and strategies teachers employ in the teaching of reading in infant classes. The second question was on how teachers employ literacy strategies and techniques to promote literacy development in the learners of the infant classes, and the third question was on the challenges the teachers encounter in the teaching and learning of reading. This chapter draws conclusions and implications of the findings of the study. Finally, the chapter presents some suggestions on areas for further research.

5.2 Conclusions and their implications

This section presents some of the conclusions and their implications in the strategies teachers employ in the teaching of literacy in infant classes in one primary school involved in the study.

5.2.1 Teachers employ Learner-centred approaches and strategies but they are less effective

The teachers who taught reading in the infant section in the school where the study was conducted, employed Learner-centred teaching approaches and strategies. However, such approaches and strategies were less effective. Despite the fact that the approaches and strategies seemed interactive, they hardly accommodated three quarters of the learners in the classes. This was the case because the approach was overloaded with activities which resulted in bringing fatigue in the learners. In standard one it was problematic to practice six pictures per period. As a result lessons ended without reaching the conclusion which resulted in other concepts left untaught. The whole-word approach and strategies also played a role in the learners' failure to grasp what was taught. This was because the learners were exposed to content before being exposed to smaller units. This made the learning of language difficult to the learners as such only a few were able to grasp what was taught.

The implication of employing less effective learner-centered approaches and strategies in the infant section is that the learners' literacy development will not be promoted; hence they will still be at basic level as the learners lack interaction. Due to the assessment policy, the learners automatically will be promoted to standard two and standard three respectively with their literacy problems. Simply because they have left the other class with a cracked foundation of literacy, this will lead the learners to reach the upper classes with literacy problems. The inability to read will lead the learners dropping out from school. Consequently, Malawi will still have illiterate people. Secondly, the learners who completely failed to grasp anything will repeat the classes which will lead to misuse of resources and increase demand on class space and high

PTR among others. Others, who would make it to secondary school, would fail to pass their MSCE Examinations and this would lead to the nation having MSCE graduates loafing in the villages for they cannot make it to the university or colleges.

5.2.2 Teachers employ Learner-centred strategies and techniques in the teaching of reading, however, learners interaction was minimal

The current study shows that teachers indeed employed strategies and techniques in order to achieve interaction, however, the interaction was minimal. When participatory strategies are used, they create an interactive environment and this environment provides room for support from peers and the teachers. It is worth noting that the learners in standards one and two of the school where the current study was conducted were still at basic level because after the teachers' model, they failed to practice the skills on their own. As per findings of the study, the learners were unable to grasp the concepts and take the knowledge as their own for several reasons: Firstly, the study has revealed that the Whole-word approaches were not learner friendly in such that learners in standard one failed to grasp the skills teachers were modeling. This was like that because the learners were not yet exposed to smaller units before exposing them to contents. Secondly, the study has revealed that Learner-centred strategies failed to work in teaching reading in English because of poor reading skills in the first language. Since the learners had already challenges in their first language, there was no transferability of the skills from the L1 to L2. These factors led the learners' literacy development to be promoted at minimal level.

The implication is that learners will have challenges to promote their literacy development in the early grades. This is because the Whole-word strategies and techniques were determined by the prescribed books which seemed challenging to the learners. The reason for this is that the learners encountered the passages before being

exposed to smaller units. As a result, though modeled, learners grasped the concepts at minimal rate as the children rarely stood independently from their teachers. This clearly shows that learners in the school the researcher studied, for example, with the promotion policy in mind, will continue to underperform in literacy as well as other subjects of their studies in upper levels. As a result, a few will make it to secondary schools and tertiary level because they will have literacy problems.

5.2.3 Teachers encounter challenges in terms of prescribed books and approaches that are imposed and followed in teaching literacy

As revealed in the results and discussions of the study, the approaches and text books caused many challenges for the learners to promote the literacy development levels in infant section of the school under study. As per the findings, it has been clearly shown that the approaches used had a negative impact on the learners' promotion on literacy skills. The approach was overloaded with activities the learners had to master by the end of a 30-minute period. The learners, as such, did not practice and exhaust all the activities scheduled in that period. In English books for example, to finish five or six pictures was a challenge as learners portrayed boredom, exhaustion which eventually led the learners to become noisy. Others reached the point of excusing themselves from the lessons as they requested for permission from the teacher to go outside and never returned for the lessons.

