

TEACHER PRACTICES FOR DEVELOPING ENGLISH
LANGUAGE SPEECH PROFICIENCY IN SELECTED
PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN ZOMBA DISTRICT

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TEACHER PRACTICES FOR DEVELOPING ENGLISH LANGUAGE SPEECH
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A Thesis

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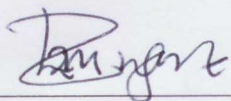
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DECLARATION

I the undersigned hereby declare that this thesis 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 acknowledgements have been made accordingly.

MARTIN LUCKY LIPENGA



Signature

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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

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DEDICATION

To my brother, Dr Allan Lipenga (Associate Professor), for supporting me in many ways. I appreciate your contribution towards my academic achievements.

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I would like to express my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Dr Foster Kholowa, for his total commitment right from the formulation of the topic to the entire period of my study. I found your guidance and supervision in the course of shaping my thesis extremely enriching. I am particularly very grateful for always being available whenever I needed your assistance. Surely, I will live to remember your support, pieces of advice, guidance and technical expertise given to me anytime throughout my study. God bless you abundantly.

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ABSTRACT

The level of spoken English of primary school learners in Malawi remains unsatisfactory despite various efforts to ensure that learners acquire and develop English language speech proficiency. This has raised major concerns from various stakeholders considering the fact that English is a key to further education and employment. This study therefore aimed at exploring teacher practices for developing English language speech proficiency. The study employed qualitative phenomenological design. Data for the study were collected using three data collection techniques namely, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and classroom observations. Social constructivist theory by Lev Vygotsky was used as the theoretical framework of the study.

The study found that the underlying causes of poor English language speech among primary school learners emanate from teacher practices which include use of translation method, drilling method, and reading aloud as some of the strategies for developing speech proficiency. Overall, the study revealed that primary school learners are not fully exposed to activities that facilitate the development of English language speech proficiency such as discussions, debates, role plays, interviews, storytelling and drama. Consequently, it was reported that learners have negative attitudes towards such teaching methods and strategies.

The findings of the study also revealed a number of challenges that contribute to the problem. Largely, these challenges are categorized into four broader areas including

challenges related to teachers; curriculum; education system, and learners. However, a number of ways that can reduce or resolve the problem of poor English language speech among primary school learners have been suggested including the use of direct method and language activities that facilitate the development of speech proficiency, introducing English speaking policy in primary schools, intensifying in-service training and consulting widely before developing the new curriculum. In addition, the study suggests the need to increase the number of teachers and provide enough teaching and learning materials in schools.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CBCC	Community Based Child Care
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
INSET	In-Service Education and Training
IPTE	Initial Primary Teacher Education
MASTEP	Malawi Special Teacher Education Programme
MIITEP	Malawi Integrated In-service Teacher Education Programme
ODL	Open Distance Learning
PCAR	Primary Curriculum Assessment Reform
PEA	Primary Education Advisor
SEED	South East Education Division
TALULAR	Teaching and Learning using Locally Available Resources
TTC	Teacher Training College

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Chapter Overview

The chapter lays the basis for the entire thesis. It first presents the background, primary school education in Malawi, Language policy in education (Stds 1-4) and the role of English in senior classes (Stds 5-8). The second part gives the statement of the problem, purpose of the study and significance of the study.

1.1 Background

Internationally, English is a widely used medium of communication for government, law, education, commerce and industry. Such being the case, Verghese (2005) observes that English deserves to be regarded as a world language since it is the world's most widely spoken language. Richards (1985) argues that in countries where English has these functions, it is usually referred to as second or official language. Likewise in Malawi, English is used for official communication and also as a medium of instruction in education, hence it is a second or official language. Basically, the knowledge of English language largely determines the sustenance of life. On the contrary, lack of English language knowledge translates into lack of opportunities for employment and further studies (Matiki, 2001). Kayambazinthu (1998) adds that proficiency in English is a determining factor for employment in Malawi. Essentially, Richards (2006) emphasizes that employers insist that their employees must be proficient in spoken English.

Larsen-Freeman (1986) asserts that language is primarily speech and the purpose of language learning is communication. Therefore, learning English language should focus on learning as a means of communication in the real and given situations (Robatjazi, 2008). Actually, Christie *et al* (2007) contend that the purpose of oral language learning is for communication. People should use English to communicate in their daily endeavors. Okombo (1999) notes that due to globalization, English is playing a decisive role within the global village. Since Malawi is within the global village, it is imperative that learners need to develop English language speech proficiency for effective communication. As Richards (2006) stresses, speech proficiency is essential for effective communication and more importantly, a prerequisite for success in today's world.

Language competencies, more especially speech skills, allow people to participate effectively in a variety of social events and occupational settings in our daily routines (Otto, 2006). Ulaş (2008) contends that speech is the most common and important means of providing communication among people in everyday interaction ranging from professional workplaces and educational to social contexts. Ideally, people use speech to convey information from one person to another, to entertain, argue and to consolidate political regimes (Schmidt and Richards, 1985). This implies that people need to develop speech proficiency for them to function successfully in a society that uses English as its official language.

In our Malawian context, English is used as a key subject for all examinations. Further to this, selection for further education, training and jobs requires a working command of English. A good example of the extent to which competence in spoken English is the main qualification for a lot of jobs is the requirement that parliamentary candidates must be competent in English since all debating in the Malawian parliament is in English. We hear and sometimes experience that those who cannot show that they have this qualification are required to take and pass an Oral English Proficiency examination to ensure that they meet this requirement (Matiki, 2001).

Thus, it is noteworthy that learners should be equipped with the command of English to enable them to express themselves in speech in a much greater variety of contexts (Verghese, 2005). To realize this goal, there is need to start molding the learners right from the primary school for them to develop English speech proficiency to effectively and proficiently communicate in different contexts. The reason is that primary school level is “crucial in children’s education because it is the foundation of the other school levels” (UNICEF, 1993 cited in Mmela, 2006, p. 4). Mhango (2004) contends that primary school education provides a fundamental base for further schooling, training and education. In essence, helping primary school learners develop English language speech proficiency lays a good foundation for further studies since English is vital for academic success.

1.2 Primary School Education in Malawi

Formal education system in Malawi constitutes primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Primary school education comprises 8 years of formal schooling, and is divided into three

sections which are infant classes (Standards 1-2), junior classes (Standards 3-4) and senior classes (Standards 5-8). Hauya (1993) cited in Mhango (2004) argued that primary education has two major purposes. Firstly, to produce a literate and numerate people that can deal with problems at home and at work, and secondly to serve as a foundation upon which further education is built. Substantially, English is introduced early in Standard 1 at primary school level as a subject to prepare learners since it is a key subject that determines academic success.

1.3 Language Policy in Education (Standards 1-4)

In Malawi, the language policy in education requires learners to be taught in local languages as media of instruction from Standards 1-4. The policy is based on the premise that learning through the mother tongue is the best form of education for the child in the early years of primary school education. It has been observed that school children learn better and faster if they are taught in their own mother tongue or vernacular language during the first four years of their formal education than when they are taught in a second or foreign language as a medium of instruction (Government of Malawi, 2007; Chauma *et al* 2007).

Research studies that have been conducted show that pupils learn better during the early years of their primary education when the medium of instruction is in the language which they speak at home (Andoh-Kumi 1999 cited in Chilora and Harris 2000). Basically, language development and literacy acquisition in young children is greatly facilitated when they are taught to speak, read, write and even count in their local language first

(Government of Malawi, 2007). To support this view, Schott (2005) in Chauma *et al* (2007) explains that using mother tongue in classroom improves the quality of communication and interaction since children are more active and participative during learning activities. Thus, language learning becomes more successful.

Generally, it is argued that both children and adults learn to speak, read and write a second or foreign language better after first becoming literate in their own mother tongue (Chauma *et al*, 2007). Thus, the advantage of using a mother tongue as a medium of instruction at an early age in schools helps to lay the child's foundation for the learning of another language later, in this case, English (Government of Malawi, 2007). Consequently, learners are expected to develop speech proficiency since there is transfer of language skills for the development of English language proficiency. Mchazime (2004) contends that the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the early years of primary education (Stds 1-4) enhances the acquisition of English and also improves learners' speech skills.

The rationale behind this language policy in education (Stds 1-4) is that providing education through the use of vernacular languages more especially in the early years of primary school (Stds 1-4) greatly facilitates the development of English language proficiency. In terms of speech proficiency, learners are expected to be fluent and proficient in spoken English considering the fact that the knowledge acquired in local languages assists in the development of English proficiency. Based on this argument, it can be explained that the use of mother tongue enormously supports the development of English language as claimed.

1.4 The role of English in senior classes (Standards 5-8)

In theory, English in senior classes (Std 5-8) is both a compulsory subject and the sole medium of classroom instruction in all the subjects except Chichewa. Further to this, among all the school subjects, English has more class periods per week than any other subject and is taught almost daily (Matiki, 2001). This suggests that learners have full exposure to the language and therefore their communicative competence ought to be high. However, the extent to which this is practically followed is debatable. Verghese (2005) argues that when learners are fully exposed to the language, it enables them to develop speech proficiency. Learners need to practice speech skills for them to communicate successfully. As McGregor (2002) rightly puts it, practice helps learners develop confidence which is an important factor for developing speech proficiency.

The primary goal of the Ministry of Education clearly states that by the end of eight year primary school course, every learner should have acquired the basic communication skills in spoken English and therefore be able to express ideas proficiently in a wide range of situations (Ministry of Education, 1991). In reality, nevertheless, this is rarely achieved (Mmela, 2006). Despite various efforts to develop English language speech proficiency, the general public has expressed with dismay a great dissatisfaction regarding the spoken English by primary school learners more especially those in the senior classes (Mhango, 2004). It has been observed by the general public that learners still lack what are considered basic communication skills, in particular, speech skills (The Daily Times, Friday, 10th July, 2009), and as a result they fail to communicate effectively in the spoken English.

Mmela (2006) indicates that primary school teachers in Malawi are vested with the responsibility to help learners develop speech proficiency. It is with this background in mind that this research study intends to explore the teacher practices for developing English language speech proficiency as a way of improving learners' proficiency in spoken English in Malawian primary schools. Furthermore, the study aims at identifying the challenges that contribute to low proficiency level in spoken English among primary school learners.

1.5 Statement of the problem

After spending eight years of primary education, it is expected that learners should acquire and develop English language speech proficiency to be able to communicate effectively and proficiently in different contexts. Besides, research evidence has shown that the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the early years of primary education facilitates the development of English language proficiency. With the existence of language policy in education for Stds 1-4, it is further anticipated that learners ought to be proficient in English since there is transfer of language skills from local language for the development of English language proficiency. However, in reality, it has been observed that primary school learners' achievement in spoken English is critically low (Mmela, 2006). In light of this, there is a general dissatisfaction with the way primary school learners communicate in spoken English.

It is disheartening to note that primary school learners can hardly communicate in spoken English and therefore less well prepared for further education since the requirements for further studies demand them to display the ability to comfortably communicate in spoken

English. Consequently, low level of spoken English therefore translates into lack of or limited opportunities for further studies. For this reason, exploring the teacher practices for developing English language speech proficiency at primary school level, which also happens to be the foundation for further educational levels could be one of the major means of dealing with the serious problem of poor spoken English by Malawian learners.

1.6 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to explore the teaching methods and strategies that are used in primary schools, more especially in senior classes (Stds 5-8) for the development of English language speech proficiency. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

- a. What are the teaching methods and strategies that teachers use to enhance English language speech proficiency?
- b. What attitudes do learners have towards teaching methods and strategies for developing English language speech proficiency?
- c. What are the overall challenges that contribute to low proficiency level in spoken English?
- d. How can the problem of low proficiency level in spoken English be resolved or reduced?

1.7 Significance of the study

This study is conducted not only to meet the academic requirements but also in the genuine belief that education planners and policy makers will take heed of the conclusive results. It is hoped that this study will go along way to widen our understanding as we attempt to solve the problem of decline in spoken English among primary school learners.

To the country as a whole, the study is particularly important because it will provide a new base for language experts, teachers and language teacher educators and give them an opportunity to reflect on their practices in an attempt to address the problem of deterioration in speech proficiency. Furthermore, the findings of the study will also be beneficial to the learners as they will be exposed to more opportunities by which they can improve their speech proficiency in English language.

In the context of continued decline in spoken English in the Malawian education system, this study will provide suggestions on how to develop English language speech proficiency to primary school learners with the intentions of building a proud nation that can communicate proficiently in spoken English. Finally, this study will also serve as a springboard for future studies on developing English language speech proficiency in Malawi and beyond.

1.8 Chapter summary

The chapter has given background of the study which has also laid the basis for the whole thesis. It has further discussed the primary school education in Malawi, language policy in education (Std 1-4) and the role of English in senior classes (Std 5-8). A statement of the problem has been provided followed by the purpose of the study which has given the outline of research questions that the study sought to explore accordingly. The chapter concludes by highlighting the significance of the study more especially to the field of language teaching and learning.

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CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of literature on developing English language speech proficiency. Literature on levels of speech proficiency and activities for developing English language speech proficiency was reviewed. A discussion on studies that have been conducted in second language acquisition was also part of the reviewed literature. The chapter ends with the explanation and application of the theoretical framework that guided the study.

2.1 Developing English language speech proficiency

According to Tiedt *et al* (2001), speech means the spoken form of language. On the other hand, Ellis (1985) defined proficiency as 'consisting of the learners' knowledge of the target language' (p. 302). Clark (1972) in Schmidt and Richards (1985) argues that proficiency is the learner's ability to use language for real-life purposes without regard to the manner in which that competence was acquired. In other words, the focus shifts from the classroom to the actual situation in which the language is used. Essentially, speech proficiency implies the ability to communicate effectively in real-life contexts using the target language (Stein, 1999). In the same vein, Lyu (2006) noted that the ultimate goal of learning a language is to be able to communicate proficiently in the target language.

In order to develop English language speech proficiency, learners need to be provided with a great deal of opportunities to communicate with others (Lyu, 2006). In simple terms, practice in spoken English is precisely what learners need to develop speech proficiency. In support of this view, McGregor (2002) observes that practice helps learners develop oral language skills and confidence which are important qualities in speech proficiency. Ellis (2008) rightly contends that the opportunity to interact in the second language is central to developing speech proficiency. Thus, through interactions, learners explore different situations and this greatly assists them to learn how to communicate proficiently in spoken English.

Bright and McGregor (1970) found out that learners have difficulties in speech simply because they have not been adequately exposed to speech skills in the classroom. Consequently, they are handicapped to communicate effectively and proficiently in real contexts. However, Mchazime (1989) suggests that the best method of teaching speech skills is to expose the learners to an environment where they can practice the language orally in real or acted situations. The school therefore should provide an environment for developing English language speech proficiency to provide learners with the opportunities to practice speech skills and interact with fellow learners and teachers (Stubbs, 1976). The interaction among learners facilitates the development of English language speech proficiency.

A study in Zambia revealed that although the school may seem to be the best language environment for developing English language speech proficiency, still learners have

difficulties to acquire oral proficiency (Wigzell, 1983). It was reported that this has its roots at primary school level for this level aims at laying a solid foundation for developing English language speech proficiency. Wigzell found that at this level, learners submissively imitate teachers' concepts, words, phrases and ideas without actually understanding them. Thus, very little communication takes place between the teacher and learners which eventually result in low levels of speech skills.

Ulaş (2008) noted that one of the important periods to develop speech skills is during primary education. Ulaş asserts that speech skills acquired and developed during primary education are significant with regard to both acquisition and permanence. This means that primary school level has to be taken seriously since this level is crucial for the development of learners' English language speech proficiency.

2.2 Speech proficiency levels

Overall, speech proficiency in second language is categorized into different levels. Harrington (2007) grouped English language proficiency into five levels which are pre-emergent level, emergent level, intermediate level, advanced level and fluent level. Figure 2.1 outlines the English language proficiency levels as presented by Harrington (2007).

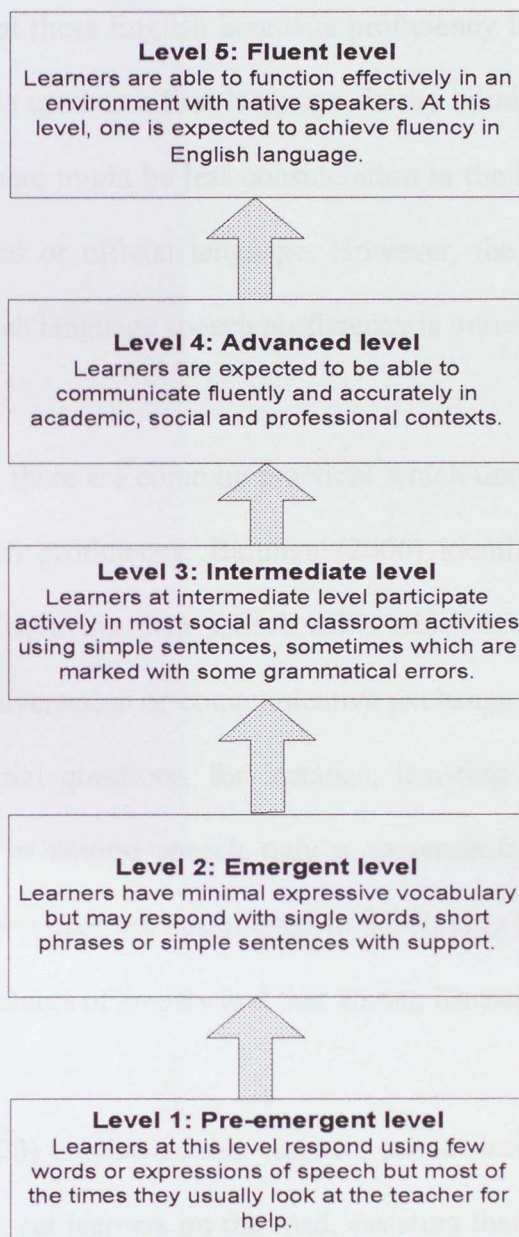


Figure 2.1: English language proficiency levels (Harrington, 2007).

It should be pointed out that these English language proficiency levels were developed in the context where English is used as a first language. In my opinion, this explains why in terms of its applicability, there might be less consideration in the Malawian context where English is used as a second or official language. However, the underlying principle as regards to developing English language speech proficiency is universal.

Literature has revealed that there are common practices which undermine the development of English language speech proficiency. Ballman (2006) identifies some practices that discourage learners from displaying their speech skills which include correcting students while in the middle of a conversation or communicative exchange. Further to this, is to ask more display than referential questions, for instance, insisting that learners answer in complete sentences when in natural speech only a sentence fragment would be used. Ballman argues that such practices are detrimental to developing English language speech skills as they may create feelings of anxiety and fear among learners.

Rivers and Temperley (1978) emphasize that teachers cannot learn the language for their learners, as such, they must set learners on the road, assisting them to practice and use the language freely and meaningfully. This implies that language teachers should assume the role of facilitators during learning activities to guide and encourage learners to practice oral English language. More importantly, Ballman (2006) proposes that when learners are involved in drama, storytelling and real-life activities, they are more willing to participate and take risks as they develop their oral proficiency. Ultimately, learners develop English language speech proficiency through practice.

In addition, Bright and McGregor (1970) observe that the majority of teachers still use reading aloud as their main weapon in the battle to develop and improve the learners' speech. They argued that this procedure is objectionable and cannot facilitate the development of English language speech proficiency since it provides a small amount of practice for a few individuals and bores everybody else. Furthermore, the learners' practice is random instead of specific as such nobody knows whether the next mistake will fall on an error of pronunciation, intonation or phrasing. Bright and McGregor conclude by arguing that the reading aloud approach cannot improve the learners' spoken English but rather facilitates their reading skills.

A study in Nigeria that was aimed at improving the quality of English language teaching in schools found that primary school teachers are responsible for poor standard of speech (Omodiaogbe, 1992). It was revealed that primary school teachers have the responsibility of laying a solid foundation in developing speech skills but failed to do so. Basically, the teacher's language is the principal model for the learners (Vergheze, 2005). Mchazime (1989) agrees that the success in language instruction depends on the quality of the model which teachers set for their learners. Similarly, Consolo (2006) states that if a language teacher's speech is frequently marked by errors, this can seriously interfere with the quality of input provided for the learners, hence low standard of speech.

Lyu (2006) considers comprehensible language input as one of the important components for developing speech skills. Lee and VanPatten (1995) illustrate the role of input in developing speech skills in a way that is easy to understand:

Input is to language acquisition what gas is to a car. An engine needs gas to run; without gas, the car would not move an inch. Likewise, input in language learning is what gets the 'engine' of acquisition going. Without it, acquisition simply doesn't happen (p. 38).

The point that Lee and VanPatten is trying to put forward is that input is an essential component of the process of developing English language speech proficiency. Klein (1986) cited in Lyu (2006) emphasizes that input should consist of speech and other information such as who is involved, when and where the interaction takes place and the presence of other objects in order to make speech development happen. The central argument is that learners must know that speech normally differs in formality, for instance, speaking to a classmate is quite different from speaking to a teacher or a shopkeeper.

Realistically, teachers do not stretch themselves to ensure that quality input is made for the development of English language speech proficiency. This according to Kuthemba-Mwale *et al* (2000), is partly due to the unqualified teachers who are teaching in most of the schools. As a result, these teachers have a lot of difficulties in trying to use the right methodologies required for the development of English language speech proficiency.

Motivation also plays an important role in developing speech proficiency. Gardner (1979), cited in Ellis (1987), indicates that motivation is the primary determinant for developing second language proficiency. He further argued that those who have high motivation attain a high proficiency in the language. Verghese (2005) emphasizes that motivation is a very significant factor in language learning, in particular speech development. However, Cao (2004) cited in Lyu (2006) differentiates between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic

motivation. According to Cao (2004), cited in Lyu (2006), intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable while extrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it leads to a specific outcome.

Therefore, teachers should strive to intrinsically motivate the learners for them to develop English language speech proficiency. In fact, Ellis (2008) stated that teachers have a lot of responsibilities to enhance the learners' intrinsic motivation for them to develop a high level of speech proficiency. Nevertheless, it seems important to raise the question of whether Malawian teachers are intrinsically motivated to motivate the learners. Deci and Ryan (1985, p. 34) cited in Lyu (2006, p. 24) argues that "when people are intrinsically motivated, they not only experience interest and enjoyment but also feel competent and self-determining." As such, Ellis (2008, p. 5) quoting Dornyei (2001, p. 26) notes that "the best motivational intervention is simply to improve the quality of our teaching". The arguments make sense considering the fact that intrinsically motivated learners usually have high chances of performing well.

2.3 Activities for developing English language speech proficiency

Tiedt *et al* (2001) identifies oral language activities that can be used to facilitate the development of speech skills. These activities include storytelling, pair and group work, dialogue, dramatization, debate, discussion and songs. Wray and Medwell (1991) observes that oral language activities that depict real life situations give learners the widest practices in spoken language by stimulating their interest in learning the language. In fact, Tiedt *et al* (2001) indicates that effective language teachers create a classroom environment that is

teeming with opportunities for exploratory talk to enable learners develop speech proficiency. The following is a description of some of the language activities that facilitate the development of speech proficiency.

2.3.1 Storytelling

Tiedt *et al* (2001) argues that storytelling is ideal for developing speech skills. They believe that through storytelling, learners are motivated as they communicate and share their experiences with others thereby developing speech proficiency. However, Tiedt *et al* suggests that teachers should provide varied modes that learners can choose from, for instance, drawing pictures or acting out stories considering the fact that not all learners are equally skilled at communicating their experiences and ideas through speech. Thus, all learners are given an equal opportunity to participate and share their experiences with the rest of the class.

2.3.2 Simulations

Jones (1982) cited in Lyu (2006) defines a simulation as reality of function in a simulated and structured environment. It is argued that the purpose of a simulation is to expose learners to a real-life situation where they have to deal with real issues. In simulation, learners are not asked to play or act out being someone else, for instance pretending or acting like a teacher or a nurse but rather doing the job of a teacher or a nurse. Actually, pretence or acting is strongly avoided. Through realistic experiences, learners gain confidence and develop speech skills when communicating with others in real situations

(Lyu, 2006). Lyu (2006, p. 26) quoting Jones (1983, p. 12) contends that it is not the “I’ve read it, so now I know it” type of confidence: It is the “I’ve done it, so I can do it” confidence. Therefore simulations provide an ideal environment for developing English language speech proficiency because learners constantly explore different situations.

2.3.3 Drama

Holden (1981) defines drama as a general term for all activities which involve the concepts of “let’s pretend”. It is strongly believed that drama is a favourable technique in aiding primary school learners to develop English language speech proficiency in the light of the fact that learners develop speech skills best by doing and experiencing (Ulaş, 2008). Young-Joo (n.d.) contends that drama-oriented activities provide an active technique by engaging learners into situations that require practice in oral communication. Further to this, Ulaş (2008) points out that drama is the ideal method for learners to develop self-confidence which is vital for oral communication. Holden (1981) adds, one of the values of drama is that it encourages learners to build up their own personal vocabulary of the language they are learning.

Nonetheless, child drama is not theatre but still it provides a medium through which the learner can express his or her ideas thereby develop and improve their speech proficiency (Bright and McGregor, 1970). Makita (1995) cited in Ulaş (2008) observes that drama activities are valuable techniques that encourage learners to participate actively in the learning process. In fact, Holden (1981) rightly notes that the whole purpose of drama activities is to bridge the gap between the classroom and the outside world. As such,

learners develop speech proficiency and gain confidence for effective communication in real-life situations.

2.3.4 Role Plays

Role-playing activities are valuable classroom techniques for developing speech proficiency as learners are given the opportunities to act out different roles in hypothetical situations and encourage them to respond with words and actions (Tiedt *et al* 2001). Lyu (2006) explains that role plays involve free speech and that learners are provided with opportunities to express themselves freely thereby developing their speech skills. Nevertheless, Ulaş (2008) singles out that in role-playing activities, teachers should create a supportive and enjoyable classroom environment to encourage and motivate learners to effectively use and practice the target language.

2.3.5 Discussion

Discussion is a perfect activity that offers plenty opportunities for learners to develop English language speech proficiency. This activity whether it is a whole class, pair or group discussion is ideal for developing speech skills because learners have chances to interact in the English language. It is argued that as learners use speech to learn about themselves and the world, they are better at telling their stories and eventually they are able to improve their oral communication skills (Tiedt *et al* 2001). Verghese (2005) indicates that language is best learnt through practice in real-life situations and that happens due to the close relation that exists between experience and expression.

2.3.6 Dialogues

Dialogues also provide opportunities to learners for abundant exposure to practice spoken English (Tiedt *et al* 2001). Littlewood (1981) states that language is a vehicle for social interaction and such being the case learners must be given the opportunities to practice and learn to communicate in social contexts. Verghese (2005) explains that dialogues on simple and contextualized situations can be used between pairs of learners but the teacher should control and guide the learners without necessarily curbing their freedom of expression. It is only through social interactions with significant people that learners learn speech acts through which the learner derives meaning (Schmidt and Richards, 1985). In this way, it gives them enough opportunities to practice oral language for speech development.

All the oral language activities that have been explained allude to the fact that the aspect of English language speech development requires intensive practice among the learners. Ur (1988) strongly observes that learners should be fully exposed to an environment where they can practice the language orally in acted or real-life situations to maximize their speech development. It should be emphasized that the list of oral language activities that have been explained is not exhaustive but rather those are just some of them that facilitate the development of English language speech proficiency.

In all fairness, most teachers know very well that the above mentioned language activities which are participatory in nature are crucial for the development of English language speech proficiency. However, there might be some constraints that hinder them from using the participatory methods during English lessons. These constraints could be large classes,

lack of enough teachers in most schools coupled with lack of enough teaching and learning materials. In addition, laziness on the part of teachers cannot be ruled out since participatory methods require good planning and that teachers should be resourceful.

2.4 Proficiency levels in the Malawi primary school English syllabus

The syllabus is the core of teaching and learning process. As such, a detailed analysis of the entire Malawi primary school English syllabus from Standards 1 to 8 was a key feature in this study as it provided a good basis for understanding the general subject expectations of English language. The researcher deliberately did this with the intention of having a clear picture of what the learners are expected to achieve as far as spoken English is concerned. However, the central focus of this study was the senior classes (Stds 5-8). Figure 2.2 summarizes the English language proficiency expectations at primary school level in Malawi, according to the primary school English syllabus.

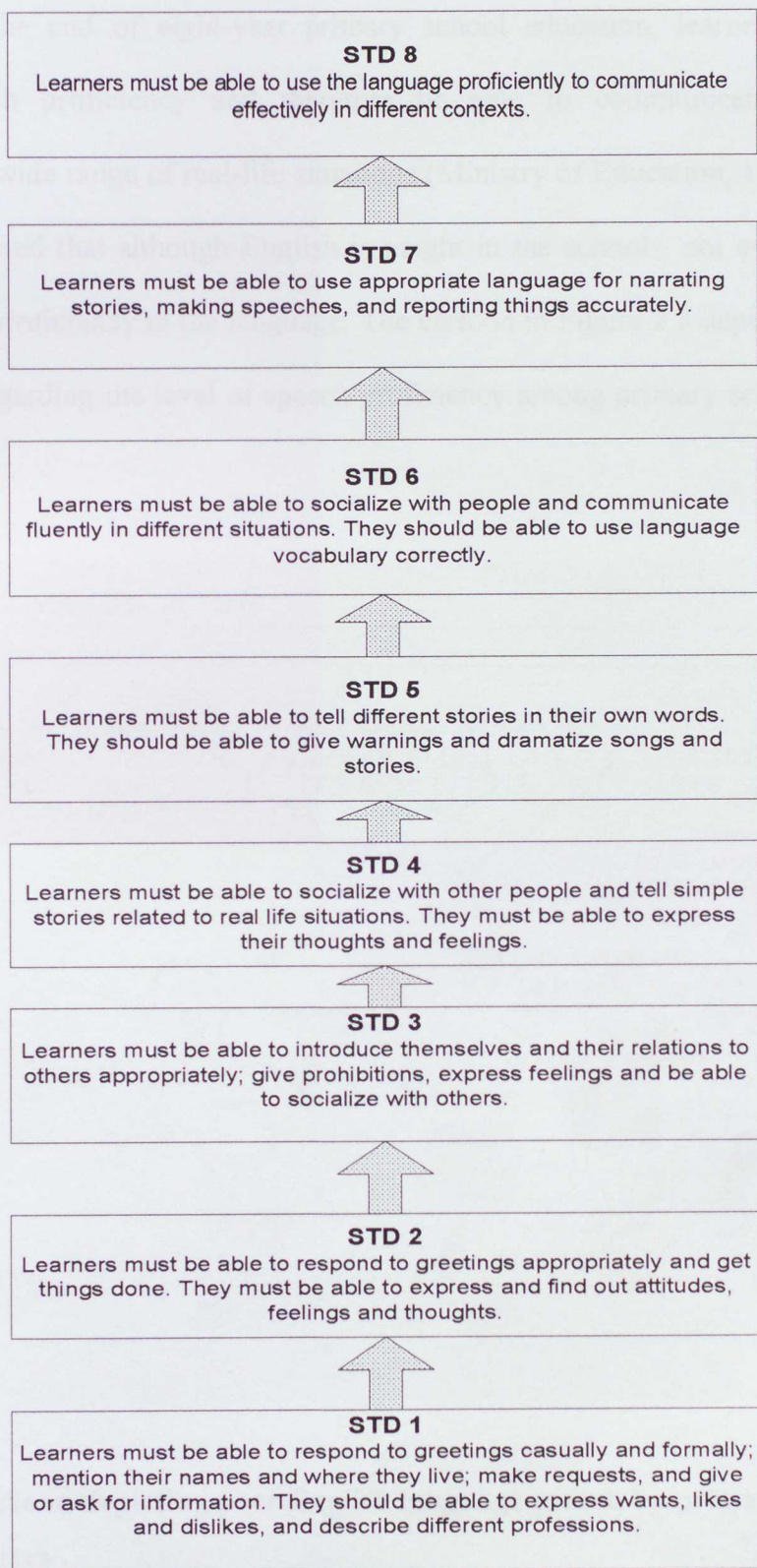


Figure 2.2: English language proficiency expectations from Stds 1-8

In general, by the end of eight-year primary school education, learners should have developed speech proficiency and therefore be able to communicate fluently and proficiently in a wide range of real-life situations (Ministry of Education, 1991). However, Matiki (2001) noted that although English is taught in the schools, not everyone has the required speech proficiency in the language. The cartoon in Figure 2.3 depicts the situation on the ground regarding the level of speech proficiency among primary school learners in Malawi.

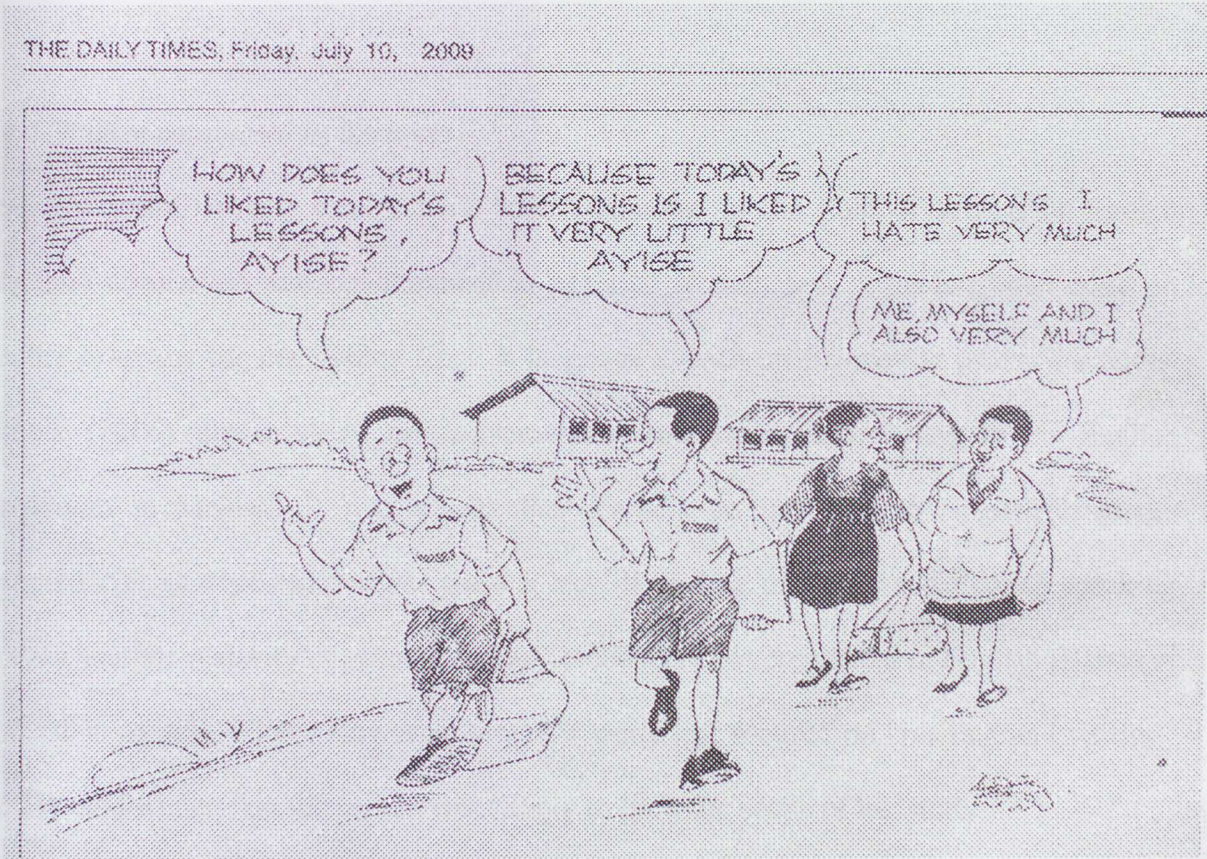


Figure 2.3: A cartoon depicting poor English language speech by primary school learners

This shows that there is a serious problem of spoken English among primary school learners in Malawi. As a matter of fact, poor speech as portrayed in Figure 2.3 is detrimental to oral communication because it destroys the whole communicative framework. Bilima (2004) adds that there are many annoying errors and mistakes that can be noticed in the quality of spoken English more especially in radio interviews and presentations, phone-in-programmes and even at work places in Malawi. This raises the argument that the quality of spoken English amongst learners in Malawi leaves a lot to be desired.

2.4.1 Studies conducted in Malawi

Over the years, several studies have been conducted in the field of second or foreign language acquisition and development in Malawi. Nonetheless, little has been done on teacher practices for developing English language speech proficiency in primary schools. Mmela (2006) did a study on Implementing Integrated Approaches in an English Classroom in Malawi. It was argued that learners do not achieve English language competencies as expected because there is lack of reading materials and English speaking models, and the majority of primary school teachers are not competent in English (Banda *et al* 2001 in Mmela, 2006). However, Mmela's study just focused on "reading and writing" (p. 21). She argued that the reason was simply to limit the scope of her study.

Lingao (2003) carried out a study on improving English language use in Malawian primary schools. The study found that a lot of primary school teachers are not qualified and consequently they fail to use the right teaching methods for learners to acquire the

language. It was revealed that learners have a negative attitude towards English language simply because teachers themselves do not converse in English. In light of this, learners opt to use Chichewa because it provides them with a sense of belonging. Furthermore, it was also reported that lack of parental encouragement has resulted in low use of spoken English since families do not provide enabling environment for learners to practice and use oral language. Nevertheless, the study focused on the attitude of learners towards English language and the influence of peers and parents on the learners' use of English.

In a comparative study investigating the teaching methods that are used in selected private and government primary schools in Zomba urban found that most learners from private primary schools are more fluent in English as compared to those learners from government primary schools (Mhango, 2004). It was revealed that generally, teachers from private primary schools use a variety of teaching and learning materials, for instance, pictures or charts for learners to develop stories as one way of practicing their oral language. On the other hand, the findings of the study showed that most teachers from government primary schools lacked commitment as it was discovered that they do not use a variety of teaching and learning materials. However, the study was comparative in nature contrary to the present one which focuses on exploring teacher practices for developing English language speech proficiency.

Another study by Kawale (2004) investigated the primary teachers' perception on the effectiveness of the current primary school English curriculum in developing pupils' oral communicative competence. The study found that teachers were not oriented in using the

current primary school English curriculum but the study does not give reasons as why teachers were not oriented. Consequently, this has negative impact on the delivery of English lessons since teachers fail to teach English effectively. The study further revealed that teachers have a negative attitude towards the curriculum because grammar is not clearly coming out. Nevertheless, the central focus of Kawale's study was the perception of teachers on the current primary school curriculum.

Despite several studies that have been carried out, little has been done on developing English language speech proficiency in primary schools. In a bid to fill into the existing knowledge gap, this study intended to explore teacher practices for developing English language speech proficiency in Malawian primary schools.

2.5 Theoretical framework

The study was guided by social constructivist theory by Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896-1934). This theory, which is also called social interactionist theory, states that through social interaction, learners expand their development of speech by relating what they already know to what they encounter in their environment (Ivic, 2000). In fact, the development of speech centres on the use of language for communicative purposes. According to Ivic (2000), the theory emphasizes that social interaction is the key to second or foreign language learning and that speech development is the result of social interaction between the learner's mental abilities and the linguistic environment. This interaction allows the learner to start learning and that learning in turn allows him or her to make progress in communication thereby developing their speech proficiency.

One essential principle in Vygotsky's theory is the existence of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Murray (1993) cited in Schütz (2004) explains that the ZPD is the difference between the learner's capacity to solve problems on his own, and his capacity to solve problems with assistance. Clearly, two levels are eminent from the ZPD. First is the actual level of development which refers to the level at which a learner can perform tasks independently without any assistance. The second level is the potential level of development where the learner can perform tasks with the assistance of more competent individuals (Schütz, 2004). The person in this scaffolding process providing comprehensive language assistance could be the teacher, parent, language instructor and peers (Vygotsky, 1978 cited in Yang and Wilson, 2006). Thus, scaffolding requires the teacher to provide learners with a wide range of opportunities to practice oral language and motivate them as they strive to develop speech proficiency.

The ZPD plays an important role in the process of language learning because this is where learners develop speech proficiency through socially mediated interaction (Wood, 2002). Schütz (2004) argues that learners learn the language by means of experiences that are gained through sharing activities with peers, teachers, parents or siblings. In essence, the ZPD captures the learner's cognitive skills that are in the process of maturing and can be accomplished only with the assistance of teachers (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>). Therefore, it is imperative that learners should be actively involved in a wide range of oral language activities that depict real-life situations to enhance the development of English language speech proficiency.

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2.6 Application of Vygotsky theory on developing English language speech proficiency

Social constructivist theory emphasizes that social interactions are crucial for developing English language speech proficiency. As such teachers must encourage social interaction among learners to maximize speech skills (Vygotsky, 1962). The idea of scaffolding is a fundamental concept in social constructivism. In its literal meaning, scaffolding is a support structure that is erected, for instance, around the building under construction. When the building is strong enough, the scaffolding can be removed and the building will still remain strong (Yang and Wilson, 2006). Basically, Jacobs (2001, p. 125) cited in Verenikina (n.d, p. 5) argues that the term scaffolding can be used as an umbrella metaphor to describe the way that “teachers or peers supply students with the tools they need in order to learn.” In other words, teachers need to set up tasks that challenge students to perform beyond their current capacity.

To enable learners develop speech proficiency, teachers need to provide support measures which make it possible for learners to perform activities inside and outside classes. Yang and Wilson (2006) argue that if the activities are not challenging enough, learners will be bored and possibly become unmotivated. However, if there is not enough support from teachers, learners may give up. Therefore, scaffolding allows learners to develop speech proficiency in their language learning. In relation to speech development, the scaffolding techniques can be provided in the form of dialogues, role plays, debates, quizzes, dramatizations and even creating the enabling environment to facilitate practice of spoken English to develop speech proficiency.

More emphasis is placed on social interaction (Vygotsky, 1962). This implies that teachers should provide opportunities to engage learners in authentic activities. Lyu (2006) argues that simulation for instance provides real communication as learners continually interact and negotiate meaning. Actually, Jones (1982, p. 9) cited in Lyu (2006, p. 22) contends that, "...a good simulation leads to more communication, ideas generate ideas, talk leads to thought, and thought leads to more talk." This also shows that learners can successfully acquire speech proficiency through scaffolding provided by other learners through interaction as they negotiate meaning in English language.

The role of the teacher is to provide guidance and support to the learners in the form of oral language activities in the classroom and to create an interactive environment even outside classrooms. Kristinsdottir (2001) cited in Schütz (2004) argues that of the many types of interactions that take place between the teacher and learners, Vygotsky emphasizes the language dialogue form as the most important tool that facilitates speech proficiency. Through this way, learners can have great chances to practice the language in a wide range of contexts for the development of English language speech proficiency.

The key issues emanating from the reviewed literature suggests that practicing English language orally through authentic activities is precisely what learners need to develop English language speech proficiency. Teachers should be there only to guide the learners during learning activities but everything should be done by the learners themselves for them to be fully exposed to spoken English. The other key issue is social interaction. Arguments from a social constructivist perspective view social interaction as central to

developing English language speech proficiency. Thus, teachers should encourage social interaction among learners in the target language to facilitate the development of English language speech proficiency.

2.7 Chapter summary

The chapter has reviewed literature from several authors that formed the basis of this study. It has been revealed from literature that poor spoken English among primary school learners is a complex problem and other countries are also experiencing it. The theoretical evidence reviewed however unveils that social interaction is key to the development of English language speech proficiency. The next chapter presents and discusses the methodology used in the study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter discusses the methodology that was used to arrive at the findings of the study. Specifically, the chapter describes the study area, data sources and data collection techniques. The chapter also describes data analysis methods, limitation and constraints that were encountered, trustworthiness of the study and ethical issues.

3.1 Research Design

The general approach that guided the study was qualitative since it was exploratory in nature, geared towards the development of English language speech proficiency. Creswell (1994) argues that a qualitative research is used to study research problems that are exploratory in nature. It is for this reason that the qualitative approach was suitable for this study because as rightly observed by Marshall and Rossman (2006), it is “pragmatic, interpretative and grounded in the lived experiences of people” (p. 2). Specifically, the study followed a phenomenological design. English and English (1958) cited in Cohen and Manion (1994) observe that “in its broadest meaning, phenomenology is a theoretical point of view that advocates the study of direct experience taken at face value; and one which sees behavior as determined by the phenomena of experience rather than by external, objective and physically described reality” (p. 29). This design was deliberately used to explore intensely the experiences of English teachers, PEAs and learners on teacher

practices for developing English language speech proficiency. Rossman and Rallis (2003) argue that in phenomenological study “the researcher seeks to understand the deeper meaning of a person’s experiences and how she articulates these experiences” (p. 97). Similarly, Merriam (1988) points out that “qualitative researchers are interested in meaning; how people make sense of their lives, what they experience, how they interpret these experiences and how they structure their social world” (p. 19). This approach therefore provided the data for this study since holistic description, explanation and interpretation were at the centre of the study.

3.2 Study area

The study was conducted in Zomba district. The district falls under South East Education Division (SEED) in the southern region of Malawi. SEED is an educational division in the Ministry of Education and comprises Zomba, Balaka, Machinga and Mangochi districts. Zomba district was deliberately chosen simply because the sampled primary schools were easily accessible to the researcher. Additionally, due to financial constraints, it was less costly on the part of the researcher.

3.3 Sample population

Zomba district is divided into urban and rural educational zones. There are 16 educational zones in Zomba rural and only two in Zomba urban. Out of the 16 zones from Zomba rural, two zones were randomly selected. For Zomba urban, the two zones were purposively included in the sample to make a total of four zones for the whole study. The researcher

chose four zones in order to have a wider understanding in terms of teacher practices for developing English language speech proficiency.

From the four selected educational zones, four primary schools, one from each zone, were selected using simple random procedure. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) argue that simple random sampling gives all the members of the population an equal chance of being selected. According to Mulusa (1995), “one of the simple methods used to pick a random sample is to write the names of all the people in the study on pieces of paper, place the pieces of paper in a basket, and pick one at a time, blindfold” (p. 97). In this study, names of the schools were written on pieces of paper and were picked. Considering what Fraenkel and Wallen argued, it was a deliberate attempt to make sure that all the schools have equal and independent chance of being chosen.

The four schools in the study were labeled A, B, C and D. Schools A and B were from Zomba urban while C and D were from Zomba rural. School A is found to the north of Zomba City whereas School B is to the west, along Chungalume road. School C is found to the north of Zomba, about one kilometer away from the main road to Lilongwe and School D is found to the south of Zomba. On the other hand, the four PEAs involved in the study were labeled W, X, Y and Z. The PEAs W, X and Y, Z were from urban and rural educational zones respectively.

3.4 Data sources and sampling procedures

The data sources included teachers of English language specifically from senior classes (Std 5-8), Primary Education Advisors (PEAs), and learners. In total, the study involved 8 language teachers, 4 PEAs and 144 learners. The English language teachers and PEAs were purposely selected. In purposive sampling, Cohen *et al* (2007) argue, “researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample based on the basis of their judgement of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought” (p. 114-115). It should be borne in mind that in purposive sampling, researchers do not simply study whoever is available but rather use their judgement to select a sample that they believe, based on their prior knowledge, is satisfactory to their specific needs and will provide the data they need (Creswell, 1998). Therefore, English language teachers were specifically chosen on the basis that they teach English subject in senior classes (Std 5-8). As for the PEAs, some of the reasons that were taken into account for choosing them were because they are responsible for supervision and teacher development.