Similarly, standard one and two Chichewa books posed challenges in that teachers had not given the learners ample time to master the sounds, letters, syllables, words, sentences and texts. Learners started reading all of these in the first week of first term which caused the teachers to encounter multiple challenges in the teaching of reading.

In addition to early exposure of texts to the learners, standard one Chichewa books had long passages which influenced boredom in the learners in that others focused their attention outside the classrooms while others failed to reach third or fourth lines. Furthermore, the books for standard one and two had pictures which were very small. These made teaching and learning of literacy difficult for many learners hardly saw what they were talking about in the extended dialogues. Worse still the books were not accompanied by supporting reading materials such as charts and pictures. As a consequence, the children just mumbled what the teacher was saying but in real sense they were left behind in the learning process. Furthermore, as the books were not accompanied by posters and charts, teachers' drawings to accompany the books misled the learners for they were not depicting the objects they labeled. Such scenarios made the learners to be still at basic level.

The implication is that learners will have problems to develop basic literacy skills at this foundation level because of the Whole-word approaches and prescribed books that are used in the infant sections. The reason for this is that the learners encounter the passages before being exposed to smaller units. As a result, the passages seem to be beyond the learners' age and cognitive development levels. What has been observed is that education decisions in Malawi are always made with middle-class or children who already underwent ECDs in mind, and have already developed reading skills. The reading approaches which expose learners to passages before mastering letters, syllables, words and sentences; exposure to more than three characters to be dealt within 30 minutes is a good example that assumes that all learners are capable. This clearly shows that learners in the school the researcher studied, for example, will continue to underperform in all subjects of their studies as they go along with their education.

5.2.4 Lack of CPDs and improper procedure of selecting teachers to implement reading programmes

The current study found that teachers were not attending any Inset trainings or CPDs. This conclusion is based on the fact that since the teachers attended PCAR training some time back, they did not go to Teacher Development Centre (TDC) in their zones or rarely attended CPD at school level. Additionally, INSETs were never conducted at school level for the reason that the schools had no funds. Thus, whenever the teachers had problems relating to the teaching of reading, the problems were never addressed. Standard one learners did not learn anything when their teachers were absent.

The other teachers did not teach the learners for they were not experts in the G-R-R approach hence, did not take the class. Head teachers, though they attended the orientation, failed to teach or implement the approach in the classrooms when the standard one teachers were absent for the reason that they were half-baked. Furthermore, in some instances, the head teacher received visitors at the school who required their attention and as they were attending to the visitors the learners were left without a teacher. This was a critical situation as far as importance of literacy is concerned.

The implication of teachers not attending inset trainings or CPDs led in the teacher employing strategies and techniques that did not facilitate the promotion of literacy in the learners. As a result, the learners will face many challenges in the learning process until upper level of their education. On the issue of only a few teachers attending training or orientation of a new program, will lead to failure of the learners to acquire the required content hence will not finish the curriculum. Consequently, the learners will go to the

next class with deficient skills in many areas of literacy and this leads to high repetition rate as well as misuse of resources. On top of that, this will be counterproductive to the entire program as well as the nation at large.

5.2.5 Lack of conducive environment to promote literacy development in the learners

The environment in which the reading was conducted was not conducive to promote learners' literacy development. This conclusion is drawn basing on the results of the current study. As shown, the teachers were not attending CPD both at TDC level as well as at school level. This is detrimental to the whole education system because the teachers will not grow professionally. This will lead in using traditional teaching strategies that cannot support the learners in the learning process.

Insufficient teaching and learning materials such as lack of posters, pictures and teachers' guides hampered the learning of reading and literacy for the books only did not suffice the function of promoting literacy development. Lastly, parents' reluctance to support in the learning of reading of their children made the environment not conducive to learning. For instance, the parents' tendency of keeping the books so that the children should not use them was a portrayal that in the home the children did not receive reading support.

The implication is that the promotion of the development of literacy will be a futility for the expected learning environment is not supportive. As such, the learners were still at basic level and this automatically will be a persistent problem in all areas of academic

disciplines. Furthermore, the goals of Malawi Government and the world at large to promote literacy will prove to be a failure.