On the other hand, learners were simple randomly selected from each class. Their names were written on pieces of paper, placed in a container and were picked whilst blindfolded (Mulusa, 1995). For each of the four primary schools, 36 learners were randomly selected from Std 5 to 8 which on average translated into 9 learners from each class.

3.5 Data collection period and techniques

This study was conducted for a period of 2 ¼ months during the second term of the Primary School Calendar in 2009/2010 academic year. Specifically, the actual data collection exercise commenced on 15th March, 2010 and ended on 13th May, 2010.

The study employed several techniques for collecting data from the participants. These were in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and classroom observations. In total, 12 in-depth interviews, 16 FGDs and 48 classroom observations were conducted. These data collection techniques and how they were used to collect the data are discussed in detail below.

3.5.1 In-depth interviews

Berg (1998) defines interview as “conversation with a purpose” (p. 57). According to Merriam (1988), the main purpose of an interview is to find out what is “in and on someone else’s mind” (p. 72). In this study, four in-depth interviews with PEAs and eight in-depth interviews with English language teachers were conducted. The aim was to gather data on the teaching methods and strategies that are used to develop English language speech proficiency. In addition, the interviews also focused on challenges that contribute to poor spoken English amongst primary school learners, and suggestions or ways that could be used to address the problem.

The guides for in-depth interviews were prepared to facilitate the course of the interviews (see Appendices 1 and 2). Patton (1990) explains that an interview guide is “a list of questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview” (p. 283). Patton contends that interview guide provides topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject. The major purpose of the guided interviews was to elicit the participants’ view and achieve uniformity (Rossman and Rallis, 2003). During the interviews, follow-up and probing questions were asked where necessary. This was mainly aimed at directing the course of the study and also to avoid digression to ensure a much more focused and detailed interviews. The reason was to allow the participants’ views and experiences to emerge on developing English language speech proficiency.

3.5.2 Focus group discussions (FGDs)

FGD was another technique that was used to collect data. Marshall and Rossman (1995) define focus group interviewing as a technique of getting oral information from a group generally consisting of 7 to 10 people although they can range as small as four and as large as 12. FGDs are ideal when one wants to investigate a particular situation, topic or phenomenon where discussion and the expression of differing opinions with the group lead to data and outcomes (Cohen *et al* 2007). Vaughan *et al* (1996) contend that FGDs are best used when conducting exploratory research in order to provide more clarification and confirmation on similar issues that the interviews and observations have experienced. The FGDs were ideal for gathering data from learners because they all had equal chances of participation. Marshall and Rossman (1995) observe that “when more than one person

participates (e.g. focus group interview), the interview process gathers a wide variety of information across a larger number of subjects than if there were fewer participants, the familiar trade-off between breadth and depth" (p. 80). The FGDs in this study centred on the teaching methods and strategies that English language teachers use for developing English language speech proficiency, and the learners' attitude towards those methods. Additionally, the discussions involved the challenges faced by learners that contribute to poor spoken English and suggestions that could be employed to resolve or reduce the problem of poor English language speech among primary school learners (see Appendix 3). At each of the four primary schools, four FGDs with learners were conducted. In total, 16 FGDs were conducted and each group had a minimum of 8 participants and a maximum of 10. The discussions were tape-recorded and later transcribed. Merriam (1988) explains that this practice ensures that everything said by the participants is preserved for analysis. In addition, field notes were written down where necessary to supplement the recorded discussions. Taking notes during interviews is recommended, as rightly argued by Merriam (1988, p. 81) that, "not everything said can be recorded." Great effort was made by the researcher to guide the course of the discussions to ensure equal participation and also to avoid vocal participants from dominating in the discussions for fair participation and contribution.

It is worthy mentioning that the in-depth interviews with English language teachers and PEAs, and FGDs with learners were all conducted in Chichewa. This was deliberately done after it was observed during the piloting stages that the participants had difficulties in spoken English. Therefore, the use of Chichewa proved successful since the participants

were able to express their views, experiences and opinions without any problems. This meant that the transcribed responses were later translated into English.

3.5.3 Direct observations

According to Marshall and Rossman (1995), observation entails “the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviours, and artifacts (objects) in the social setting chosen for the study” (p. 79). Rossman and Rallis (2003) point out that “observation is fundamental to all qualitative inquiry” (p. 194) because through observation, the researcher learns about actions and attaches meanings to those actions. Actually, the direct observations have unique strength of discovering complex interactions in natural social settings as such, they enable the researcher to gather data that often would be unavailable by other means (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). As Robson (2002, p. 310) cited in Cohen *et al* (2007) explains, “What people do may differ from what they say they do, and observation provides a reality check” (p. 398). This is because “it takes the researcher inside the setting and that it helps him or her discover complexity in social settings by being there” (Rossman and Rallis 2003 p. 194). The value of direct observations, as noted by Patton (1990), is that the researcher can learn about things that participants are unwilling to talk about in an interview.

The overall period for observation was the entire period of data collection. In total, 48 observations were made which means that 12 observations were conducted at each of the four primary schools. The central focus of the observations was the teaching methods and strategies used by English language teachers during English language lessons; the type of

language used by learners during learning activities and if they are able to interact using English language. Furthermore, it also included the approaches used by English language teachers, whether they were involving learners or not during English language lessons (see Appendix 4). During the classroom observations, the researcher assumed the role of a complete observer. Cohen *et al* (2007) argue that being a complete observer, the participants do not realize that they are being observed, as a result, they behave naturally. The events and behaviors were just noted and recorded in the writing pad. The classroom observation was essential since it supplemented the data that was obtained through in-depth interviews and FGDs.

3.6 Data analysis

Cohen *et al* (2007) define data analysis as, “making sense of data in terms of participants’ definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities” (p. 184). The collected data from in-depth interviews, FGDs and classroom observations were typed and duly edited. Merriam (1988) explains that, “developing categories, typologies, or themes involves looking for recurring regularities in the data” (p. 133). Similarly, in this study, outstanding themes and categories were identified and coded accordingly. This was achieved as the researcher was reading and re-reading the notes of the collected data. Further to this, the researcher listened to the recorded data where necessary.

Data analysis in this study was a continuous process and it started right from the first day of data collection. Rossman and Rallis (2003) state that data analysis is an on going process and that “throughout a study you are describing, analyzing and interpreting data...” (p.

271). Each day after the fieldwork of collecting data, great effort was made to organize the data and read over and over again to familiarize with them. Actually, the process of re-reading the data assisted the researcher to be familiar with the collected data (Rossman and Rallis, 2003). The themes and categories were integrated with the supporting data. Cohen *et al* (2007) argue that “qualitative research rapidly amasses huge amounts of data, and early analysis reduces the problem of data overload by selecting out significant features for future focus” (p. 184). In this study, early data analysis was a deliberate move by the researcher to avoid piling up of data which otherwise would be quite difficult to manage in the end after the completion of the whole data collection exercise.

Basically, the interpretations of the findings of the study were made and were accordingly supported by the related literature. Patton (2002) describes interpretation as attaching significance to what is found, making sense of findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions and making inferences.

3.7 Piloting of the study

Prior to the actual data collection exercise, a pilot study was conducted at Machinga L.E.A School in Machinga district. This school was ideal simply because the study targeted full primary schools (those with Stds 1-8). Blaxter *et al* (2001) explain that “piloting is the process whereby you try out the research techniques and methods which you have in mind, see how well they work in practice and, if necessary, modify your plans accordingly” (p. 135). It was revealed from the pilot study that the participants were not comfortable to be interviewed using English language. Consequently, the participants were unable to bring

out the needed data due to difficulties in spoken English. It is ironical that the researcher was interviewing English language teachers but interestingly all the interviews were done using Chichewa language when the researcher was exploring English proficiency. However, the piloting survey was vital as it helped the researcher to conduct the in-depth interviews and FGDs in Chichewa. In addition, the process was also equally essential in the sense that it assisted the researcher to re-phrase and modify the research tools in readiness for the actual data collection exercise.

3.8 Access negotiations

Before the commencement of data collection, a letter of introduction was sought from the Department of Educational Foundations at Chancellor College which was taken to the Ministry of Education through the Division Manager for the South East Education Division (SEED) for permission to collect data from primary schools (see Appendix 5). Homan (1991) argues that gaining access requires getting permissions from gatekeepers who control access to data and to human participants. The Division Manager for the SEED gave the researcher a permission letter to collect data from primary schools in Zomba district (see Appendix 6).

The letter from the Division Manager was taken to all the primary schools in Zomba district where the study was conducted before the actual data collection. All the sampled schools were visited in advance to meet the English language teachers and learners for interviews and focus group discussions respectively. This was a deliberate effort made by the researcher to ensure that all the participants were briefed on the purpose and importance

of the study. The reason was to make sure that all the participants voluntarily and willingly participate in the study.

3.9 Ethical issues

Neuman (2003) explains that ethically, it is believed that it is not enough to get permission from people; “they need to know what they are being asked to participate in so that they can make an informed decision” (p. 124). In a similar way, this study observed ethical issues in that participants were not forced to participate in the study. Equally important, all the participants were assured of maximum confidentiality and anonymity by not disclosing their names or identities to the researcher to secure the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity (Cohen *et al* 2007; Cohen and Manion, 1994).

In addition, the participants were guaranteed that their rights to privacy would not be violated in any way with reference to Section 21 of The Constitution of the Republic of Malawi, which stipulates that everyone has a right to privacy.

3.10 Trustworthiness of the study

The trustworthiness of the study was achieved through triangulation of data sources. Data for this study was collected from several data sources which were English teachers, PEAs and learners. According to Lacey and Luff (2001), triangulation means “gathering and analysing data from more than one source to gain a fuller perspective on the situation you are investigating” (p. 23). In addition, triangulation was also addressed through techniques

of data collection. This study employed several techniques for collecting data such as in-depth interviews, FGDs and direct observations. In support of this view, Rossman and Rallis (2003) also argued that triangulation involves collecting data from several data sources and methods to inform the same question or to strengthen the conclusion. In addition, to strengthen the trustworthiness of this study, the research tools were duly piloted prior to the actual data collection exercise. This process helped the researcher to make some improvements on the instruments.

Further to this, critical friends were directly involved throughout the study and were instrumental in both shaping and critiquing some ideas. Most of these critical friends were my fellow postgraduate students at Chancellor College and College Tutors from different Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs).

3.11 Limitations of the study

This study was conducted in four primary schools in Zomba district that is, two primary schools in the urban and rural settings respectively. Therefore, this entails that the findings of the study may not be generalized to the whole of Zomba district, SEED or the country of Malawi as a whole. However, the findings of the study can be simply generalized within the context of the participating schools.

3.12 Chapter Summary

The chapter has depicted the methodological framework that was used in the study. The general approach and data collection methods and how the data was analyzed have been included in the chapter. The limitations of the study have also been outlined. Furthermore, ethical issues and trustworthiness of the study which are vital for research have been highlighted as well.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study in relation to each research question. The findings are presented under the following categories: Teaching methods and strategies teachers use to enhance the development of English language speech proficiency; Learners' attitudes towards teaching methods and activities for developing English language speech proficiency; Challenges that contribute to low proficiency level in spoken English; and Suggestions or ways that could be used to improve the problem of low proficiency level in spoken English. The chapter first presents the level of spoken English of primary school learners before discussing the substantive findings of the study related to research questions.

4.1 Level of spoken English of primary school learners

One major issue that was repeatedly mentioned by the participants during the study was poor spoken English amongst primary school learners. All the participants in the study observed that the level of spoken English in primary schools is critically low. The following quotations represent the many similar comments that participants made:

Kuno ku pulaimale sukulu, ana sakutha kuyankhula chizungu ndipo ndimaonera m'kalasi mwanga. Ineyo m'kalasi mwangamo ana sakutha kuyankhula chizungu iyayi, amachitanso okha kundiuzwa kuti Madam, ife zimene mumaphunzitsa sitimamva komanso mukamatifunsa mafunso kuti tiziyankha m'chizungu ifeyo zimativuta, sitimatha kuti tiyankhe m'chizungu.

Ndiye ngati akumasuka kunena choncho ndiye kuti pali vuto lalikulu ndithu. Ndiyeno in general, ndinganene kuti English 'yi anawa ikuwavuta kwambiri kuti ayankhule.

(Here in primary schools, learners are unable to speak English. In my class, learners fail to speak English and they normally tell me themselves that: "We do not understand what you teach us. In fact, we have problems in speaking English and answering oral questions." So if learners are able to say that comfortably, it totally shows that there is a serious problem. In general, I would say that learners in primary schools have problems in spoken English). [Female English language teacher 7, April 9, 2010]

At the moment, spoken English in primary schools is poor, learners fail to speak and communicate in English¹. [PEA x, May 2, 2010]

uch sentiments reveal the existence of the problem of poor spoken English among learners in primary schools. Consequently, this has a negative impact on the performance of learners in class. It was learnt that learners perform poorly in English and other subjects that are taught in English. This finding is in agreement with Mmela (2006) who observed that primary school learners' achievement in spoken English is critically low. Overall, this seems to vindicate what the Ministry of Education (1995) found that the quality of primary school education in Malawi has been reported as miserably low and worse still, one of the least developed in Southern Africa.

he findings have revealed that the level of spoken English among primary school learners is generally poor confirming the existence of the problem. However, based on the analysis and observations throughout the study, it was established that most primary school learners are still under emergent level. This is the level where learners have minimal expressive

¹This is the only sentence that one PEA managed to come up with in English otherwise the rest of the interviews were done in Chichewa.

vocabulary but may respond with single words or sometimes simple sentences with support from the teacher (Harrington, 2007). The study has found that learners had difficulties to actively participate in classroom activities using English which suggests that they have not reached the intermediate level. This has implications on the learners especially when we consider the fact that English is a key to further education and employment.

4.2 Teaching methods and strategies teachers use to enhance the development of English language speech proficiency in primary schools.

As its first research question, the study sought to explore the teaching methods and strategies that teachers use to enhance the development of English language speech proficiency. This section will provide the findings in relation to teaching methods and strategies teachers use.

4. 2.1 Teaching methods and strategies

The study has found that generally English language teachers use translation method. Besides, it has established that some of the methods and activities used included group work, question and answer, demonstration and individual work. Additionally, it has also found that teachers use reading aloud as one of the strategies for developing English language speech proficiency. These teaching methods, activities, strategies and others that are used during English language lessons are discussed in detail in the following sections.

4.2.1.1 Translation method

The study has found that normally English language teachers use translation methods when teaching English. The following excerpts confirm this assertion:

Zimakhala kuti aphunzitsi akuphunzitsa English koma akuyiphunzitsa m'chichewa. Mawu okhawo a English'wo ndi amene amawatchula iwo m'chingerezi koma kwinako amanena m'chichewa. "Kodi mawu amene awawa, akutanthauza chani, amene awawa, 'accumulate'?" Ndani anganene? Ndiye aphunzitsi ambiri amakonda zimenezozo, they Chichewarize their English lessons.

(Teachers use Chichewa when teaching English. Only few words are mentioned in English for instance 'accumulate' but everything is taught in Chichewa. In fact, most teachers like that practice of translating their English lessons into Chichewa). **[Male English language teacher 3, March 26, 2010]**

...Inu, inu mukamamva kuti: "What is the meaning of this word?" Pamenepo simungamve iyayi? Akuti: "Liwuli tanthauzo lake ndi chani?" Ngakhale anawa anazolowera kuti mukamawerenga nkhani m'chizungu uyenera uziwathanthauzira word iliyonse, paragraph iliyonse komanso sentence iliyonse. Ngati mwina tsiku limenelo sutero ndiye akufunsa kuti: "Sir, pamenepo ndiye akuti chani?" Mwachitsanzo, Sumani became a millionaire. Pamenepo akuti: "Sumani analemera kukhala ndi chuma chankhani-nkhani."

(...When teaching English, teachers translate each and every word and even learners are used to that practice. If a teacher has not done that, learners normally ask the teacher to conform to the practice of translating word by word). **[Male English language teacher 8, April 16, 2010]**

Worse still, despite the fact that from Standards 5-8, all subjects are taught in English apart from Chichewa only, in-depth interviews with participants confirmed that most teachers use translation methods in other subjects like Sciences and Social Studies. An excerpt from one English language teacher explained in detail as follows:

Ma subject onse timayenera kuphunzitsa mu English kupatula Chichewa. Ndiye aphunzitsi akaona kuti ana samva zotsatira zake amangoti: "Iiii poti iyiyo si English koma ndi Science ndiye tizinena mu Chichewa, mawu okhawo tizinena mu English: Leroro tifuna tiwone zigawo za digestive system, iyiyi iyi, this is tongue...."

(All subjects are supposed to be taught in English except Chichewa. Nevertheless, teachers use Chichewa as a medium of instruction in subjects like Science with exceptions to very few words only). [Male English language teacher 5, April 16, 2010]

The problem of poor spoken English in primary schools is aggravated by teachers' practices of using translation method when teaching English and other subjects that are supposed to be taught in English. Some PEAs indicated that most teachers are used to their own practices of using translation method despite being advised against such practices. One PEA argued:

Tikachita observe lesson ija ikatha, timamuwuziratu m'phunzitsiyo kuti: "When you are teaching English, 100% communication in English, no matter kuti mwanayo sakumva. Ngati chinthucho chiri chofuna kutanthauzira, you can either use a real object or a gesture kuti anawo achite understand meaning.

(After lesson observation, we advise teachers to strictly use English as a medium of instruction, no matter what circumstances. We normally advise them that if something needs clarification, they can use either real objects or gestures to explain better). [PEA x, May 2, 2010]

The general consensus among teachers was that the use of translation method is a deliberate effort to make sure that there is total participation of learners during English lessons. It was learnt that learners remain quiet when teachers strictly use English as a medium of instruction. To counter-argue that reasoning, Larsen-Freeman (1986) strongly explains that translation method is not very effective in preparing learners develop English language speech proficiency and use it communicatively. Instead, learners should be fully exposed to the target language to develop English language speech proficiency.

4.2.1.2 Group work

From all the interviews that were conducted in this study including classroom observations, it was found that group work is commonly used by English language teachers. The reason behind this is that learners are fully involved in classroom activities and much work is done by the learners themselves. Thus, group work facilitates learning of language through social interaction. The following response represents the many similar comments that English language teachers made about group work:

Mukagwiritsa ntchito group work, ana amatengapo gawo lalikulu komanso m'magulu muja amamasukamo bwinobwino. Zotsatira zake anao amachita contribute, they become freely, they are able to contribute themselves. Amakhala kuti akumasuka pa gulu la anzizawo rather than kuti mwina mwake azingomvetsera kwa aphunzitsi.

(Learners take a greater part when group work is used and as a result, they become free and able to contribute rather than just listening to the teacher).

[Male English language teacher 5, April 1, 2010]

The teachers also felt that group work helps those learners who are shy to participate in learning activities, as such there is equal participation of learners and they all become active. Further comments were made by teachers about the relevance of group work in developing English language speech proficiency. One comment made by an English language teacher serves to emphasize the importance of group work and why they are commonly used by teachers:

Kufunika kwa group work ndikonena kuti pali ana ena omwe ali ma slow learners, ndiye ana amene akumva mwachangu kuchokera kwa aphunzitsi aja amawathandiza ma slow learners aja. Komanso pali ana ena omwe mwina sikuti ali fast kumva zinthu m'kalasi muja koma mwina anazimvapo pena pache, amatheka kuwathandiza anzawo pa gulu paja.

(The importance of group work is that those who are fast learners are able to help their fellow friends who are slow learners. Besides that, some learners can assist their friends in those groups not because they are fast learners but through their experiences). **[Male English language teacher 3, March 26, 2010]**

Conversely, the major problem that was noted in the study from classroom observations and interviews with participants was that learners use Chichewa when discussing in groups. This was also a concern for one English language teacher who made the following claim:

Vuto ndiloti anawo amakhala kuti akugwiritsa ntchito Chichewa kwambiri akamakambirana m'magulumo.

(The problem is that learners use Chichewa when discussing in those groups). [Male English language teacher 5, April 1, 2010]

Much as group work increases opportunities for practice in real communication, based on classroom observations, it was found that group work, when poorly utilized, is detrimental to the development of English language speech proficiency in two ways. Firstly, the study established that learners are put in large groups for instance 10 to 12 learners per group. As a result, there is a lot of noise-making and different forms of disturbances from learners which come about due to the large groups and failure by teachers to control them. Contrary, Davis (1999) observes that groups of between 4 and 6 learners work best and are recommended. This implies that groups larger than six are generally not recommended.

Secondly, the revelation among the teachers themselves that learners use Chichewa for discussions during group work defeats all the efforts to develop English language speech proficiency amongst primary school learners. Even if the group size is reduced as Davis (1999) argued, it cannot bear any positive results considering the fact that learners use Chichewa. However, in my opinion, learners cannot be blamed for using Chichewa but rather teachers should accept the blame. This is because based on the interviews, it was learnt that the teachers themselves are not proficient in spoken English that was why the interviews were conducted in Chichewa. One wonders whether it is logical to expect the

learners to strictly use English for discussions during group work when in ~~actual~~ fact their teachers cannot be interviewed in English. This has implications for the extent to which learners can use English during classroom activities.

4.2.1.3 Pair work

Interviews with English language teachers and PEAs revealed that teachers use pair work as one way of giving learners an opportunity to practice their oral language for the development of English language speech proficiency. One English language teacher explained in this way:

Njira ya pair work, anyamata aja timawapatsa ma roles oti achite, zimene zijanso zimathanso kuthandiza kuti mwana ujayo azichita build confidence makamaka ku nkhani ya kulankhula chizungu.

(For pair work, we give learners different roles which they are supposed to do. In so doing, it helps them to build their confidence which is essential for developing English language speech proficiency). [Male English language teacher 3, March 26, 2010]

Furthermore, another English language teacher emphasized the importance of pair work in this way:

Ndimona kuti pair work ndiyofunikira kwambiri chifukwa ana aja ngati akuyankhula awiri, zimatipangitsa ife aphunzitsi kudziwa kuti kodi anawa m'mene akuyankhuliramu ndi m'mene ifeyo timafunira? Ndiye kuti m'mene ana aja akuyankhulana timadziwa kuti iyayi, awawa sakuyenera kuyankhula chonchi koma akuyenera kulankhula mwakuti-mwakuti.

(Pair work is important in the sense that when learners are doing their roles, it helps the teacher to know if they are doing them correctly according to instructions. If things are done contrary then the teacher corrects them). [Female English language teacher 7, April 9, 2010]

Although one PEA stressed that pair work is one of the commonly used methodologies that English language teachers use during English language lessons, from classroom observations, the study found that pair work was rarely used by the teachers. Similarly,

participants in FGDs confirmed that English language teachers hardly use pair work during English language lessons. As put forward by one learner:

*Mwanthawi, aphunzitsi amatiuza kuti tizikhala awiri-awiri koma
sidzimachitika pafupi-pafupi ayi.*

(Teachers rarely use pair work during English lessons). [Learner, FGDs,
Sch. A, March 24, 2010]

The study has revealed that English language teachers use pair work only whenever they are being supervised by PEAs in order to impress them and at the same time to avoid being taken to task for not using learner-centred methods. It was learnt that sometimes teachers are sent out of the classrooms by PEAs and later punished for not using learner-centred methods. The fact that teachers use pair work during supervision only implies that learners are not seriously exposed to activities that facilitate the development of English language speech proficiency. As a result, this has a negative impact on their speech proficiency. There is need to put in place measures to force teachers to use participatory methods regardless of supervision. One way could be encouraging Headteachers to supervise teachers frequently during lessons, assuming that the Headteachers themselves have the competence to do so. However, even if pair work is employed during English lessons, it will still have little impact since learners would not stop doing the assigned roles using Chichewa.

4.2.1.4 Question and answer

The study has found that the question and answer method is favored by the majority of English language teachers. In most cases, English language lessons are highly dominated

by this method. Below is a statement made by one English language teacher admitting the dominance of using question and answer method:

...Ndisaname, njira yomwe imakhala ngati imagwira daily ndiye ndi question and answer chifukwa chakuchuluka kwa ana, m'makalasimu ndimodzaza. Ndiye njira monga group work imapangidwa koma kawiri-kawiri njira imene imagwira kwambiri ndi question and answer.

(...Honestly the only method that teachers use and work on daily basis is question and answer due to large classes. Of course teachers use other methods like group work but the only method that teachers use quite often is question and answer). [Female English language teacher 2, March 22, 2010]

Besides that, it was also found that English language teachers use question and answer method as an assessment tool for them to know whether the lesson has been understood by the learners or not. For instance, one English language teacher said:

Tiri ndi method ya question and answer imene timatha kuwafunsa ana aja, mmm kufuna kudziwa kuti kodi zimene takambirana kapena taphunzitsa ana aja amva kapena ayi.

(Question and answer method helps teachers to know whether the lesson has been successful or not). [Female English language teacher 7, April 9, 2010]

The dominance of question and answer technique during English lessons implies that learners are not given enough opportunities to interact and communicate in spoken English. This implies that teachers do not encourage social interactions among learners, contrary to social constructivist theory. According to social constructivist theory, social interactions are central to developing English language speech proficiency among learners (Vygotsky, 1962). It can be argued therefore that lack of interactions among learners has implications on speech proficiency. Much as it is a fact that teachers are handling huge classes, on the other hand, it shows that most teachers do not stretch themselves to creatively make efforts to use other teaching methods during English language lessons.

4.2.1.5 Demonstration

It was reported that English language teachers use demonstration method during English language lessons. Participants in the study revealed that demonstration method is used as a way of setting the pace to enable learners see what exactly they are required to do at that particular lesson in that particular activity. The teacher demonstrates first so that learners should see what they are supposed to do. One English language teacher elaborated this as follows:

Demonstration *ndiyofunika chifukwa choti sitimangofikira ana aja kuwapatsa activity ayi pokhapokha timayamba kaye tachita demonstrate. Kusonyeza kuti timayamba kaye tawonetsa eti kuti ana aja awonelere. After kuonera kujano ndiye kenako timauza kuti ana ajano apangenso kaya in pairs cholinga chokuti apange zimene tawonetsa zija...*

(Demonstration method is important in the sense that we (teachers) do not just engage learners in activities but rather we (teachers) demonstrate first before involving the learners. Thereafter, we (teachers) ask the learners to showcase as it has been demonstrated). **[Female English language teacher 7, April 9, 2010]**

When the teachers were asked the importance of demonstration method in developing English language speech proficiency, one English language teacher puts the usefulness of the method as explained below:

Ine ndimaona kuti exercise imeneyi ndiyabwino chifukwa mwana uja payekha samayiwalira ayi, eeee chifukwa choti wachita yekha.

(Demonstration method is important simply because learners do not easily forget what they have demonstrated. The reason is that they were directly involved in the activities). **[Female English language teacher 6, April 1, 2010]**

This response alludes to the fact that when learners are involved in activities, they hardly forget. Nevertheless, one PEA expressed a great concern regarding the way teachers use demonstration method during English lessons. This was the concern for the PEA who said:

Vuto la aphunzitsi ndiloti amangochita ka demonstration kamodzi kokha, 2 minutes yokha basi instead of having several demonstrations kuti anawo awonelere bwinobwino.

(The problem with English teachers is that demonstration is done only once, worse still, within two minutes instead of having several demonstrations for learners to have ample time for practice). [PEA, May 2, 2010]

The sentiment made by the PEA above confirms one of the major shortcomings of the majority of English language teachers. Most teachers have the tendency of doing things just in passing forgetting that some learners would need more time for practice. Eventually, learners end up achieving low levels of speech since they are deprived of the opportunity to practice English language orally during English language lessons.

4.2.1.6 Drilling method

English language teachers emphasized that they regard drilling method as effective in assisting learners acquire English language speech proficiency. One English language teacher firmly explained below:

Ndimakonda drilling method. Ndimakonda kubwereza, bwereza, bwereza. Ndiye drilling method imathandiza ana aja kuti aloweze, chifukwa amakhala alowezeratu.

(I like drilling method. I like repeating whatever I am teaching for several times and this practice encourages memorization since they memorize whatever is taught). [Male English language teacher 8, April 16, 2010]

The teacher's response above testifies that learners are not given enough time for practice as the method is largely teacher-centred. This supports the finding by Stuart and Kunje (2000) who reported that teachers in Malawi normally use teacher-centred methods since they believe that they are both the custodians and masters of knowledge and the learners as receivers. Therefore, it can be deduced that learners have little or no time to practice oral

English language since much of the lesson time is used by the teachers themselves. It can be argued that probably the problem of poor English language proficiency among primary school learners is influenced by teachers' practices for not encouraging interactions. As argued earlier on, this is against the principles of social constructivism (Ivic, 2000).

4.2.1.7 Individual work

Interviews with English language teachers established that English language lessons would be incomplete without giving the learners an individual work. As remarked by one English language teacher:

...Individual work *ndimayikonda, ndikawaphunzitsa, phunzitsa ndimawapatsa ntchito yoti tsopano ndimuone katakwe ndani. Ndipo (njira) imeneyinso ndimayilimbikira kwambiri. Izi zimapangitsa kuti m'kalasimo mukhale mpikitsano kwambiri kuti ine ndimupose m'nzangayu ndiye ana aja amalimbikira.*

(...I like individual work. After I have taught the learners, I always give them individual tasks to do and I do that quite often. This encourages competition amongst learners as they strive to score higher than their friends). [Male English language teacher 8, April 16, 2010]

Although the teacher believes that individual work encourages competition amongst learners, on the contrary, the learners do not have opportunities to interact with each other in the target language. Thus, denying them chances to practice spoken English. In the end, it has implications on the speech proficiency implying that learners cannot develop English language proficiency.

4.2.1.8 Dialogue, role play and debate

Most English language teachers that were interviewed claimed that they use dialogue, role play and debate during English language lessons. However, based on classroom

observations in all the schools, the study found that English language teachers hardly use any of them during English language lessons. Similarly, participants in FGDs confirmed that dialogue, role play and debate are rarely used by English language teachers during English language lessons. As put forward by one student:

Ifeyo chiyambireni role play aphunzitsi anachitapo kamodzi kokha basi koma dialogue ndi debate ndiye sitinayambe tachitapo ayi, aphunzitsi sanatipangitsepo.

(Ever since we started, role play was done only once but as for the dialogue and debate then we have never ever done that before). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. C, April 12, 2010]

It was learnt that English language teachers do not use different varieties of teaching methods during English language lessons. Most English language teachers have the tendency of always using the same methods. For instance, one English language teacher commented about it and is quoted below:

Ma method amu English ndi ambiri koma aphunzitsi ambiri mwina ena ngakhale chiyambireni uphunzitsi, pali njira zina sanadzigwiritsepo ntchito. Aphunzitsi ambiri akamaphunzitsa, amangogwiritsa ntchito njira yomweyo-mweyo tsiku ndi tsiku, sanasintheko ndikugwiritsa ntchito njira ina ayi.

(In English, there are several methods of teaching. However, most English teachers have never used other methods since joining teaching professional. Most teachers use the very same teaching methods each and every day and they have never tried other methods). [Male English language teacher 8, April 16, 2010]

All this shows that most English language teachers do not have the desire to learn and use other new teaching methods. Similar finding was reported in Mmela (2006) that lack of interest for learning new teaching methods is common to most primary school teachers. In general, one comment made by the PEA serves to vindicate what the teacher above explained:

The commonly used methodologies *zimene timazona kwa aphunzitsi* its like group work, pair work *imatha kukhalapo* then *amachita* demonstration *imene ndikunena kuti* it may be one demonstration only, *pamene zimafunika kuti akachita* demonstrate, *pabwerenso magulu ena adzachite* demonstrate *kuti ana ena aja awonere*.

(The frequently used teaching methods by English teachers are group work, sometimes pair work, and demonstration which are partially and hastily done). [PEA x, May 2, 2010]

This calls for English language teachers to start using learning activities such as dialogues, role plays and debates for learners to be exposed to English language. This is in agreement to what Vygotsky sees social interaction as a vehicle for learners to share their expertise with others (Kauchak and Eggen, 2007). As the learners exchange their experiences, views or thoughts, they refine their language thereby developing English language speech proficiency in the process.

4.2.1.9 Reading aloud

Reading aloud is one of the strategies mentioned by English language teachers for developing English language speech proficiency. Teachers believe that when learners are reading aloud, it gives them an opportunity to practice English language and at the same time develop speech proficiency. One English language teacher explained it this way:

Aphunzitsi ambiri amachita emphasize reading aloud, *ana aja aziwerenga*. *Ndiye limenelonso ndi vuto lalikulu ndipo limenelo ndi lalikulu kweni-kweni choncho ana aja ngati sakutha kuyankhula chizungu timawatenga ngati opanda nzeru koma vuto liri la ifeyo aphunzitsi chifukwa* we emphasize on reading aloud.

(Most English teachers emphasize reading aloud. That is a major problem by most English teachers and it is a serious problem. As a result, learners are considered as dull yet the problem originates from English teachers themselves for using reading aloud as one way of developing English language speech proficiency). [Male English language teacher 5, April 16, 2010]

A similar observation was made by the PEA who had this to say:

Tikapita m'masukulu, aphunzitsi throughout amangokhalira reading, reading, reading, basi kumangoti reading.

(During supervision, what we normally see is that English teachers always use reading aloud as a strategy for assisting learners acquire English language). [PEA z, May 5, 2010]

The general belief among teachers is that reading aloud facilitates the development of English language speech proficiency. The teachers' understanding was that reading aloud improves the learners' abilities to develop speech proficiency. These findings are similar to what Bright and McGregor (1970) observe that the majority of English language teachers still use reading aloud as their main weapon to develop the learners' English language speech proficiency. They argue that this strategy only provides a small amount of practice to a few individuals and bores others. This is also what Riddell (2003) reports that a reading aloud lesson could be very boring and that some students feel pressured either as they are reading or as they wait for their turn.

When the researcher asked the English language teachers what exactly happens after they have taught but still find that learners have difficulties in spoken English, it was observed that generally teachers do not care whether learners are able to practice and speak English language or not. One English language teacher justified this as follows:

...Chifukwa cha kuchuluka kwa ana m'makalasimu, tikaphunzitsa basino timangoti: "Taphunzitsa, amene wamva, wamva; amene sanamve basi zake izo, sanamve..."

(Due to large classes, we do not mind whether learners have understood and acquired the English language or not, provided we have taught). [Female English language teacher 7, April 9, 2010]

The teacher's comment above clearly confirms that most English language teachers are doing little in helping primary school learners develop English language speech proficiency. This has negative implications on the extent to which learners develop speech proficiency. Similarly, one PEA observed that the problem of low proficiency level in spoken English among primary school learners to some extent emanates from teachers' practices. This is what the PEA explained:

Aphunzitsi sakuwathandiza anawa moyenelera kuti azitha kuyankhula chizungu. Vuto ndiloti aphunzitsiwo amangophunzitsa kuti iiiii bola ndabwera ndikwanilitse tsikulo. That is why ana m'mene analiri Std 5 alinso chimodzimodzi ku Std 8; m'mene analiri mu January alinso chimodzi mpakana pano.

(English teachers do not effectively assist learners to acquire speech skills for spoken communication. The problem is that English teachers just come and teach as a habit not necessarily to help learners. That is why you would find that the learners have not achieved anything in as far as spoken English is concerned. The way they were in Std 5 is the same way they are in Std 8 now. Similarly, the way they were in January it's the same way they are now, at the moment). [PEA y, May 4, 2010]

It is frustrating to notice that most primary school English language teachers do not care whether learners are able to speak English language or not. This agrees with what Omodiaogbe (1992) found in Nigeria that primary school English language teachers are responsible for poor quality of spoken English. As a matter of fact, it is the responsibility of English language teachers to ensure that learners have acquired and developed English language speech proficiency. While to some extent such a claim may be true, it is important to consider other contextual constraints such as large classes, lack of enough teachers, and lack of instructional materials which can contribute to poor spoken English among primary school learners.

On the overall, and in terms of teaching methods, the findings of the study indicate that teachers generally use translation method during English language lessons. Teachers also use drilling method and reading aloud as some of the strategies for developing English language speech proficiency. Such methods have little or no impact in helping learners acquire speech skills. In addition, the study found that teachers quite often use question and answer technique and individual exercises. Group work is used during English language lessons but it was learnt that it was not properly organized and monitored. The study further found that pair work, dialogue, role play and debate are rarely used by teachers during English language lessons. It can therefore be argued that learners are likely to acquire low levels of speech since they are not fully exposed to activities that facilitate the development of English language speech proficiency.

4.2.2 Teaching and learning materials

The study further sought to find out the teaching and learning materials that English language teachers use in English language lessons since they also play a vital role for the development of English language speech proficiency. It found that learners' books are commonly used as the sole teaching and learning materials in all the schools that were involved. Although charts are readily available in schools, it was found that they are rarely used by English language teachers. Additionally, it was also found that language teachers hardly use real objects during English language lessons.

4.2.2.1 Learners' book

Generally, the study has found that the teaching and learning materials that English language teachers use during English language lessons are the English learners' books. One language teacher confirmed that normally English language teachers use learners' books as the only teaching and learning materials. The following excerpt confirms this assertion:

M'kalasi ya English kwambiri ma resource amene ndimagwiritsa ntchito kwambiri ndi ma learners' books amene alinawo anawo.

(Almost always I normally use the learners' books as my teaching and learning materials during English lessons). [**Female English language teacher 4, March 30, 2010**]

When the researcher asked the English language teachers the reasons why they always use learners' books as the only teaching and learning materials, one language teacher firmly elaborated this as follows:

Mabukhuwo kumbali ya ineyo ndi amene amapezeka. Ndinene kuti ndi amene amapezeka, eyaaa. Amatilembera zambiri m'mabukhu muja zoyenera kutibe tigwiritse ntchito ku phunziro limeneli koma zimakhala zoti sitingathe kuzipeza. Ndiye zimakhala za simple amakhala mabukhuwo.

(As for me, I normally use the learners' books simply because they are readily available. So many teaching and learning materials have been suggested in the Teacher's guides to be used during English lessons but we cannot manage to find them, that is why I always use the learners' books since they are easily accessible). [**Female English language teacher 7, April 9, 2010**]

On the other hand, one English language teacher defended the tendency of teachers of using the learners' books as the sole teaching and learning materials during English language lessons. He emphasized the importance of using the learners' books in this way:

Mabukhu ndi ofunika kwambiri chifukwa mwana uja tikamuza, akapita ku nyumba amathanso kumakawerenga ndiye bukhulo limakhala ngati ndi chida kapena mfuti ya mwana imene amakhala nayo nthawi zonse.

(Learners' books are important because learners can use them even at their homes. As a matter of fact, the learners' books are like a weapon or a gun to

the learners since they are always with them). **[Male English language teacher 8, April 16, 2010]**

Despite the fact that some learners are given the books to take them home for practice since they are inadequate, such sentiments confirm that teachers do not explore and try to use other teaching and learning materials. Similarly, a study conducted in the primary schools of Malawi by Kadzamira and Chibwana (1999) found that teachers relied on learners' textbooks to prepare lessons. This shows lack of creativity on the part of teachers which may negatively affect the learners as they strive to develop English language speech proficiency.

4.2.2.2 Charts

Although charts are readily available in primary schools, the study found that English language teachers rarely use them during English language lessons except on special occasions. Participants in the FGDs revealed that English language teachers seldom use charts in classrooms. One learner explained:

Nthawi zina aphunzitsi amatha kugwiritsa ntchito monga chart, amalemba zinthu pamenepo ndikumata pa bolodi kapena pa khoma komano sidzimachitika kawiri-kawiri ayi.

(Occasionally, English teachers use charts during English lessons and they paste them on the chalkboard or on the wall but not quite often). **[Learner, FGDs, Sch. A, March 25, 2010]**

The researcher then further asked the English language teachers to explain on what special occasions are the charts used during English language lessons and what prompts them to do so. One English teacher honestly explained as below:

Tikati tinene zoon, kweni-kweni ma chart'wa timawagwiritsa ntchito akakhala kuti ma PEA abwera kudzachita supervision chifukwa ngati iweyo sugwiritsa ntchito chart pa lesson yako ndiye kuti wapalamula, zikuvuta.

Ndiye akakhala PEA wina, amatha kukutulutsa m'kalasimo kuti ukatenge chart. Koma kunena zoon, panopa ndiye "teaching ndi cheating". Timangochita kuti tiwasangalatse ma PEA.

(To be honest, we (teachers) use charts only when PEAs have come for supervision. The reason being that if the teacher does not bring a chart into the classroom, then he/she is asking for trouble. Other PEAs can even send you out of the classroom to go and bring the chart. Honestly, **"teaching is cheating these days"** because we (teachers) normally do such things just to impress the PEAs and make them happy when in actual fact that is not what we normally do). [Male English language teacher 1, March 22, 2010]

The revelation made by the teachers themselves that **"teaching is cheating these days"** can be one of the contributing factors to poor English language proficiency. This finding seems to raise an argument that there is lack of professionalism among some teachers which has implications on learners. For instance, a study by Mmela (2006) explains that primary school teachers in Malawi are vested with the responsibility to assist learners acquire English language speech proficiency. Therefore, it can be deduced that the English language teachers themselves are contributors to poor English language speech in primary schools. This goes back to what Omodiaogbe (1992) found in Nigeria that primary school English language teachers are responsible for poor quality of spoken English.

However, it was reported that schools are not frequently supervised by PEAs and as a result, teachers are tempted to sit back and relax since they know that there is no one to monitor them. Worse still, it was learnt that the kind of relationship between PEAs and teachers is that of boss and servant. As such, teachers do not get the required professional support. This finding agrees with the study by Saiwa (2008) who found that some teachers are fearful of the PEAs which inhibits them from seeking professional pieces of advice.

The fact that teachers are sometimes not supported by PEA may mean that developing English language speech proficiency may not be maximally achieved.

4.2.2.3 Real objects

Similarly, the study has established that English language teachers again hardly use real objects when teaching English. Although the situation is like that on the ground, it was interesting to learn from most English language teachers that were involved in this study that they all indisputably appreciate the fact that real objects motivate the learners in their learning. More importantly, real objects also assist to explain things, concepts and ideas more clearly for the betterment of the learners' understanding and practice. An excerpt from one English language teacher explained that:

Kufunika kwa ma real objects ndikoti ana aja amanena kuti amamva bwino chinthu akamachiona osati kumangokamba kokha ayi. Ndiye mwana amamva bwino chinthu akamachiona, akamachigwira, akamachinunkhiza amamva bwino, amatha kuchita practice mosavuta.

(The importance of using real objects during English lessons is that learners easily understand things that are being taught rather than just explaining to them. Thus, learners do understand the concepts much better when they are experiencing, touching and sensing the real objects. As a result, it gives them an opportunity to practice easily). **[Female English language teacher 2, March 22, 2010]**

Despite such sentiments, it was pointed out by another English language teacher that the problem of poor spoken English among primary school learners is greatly aggravated by English teachers' practices of not using a variety of teaching and learning materials that motivate and facilitate the acquisition and development of English language. This was the concern for the English language teacher as argued.

Vuto lalikulu ndiloti aphunzitsi ambiri alibe chizolowezi chomabweretsa zinthu zosiyanasiyana zoti aphunzitsire kuti ana aja athe kumva bwinobwino. Iwowo amangozitenga zinthu for granted ndiyenso ndi chifukwa chake tiri ndi vuto loti anawa sakutha kuyankhula chizungu chifukwa akati aphunzitsa ndiye iwowo kumangokhalira kuyimba nthawi zonse, basi iwo kumangolongolora okha m'kalasimo.

(The major problem is that most English teachers do not use different teaching and learning materials during English lessons. They just take things for granted and probably that is why we are having the problem of poor spoken English among learners in primary schools. Most English teachers are used to talking because to them if they are not talking then they are not teaching). [Male English language teacher 5, April 1, 2010]

Worse still, the study also found that sometimes some English language teachers do not bring anything to class during English language lessons apart from pieces of chalk. Most participants in the FGDs complained that:

...Nthawi ya English ndiye aphunzitsi samabweretsa china chirichonse ayi, amangogwiritsa ntchito bolodi basi. Samabweretsa zima chart zina ziri zonse ayi.

(...Some English teachers do not bring any teaching and learning material at all, they just use the chalkboard. They have never brought any chart into the classroom). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. B, March 31, 2010]

In theory, teachers know the importance of real objects in developing English language speech proficiency but to put them into practice becomes a problem. Perhaps, this raises the question of the extent to which these teachers were trained. It is even more complicated when one realizes that the majority of teachers seem not to be motivated to use real objects during English language lessons. Generally, the study found that most primary school English language teachers only depend on Teacher's Guide and learners' books as their sole teaching and learning materials. This finding corresponds to a study conducted by Mmela (2006) who reported that primary school teachers just focus on Teacher's guide and learners' books only during English language lessons. Of course teachers acknowledged the significance of real objects, however, they have to be motivated for them to apply the

theory into practice. It can be suggested that PEAs should frequently organize zonal and school-based insets to encourage and motivate teachers to use a variety of teaching and learning materials. In fact, language teachers need more professional support to creatively and maximally assist primary school learners to develop English language speech proficiency.

The study has established that language teachers just use learners' books as the sole teaching and learning materials. It was further revealed that charts and real objects are hardly used during English language lessons. Therefore, it can be argued that to a certain extent, the problem of poor English language speech among primary school learners is enhanced by teachers' practices for not using a variety of teaching and learning materials which facilitate the development of English language speech proficiency.

4.2.3 Other related teacher practices

The study was further interested in finding out other related teacher practices that contribute to poor English language proficiency among primary school learners. These findings are discussed in detail in the following sections.

4.2.3.1 Exclusion of listening and speaking skills

The study has found that most primary school English language teachers do not spend much time on listening and speaking skills. Worse still, it was found that in most cases these skills are completely left out during English language lessons. This was evident when an English language teacher explained as follows:

...*Vuto lina ndiloti mwama skills a English monga listening, speaking, reading and writing ndiye ma skills amenewawa aphunzitsi amasankhapo. Listening and speaking amayizemba aphunzitsi ambiri. Zimene amadziwa iwo ndi reading and writing basi, amaona ngati listening and speaking skills ziwachedwetsa.*

(...Another problem is that of all the four language skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing, most English teachers leave out listening and speaking skills. They only concentrate on reading and writing skills because they see that teaching listening and speaking skills is a total waste of time). [Male English language teacher 8, April 16, 2010]

When the researcher asked why most primary school English language teachers leave out listening and speaking skills yet they are part of English language skills, the participants argued:

Pena zimaoneka kupanda kuzitsata bwinobwino pena zimaoneka ngati basi munthu ukungotaya nthawi, zimaoneka ngati basi zopanda ntchito, zongowonjezera.