5.2.6 Wastage of instructional time caused by Feeding programme, insufficient teaching materials and a bell to regulate lesson transition

It was also revealed that there was wastage of instructional time. There are several factors that led to the wastage of the instructional time. Firstly, as discussed in chapter 4, the feeding program exhausted almost an hour of the instructional time every day because the learners were receiving porridge. When one hour was lost, that time was never restored. In an academic year this is a lot of time. Secondly, teachers also wasted instructional time because of absenteeism. Teachers were absent for they went to collect their salaries and sometimes it was because of sickness. When this happened the learners were not attended to because the other teachers were not experts in the new approach and strategies. Consequently, the classes were dismissed or the learners were left running about in the classrooms and on the school yard.

Lastly, there was wastage of instructional time because the schools had no bell or whistle to regulate periods from one lesson to the other and also to regulate time to go out for break and time to enter the classrooms after break. Due to lack of the bell, the learners did not enter the classes in time hence entered the classes when the lessons were in the middle or even at the end. Others spent the whole day playing in the school yard.

The implication is that playing outside the classroom would result in repeating the class or dropping out of school for the learners miss lessons. Repetition will lead to not only waste of resources but also high PTR in the early classes. Dropout rate of the children

would increase the number of illiterate people in the villages or communities where the largest population of more than 85 % of Malawians lives. Again, as illiterate as they will be in future after attaining parenthood, they will not assist their children to read at home. Furthermore, those learners who will be half-baked will meet a lot of challenges in their education in each class because of having a poor literacy background. In all subject areas, they will encounter problems as they will fail to grasp the concepts, hence the country will be full of primary school graduates who will in the end have no capability to secure any job in society. Scenarios like these will compound poverty situations in the country.

5.3 Areas for further research

As far as the teaching of literacy is concerned, there are some areas that need to be researched. The suggested areas for further study are as follows:

- ❖ A study on the effectiveness of guided model in the teaching of literacy in large classrooms. In the current study it was found that the teachers faced challenges in using the guided model in large classrooms. Therefore, a study should be carried out to find out its effectiveness.
- ❖ A study on integrated approaches to the teaching of reading in early grades. In the current study, it was observed that teachers were not provided with an opportunity to use another approach when the recommended one seemed to suffice the purpose at a lesser extent. Therefore, a study should be carried out to find out if integrating approaches in the teaching of literacy is viable in the early grades.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 : A letter of introduction from Chancellor College



PRINCIPAL
Prof Richard Tambulasi, B.A (Pub Admin), BPA (Hons), MPA, Ph.D

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE
P.O. Box 280, Zomba, Malawi
Telephone: (265) 524 222
Fax: (265) 524 046
E-mail: principal@cc.ac.mw

16th January 2017

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I am pleased to introduce to you **Ms Catherine Jaluwa**, our final year Master of Education [*Language Education*] student in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching Studies, Faculty of Education. Ms Jaluwa has finished her course work, which covered a variety of courses in Curriculum Studies and Education Foundations.

As part of the requirements for the Master of Education Program, Ms Jaluwa has planned to carry out a study on *Language Teaching* in the Southern Region of Malawi.

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

I thank you in anticipation for your cooperation and support.

Many thanks

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

Foster Kholowa, Ph.D
Senior Lecturer in Language Education
Email: foskho@gmail.com/fkholowa@cc.ac.mw
Mobiles: +265 888 554 203; 0994 653 160

Appendix 2: A letter of introduction from the District Education Manager

All communications should be addressed to the:
District Education Manager

Tel: (265) 1466 635 (DEM)
Tel: (265) 1466 322
Fax: (265) 1466 565
Email: mulanjedem@ymail.com

In reply please quote:
Ref. No: MJ/ED/2/19

The District Education Manager,
P.O. Box 43,
MULANJE.

To : THE PEA
CHITAKALE ZONE

: THE PEA
LIMBULI ZONE



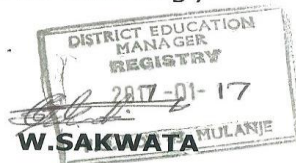
17th January, 2017.