(By just looking at listening and speaking skills, one could be tempted to say that they are not important, they are just extra-language skills). [Female English language teacher 4, March 30, 2010]

Mistake *imeneyi anayichita ndi a boma, eeee chifukwa choti listening and speaking skills zikuphezeka mu Teacher's guide ndiye ana sangadziwe kuti aphunzitsi akuzemba chakuti chifukwa choti ziri mu Teacher's guide basi, mu learner's book mulibe, mwaonatu.*

(This mistake was made by government because listening and speaking skills are only available in Teacher's guide. Such being the case, learners cannot recognize that English teachers are leaving out these language skills just because they are available only in Teacher's guide). [Male English language teacher 5, April 16, 2010]

Teachers are directly leaning on other language skills leaving out listening and speaking skills. Such practices are detrimental to the development of English language speech proficiency simply because they deprive learners an opportunity to be exposed to spoken English. The understanding among teachers that listening and speaking are less important justifies the reason why primary school learners have achieved low levels of spoken

English. One would have expected teachers to be in the forefront encouraging oral English language in schools but leaving them out completely defeats all the efforts to help learners develop English language speech proficiency. Without realizing that listening and speaking skills are crucial in developing speech proficiency, the idea of helping primary school learners develop English language speech proficiency will be meaningless. Perhaps this also reflects on the extent to which teacher preparation addresses the issue of language skills.

4.2.3.2 Laziness and lack of commitment

The study has also found that most primary school teachers are lazy and to make matters worse, they are not committed to work. Another English language teacher from one of the primary schools explained as follows:

Vuto lina ndi m'nyenyo wa aphunzitsi, samalimbikira kuphunzitsa ayi. English mwina pa timetable ili almost daily komanso two periods pa tsiku koma upeza kuti basi walowa m'kalasimo angophunzitsa period imodzi yokha basi. Ndiye aphunzitsi olimbikira amakhala ochepa koma ambiri, we are not conscious, we are not dedicated, tiribe nazo ntchito.

(Another problem is that most English teachers are lazy, they do not work hard at all. English subject is taught almost daily and more over it has double periods per day but you will find that some of them just teach only one period. It is only very few teachers who are hard-working but the rest are not committed and dedicated, we do not care). **[Male English language teacher 8, April 16, 2010]**

This finding presents a mismatch of what teachers are expected of professionally. The general expectation is that teachers should be hard-working and committed. This has created a difficult situation among learners for realization of speech proficiency. Laziness of teachers, coupled with lack of commitment has led to the current status of low levels of spoken English among primary school learners.

4.2.3.3 Lack of resourcefulness by English language teachers

The study has further found that the majority of English language teachers are not resourceful. It was learnt that most teachers just focus on Teacher's guide and learner's book only. This was also the concern for most participants who said:

Nthawi zambiri aphunzitsi amangotenga bukhu lija m'mene liliri koma sayenera kutero, that is just a guide, kumuwongolera m'phunzitsiyo koma they have options to add more according to knowledge and abilities of the learners. Zimenezo aphunzitsiwo samachita.

(Most of the times, English teachers just teach using the Teacher's guide only of which they are not supposed to do that because that is just a guide and it is there to guide him/her on what to do. English teachers are encouraged to use some other teaching and learning materials according to the learners' knowledge and abilities but they do not do that). [PEA y, May 4, 2010]

Vuto lina liri ngati limenelo loti aphunzitsi amangodalira Teacher's guide basi, satha kuyang'ana mabukhu ena oti awathandizire bwinobwino kaphunzitsidwe kawo.

(Another problem is that of English teachers' overdependency on Teacher's guide only. They do not explore other teaching and learning materials to help them teaching effectively). [Female English language teacher 4, March 30, 2010]

Such sentiments reveal that teachers do not go beyond the recommended books. This is critical especially if we take into consideration that teachers are expected to be resourceful. To some extent, this raises the issue of teacher training and how these teachers were imparted with knowledge on how to teach English language. This finding is similar to what Mmela (2006) found in her study that primary school teachers just focus on Teacher's guide and learners' books only. In trying to trace the root of the problem, Stuart and Kunje (2000) revealed in their teacher-education study that teachers in Malawi are trained as technicians with restricted roles to deliver the curriculum. Interestingly, old books in schools are not used, they are just kept in cupboards but teachers cannot make good use of

them. This has implications for developing speech proficiency especially when we consider that the fact that learners may need teachers' efforts if they are to effectively develop English language speech proficiency.

4.2.3.4 Lack of collaboration among teachers

Participants reported that there is lack of collaboration among teachers which negatively affect the learners in one way or the other. One English language teacher explained this as follows:

Collaboration ya *aphunzitsi* is another problem. *Vuto ndiloti aphunzitsi ambiri samakonda kukhalira pamodzi nkumakambirana zinthu zimene mwina zikuwavutazo. Zotsatira zake amangoti zikaoneka m'kalasi momwemo, basi kumangowanamiza ana aja. Choncho ana sangathe kuyankhula chizungu bwinobwino. Aphunzitsi samafuna kufunsa anzawo kuopa kuti ati apepera.*

(There is lack of collaboration among teachers. The problem is that teachers do not like sharing their problems that they encounter in their respective subjects with fellow teachers. As a result, they just go to the class empty-headed and end up cheating the learners. In view of that, learners cannot speak English better. English Teachers do not consult their fellow teachers for fear of being seen as foolish). [Male English language teacher 5, April 16, 2010]

Collaboration would mean teachers sharing knowledge, experiences and problems in the subject matter. Collaboration among teachers is very important in helping primary school learners develop English language speech proficiency. However, non-existence of collaboration among teachers in the end raises the problem of lack of knowledge on the part of teachers which directly affect the learners. Since collaboration assists teachers to share knowledge, ideas and experiences, it can be argued therefore that lack of collaboration among teachers may determine the extent to which learners acquire English language speech proficiency. Of course there is need to consider other factors including

availability of teaching and learning materials, environment and learner motivation which may be vital.

In general, the study has found other related teacher practices that contribute to poor English language proficiency among primary school learners. These practices include exclusion of listening and speaking skills, laziness and lack of commitment, lack of resourcefulness by English language teachers, and lack of collaboration among teachers. Of course there is need to be cautious considering the fact that there are other practices like teaching methods and strategies which are also crucial in developing English language speech proficiency.

4.3 Learners' attitudes towards teaching methods and activities for developing

English language speech proficiency

The study further sought to find out the attitude of learners towards the teaching methods and activities that English language teachers use during English language lessons for the development of English language speech proficiency. This section presents the findings of the learners' attitudes towards the teaching methods and activities used by English language teachers in the classrooms.

4.3.1 Attitudes towards teaching methods and activities

The study sought views from the learners themselves about their attitudes towards teaching methods and activities that are used in English language lessons. This section describes the results in detail.

4.3.1.1 Translation method

From the FGDs with learners in all the primary schools that took part in the study, few learners showed their positive attitudes towards translation method. The following statement exemplifies their positive attitudes towards this method:

Aphunzitsi akamaphunzitsa azitha kutimasulira m'Chichewa chifukwa zimathandiza kuti tizimva bwinobwino.

(When teaching English, teachers should use translation method because it is easier for us to understand things much better). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. B, March 26, 2010]

The researcher asked further to know how the use of translation method can facilitate the development of English language speech proficiency, one learner answered:

...Tizitha kuyankhula chizungu chifukwa choti tizidziwa kuti ichi kumasulira kwake ndi uku choncho tizitha kugwiritsa ntchito mawuwo tikamayankhula.

(...It will help us to speak English much better because by using translation method, it will definitely help us to know the meanings of words and how best they can be used when speaking English). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. B, March 26, 2010]

On the contrary, the majority of participants in FGDs had very negative attitudes towards the translation method. According to them, using translation method cannot in any way help them develop English language speech proficiency if anything it will just make matters worse. One learner explained that:

Aphunzitsi akamaphunzitsa English mmm asamatanthauzire m'Chichewa chifukwa choti akamatanthauzira m'Chichewa amapangitsanso kuti ana ife tizingoyankhulabenso Chichewacho.

(Teachers should not translate when teaching English because doing so only encourages us to keep on speaking Chichewa). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. C, March 31, 2010]

When the learners were asked to explain what prompts English language teachers to use translation method when teaching English, one learner elaborated as follows:

Aphunzitsi aja amaona kuti atilongosolere m'chizungu, amaona kuti one: chifukwa chake chizungucho sinanga sitimachidziwisitsa ndiye amaona kuti atipatsa vuto lokuti tiyambe kuchimva chizungucho; komanso two: Tidzayambeno kumvesetsano chinthu chomwe akutilongosoleracho. Ndiye amaona kuti atipatsa mavuto awiri, ndichifukwa chache basi amangoyankhula m'Chichewa, kumatilongosolera m'Chichewa.

(Since we have difficulties in spoken English, teachers know that using English will definitely give us double problems. Firstly, it will be difficult for us to understand the language itself. Secondly, it will be difficult again for us to understand the concepts being taught. That is why English teachers use translation method). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. C, April 12, 2010]

While some learners felt that it is justifiable for English language teachers to use translation method to enable them understand easily what is being taught, others were of the opinion that this method is detrimental for the development of speech proficiency. Similarly, Larsen-Freeman (1986) argued that the method is ineffectual since it deprives learners an opportunity to directly practice oral English language. It can be argued therefore that translation method has no impact in developing English language speech proficiency.

4.3.1.2 Group work

The study also sought views from the learners about their attitudes towards group work. It was reported that learners have mixed attitudes. On one side, it was found that learners have a positive attitude towards group work. One learner explained in detail as follows:

Ife zimatisangalatsa kukhala m'magulu chifukwa timatha kumathandizana nzeru m'magulu muja. Mwina wina akalakwitsa timatha kumakonzana tokhatokha komanso timakhala omasuka pokambirana.

(We enjoy working in groups because we help one another, when one has made mistakes we assist each other. In addition, we are free when working in groups). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. A, March 24, 2010]

In addition, learners also had expressed that group work has a positive impact on their performance. The following excerpt from one learner confirms this assertion:

Kukhala m'magulu kumatisangalatsa chifukwa choti tikakhala m'magulu muja timakambirana bwinobwino, motakasuka. Komanso tikakhala m'magulu muja timakhoza kwambiri chifukwa choti chimene akudziwa munthu wina, wina amakhala sakuchidziwa chinthu chimenecho ndiye timakhala kuti tikuthandizana bwinobwino.

(We enjoy working in groups because we are able to discuss comfortably. More importantly, we normally perform very well when working in groups because we share ideas as a group). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. B, March 26, 2010]

The findings imply that group work provides opportunities for each learner to become actively involved in the learning activities given and increases the acquisition and development of English language through social interaction. In support of this view, according to social constructivist theory, social interaction is a major factor for the development of English language speech proficiency (Ivic, 2000). Central to the argument is that interactions among learners greatly facilitate the development of English language speech proficiency.

Nonetheless, it was also reported that some learners have negative attitudes towards group work. When they were asked what problems they experience in group work, this is what they had to say:

Ine sizimandisangalatsa kukhala m'magulu chifukwa anthu ena amatha kungobwera, kumangobwera kudzakusokonezani pamene inu mukufuna kukambirana. Komanso anthu ena m'magulu muja amalongolora ndiye zimapangitsa kuti ansala imene umayiganizira ija umatha kuyiwala.

(Personally, I do not like working in groups simply because fellow learners just come to disturb their friends during discussions. Besides, some learners make a lot of noise and that makes you to forget whatever you were thinking about). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. A, March 24, 2010]

Anthu m'magulu muja amandisiira ndekha, atha kundipatsa pepala lija kuti ndizilemba ndekha komanso akudikira kuti ma ansalanso ndizinena ndekha. M'malo moti tizithandizana pa gulupo koma iwo amatha kumangokhala chete, iwe uzingoyankhula wekha.

(In those groups, my fellow learners leave everything to me. They expect me to write and at the same time I should provide the answers alone. One would find that they are all quiet leaving everything to be done by myself instead of working together as a group). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. D, April 19, 2010]

Furthermore, it was found that group work also negatively affect learners' performance.

Participants in FGDs confirmed this revelation as argued.

Mukakhala pa gulu anthu ena amatha kumayankhula chinthu cholakwa, iwe wekha kumayankhula chokhoza ndiye chifukwa choti iweyo ulipo wekha, nonse mumasatira za anzakowo chifukwa choti alipo ambiri kusiya yankho lako ngakhale liri lokhoza koma chifukwa choti ulipo wekha. Komanso pa gulu pamakhala anthu ena amakani ndiye mumatha kulakwa zinthu zina chifukwa cha makaniwo.

(When working in groups, wrong answers can be accepted because of the majority rule syndrome; and right answers can be denied simply because they are from the minority members or just an individual and that leads to failure. On top of that, a group can consist of stubborn people which sometimes become difficult to agree on one thing, as a result you end up failing miserably). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. B, March 31, 2010]

Anzako ena pa gulupo amangokhalira kucheza ndiye ikabwera exercise kuti tipange pa gulu paja, timalephera chifukwa choti anthu pa gulupo amangokhalira kucheza basi.

(Some friends are always there to play. When we have been given an exercise to do, we end up failing because some group members were just there as free riders). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. D, April 19, 2010]

These explanations confirm one of the weaknesses of group work. This means that if group work is not properly organized by the teacher, it may lead to few learners in the group doing all the work while the rest of the group mates are busy doing other things. The matter of proper group work organization relates to Kauchak and Eggen's (2007) explanation that effective use of group work requires careful planning and organization to make sure that the learning activities and the interactions contribute to learning. The concerns raised by the learners suggest that teachers do not organise the groups properly for the benefit of learners. For instance, the study noticed that learners are put in large groups of about 10 to 12 learners per group. Actually, Davis (1999) observes that groups of between 4 and 6 learners work best and are recommended. This implies that groups larger than six are generally not recommended. Ideally, it can be argued such groups cannot facilitate the development of English language speech proficiency. Of course there is need to seriously consider other constraints like large classes which may mean that teachers have no choice.

4.3.1.3 Individual work

Some participants in FGDs were of the opinion that they prefer individual work to group work. It was learnt that some learners do not show any kind of commitment to group work.

One learner explained that:

Ineyo ndimakonda ntchito yoti aliyense apange yekha-yekha chifukwa umatha kudziwa wekha kuti ndipange chonchi. Pamene m'magulu muja pamakhala anthu ena oti amakhala busy ndi zinthu zina ndiye amangosewera kuti aaaa ena apanga kale pamenepo, apanganso ntchito yonseyi.

(Personally, I like individual work because you know how best you can do it whilst when you are working in groups, you will find that other learners are busy with other things since they know that surely my friends will do it all for me). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. A, March 25, 2010]

Such sentiment really shows that some learners feel happy and comfortable to work individually rather than working in groups. To a larger extent, such kind of preference comes about due to the behavior of some learners who tend to be free riders during learning activities. As a result, other learners get bored and frustrated. This calls for language teachers to seriously monitor the groups during learning activities to benefit the learners.

4.3.1.4 Debate

The majority of the participants in FGDs from all the primary schools expressed their positive attitude towards debate. The following excerpt from one learner confirms it all:

Ifeyo kupanga debate ndi njira yabwino ndipo timayikonda kwambiri, kuyigawa kalasi uku ndi uku, A ndi B ndikumafunsana mafunso a English okhaokha. Zimene zija zimathandiza kuti tizilimbikira kuti chizungu chathu chikhale chabwino.

(Doing debate during English lessons is a good method; let us say dividing the class into two groups for instance A and B. It both encourages and motivates us to speak good English). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. A, March 25, 2010]

Conversely, the only demotivating factor and probably the most serious one is that learners are hardly engaged in debate. Most participants in the FGDs complained that:

Vuto ndiloti ma debate'wo sachitika ndipo sizinachitikepo kuchita debate m'kalasi...

(The major problem is that debates are rarely done during English lessons. In fact, we have never done that before). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. C, April 13, 2010]

The consensus among learners was that debating activities do not only encourage but also motivate them to speak English despite the fact that they are hardly used during English language lessons. For this reason, there is need to encourage the use of debates in classes. It is imperative, therefore that English language teachers should intensify using debating

activities during English language lessons to enable learners practice oral English language for the development of speech proficiency.

4.3.1.5 Dialogue

The study further sought to find out the attitude of learners towards dialogue since it is one of the activities that facilitate the development of English language speech proficiency. It was established that almost all the participants in the FGDs have a positive attitude towards it. This is evident when one learner explained as follows:

Ma dialogue ndi abwino, munthu ukakhala ndi m'nzako, awiri-awiri ndikumayankhulana zimatha kuthandiza kuti ndilankhule bwino ndimupose m'nzangayu koma vuto ndiloti zimenezo aphunzitsiwo samatipangitsa pafupi-pafupi ayi.

(Dialogues are good more especially when you are doing the conversations with your friend, there is that kind of competition to speak better than your friend. As a result, it gives you an opportunity to practice the English language more. However, the only problem is that dialogues are not done quite often). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. B, March 26, 2010]

This shows that the learners themselves appreciate the impact of dialogues in developing English speech language proficiency. However, the major problem that was noted in the study was that dialogues were not used during English language lessons. This entails that English language teachers should use dialogues quite often during English language lessons to enable learners have more time to practice spoken English.

4.3.1.6 Drilling method

Participants in FGDs showed a negative attitude towards drilling method. They complained that this method does not in any way help them to practice oral English language. The following statements by learners exemplify their negativity towards the method:

Aphunzitsi akamangokhalira kuphunzitsa nthawi zonse, timakanika kuti nafenso tiziphunzira kuyankhula chizungu chifukwa choti sitimakhala ndi mpata woti tizipanga practice kuyankhula chizungu. Sinanga iwowo amangoyankhula okha ndiye sizimatisangalatsa kweni-kweni.

(When English teachers use drilling method, we normally do not have opportunities to practice spoken English since there is too much talking by the teachers themselves. Such being the case, we do not like the method very much). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. B, March 26, 2010]

Nthawi zina aphunzitsi aja amatheka kumangophunzitsa, basi kumangoyankhula okha ndiye ifeyo pena pake zimativuta, samatipatsa ifeyo mpata wokwanira kuti tiziyankhula chizungu.

(Sometimes English teachers just talk, they do not involve us in the talking and that gives us problems since we are not given enough time to speak English). [Learner, FGDs, April 19, 2010]

The learners' comments above confirm that they have negative attitude towards drilling method. Since the method is teacher-centred, learners have proved themselves that little is done on their part for them to practice spoken English. This is also what Tiedt *et al* (2001) strongly believe that participatory activities such as storytelling, role plays, debates, dialogues and drama facilitate the development of English speech proficiency. As learners interact in the target language, they also acquire new words for speech development.

Overall, the study has found that the majority of learners have negative attitude towards translation method. They observed that the method contributes to poor English language proficiency since it encourages communication in local language(s). As for group work, some learners expressed their positive attitude towards it considering that they assist each other. However, some learners had negative attitude because in most cases fellow learners disturb their friends and worse still, some learners do not participate at all during learning activities. Consequently, they end up performing poorly and that forces some learners to prefer individual tasks to group work. Besides, all the learners showed their positive

attitude towards debate and dialogue despite the fact they are not usually used during English language lessons.

On the contrary, the study further found that all the participants (learners) have strong negative attitude towards drilling method. Their negativity was due to the fact that the method is teacher-centred and such being the case denied them opportunity to practice English language orally. In short, the study has found that learners have negative attitude towards some of the teaching methods and activities simply because they do not expose them to oral language for the development of English language speech proficiency.

4.3.2 Attitudes towards teaching and learning materials

The study again sought views from the learners about their attitudes towards teaching and learning materials that language teachers use during English language lessons. Therefore in this section, the findings related to learners' attitudes towards teaching and learning materials used are discussed.

4.3.2.1 Learners' books

The study has found that most learners have a positive attitude towards the learners' books that are used in English classes. This is what the participants explained:

Mabukhu timawakonda motsogola chifukwa choti zonse zimene amaphunzitsa zimachokera m'bukhumo.

(We like the learners' books very much because everything that English teachers teach comes from those books). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. D, April 19, 2010]

Timakonda mabukhu chifukwa choti aaa amatha kutipatsa nkhani yoti tiwerenge, tikawerenga amatiuza titseke mabukhuwo ndiye timatseka ndikuyamba kuti... kuonano mawu achilendo.

(We like the learners' books because after reading the passage then we look at the new words from the passage). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. A, March 25, 2010]

All the comments made by the learners allude to the fact that their positive attitudes towards the learners' books is simply because they are the only teaching and learning materials that are accessible to them. In addition, it was learnt that teachers rely on learners' books implying that everything that is taught comes from the learners' books only. Besides, the learners appreciate the use of learners' books in the sense that they enrich their vocabulary by looking at the new words that have been used in the passages.

However, though interestingly, some participants in the FGDs explained that they cannot say whether they have positive or negative attitude towards the learners' books. The following excerpt confirms this assertion:

Vuto ndiloti aphunzitsiwo amangobweretsa mabukhuwo basi nthawi zonse ndiye ndizovuta kuti tinene kuti timawakonda kapena ayi chifukwa choti tiribe mpata woti tisankhe kuti icho timachikonda, icho sitimachikonda.

(The problem is that English teachers always use learners' books. Such being the case, it is difficult for us to say whether we like them or not simply because we are limited to choices). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. B, March 31, 2010]

The participants observed that it was difficult for them to say whether they have positive or negative attitudes towards learners' books simply because they are not exposed to choices. This finding begs a question of why do teachers not use a variety of teaching and learning materials during English language lessons. It can be connected to laziness of language teachers, coupled with lack of commitment and also lack of collaboration among teachers

to share ideas as possible reasons. However, it is also important to consider other factors such as lack of instructional materials which are the realities on the ground.

4.3.2.2 Charts

Most of the learners that took part in the study expressed their positive attitude towards the charts as teaching and learning materials. Below are statements made by some of the learners about charts.

Ine ndimakonda ma chart chifukwa choti aphunzitsi aja amatha kujambula zinthu ndikuyika pa khoma ndiye nthawi yopumula, umatha kumathanga-thamanga ndikupita kukaona pamene paja ndiye zimalowa m'mutu.

(I like the charts because at our own free time, we can go and study. As such they provide an opportunity for practice). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. C, April 12, 2010]

Ifeyo timakonda ma charts chifukwa choti timatha kuphunzirapo zambiri, kaya mwina nkhani.

(We like the charts because we learn a lot from them, for instance, coming up with stories). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. A, March 24, 2010]

Conversely, the majority of participants in FGDs complained that charts are rarely used by teachers during English language lessons. The following complaint was obtained representing the many views of the majority:

Ma chart 'wo timawakonda koma vuto ndiloti aphunzitsiwo samabweretsa ma chart 'wo kawiri-kawiri.

(We like the charts very much but the major problem is that English teachers rarely bring them during English lessons). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. B, March 26, 2010]

The study has found that learners have positive attitudes towards charts as teaching and learning materials. It was learnt that charts can be used in place of books and that gives equal chance to learners to practice spoken English since so many ideas can emerge from

them. The belief among learners is that charts play significant role in developing English language speech proficiency.

4.3.2.3 Pictures

The study has found that most learners like pictures when they are used as teaching and learning materials during English language lessons. This was evident when one learner explained as follows:

Ifeyo ma pictures'wo timawakonda kwambiri chifukwa choti timatha kuphunzirapo zambiri, titha kukamba nkhani zambiri kuchokera pa picture'po. Ndiye zimatithandiza kuti tizikamba nkhani m'chizungu.

(Pictures are very effective when they are used as teaching and learning materials. A lot of stories can emerge by just looking at the picture and that gives us an opportunity to practice English). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. A, March 24, 2010]

Nevertheless, it was found that to a greater extent, learners have a negative attitude towards pictures in terms of visibility. The following quotation represents the many similar comments made by learners in FGDs:

Ma pictures aja sitimawakonda kweni-kweni chifukwa chokuti akabweretsa picture ija, ifeyo zimatheka kuti tayiwonera patali ndiye tsiku lina zimakhala zovuta kuti tidzachite revise kapena kuyankha mafunso ochokera pa picture paja chifukwa choti sitinayiwonesetse bwinobwino.

(We do not like the pictures because it becomes difficult for us to see clearly what exactly is on the picture from the back of the class. As a result, it becomes difficult for us to revise or to answer questions from the picture because it was not clear). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. C, April 12, 2010]

The learner above testifies that pictures cannot work effectively during English language lessons if some learners are unable to see them clearly from the back of the class due to their sizes or visibility. This also provides another problem on the part of learners.