Head teacher for Thawale
Please assist the bearer
of that letter as indicated.
She would like to carry out
a research at your school.
She is studying at Chancellor College
and she teaches at Gwam' se. S.S.
(PEA)

IDENTIFICATION: MS. CATHERINE JALUWA

We write to introduce to you Ms Catherine Jaluwa who is a final year Master of Education (Language Education) student. She would like to carry out a study on Language Teaching at CHITAKALE ZONE and LIMBULI ZONE. I would like to ask you to support towards her study as she collects the appropriate data.

Would you please assist her accordingly.



FOR: THE DISTRICT EDUCATION MANAGER

Appendix 3: Observation schedule

Observation instrument

School code _____

Date of observation _____

Subject _____

Lesson _____

Class _____

Number of learners _____

PART A: Class literacy environment Comments

1. Is there any Literacy centre / corner in the classroom?-

2. Are the talking walls

available? _____

3. Are reading materials

available? _____

4. Are the reading materials sufficient for the

learners? _____

Overall comments/ observations (on 14):

PART B: Lesson observation

Interactional environment

5. Does the interaction between the teacher and learners provide room for scaffolding? _____

6. Does the teacher and the more knowledgeable learners assist less knowledgeable

learners to enhance scaffolding? _____

7. Does the teacher provide room for interaction among learners? _____

Does the teacher perform his/her role of a facilitator?

9. Does the teacher organise instruction that facilitate interaction and collaboration in reading? _____

Overall comments / observations (5-9):

Teaching strategies

10 What strategies does the teacher employ in reading English/ Chichewa? _____

11. Does the teacher employ a diverse of teaching techniques in the teaching of reading? _____

Overall comments/ observations (10-12):

Teaching activities

12. What reading activities does the teacher employ? _____

13. What is the learners' performance in the reading activities? _____

14. Does the teacher employ diverse activities in teaching reading? _____

Overall comments/observation (13-15)

PART D: School literacy environment

Library

16. Does the school have a library? _____

17. If yes, do they utilize the library? _____

18. How often per week? _____

Types of materials in the library

19. Does the library have recommended texts for the learners? _____

20. Are the learners given opportunity to choose the text books they want to read?

21. Does the school have supplementary reading materials?_____

22. Does the teacher utilize the supplementary reading materials?_____

23. How do learners scaffold each other through the supplementary reading

materials?_____

Overall comments/ observations

Appendix 4: Teachers' Interview Schedule

Bio-data

Academic qualification _____

Professional qualification _____

Years in service _____

THE TEACHING PROCESS

1. What approaches do you use to teach English/ Chichewa?
2. (a) Do you encounter problems in teaching reading?
(b) If yes, how do you resolve to overcome such problems?

TEACHING METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

3. What methods of teaching do you use in the teaching of literacy in general?
4. What techniques of teaching do you employ in the teaching in teaching language?
5. How effective are the strategies and techniques in developing and facilitating the development of literacy in learners?

PERCEPTION ABOUT INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

7. What materials do you use in your English lessons?
8. What materials are available for the students in Chichewa?
9. What can you say about the availability of books in this school?
10. Are the materials appropriate to the learners' grade level?

Thank you for participating in the study

Appendix 5: School Head Teacher's Interview Guide

Interview schedule for head teachers

Bio-data

Academic qualification _____

Professional qualification _____

Years in service _____

Years in position (Head) _____

1. When did the school start?
2. What is the enrolment of the school?
3. What is the admission criterion for standard one?
4. How many teachers do you have and what are their qualifications?
5. How is the performance of the school from standard one to eight over the years?

Training and CPD

6. Were you trained for the current curriculum?
7. What assistance do you provide the teachers in implementing the literacy curricula?
8. Do your teachers as well as you attend in-set programmes on the teaching of
If yes:
 - i. Where?
 - ii. How often?
 - iii. What are you trained on?
 - iv. Who trains them?
 - v. What are the weaknesses and strengths of the training?

Relationship with the community

9. What is your relationship with children's parents in terms of promoting the children's literacy development?

General comments

10. What are your general comments about the teaching of literacy in lower primary school?

11. Any other information you would like me to know about literacy instruction at this school?

Thank you for participating in the study.

Appendix 6: Interview schedule for key Teachers

Bio-data:

Years on the position_____

Date of interview_____

Approach to the teaching of literacy in English and Chichewa

1. What approaches are used in teaching both English and Chichewa in classes, 1 and 2?
2. What can you say about PCAR approach and the approach of NRP Programme (Explain)
3. What are the differences between PCAR and NRP programme in terms of teaching learners in small groups? (Explain)
4. From the study, it is revealed that the approach to the teaching of vowels and consonants specifically in standard 1 has changed. What can you say about it? (Probe on confusing the learners, letter sounds and letter names and level of difficulty for the learners, too much work for the teacher)

Continuous Assessment

5. What is the mode of Continuous Assessment in facilitating the acquisition of literacy skills among the learners specifically those in standard 1? (Explain)

Relationship with head teachers and teachers in promoting literacy development in learners

7. What is your relationship with head teachers and teachers in regards to literacy promotion in young learners?(probe on teachers' absenteeism)
8. Are the problems faced in different schools related to literacy similar? (Probe on in-sets on both PCAR and NRP)

Teaching and learning materials

9. Are the books appropriate for the learners' level of ability (probe on content, and pictures)
10. Apart from prescribed text books, what else do teachers use in teaching literacy (probe more on TALULAR, charts etc)

Thank you for participating

Appendix 7: Primary Education Advisor's Interview Guide

Bio-data

Academic qualification _____

Professional qualification _____

Years in service _____

Years in position (PEA) _____

Literacy environment

1. What literacy opportunities are the learners given in your zone?
2. Do schools in your zone have conducive environments for the learning of literacy?
 - i. Explain:

In-service training

3. Do teachers of literacy in your zone undergo in-service trainings?
4. How often do the teachers undergo the in-service trainings?
 - i. What are they trained on?
 - ii. Who trains them?
 - iii. What are the strengths and the weaknesses of the training?
5. Do the teachers implement what they learn from the in-service trainings?
6. To what extent do the teachers implement what they learnt in in-service training?

General comments

In general what is the relationship among teachers, administrators (head teachers) and you in promoting literacy development in learners?

6. What kind of assistance do you provide the teachers in general in the course of implementing literacy curricular?
7. Do you have any problem you encounter as far as literacy teaching is concerned?
(Explain)

Thank you for participating in the study

Appendix 8: Primary Education Advisor Coordinator's Interview Guide

Bio-data

Academic qualification _____

Professional qualification _____

Years in service _____

Years in position (PEA Coordinator) _____

Literacy environment

1. What literacy opportunities are the learners given in your district?
2. Do schools in your district have conducive environments for the learning of literacy? Explain:

In-service training

3. Do teachers of literacy in your district undergo in-service trainings?
4. How often do the teachers undergo the in-service trainings?
 - i. What are they trained on?
 - ii. Who trains them?
 - iii. What are the strengths and the weaknesses of the training?
5. Do the teachers implement what they learn from the in-service trainings?
6. To what extent do the teachers implement what they learn in in-service training?

Co-ordination among PEAs in the district

7. How do you co-ordinate the PEAs in your district as far as literacy teaching is concerned?
8. Are literacy problems encountered by the PEAs in their respective zones similar?
9. What do you do to assist the PEAs learn from each other as far as literacy teaching is concerned?

General comments

8. In general what is the relationship among teachers, administrators (head teachers), PEAs and you in promoting literacy development in learners?
9. What kind of assistance do you provide the PEAs in general in the course of implementing literacy curricular?
10. Do you have any problem you encounter as far as literacy teaching is concerned? (Explain)

Thank you for participating in the study

Appendix 9: Interview schedule for learners' Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

School code _____ **Date** _____ **Time** _____

Number of participants _____ **males** _____ **females** _____

School literacy

1. What can you say about literacy levels in general at your school?
2. What reading opportunities do you have as learners at school in class? Outside classroom?
4. What activities does your teacher use in reading lessons? (Probe for group work: What are the strengths and weaknesses you in those groups)?
5. Are you provided with opportunities to take books home? (Explain)

Perception about instructional materials

7. Are the books appropriate for your age as learners? (Explain)
8. Apart from books what else is used by your teacher in teaching you reading? (Explain)

School library

6. Do you have a school library? (Do you use it? If so, how?)
7. Do you have anything in general to share with me as far as reading is concerned?