Therefore, English language teachers should use pictures that are visible and large in size for the learners to see them clearly even at the back of the class.

In terms of teaching and learning materials, the study has generally established that learners have positive attitudes towards learners' books. It was learnt that the learners' books are accessible and more importantly they facilitate the enrichment of vocabulary through the learning of new words. In addition, it was found that learners have positive attitude towards other materials such as charts and pictures. However, the only demotivating factor among learners is that these materials (charts and pictures) are hardly used during English language lessons. As a result, this has implications on the part of learners in terms of acquiring English language speech proficiency.

4.4 Challenges that contribute to low proficiency level in spoken English in primary schools; and suggestions or ways that could be used to reduce or resolve the problem of low proficiency level in spoken English in primary schools

The study also sought to explore the challenges that contribute to poor spoken English among learners in primary schools. These challenges are grouped in different categories and they include challenges related to teachers; curriculum; education system, and learners. Based on the challenges, the participants in the study suggested ways that can be adopted to reduce or resolve the problem of low proficiency level in spoken English among primary schools learners. Therefore this section discusses the findings related to challenges that contribute to poor English language proficiency among primary school learners and ways

that could be used to resolve/reduce the problem of low proficiency level in spoken English in primary schools.

4.4.1 Challenges related to teachers

The study established that there are some challenges that are related to teachers which in one way or another affect them to impart knowledge to learners to enable them develop English language speech proficiency. Some of the challenges especially those related to teachers and ways to reduce/resolve them are discussed in detail.

4.4.1.1 Modes of teacher training

The study has found that one of the major challenges that contribute to poor spoken English in primary schools is the mode of training that English language teachers go through. It was found that primary schools fall under different categories depending on the mode of training they went through. The following excerpt from the PEA confirms this assertion:

The other problem could be the type of training which the teacher(s) undergo. We have several categories of teachers: the MIITEP, IPTE, the ODL and there is this one which is known as what, MASTEP. If you look at these categories of teachers, the trainings which these teachers underwent and the approaches which they were taught to help impart skills on English are totally different. [PEA x, May 2, 2010]

The fact that teachers have attended different trainings altogether means that they have different philosophies, approaches and beliefs about language teaching. Such being the case, their lesson preparation and delivery will quite differ. This is consistent with the findings of Milner *et al* (2001) who reported in their study that teachers in Malawi have attended different training programmes ranging from one year to three years in duration.

The study further revealed that some teachers have attended crash training programmes like Malawi Special Teacher Education Programme (MASTEP) which composed of class teaching of student teachers during school holidays and full-time teaching when schools were in session. It can be argued that the modes of teacher training which teachers go through have implications on how language teachers prepare and deliver lessons to enable learners develop interest and acquire English language speech proficiency.

4.4.1.2 Teacher knowledge

Teacher knowledge was found to be one of the serious problems for the majority of English language teachers. The study found that English language teachers themselves have serious problems in spoken English. The English language teachers themselves alluded to this as argued.

Kunena zoonā, aaa tinene kuti chizungunso kwa ifenso aphunzitsi chimativuta, tivomere...

(Honestly, we have to accept a harsh reality that we (English teachers) have problems in spoken English). [Male English teacher 3, March 26, 2010]

Tikamakambirana aphunzitsi timakambirana m'Chichewa ngakhale ku staff meeting. Mawu achizungu amene amamvekapo pa meeting'po ndi "Welcome" basi, kenako zalowa Chichewa. Tsiku lina ku meeting'ko anandipempha kuti ndipemphere ndiye ndinapemphera pemphero la mu English. Titatuluka panja aphunzitsi anzangawo nkumati: "Ndiye abusatu, nanga kupemphera mu English chonchija ngati tiri ku Theological College?"

(Teachers always discuss in Chichewa and that also happens during staff meetings. The only English word that one would hear at the staff meeting is "Welcome" but the rest of the discussions are done in Chichewa. One day, I was asked to give prayer and I prayed in English. When coming out of the meeting, my all fellow teachers said to me: Are you a pastor? Why then praying in English as if we are in Theological College?). [Male English language teacher 8, April 16, 2010]

Issues of teacher knowledge and skills in English are particularly important considering that teachers are responsible for assisting learners to develop English language speech proficiency. Despite the fact that all the teachers that were involved in the study were qualified and above all, were holders of Malawi School Certificate of Examination (MSCE), the study found that most of them had problems in spoken English. One piece of evidence to this assertion was that all the interviews with English language teachers were conducted in Chichewa although they were teachers of English language and that says a lot in terms of their proficiency. As it has been already argued in the previous sections, if English language teachers themselves have difficulties in spoken English then it will be a far-fetched dream to expect primary school learners speak good English.

However, almost all the participants suggested the need to unify the modes of teacher training for teachers to acquire the same knowledge and philosophies about language teaching and learning. In addition, the participants suggested that introducing specialization in primary schools can resolve or reduce the problem of teacher knowledge. On this issue of specialization, several explanations emerged from the participants. The following excerpt confirms this assertion:

Government should introduce specialization in primary schools so that those teaching English must be specialists in English language. The introduction of specialization therefore will definitely improve or completely solve the problem of spoken English in primary schools because it is like you are forcing someone to teach the subject which s/he is not good at. But if specialization will be introduced then things will improve for the better.
[PEA x, May 2, 2010]

The general perception among participants is that the introduction of specialization in primary schools will greatly reduce or resolve the problem of poor English language

proficiency. Much as primary school teachers undergo training in TTC's, teachers observed that their trainings focus much on the methodologies and little is done on the subject matter. Such being the case, there is need to introduce specialization in primary schools. Perhaps better training for teachers cannot be left out. In my opinion, specialization, coupled with better training are significant in reducing the problem especially in terms of knowledge and skills that teachers may have acquired to enhance the development of speech proficiency. This seems to agree with research evidence from Malawi and other countries which suggest that better-trained teachers pass on to learners higher levels of subject matter knowledge and hence are more effective teachers (Fuller and Kapakasa, 1991 in Kadzamira and Chibwana, 1999). Therefore, this suggests that specialization and better training improve the quality of subject knowledge and lesson delivery thereby enhancing teachers' abilities to assist learners develop English language speech proficiency.

Of course one way to deal with the problem of low proficiency level in spoken English among primary school learners could be to introduce specialization in primary schools. Nonetheless, introducing specialization in primary schools could worsen the already existing problem of shortage of teachers since teachers will be restricted to teach those subjects that they have specialized in only.

Although not directly linked to the suggestion given above, the participants further suggested the need to introduce oral proficiency interviews when selecting students into TTCs. This will act as one of the measures to select the would-be-teachers who are

proficient in spoken English. The following quotation represents the many similar comments that the participants made:

Akamafuna kulemba anthu kuti apite ku sukulu ya uphunzitsi, I think adzichita stick or emphasize kwambiri pa oral interviews chifukwa ma written interviews aja anthu ambiri amabisala, amatha kukakhoza ma written interviews aja koma munthu asakutha kulankhula chizungu.

(When selecting students into TTCs, they should emphasize much on oral interviews and not written interviews. The reason is that through written interviews, it is hard to tell whether the person is good at spoken English or not. Therefore, much emphasis should be on oral interviews so that those selected into TTCs should be proficient enough in spoken English). [PEA z, 5th May, 2010]

Oral interviews provide a general picture of the candidates in terms of skills and abilities. This implies that introducing oral interviews will have a positive impact on the quality of teachers to be trained since if teachers themselves are proficient in spoken English then it will be easy for them to transfer the knowledge and skills to the learners. Currently, students are selected into TTCs based on written interviews. One of the weaknesses of using written interviews is that it is hard to tell whether the candidates are proficient in spoken English or not. It is more complicated especially if the teachers themselves are not proficient in spoken English and that has implications in assisting learners to develop English language speech proficiency. It can therefore be deduced that introducing oral proficiency interviews will expose such incompetences.

Nonetheless, the suggestion to introduce oral interviews raises questions. Some of the questions could be on the feasibility to conduct oral interviews for the many applicants and the availability of resources to conduct such interviews. It could be expensive to conduct oral interviews national wide.

4.4.1.3 Lack of insets

The other challenge that was highlighted by most participants was lack of insets. The study found that the problem is made worse with lack of funds as most teachers do not attend insets that have no allowances. Below are statements made by PEAs admitting the existence of the problem.

...Inset ya English 'yi sitinayipange posachedwapa, tinayipanga chaka icho, 2008.

(...We have not organized any inset as of recently that concerns English language. The last time we conducted an inset for English subject was in 2008). [PEA y, May 4, 2010]

Vuto ndi kuchepa kwa ma inservice training amene timachita provide may be at district or zonal level. Koma izi zimachitika chifukwa cha kusowa kwa ndalama, ndiye aphunzitsi akangomva kuti kuli inset koma kulibe ndalama (allowance) basi samabwera ndiye pena pake umaopa kuti ndiwayitane? Chifukwa ena amayankhula udyo...

(The problem is that only few insets are organized either at district or zonal level due to financial constraints. The problem comes in because teachers do not attend insets that have nothing like allowance attached to it, so sometimes we are afraid to invite them to attend free insets because they talk tough). [PEA x, May 2, 2010]

In theory, some may argue that insets are organized in schools and at zonal levels but in practice, this study has found that insets are rarely organized. It is important to appreciate the fact that organizing frequent insets for English language teachers can improve the quality of lesson preparation and delivery for the benefit of learners since teachers learn and share skills and ideas. However, the fact that most teachers do not attend insets that have no allowances means that they do not have the commitment to learn new skills and ideas. This is consistent with the findings of Mmela (2006) who reported that primary school teachers lack interest for learning new teaching methods. Mmela further argues that, "A teacher who does not have a desire to learn is like stagnant water in a dam that has no

inlet or outlet, it soon gets stale and dry up" (p. 94). According to her, this implies that professional development activities, for instance insets, are like an inlet of fresh waters into a dam which through an outlet gives fresh waters in the form of improved learning for the learners. Therefore, it can be argued that generally, insets are a catalyst for improving English lessons delivery.

When the participants were asked how the problem of lack of insets could be resolved, most participants in the study suggested the need to organise frequent insets either at school or zonal level as explained below:

Ma inset akanati m'masukulumu azichitika pafupi-pafupi, eyaa ndi cholinga chokutibe nanga siii English ya mabukhu amene tiri nawo pakali pano olo m'phunzitsiyo ikumatha kumamuzunguza...Ndiye kukonza ma inset pafupi-pafupi kungathandize aphunzitsi kuti azithandizana komanso kugawana m'nzeru.

(School-based insets should be conducted regularly to enable teachers share the knowledge and ideas. The problem with current books (PCAR) is that they are very challenging even to teachers themselves. As such, organizing insets quite often will assist them to help one another and share ideas).

[Female English teacher 7, April 9, 2010]

Ma head azikonza ma inset okhuza ma subject monga English. Izi zimathandiza kuti aphunzitsi azitha kugawana m'nzeru kuti zinthu ziziyenda bwino.

(Head teachers should organise school-based insets in subjects like English. The insets will help English teachers to share knowledge and skills for effective teaching).

[Male English teacher 8, April 16, 2010]

Organizing school-based insets is not only the responsibility of PEAs but even Head teachers can organise them to enable teachers to share ideas, knowledge and skills in specific subjects. As a matter of fact, organizing insets frequently for English language teachers can improve the quality of English lessons preparation and delivery with the intention of assisting learners to develop English language speech proficiency. This

supports the views held by Milner *et al* (2001) that insets are important because they help to update and improve teachers' professional knowledge and skills. It can be argued that insets are vital in assisting learners develop English language speech proficiency. Regarding the issue of allowance, we need to be aware that this issue remains a big challenge although a solution to this one was not mentioned by both teachers and PEAs.

4.4.1.4 Shortage of teachers

Shortage of teachers was found to be one of the problems in most primary schools. The participants explained that shortage of teachers also contribute to poor English language proficiency because it becomes difficult for few teachers to handle the whole school and deliver lessons effectively. As a result, teachers just go to the class while they are not prepared and it negatively affects the learners as they strive to develop speech proficiency.

This was evident when English language teachers elaborated this as follows:

Musukulu muli aphunzitsi ochepa mwina pena kalasi yonse m'phunzitsi m'modzi, ena aphunzitsi atatu kapena anayi sukulu yonse kuyambira 1 mpaka 8. Pamenepa angaphunzitse bwinobwino kuchita prepare kuti ana athe kuphunzira bwinobwino komanso kuyankhula chizungu?

(There are few teachers in some primary schools, in most cases you will find that one teacher is handling the whole class. In other schools, there are three or four teachers only managing the whole school from Std 1-8. Can they manage to prepare for the lessons and at the same time help learners speak English? I doubt!). [Male English teacher 5, April 1, 2010]

...kuchepa kwa aphunzitsi kukupangitsa kuti anawa asamathe kuyankhula chizungu chifukwa monga ngati ine ndimaphunzitsa maphunziro okwanira 6 ndiyeno zinthu ngati zimenezozo umakhala kuti watopa basi kwinako umangoti: "Iiii nanga ine ndipange bwanji? Basino anawa izizi ngati zikuwakanika basi..."

(The problem of few teachers in primary schools is causing the problem of poor spoken English among learners. For instance, I teach six subjects and by the end of the day I get tired. As a result, you just say: "What else can I

do? If learners have problems in these things, let it be like that). [Female English teacher 7, April 9, 2010]

Teachers are vital in assisting learners develop English language speech proficiency which means that when they are short in supply then it can definitely affect the learners. In fact, shortage of teachers generally affects the ability of teachers to prepare their English lessons thoroughly and that affects their lessons delivery. Similarly, a study conducted in the primary schools of Malawi by Kadzamira and Chibwana (1999) found that teachers are in short supply more especially those with training. It is surprising that in 1999 we were having this problem and right now, we are still experiencing the same problem of shortage of teachers. It means that little is done by colleges to produce enough teachers. Despite the fact that there are various programmes, for instance Open Distance Learning (ODL), the number of teachers still remains few as compared to the demand. It is therefore imperative that colleges should put in place measures to increase the number of teachers to deal with the problem of shortage of teachers in primary schools.

Nevertheless, the participants in the study suggested that government should recruit more primary school teachers to reduce the problem of shortage of teachers in most schools. The following suggestion was made by the PEA who had this to say:

Aphunzitsi, chiwerengero cha aphunzitsi chikanakhala chochuluka makamaka ku sukulu za kumidzi kuti m'phunzitsi uja azitha kuchita handle bwinobwino makalasiwo. Izi zingathandizenso kuti vutoli lichepe.

(The number of teachers in primary schools should be increased more especially in rural areas. This will help teachers to easily handle their classes thereby reducing the problem of poor spoken English). [PEA w, April 22, 2010]

The deployment of enough teachers can definitely reduce the teacher-pupil ratio and at the same time reduce the workload on the part of teachers. As a result, language teachers will have ample time to prepare their lessons for effective delivery thereby assisting learners to acquire and develop English language speech proficiency. Besides, participants further emphasized the need to motivate teachers to maximally assist learners to develop English language speech proficiency. It was then suggested that increasing salaries to teachers will motivate them to work extra harder to improve the problem of poor English language proficiency among primary school learners. The quotation below represents the many similar comments that the participants made:

Malipiro ndi ofunikabe kuti akonzedwe bwino. Chimene ndikunenera kuti malipiro akonzedwe bwino ndichoti: Munthu ntchito imene ikunenedwa kuti mwana afike saizi yoti alankhule chizungu pamakhala ntchito yaikulu pamenepo. Ndiye munthu ameneyoyo ndiofunikatu malipiro ampatse ochuluka...

(Teachers' salaries should be increased because for one to learn and be able to speak English is not an easy job. Therefore, teachers deserve good salaries as one way of motivating them). [Male English teacher 3, March 26, 2010]

The impact of language teachers on helping learners to develop English language speech proficiency cannot be underplayed. Bearing that in mind, increasing the number of teachers and more importantly, increasing their salaries considerably can motivate them to work extra harder. This could be attributed to what Milner *et al* (2001) observed that satisfied teachers work harder for the benefit of the learners, and are less likely to leave the teaching profession. As a result, learners are expected to acquire and develop English language speech proficiency.

4.4.2 Challenges related to curriculum

The study found some challenges that are related to the curriculum which contribute to poor English language proficiency among primary school learners. This section discusses the findings on the challenges related to the curriculum and possible solutions that can be adopted to reduce or resolve these challenges.

4.4.2.1 Frequent change of curricula

The majority of participants firmly explained that the problem of low proficiency level in spoken English is aggravated by changing the curricula frequently, as some participants explained:

Vuto lalikulu ndilonena kuti boma likusinthatintha ma curriculum ndiye kusintha kwa ma curriculum kumeneko kukumapangitsa kuti kukathe kusokoneza m'mene aphunzitsi angagwilire ntchito yawo.

(The major problem is that government is changing the curricula so frequently. As a result, English teachers get disturbed and that affects their teaching). [Male English teacher 1, March 22, 2010]

Kusinthatintha kwa ma curriculum amene tiri nawo kumapangitsa kuti ana aja ngakhalenso aphunzitsi amene muwasokoneze. Vuto ndiloti ma content aja amabwera mosiyana-siyana ndiye curriculum ikasinthidwa, imakhala kuti zonse zija mwasokoneza ndi chifukwa chachenso anawa akuvutika kuyankhula chizungu...

(Frequent change of curricula disturbs both teachers and learners. When the curriculum changes, everything changes as well including the content and that is why learners have difficulties in spoken English). [Male English teacher 5, April 1, 2010]

When the curriculum changes, it is hard for the teachers to get used to the new content and deliver lessons successfully. Eventually, it negatively affects the learners in terms of speech development. Similar findings were also reported in Kadzamira and Chibwana (1999), who found that even experienced qualified teachers were experiencing grave problems in

implementing the new curriculum. The central argument is that even well qualified and experienced teachers also get affected when the curriculum changes, let alone the learners.

On frequent change of curricula, the participants suggested that the primary school curriculum should be given enough time before phasing it out. The following quotation made by one English language teacher represents similar suggestion:

Akalembe curriculum, adziyisiya curriculum'yo kuti idzikhala for quite enough period of time osati mu Std 1 amene ayamba chaka chino ali ndi curriculum ina, akamafika Std 4 ati amva kuti curriculum ija yatani, yasintha zikubwera zina, akamafika Std 8 amakhala kuti ana aja mwawasokoneza. Ndiye tisamangosintha curriculum chifukwa choti anzathu mayiko ena akusintha ayi.

(The curriculum should be given enough time before changing it in order to reduce confusion to learners as they move from one class to the other during the primary school cycle. In view of that, we should not just change curricula simply because other countries are doing the same). [Male English teacher 3, March 26, 2010]

The curriculum is the core to teaching and learning implying that any frequent changes not only disturb the learners but also the teachers themselves considering that it may take time for them to get used and start implementing the new curriculum respectively. All these affect learners and have implications on developing English language speech proficiency.

4.4.2.2. The content of grammar

The other problem that was repeatedly mentioned by the participants is the content of grammar in the current curriculum (PCAR). Almost all the participants expressed their disappointment over the content of grammar found in PCAR.

Panopa kuti muyang'ane mabukhu ake amene ali panopa, sequence ya kaphunzitsidwe ka grammar ndi kovuta. Tsiku lina akuuzani kuti ana adule m'nzere kusi kwa ma noun, tsiku lina adule m'nzere kusi kwa ma adjectives, angopanga pang'ono basi, ka mutsu basi. Tsono mitundu ya ma

noun, yama adjective... *chani mwadongosolo ngati m'mene timachitira kale ndi curriculum imene inali m'mbuyomo upeza kuti mulibemo mu curriculum ya tsopanoyi. Sequence ya grammar, ndondomeko ya grammar sili bwino ayi choncho mwana sangathe kuyankhula bwino chizungu chifukwa choti kuti munthu athe kuyankhula bwino chizungu ndipofunika kuti grammar ikhale bwino*, poor in grammar translates into poor in spoken English.

(The content and sequence of grammar in the current curriculum (PCAR) leaves a lot to be desired. Grammar part in these books has been tackled just in the passing; and there is no logical and order of grammar content as was the case with the previous curriculum. As such, learners cannot speak English because grammar is essential for spoken English since poor in grammar translates into poor in spoken English). [Male English teacher 5, April 1, 2010]

It should be appreciated that grammar plays a vital role in spoken English. The simple fact is that one cannot come up with well constructed sentences without grammar. The above quotation reveals that the content of the new curriculum (PCAR) is overloaded, the grammar is too shallow and the sequence is illogical. Consequently, this has contributed to poor spoken English among primary school learners. Much as it is true that the content and sequence of grammar has been modified in the new curriculum (PCAR), on one hand, it may mean that teachers do not make efforts to stretch themselves and teach grammar productively. On the other hand, it could be that teachers were not trained to teach grammar that way. This has implications on learners to develop English language speech proficiency.

When the researcher asked the participants on how the problem of grammar content in the PCAR curriculum can be best resolved, the majority of the participants suggested that grammar should be taught in isolation. The participants observed that teaching grammar in isolation could reduce or resolve the problem of low proficiency level in spoken English among primary school learners. Below are statements made by the participants about this:

Ineyo ndimaona ngati grammar ija ikanabwelera to come out clearly ngati m'mene imaphunzitsidwira kale kuti we should have grammar payokha. M'mene ziliri pakali pano nthawi ikumachepa yoti m'phunzitsi ayitambasule mu lesson muja, nthawi siikutani, siikukwana. Even mukapita ku college 'ko simumaphunzira ma ujeni payokha-payokha, kubwera ma syntax ndi ma chani, zimabwera pazokha-pazokha. Nanga bwanji mwana waku primary? Ngati amaphunzira munthu waku college?

(In my view, grammar should be taught like it was in the old curriculum that is it should come out clearly and be taught in isolation. As things are at the moment, time is not enough for English teachers to explain the nitty gritty concepts of grammar. Even when you go to college or university you would find that courses like syntax and others are taught separately, then why not at primary school? If a college or university student can learn courses separately, why not in primary schools?). [PEA x, May 2, 2010]

Mmm...ndimaona ngati akanabwelera kale lomwe lija kuti grammar ikhale ndithu, izikhala lesson payokha osati kungoipachiza-pachiza ngati m'mene apangira panopamu ayi chifukwa ayipatsa kanthawi kochepe, angozomola ndithu m'malo moti mwina ikhale lesson yamtunthu yoti nkupanga nawo atleast grammar yokhayokha, ndikuona ngati njira imeneyoyo ndiyothandiza...

(I feel grammar should go back to its original design like it was in the old curriculum where it was taught in isolation. The way it has been put now, grammar is appearing in small bits and to make matter worse, it has little time for teaching. If grammar can be made into a full lesson, that way then things can be much better). [Female English teacher 2, March 22, 2010]

The belief among participants was that grammar is instrumental to spoken English. Participants observed that primary school learners have difficulties in spoken English simply because grammar has been "distracted and disorganized". They strongly felt that for one to come up with good spoken English then one has to first of all know the grammar because it is crucial and plays a vital role in spoken English. For that reason, it has to be handled carefully and taken seriously. Of course it is true that grammar is key to spoken English, however, this would also depend on the extent to which the language teachers are knowledgeable about the concepts of grammar considering that some language teachers

may not have the required knowledge to teach grammar in a way that would enhance the development of English speech proficiency.

Central to the suggestion was that grammar should be taught in isolation for the betterment of the learners' spoken English. In my opinion, teaching grammar in context to some extent is less advantageous because there is little focus on grammar. Therefore, teaching grammar in isolation would assist teachers to cover more ground on grammar which has implications on developing speech proficiency. In this way, it will assist primary school learners develop English language speech proficiency.

4.4.2.3 No answers in Teacher's Guide

The study has also found that the current curriculum (PCAR) does not provide answers in Teacher's Guide. As a result, it was learnt that it brings a lot of pressure on the part of English language teachers and makes them to panic. The following quotation represents the many similar comments made by English language teachers.

Teacher's book *ija yakale amati akapeleka ntchito ija iliyonse*, exercise *iliyonse imene ili m'mene mujamo, amapelekanso ma ansala ake koma panopa asiya, mulibe ma ansala m'mene muja mu* Teacher's guide, *ukafuna wekha ndiye ndi ntchito...Ndiye muli zinthu ngati idioms, proverbs, solving crossword puzzles, similes, angopeleka zinthuzo kuti ukaphunzitse komanso ana alembe ndiye iwe sudziwa, utha? Zotsatira zake amangodumpha. Limenenso ndi vuto lina, aphunzitsi amangodumpha zimene akuona kuti sadzikwanitsa...*

(Currently, they have not provided the answers in Teacher's guide as opposed to the old curriculum implying that teachers should find the answers for themselves...There are many different kinds of exercises on idioms, proverbs, crossword puzzles and similes that learners are supposed to write them yet the teacher does not know and worse still, are not provided with answers. As a result, teachers just leave out those exercises that are difficult. That is another serious problem). [Male English teacher 8, April 16, 2010]

The revelation that teachers leave out exercises that are difficult raises a number of questions about their expectations and competences. The assumption that one would make is that teachers do not like challenging stuff. Further to this, one can argue that even the teachers themselves are not competent enough to teach English and this has implications on the extent to which learners develop English language speech proficiency.

However, the majority of English language teachers suggested that answers should be provided in the Teacher's Guide for references. The following excerpt confirms this suggestion:

Wochita prepare ma curriculum pena amayikamo zinthu zoti m'phunzitsiyo sanampatse mwina mwake mayankho ake, mu Teacher's Guide mulibe. Apeleke mayankho, m'phunzitsi uja nayenso zimatha kumusokonekera ndiye azitha kuchita refer, kunena kuti oooh kodi apapa ndi momwemu? Zidzikhala choncho.

(Currently, there are no answers in the Teacher's Guide and that makes life difficult for teachers. They should provide answers in the Teacher's Guide for references because English teachers can make mistakes as well). [Male English teacher, April 1, 2010]

The issue of whether answers should be provided in Teacher's Guide or not can be viewed differently. In my opinion, providing answers in the Teacher's Guide assists teachers to make references where the need arises. As a result, teachers are encouraged and motivated to attempt each and every exercise in the learner's books for the benefit of learners. In addition, it also increases the confidence of teachers in whatever they teach. Of course, some may begin to question the teachers' competences by suggesting the need to provide answers in the Teacher's Guide. The fact of the matter is that when teachers choose to leave out some exercises due to lack of answers, it has direct implications on the learners' knowledge as they strive to develop English language speech proficiency.

4.4.3 Challenges related to the education system

The study further found some challenges that are related to the education system as a whole but contribute to poor English language proficiency among primary school learners. Some of the challenges include lack of consultations, language policy in education (Stds 1-4), and large classes. This section discusses these challenges and how they can be resolved or reduced.

4.4.3.1 Lack of consultations

Participants in the study observed that lack of consultations is one of the major problems in the education system. The study found that primary school English language teachers are not usually consulted when changing the curriculum. If anything, they are consulted for formality sake but in true sense they are not. The participants elaborated on this as follows:

Vuto ndiloti akamafuna kuti asinthe curriculum, kwa ine ndimaona kuti m'phunzitsi wa pulaimale amakhala kuti akuyikidwa pa mbali.

(The problem is that when they want to change the curriculum, in my opinion, primary school teachers are not considered at all). [Male English teacher 3, March 26, 2010]

Aboma akamafuna kusintha zinthu, curriculum, we have discovered kuti they consult teachers kujako atapanga kale. They consult us just for formalities. That is a mistake because teachers are pioneers, azifunsa ifeyo chifukwa chirichonse akachipanga wovutika nawo ndi ifeyo aphunzitsi koma ifeyo amangotiuza zinthu zokutha-itha. Mwachitsanzo, pali ma primary school teachers ambiri amene m'mabukhumu anasayina nawo, eeee koma amanena kuti zinthu izi tinazikana koma zimene ife tinanenazo anazikana, atenga za iwo ma bwanawo.

(We have discovered that when government wants to change the curriculum, they involve teachers as a rubber stamp. This is where the problem comes because primary school teachers are the implementers of the curriculum. For instance, some primary school teachers that were involved and even their names are found in the books as those consulted revealed to us that they made some suggestions on certain issues but their ideas were not

considered. They only considered those ideas from the senior people).
[Male English teacher 8, April 16, 2010]

Such sentiments suggest that primary school teachers should be consulted when changing the curriculum. These findings are similar to what Kadzamira and Rose (2003) found that the education formulation process in Malawi does not have the tradition of consulting with stakeholders including teachers involved in education. In a similar way, it should be emphasized that consultations does not necessarily mean that everything that teachers would say will automatically be taken on board. Other factors such as the assessment of the inputs have to be considered as well.

On the other hand, participants in the study suggested that consulting widely could assist to reduce or resolve the problem of low proficiency level in spoken English among primary school learners. It was learnt that the consultations should involve all the stakeholders in the education sector. This is what the participants commented about:

Ma policy makers akamachita zinthu, azichita involve ma stakeholders, we are talking about teachers here, achaeni ake amene amalowa m'kalasimo osati amene amakhala mu office ndikumangolamula kuti zinthu zisinthe, then kungoyika zimene zija muma curriculum kuti aphunzitsiwo akapangabe izi, ayi. It's easy to say than done. Ndiye azipita ndithu ndikumakatenga ma Headteachers, ma PEA takhalani apapa, mukufuna curriculum yathu izikhala bwanji? Izizi zikumachitika kuyambira mwina mwake pa district level ndikufika pa regional level kenako pa national level, titha kukhala ndi curriculum yabwino yoti mwina mwake ana ndikuwathandizanso bwinobwino kuti azitha kuyankhula chizungu.

(When changing curriculum, policy makers must involve all the stakeholders more especially primary school teachers who are the implementers of curriculum and not necessarily those people who are always in offices busy imposing things on teachers. It's easy to say than done. Therefore, they must involve Headteachers, PEAs and consult them exclusively what they would like to be included in the curriculum. If these consultations are done from district level to regional level then to national level, I believe we will have an impressive curriculum that would help

primary schools learners able to speak English). [Male English teacher 5, April 1, 2010]

Boma lizitumanso ma experts amene amalemba ma curriculum'wo kuti asanayambe kulemba curriculum'yo azichita consult kaye widely kuti azimva bwinobwino maganizo anthu. Zimenezi zimathandiza kuti curriculum yoteroyo idzapindulire aliyense atayamba amva kaye maganizo a anthu osiyanasiyana osati maganizo a anthu amene akuchita fund project'yo ayi.

(Government should send the curriculum specialists to consult widely before developing the new curriculum and do thorough consultations to get views from different people. It is only through wide consultations that we can have a curriculum that can benefit everyone but not necessarily getting views from the donors only who are funding the project). [PEA z, May 5, 2010]

The fact that consultations are crucial in improving the quality of education cannot be denied. Such being the case, consulting teachers, Head teachers, PEAs and other stakeholders widely is essential considering that they are better placed to suggest what should be included and excluded in the curriculum. Above all, teachers are equally important since they are the implementers of any curriculum. When the researcher asked the participants on what curriculum aspects they would actually like to be consulted, all the English language teachers explained that they would like to be consulted on matters pertaining to curriculum change, life span of the curriculum and the content to be included and excluded in the curriculum. It can also be argued that getting views from the donors only is detrimental to improving the standards and quality of education simply because the realities on the ground such as the class size, availability of instructional materials and other conditions may differ.

4.4.3.2 Language policy in education (Stds 1-4)

Another problem that featured highly during interviews with the participants was the language policy in education (Stds 1-4). The participants felt that the policy is heavily contributing to the problem of poor spoken English among learners in primary schools. The following quotation presents the many similar comments that the participants made:

Ana ku Std 1 mpaka Std 4, ma subject ambiri amaphunzitsidwa m'Chichewa chimene chiri chinthu choti akafika ku Std 5 amakhala ndi phuma. Mwana ku Std 5 kumufunsa funso mu English akulephera kuyankha chifukwa choti wazolowera Chichewa m'ma subject ambiri. Vuto ndiloti anawa amalephera kugwiritsa ntchito ma concept amene awaphunzira mu Chichewa kuwabweretsa mu English. Ndiye m'phunzitsi ngakhale alongosole motani, zimakhala zovuta chifukwa choti chizungucho achiyambira kweni-kweni mu Std 5.

(From Stds 1-4, almost all the subjects are taught in Chichewa, a thing which learners find difficult in Std 5 to realize that all subjects except Chichewa only are taught in English. A Std 5 learner fails to answer questions in English simply because they were used to learn using Chichewa in Stds 1-4. The major problem is that learners fail to transfer the concepts from Chichewa to English language. No matter how best the English teacher can explain, it becomes difficult for them to understand because it is a new experience to learn everything in English). [PEA y, May 4, 2010]

Contrary to the arguments that literacy in one's most familiar language facilitates the development of English language proficiency (Government of Malawi, 2007), the study has established that learners find problems to transfer their knowledge and skills from local languages to English language. It was learnt that learners encounter difficulties to apply the concepts into English language. As a result, this development delays the learners to acquire and develop English language speech proficiency.

As a way forward, participants suggested that the Language Policy in Education (Stds 1-4) should be reviewed in order to help primary school learners acquire English language for effective communication. The following quotation confirms the claim:

Vuto la language policy ndiloti anawa amalephera kugwiritsa ntchito ma concepts amene awaphunzira mu Chichewa kuchokera Std 1 mpaka Std 4 kuwabweretsa mu English. Ndiye zikukhala zovuta chifukwa choti chizungucho akuchiyambira kweni-kweni mu Std 5. Ngati tikufuna kuti ana athuwa aziyankhula chizungu ndiye policy imeneyi kuli bwino ithe chifukwa ikubwezeretsa chizungu m'mbuyo...

(The problem with Language Policy in Education (Std 1-4) is that learners fail to transfer the skills into English language. The problem now comes in when they are in Std 5 because its difficult for them to start using English as a medium of instruction. If it is our wish that primary school learners should learn to speak English then the Language Policy should better be phased out simply because it is contributing to the problem). [PEA y, 4th May, 2010]

The conviction among the participants was that teaching primary school learners from Standards 1-4 in local languages delays the acquisition and development of English language speech proficiency. Participants emphasized that probably this is one of the reasons why primary school learners are unable to speak English. These findings are similar to what Kadzamira and Chibwana (1999) found that teachers also blame the language policy for the poor performance of learners in English and in subjects taught in English after Standard 4. Kadzamira and Chibwana reported that teachers argue that the policy is denying learners an opportunity to master English since for most learners, the school is the only place where they can get exposed to the English language. In our Malawian context, it is true that most learners consider the school as the only place to learn and practice English. As such, by not exposing them to English language vigorously during the first four years of primary school education defeats all the efforts and expectations to acquire English language.

It is equally important that our local languages should be promoted and one way of promoting them is through the Language policy in education (Stds 1-4). However, in the context of this study, it was found that the policy does not facilitate the development of

English language speech proficiency among primary school learners although there are arguments that it does facilitate the development of English language speech proficiency. Perhaps if teachers were of good quality, probably they should use language activities that facilitate the development of speech proficiency to assist learners to practice English language though they are still in Stds 1-4.

4.4.3.3 Large classes

The majority of participants complained that generally, the education system in Malawi more especially primary schools are characterized by large classes. It was learnt that due to such circumstances, it becomes difficult for the language teacher to manage and control classes and that affects learners. One teacher elaborated on this as follows:

Kunoko tiri ndi ana ambiri, mwina 150 kapena 160 kalasi imodzi komanso m'phunzitsi m'modzi. Ndiye zimakhala zovuta kuti m'phunzitsiyo adziwe mavuto a mwana aliyense komanso kuti athe kuthandiza mwana aliyense malingana ndi mavuto ake.

(We have large classes in primary schools, maybe 150 or 160 learners per class and handled by one teacher. Thus, it becomes difficult for the English teacher to know each and every learner's problems and it is equally difficult for him/her to assist them individually according to their problems and needs). [Male English teacher 1, 22nd March, 2010]

In the context of large classes, teachers should devise ways and means to engage and monitor learners in learner-centred activities for them to develop English language speech proficiency. Stuart and Kunje (2000) also reported similar findings that there were huge classes in most of the primary schools in Malawi. In reality, large classes are there to stay in Malawi due to increasing number of pupils. This calls for teachers to creatively motivate learners to maximally participate during lessons to develop English language speech proficiency.

As suggested under Section 4.4.1.4, participants pointed out that increasing the number of teachers alone is not enough but also there is need to build more school blocks in most primary schools in order to create an environment which is conducive for teaching and learning, as one PEA suggested:

Komanso boma layenera kuganizira mwina kuonjezera ma class blocks m'masukulumu kuti ana azikhala ochepa kuti m'phunzitsi azitha kugwira bwino ntchito yake. Ndikuganiza kuti zitachitika zimenezo ana adzatha kuyankhula chizungu mosavuta.

(Government should also consider seriously building more school blocks in primary schools in order to have manageable classes for teachers to work comfortably. I believe if this can be done then it will help learners to speak English without difficulties). [Male English teacher 1, March 22, 2010]

The above quotation suggests that if learning conditions are uncomfortable, they certainly affect the performance of both teachers and learners (Milner *et al* 2001). Therefore, this calls for government to consider building more class blocks in most primary schools. Having enough teachers and more class blocks would mean teachers can handle manageable classes and this has implications on the extent to which learners develop English language speech proficiency.

4.4.4 Challenges related to learners

The study also found that there are other challenges that are related to learners which affect them to develop English language speech proficiency. The challenges specifically those related to learners are discussed in detail including the suggestions or ways that can be used to resolve or reduce the challenges.

4.4.4.1 Lack of practice and motivation

The study found that lack of practice, coupled with lack of motivation were major problems that obstruct learners to acquire and develop English language speech proficiency. Learners complained that lack of practice seriously hinders them to develop speech proficiency. One learner explained.

Timakanika kuyankhula chizungu bwinobwino chifukwa choti sitimakhala ndi mpata wokwanira kuti tizipanga practice kuyankhula chizungu. Ndiye vuto lalikulu limakhala limenelo kusowa mpata woyankhulira chizungu. (We fail to speak English simply because generally we do not have opportunities to practice spoken English and that is a major problem).
[Learner, FGDs, Sch. B, March 26, 2010]

Such a complaint confirms the assertion that learners suffer silently as they struggle to acquire English language speech proficiency. Learners explained that lack of practice is fuelled by the tendency of most teachers who normally encourage them to speak Chichewa in and out classes. Similar observations were made by some language teachers:

Anawa alibe mpata woyankhulira English, nthawi imene angayankhule English ndi nthawi imene ili period ya English'yo. Chifukwa mwina mwatsoka period imeneyo ndi ya Social Studies, aphunzitsi ake samakonda English ndiye kuti azikamba mu Chichewa: "Lero tikamba za ma rivers". Mukuona, nthawi yoti mwana ayankhule English ndiyochepea [...]. (These learners do not have opportunities to speak English, the only time they have is in class more especially during English period. Worse still, subjects like Social Studies are sometimes taught in Chichewa. Today, we will talk about rivers. You see, learners have little or no time to practice spoken English...). **[Male English teacher 8, April 16, 2010]**

The fact that there is lack of practice raises the question whether teachers are really doing the right thing in schools. It can be argued that teachers do not offer scaffolding which requires them to provide learners with a wide range of opportunities to practice English language orally. This is contrary to the principles of social constructivism (Ivic, 2000). This shows that teachers do not make any effort to assist and encourage learners develop

English language speech proficiency. In sharp contrast, McGregor (2002) raises the argument that practice helps learners develop oral language skills and confidence, which are important qualities in speech proficiency. Partly, it could be that teachers do not motivate learners, as one learner complained:

...Aphunzitsinso samatipatsa chidwi kuti nafenso tiziyankhula chizungu chifukwa choti nthawi zambiri amayankhula Chichewa ngakhale m'kalasi. Akafuna kufunsa funso amafunsa kuti: "Pali funso?" kuyankhula Chichewa ndiye mwana woyankha eti, amayankha m'Chichewa momwemo.

(...Teachers do not motivate us to speak English because most of the times, they too speak Chichewa. When asking questions, they always do so in Chichewa and that does not motivate us to speak English since we also respond in the same language). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. A, March 25, 2010]

Learners argued that lack of motivation has a negative impact since most of them do not appreciate the benefits of being proficient in spoken English. This calls for English teachers to maximally motivate learners to practice spoken English as advocated by Gardner (1979) in Ellis (1987) that motivation is the primary determinant of language proficiency and those learners who are highly motivated attain a high proficiency in the language.

Participants however suggested that the problem of lack of practice and motivation can be reduced or resolved by using direct method and language activities that facilitate the development of speech proficiency to give learners an opportunity to be fully immersed in the English language. Larsen-Freeman (1986) defines direct method as a method which does not allow translation into the native language. This implies that the meanings have to be associated directly to the English language without necessarily translating into the learners' local language(s). The learners themselves expressed similar sentiments:

...Aphunzitsi akamaphunzitsa English aziyankhula English yokhayokha, asamamasulire m'Chichewa bwenzi nafenso tikutha kuyankhula English bwinobwino.

(...When teaching English, teachers must use English only, they should not translate as that could motivate us to speak English). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. A, March 25, 2010]

Aphunzitsi akamaphunzitsa English kaya ma new words, asamatimasulire m'Chichewa ayi, azingotilongosolera mu English momwemo basi.

(When teaching English more especially new words, teachers should not translate at all but rather they should explain using the same English language). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. C, April 12, 2010]

The learners expressed the need to make good use of direct method during English language lessons. Learners will develop speech proficiency more if the teachers' approach requires them to use English language directly. When something needs clarification or any kind of explanation, English language teachers can make use of real objects or gestures to assist learners understand better. Larsen-Freeman (1986) supports the idea and argues that the direct method assist learners to associate meaning in the target language directly. She further adds that when the teacher introduces a new target language word or phrase, s/he demonstrates its meaning through the use of realia or pictures and that exposes learners fully into the target language, in this case English language. The bottom line is that direct method is influential in the development of English language speech proficiency among learners.

Besides, participants further suggested that introducing English speaking policy in primary schools could help to reduce or resolve the problem of poor spoken English among learners. It was argued that this policy can encourage and motivate learners to speak English language. As put forward by the participants:

Mwina bomanso likanakhala ndiii... akanapanga njira ina yake kuti kuyankhula English m'masukulumu kukhale compulsory [...] kuti through kuyankhulayankhula kuja bwenzi English ikuyeserako koma lamulo limeneli mulibe m'masukulu.

(Government should introduce a policy so that English speaking should be made compulsory in primary schools. Through that way, it will improve the quality of spoken English but we don't have that policy in schools). [Female English teacher 2, March 22, 2010]

Akanangokhazikitsa komanso ndikukhwimitsa lamulo kuti anthu aziyankhula English basi m'masukulumu, oyankhula Chichewayo adzilandira kaya chibalo kapena chilango. Pafunika kungokhwimitsa lamulo loti aliyense aziyankhula English chifukwa akatisiilira ndiye kuti zidzavuta pa tsogolo pake.

(Government should have just introduced and enforced English speaking policy in primary schools so that those speaking Chichewa should be punished. There is need to enforce that policy because if things remain unchecked as they are at the moment then definitely we are heading for a disaster). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. B, March 31, 2010]

The general consensus amongst the participants was that if English speaking policy is introduced in primary schools, it will be easy for teachers to enforce it. Otherwise, teachers face problems to enforce it in the absence of such policy. In that way, learners will be exposed to English language thereby developing speech proficiency. This goes back to what McGregor (2002) argues that practice assists learners develop oral language skills and confidence which are essential qualities for developing English language speech proficiency. Partly, it could be that teachers lack strategies to encourage and motivate learners, as one learner suggested:

Sukulu itha kungogula makope aja mbiri kuti amene atamayankhule chizunguyo adzimupatsa makope ndiye bwenzi anthu ambiri akulimbikira kuti aaa... ndipeze, ndiziyankhula chizungu kuti ndipeze makope.

(Schools should buy enough exercise books to be given as rewards to only those learners who speak English. In that way, it will encourage learners to speak English with the intention of receiving exercise books). [Learner, FGDs, April 19, 2010]

Providing rewards to outstanding learners in primary schools encourages a hardworking spirit and competition among them. In fact learners will strive to use any possible means to speak English in an effort to receive the rewards. In that way, learners can be encouraged and motivated to speak English always which can eventually facilitate the development of English language speech proficiency. Such rewards could be in form of exercise books, pencils or rulers.

4.4.4.2 Lack of learning and teaching materials

The study has found that lack of learning and teaching materials is another problem faced in most primary schools. Although the problem is experienced in both rural and urban areas, the study has found that the situation is even worse in rural primary schools. The following statements confirm this assertion:

...Sitimakhala ndi mpata woti tizitha kuwerenga mabukhu osiyanasiyana chifukwa choti mabukhuwo amasowa, sitimatha kuwapeza...

(... We do not have an opportunity to access and read books simply because they are not available; we fail to get them). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. D, April 13, 2010]

Kusowa kwa mabukhu, m'kalasimo upeza kuti bukhu limodzi loti aziona ana 10 pa gulu limodzi, choncho ndiye awerengapo chani? Zotsatira zake anawo sangathe kuchita pronounce ma words ayi chifukwa cha kuchepa kwa mabukhu.

(There is lack of teaching and learning materials and you would find that in a class, 10 learners are sharing one book, then how can they read like that? Consequently, learners cannot manage to pronounce words because of lack of books). [PEA y, May 4, 2010]

Lack of enough teaching and learning materials has implications on the extent to which learners develop English language speech proficiency. In support of this finding, Kadzamira and Rose (2003) also found that teachers in primary schools often lack teaching

and learning materials to enable them to deliver the curriculum effectively. As a result, teachers are forced to use teacher-centred methods with a large proportion of lesson time used by the teacher himself/herself. This brings us to the question of whether teachers should use teacher-centred methods due to lack of learning and teaching materials. If we take into consideration the idea of Teaching and Learning using Locally Available Resources (TALULAR) then we can begin to see the potential that teachers have in preparing learners for the development of English language speech proficiency even with lack of learning and teaching materials. Ideally, this suggests that teachers have a crucial role in helping learners develop English language speech proficiency even with the existing problem of shortage of learning and teaching materials.

Therefore, participants suggested that government should provide enough teaching and learning materials in primary schools in order to facilitate the delivery and learning of English. The participants made these suggestions:

Ma resources ngati alipo ena oti boma litha kuchita supplement, adzichita ngati m'mene amachitira kale, kumabwera kaya zinthu zopanga-panga kale. Kale zimabwera siuja amapanga ma ox, kumapanga picture related to liwu lake. Zimenezozo zimachita capture interest ya ana, pamene masiku ano, aaaa sizikubwera.

(Government should provide enough teaching and learning materials in primary schools. Like in the past, government was providing already made teaching and learning materials like oxes and pictures that were related to words. In fact, these kind of teaching and learning materials arouse learners' interest but unfortunately they are not provided in primary schools these days). [PEA x, May 2, 2010]

Vuto ndiloti mabukhu alipo koma ndiochepa ndiye zimavuta kuti tikwanire mabukhuwo. Akanati mabukhu azibwera okwanira m'masukulumu oti tiziwerenga bwenzi tikutolapo tina ndi tina kuti tiziyankhulako chizungu...

(The problem is that there are few books in schools and it becomes difficult for us to share them. If books were enough that would have helped us to

acquire more vocabulary through reading). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. B, March 26, 2010]

Teaching and learning materials are essential for supporting teaching and learning in the classroom. It can be argued therefore that providing enough instructional materials has implications on how English language lessons are taught and more importantly, the extent to which learners understand the concepts. The understanding of concepts in turn facilitates the development of English language speech proficiency.

Further to this, participants suggested that introducing libraries in primary schools and communities will help to reduce the problem of lack of learning and teaching materials. At the same time, it will also inculcate the culture of reading which is lacking in most primary school learners. As a result, this will help learners to acquire enough vocabulary which is essential for oral communication. This is what the participants commented on:

M'ma primary school 'mu kapena m'midzimu mutakhala kuti muli ma library kuti ana aphunzitsidwe kukhala ndi mtima woti kukhala ndi chilakolako chofuna kuwerenga mwina zikhoza kuthandiza chifukwa mabukhu amathandiza ana aja kuti azitha kuyankhula chizungu.

(Libraries should be introduced in primary schools and communities in order to encourage the reading culture among primary school learners. This will help in the sense that through reading different books, learners will improve their spoken English). [Male English teacher 1, March 22, 2010]

Boma likanaganiza kumanga ma library m'masukulu kuti ana aja azitha kuwerenga kapenso kumabwereka mabukhu.

(Government should consider building libraries in primary schools so that learners should have chances to read and even borrow books). [Female English teacher 6, April 1, 2010]

The above suggestions imply that if primary schools and communities have libraries, learners will have access to learning materials thereby encouraging the culture of reading among primary school learners and children. Through reading, learners will acquire enough

vocabulary for communication. In support of this finding, an international study of literacy involving 32 systems of education showed that high levels of literacy were associated with the availability of school libraries from which learners could borrow books (Elley, 1992 in Milner *et al* 2001). Similarly, research evidence has shown that libraries are important in any school because they encourage learners to read implying that in the absence of such facilities the culture of reading cannot be enhanced (Milner *et al* 2001). Therefore, it can be deduced that lack of reading culture has implication on developing speech proficiency considering the fact that wide reading enriches knowledge base.

4.4.4.3 Lack of parental encouragement

The study further found that lack of parental encouragement and family background affect learners and contribute to poor English language proficiency in primary schools. As put forward by one PEA:

Makolo sakutengapo mbali kuti aziwalimbikitsa anawa kuti azichita bwino chani, chizungu...Ndichifukwa chakenso pali vuto limeneli, makolo ena sakuwalimbikitsa ana.

(Parents are not taking part in encouraging learners to speak English. That is why we are having this problem of poor spoken English amongst primary school learners since some parents do not encourage their children). [PEA w, April 22, 2010]

Parents can play an instrumental role to motivate and encourage children to practice spoken English. Other arguments during the interviews pointed out that family background of learners has implications on acquiring English language as one PEA explained:

Aaa... chifukwa china ndichotinso ku nyumba kumene akuchokera ana, ngati akuchokera m'ma families amene makolo awo sanapite ku sukulu, it becomes a problem kuti mwana uja alimbikitsidwe kuyankhula chizungu.
(Another problem is family background where the children come from, if they are coming from families whose parents are not educated then it

becomes a problem for the child to be encouraged to speak English). [PEA
z, May 5, 2010]

To some extent, it could mean that some parents do not realize the benefits of being proficient in spoken English due to illiteracy. In fact, Milner *et al* (2001) noted that parental education is important and can be related to learner achievement because educated parents can help a child with schoolwork and are more likely to be able to check progress. On the contrary, the study found that most parents appreciate the importance of spoken English despite being illiterate. For instance, Kholowa (2007) also found that parents and guardians send children to Community Based Child Care (CBCCs) in order for them to learn to speak English.

Central to this finding is that the illiteracy of community members to some extent, coupled with negative attitude towards spoken English has implications on how learners develop English language speech proficiency. As one learner explained:

M'midzimu mwinamu muli anthu okuti osaphunzira ndiye kuti akuone iweyo ukulankhula chizungu ndi m'nzako amayamba miseche kuti iweyo kwanu ndi kuti, ndiye usamayende ndiife kunyada kwake kukakhala kumeneko. Ndiye anthu basi kumangosiya, kumangoyankhulano chiyankhulo chathucho chimene timayankhula ku nyumbacho.

(In the villages, there are people who are not educated and when they see you speaking English, they normally backbite and question your originality. They even tell you not to chat with them. In view of that, you just decide to stop speaking English and start using the home language). [Learner, FGDs,
Sch. D, April 19, 2010]

The negative perception of community members towards English language has a bearing on learners. Once annoyed, learners decide not to speak the English language any more to avoid being segregated from the community. In so doing, the learners cannot develop

English language speech proficiency since they do not have the desire to practice the language orally.

However, the participants suggested that the government through the Ministry of Education should conduct awareness campaigns to sensitize the general public and parents or guardians on the importance of spoken English among primary school learners. Participants in FGDs made the following suggestion:

Aboma aziyitanitsa misonkhano ndipo aziwauza makolo kuti adziwalimbikitsa ana kuyankhula chizungu komanso makolowo pena ndi pena ngati ali ophunzira azitha kuwaphunzitsa ana awo kuyankhula chizungu.

(Government should sensitize parents to encourage their children to speak English. If the parents are able to speak English then they should as well assist their children how to speak the language). [Learner, FGDs, April 19, 2010]

Carrying out awareness campaigns will encourage parents or guardians to motivate their children to practice and speak English language. At the same time, it will also enlighten them to appreciate the importance of spoken English since some of them might not realize its importance due to illiteracy and other factors. Although it is difficult to change people's attitudes overnight, it is hoped that through these campaigns, their perceptions and attitudes will eventually change.

Though not directly related to the suggestion given above, participants further suggested that introducing play groups or nursery schools in the communities will greatly reduce or resolve the problem of low proficiency level in spoken English among primary school learners since children will have good background knowledge of English language before

joining primary schools. The following statement made by the participants exemplifies the suggestions made about this:

Tikupempha boma kuti likhazikitse m'midzimu masukulu ana kuti anawo akamakula asanapite kukayamba Std 1 ku primary azikhala akudziwa kuyankhula chizungu. Komanso ku masukulu amenewo adzilibikitsa anawo kuyankhula chizungu...

(We are asking the government to establish nursery schools in the villages. This will help to lay a good foundation for children to start learning English before going to Std 1 at primary school. In addition, emphasis should be on spoken English in those nursery schools). [Learner, FGDs, Sch. D, April 19, 2010]

Of course CBCCs already exists in many communities but central to the argument is that they should prepare children for future learning. At the same time, the CBCCs will also help to prepare children mentally and psychologically, and above all encourage interaction with fellow learners. This agrees with a study by Kholowa (2007) who found that CBCCs are instrumental in preparing children to build confidence for learning at primary school level, not only in terms of interacting with teachers and fellow learners but also in the content taught.

This section has presented the challenges that are specifically related to learners which contribute to poor English language proficiency in primary schools and how the challenges can be reduced or resolved. These learner-related challenges include lack of practice and motivation, shortage of learning and teaching materials and lack of parental encouragement.

Overall, the discussion in the whole section centred on challenges that contribute to low proficiency level in spoken English among primary school learners. In addition, ways or

suggestions that can be used to reduce or resolve the challenges have been discussed. The findings point to the fact that poor English language proficiency among primary school learners is a complex problem. As such, this problem requires collective efforts from teachers, learners, parents, policy makers and the government in order to reduce or resolve the problem of poor spoken English among primary school learners.

4.5 Chapter summary

The chapter has analysed and discussed the data that was specifically sourced from primary school English language teachers, PEAs and learners. It has reported that poor spoken English amongst primary school learners arises due to a number of factors which largely emanate from teacher practices. The chapter has also reported learners' attitudes towards teaching methods and strategies used during English lessons and concluded that generally, learners have negative attitudes towards them. Additionally, challenges that contribute to the problem of low proficiency level in spoken English among primary school learners have been highlighted which in broader terms include challenges related to teachers; curriculum; education system, and learners.

The chapter has also discussed a number of suggestions that have been made. In relation to this, it was suggested that using direct method can expose learners to English language thereby developing speech proficiency. From the participants' perspective, the general consensus was that there is need to consult widely when both changing and developing the curriculum. Moreover, organizing frequent insets would help in equipping English teachers

with new knowledge and skills required for effective English language teaching. The next chapter wraps up the discussions of the whole study.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Chapter Overview

The study explored teaching methods, activities and strategies that primary school teachers use for developing English language speech proficiency amongst primary schools learners. The study generally involved four primary schools in Zomba district, two schools in an urban setting and two schools in a rural setting. The key data sources were English language teachers, PEAs and learners. The study used social constructivist theory to guide the study.

The study was mainly responding to four research questions, namely; teaching methods and strategies that teachers use to enhance English language speech proficiency, attitudes that learners have towards teaching methods and strategies for developing English language speech proficiency, overall challenges that contribute to low proficiency level in spoken English, and ways or suggestions that can be used to resolve or reduce the problem of low proficiency level in spoken English. All the four research questions have been responded to in Chapter 4. This chapter presents a summary raised from the study findings and some recommendations.

5.1 Key issues

The study has established that the quality of spoken English amongst primary school learners is generally poor and this largely originates from language teachers through the use of teaching methods and strategies which do not facilitate the development of English language speech proficiency. Consequently, primary school learners achieve low proficiency level in spoken English which makes them unable to communicate effectively in different contexts.

Teacher practices were viewed from teaching methods, activities and strategies that teachers use to enhance English language speech proficiency as per the first research question (see Chapter 1, Section 1.6). Overall, the study has found that English language teachers have the practices of using teaching methods, strategies and activities which do not facilitate the development of English language speech proficiency. Some of the teaching methods, strategies and activities include translation method, drilling method, question and answer, individual exercises and reading aloud which normally limit learners to interact in English language. Basing on the theoretical framework, social constructivism, developing English language speech proficiency demands a lot of interactions and practice amongst learners. While learners might have the desire to develop English language speech proficiency, such efforts may become meaningless considering that these teaching methods, activities and strategies have little or no impact on developing English language speech proficiency. This has implications on the extent to which learners acquire English language.

In terms of teacher professionalism, the study revealed that English language teachers are leaving out listening and speaking skills which means that learners are denied the opportunity to interact and practice English language orally, contrary to the principles of social constructivism (Ivic, 2000). Thus, learners cannot develop English language speech proficiency in the absence of listening and speaking skills. Further, it was found that teachers are not resourceful, they do not collaborate, and they are lazy and not committed. In general, this appears to be in conflict with regard to what teachers are expected of professionally. Such practices are detrimental simply because they defeat all the efforts to assist learners to develop English language speech proficiency.

As regards language learning activities, the study has found that English language teachers rarely use activities such as dialogues, role plays and debates during English language lessons. Although the study found that group work is commonly used by English language teachers, it was established that they were poorly organized by teachers and ended into an informal chat which are usually done in Chichewa. On the other hand, the study found that English language teachers just focus on Teacher's Guide and learners' books only as teaching and learning materials implying that charts, pictures and realia are not used during English language lessons. The fact that teachers do not use a variety of language activities and teaching and learning materials that facilitate the development of speech proficiency during English language lessons have implications on the extent to which English language can be achieved among primary schools learners. It can be deduced therefore that it is impossible to expect primary school learners to develop English language speech proficiency when in actual fact they are not exposed to the language itself.

In response to the second research question about learners' attitudes towards teaching methods and strategies used by teachers, overall, the study has found that learners had negative attitudes towards them. The key issue is that teachers emphasize methodologies that are not only disliked by the learners but also do not facilitate the development of English language speech proficiency. Learners observed that teaching methods and strategies such as translation and drilling methods, individual exercises and reading aloud have little or no impact in developing English language speech proficiency. This implies that learners have not benefited in terms of speech development and it has implications on speech proficiency. The need for language teachers to use activities such as dialogues, debates, role plays during English language lessons cannot be over-emphasized. These language activities are particularly important because they facilitate the development of English language speech proficiency among learners through interactions.

Nonetheless, some learners had a positive attitude towards some of the teaching methods such as group work, individual exercises and pair work but only disliked the manner in which they were handled and the frequency at which they were utilized in class by English language teachers. To some extent, this has implications on the extent to which learners develop English language proficiency.

Concerning the learners' attitudes towards teaching and learning materials, the study has found that learners have a positive attitude towards learners' books not by choice but because they are the only teaching and learning materials used by English language teachers. It was found that the use of a variety of teaching and learning materials such as

charts and pictures during English language lessons is lacking in primary schools. This has a serious and negative impact on the development of speech proficiency. The current practices by teachers in primary schools calls for English language teachers to creatively make efforts to use other teaching and learning materials apart from learners' books for the betterment of primary school learners to develop English language speech proficiency.

The third and fourth research questions explored the overall challenges that contribute to low proficiency level of spoken English and ways that can be used to resolve or reduce the problem of poor spoken English among primary school learners respectively. According to the findings, the study has found that, in broad terms, there are challenges that are related to teachers; curriculum; the education system, and learners which have largely contributed to the problem of poor English language proficiency among primary school learners.

On challenges that are related to teachers, the study found that the modes of teacher training, teacher knowledge, lack of insets and shortage of teachers contribute to poor English language speech among learners. The fact that the modes of training which teachers undergo are different means that they are likely to acquire knowledge differently. This implies that teachers have different philosophies about language teaching and learning and it has implications on lesson preparation and delivery. As has previously been discussed, this raises the issue of the extent to which speech proficiency among primary school learners can be achieved.

In general, the other key issue was that most primary school English language teachers have problems in spoken English. It is crucial especially when we consider that teachers are responsible for assisting learners to develop English language speech proficiency. This suggests that learners cannot develop English language speech proficiency since teachers do not provide the required assistance as is generally expected in scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978 cited in Yang and Wilson, 2006). Further, the problem is compounded by lack of insets and shortage of teachers in schools. All this has implications for speech development as teachers are unlikely to stretch themselves in order to achieve maximum learning for the learners.

The major challenge that was observed concerning the curriculum was that there is frequent change of curricular. Consequently, it is hard for teachers to get used to the new content and deliver English language lessons successfully. Efforts to assist learners to develop English language speech proficiency can be meaningless if teachers have problems in delivering the lessons. The findings further indicate that the content of grammar leaves a lot to be desired in the current (PCAR) curriculum. It was found that the content of grammar has been "distracted and disorganized" and this has implications on speech development. It is important to bear in mind that grammar plays a vital role in spoken English.

Regarding the education system, lack of consultations was found to be one of the major challenges. Findings show that major stakeholders are generally not consulted on the content to be included in the curriculum and the life span of the curriculum. Another

challenge was the language policy in education (Stds 1-4). This policy has implications on developing English language speech proficiency as it was observed that learners face difficulties to transfer the skills for the development of English language. The revelation that the policy delays the acquisition of English language raises important questions with regard to the extent to which speech proficiency may be achieved. In addition, teachers were found to have problems in handling learners due to large classes. In the end, teachers opted to teach English using teacher-centred methods. Such methods are irrelevant in helping learners develop English language speech proficiency.

In relation to the challenges that are related to learners which contribute to poor English language proficiency, the study has found that lack of practice among learners, lack of learning and teaching materials, and lack of parental encouragement are the major challenges faced by primary school learners. All this has negative implications on speech development and on the extent to which learners acquire English language speech proficiency.

However, participants came up with some suggestions that can be adopted to resolve or reduce the problem of low proficiency level in spoken English among primary school learners. It was observed that learners have the potential to develop English language speech proficiency if language teachers make use of teaching methods, activities and strategies that facilitate the development of speech proficiency. The provision of better training for teachers and intensifying insets would also assist teachers to gain more knowledge and skills to improve English language lessons delivery. Participants further

suggested that reviewing language policy in education (Stds 1-4) was necessary based on the findings that it delays the acquisition of English language although there are arguments that there is transfer of skills.

5.2 Recommendations for improvement

The study has drawn some recommendations from the analysis which, if seriously considered in one way or the other, will help in the achievement of good quality of spoken English amongst primary school learners.

1. There is need for English language teachers in the four schools to seriously consider using direct method when teaching English. The method will enable learners to be fully exposed to English language and have enough time and opportunities for practice. English language teachers should always use learner centred activities like debates, role plays, dialogues and discussions simply because they facilitate the development of English language speech proficiency.
2. Language teachers in the four schools should consider using language activities to assist learners to practice English language even though they are still in Stds 1-4. Possibly, the Ministry of Education should consider reviewing the language policy in education (Stds 1-4) and find ways in which the role of English language can be promoted even at lower levels of primary education than is currently happening.
3. There is need for the four schools to intensify organizing the school-based insets to allow language teachers to share knowledge, skills and experiences. Perhaps,

the Ministry of Education should explore ways of promoting school insets despite challenges that are there from teachers to demand incentives. This could be one of the critical ways of improving English lessons delivery considering the fact that insets assist in equipping teachers with new knowledge and skills required for effective teaching.

4. Development of curriculum, being a key to teaching and learning, should involve all the major stakeholders including teachers, Head teachers, PEAs, parents and NGOs' involved in education than is currently done. Consulting widely before developing a new curriculum will help to improve the quality of the content in the new curriculum.

5.3 Areas for further studies

- There is need to conduct a long-term study involving a larger sample to establish the relationship between teacher practices for developing English language speech proficiency and learner performance in subjects that are taught in English.
- A replication of this study should be conducted to other districts and regions considering that the findings of this study may not be generalized to all schools in Malawi.

- A study should explore the impact of language policy in education (Stds 1-4) on developing English language speech proficiency. Of course some people can argue there is literature that mother tongue improves the development of English language speech proficiency but the extent to which that is done is still debatable.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview guide for English language teachers

Level of spoken English of primary school learners

- In general, what is the level of spoken English of primary school learners?
Probe: What are the factors that hinder primary school learners from developing English language speech proficiency?
- In your opinion, how does low proficiency level in spoken English affect:
 - i. English language teaching and learning
 - ii. The performance of primary school learners
- How do English teachers assist learners when they have difficulties in spoken English?

Teaching methods and strategies for developing English language speech proficiency

- What teaching methods and activities do you use during English lessons to help primary school learners develop English language speech proficiency?
Probe: What kind of activities do you use during English lessons to enhance English language speech development?
- What is the importance of each of the activities (mentioned above)?
Probe: How often do you use the activities during English lessons?
- In your opinion, based on practical or professional experience, which activities do you consider as more effective for developing English language speech proficiency?
Probe: Why?
- How do English teachers help primary school learners to be proficient in English language?

- What kind of teaching and learning materials do you use during English lessons?
Probe: How important are the teaching and learning materials (mentioned above) in developing English language speech proficiency?
- In your opinion, do you think English teachers are doing enough to help primary school learners develop English language speech proficiency? Explain.

Challenges that contribute to low proficiency level in spoken English

- What are the challenges that contribute to low proficiency level in spoken English amongst primary school learners?
Probe: Explain why primary school learners have difficulties in spoken English?
- How do you overcome those challenges (mentioned above) that contribute to low proficiency level in spoken English?

Suggestions that could be used to improve the problem

- What are the suggestions/ways that could be used to improve the problem of low proficiency level in spoken English amongst primary school learners?
Probe: In your opinion, in what ways can the problem of poor spoken English in primary schools be best addressed?

Appendix 2: Interview guide for PEAs

Level of spoken English of primary school learners

- In general, what is the level of spoken English of primary school learners?
Probe: What are the factors that affect primary school learners from developing English language speech proficiency?

Teaching methods and strategies that are used during English lessons

- What are the teaching methods and activities that English teachers use to enhance English language speech development?
Probe: In your opinion, are you satisfied with what primary school English teachers do to help learners develop English language speech proficiency?
Explain.
- How do you advise English teachers to assist primary school learners develop English language speech proficiency?

Challenges that contribute to low proficiency level in spoken English

- What are the challenges that contribute to low proficiency level in spoken English in primary schools?
- How do you advise English teachers to overcome those challenges in order to help primary school learners develop English language speech proficiency?

Suggestions that could be used to improve the problem

- What suggestions/ways can you give that could be used to improve the problem of low proficiency level in spoken English in primary schools?
Probe: In what ways can the problem of low proficiency level in spoken English in primary schools be best addressed?

Appendix 3: Focus group discussion guide for learners

Teaching methods and strategies that are used during English lessons

- What teaching methods and activities do English teachers use when teaching English?

Probes: What opportunities are you given to practice English language?

How often?

- How do English teachers assist you when you have made mistakes in spoken English during English lessons?
- What teaching and learning materials do English teachers use during English lessons? (Ref: real objects, charts, pictures, books etc)

Probe: Which teaching and learning materials do you like and dislike? Explain.

Learners' attitude towards teaching methods and activities used during English lessons

- What is your attitude towards teaching methods, activities or tasks that English teachers use during English lessons?

Probe: In your opinion, which activities promote English language speech proficiency? Explain.

- To what extent do those activities or tasks help you develop English language speech proficiency?
- Is there any special guidance that English teachers do to help you develop English language speech proficiency? Explain.

Challenges that contribute to low proficiency level in spoken English

- What are the challenges that contribute to low proficiency level in spoken English amongst learners in primary schools?

Probe: How do you overcome those challenges (mentioned above)?

- How do English teachers help you to deal with those challenges that contribute to low proficiency level in spoken English?

Suggestions that could be used to improve the problem

- What suggestions/ways can you give that could be used to improve the problem of low proficiency level in spoken English amongst learners in primary schools?

Probe: In what ways can the problem of poor spoken English in primary schools be best addressed?

Appendix 4: English language classroom observation checklist

Teaching methods and strategies that are used during English lessons

- The teaching methods and activities that English teachers use during English lessons.
- Approaches used by English teachers during English lessons
 - Are they involving learners?
 - Is it learner-centred or teacher-centred?
- The teaching and learning materials that are used (Ref: real objects, charts, pictures, books etc)

English teachers' perspective

- Teachers' communicative competence in English language.
- The role of English teachers during English lessons.
- How do English teachers assist learners to develop English language speech proficiency?

The language used during learning activities

- Which language is used by the learners during learning activities?
- Are the learners able to interact using English language?
 - Learners' abilities to communicate in spoken English.
- Overall, which language is used as the medium of instruction during English lessons?

Appendix 5: Introduction letter

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI



CHANCELLOR COLLEGE
Department of Educational Foundations

PRINCIPAL

Prof. Chris Kamlongera., B.A., DipTEO., M.A., Ph.D

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Our Ref.: Edf/6/19

Your Ref.:

5th March, 2010

Dear Sir/Madam

INTRODUCING MARTIN L. LIPENGA

I have the pleasure to introduce to you Martin Lipenga, our Masters of Education [Curriculum and Teaching Studies-Language Education] student in the faculty of Education. Martin Lipenga is exploring Teacher practices for developing English Language speech proficiency as a requirement for successful completion of the program. He is now required to collect data for his thesis. I, therefore, write to kindly ask for your support towards his study as he collects the data and related literature.

I thank you in anticipation for your cooperation and support.

Dr. Bob Wajizigha Chulu

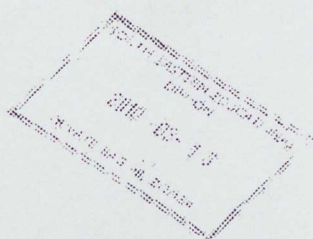
Lecturer in Psychometrics & Head, Educational Foundations Department

Appendix 6: Permission letter

REF. NO. SEED/ADM/VOL. 8/277

16th March, 2010

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



TO : THE HEADTEACHERS, ZOMBA DISTRICT PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

AUTHORITY TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I write to kindly request your office to allow Mr. Martin Lipenga, to undertake research activities at your institutions.

Mr. Lipenga is currently pursuing his Masters of Education with University of Malawi (Chancellor College).

I would be most grateful if Mr. Lipenga is given all the necessary support so that his research activities are carried out successfully.

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


M.S.D. Mufandikas
EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER