



**EXAMINING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL READING PROGRAMME  
BY TEACHERS IN STANDARDS 1 to 4 IN MALAWI. A CASE OF SELECTED  
SCHOOLS IN BLANTYRE RURAL.**

**By**

**GETRUDE MBALE**

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**Supervisor: Dr AGNESS HARA**

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**DECLARATION**

I, Getrude Mbale, declare that the thesis entitled '*Examining the Implementation of the National Reading Programme by Teachers in the Lower Primary Classes (Standards 1 to 4). A Case of Selected Schools in Blantyre Rural*' is my own work and has been carried out at Mzuzu University under the supervision of Dr Agness Hara. It has not been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other university. All the sources that I have used and quoted have been sincerely acknowledged and indicated by means of complete references.

Signed..... Signed .....

Student Date

Signed..... Signed .....

Supervisor Date

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to early childhood teachers in the primary schools of Malawi.

I recognise your efforts, amidst the numerous challenges you encounter as you strive to develop reading skills in early grade learners.

*Nothing can replace an early childhood educator*

## **ABSTRACT**

The Ministry of Education Science and Technology, introduced the National Reading Programme (NRP) in 2015, to improve early grade learners' literacy skills. Central to achieving this goal, the MOEST engaged in building teachers' capacity to teach foundational reading skills that are key for successful reading and comprehension abilities needed for learning content across the curriculum. All teachers teaching language in standards 1-4 across the country were trained in the use of Teachers' Guides and Learners' books.

However, research findings from both the NRP monitoring team and Malawi Reading Assessment conducted by MOEST in 2017/2018 showed that the state of reading achievement was still below average. This was worse in rural primary schools. According to MOEST, 2016, this was partly due to inadequate mastery of some methods, content and strategy on the part of teachers. Therefore, the study sought to examine how teachers carried out the reading implementation exercise in standards 1-4 by focusing on teachers' understanding and interpretation of the reading instruction in terms of strategies of teaching reading, their preparation for the implementation exercise and the challenges they encountered in the implementation process.

The study was guided by the social constructivist theory which was developed by Lev Vygotsky, in 1978. It is based on an interactive and cooperation learning in which learners are vigorously involved in constant and continuous practice of concepts with the teacher and peers. (Stuart et al. 2009). The study was qualitative in nature and a case study design was followed. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with sixteen teachers, four headteachers, two PEAs and the NRP Officer. Documentary analysis and classroom observation were done to triangulate data collected through interviews.

Based on the most significant findings of this research study, it was concluded that most teachers implemented the reading programme with difficulties. Consequently, the goals of NRP might not be achieved to the maximum. Therefore, the most prominent recommendations for improvement of the NRP implementation exercise were made.

**List of key words**

Cascade model.

Curriculum

Early childhood

I do, we do, and you do

Implementation

National Reading Programme

## **Glossary of acronyms and abbreviations**

ATP	Areas of Teaching Practice
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CERT	Centre for Education, Research and Training
DC	District Coordinator
DEM	District Education Manager
EFA	Education for All
EMIS	Education Management Information System
GRRM	Gradual Release of Responsibility
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
MNRA	Malawi National Reading Assessment
MOEST	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
NRP	National Reading Programme
PEA	Primary Education Advisor
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SACMEQ	South and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring and Evaluation Quality
SIP	School Implementation Plan



TDC	Teacher Development Centre
TG	Teachers Guide
TLC	Teacher Learning Circles
TLM	Teaching and Learning Materials
TTC	Teacher Training College
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
ZPD	Zonal Proximal Development

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This section presents the background to the study. It also presents the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, main research question, sub-research questions, and significance of the study.

### **1.2 Background of the study**

In the history of education, reading is the principal focus of every child's learning. According to Gordon (2011), reading skills are fundamental to a child's access to print for academic growth, interaction with society and provide an alternate mode of communication in today's ever advancing world of technology. Research from around the world has confirmed that reading is fundamental to success in the formal education system. For example, (Abadzi 2017; Montenegro and Patrinos 2014) explain that reading is a prerequisite for writing, advanced cognitive skills, and the ability to progress through school systems. Children who develop good reading skills are more likely to succeed at school and become productive members of the society (World Bank 2016). In order to achieve high rates of literacy, it is paramount that children learn to read around the age of five or six. According to Graham (2018), the World Bank's education strategy statement for 2020 also acknowledges that in the early grade years, quality teaching is critical for equipping learners with the foundational reading skills on which lifelong learning depends. In an even stronger statement on the criticality of literacy to learning, World Bank (2017) reports that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) recently established an objective of achieving improved reading skills for 100 million children in early primary grades by 2015. Findings from neuroscience research also show that the ideal time to develop the basic reading skills that lead to reading fluency is in early



childhood (Clark-Charelli & Louge 2016; Abadzi 2017). The explanation for this is that the costs of addressing reading problems are lower in early primary school compared to upper primary school (Gross 2009). Although no two children will develop their reading skills in exactly the same way, in the same time frame, all readers will progress through a series of phases in their reading development. Ultimately, if a child does not begin learning to read around 1st grade, the negative effects cascade and prevent the person from achieving high levels of fluency, learning more advanced cognitive skills, and progressing to higher levels of education.

Unfortunately, Literacy is the most neglected of the Education for All (EFA) goals (World Bank 2017). Millions of students that have completed primary school in low-income countries lack even the most basic literacy skills (World Bank 2017). A global report by the the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2011 indicated that the lowest literacy rates are observed in South and West Asia. Even more distressing are results from Sub-Saharan Africa, which show that in some regions and countries, more than 80% and even 95% of children at the end of Grade 2 cannot read *one word* of a simple story (Gove & Cvelich 2010). Large portions of students are completing several years of schooling while remaining completely illiterate. In Gambia, for example, over half of all grade 2<sup>nd</sup> graders cannot read a single word. In Guyana, almost 30% of all 3<sup>rd</sup> graders are zero-word readers (Gove & Cvelich 2010). Likewise, most children in Malawi, are unable to comprehend grade level texts. For example, the Malawi National Reading Assessment (2014) revealed that only 1.6 percent of standard 1 to 3 children in Malawi, could recognize a word either in English or Chichewa. This has direct implications for achievement in all areas of study. Because childhood is the ideal time to learn to read, and because reading is a prerequisite for writing, advanced cognitive skills, and the ability to progress through school systems, these children

are unable to take advantage of the high private returns to education and increasing demands from labour markets for advanced skills (Abadzi 2017; Montenegro & Patrinos 2014; World Bank 2016)

In 1994, the government of Malawi introduced free Primary education soon after the nation attained the democratic system, with an aim of providing opportunity for all children to enroll in schools. According to Mgomezulu and Wamba (2014), this was partly in response to the Jomtien conference which advocated for Education for All (EFA), in Thailand, in 1990. This also formed part of a national policy on poverty alleviation of the Government. The Government realized that reducing poverty was not possible without sustained economic growth and that economic growth would not happen without investing in education, (Mgomezulu & Wamba 2014).

Although enrolment rates in schools rose markedly in recent years, globally, literacy rates were still very low. For example, UNESCO (2011) estimated that 250 million primary school-aged children, out of a total of 650 million, were failing to acquire basic reading skills (Education for All 2014). Likewise, although the education sector in Malawi made significant gains in increasing equitable access to the primary education system, learning levels remained low as indicated in National Reading Assessment (2014) results. Kadzamira and Rose (2003) report that Malawi faces an acute illiteracy levels in students in the lower classes of Primary Education, and this is worse in rural primary schools. The results of the National Reading Assessment (2014), revealed that learners could reach standard four without acquiring the basic reading skills. As a result, Malawi was mapped a country with the lowest quality education in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Region. Masina (2014) in his article *Malawi Schools to teach in English*, also observed that English speaking, reading and writing were very big challenges to pupils in Malawi, including those who completed secondary school

education. Most of the students in Malawian schools moved from one class to another without attaining a desirable level of literacy skills. These revelations signaled the dire need to improve reading instruction and outcomes in order to achieve the goal of universal primary education. Unfortunately, most teachers in Malawi were not receiving adequate professional development in effective strategies to address the teaching of language skills. Mackey and Gass (2012) assert that the teaching of language skills was a challenge to most of the teachers, not only in Malawi, but to other SADC countries as well.

English, as a language, is described in terms of the four basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Teachers need to address all these skills in the teaching of languages, and whenever possible, utilize activities that integrate all four skills since each skill reinforces the others. The common problem with early grade teachers is that they tackle language through isolable and discrete structural elements, yet in reality, it's rare for language skills to be used in isolation because they are interconnected, (Madericova 2013). For example, both listening and speaking skills are needed and applied at the same time in a conversation, and in some contexts, listening and making (writing) notes is likely to be almost as common as having a conversation.

The ability of teachers to tackle language skills depends on the training in their initial teacher training course. For example, most teachers who were trained after the attainment of multiparty Democracy in 1994 were not properly baked because the training period was too short, (Nthenda 2001). According to Kadzamira and Rose (2003), the teachers were trained hurriedly because they needed to rush for the 1.9 to 3.9 million masses of children who had enrolled in primary schools. As a result, the teachers were not effective in the teaching of the second language and literacy skills. Since then, Malawi has been experiencing poor literacy attainment levels in education of the children including those who complete secondary school education.

To address the learners' reading challenges in schools, the Malawi Government through the Ministry of Education Science and Technology, introduced the National Reading Programme (NRP) in 2015, in order to improve the reading achievements of standards 1 to 4 learners to ensure that at least 50 percent of learners that complete standard 4 and are able to read at that level (MoEST 2016). The National Reading programme has been under implementation from September 29, 2015 and was rolled out in all standard 1 class rooms in the 2016-2017 academic year in schools across Malawi (MoEST 2016). In the 2017-2018 academic year, the programme rolled out in standards 2-4. The Ministry of Education also took the task of strengthening teachers' skills and knowledge of how to teach language skills in standards 1-4 by providing them with the training and on-going professional development through coaching. All language teachers, headteachers and PEAs received training in NRP instructional methods, approaches and strategies of teaching reading, to complement the ones teachers are already using in schools. MOEST also introduced teachers to effective reading instruction through the five essential components of phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension including oral language development and writing as part of reading instruction. This was to ensure the fruitful implementation of the National Reading Programme across all schools.

The introduction of the National Reading Programme (NRP) in primary schools was necessitated by the results of the Malawi National Reading Assessment (MNRA) (2014) and other reading surveys which revealed the pathetic situation in primary schools. Most of the findings noted that learners could reach standard four without acquiring the basic reading skills. This situation was deemed to have also affected other learning areas, as no learner can do better in other subjects without knowing how to read. For example, in a related development, the South and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring and Evaluation Quality II (SACMEQ) exam, administered to Standard 6 pupils throughout 15 countries in Southern Africa, Malawian

pupils scored the lowest, with over 91 percent of the pupils being unable to demonstrate a minimum level of mastery for reading (SACMEQ 2012). This was mostly contributed by the shortage of qualified teachers, in schools. Most of them lack basic language teaching practices and skills. That is why Adekola (2007) in his article, *Language, Literacy and Learning in Primary Schools*: explains, “Teachers were generally weak in English and unable to explain lessons through the medium of this language.”

For all children to learn to read and write effectively, it required the MOEST to provide all children in Malawi with excellent reading instruction, and the materials they needed to read. According to Gersten and Geva (2016), this was fundamental not only to their completion of the basic cycle, but also to their future personal, academic and social success. For this to be fruitfully achieved, the MOEST needed to be supported with the effort and commitment from stakeholders such as education authorities, headteachers and their associations, teachers and their professional associations, the deans of education, health professionals, parents and parent organisations. Hence, the NRP trained school leaders and sensitized the community on how best to support teachers as they implemented the reading programme in schools (Rowe 2005). All the stakeholders were encouraged to hold hands to support the implementation of the reading activity so as to achieve the desired results.

Basing on this background, the objective of this study was to examine how teachers in rural schools implemented the National Reading Programme in the lower primary classes, standards 1-4, by focussing on their understanding and interpretation of the reading instruction in terms of approaches to teaching reading, preparation of teachers for the implementation exercise and, the challenges teachers encounter in the implementation process.

### **1.3 Statement of the research problem**

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) recognises that learning to read and write is the cornerstone of providing learners with quality education. Given the role that reading and writing play in education, as well as the life-long benefits of literacy, learning to read in the early primary grades is a critical goal for Malawi's education system (MOEST 2016). With more than half of its population being the youth aged below 18, education is the key to the country's growth and prosperity, hence the government is aggressively working to raise educational standards. Recognizing the need for greater change, MOEST introduced the National Reading Programme (NRP) in 2015 to improve early grade (standards 1 to 4) learners' literacy skills. This programme incorporated good teaching and learning practices drawn from several literacy interventions that had been conducted in selected districts across Malawi over the past years, such as Read Malawi and Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA), in order to achieve the most desired reading outcomes. Central to achieving the goal, all language teachers, headteachers and PEAS received training in the use of the new teachers' guide and the learners' books, NRP instructional methods, approaches and strategies of teaching reading, to complement the ones teachers are already using in schools. Building teachers' capacity to teach foundational reading skills was the key to successful reading and comprehension abilities needed for learning content across the curriculum.

However, results from the 2017 and 2018 National Reading Assessment for Standards 2 and 4 and NRP monitoring team revealed that the state of reading achievement was still below average. Most children in Malawi were still unable to read even after spending four years in school. These revelations pointed to the critical need to improve reading instruction and reading outcomes in order to achieve the goal of universal primary education. Therefore, it was imperative to examine how teachers implemented the reading programme in the early grades,

especially in rural primary schools. The study intended to carry out an inclusive participatory investigation into options for improving the teachers' understanding of the National Reading curriculum, preparing teachers for the reading implementation in schools, improving the way of applying the NRP approach in reading instruction and reducing challenges they encountered in the reading implementation exercise.

#### **1.4 Rationale and purpose of the study**

This sub-section presents Rationale and purpose of the study.

##### **1.4.1 Rationale of the study**

This study was important because it would provide, a set of principles of learning about the ideas and practices that promote learners' academic achievement in reading and writing. Another anticipated value of the study was that it would aggregate previous relevant studies on the issues and problems surrounding reading and writing and synthesise the findings of previous studies. Finally, the study will help primary education advisors to plan for frequent continuous professional developments (CPDs) to help teachers grow professionally which will in turn help improve their instructional practices in the infant and junior primary classes.

##### **1.4.2 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was to examine instructional practices of teachers in early grade classes in rural primary schools by focussing on teachers' understanding and interpretation of the National Reading curriculum, how they are prepared to implement the reading curriculum and the challenges they encounter in the teaching and learning process.

## **1.5. Research questions**

This study is guided by the following research questions:

### **1.5.1 The main research question**

How do teachers implement National Reading Programme in the primary lower classes (standards 1 to 4)?

### **1.5.2 The Research sub-questions**

- What do teachers understand about the National Reading Programme?
- How are the teachers prepared for the implementation the National Reading Programme?
- How is the instruction best provided using the National Reading Programme approach to teaching reading?
- What challenges do teachers experience when implementing the National Reading Programme?

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

This study was significant in the following ways: First, academically, since there are few country studies conducted on the National Reading Programme; the study will supplement the existing pool of knowledge or literature in the area of education in Malawi which could be of great value. Secondly the results will help teacher training colleges to give extra attention to early grade learning and teaching strategies and approaches to equip student teachers with knowledge of how to use them. Furthermore, the study findings will provide monitoring and evaluation information about the National Reading Programme implementation in the country. Again, the findings might also be used by other stakeholders like the donor countries, relevant NGOs' and academicians in public and private sector in policy formulation/management



decisions on education and administration planning. Findings of the study will also help primary education advisors to plan for frequent continuous professional developments (CPDs) help teachers grow professionally. Finally, the study will be useful to scholars, and practitioners and for staff and students, and future researchers in education as a reference material on issues of new language curricula implementation.

### **1.7. Theoretical framework**

There are a number of theories that influence the teaching of reading in the lower classes of primary school. However, this study adopted Social Constructivist theory.

The social constructivist theory was developed by Lev Vygotsky, in 1978. He states that learning is an active continuous process where learners take information from the environment, construct meaning and make interpretations based on their prior knowledge and experience. The National Reading Programme has been based on the constructivist theory. According to Christine (2011) it is based on the belief that learners should be helped to construct knowledge that is meaningful and useful in their own lives. What is important is not so much what learners learn, but how they learn. The skills they learn are more important than the content. Learning takes place as learners are vigorously involved in constant and continuous practice of concepts with the teacher, (we do) and on their own (you do) in groups, pairs, and individuals, with authentic tasks given within a meaningful context in order to promote individual learning and encourage learners to be engaged in a task. The social constructivist theory promotes the learner centred approach to learning while at the same time encourages co-operative teaching. It therefore stands to reason that, through co-operative learning, that is, through collaboration, when learners discuss, share problems and solutions learners' poor reading can be alleviated (Stuart et al. 2009 & Christine 2011). Vygotsky uses two key concepts to support his theory

argument. These are: *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) and the concept of *scaffolding*. (Stuart et al. 2009).

### **1.7.1 Zone of Proximal Development**

It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level (of the child) as determined through problem solving (on their own) and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky1978). This theory suggests that social interaction leads to continuous step-by-step changes in children's thought and behaviour that can vary greatly from culture to culture (Vygotsky1978).

The theory further states that development depends on interaction with people and the tools that the culture provides to help form their own view of the world. Vygotsky indicates that if the child is given the support that is appropriate and meaningful, the his/her understanding can be extended far beyond that which he/she could reach alone and therefore move from minimal level to a higher level of performance (Stuart et al. 2009). In this model, therefore, learning is seen as assisted performance. The role of the teacher is to identify the ZPD, help learners to do what they cannot do on their own and support them until they can do it independently. Such support depends on careful choice of participatory methods, appropriate teaching resources and preparation of varied learning activities. The teacher, therefore, must understand the subject matter and the way children's understanding typically develops in a particular culture. Constructivism avoids direct instruction, instead, the teacher with experience and content knowledge guides learners in discovering knowledge on their own.

In constructivism, students are actively involved, rather than passively absorbing information; the learning environment is democratic, the teacher is not seen as an authority figure as much as a learning guide; the activities are interactive and student-centred instead of being lesson-

centred. The teacher facilitates activities in which students are responsible for their own learning and are autonomous from one another.

### **1.7.2 The Concept of Scaffolding**

The concept of scaffolding leads on to the second key insight from Vygotsky's work. This concerns the role of the culture and the wider context of the learner in influencing his/ her understanding (Stuart et al. 2009). This influence starts in informal ways, from birth, as the infants and the young children interact with their parents and family. The youngsters, through experiencing the language and forms of behaviour of their culture, acquire particular cognitive skills, strategies, knowledge and understanding. Cognition, language, and forms of thought are thus *scaffolded* by the culture and social history of the learner as well as by direct teaching.

This influence of culture continues throughout life. The local ideas, language and concepts, which are derived from interaction with others, will structure, challenge, enhance or limit thinking (Vygotsky 1978; Wells & Claxton 2002). Thus, learning is social as well as individual, and the school context is an important factor. The role of language is particularly important. It is seen as central to the development of thinking, therefore, talk and interaction with peers, is important. Vygotsky further elaborates on the importance of play in children's learning situations. Following this perspective, teachers need to provide children, many opportunities to play. Through play and imagination, a child's conceptual abilities are stretched. Through play, children can develop the fundamentals required for proper development of reading skills. Recognizing and praising learners' efforts of improvement is vital, as it encourages more class participation. The theory can be useful in any intervention especially in reading intervention.

In many ways, teachers must act as scientists, investigating students' thinking, finding ways to learn about how particular students are actively constructing their understanding. Teachers

must probe students understanding, sometimes even interviewing them about their thoughts and logic. Instead of being mere founts of knowledge, teachers will also have to become inquirers, asking questions and testing hypotheses about what their students know and do not know. The social process also recognizes the important role of a teacher as a mediator or facilitator who should help learners (apprentices) develop their reading skills by working with the teacher and peers and later being able to work alone. This is called ‘*scaffolding the learners*’ which means giving learners help only when they need it and withdrawing it once they are able to work on their own (Vygotsky 1978 & Stuart et al. 2009). The teacher uses this process to find out the inadequacies and strengths of learners so as to determine the appropriate assistance and support to give them. In this way, the aspect of zone of proximal development has occurred.

Three main roles of the teacher that will enable appropriate application of this theory are: modelling, guiding and coaching and scaffolding -to provide sufficient support to promote learning when new concepts are introduced. The teacher is further expected to: facilitate learning by providing a variety of experiences, provide opportunities for learners to explore and experience, and emphasizes the opportunities that allow learners of different cognitive levels to work together, encourage less mature students to advance in creating understanding by scaffolding each other’s thinking, while the teacher extends their understanding in ways that are appropriate to their level.

### **1.8. Delimitation of the study**

This study was basically qualitative in nature and only confined to teachers in the few rural public primary schools in Blantyre rural. Although it is possible that the challenges and experiences of rural schools are similar, these possible relationships were not examined. Therefore, research findings might not be replicated to other parts of the region and in Malawi at large.

## **1.9 Operational definitions of terms**

This section presents the definitions of key words on which this study is based. These definitions will therefore help readers to understand important concepts and arguments which are presented in this thesis.

### **1.9.1 Reading**

Rowe (2005) defines reading as ‘learning how to decipher print’ and ‘understanding what the print means’. It is a message-getting, problem-solving activity which increases in power and flexibility the more it is practised and a process by which children can, on the run, extract a sequence of cues from printed texts and relate these, one to the other, so that they understand the message of the text. (Rowe 2005).

### **1.9.2 Components of reading**

These are layered, interactive processes in the teaching and learning process also known as the five literacy elements, or component skills. According to Wiggins and McTighe (2007), they include: phonological awareness, alphabetical principle, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension

### **1.9.3 Guided, shared and independent Reading strategies**

These are the strategies that have special elements and characteristics that trigger the involvement of learners in interactive processes that enhance scaffolding of literacy development. Their effects are escalated in all steps of lesson activities. NRP adopted the three strategies as effective approaches to reading instruction (National Reading Panel 2014).

**1.9.4 Gradual Release of Responsibility Model:** It is the gradual release framework of the reading instruction which progresses from guided reading through modelling to shared reading, then independent reading (Burkins & Croft 2010). It is released through the process of *I do, we do and you do*.

### **1.9.5 Areas of teaching practice**

These are the key elements in an English instruction, which are considered to be of high impact to learner achievement. Teachers must observe and apply them right from beginning of lesson to conclusion. For example, inclusive involvement of learners in lesson activities, checking for understanding and giving actionable feedback.

### **1.9.6 Constructivism**

Constructivism is the theory that was developed by Lev Vygotsky in 1978. It states that learning is an active continuous process where learners take information from the environment, construct meaning and make interpretations based on their prior knowledge and experience (Stuart et al. 2009).

### **1.9.7. Scaffolding**

This refers to the variety of ways in which teachers and others help to support learners to move beyond their current levels of understanding by providing cues, suggestions or direct guidance at appropriate moments in their investigative activities. (Kershner 2000).

**1.9.8 Learning difficulties** are multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. For the purpose of this report, students with learning difficulties are defined as those who experience significant difficulties in acquiring literacy (and numeracy) skills, but excludes students who have an intellectual, physical or sensory impairment, or whose learning difficulty is due to social, cultural or environmental factors.

### **1.9.9 Chapter summary**

The chapter has presented the background to the study followed by the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, main research question, sub-research questions, and significance of the study. The theoretical framework guiding this study has also been discussed. The chapter has ended with the definitions of key words on which this study is based.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I review studies that have assessed previous early grade interventions with regards to their practices and trainings of teachers. Secondly, I look at the most important factors on which the teachers' understanding of NRP instruction should be based. I discuss different strategies that various scholars have described to be very effective to the teaching of reading in the lower classes. Thereafter, I review studies that have assessed the effectiveness of the strategies in reading development. I also discuss development of teaching strategies by looking at the different stages (learning circle) that children go through as they acquire the concept of the reading instruction. Furthermore, I describe areas of teaching practice, which are the elements that bring high impact on literacy development. In addition, I deliberate the core elements of literacy and language development in English and the five components of reading, on which effective reading instruction leans. Finally, I evaluate challenges that teachers experience in the teaching of language skills.

### **2.2. Previous early grade interventions**

In recent years, a large number of projects have sought to address early-grade literacy deficiencies. These were Early Grade Reading intervention projects. Graham (2018) states that EGR intervention projects covered most of the low and middle – income regions such as Sub-Saharan African countries, for example, Uganda South Africa, Congo, Tanzania and Malawi.

At a minimum, they trained teachers to teach reading using simplified instructional techniques and evidence-based curricula. In addition to that foundation they contain a mix of four potential components: provision of instructional guidelines, in-school coaching and monitoring for teachers, provision of supplementary instructional and reading materials, and provision of tools and training for student assessment. Early grade programmes aimed at developing sound

recognition (LSR) and letter name recognition (LNR), which measure the basic reading skill of the alphabetic principle, as well as oral reading fluency (ORF) and reading comprehension (RC), which assess fluency and comprehension (Graham 2018).

Some of the reading interventions that took place in Malawi, include Read Malawi, Strengthening Early Grade Reading in Malawi (SEGREM), (Language Across the Country (LAC) and Malawi Break Through to Literacy (MBTL). Early Grade Reading intervention projects are defined as having a combination of five components. Each and every component has the theoretical evidence for why it should improve literacy, as described below:

### **2.2.1 Training teachers to teach literacy with simplified instruction and evidence-based curricula (the core component)**

Almost all successful instructional interventions include at least a minimal attempt to develop teachers' capacity to deliver effective classroom instruction (World Bank 2017). According to the 2018 World Development Report on Education, teacher trainings are most effective when they teach practical skills, are specific to a subject, and occur continuously - much like and EGR intervention (World Bank 2017). While these reviews did not explicitly study literacy, the broader education literature clearly agrees that training teachers on evidence-based pedagogies is largely effective.

### **2.2.2 Providing instructional guidelines**

Where teacher capacities are low, teachers may need clear instructional guidelines in addition to trainings. These guidelines should allow teachers to develop simple literacy-instruction routines (Abadzi 2017). The ideal guide should provide step-by-step instructions without too many words or complex procedures (Allan and Horn 2013). The guidelines may even have interactive content. The best guidelines should also give scripted lessons for every



instructional day of the semester. Regardless of the format, teachers should receive training before implementing them (Kim, Boyle, Zuilkowski, & Nakamura 2016).

### **2.2.3 Following up with coaching and monitoring**

To compound the effectiveness of teacher trainings, EGR interventions can provide ongoing monitoring, feedback, and in-classroom coaching to teachers. Such measures ensure that teachers correctly apply what they have learned in training. (Kim et al 2016).

### **2.2.4 Providing supplementary instructional materials**

Ensuring the classrooms have reading materials is a key component in teaching students to read (Kim et al 2016). But most country schools lack adequate books. While the provision of materials alone does not transform learning outcomes, reading materials are fundamental for instruction once teachers have training to use them in reading instruction (Allan and Horn 2013).

### **2.2.5 Providing Tools and Training for Student Assessment**

Teachers need to understand what their students do not know in order to adjust instruction. Assessments are therefore a critical part of effective literacy instruction (Kim et al 2016). Effective EGR interventions should train teachers and give them the tools to conduct assessments, analyse results, and modify their instruction. Primarily, assessment of students' progress in reading skills presents an opportunity to strengthen accountability. If teachers properly explain assessment results, parents and school administrators will understand students' progression and respond accordingly.

These generally positive findings are consistent with the broader literature on education interventions. A recent systematic review of education interventions found that the two interventions with the largest effects were adapting teaching methods to students' skills and recurrent teacher trainings (Evans and Popova 2015). An even larger systematic review

asserted that structured pedagogy programmes have the largest and most consistent positive average effects on learning outcomes.

### **2.2.6 Outcomes of previous early grade interventions**

Unfortunately, although most literacy interventions followed most of the afore-described elements in conducting the programs, evaluations have proven that the interventions failed to yield their objectives, and there is less evidence that shows why they failed. Certainly, it is clear that not only program elements, but also contextual elements matter. According to World Bank (2017) report failure may have been due to external shocks such as increased class sizes that disrupted implementation. In Uganda, for example, the same intervention was carried out in a variety of different areas with widely ranging results. Nevertheless, it is not clear which contextual factors matter. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, it may have been due to a lack of buy-in from teachers. Elsewhere, as in Tanzania, negative results from the evaluation may have been due at least partially to a lack of a sound comparison group.

Similarly, the EGRA program in Malawi, was one of the most intensive with a wide variety of intervention components, but it was also one of the least successful. However, according to MOEST 2016, the intervention monitoring and evaluation showed that teachers lacked special skills of handling early grade learners. Early grade children needed explicit instruction and well-scaffolded opportunities to practice and apply learning. Teachers needed to engage in ongoing diagnostic assessments and opportunities to receive timely and helpful feedback, develop and exhibit competence, and revise work to improve and give learners more opportunities to develop metacognitive skills through planning and management of complex tasks, self- and peer- assessment, and reflection on learning, children's needs and the content to be learned. According to Lowe (2005), productive comprehension instructional strategies support motivation, competence, and self-directed learning. These curriculum, teaching, and

assessment strategies feature well-scaffolded instruction and ongoing formative assessment that support conceptual understanding, take students' prior knowledge and experiences into account, and provide the right amount of challenge and support on relevant and engaging learning tasks.

### **2.3 Strategies of reading**

Basing on the good teaching and learning practices drawn from the aforementioned previous literacy interventions, NRP embarked on building teachers' capacity and understanding on use of strategies that engage them in evidence-based practices, which help and guide learners to decipher letter names, letter sounds, letter shapes, word recognition and the ability to derive meaning from written text. Teachers' understanding of the guided and comprehension strategies which are based on components of reading and replicated by the reciprocal approach would help yield high literacy results in learners. Among the many strategies that have been found effective in stimulating mindful engagement in reading are Reciprocal Teaching and Transactional Strategies Instruction, which variously include strategies that ask students to think aloud as they are reading, construct images, create themes, predict, question, clarify, make connections, summarize, and read for specific literary elements (Duke & Pearson 2002).

Different monitoring and evaluation reports have revealed that strategies such as guided, shared, independent, demonstration and comprehension strategies are effective in enhancing literacy levels in standards 1 to 4 children. For example, the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (2005) in Australia, has established that achieving sustained improvements in the literacy is dependent on strategies that engage learners in evidence-based practices, which help and guide learners to decipher letter names, letter sounds, letter shapes, word recognition and the ability to derive meaning from written text. However, this is always dependant on the competent and well-trained teachers who should tackle language skills using differentiated and

interactive reading strategies with emphasis on the activation of learners' prior knowledge using the recommended approach in a print rich environment. These reports are supported by several studies, for example, Cekiso and Madikiza (2014), reveal that when teachers use guided and comprehension strategy in an interesting and positive classroom environment with varied learner-centred and differentiated lesson activities, teaching approaches, strategies and resources, they yield high literacy results in learners. According to Levy (2007); Allington and Walmsley (2007), these strategies have special elements and characteristics that trigger the involvement of learners in activities in almost all steps of the lesson. The following paragraphs explain more about guided, shared, independent, demonstration and comprehension strategies.

### **2.3.1 Guided reading strategy**

Guided reading is a strategy that is based upon a framework of reading known as Gradual Release of Responsibility model (Wall 2014; Levy 2007). The reading framework was developed by Pearson and Gallagher in 1983. It states that instruction should occur along a continuum, beginning with the teacher modelling the desired behaviour, followed by the teacher and students engaging in shared activities as the teacher gradually allows the students to gain increasing responsibility, and finally the students independently reading without support. This approach is commonly referred to as "I do, we do, you do" (Routman 2008).

In many models of balanced literacy, reading instruction follows the gradual release framework and progresses from modelled reading to shared reading, then guided reading, and finally independent reading (Burkins & Croft 2010). Key here is the placement of guided reading just before the independent reading stage, with students holding a majority of the responsibility for reading during guided reading sessions. Instruction is structured so that learners experience a strategy or skill, much like a rehearsal as they (a) observe modelling by the teacher, (b) participate in guided practice, and (c) try out new strategies and skills on their own, thus withdrawing it once they are able to work on their own. This is called '*scaffolding*'

*the learners'* which means giving learners help only when they need it. Teacher modelling involves teacher self-talk and demonstrations of how to do the cognitive work of reading (Stuart et al. 2009). Involving learners in practical work creates a lasting impression as well as help in problem solving and making learning more meaningful for both the fast and slow learners. The planned lesson activities should be as learner centred as possible. This is only one step towards delivery of an effective reading lesson. Levy (2007) clarifies *I do, we do, and you do* in Table 2.1 below:

**Table 2.1 clarifies I do, we do, and you do.**

<b>Instruction</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Learner</b>
<b>I do it</b>  Direct instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides direct instruction</li> <li>• Establishes goals / purposes</li> <li>• Models</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively watches</li> <li>• Actively listens</li> <li>• Asks for clarification</li> </ul>
<b>We do it</b>  Shared and  Guided instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interactive instruction</li> <li>• Works with learners</li> <li>• Checks, prompts, clues.</li> <li>• Provides more modelling.</li> <li>• Meets needs-based groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asks, responds to questions</li> <li>• Works with classmates</li> <li>• Completes the process alongside others.</li> </ul>
<b>You do it</b>  Practice together  Independent practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moves among learners</li> <li>• Clarifies confusion</li> <li>• Provides support</li> <li>• Provides feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Works with classmates</li> <li>• Look to peers for clarification.</li> <li>• Completes process in small groups and individually.</li> </ul>

While research continues to consistently support and demonstrate that students learn better if they are actively engaged in the language skill practice with the guided strategy, McCoy (2011) argues that most teachers choose to use explanation and other traditional strategies rather than guided strategy (Lipp & Helpfrich 2016). However, the World Bank (2017) reports that guided reading has more than 30 years of extensive, positive data to support its effectiveness especially if teachers are patient with learners. It is not easy to achieve the desired results in a day. It takes rigorous practice for learners to start showing positive response to the practice of reading. Responding to the report, Burkins and Croft (2010) argue that although guided reading strategy reinforces literacy development, it is less effective to children who have no literacy background from kinder garden. Even if the teacher guides and supports, most learners will still profit very little from independent reading unless it is accompanied by other strategies. Responding to the claim, Lipp and Helpfrich (2016) advise that guided reading should be extended with supplementary books with small groups of four to six students meeting with the teacher to read a carefully chosen, appropriately levelled text. The focus of the lesson is on guiding students to apply reading strategies that have been previously taught and modelled by the teacher. This is also known as optimal guided reading. According to Wall (2014) optimal guided reading is a short-term intervention that provides one-on-one tutoring to early grade students who are struggling in reading and writing. In its optimal form, guided reading is small group reading instruction designed to teach students to apply strategic reading behaviours independently (Schulman & Payne 2000; Johnson & Keier 2010). The focus of the lesson is on guiding students to apply reading strategies that have been previously taught and modelled by the teacher. According to Wall (2014), the groups are formed flexibly according to similar reading levels and demonstrated needs, and students are never sentenced to a specific group for an indefinite, lengthy period. The goal is to provide a delicate balance of instruction at the

beginning of the guided reading session – just enough to clarify any potential misconceptions, while leaving enough words and concepts for the students to solve on their own.

### **2.3.2. Shared reading**

Shared reading, which was developed by Holdaway (1980) is a supported reading experience in which the teacher and students collaborate together to read and understand texts (Salim & Wardana 2013). Various reports have revealed that shared reading is effective because they provide students with a fully supported reading experience. For example, Kemizano (2007) reports that shared reading is dominant in New Zealand education system, especially in lower classes.

While read aloud sessions provide students with a fully supported reading experience, the National Reading Panel (2000) has confirmed that shared reading progresses gradually from a teacher supported reading experience to one in which students increasingly take over more of the reading task as they develop reading strategies. The text is read several times over several consecutive days, first by the teacher, and then with students as they assume some responsibility for the reading through active participation, including joining in with the reading when they feel comfortable doing so at key instructional points, or when the text is repeated. This sentiment is supported by Klapwijk and Van der Walt (2011) who explain that this strategy allows students of all abilities to be actively involved in the learning process and most students like it. The teacher provides enough support (scaffolding) so that students are able to enjoy and understand the text, regardless of their reading ability. Salim and Wardana (2013) also report that the Indonesian primary school teachers started engaging learners in shared reading after it was observed that learners had lost interest in reading, when teachers used traditional way of teaching. The implementation of shared reading shows very good result in helping young

learners to code print, expressing their ideas confidently, knowing the language convention, sharing ideas with peers and showing their reading interest.

It is proved that the success of reading at emergent stage can support children's further study, and also enhance participation in social life. Shared reading is an instruction-packed component of a comprehensive literacy programme. Salim and Wardana (2013) however, advise that the texts in the books need to be adjusted to help children understand the story by relating it to what they see, experience and get involved with in everyday life. The National Reading Panel (2000) adds that teachers need to be trained rigorously on varied strategies so that they are able to choose what fits what lesson.

### **2.3.3 Independent reading**

During an ideal guided or shared reading lesson, students independently read the selected texts silently and apply word-solving decoding strategies. The teacher looks on and listens in, providing support through prompting of specific strategies, while the majority of the problem-solving is carried out by the students. According to Burkins & Croft (2010), as the teacher watches and listens to the students read, the teacher is noting behaviours, misconceptions, and successful or unsuccessful strategies used by the students. After they have had a chance to read the story, possibly several times, the teacher then reconvenes the students to focus on one or two teaching points based on her/his observations. While the above description outlines an optimal guided reading lesson, the reality is that day-to-day instruction may vary widely. For instance, in trying to give an explicit modelling to learners, guided reading sessions can become dominated by excess instruction on isolated skills, leaving little or no time for students to read connected text. In other cases, teachers might "automate" sessions by teaching identical skills to successive groups of students rather than differentiating instruction based on observations (Levine 2000; Burkins & Croft 2010).



There is considerable evidence to support having children read aloud independently with guidance and feedback, but no evidence to confirm that instructional time spent on silent independent reading with minimal guidance and feedback improves reading fluency and overall reading achievement (Center 2005). This does not mean that teachers should abandon independent reading in the classroom, but they should use texts that match the child's independent reading level and ensure that each child receives feedback (from the teacher, peer, or a volunteer) to enhance fluency, comprehension, and the motivation to read. These practices help children to decode with increasing fluency and comprehension.

Basing on the characteristics of the three aforementioned strategies, NRP approved guided, shared and independent reading strategies, as effective approaches to reading instruction (National Reading Panel 2014). The approach is supportive of the reading skill because it involves learners in interactive processes that enhance scaffolding of literacy development. The scaffolding helps bridge the ZPD gap in learners because learners' understanding is enhanced by the varied lesson activities that are carried out outside and inside classrooms. The learning activities are planned in such way that they provide more opportunities for the learners to express their views freely through hands on and experimental activities based on their experience or background knowledge. Students' needs for teacher support change as they become more cognitively engaged and develop expertise. Teachers need to gauge how much scaffolding to provide as individual learners become more knowledgeable and proficient. However, at any stage of development, learners benefit from strategically placed direct instruction, feedback, and critical questions that guide their learning According to Stuart et al. (2009), the role of the teacher is to guide, and provide support and encourage all learners to participate actively.

#### **2.4. National Reading Programme comprehension strategies**

Cekiso and Madikiza (2014) define the reading comprehension strategies as deliberate, conscious procedures used by readers to enhance text comprehension and their application is believed to contribute to efficient reading. This sentiment is echoed by Gersten and Geva (2016) who describe comprehension strategies as intentional actions that a reader can take to increase the chances of understanding or remembering the information in a text. According to the National Reading Strategy Panel (2014-2019), NRP uses comprehension strategies to support the approach to teaching reading. Levy (2007) adds that comprehension strategies are applicable in enhancing the reading approach because they consist of differentiated and interactive reading strategies which emphasise the activation of learners' prior knowledge using a print rich environment. Kissy and Hiller (2013) are also of the view that comprehension strategies, which include: predicting content, activating background knowledge, visualising, retelling the story and role-playing draw upon a small repertoire of strategies to help students derive meaning from the instruction.

Multiple studies have found it effective in the teaching of reading, for example, Levy (2007) has proved that when a concept is modelled, and released to learners with appropriate support and guidance using comprehension reading strategy instruction, learners will not only improve comprehension, but they will also acquire decoding skills basing on letter names, shapes and sounds. Learners will also recognise print with knowledge of sight words and this will enhance the bridging of the gap for students who demonstrate a discrepancy between decoding skills and comprehension skills. Wall (2014) also states that comprehension strategies help learners to link what they read with their experience because it involves a scaffolding approach, as is advocated by the constructivism theory, beginning with high levels of teacher instruction and modelling, during which the teacher specifically and explicitly models his or her thinking processes out loud, using each of the four reading strategies. The roles are gradually reversed

to the point where learners are able to use the strategies independently. Cognitively, learners are able to decode print as they apply their background knowledge and experience with the help of appropriate teaching resources which aid the understanding of the concept (Wall 2014). The sub-sections below discuss the comprehension strategies in details.

#### **2.4.1 Predicting content**

Chilimanjira et al. (2017) define predicting as the supposition of moving from what the reader already knows with what is anticipated to be read and learnt from the text. According to Pressly (2002), this is reflective of schema theory. It involves using background knowledge, peeking or previewing and over viewing or summarizing (Pressly (2002). The role of the teacher is to encourage learners to generate thoughts or outcomes about how characters might act or react based on the setting, situation, events, or other characters. These techniques are found to be highly effective for less able readers or emergent/beginning readers. Predicting is done by using the title and illustration and learners are guided and helped to predict what is to come in a text. It can be done in three stages. Before reading, learners use prior knowledge to think about the topic and make predictions about the probable meaning of the text. They preview the text by skimming and scanning to get a sense of the overall meaning. During reading, Chilimanjira et al. (2017) state that teachers monitor understanding by questioning, thinking about, and reflecting on the ideas and information in the text. After reading, learners reflect upon the ideas and information in the text and relate what they have read to their own experiences and knowledge, then they clarify their understanding of the text and extend their understanding in critical and creative ways.

#### **2.4.2 Activating background knowledge**

Activating background knowledge means relating the prior knowledge to the new information and the application of that knowledge to the learning situation. The teacher guides learners to relate the title of a story with what they already know, from their background knowledge and

experience (Chilimanjira et al. (2017). Relating the prior knowledge to the new information and the application of that knowledge to the learning situation helps learners to learn new words and concepts.

Effective teaching leads to the enrichment of the existing knowledge, deepens it and makes it more comprehensible via connecting the lesser-known and better-known, the old and the new information, and elaborating on the new concepts and the key words. Such a teaching forms a network of ideas so that all the key words and concepts are logically related to each other and to the other existing ideas in the same text. This communicative approach to language teaching values the experience and the background knowledge of the learner as very important factors contributing to the learning process of the learner. The learner is thus looked upon as an intelligent, problem solving individual rather than as an empty receptacle forced to learn the structural systems in the language. Eskey (1988) explains that comprehending a passage strongly requires an establishment of relation between the text and the cultural factors on the part of the reader.

Eskey (1988) further emphasizes the importance of an association between culture and language as it can help a non-native reader in understanding the meaning of a text to its fullest. Research in the area has proved the importance of the reader drawing upon his/her own experiences, background knowledge in the act of comprehending what s/he reads. This strategy, however, may not favour learners who have poor school background, for example, most learners in rural areas have fewer or no chance of learning in nursery schools as compared to learners in urban areas who are exposed to print. Other scholars have also argued that background knowledge may not have any significant effect on the advanced learners' comprehending of a passage. Deshpande (2016) believed that background knowledge played more a crucial role in good readers than in poor readers. They suggest that the schema of poor readers may not develop and may not be used as efficiently as the schema of good readers.

Poor comprehension could be the result of some mismatch between the reader's background knowledge and the text. Deshpande (2016) further provides three possible reasons for failure to understand a passage: Lack of appropriate schema on the part of the reader, failure on the part of the author to offer adequate clues to suggest to the existing schema, and failure on the part of the reader to build an exact interpretation as intended by the author.

### **2.4.3 Retelling the story**

Retelling involves having readers transform a text into their own words. In other words, the reader needs to organize text information in order to provide a personal interpretation of it. Retelling, is considered one of the most powerful ways to enhance children's comprehension and their desire to read (Levy 2007). This is because readers or listeners tell what they remember in their own words, either orally or in writing or illustrations focussing on the main narrative components including character, setting, problem, events, solution and theme. The underlying theory of retelling is examined along with the mechanics of repeated story reading and its effects. Retelling helps students to focus on their understanding of what they read and challenge them to communicate what they have learned to others. Therefore, by its very nature, retelling indicates readers or listener's assimilation and reconstruction of text information, and it reflects their comprehension. This is what Morrow et al. (1996) call 'integration of information' and the 'personalization of information'. In this sense, readers are involved in a meaning constructing process.

Teachers can use retelling for multiple purposes including assessment. Han (2005) points out that retelling can specifically reveal: (1) the point or points students see in the stories they read, and (2) the problems students have in organizing the different elements of a story into a coherent whole. With that knowledge, teachers can evaluate the effectiveness of the stories students read, as well as measure the impact of those stories on students. In addition, analysing retelling can also reveal the strengths of weaker readers and the difficulties stronger readers

can sometimes have in manipulating text. Retelling is an effective assessment tool because when a child is asked to do a retelling, (s)he becomes engaged in tasks requiring use of oral or written language, recall, and comprehension of narrative text (Rog 2003).

The strategy of retelling also matches the goal of reading: *to interact purposefully with all the ideas of the text*. Story retelling develops children's awareness of a story's content and demonstrates their level of reading comprehension (Morrow 1996). This strategy is simple but effective, and it can be used to assess children's understanding of a story once a teacher has adequately modelled it for them. It also allows interactive behaviour between adult and child as a teacher guides a child through the first attempt at retelling through discussion (Morrow 1996). Retellings go beyond the literal and help children focus on a deeper understanding of the text (Levy 2007). Teachers should always praise learners for the effort they make in retelling the texts in their own words, as this encourages them to read more.

#### **2.4.4 Role playing the story**

Role-play is a reading technique that allows students to explore realistic situations by interacting with other people in a managed way in order to develop experience and trial different strategies in a supported environment (Chilimanjira et al. (2017). Depending on the intention of the activity, participants might be playing a role similar to their own or could play the opposite part of the conversation or interaction. Both options provide the possibility of significant learning, with the former allowing experience to be gained and the latter encouraging the student to develop an understanding of the situation from the 'opposite' point of view. Teachers are expected to encourage and guide learners to act the text or story. Children enjoy games involving role play from a very early age. Role playing helps learners to understand the story. It is also a way of involving learners in the lesson. Teachers should remember to de-role the actors at the end of the lesson.

While the evidence indicates that some teaching strategies are more effective than others, no one approach on its own can address the complex nature of reading difficulties. An integrated approach requires that teachers have a thorough understanding of a range of effective strategies, as well as knowing when and why to apply them (Rowe 2005).

#### **2.4.5 Effectiveness of comprehension strategies**

Cekiso and Madikiza (2014) conducted a study that sought to examine the effectiveness of comprehension strategy on Grade 11 learners' reading comprehension in Eastern Cape, South Africa. The results indicated that learners who received comprehension reading strategy instruction improved their reading comprehension and outperformed those who were not exposed to the intervention programme. These results are supported by a number of studies that maintain that comprehension strategy instruction has positive effects on learners' reading comprehension. For example, in their studies conducted in the United Kingdom and Ireland Lipp and Helfrich (2016) have revealed that when children are taught reading comprehension strategies and given multiple opportunities to practice them, their reading comprehension scores increase. Rowe (2005) also confirms that comprehension strategies are research evidence-based and they involve the application of rigorous lesson activities in which learners are actively engaged throughout the lesson. Lai et al. (2008) add that effective comprehension instruction becomes particularly important when learners shift from the foundation phase to higher classes where they shift from learning to read to reading to learn.

Although most researchers have analysed the effectiveness of comprehension strategies, it is important to mention that there has been lack of agreement among methodologists over the fruitfulness of reading strategies. For example, Pressley and Block (2002) argue that while decoding and word recognition skills are frequently emphasized when working with very young students (ages 5-10), this type of instruction does not necessarily result in improved reading comprehension ability. Catts and Hogan (2002) also found that 20% of 10-year-old

weak readers in the USA read fluently but lacked adequate comprehension skills. As a result, most teachers deliberately avoid using comprehension strategies because they do not see its effectiveness. For example, Ness (2009) explains that research conducted in countries such as Australia and Ireland have shown that many teachers are not implementing reading comprehension instruction in their classrooms. Even more disturbing, Ness (2009) further reports that the teenage high school students in the study received no instructional time devoted specifically to reading comprehension strategies. In agreement, Klapwijk and Van der Walt (2011) state that although comprehension strategies have been proved to be effective, it is not a common practice in most schools. However, Morgan (2016) argues that reading instruction does not end when students can decode the words, they continue to need instruction that will support their understanding of what they are reading.

While attempting to better understand why most teachers do not like to use comprehension strategies in the teaching and learning of language skills, existing literature, for example, (Rowe 2005), seems to point to various reasons for the ‘non-uptake’ of strategy instruction: firstly, teachers seem to remain unconvinced about the effect of strategy instruction on their learners’ progress and prefer to receive ‘physical evidence’ of the effect of an intervention or method on their learners’ results. Secondly teachers do not seem to know how to teach comprehension due to lack of proper teacher education. For example, Sailors (2008) points out that most professional development of teachers seems to be focused on reading instruction and teaching learners to decode words, not on reading comprehension instruction. Thirdly, Ness (2009) reports that due to a heavy curriculum in the content area and pressure to have students do well on standardized tests, teachers focus on covering course content in preparation for end of year tests was their primary instructional responsibility. Hence teachers avoid specific reading comprehension strategies because they are time consuming.



In their study involving selected primary schools in the Eastern Cape, Cekiso and Madikiza (2014) found that reciprocal teaching, (I do, we do, and you do), much as it is a beneficial strategy, is painfully difficult and too time-consuming for teachers to use and often requires modifications. Mc Namala (2009) also argues that without professional development, teachers will have difficulty implementing comprehension instruction.

Another explanation among the early grade teachers for neglecting to address reading comprehension strategies is that they are unprepared for this task. Literature states that almost all successful instructional interventions... include at least a minimal attempt to develop teachers' capacity to deliver effective classroom instruction. According to the 2018 World Development Report on Education, teacher trainings are most effective when they teach practical skills, are specific to a subject, and occur continuously (World Bank 2017).

While these reviews did not explicitly study literacy, the broader education literature clearly agrees that training teachers on evidence-based pedagogies is largely effective. Sadly, most teachers have not been adequately trained in their teacher preparation to help learners improve their reading comprehension skills (Cekiso & Madikiza 2014). However, McDevitt (1998) reveals that teachers receive inadequate training due to the fact that most education departments use Cascade Model to train teachers for curriculum implementation. According to McDevitt (1998), Cascade Model is a system of delivering training messages from trainers at the central level to trainees at the local level through several layers. It is largely used for in-service training, as it can deliver many trained teachers quickly and economically. In their concern with 'improved' curricula and 'more effective' teaching-learning methods, education ministries often use the Cascade Model to attempt to effect large-scale change at the classroom level (Hayes (2000). Each training takes place as a result of the previous one, in principle imparting an agreed and consistent body of knowledge, skills and attitudes (McDevitt 1998).

Despite its advantages, the Cascade Model is often criticised. Experience of Cascades in in-service development has shown that the message is often reduced to a trickle by the time it reaches the class-room teacher, on whom the success of curricular change depends. Its main weakness is the distortion of the messages transferred during the training, because they are passed down through many different levels of personnel. The distance between the central and the local level is too long. The intended messages are often altered and their effects are diluted through miscommunication and different interpretations of the same messages. For example, Mpabulungi (1999) reports that the evaluation study of a three-layer Cascade Model in Uganda indicates problems especially at the lowest level. The trainers for the training at the lowest level had not internalised the messages from their own training. Consequently, they could not perform well for some steps of the training contents.

The other challenge is that teachers are trained too much content and it becomes difficult to remember, apply and observe all of them in the classroom situation. Trainings need to focus very specifically on literacy instruction that is appropriate to the context. Teacher trainings are most effective when they are catered to a specific subject matter (World Bank 2017). By limiting the number of strategies and techniques taught, teachers gain increasing competence and independence while using these strategies.

## **2.5. Core elements of literacy and language development in English**

Acquiring a new language takes time and explicit instruction. Chilimanjira et al. (2017)) advise that literacy and language development are achieved through listening, speaking, reading and writing. These are four walls of language called the basic oral language skills. Learners are exposed to activities meant to develop these skills. According to Mackey and Gass (2012) language skills are interconnected, and teachers are expected to integrate listening, speaking and reading when using comprehension strategies, as this is particularly important for English

learners. Madericova (2013) outlines how core elements help in language development as follows:

### **2.5.1 Listening**

During the modelling (demonstration), the learner is expected to listen attentively and critically in order to understand and respond to others in a wide range of situations through a variety of media. For example, children in the lower primary listen with enjoyment to stories, speeches, dialogues, live broadcasts and recorded texts. Learners then respond accordingly e.g. answer comprehension questions, role play, ask questions, taking notes and writing dictation.

### **2.5.2 Speaking**

The learner is expected to confidently express his/her own ideas fluently and respond appropriately to others orally in a wide range of situations. For example, as children in the lower primary listen to stories, poems and music, they are able to respond to, ask for and give information, express their feelings, attitudes and thoughts, and give and follow instructions as they interact with the teachers and peers and others in everyday life.

### **2.5.3 Reading**

The learner is expected to read fluently and critically to understand and respond to different types of texts for information and enjoyment. This is achieved when learners are involved in reading letters, words, sentences, dialogues, narratives, plays, poems (different genres) based on various themes for example, corruption, hygiene, Human rights etc. Focus is on understanding the text which is assessed through comprehension activities such as: answering questions, retelling the story, debate, role playing, simulation and other activities.

#### **2.5.4 Writing**

The learner is expected to write legible and factual words, sentences, letters, paragraphs speeches, stories, reports, poems and imaginative texts for a wide range of purposes. Teachers use techniques such as gap filling, jumbled sentences, pictures, guiding notes to encourage learners to come up with productive writing. Through writing, the learner is expected to express fluency, accuracy and logic in writing their personal ideas, thoughts, opinions, attitudes and knowledge on a wide range of topics.

#### **2.5.5 Critical thinking and reasoning**

The learner must use language to think and reason as well as to access, process and use information for learning. This is achieved when learners are involved in solving puzzles, riddles, proverbs, analyzing data (tables, graphs), case studies, comprehension questions, debate and plays.

#### **2.5.6 Structure and use of language**

The learner must be able to understand how sounds, words and grammar can be used to create and interpret texts. For example, parts of speech, punctuations, sentence structures, choice and correct use of words are integrated with listening, reading and speaking skills. Such instruction must be part of an intellectually challenging literacy environment that is inclusive of all children (Madericova 2013). Focus is on practicing using the language not on memorizing grammar concepts.

### **2.6 The five components of reading skills**

Working to understand reading acquisition requires a grasp of letter sounds, letter names, and letter shapes. These are the literacy elements which guide learners to decode print. According to National Reading Panel, (2000), literacy elements are compounded in the five basic skills,

also known as component skills. The following sub-sections provide a discussion of the component skills:

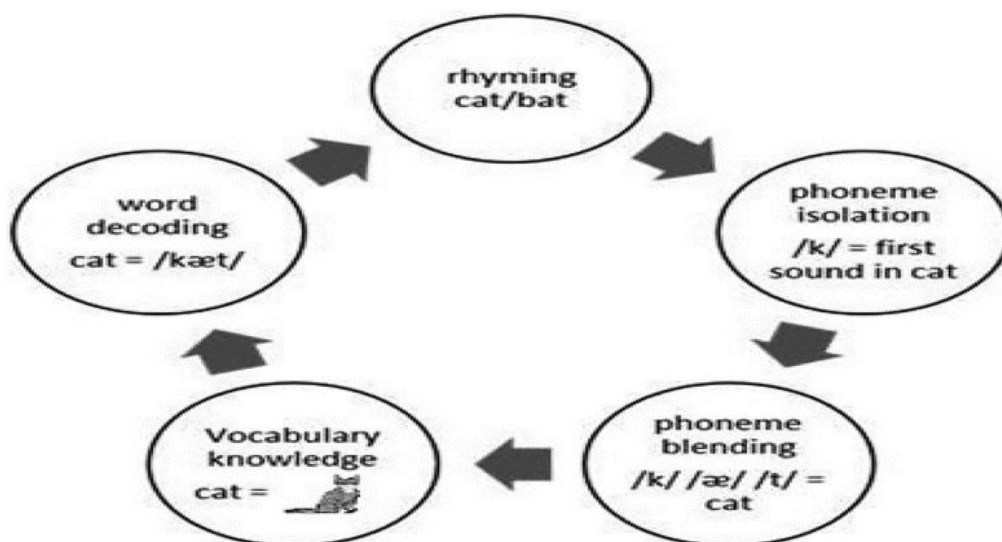
### **2.6.1 Phonemic awareness**

Kaminski (2017) defines phonemic awareness as the ability to hear, manipulate and detect individual sounds within words. The sounds within words are called *phonemes* so awareness of these sounds is phonemic awareness. Spoken words are composed of sounds. For instance, the word *cat* has three sounds or phonemes: /c/ /a/ /t/ (conventional linguistic notation separates individual sounds or phonemes with slash marks). For most adults, dividing words like *cat* into constituent sounds is easy, but for young children the task can be formidable: Words seem to “explode out” as one big sound—*cat*— rather than as collections of smaller sounds.

Young children vary greatly in the ability to hear the individual sounds within words, and this variation led some scientists to hypothesize that phonemic awareness might be an essential early reading skill. Deacon (2011) explains that stages of phonological awareness are suggested to initially consist of a child’s identification of words that rhyme, then knowing that words are comprised of component sounds (e.g., *cat* begins with /k/), and then the understanding that words are comprised of specific sound segments that when blended together make a whole word (e.g., /k/ /æ/ /t/ = *cat*). Children need foundational skills of phonological awareness such as rhyme and segmenting to build reading skills. Children bring this knowledge to activities involving printed letters and words. As children gain experience with print, they are provided with a visual system to map their phonological knowledge onto and gain letter-sound awareness. Children not only learn specific one-to-one letter sound correspondence but begin to learn that specific letter combinations represent different sounds than they may have originally learned in isolation (e.g., *sh* = /ʃ/ and not /s/ /h/). Additionally, morphological components of words are learned as having both specific sound and meaning properties (e.g.,

-ed, -ing). Context is important in learning to read, such that the vocabulary used for word decoding provides further support in deciphering written language. Kaminski (2017) states that English is an “alphabetic language,” meaning that the letters in the written language refer to or correspond to the sounds in the spoken language.

A child who cannot perceive the separable sounds within words is at a disadvantage when it is time to match these sounds with letters while learning to read. The interrelatedness between phonological awareness, vocabulary knowledge, and reading is depicted in figure 1. Morgan (2016) explains that phonological awareness begins in infancy when parents engage in verbal interactions with their babies. Initially, infants hear a babble of sounds, but as they grow older, they begin to hear boundaries between words. For example, *seethedog* becomes *see the dog* (Vukerich, Chrissie & Enz (2012) in Morgan 2016). Word awareness is followed by syllable awareness, on set rhyme awareness and finally phonemic awareness. Speech sounds enhance growth in reading and spelling. (Kaminski 2017) shows the relationship between phonological awareness, vocabulary knowledge, and word reading in figure 1 below:



**Figure 2.1: Relationship between phonological awareness, vocabulary knowledge, and word reading according (Kaminski 2017).**

Children's early progress in learning to read depends critically on their oral language skills (Rowe 2005). Children should be able to recognize that words are made up of individual sound units. It is an umbrella term that is used to refer to a student's sensitivity to any aspect of phonological structure in language. Gersten and Geva (2016) echo that children who have phonemic awareness are able to segment (break apart) a word into phonemes in order to write the word and to blend (put together) phonemes in order to read a word.

Children with phonemic awareness and who also have some knowledge of letter-sound relationships are able to come up with an approximate spelling of a word (an invented spelling) or an approximate pronunciation, which must be checked with context and meaning cues in order to make sense of what is being read. However, Lowe (2005) emphasizes that it calls for the teacher who is experienced, conversant, and knowledgeable of the concept, for learners to develop phonological awareness. This is because knowledgeable teachers plan differentiated activities that will help children grasp letter sounds in the words they read and scaffold those with difficulties to reach their zone of proximal development.

### **2.6.2 Alphabetical principle.**

Chilimanjira et al. (2017) define Alphabetical principle as the ability to associate sounds with letters and use those sounds to read and spell words. As children learn the alphabetical principle, they begin to recognize letter shapes and letter names, hence make connections between letter names and letter sounds. For example, learners may see a picture of a bottle, next to the word 'bottle, 'recognize the shape of the letter 'b' and make connections between this letter and its sound /b/, as the first sound in the word bottle. As learners encounter more words in the learner's book and in supplementary materials, they will notice the letters and letter shapes, and begin to understand that letters are combined to make words.

It is believed that the idea of teaching learners the alphabetical principles have their origins in the 16th century where John Hart's 'An Orthographie' (1569) and Richard Mulcaster's 'Elementarie' (1582) both researched and advocated the utility of the 'alphabetic principle' via explicit teaching of letter-sound relationships for beginning reading (National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy 2005). Knowledge of alphabetical letters is a strong predictor of short- and long-term literacy success. When a child decodes, he/she is converting written symbols into units of sound (Gersten and Geva (2016). Knowing names of letters and being able to identify the corresponding sounds allows for successful decoding of unknown words. According to Rowe (2005), a child with well-developed print concept knows that: 1. Print tells a story 2. Text on page is read from left to right. 3. Progression through text moves from the top of the page to the bottom. 4. When one page of text is read, the story continues on the next page. 5. The white spaces between groups of letters represent a break between spoken words.

### **2.6.3 Fluency**

Fluency means reading accurately, with expression, and at a pace that is not too fast nor too slow. It is quick and accurate recognition of letters and words. It can also be oral fluency how well learners use dialogue and vocabulary to communicate with others. Learners who read with fluency can accurately read words and sentences with expression at a pace that is neither too fast nor too slow (Moore & Lyon 2005). Learners must apply their growing phonemic skills, knowledge of the alphabetic principle, and background knowledge to the act of decoding. Teachers help learners to read with fluency by using the following strategies:

**2.6.3.1 Shared reading:** this is where a learner reads with a friend by sharing a sentence or a paragraph. One learner reads first then his or her friend reads after a friend. When one is listening to his or her friend reading smoothly and with expression, paying attention to the punctuation, it is necessary that the listener should try to read that way too.



**2.6.3.2 Echo reading:** this is done when the teacher models oral reading, asking learners to imitate him or her. The teacher reads words, a few lines or a page of text to the learners to model a fluent pace. Then the learners imitate the teacher. This strategy works well with short words and texts.

**2.6.3.3 Chunking:** with this strategy, learners read chunks or groups of words that go together. Learners read a phrase or a group of words, pausing at a punctuation.

**2.6.3.4 Paired reading:** this a type of reading in which two learners read together in unison. Learners help each other to read chunks of words with expression and pause of expression.

**2.6.3.5 Radio reading:** this strategy helps learners to read with fluency when they read a text like radio news readers they admire. Radio news readers read correctly, at good pace, and with expression. This strategy helps learners to improve their fluency through practice, as they read other books, at their own time.

Other studies, however, have condemned round-robin reading, the practice of having children taking turns reading aloud while everyone in the classroom follows along. Studies suggest that much of the time devoted to round-robin reading is wasted in terms of student learning. According to National Reading Panel (2000), only the reader appears to gain any benefit from this practice, while the listeners learn nothing. Teachers are expected to plan better ways of utilizing time for learners' benefit.

## **2.6.4 Vocabulary**

Vocabulary refers to word meanings and vocabulary instruction (Chilimanjira et al. (2017). Because much of reading instruction is focused on words, that is, word recognition, sight words, word attack, word structure, word sorts, and so on, *vocabulary* is often used to refer to both word recognition and word meaning. When learners acquire new words, they are better able to communicate through listening, speaking reading and writing. As children learn to read,

they draw from the oral vocabulary they have learned by listening and speaking to others at home, school, and in the community. Children who have well developed vocabulary tend to acquire written language more efficiently than those who do not. For example, a student may be able to decode (i.e. sound out) words, but still not be able to understand a text because she or he does not know the meaning of those words (Moore & Lyon 2005).

Teaching learners, the meanings of words with a variety of real materials, visual aids, tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, demonstrations, miming, pictures and drawings will help them grasp meaning of words with little explanation. Understanding meanings of words helps learners to understand the stories or read aloud comprehension. Studies show that learners develop vocabulary directly or indirectly. Indirect vocabulary occurs when learners engage in conversation with peers, teachers and parents or when they are read to. Direct vocabulary acquisition occurs when teachers actively engage learners in vocabulary activities such as teaching new words with real resources in a print rich environment, prior to reading. Since the goal of vocabulary teaching is to build an understanding of the words, it should be no surprise that successful instructional approaches lead students to deeply engage in thinking about the word meanings. According to National Reading Panel (2000), activities like copying definitions from a dictionary are not effective because they can be done superficially, without thinking about what the word means or how the word relates to other words. One highly successful approach to vocabulary instruction engages students in formulating several kinds of definitions and explanations for the words. Alternatively, the real-life example requires the student to try to apply the word to a personal experience, which can make it easier to remember, as does translating words into different forms such as pictures or actions.

### **2.6.5 Comprehension**

This means understanding what one is reading about. It is the act of understanding and interpreting the information within a text. Rowe (2005) stresses that comprehension is about the

construction of meaning more than about passive remembering. It is a form of active and dynamic thinking and includes interpreting information through the filter of one's own knowledge and beliefs, using the author's organizational plan to think about information (or imposing one's own structure on the ideas), inferring what the author does not tell explicitly as well as many other cognitive actions. It is important to note that successful comprehension requires the thoughtful interaction of a reader with a text.

The overall purpose of teaching children how to read is so that they can read with understanding (Morgan 2016). When learners read with comprehension, they are able to understand the meaning of the pictures, words and sentences they encounter in the learner's book or supplementary readers. According to the Stuart et al. (2009), children come to school with many first-hand experiences related to stories they listen to. They are also familiar with a wide variety of real-life activities that take place in the society. Helping learners to apply background knowledge to stories and pictures encourage them to think about what they already know. It should be evident from the material already presented that there are many successful avenues to improved reading comprehension, including the teaching of phonemic awareness, phonics, oral reading fluency, and vocabulary.

## **2.7 Challenges that teachers experience in the teaching of language skills**

Most of the previous literacy interventions, precisely Read Malawi mention shortage of teachers, teaching materials and large classes as the ongoing challenges that limit the implementation of literacy programmes. Shortage of teachers was directly attributed by lack of teachers' houses on school grounds. Teaching materials and large classes were influenced by the high enrolment of learners in schools following the introduction of Free primary education in most countries. Multiple studies also admit that the aforementioned challenges affect the teaching of reading in most low-income country schools. Examples follow.

### **2.7.1 Shortage of teachers**

Nilsson (2003) analysed various country reports prepared for the 2000 World Education forum in Dakar, and noted that many African countries face large shortages of teachers, which hinder their efforts to achieve universal primary education. For example, a global report by UNESCO in 2011 established that acute shortages of teachers are common, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, which hinder quality teaching and learning. UNESCO (2011) also reports that in the United States of America it has become the practice of many states to declare teaching vacancies in counties every year by subject area, grade level and geographical location.

To achieve EFA by 2015, African countries would need between 18% (Angola) and 84% (Malawi) increase in their current teacher supply, noting that majority of the primary teachers in most countries are unqualified according to the national requirement. For example, World Bank (2012) reports that most country schools employ volunteer teachers to beef up teacher shortages. However, Cobbold (2015) reports that most primary teachers in most countries, such as Nigeria, leave the profession early because of poor working conditions, and the desire for upward mobility, hence seek greener pastures in other countries. Cobbold (2015), further reports that the problem of teacher shortage has reached such an extent that maintaining adequate levels of staffing and retention have been recognised as important areas of policy intervention for the primary education system.

The aforementioned international experiences are no less evident in the Malawian context, where Mgomezulu and Wamba (2014) trace the problem of teacher shortage to the history of the introduction of democracy in 1994 when the country introduced free primary education. The country experienced deteriorating education progress caused by the large numbers of learners which flocked in schools against the few numbers of teachers in the country. This forced the nation to recruit untrained teachers to complement the few teachers that were in the

system. Education Management Information System (EMIS) (2016-2017) add that shortage of teachers is high in rural primary schools because they are characterized by poor environments and working conditions which include, poor classrooms and teachers houses, lack of banks and good markets, to mention but a few. Hence most teachers are not willing to teach there.

### **2.7.2 Large classes**

Adekola (2009) describes a large class as one that has more students assigned to a classroom or building than the number of students it was designed to accommodate. When the capacity of the classroom is exceeded, it places greater demands on the schools' existing resources and infrastructure that need to be used for effective learning. Adekola (2009) further points out that the issue of large class seems to be a normal occurrence in most schools of the sub-Saharan African countries, therefore, teachers need to plan how to handle learners and create positive learning environments. However, Yaman and Uygulamada (2009) allude that overcrowded classroom conditions hinder teachers' attention to individual students, hence slow down the progress of students' learning. Yaman and Uygulamada (2009) add that teachers are forced to neglect learners' needs to keep pace with the prescribed time allocation for each learning area. These sentiments are echoed by Cekiso and Madikiza (2014) who regret that large classes make teachers to focus more on teacher centred lessons, abandoning learners' needs. Adekola (2009) also points out that large classes hinder the achievement of learning objectives and reduce the completion of learning activities. In such situations, quality learning may not be achievable. Given the current issue of large class sizes experienced by many schools in the Sub-Saharan countries, students' learning and academic performance is under challenge. World Bank (2016) recommends 40 as the ideal number of learners for each class in the primary school.

### **2.7.3 Teaching materials**

A recent study undertaken by Narayan (2012) indicate that students in several developing countries that espoused "Education for All" including Malawi, cannot read even after

completing primary school education due to lack of teaching materials. For example, Uwezo (2011) states that due to introduction of free primary education, most schools in Uganda, Ghana and Tanzania lack adequate teaching materials such as text books, charts and writing materials.

Learners' books in particular, are never enough in schools because of the large classes. Educators know that teaching and learning materials are indispensable to education. A scarcity of textbooks means that students are not able to practice reading and writing or increase their information base beyond classroom note taking. Kasmaienezhadford (2015) also complains that most text books used in schools are of low quality. This contradicts with most experts in educational systems who point out that quality instructional textbooks are deemed as the heart of pedagogical activities. Good and fascinating books are able to provide students a wide choice of new and inspiring facts and to create incredible experience, hence need to be of high quality, (Kasmaienezhadford 2015). However, Sabarwal et al. (2013) is of the view that the availability of textbooks, does not necessarily mean that they are used in the classroom. Sabarwal et al. (2013) observes that most schools store textbooks in storage units for fear of damage or loss if they are turned over to students. Sabarwal et al. (2013) sites Sierra Leone, as an example, where uncertainty over future supplies has led to hoarding and non-use of textbooks. Likewise, in Malawi, World Bank (2012) reports that teachers were reluctant to let children use books because of lack of care or the risk that students would go absent or drop out.

The other challenge is about the teacher's guides. Graham (2018) observes that teachers' guides contain too many activities and this has a negative impact on teachers, especially on allocation of time for the activities. As result, most activities are either inadequately taught or simply skipped. Activities in teachers' guides always link to each other, and when teachers do not

teach some concepts, learners are left in suspense. This leads to poor progress of language learning in schools.

#### **2.7.4 Monitoring and supervision**

Examining, monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning activities is essential if education goals are to be achieved. It is through such exercises that schools get the educational support they need to succeed. Matete 2009 stipulates that the African countries use school inspection as a major way through which the government can monitor the quality of education provided in their societies. This is because school inspectors make visits in schools and collect first-hand information about the perceived problems that in one way or another may affect the work of the teacher. School Inspection is an integral part of education systems globally, and has maintained the same purpose irrespective of its historical development in different parts of the world. Lupimo (2014) however, notes that there is ineffective inspection and monitoring of teaching and learning of language in most schools in rural areas. For example, in Tanzania, Zambia and Malawi, most rural schools are rarely monitored or inspected as compared to urban schools. As a result, primary education is characterized by poor learner achievements and does not provide learners with the desired competencies. Matete (2009) observes that most teachers are not able to apply the effective strategies accordingly because they lack proper demonstration of strategies by their education leaders especially the language inspectors. Responding to the concern, Makuwa (2012 and Dambudzo (2015) are of the view that inspectors and the Language teachers are affected by curriculum changes in education. These recurrent changes disturb the professional growth of both the inspectors and the language teachers. Moreover, Inspectorate departments in most countries lack quality motorcycles to use for transport to visit schools (Education Management Information System (EMIS) 2016-2017). Therefore, most schools are not adequately visited.

## **2.8 Chapter summary**

This section has presented the literature review about previous projects that sought to address early-grade literacy deficiencies in Sub-Saharan African countries. In Malawi, the early grade literacy interventions include; Read Malawi, Strengthening Early Grade Reading in Malawi (SEGREM), (Language Across the Country (LAC) and Malawi Break Through to Literacy (MBTL). The section has also discussed methods and approaches to reading that are applied in the teaching of reading using comprehension strategies. The five components of instruction on which NRP instruction is based are the phonological awareness, alphabetical principle, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. These have also been discussed in details. This section has further discussed Cascade Model, which the education departments use to train teachers for curriculum implementation, and has analysed its ineffectiveness on teachers and learners. Finally, the section has mentioned challenges that are experienced in the teaching of language skills and suggestions of how to solve them have been outlined. The section has based its discussion on Vygotsky's belief that cognitive abilities in children are formed through interaction with the social environment, therefore teachers' understanding of NRP content will promote its effectiveness on teaching and learning.



## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This section discusses the research design, followed by the description of the study location and the reasons for choosing the area of the study. It then provides the sampling process of the schools and the research participants. This is followed by a description of the data collection instruments that will be useful in this research. The issue of research procedures, credibility and trustworthiness are also provided followed by data analysis plan. It also discusses the relevant ethical issues that the researcher will be required to observe in the field setting. The last section provides a summary.

### **3.2. Research paradigm**

This study used constructivist paradigm. According to Nieuwenhuis (2010 p. 59), constructivist paradigm focuses on enquiring more about the experiences of participants. This agrees with Truter (2015) who stipulates that in constructivism, the study focuses on the realities created by individuals or groups of people. In this study, I explored more on the experiences and teaching approaches, which are realities that were portrayed by teachers in the process of implementing the reading programme. Since the research used qualitative approach, in order to learn more about the issues guided by research questions, in line with the constructivist's paradigm, the research used participant observation, interviews and documents to collect data. As teachers taught, they created innovative ways which became realities that helped learners to read. Constructivists believe that knowledge is subjective and for learners to read, teachers believe that learners can do something on their own. Constructivists believe that knowledge is constructed by people in the research process, as one interviews, interacts and observes what the participants (teachers and learners) do in a given situation, such as in a classroom. Following this thinking, the study used teachers in the selected schools to unveil their experiences and responses towards the NRP approaches approximately. Teachers were used

because they are the ones who impart knowledge to learners and performance was checked against how learners responded to their teaching. The district education manager (DEM), the primary education advisor and headteachers enlightened the researcher on how the chosen schools perform, and the information the researcher got established the assumption of how experienced the teachers of the concerned schools are. Then through lesson observation, the study got the real concept about teachers' experiences. The study used different techniques in order to overcome possible values and biases related to topic under study that would interfere with the neutrality of the participant.

### **3.3 Research approach**

The study was qualitative in nature and a case study design was followed based on the constructivism paradigm. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is a type of education research in which the study relies on the views of the participants, asks broad, general questions, collects data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants in their natural setting, where the researchers have face-to-face interaction, often over time and describes and analyses these words for themes and constructs. With a qualitative approach, which is exploratory in nature, I went in the field with an open mind to explore the views of teachers with regard to how they applied the NRP approach of teaching language skills; and the challenges they experienced in complimenting the approaches with the traditional strategies of teaching (Matete 2009). With the constructivism theoretical framework that guided this study, the qualitative approach was considered the best, since it gave the true picture of what was happening on the ground, by examining experiences of teachers and observing how learners respond to the new approaches of teaching language skills. Since it is holistic and provides a contextual understanding of the lived experience from the participants, it is more convincing and appealing than statistical power, generalized and replicated findings (Patton 2002). Qualitative research offers more proof, concrete, and convincing information to the study since

it gets the first-hand information from the interaction with the concerned participants. The research also involved observation of English lessons in standards 1 and 3 to examine how teachers apply the NRP approaches and strategies in the teaching of language skills, and how learners respond to the approaches. Qualitative research was again justified, because, the study explored the perception and views of those people who are concerned with education, such as the district education managers, The National Reading Programme district coordinator (DC), primary education advisors, headteachers and teachers. The case study's unique strength is the ability to deal with a wide variety of data collection instruments. I used multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, documents, and audio-visual information rather than rely on a single data source.

### **3.4 Study location**

I conducted the research study in four rural primary schools in Blantyre, in the southern region; two from the sub-urban area, and the other two from typical rural area. According to EMIS (2016-2017), Blantyre rural has a total of 146 Primary schools, 42 government public primary schools and 104 mission primary schools. I chose to conduct the research in rural Primary schools because rural communities are characterized by low-income populations with high illiteracy levels because they are not exposed to enough print as compared to urban school children who are advantaged to kinder gardens and watching television which advance their literacy levels. Hugo (2010) adds that most children in the rural areas do not have the opportunity to attend to nursery schools and they come to school without necessary skills to begin the complex task of learning how to read in standard 1. For this reason, reading programmes for low-income populations often give disappointing results (Abadzi 2017). The other reason for the choice to study in rural primary the schools is that remote schools are rarely inspected. EMIS (2016-2017) states that school inspectors are expected to visit every school at least once in a year, while the primary education advisor (PEA) is expected to visit a school

three times a year. However, most of the schools that are visited are those from the urban while remote area schools are ignored.

### **3.4.1 Study population**

Ndengu 2012 defines study population as all members of any well-defined class of people, events or objects where the researchers wish to draw conclusions. This study targeted teachers who taught in the infant (standards 1 & 2) and junior (standard 3 & 4) sections Blantyre rural primary schools. 16 teachers were picked to represent all teachers. The study also targeted the NRP official responsible for reading programme, primary education advisors (PEAs) and headteachers of the targeted schools. I chose these groups because they have a direct bearing on the implementation and managing of the reading programme in lower classes (1 to 4) of primary schools.

### **3.4.2 Sample size and its characteristics**

The total population was twenty-three, the district coordinator, the PEA 1, one primary education advisor, four headteachers and sixteen teachers. This population was obtained from the district education rural office, the teacher development centre (TDC) and four rural primary schools. All the participants chosen were directly involved in the trainings for the implementation and managing of the NRP programmes in the infant (1to2) and junior classes (3 to 4) of primary schools.

**Table 3.1 Summarises the participants who were involved in the study.**

<b>VENUE</b>	<b>PARTICIPANT</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
District Education office	1. PEA 1	1
	2. District NRP coordinator	1
Zone	PEA	1
Primary schools	4 Headteachers	4
	4 Teachers from each school	16
Total number of participants		23

The sample of 23 participants was considered adequate as Ndengu (2012) contends that in a qualitative research, a small distinct group is usually investigated to understand the problem in depth. Moreover, the size of the sample is determined by basing on the information needs, and so data saturation is the guiding factor.

### **3.5 Sampling technique**

The study used two sampling techniques which are Purposive and simple random sampling techniques. With purposeful sampling, participants were chosen because of the qualities that they possessed. According to Lupimo (2014), in purposive sampling, the study uses personal judgment to choose those best for the purpose of the study. Purposive sampling was used to select the, NRP district coordinator, PEAs, and headteachers and the teachers who attended NRP trainings and were directly involved in the reading programme in the schools that were visited. Simple random sampling was used to select the two schools at the trading centre and the two schools in the typical rural areas. Names of all schools were written on pieces of paper which were folded and put into a dish. Four children from different families were asked to pick

one piece each. The chosen pieces were then taken as the ones to represent all schools. Then the picked schools were given pseudonyms.

### **3.6 Data collection method**

Three methods were used to collect data in this study. These were documentary analysis, interviews and classroom lesson observations. I chose these methods because I believed they would provide the necessary information that would help me to gain an insight into an understanding of how the implementation of the reading programme was being carried out. The methods were also chosen because they are consistent with the ideal qualitative research methods. Furthermore, the three methods complemented each other to provide methodological triangulation in the study (Cohen et al. 2010). Methodological triangulation helps to cross check the reliability of the data of a study. There were two types of interviews conducted in the study. These were teacher face to face semi-structured interviews (Appendix D), which were conducted before observing lessons; focus group interviews (Appendix E) for all teachers. The interviews were individual and “semi-structured.” The study adopted both individual and group interviews because I wanted the interviewees to express their thoughts especially on issues of their understanding of NRP as a new curriculum, and the challenges they encountered in its implementation. The interviews used in this study are characterised as being “semi-structured” because they were open ended at the same time flexible. In semi-structured interviews, I followed the questioning plan, and took a conversational style that enabled natural flow of responses to questions in an orderly manner as guided by the questionnaire. Group interviews were conducted at the very end in order to complement data collected from individual responses. The interviewees were free to say whatever came to mind in relation to the questions (Cohen 2010). I followed the procedure of semi-structured interviews as described by Cohen, (2010) in interviewing the teachers and the headteachers, PEAs and the district NRP coordinator. The methods of data collection used in this study are described below:

### **3.6.1 Interview**

One teacher in every class in the lower primary (standards 1- 4) of the participating schools was interviewed after I observed lessons in standards 1 and 3 classes (Refer to appendix D) Interviews were used to investigate what they understood about NRP, how they were prepared for the reading implementation exercise, the approach and strategies they used in implementing the reading, their working practices in the teaching of the programme and challenges facing the implementation of the reading programme and how they were coping in their work. According to Matete (2009), interviews allow the study to probe more questions and facilitate interaction between the one asking questions and the informants. Interview is based on Bryman (2011) who contends that if one wants to understand peoples' world and their life she/he should talk with them. The interview helped me to collect data on real lived experiences of the informants. Interview enriched the data that I collected from documentary review. The study used this instrument to collect data from the PEA, (Appendix A) the NRP district coordinator (Appendix B), headteachers (Appendix C) and teachers (Appendix D). The data was captured through tape recordings and writing. However, most participants were preservative in having their contributions tape-recorded. To solve this problem, I assured them that all the information they gave would be treated with the strictest confidentiality and would be used solely for this research.

### **3.6.2 Focused group discussion**

Focus group discussion (Appendix E) was done after observing lessons in standards 1 and 3 in each of the four schools. All participating teachers in standards 1-4 in each of the four schools were requested to assemble in the staffroom or headteachers' office for focus group discussion. These discussions helped me to obtain a variety of views or opinions about the Reading implementation, and this complemented the data I collected from individual interviews since the participants were free to discuss their views on their daily activities especially on teaching

and learning (McNamara 2009). Focus group discussion provided a great deal of information since there was great flexibility and opportunity to restructure the questions. Through this technique participants were able to answer and give their arguments. It also helped the researcher to obtain in-depth information since teachers were able to complement each other's views and concepts thus making data richer and more complete and revealing.

### **3.6.3 Documentary analysis**

Documentary analysis was used to collect data that was concerned with schemes of work and lesson preparatory notes. It was in form of checklist (Appendix G). I used check list to observe the availability of records of teachers, such as schemes of work, progress report record, the class register and records showing the borrowing and lending of supplementary books to learners. The checklist also helped me to check examination results records; inspectorate and supervisory records in the headteachers' office. These were pieces of evidence with regards to whether teaching and learning of language was supervised and monitored. The success of the reading implementation depends on how teachers plans their work. Schemes of work tell if the teacher is effectively implementing the reading programme according to how they were trained. The scheme of work shows suggested teaching and learning methods and resources that guide the teacher in planning for the lesson. Through the documentary analysis, I was able to scrutinise the literature and extract what seemed to be relevant to the issue in question.

### **3.6.4 Observation**

I used this technique to observe English lessons in Standard 1 and 3 classes in all the sample schools. Two classes were observed at each school. I chose the two classes because the foundation for schooling is effectively laid in standard 1, while standard 3 is the last class to exit the foundation phase, whereby systemic evaluation is implemented. I used (Appendix F) as my lesson observation tool. The instrument helped me to examine how teachers planned and prepared English reading lessons, apply the NRP approaches through differentiated strategies



in the teaching and learning of language skills, how they modelled and involved learners in sounds and other lesson activities, how the participant encouraged and motivated learners to get involved in oral and reading activities in groups, rows, pairs and individually, through positive reinforcement and acknowledgement of learners' efforts by using actionable feedback.

Class observation also helped me to examine how teachers assessed learners in the course of the lesson, and to find out if they observed inclusive learning where both boys and girls are involved in lesson activities equally. Observation also provided the true picture of how teachers understand NRP curriculum approaches and strategies of teaching language skills, because the understanding of a curriculum is proved through the way one applies it in lesson delivery. In this way observation was justified because Cresswell (2014) explains that the way people interact, their behaviour and actions and how they interpret them are best generated by observing real life in their settings. I recorded all what I observed. Thus, the evidence of the social world was clearly proved.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

The following process was followed in the analysis of data: After data collection, data was analyzed manually through thematic approach which involved transcribing raw data, re-reading data, categorizing and organizing data to similar codes and themes. I looked at the themes that emerged from the respondents in the interview and then organized those themes into categories to be meaningful. Then I integrated and refined the categories. Thematic analysis helped me to identify patterns and themes in the data and draw conclusions from it. The thematic analysis was justified because it complemented the research questions and the emerging themes became the categories for analysis (Truter 2015)

### **3.8 Credibility and trustworthiness**

This sub-section explains how credibility and trustworthiness of the study was established.

#### **3.8.1 Credibility**

Credibility refers to reliability (Truter 2015). It is defined in the context of internal validity. In this study, credibility was established by conducting a highly structured interview (Cohen 2010). The study prevented putting words in the mouths of the interviewees, or asking questions that will direct the participant to the response that the researcher would like to hear. I also established credibility through on depth literature study that guided me in compiling the interview schedule.

#### **3.8.2. Trustworthiness**

The study ensured that the outcomes of the findings were the same even if other scholars conducted the same study using the same methods, same participants and locations. The study ensured that the findings were truly of the experiences of the participants and not the researcher. This was achieved by using four different data collection methods which were document analysis, semi structured and focus groups interviews and lesson observation. I also used four different sites and a wide range of participants. The research encouraged participants to be honest when contributing to interviews and they were not forced to participate, but were doing it upon their willingness to do so.

#### **3.8.3 Ethical considerations**

This sub-section establishes ethical attentions that were considered in respect of the study.

##### **3.8.3.1 Consent**

I obtained an identification letter from Mzuzu University (Appendix H). Secondly, I requested for permission from the Blantyre Rural District Education Manager (DEM) (Appendix I) to conduct research in the schools. I then requested the NRP official (Appendix N) to participate

in the study. I took the DEM's permission letter (Appendix J) to the PEA at the zone and then I requested her to participate in the study before interacting with schools in the zone (Appendix M). I consulted and requested headteachers (Appendix K) for the chosen schools to participate in the study, and also allow me to use their teaching staff as participants. Lastly, I asked for permission from the teaching staff (Appendix L), the language teachers in lower classes before involving them in the study. Finally, I gave liberty to participants to choose whether to participate or not because participation was voluntary. All the participants were informed about the research topic and its objectives and signed the declaration letter (Appendix O) to show acceptance to participate in the study. According to Robson (2011), a prospective participant in a research must be given sufficient advance information about what is involved to make informed choice about participation.

### **3.8.3.2 Anonymity and confidentiality**

Pseudonyms for schools and participants were used (Ndengu 2012). The four schools were C, K, L and N while participants were teachers 1-16. I named PEAs as PEA 1 and 2. I confined Respondents confidentiality, by assuring them that no information that they gave would be made public or available to others (Creswell 2014). Those who accepted to participate were requested to sign on the letters of consent before participating in the study (Appendix L).

### **3.9 Chapter summary**

In this chapter I have presented research methodology. I have analysed the design of the study, which is qualitative and the paradigm in which the study is situated with justifications. I have also reflected on methods and tools used for collecting data, and have justified their use. Furthermore, I have discussed my research site, population and sampling techniques with viable justifications. Finally, I have explained how credibility, trustworthiness and research ethical issues were assured to my participants.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter, presents and discusses the findings of this study. First, detailed information of schools and participants involved in the study is reported. This is followed by the presentation and discussion of findings.

### **4.1 Information about participants according to school**

#### **4.1.1 School C**

School C (**Appendix P**) has an enrolment of 419 boys and 422 girls respectively, making 841 learners in total. It has 9 teachers, four males and 5 lady teachers. Classes 1-4 are the vast majority of the student population and each class was streamed twice. There is a significant drop in enrolment in upper grades 5-6, which is an ongoing challenge for schools in Malawi (World Bank 2010). The school has 3 permanent blocks which are well protected with a baked brick fence. Infant (1 and 2) classes and standards 5 and 8 learn in the classroom. Classes 3, 4 and 6 learn under trees. School C is about nine kilometres away from the main road. The school has a catchment area of five (5) villages which are 2 to 5 kilometres away from school. The school records high absenteeism of learners in all classes and this is mainly observed on market days, as most of the learners help parents to carry goods for sale to various markets which take place on Mondays and Fridays. The other cause of absenteeism is the long distance to and from school. Unlike many schools in the Zone, school C is not provided with the feeding programme.

#### **4.1.2 School K**

School K (**Appendix Q**) consists of classes 1-4. It had 4 teachers, including the headteacher, two males and two lady teachers. The school community employed two volunteer teachers who teach in standard 3 and 4. The headteacher also teaches in addition to his administrative duties. The school has an enrolment of 115 boys and 138 girls respectively, making 253 learners in

total. There is one permanent school block which has two classrooms, for standards 1 and 2 learners. Standard 3 and 4 use the CCAP Church as classrooms. Other junior class streams learn under trees. The school has one permanent house for the headteacher. The school has a catchment area of five (5) villages which are 2 to 7 kilometres away from school. School K is about 15 kilometres away from the main road. Most villagers are peasant farmers who are characterised with poverty and illiteracy levels. The children in this area are rarely absent from school because of the school feeding programme. This is advantageous to the implementation of the NRP because teachers are assured of full coverage of the programme to all learners in the school. School K however, is very far from other schools. This affects children who get promoted to upper classes. Hence, most of them do not continue with school. This is the main challenge that affects education of learners in this area where school K is.

#### **4.1.3 School L**

School L (**Appendix R**) has an enrolment of 2,982 which comprises of 1358 girls and 1324 boys. There are 32 teachers, 6 males and 26 female teachers. The school has a number of streams for each class in the lower classes. School L is surrounded by seven villages which are 1 to 5 kilometres away from school. Most of the people in the villages are both business and working class. Most of the houses in the villages are built with baked brick, and thatched with iron sheets. The school has quite a big enrolment because of its geographical position and location. Like in many primary schools, classes 1-4 have the vast majority of the learner population which decrease as learners upgrade into upper classes partly due to dropouts as a result of poverty and long distances to and from school.

#### **4.1.4 School N**

School N (**Appendix S**) is about 3 kilometres from the main road, where there is also a busy market every day. The school has 5 male and 16 female teachers, making a total of 21 teachers. The school enrolment is 1025 girls and 1063 boys adding to 2028 learners. Most of these

learners are in classes 1-4. The school is surrounded by six villages, whose inhabitants mostly run small scale businesses. According to the headteacher, the school records the highest number of drop-outs and orphans in the zone. This is due to HIV/AIDS related pandemic which has affected most parents in the area. The school has a feeding programme; however, absenteeism of learners is mainly observed on markets days on which most of the learners rush to school to get their porridge and then return home, change uniform and go to the market. Porridge is served between 6.30 to 7.00 morning hours.

## **4.2 Presentation and discussion of findings**

The presentation of the findings is in line with the order of research sub-research questions. (refer to chapter 1: section 1.5.2) from which the following sub-headings emerged:

- Teachers' knowledge and understanding about NRP
- How the teachers are prepared for the implementation of the reading programme
- How the instruction is best provided using the NRP approach to teaching reading
- Challenges teachers experience in the implementation of the reading programme.

### **4.2.1 Teachers' knowledge and understanding about NRP**

The effectiveness of curriculum implementation is dependent upon the teachers' sound understanding and appreciation of its aims, content, approaches and strategies in order to meet the needs of a learner. However, most of the teachers in the participating schools were simply able to describe and recite the goals of the NRP curriculum without proving their understanding of its content. Participants understood NRP as a new curriculum which follows a unique approach in order to help learners in standards 1-4 to read. This was evidenced as follows:

It's a new reading curriculum that has been introduced in Malawi to improve reading in learners in standards 1-4. **(PEA 1)**

I can say it's a new reading curriculum that has just been introduced in Malawi to help learners to read. **(Teacher 3)**

It's a special reading programme which follows a special approach known as I do, we do, and you do. **(Teacher 15)**

The reading literacy literature reveal that in order to teach the reading components (e.g. phonemic awareness, phonics and alphabetic code, and comprehension, teachers have to be knowledgeable, strategic, adaptive and reflective. According to Mulkeen (2010), expert teachers have a deep understanding of the structure and epistemologies of their disciplines, combined with knowledge of the kinds of teaching activities that will help students come to understand the discipline for themselves. This being the case, therefore, what teachers 3, 15 and PEA 1 demonstrated about the National Reading Programme, did not adequately show understanding of the reading curriculum. By simply knowing the meaning, roles and goals of the NRP, is not sufficient for the teacher to implement reading in the lower classes successfully. Teachers also need to describe how to transform the goals into learning experiences and plan activities that integrate language, with the guidance of components of reading, also known as literacy elements (refer to section 2.7) so that learners understand and develop the reading skills. English, as a language, is described in terms of the four basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (refer to section 2.3). Teachers need to address all these skills in the teaching of languages, and, whenever possible, involve learners in as many interactive activities as possible, using varied and learner centred comprehension strategies that integrate all four skills since each skill reinforces the other.

In trying to probe more about teachers understanding of the reading curriculum, I observed lessons in standards 1 and 3, to examine how teachers used the NRP approach and comprehension strategies, and how they demonstrated their knowledge of areas of high impact

on learners during the lessons, how they promoted interaction in the classroom and made the learning environment safe, gender-sensitive and conducive for all learners. I was guided by an observation tool (Appendix F). It was observed that standard 1 teacher followed and observed the NRP approach more explicitly compared to standard 3 teachers. For example, teacher 1 in school C, modelled reading the words, *bridge*, *cross*, and *river*. She took learners to a small bridge which is near the school and modelled *crossing*, then *she asked learners to cross* with her, finally she told learners to cross on their own. She encouraged all learners to participate and she continuously praised learners for the efforts they made. In standard 3, teachers only observed *we do* and *you do*, stages and the lessons were mostly dominated with traditional methods, especially group work, with few resources. Most teachers did not model lesson concepts to the class and comprehension strategies were rarely used. This indicated that most of them did not have adequate understanding of the reading curriculum approach.

The inadequate understanding of the reading curriculum approach by most teachers contradicts with Cekiso (2017) study outcomes which indicate that in order to successfully fulfil their instructional roles, it is imperative that English Second Language (ESL) teachers must understand the curriculum document or syllabus well in order to implement it effectively. The constructivism theory also attaches great importance in having learners getting more competent interactions and collaboration with competent teachers, who understand the lesson activities in order to achieve lesson objectives (Vygotsky 1978). According to Kuzborska (2011), teachers' understanding and interpretation of reading instruction has a profound influence on their classroom practices. For the teacher to scaffold the child into understanding of concepts far beyond that which he/she could reach alone, he or she requires to be given appropriate and meaningful support from teachers who understand his/her needs through proper implementation of the high impact elements of reading and thereby move from minimal level



to a higher level of performance. The sentiments in the preceding lines are echoed by Richards and Rodgers (2001) who admit that teachers need to employ distinctive interactional characteristics that will create positive environment and support for all learners. For teachers to identify learners' Zone of Proximal Development ZPD, and give them necessary scaffolding, it depends on careful choice of participatory methods, appropriate teaching resources and preparation of varied learning activities. Therefore, the teacher must understand the subject matter and the way children's understanding typically develops in a particular culture (Vygotsky 1978). Because of not understanding the new curriculum most teachers often disengage with their learners as they fail to maximise their pedagogic potential and promote interaction in the classroom. Richards and Rodgers (2001) also state that teachers' perceptions influence their goals, procedures, materials, classroom interaction patterns, their roles, their learners and the schools they work in. Richards and Rodgers (2001) further point out that teachers' knowledge and understanding about language and language learning provide the basis for a particular approach to reading instruction. In order to achieve this, Farrant (2004) suggests that for the teachers to understand a curriculum, they must play a more significant role in designing it. This is because teachers know and understand the needs of learners better than anyone else, hence they must be involved in curriculum planning and development so that they can understand, modify and implement the curriculum for the benefit of their learners.

Since most teachers did not understand most participatory strategies, it was discovered that most of them skipped most of the work that required application of NRP comprehension strategy in the teacher's guide. This was remarked as follows:

Some dialogues are too long, so I just teach part of it or just ignore them (**Teacher 2**).

The practice of skipping content affects the successful implementation of the reading programme because the teaching units in the teacher's guide build on one another. Reading

takes place through a strict sequence, where one skill builds on another (Marinelli et al. (2011). If this sequence is not followed, literacy acquisition can take much longer, or not occur at all. The teachers' guide and the learners' book are aligned in such a way that the content progress in a sequence, moving from easiest to more difficult. According to NRP (2016), fruitful implementation of the reading programme is best achieved when all the activities are taught exactly the way they are lined up in the teachers' guide, without skipping or changing anything. For this reason, it was revealed that when the NRP monitoring team visited schools to supervise the implementation of reading, they made sure that all activities were taught exactly the way they are written in the teachers' guide. The following remark was captured:

*Oyendera akabwera, monga a NRP, amatenga teacher's guide nkumatsata ma step onse momwe aliri mu TG kuti awone ngati akutsatiridwa. Iwowotu sayitanitsa lesson plan. (The NRP monitors assess each and every lesson activity as stipulated in the teachers' guide. They don't use the lesson plan.)*

**(Teacher 16)**

The moment some activity is skipped or left out, then we have disturbed the normal pattern of activities, thus making learners' experiences inconsistent.

#### **4.2.2 How the teachers are prepared for the implementation of the reading programme**

Teacher capacity is central to the implementation of reading to early-grade literacy learning. Preparing teachers and equipping them with adequate subject and content knowledge, effective teaching practices and the ability to work with colleagues and management, is imperative for the success of any curriculum implementation.

Data revealed that the training of teachers followed the Cascade Model (refer to section 2.3.5) for definition). Teachers got trained in the zones and were the last officers to get trained. Data also revealed that teachers were trained by PEAs and fellow educators, known as 'Key

teachers.’ These are the teachers who were identified as best performers in the zones, following the NRP trainings. This was evidenced in the following direct speech:

We trained our teachers at zonal level. Its Cascade model of training (**NRP official**)

There has been trainings and these trainings trickled down to teachers in stages.  
**(PEA 1)**

Teachers were trained at the last level of the Cascade Model, and the trainings were done in their respective zones. Although most teachers were engaged in the training, participants revealed that they were not properly demonstrated in the important foundational skills by their facilitators. This was evidenced in the following remarks:

*Otiphunzitsa akewo, mmm amangophwanyirira, nawonso zimawavuta* (those who were training us, mmm, they were not effective. They too, had problems in demonstrating concepts to us. **(Teacher 12)**)

What Teacher 12 said confirms Mpabulungi (1999) reports which state that the evaluation study of a three-layer Cascade Model of training teachers in Uganda indicates problems especially at the lowest level. Likewise, in Malawi, although NRP managed to train large numbers of early grade teachers in the use of NRP approach and comprehension strategies, most of the teachers were observed to have been improperly trained in the use of NRP approach and comprehension strategies during the language lessons. This shows that the facilitators (PEAs and Key teachers) may have missed important information during their training at district level or they may possibly not have internalised the messages. Consequently, most of the training content was not properly demonstrated to the teachers. This showed that the model of training teachers was not reliable, and the fact that teachers were trained by fellow teachers questioned the necessity and importance of the NRP curriculum. It is worth noting that

improper teacher education and training is detrimental to understanding of the content and teaching a reading skill to implement high-quality programme.

Farrant (2004) states that a new curriculum cannot be implemented until the teachers have been trained in the use of necessary teaching materials such as text books, work books, and any audio-visual materials that are essential to the exercise. Moore and Lyon (2005) add that it calls for curriculum implementers to conduct vigorous training of teachers in all schools before rolling out the programme in schools. Therefore, for the NRP curriculum to be implemented effectively, teachers needed additional in-service training in the use of strategies and approaches and to improve their teaching skills in applying elements of high impact for learner performance. However, UNESCO (2010) reports that over a quarter of all teachers in developing countries are not trained according to national standards. This is echoed by Education for All 2014 who report that most teachers in developing countries have little -to-no training in teaching literacy. Given the evidence that reading should be trained in a very specific way, this is an obvious problem.

The inadequate training of teachers leads to poor quality of learning and this controverts with the constructivism theory when it states that teachers must be adequately prepared both in their pre-service education and during subsequent years of practice, if they are to conduct effective modelling, coaching and scaffolding and sufficient support to promote learning when new concepts are introduced. Rowe (2005) places a major emphasis on *teacher quality*, and on building capacity in teachers towards quality, evidence-based teaching practices that are demonstrably effective in meeting the developmental and learning needs of all students. Rowe (2005) adds that the preparation of teachers to teach reading across the country need to adopt evidence-based and integrated approach including instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics,

fluency, and vocabulary knowledge and text comprehension. Rowe (2005) points out that the NRP five literacy elements, (refer to section 2.5) are dependent on one another and are a literacy map for teachers. Each of the five literacy elements is needed to create the core foundation of student's success in reading. Therefore, without proper knowledge and review of these five elements, teachers cannot properly implement a beneficial literacy block.

### **Coaching and teacher training circles**

It was further mentioned that in order to compound the effectiveness of NRP trainings, teachers were also prepared for the implementation of reading through coaching and teacher learning circles. Although, it was observed that the two exercises were rarely conducted as planned in schools, they were created to provide ongoing monitoring, feedback, and in-classroom coaching to teachers. They were treated as in-service trainings which kept teachers updated with the NRP approach at school level. This was evidenced as follows:

*Timakhala ndi coaching komanso TLC kamodzi pa mwezi kumakhala ngati kupitiriza NRP training ija komano pa school level. (We have coaching and TLCs once in a month, it's like we continue NRP trainings, but at school level)*

#### **(Teacher 2)**

Mostly these teachers support each other through the coaching exercises which are done once in every month. Key teachers and section heads were trained to conduct coaching at every school. **Headteacher, school K**

Key teachers. With the help of section heads, key teachers conduct coaching in schools to keep teachers updated with the NRP approach. Coaching is done once in a week and is focussed on the six areas of teaching practice, ATP, which bring high impact to learner achievement. They include:

**Plan in advance** and prepare varied and differentiated lesson activities, strategies and teaching resources including many interactive processes that will cater for all the language skills, at the same time, considering learners differences, abilities and learning styles.

**Teach effectively** with application of NRP approach which involves modelling the concept, practicing the concept with learners then allowing more adequate opportunity for learners to practice the concept.

**Encourage reading in class by ensuring** that each learner reads connected text every day to support reading accuracy, fluency and comprehension; using print-rich classroom to promote learners' interest and practice of reading and providing rigorous and frequent opportunities for learners to read and practice concepts.

**Demonstrate inclusive and effective classroom practices** and making sure the majority of learners are actively engaged in learning, at the same time reinforcing learners positively, as much as possible.

**Check for understanding** when learners work in groups/pairs/rows/ and individually. Teacher must move around the classroom to watch and listen carefully to check for understanding. Ongoing, informal assessment must be frequently integrated during typical daily activities in order to gauge reading progress. According to Abedi (2010), to manage the formative feedback and learning process, teachers benefit from being able to draw on a range of assessment strategies and tools such as observations, portfolios, performance tasks, prior knowledge assessments, rubrics, peer assessments, and student self-assessments. They can then combine rich evidence of student learning with their own deep understanding of the learning process so that they can use insights from assessment to plan and revise instruction and to provide feedback that explicitly helps students see how to improve.

**Provide actionable feedback** by responding gently with positive reinforcement and specific feedback that guides the learner to the correct response. When teachers give explanatory feedback, rather than corrective feedback, student performance improves. It is also important to be in the habit of praising learners for their efforts and progress, even if they have not yet fully mastered a skill. Learners need to believe that the ability to read comes from effort and hard work, and is not pre-destined by being born intelligent or not.

When areas of teaching practice are well observed during the teaching, children can, and should learn to read with understanding by the end of standard 2, despite differences in complexity between languages and differences in the contexts in which children are taught to read. ‘Reading with understanding’ includes both the ability to decode (translate sound to print) and understand what is read at the level of words, simple phrases and sentences. While no two children will acquire reading skills at exactly the same rate, all are able to reach this stage in the early grades. Failing to read with understanding by grade 2 should be considered a ‘warning light’ for action to be taken to correct this by grade 3.

Teacher Learning Circles are done once in a month and they involve teachers coming together to discuss any topic which is identified from the teacher’s guide as challenging to teach. Then after discussing the topic, one teacher is chosen to teach it following the discussion, while other teachers observe the lesson. At the end teachers meet again to discuss successes, challenges of the lesson and areas the teacher needed to improve. Coaching and teacher learning circles are considered as major CPDs for teachers at school level.

Literature recommends Coaching and TLC as being important for teachers to improve their instruction practice in class. For example, Graham (2018) advises that in-order to compound

the effectiveness of teacher trainings, early grade reading interventions can provide ongoing monitoring, feedback, and in-classroom coaching to teachers. Such measures ensure that teachers correctly apply what they have learned in training. Typically, teachers struggle to retain and put into practice new knowledge gained from trainings (Clark-Chiarelli & Louge (2016). Coaching and continual feedback mollify these problems. (Abadzi 2017) explains that coaching helps teachers to experience and develop understanding of an integration of knowledge and skills. Coaching also helps teachers to have opportunities to process new learning with others. Through coaching teachers' beliefs are challenged by evidence which is not consistent with their assumptions. Even the social constructivist theory promotes and encourages co-operative teaching. It therefore stands to reason that "through co-operative teaching and learning, learners' poor reading can be alleviated" (Stuart et al. 2009). In general, teachers tend to apply more of what they learn when trainings feature in-classroom coaching and feedback (Kim et al 2016). The National Reading Panel (2000) and NRP Monitoring report (2017-2018) also support the idea of providing teachers with the training and on-going professional development through coaching, as a way of strengthening teacher's skills and knowledge of how to teach language skills. The two reports add that close monitoring of coaching and TLC are vital, as it ensures teachers support and uplifting.

Although literature supports coaching and TLC as important concepts in schools, they are not effectively beneficial to teachers. Most of the planned programmes are never fulfilled, and the few that are done are never monitored. Partly it is because, most teachers are absent on most of the days in the week. For example, the headteacher of school K said that, at times Key teachers do not understand how they can help fellow teachers. And with the insufficient visits by PEAs in schools, this is an obvious problem.



### 4.2.3 How the instruction is best provided using the NRP approach to teaching reading

Before NRP was introduced, teachers had been involved in many Early Grade Reading interventions, such as Read Malawi which had their own unique approaches to teaching reading that proved to be ineffective. Therefore, it was important to analyse how best the instruction should be provided using the NRP approach. With regards to this objective, it was observed that most teachers used Gradual Release of Responsibility Model, (GRRM) also known as the Learning Circle which involved *I do*, *we do* and *you do*. One of the teachers said,

I start reading, that is, I demonstrate, (I do), I read with learners, (we do) and then learners read on their own (you do). Previously learners were reading on their own.

But now teacher models before learners are involved in the reading. **(Teacher 2)**

What Teacher 2 said was also evidenced through lesson observations in standards 1 and 3. During the lesson, teachers modelled the skill concept to learners, (*I do*) then they practised the concept together with learners (*we do*). Finally, learners practised the concept on their own (*you do*). It was also noted that, whenever a learner was failing to practice a concept, at *you do* stage the teacher modelled a concept again, meaning that *I do* stage was done at any time to help learners grasp the concept. This showed that for learners to capture concepts, there has to be rigorous and repeated practice of the lesson activity which has been well modelled by the teacher.

It was further observed that most teachers, especially those in standard 1 enriched the approach with gestures and real objects or colourful pictures. At times songs, games, rhymes, could also be applied within the lesson. The following remarks crown it all:

I normally use gestures and pictures to explain difficult concepts that the learners seem to not understand, but I also encourage them try to practice speaking English every day, even if they are doing mistake. **(Teacher 4)**

We encourage teachers to use pictures or real materials during modelling. Pictures promote critical thinking and sharing of ideas. Besides, pictures promote storytelling and support reading comprehension. **(NRP official)**

The gradual release of responsibility (also known as I do, we do, you do) is a teaching strategy that includes demonstration, prompt, and practice. At the beginning of a lesson or when new material is being introduced, the teacher has a prominent role in the delivery of the content. This is the “I do” phase. But as the student acquires the new information and skills, the responsibility of learning shifts from teacher-directed instruction to student processing activities. In the “We do” phase of learning, the teacher continues to model, question, prompt and cue students; but as student move into the “You do” phases, they rely more on themselves and less on the teacher to complete the learning task (Levy, 2007). Therefore, what Teacher 2 said meant that learners are involved in rigorous and repeated practice of the lesson activity which has been well modelled by the teacher. Teachers provide direct instruction at critical junctures, offering explanations or directing students to resources that are crafted and timed to support inquiry. Effective teachers also offer strategic feedback that takes students to the next stages of learning. This is in line with the constructivism theory when it indicates that learning takes place as learners are vigorously involved in constant and continuous practice of concepts with the teacher (*we do*) and on their own (*you do*) in groups, pairs, and individuals, with authentic tasks given within a meaningful context in order to promote individual learning and encourage learners to be engaged in a task.

According to Vygotsky (1978), constructivism avoids direct instruction. Instead, the teacher with experience and content knowledge guides learners in discovering knowledge on their own. In constructivism, students are actively involved, rather than passively absorbing information; the learning environment is democratic, the teacher is not seen as an authority figure as much

as a learning guide; the activities are interactive and student-centred instead of being lesson-centred. The teacher facilitates activities in which students are responsible for their own learning and are autonomous from one another.

Levy (2007) adds that when the modelling of a concept is enriched with gestures, pictures, miming, and demonstration and released to learners with appropriate support, learners will not only improve comprehension, but they will acquire decoding skills basing on letter names, shapes and sounds. The use of real objects, pictures and drawings, in oral and comprehension lessons, as uttered by Teacher 4 and the NRP official, will also help learners recognise print with knowledge of sight words and this will enhance the bridging of the gap for students who demonstrate a discrepancy between decoding skills and comprehension skills.

Constructivists believe that senses are the gateways of learning. Perceptions become clearer when things are sensed in different ways such as by seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling using the sense organs. Materials of different colours, sizes, textures, odours, and tastes sharpen perception and thus make learning easier especially at early age. By so doing, learners develop knowledge through linking real objects, pictures and drawings, to their experiences and what they learn in class. Such engagement in experiences, activities and discussions challenge learners to make meaning of their social and physical environments. Graham (2018) adds that various materials relating to the desired objective of learning can play vital and positive roles in breaking the monotony of the teacher-centred classrooms which in most cases emphasize rote learning. The very presence of real materials before the children moves them spontaneously to play and manipulate with these materials thus making them active learners. These materials help the children to participate in the learning activity in a lively manner minimizing their passive hearing.

Multiple studies have proved the effectiveness of GRRM in the teaching of reading, for example, Levy (2007) and Wall (2014) also explain that guided instruction is based upon a framework of reading informed by Pearson and Gallagher's Gradual Release of Responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher 1983). It states that instruction should occur along a continuum, beginning with the teacher modelling the desired behaviour, with use of appropriate teaching materials, followed by the teacher and students engaging in shared activities as the teacher gradually allows the students to gain increasing responsibility, and finally the students independently reading without support. In many models of balanced literacy, reading instruction follows the gradual release framework and progresses from modelled reading to shared reading, then guided reading, and finally independent reading (Burkins & Croft 2010). Key here is the placement of guided reading just before the independent reading stage, with students holding a majority of the responsibility for reading during guided reading sessions. Levy (2007) clarifies *I do*, *we do*, and *you do* in Table 2.1.

During the guided reading or practice, the teacher is expected to observe the Areas of Teaching Practice, (refer to 4.2.2). When areas of teaching practice are well observed during the teaching, children can, and should, learn to read with understanding by the end of standard 2, despite differences in complexity between languages and differences in the contexts in which children are taught to read. While no two children will acquire reading skills at exactly the same rate, all are able to reach this stage in the early grades. Failing to read with understanding by grade 2 should be considered a 'warning light' for action to be taken to correct this by grade 3.

While research continues to consistently support and demonstrate that students learn better if they are actively engaged in the language skill practice with the GRRM approach, Burkins and Croft (2010); McCoy (2011) argue that although guided reading strategy reinforces literacy development, it is less effective to children who have no literacy background from kinder garden. Even if the teacher guides and supports, most learners will still profit very little from

independent reading unless it is accompanied by other strategies. Cekiso and Madikiza (2014) also contend that reciprocal teaching, (*I do, we do, and you do*), much as it is a beneficial strategy, is painfully difficult and time-consuming for teachers to use and often requires modifications. However, Abadzi (2017) argues that guided reading has more than 30 years of extensive, positive data to support its effectiveness especially if teachers are patient with learners. It is not easy to achieve the desired results in a day. It takes rigorous practice for learners to start showing positive response to the practice of reading. Responding to the claim, Graham (2018) disputes that early grade reading interventions are not a guaranteed means to improve reading, and they rarely lead to fluency over a short span of time, but they are a mostly reliable means to make significant improvements in literacy over a short period of time.

Teachers should further enhance reading by enriching the classroom with print and naming all objects in the classroom. The teacher can also establish functional print in form of weather chart, song/poem charts, children's names, class rules, job board, calendar, alphabet charts and learners' product wall chart. According to Stuart et al. (2009), constructivists believe that in this way, learners will be able to construct knowledge on their own and develop effectiveness of their cognitive strategies.

#### **4.2.4 Challenges teachers experience in the implementation of the reading programme.**

Curriculum implementation is a slow process because many challenges are exposed in the course of implementing a curriculum. Teachers and all concerned stakeholders are affected by challenges in one way or the other. Challenges are good because they help curriculum planners to improve future curricula of the same type. Therefore, the final objective sought to identify challenges that teachers experience in the course of implementing the reading programme. The research question was: "*What challenges do teachers experience when implementing the*

*National Reading Programme?*” Findings revealed that the reading implementation was facing various categories of challenges as indicated in Table 4.1:

**Table 4.1 Challenges according to categories**

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>CHALLENGE</b>
Teaching materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners books have small pictures</li> <li>• Teachers guides have too many lesson activities</li> <li>• Inadequate time to teach all lesson activities</li> <li>• Scripted lesson plans in the T.G are difficult to follow.</li> <li>• Shortage of textbooks</li> <li>• Government is not replacing lost books</li> <li>• Lack of charts</li> </ul>
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inadequate knowledge about the approach and comprehension strategies on the part of teachers</li> <li>• Shortage of teachers</li> <li>• Absenteeism of teachers</li> <li>• Teachers’ proficiency in English language</li> <li>• Not willing to teach in rural areas</li> <li>• Transfer of trained teachers to other schools</li> <li>• Lack of skills for assisting learners with SEN</li> </ul>
Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large classes</li> <li>• Absenteeism of learners</li> </ul>

Infrastructure and school conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor classrooms</li> <li>• Inadequate classrooms</li> </ul>
Location of schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long distances to and between schools</li> <li>• Learners fail to continue with school after standard 4</li> </ul>
Supervision and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inadequate supervision of teachers</li> <li>• Inadequate support by parents</li> </ul>

#### 4.2.4.1 Challenges in relation to teaching materials

This sub-section discusses challenges with regards to teaching materials.

##### a) Learners' books have small pictures, especially in standard 1

Teachers complained that learners' books, especially those of standard 1 have many small pictures drawn on each of the pages (**Appendix V**). It is difficult for learners to identify and point at the right picture for a particular lesson concept. It takes the effort of the teacher to move around and show learners the picture being referred to the lesson, and this is time consuming considering the large classes and several activities that have to be covered in each lesson. This concern was raised as follows:

The pictures in learner's book are too small, *komanso pa page iliyonse, anajambula zithunzi zambirimbi*, during modelling I point to the picture, but before going on with lesson, I have to go around to check and make sure everyone is pointing at the right picture, *zimenezi zimandidyera nthawi*. (**Teachers 9**)

(The pictures in learner's book are too small, and many pictures are drawn on each page. During modelling I point to the picture, but before going on with lesson, I have to go around to check and make sure everyone is pointing at the right picture, this consumes most of my time) (**Teachers 9**)

Pictures and illustrations in the textbooks for early beginners have to be large because they are designed for many tasks which include attracting learners' attention, creating stories, clarifying concepts, and promoting enjoyment and consciousness among children. Therefore, the concern raised by teacher 9 is an obvious one. For example, Mahmmod (2011) explain that pictures in learners' books help explain and make clear content that is not easy to understand. With large pictures, learners can generate previous knowledge and relate it to new context and then make prediction of what they will read about and imagine what will happen in the future, thus influencing the learning process. According to Kasmaienezhadford (2015), students often see pictures before reading the text and these pictures can enhance the power of imagination of the students. Kasmaienezhadford (2015) further alludes that a child in standard 1 gains control of oral language by relying heavily on pictures in text; hence, books need to have big pictures.

Kaufman, et al. (2007) concur that large pictures in a text book are able to motivate students to study the attached text; they can increase attention or encourage more detailed processing of textual data. Kaufman et al. (2007) add that large pictures in textbooks give a chance to new readers to be conscious about variety of art styles, hence, improve their quality of judgment. Kasmaienezhadford (2015) explains that apart from promoting enjoyment and consciousness among children, large and clear images in learning material assist pupils to make perception about their experiences since they are considered as attractive and cheerful factors of reading. And when they are complemented by print rich environment, they fulfil the law of Vygotsky's constructivism theory "zone of proximal development" which points out that through print rich environment, early grade learners can solve some tasks which are difficult on their own, with the help of peers and through group skills. Therefore, conditions and standards, vocabulary and format of textbook have to be significant. Swanepoel (2010) advices that content organization, power words which are utilized in the textbook, page design, consequence of the image and pictures, technique of print and size, and content legibility, should be well articulated.



## **b) Shortage of textbooks**

Aside having small pictures, data indicated that learners' books were inadequate in schools. Most of the books were lost, and the few that were in schools were in bad shape. It was further verbalised that one of the conditions that the National Reading Programme (2016) established in schools was that every learner should be given a book so that he or she should continue practicing reading at home with the assistance of the parents or his/her siblings. Participants lamented that this practice, however, resulted in loss of books, as most learners are too small to care for the books. During the rainy season, books get soaked in rains, and torn. Findings revealed that NRP, in corroboration with the Ministry of Education had promised that they would be replacing books every year, a thing which has not been fulfilled. This matter was remarked as follows:

The principle of giving learners books to read at their homes is not helping us. Most of the books are lost, others are torn and some of the learners who took books have stopped coming to school. And we cannot trace them. This is a loss altogether (**Teacher 13**)

We have lost a lot of books and teachers are facing challenges to teach learners. You know NRP demands that we give learners books to read at home. This has brought crisis in schools. (**PEA 2**)

Due to inadequate books, it was observed that in most classes, one book was shared by not less than ten learners, for example, in standard 3 of school C, only 13 learners out of 93 learners who were present for the lessons, had the books, hence Teacher 4 grouped learners into seven groups. In school L, teacher 11 put 10 learners in one group, because there were only 6 English books against 62 learners who were present. In my interaction with the PEA, he presented the same complaint as follows:

So, you can just imagine that this time around, more especially in standards 1 and 2 there are no books in most schools. If anything, then it means the teacher is going to use 1 or 2 books with a lot of learners. **(PEA 1)**

Educators know that teaching and learning materials are indispensable to education. A scarcity of textbooks means that learners are not able to practice reading and writing, and increase their information base beyond classroom note taking. Hence, the concerns raised by teacher 13 and PEA 1 are truth, and they are in line with Roskos et al. (2009), who regret that it is difficult to teach children to read without basic materials such as books. According to the International Reading Association (2004), active teaching in early grades reading is evident in the availability of adequate books. Roskos et al. (2009) add that children thrive in learning to read when the environment contains ample books and print. Unfortunately, the study results that were obtained by Kim et al. (2016) reveal that the availability of texts in developing country schools is often woefully inadequate. However, UNESCO (2015) reports that the availability of textbooks does not necessarily mean that they are used in the classroom. Textbooks may be kept in storage units for fear of damage or loss if they are turned over to students. Although NRP requests schools to give books to learners, in Malawi, teachers are reluctant to let children use books because of lack of care or the risk that students would go absent or drop out (UNESCO 2015).

This sentiment defeats Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development" which requires that children be exposed to a print rich and positive environment which can tempt and attract their attention to reading. The availability of adequate text books and the use of group interactions, can help to accomplish those tasks which are too difficult for the child to solve alone. The NRP provides evidence of how children's reading comprehension is developed as they build letter-sound links, vocabulary knowledge and fluency in reading through the varied strategies. Allan and Horn (2013) are of the view that while the provision of materials alone does not transform

learning outcomes, reading materials are fundamental for instruction once teachers have training to use them in reading instruction. The books need to match the students' abilities and needs, and the teachers need to know how to teach reading effectively with the books.

Data also revealed that most schools lacked supplementary books, charts, exercise books and writing materials. The success of NRP depends on making the classroom environment print rich so that learners should continue reading on their own at their own free time. With regards to this problem, this was echoed,

Moreover, schools lack provision of other materials like charts, pent pens all that, these are also problems that are hindering the success of NRP in the system **(PEA 1)**

While most schools can purchase most of the teaching materials from the market using the School Improvement Plan (SIP) funds to draw, develop and prepare TLMs by themselves and by the involvement of learners in upper classes, they cannot afford to purchase all the materials that they require and sometimes typical materials that they need in their classrooms are not readily available in the market. Therefore, Kadzamira and Rose (2003) are of the view that the government should meet its obligation of providing sufficient resources in rural schools.

**c) Scripted lesson plans in teachers' guides have too many activities**

It was also observed that English Teacher's Guides have too many activities, and each of the lessons in the guide has several steps which are not easy to teach in the stipulated time of 30 minutes for infant classes and 35 minutes for junior classes respectively. Participants also complained that most of the learners have no pre-school background, and it is not easy for them to learn many activities at a time. For example, out of the four English lessons that I observed in standard 1 and 3 respectively, only Teacher 1 finished her lesson on time because she only extracted two steps from the scripted lesson plan in the teachers' guide due to how her learners were performing. The rest had to continue the lessons in the other English periods.

Teachers' Guides have too many activities for a standard one learner with no pre-school background. **(Teacher 1)**

Time is never enough to teach all lesson activities. Every day, I never finish my lesson. NRP wants us to follow all the TG steps and to give learners more time for practice **(Teacher 2)**

What Teachers 1 and 2 explained is in line with Truter (2015) who reports that teachers routinely complain that they do not have enough time to explain anything in detail, or to organise activities in the classroom. Truter (2015) further bemoans that due to inadequate teaching time, opportunities for children to carry out experiments, excursions, or any kind of observations are scarce even in the best of schools. Campbell (2015) adds that the issue of time is also often raised by teachers when they confess that they avoid specific reading comprehension strategies because they are time consuming. Abadzi (2017) also notices that educators frequently allocate insufficient school time to language teaching, so children learn little reading or language in the early school years. Thus, they cannot gain more complex knowledge through reading.

It was also noted that each of the English scripted lesson plans in the TG contained a lot of activities under each step. For example, teachers mentioned that dialogues are too long and are the most critical topics to teach. They are overcrowded with several steps to be followed and covered within the lesson. Teachers have to practice each step rigorously before coming to the next step. In one of the standard 3 lessons, teacher 11 managed to teach only the first step of her lesson, and the bell rang. I had to continue observing the same lesson in the next period which came soon after break. With regards to this concern, one participant said:

The main problem that teachers face with scripted lesson plan is that each lesson is overloaded with activities which do not match with time allocated on the time table. With the poor background of children in rural schools, it takes more time to come up with a positive result in a lesson (**Headteacher of school K**)

The challenge of overloaded curriculum, will always affect its implementation in varying degrees, especially in areas with disadvantaged children. For example, time is never enough to teach all prescribed teaching content in each lesson and for teachers to give individual assistance to learners. Therefore, what the headteacher of school K explained is a common problem which was also raised by Graham (2018) who complains that due to a heavy curriculum in the content area and pressure to have students do well on standardized tests, teachers fail to teach the basics and essentials in our schools. Graham (2018) further laments that the demands on the curriculum and on teachers and students is increasing to such a degree that teachers offload a lot of this to outside of school time. Campbell (2015) concurs that not only do teachers have to contend with the problem of an overloaded curriculum, the constant demands to change teaching practices and adapt to new and apparently improved forms of pedagogy, and so forth, mean that there is a growing sense of frustration with constant change in many schools.

Frequent change of curriculum and interventions confuse teachers and it is these confused teachers that have to handle classes. Teachers are introduced to other programmes before they have mastered the previous ones. Graham (2018) adds that in school environments that are disadvantaged, poorly resourced and poorly staffed, the effects of an overloaded curriculum and the desire to keep up with this or that latest technique in pedagogy or technology may lead to genuine crisis. Graham (2018) further complains that when the curriculum becomes overloaded education becomes the first casualty.

The issue of curriculum reform always involves balance and good judgement. With excellent resources, high levels of staffing and an environment without the hindrance of social problems and disadvantage, teachers may be able to handle all of these demands and changes; but the challenge of overloading will still affect the curriculum implementation in varying degrees.

It was further observed that most teachers were just reading the scripted lesson plans in the teacher's guide while teaching. For example, Teacher 7 of school L was simply reading the TG when teaching an English lesson in standard 3. This contradicts with Areas of Teaching Practice which demand that teachers should plan lessons in advance in order to create relevant activities in which to involve learners. Advance planning also helps teachers to identify the relevant teaching resources and strategies to be used in the lesson. The following direct speech complements the observation:

After all, we teach what we are asked to do and not what we know is good right for our learners. We are strictly advised to follow all the scripted steps in the teachers' guide, and each step attracts many rigorous sub-steps that the teacher has to undergo before the learner understands the concept. (**Teacher 14**)

While it is believed that the scripted lesson plan has reduced teachers' work, it has partly changed the role of the teacher in the classroom from expertise to mere receivers of knowledge, because teachers can no longer suggest teaching methods and materials on their own according to the ability of their learners. Moreover, this move from teacher led to scripted instruction has left teachers feeling powerless and overcome. They are often caught between what they are asked to do instead of planning what they know is right for their learners. It is even more problematic for teachers to help learners with special educational needs when they are obliged to follow the scripted lesson plan because it is difficult to modify any part of the lesson in order to assist the learner with special needs. Therefore, the concern raised by Teacher 14 was genuine and needs a serious overhauling.

When teachers are not prepared for the lesson, they simply read to learners the scripted lessons from TG. By so doing learners' different styles of learning are not considered, and most of them learn little or nothing by the end of the teaching period. In his study outcomes, Graham (2018) also notes that the manner in which the syllabus is 'covered' in the average classroom is by means of reading the prescribed textbook aloud, with occasional noting of salient points on the blackboard. In the average school, especially the school located in a rural area, even routine teaching of the kind described above does not take place in many cases. In several states, school teachers encourage children to attend after-school tuition given for a fee while regular classroom teaching has become a tenuous ritual.

Teachers also reported that PEAs were often accusing them for not covering the schemes of work. This was captured in the following remarks:

PEAs ask us a lot of questions when the scheme is behind. So, we make sure when they come we fill scheme up to the present week number, even when we have not covered the work (**Teacher 14**)

Usually, it's not easy to cover all work in the week, we just keep on going, otherwise, *umatsaliratu*. (one may be left behind) (**Teacher 7**)

What teachers 14 and 7 reported was also observed by Ness (2009) in his study when he quoted teachers saying that covering course content in preparation for end of year tests was their primary instructional responsibility. Subsequently, most learners moved from one class to another without attaining reading skills, which made it hard for them to learn other subjects. Due to many activities in the content area, it was discovered that most teachers failed to use varied strategies of teaching language, others ignored the NRP approach completely, and others focussed on active learners only, neglecting passive learners because they rushed to covering course content in preparation for end of year tests. Here is the quoted speech;

Some of the strategies are time-wasting. Most of my children can read but I never use these comprehension strategies (**Teacher 3**)

Responding to the concern, Campbell (2015) is of the view that it is hard to reconcile the rigorous 'academic' regime that is imposed on children from an early age with widespread complaint made about the declining norms and performance of the formal system of education. Graham (2018) contends that 'Covering' the syllabus seems to have become an end in itself, unrelated to the philosophical and social aims of education. Schools are pressured to add this or that new and "important" issue or concern to their curriculum. Cekiso and Madikiza (2014) add that it is not easy for teachers to achieve the results of this constant change and additions especially in rural areas, unless, the environment becomes conducive enough for both the teacher and the child. Campbell (2015) also regrets that the problems of curriculum overload and constant demands for change in schools can have significant negative consequences for both teachers and students. Campbell (2015) explains that one message of this situation is that both the teacher and the child have lost the sense of joy in being involved in an educational process.

Teaching and learning have both become a bore for a great number of teachers and children. The majority of our school-going children are made to view learning at school as a boring, even unpleasant and bitter experience. They are daily socialized to look upon education as mainly a process of preparing for examinations. No other motivation seems to have any legitimacy. Allan and Horn (2013) contend that the contribution that teachers make towards this kind of socialisation is especially worrisome. However, proper education rests on our capacity to slow things down, focus and pay attention to what is important. While many of the reforms and changes that are made to education may be inspired by good intentions and in many cases provide real benefits to teachers and students alike, Campbell (2015) advises that planners



ought to also consider the unintended consequences of some of the reforms and changes, especially on those who are disadvantaged.

#### **4.2.4.2 Challenges in relation to infrastructure**

This sub-section discusses challenges with regards to infrastructure.

- **Inadequate and poor classrooms**

It was observed that most schools had inadequate class rooms. For example, children at school ‘K’ were using the CCAP church as a classroom. At school L, children in standard **1C** were learning in the open air (**Appendix T**), while at school N, the community constructed temporally grass shelters to compliment the few classrooms that are in the school; and standard **4B** was one of the classes learning in a grass-made structure. (**Appendix U**). Most of the structures were not safe for children especially during rainy season. One of the participants bemoaned:

As you can see we have classroom and teacher shortages, three classes are located in the church, there, others are under the trees. Only infant (standard 1& 2) classes are in classrooms. (**Headteacher of school K**)

Look at the infrastructure themselves, under which children learn, and most children learn under trees which is not on, this is another area that hurdles our process of implementing NRP. So, teaching is not effective. (**PEA 1**)

The worry expressed by the headteacher and the PEA 1 above is also observed by UNESCO (2010), who report that most school buildings in rural primary schools are old and not fit to be used as classrooms. UNESCO (2010) further explains that poor physical infrastructure of the school is disheartening to the nation because low-quality schooling is second only to cost as a reason for child absenteeism and dropout. Students need a sense of physical and psychological

safety for learning to occur, since fear and anxiety undermine cognitive capacity and short circuit the learning process. Apart from poor infrastructure, most schools lacked basic services such as electricity, potable water, sanitary drains, telephone or proper ways to dispose garbage and waste in schools. According to Cekiso (2017), such poor conditions in schools are strongly associated with violence, discrimination, and limited opportunities to learn. These children are within the teacher's grasp for a fleeting moment before they are gone. Consequently, the NRP curriculum goals remain elusive because a curriculum is only implemented where there are learners. Therefore, investments in school infrastructure and the physical conditions for learning are not a luxury but a need.

#### **4.2.4.3 Challenges in relation to teachers**

This sub-section presents challenges with regards to teachers.

##### **a) Inadequate knowledge about approaches and strategies**

It was observed that most teachers had inadequate knowledge about the approach and strategies of the NRP implementation instruction, especially those in the junior section (standards 3 and 4 teachers). This was mainly observed during lesson observation when it was found that almost all the teachers in Standard 3 used the old methods and strategies of teaching. When participants were asked why they did not follow the new curriculum approach, they gave the following remarks:

The challenge I have personally is that I do not know yet some of the strategies to use when teaching. *Mukudziwa madam, ku 3 ndi 4, 'tu we have attended NRP once. (You know madam, standard 3 and 4 teachers attended the training only once) (Teacher 15)*

Most teachers are not able to apply the teaching strategies accordingly because they lack proper demonstration of strategies by the NRP facilitators. **(HT, school N)**

The complaint raised by teacher 15 and the headteacher of school N was also observed by Klapwijk (2012) and Van der Walt (2011), when they found that despite evidence of the benefits of reading instruction, teachers seldom used reading strategies explicitly in South African schools, thereby depriving learners of the strategies they need. According to Cekiso (2012), lack of adequate training and excessive work load are some of the reasons for the ‘non-uptake’ of strategy instruction. This is a cause for concern as teachers’ awareness and application of a wide range of reading strategies is important. Klapwijk (2012) agrees that teaching students using a repertoire of reading comprehension strategies increases their comprehension of text. Klapwijk (2012) is in line with the social constructivist theory, when it states that learning is an active continuous process where learners are exposed to varied strategies during the reading instruction. Learners construct meaning and make interpretations based on their prior knowledge and experience. The National Reading Programme has been based on the constructivist theory.

While the evidence indicates that some teaching strategies are more effective than others, no one approach of its own can address the complex nature of reading difficulties. This is in consistent with findings of Center (2005) when he alludes that effective teachers often integrate teaching practices from several strategies, and that an integrated approach is more effective than exclusive reliance on one single approach. However, Kissay and Hiller (2013) argue that an integrated approach requires that teachers have a thorough understanding of a range of effective strategies, as well as knowing when, how and why to apply them. Responding to the concern, Wall (2014) suggests that strategies and techniques should be limited so that teachers gain increasing competence and independence while using these strategies. Regardless of the format, teachers should still receive training in the use of the strategies (Kim et al. 2016, pp. 10-11).

## **b) Lack of skill to assist learners with special educational needs**

In order to ensure full participation of all learners including learners with diverse needs, teachers are expected to use multisensory throughout instruction. This includes activities that involve two or more senses to gain new information such as seeing, hearing, speaking and moving. However, it was observed that teachers did not assist learners with special educational needs adequately. For example, in Standard 1 of School K, I observed one learner who seemed not to participate in lesson activities because he seemed not to hear what the teacher was saying. When I asked the teacher about the learner, the following remarks were quoted:

The school has three learners with hearing problems and we do not know how to handle and assist them effectively in class. There is no specialist teacher at this school **(T5)**

With regards to learners with special needs, currently there are numerous challenges and hurdles to effective inclusion of learners with special education needs into the mainstream of ordinary public schools. There is a perceived lack of skills and competence as well as large classes and insufficient resources in our schools. Building structures in most schools are not friendly, we have a lot to do for schools. **(PEA 1)**

The lack of proper services remains a challenge to reaching out to learners with special educational needs. In a positive and accommodative environment, the teacher was supposed to help such a learner by providing tactile means of exploring or assistive devices to enable the learner to read with his /her friends. However, Teacher 5 kept on teaching with no adjustments to accommodate learners with diverse needs. Therefore, her remark and that of the PEA 1 was truth, and it confirms what Moats et al. (2010) found in their study. They state that the majority of teachers at all levels have not been prepared in sufficient depth to teach learners with learning

disabilities successfully. Assaad et al. (2014), in their study also observe that in most countries the marginalised do not get the recommended attention as regards to education. Assaad et al. (2014) give an example of Egypt, where, although entry into primary school for children is becoming almost universal, the most marginalized group, primarily girls from poor families in rural Upper Egypt, are still disadvantaged in that regard. Assaad et al. (2014) further state that among those who do enter the school system, poorer youth are more likely to repeat a grade and also are more likely to drop out during basic education. As well as unequal attainment, students experience unequal school quality depending on their background, and achieve unequal levels of learning (Assaad et al. 2014).

Likewise, for many years in Malawi, there has been a policy of separate systems of education. Regular schools used to cater for learners who were regarded as “normal” as the term was used then, while learners with specific learning difficulties and behavioural problems were accommodated in special residential schools or institutions such as Montfort in Chiladzulu so that they could be handled by specialist teachers. The appropriateness of having such separate systems has recently been challenged both from a human rights perspective and from the view of effectiveness (Jorun Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, (2016). The practice showed discrimination against those with disabilities and those who were previously disadvantaged.

The 1994 UNESCO Salamanca conference statement made in Spain, strongly advised against this practice and instead advocated for inclusive education which is more focused on learning to live together rather than living together to learn. This is in line with Vygotsky (1978) who emphasises on the interaction between the individual and the surrounding home and school environment. Vygotsky (1978) attaches great importance on cooperation with more competent teachers, adults, youth or children in the process of development. Much as most educators often have trouble in developing appropriate support mechanisms for special needs early grade second language learners, Jorun Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban (2016) strongly recommend

teachers to observe the best practices of teaching English language skills in an early grade inclusive class by developing a plan within the curriculum that suits all the children and their diverse needs.

**c) Shortage of teachers**

Data revealed high shortage of teachers against large enrolments of learners in rural primary schools. As a result, the ratio of 60 learners to a teacher, which the Malawian policy is advocating for, is far from the deal. See Table 4.2 below:

**Table 4.2 Shortage of teachers in participating schools.**

<b>School</b>	<b>School Enrolment</b>	<b>Teachers required</b>	<b>Teachers available</b>	<b>Shortage</b>
<b>C</b>	841	14	9	5
<b>K</b>	253	4	2	2
<b>L</b>	2, 982	50	32	18
<b>N</b>	2,028	34	21	13

It was observed that most teachers taught about 78 to 150 learners in lower classes. The following remarks were made:

Well, we have quite a number of problems, as you can see we have teacher shortages..... **(Headteacher, school K)**

Moreover, some teachers who have NRP knowledge are transferred to other schools, so we have challenges in allocating other teachers to infant and junior classes **(T6)**

The concerns raised by headteacher of school K and Teacher 6 correspond with International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (2012) which indicate that the allocation of teachers

in primary schools is not equally distributed across sub-Saharan African and west Asia countries. For example, acute shortages of teachers are common in countries such as Nigeria, Rwanda, and Malawi, a factor which hinders quality teaching and learning. According to SACMEQ (2012), even greater shortages of trained teachers in some countries hinder quality teaching and learning. Mulkeen (2010) adds that the distribution of better qualified teachers often favours urban areas, and efforts to place teachers in rural and isolated areas, where they are needed the most, have had limited success. Mulkeen (2010) notes that once new teachers are deployed, they receive little support from their headteachers, who are not trained in how to manage staff and are often away from the school to fulfil administrative duties at the district level. It was further revealed that most teachers are not willing to teach in rural areas. The following remark was made:

Finally, most teachers are reluctant to teach in rural areas especially females a thing that contributes to shortage of teaching staff in schools. Rural areas have poor transportation and communication, and poor conditions of work places as compared to urban schools. **(PEA 1)**

What the PEA 1 explained agrees with the study results conducted by Grauwe in (2007) when he stipulates that teaching in rural areas is not motivating because rural areas lack most of the delivery services such as electricity, piped water, modern markets, which are found in towns. Rural areas are further characterised by poor working conditions such as temporally grass shelters which prevail in most rural primary schools (Education Management Information System (EMIS), 2016-2017). These demotivate teachers. It is therefore imperative for the education leaders to balance postings of teachers in schools, especially those in rural areas so that rural school learners should enjoy same benefits that urban learners experience.

World Bank (2017) however, observes that in sub-Saharan Africa, deaths and resignations due to HIV/AIDS constitute an important cause of teacher shortages. World Bank (2017) mentions

Lesotho and Malawi, as some of the countries where about a third of all teacher departures are due to terminal illness, most of it presumably HIV-related. The highest numbers of deaths occur among the most experienced teachers, aged between 41 and 50.

Because of the inadequate teaching staff, data revealed that teachers who were trained in the NRP approaches were either being posted to other schools or re-allocated to senior classes in order to balance up the number of teachers in schools. This was echoed as follows:

We have establishment. This means each and every school has got to have a minimum or maximum number of teachers. But now due to exodus of teachers from this school to that school due to various reasons, retirement, death, interdictions, dismissal, all that- there you are, crucial problems that we are facing, otherwise if teachers were intact in schools we could not have these issues to discuss today (**PEA 1**)

The concern raised by the PEA 1 confirms what Dambudzo (2015) found, when he laments that teachers are posted to other duty stations from time to time. Most classes in most schools are taken up by new teachers almost every year. Gove and Cvelich (2010) also observe that Universal primary education expansion in sub-Saharan Africa has pushed some education systems to recruiting and hiring uncertified teachers in many countries, putting pressures on both the teacher preparation (pre-service) and teacher professional development (in-service) systems. Consequently, this creates the gap in the implementation of reading in the lower classes because teaching reading, especially in the foundation phase, requires a special skill so as to be able to diagnose and address learners with reading problems.

#### **d) Absenteeism of teachers**

It was observed that there is frequent absenteeism of teachers in rural schools. According to documental records (time book), about 3-4 teachers were absent from work every day and this affected the implementation of reading in schools. The following remarks were captured:



Most teachers are absent every day on related reasons. Much time is lost due to attending to sick relatives, funerals or church functions, weddings, the list goes on.

Sometimes teachers are absent while they are in class (**Teacher 2**)

Teacher absenteeism is mainly caused by long sicknesses of our teachers. Some teachers are absent from work even for the whole year. This has serious consequences for instructional time and student achievement. (**PEA 1**)

Teacher absenteeism takes a toll on student learning by reducing the number of hours that children are actually taught. However, Patrinos (2013) observes that teacher absenteeism remains a persistent problem in many countries, exactly the same way Teacher 2 and PEA 1 stated. For example, the teachers' late arrival, absenteeism rate and skipping class in primary education are high in Ghana, India, Kenya, Senegal and Uganda. Similarly, World Bank (2016) reports that in Pakistan, teacher absenteeism rate is increasing more in the rural area than the urban area.

Loss of instructional time has been identified as a major constraint in improving quality in education. In developing countries considerable amounts of instructional time are lost because of teacher and learner absenteeism, classroom shortages, lack of learning materials and other factors such as lack of discipline and difficulty in maintaining learners' attention. UNESCO (2010) concurs that loss of instructional time and its inefficient use are indications of poor education quality, making private schooling more attractive to parents than government schools in many countries. The actual time available for instruction is further shaped by how teachers and students use time during class (DeStefano & Elaheebocus 2010). For example, UNESCO (2010) cites Uganda to be where most teachers who were in the classroom were not actually teaching. However, Chaudhury et al. (2006) argues that absenteeism of teachers is caused by poor working conditions which prevail in most rural areas including unhealthy infrastructure

and shortage of books talk less of lack of electricity, poor water, and long distances to and from school. UNESCO (2010) also observes that absenteeism of teachers is rampant because of professional frustrations. Similarly, most teachers in Malawi are absent due to similar reasons, attending funerals, caring for sick relatives, unplanned strikes and chalk downs. Teachers also waste time with morning staff meetings which usually consume the first two periods every day. And while right in class, most teachers teach only one subject, for the rest of the periods, learners will be singing while teachers are doing personal issues.

Singh and Sarkar (2015) however, are of the view that the impoverished background of most learners, which include, malnutrition, low parental literacy rates, and lack of pre-school education, exert more pressure on teachers' work. Ultimately as a way of easing themselves, they absent themselves from work. Singh and Sarkar (2015) in their study, also identified lack of professional recognition, discipline problems in the classroom, workload, large class size, lack of transport, long-distance travel, low salaries and limited professional opportunities for professional development as some of the factors that discourage teachers and inhibit their performance.

#### **e) Teachers' proficiency in English language**

Literature has proved that language proficiency affects how well a teacher can teach a second language. For example, Mackey and Gass (2012) explain that teachers who speak good English are believed to be more competent in teaching English Language in schools. However, data revealed that most teachers have poor fluency in English speaking which affect learners' progress in developing reading skills. With regards to the concern, the NRP coordinator made the following remarks:

Most Teachers cannot demonstrate good speaking skills to learners, this hamper reading implementation. Learners are misled in spellings and pronunciation of most English words (**NRP official**)

The remark uttered by the NRP official, is in line with Masina (2014) research results which indicate that most primary school teachers are not fluent in English Language. This restricts their instruction in class because they fail to articulate the right vocabulary, hence, denying the students the information they need. This sentiment is in line with Adekola, (2009) when he regrets that most teachers cannot present a lesson in English throughout the lesson. Most of the English lessons are sabotaged by either wrong pronunciation of words, tenses or use of local language. For example, in an English lesson, in Standard 3, of School K, teacher 15 taught, *the child has went home*. This shows that the teacher does not know the past participle which should be used with the past perfect and present perfect tenses and uses the past tense form of the verb instead. And this was repeated and practiced rigorously with learners, leading to internalisation of the wrong concept. According to Phiri (2016), proficiency in English is the key principle for successful instructed language learning. Even second language acquisition theorists have recommended that learners acquire second language through exposure to comprehensible input that is within their zone of proximal development, (Vygostky's 1978). This type of input is defined as the language which is at the students' next level of development and teachers often serve as the key source of input. Responding to the claim, Cook (2008) argues that teachers are supposed to balance the use of the two languages within a single lesson. The teacher is allowed to code-switch at certain key points, for instance, the teacher is expected to switch to local language when concepts are important, when giving instructions, when the students are getting distracted or when students should be praised. Masina (2014) however, argues that, because of frequent code switching, most English lessons are taught with poor fluency and this brings poor impact on reading development progress in learners. Proficiency

in English cannot improve because teachers mostly explain concepts in their first language. The role of the teacher is that of a learning mediator, who uses language as a psychological tool to scaffold student learning through social interaction (Vygotsky 1978). In other words, optimal learning can be achieved when it is assisted or well-scaffolded through the way the teacher uses language appropriately in the classroom. Therefore, to function effectively in the classroom, English language teachers, no doubt, need to have an advanced level of general proficiency in English.

#### **4.2.4.4 Challenges in relation to learners**

##### **a) Large classes**

It was observed that most classes were overcrowded, and this defeated the policy of teacher-learner ratio of 1:60 learners. For example, at school L, the smallest class had 79 learners. The rest of the classes had not less than 150 learners. The participants lamented as follows:

Also, we have large classes which do not match with the number of our teachers in schools. **(PEA 1)**

The biggest challenge hindering the implementation is the overcrowded classes...  
**(Headteacher L)**

With such a large class, it's difficult to assess learners, progress. I am not sure how most of them are progressing but with the problem of time, I have to keep on with my topics of teaching. Those slow learners are left behind and that is where majority are because most of them are always absent from school, so it's difficult for me to be always repeating the already taught work **(Teacher 9)**

In their study, *'The crisis in Public Education in Malawi'* Mgomzulu and Wamba (2014) observed that children flooded a school system following the introduction of free primary education in Malawi. Large classes became the order of the day and was followed with a lot

of negative impacts on children's learning. For example, what teacher 9 reported demonstrates that due to large classes, most teachers do not even assess or follow up learners' progress during the progress of learning. Others do not even apply learner-centred methods. Overcrowded classroom conditions also hinder teachers' attention to individual students and slows down the progress of students' learning (Patrinos 2013). Such learners are neglected in order to keep pace with the prescribed time allocation for each learning area. Adekola (2007) adds that in a 30 minutes lesson, active learning takes place in the first eight minutes, the rest of the time is either unproductive or teacher monologue of the 'chalk and talk' variety with little opportunity for children's responses. For example, in Standard 3 of School N, I observed that due to a large class, learners were actively involved in learning for only a very small part of a lesson. Most of the time the teacher was talking or disciplining the children for being noisy and disruptive partly because there were inadequate text books for learners. UNESCO (2011) contends that large classes create hurdles for children to get quality education. Moreover, overcrowded classrooms contribute to lots of indiscipline cases that in turn reduce the morale of teachers. Large classes hinder the achievement of learning objectives and reduce the completion of learning activities. In such situations, quality learning may not be achievable.

#### **b) Frequent absenteeism of learners**

Data revealed that there was high absenteeism of learners in schools, especially in schools which do not have feeding programme. This was evidenced as follows:

The other problem is absenteeism. Almost every day, teachers teach a new set of learners, who get absent the following day. This hinders the effectiveness of the reading implementation. **(Headteacher, school C)**

Although class registers in all the four schools indicated high absenteeism of learners on daily basis, most learners were absent on Wednesdays and Fridays which are market days. It was

revealed that most of the learners accompanied their parents to the markets to sell their commodities. However, schools which have school feeding programmes, had less absenteeism of learners. Child absenteeism affect the effectiveness of the NRP implementation, because learners who are absent from school may not make sense of lessons as they are not able to link each new lesson to the preceding ones. It is worth noting that no curriculum can be implemented without a learner. So, absenteeism of learners is a concern to both teachers and whole education system because it defeats the NRP curriculum objective, of improving early grade learners' literacy skills. According to Graham (2018) the learner is the central figure in the curriculum implementation process. Implementation takes place as the learner acquires the planned or intended experiences, knowledge, skills, ideas and attitudes that are aimed at enabling the same learner to function effectively in a society. According to what was observed in the class registers, most learners were absent twice or thrice a week. Participants revealed several factors that contributed to absenteeism of learners, such as: poverty, HIV and AIDS pandemic, long distance to schools, and lack of pre-school education. What the participants revealed confirm what literature has written about the aforementioned factors as discussed below:

### **1) Poverty**

Conditions at home and in the communities of children from poorer and more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and particularly children with disabilities, have a significant bearing on their learning achievement levels and future life opportunities. For example, data from the four participating schools revealed that most learners in the rural primary schools came from impoverished family backgrounds which could not afford buying their children nice clothing to wear at school. One of the teachers explained,

Sometimes, these children they come to school inadequately dressed, without a jersey or shoes, not even a slipper.” “When a child is shivering, he does not learn well. He will not listen to the teacher or concentrate on what the teacher is doing because of the cold that he is feeling. (**Teacher 11**)

What Teacher 11 uttered tallies with observations made by UNESCO (2010) who report that in rural areas in Zimbabwe, most children come from impoverished family backgrounds which cannot afford buying food, and nice clothing for their children to wear at school. Hence most learners are absent from schools on most days of the week. And eventually, most of them drop out of school before they have acquired any literacy skills. As UNESCO (2010) reports, it is well documented that poverty decreases a child’s readiness for school through aspects of health, home life, schooling and neighborhoods. It is also worth noting that a child’s home has a particularly strong impact on school readiness.

Young people who have little continuity in their home and community environments are likely to discontinue with school. Furthermore, children fail to develop greater competence and confidence to support their growing autonomy. A growing body of evidence notes that low-income students are also likely to fall into maladaptive behaviours which include substance abuse, eating disorders, and even suicide attempts. The constructivism theory also emphasises the impact of the home on child education when it demonstrates that the role of the culture influences child development in informal ways; from birth, as the infants and the young children interact with their parents and family (Stuart 2009). Irregular school attendance and progression, weak learning outcomes and low completion rates remain critical issues in many parts of the developing world, especially in fragile states. Educational disparities within countries, disproportionately affecting children from rural, indigenous, poor and/or slum populations, are widespread. UNESCO (2015) also accounts that multiple hurdles to education

quality are apparent, including acute teacher shortages, insufficient teacher training, crowded and dilapidated classrooms, and too few textbooks.

Most countries inadequately address the learning needs of the young. A report by Thomas (2007) concluded that children from lower income households score significantly lower on measures of vocabulary and reading and communication skills, knowledge of numbers, copying and symbol use, ability to concentrate and cooperative play with other children than children from higher income households. Thus, the evidence is clear and unanimous that poverty decreases a child's readiness for school through aspects of health, home life and schooling. It is imperative therefore, to encourage parents to increase their knowledge of child development, particularly age-appropriate needs of and activities for their children, observe and encourage good parenting – mutual attention and contingency of interaction by taking turns and listening to each other, verbal behaviour, that is, amount of talking and quality, sensitivity and responsiveness (awareness to signs of hunger, fatigue, boredom and providing an appropriate response), role modelling and reading to their children.

## **2) HIV and AIDS pandemic**

Data revealed that most learners were orphans and lived with their grandmothers. It was further learned that most of the learners were affected by HIV and AIDS related sickness and were most of the times ill.

And most of my learners here live with their grandparents who are too poor to provide their children school needs. And most of them are affected by diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS. So most of them are perpetually ill (**Headteacher, school N**)

The HIV/AIDS factor raised by the headteacher of school N has a negative impact on learning especially in lower classes. Ferguson et al. (2007) indicates that school readiness requires



physical well-being and appropriate motor development, emotional health and a positive approach to new experiences, age-appropriate social knowledge and competence, age-appropriate language skills, and age-appropriate general knowledge and cognitive skills. Children who suffer from HIV and AIDS related sicknesses are associated with homes which are stricken with the disease. In rural areas, most parents are not educated and they do not know how to take care of themselves and their suffering children. Very often, the parents of these children also lack support.

### **3) Long distance to schools**

Data revealed that long distances to and from school also greatly contributed to learner absenteeism in most schools. Records of the headteachers on the office notice board indicated that the catchment areas of most schools consisted of villages which were between 3 to 5 kilometres away from schools. Since most learners in lower classes are of small age, it is challenging for them to walk to and from school every day. This affects the implementation of reading because most learners come late, and are often too tired and hungry to learn successfully. Fatigue and hunger lead students to drowsiness during learning. The following comments were made with regards to the matter:

Most children cover long distances to and from school. So, they come today, tomorrow they are absent. They cannot afford to cover that distance every day. Some learners are very small (**Teacher 9**)

This school is very far from other schools. When learners are upgraded to standard 5, they stop going to school. The nearest school is about 5 kilometres from here. So, they end up marrying and start farming. (**Teacher 12**)

The remarks expressed by Teachers 9 and 12 tallies with observations made by Kamwendo, (2016). He regrets that while enrolment rates have been rising in recent years, the dropout rate

in primary school is high due to long distances to schools. Long distances between schools contribute to discontinuation of learning for most pupils. According to UNESCO (2010), distance to school, difficult economic conditions, denial of access for girls—all are contributing factors for the high rates of learner absenteeism and out-of-school children. With such hurdles, it is difficult to achieve universal quality primary education.

#### **4) Cost of education**

Data revealed that the implementation of reading was also affected by the frequent chasing of learners from school because of failing to contribute money to the school fund. It was unearthed that in every term of the academic year, learners were asked to contribute K1000 for school up-keep. Those who failed to meet the demand were given a grace period of 1-3 weeks. It was revealed that most learners stopped coming to school after the elapse of the grace period. This was evidenced from the following remarks:

Learners are asked to bring school fund on the first day of opening schools. Those who do not have are given an allowance of three weeks to bring the money. Now after three weeks, most children stop coming to school (**Headteacher of school L**)

What the headteacher of school L reported, is observed to be practiced in most countries, for example, Patrinos (2013) in the report, ‘Transparency International’, observed that illegal collection of fees is high in Ghana, Madagascar, Niger and Sierra Leone. The report stipulates that parents from most countries surveyed reported paying illegal accounting fees even though, by law, primary schooling is free. Chirwa (2009), also reports that in Malawi, despite abolition of school fees, children are seen being chased from school to go home and collect money which is commonly called ‘School development fund’. If parents happen not to have the money, the child will stay at home till the money is found. This shows that although primary education in Malawi is free, in reality, it is not free. Moreover, households also incur substantial direct and

indirect costs of schooling such as costs of notebooks, clothing and other essentials such as soap. For poorer families these costs become too much and the pupils give up school. This means that most learners will still remain illiterate, thus, hampering the education goals, which are aimed at achieving Universal Education for All. With the promise of universal quality primary education, millions of families have sent their children to school, hoping for the most basic of returns on their efforts—a child who can read and write. World Bank (2017) pleads with all education stakeholders to deliver on the promise.

### **5) Lack of pre-school education**

Teachers lamented that most learners in rural schools have no pre-school education. During lesson delivery, it was observed that teachers had to undergo several rigorous modelling and demonstrations of concepts, shared practice and assisting learners during independent practice for the learners to internalise the concepts. For example, in Standard 1 of School L, Teacher 9 spent a long-time modelling and demonstrating parts of the body in lesson 3 of unit 7 of the teachers' guide. The teacher had to model and re-model the lesson concept each time learners were observed to be struggling with it. One of the headteachers gave following remark:

Lack of pre-school education is a hiccup to education of learners. For them to start reading, teachers pass through many stages in providing support to learners. **Headteacher, school N)**

Most learners who pass through nursery school before beginning primary education, find it easy to point and name their parts of the body. Most research findings have confirmed that children's earliest education experiences in life can have a profound effect on their success in later grade levels and beyond. For example, the Educational Research Association (2018) have stated that a sustainable early childhood education experience gives a child solid foundation for the primary school education. Pre-school attendance is associated with short and long-term,

positive effects on academic performance. The Educational Research Association (2018) noted that children who attended preschool tended to enter primary school with increased cognitive abilities, higher literacy abilities, and higher subject abilities. Graham (2018) also observed that children who had attended nursery schools maintained academic performance advantage over children who had not. It was further observed that children who pass through early learning opportunities had better attitudes toward learning and school than peers who did not receive early childhood education prior to primary school entry. This proves that the best foundation of basic education is the pre-school. However, UNESCO (2011) observes that much as pre-school education is profitable, most parents in rural areas cannot afford to send their children to nursery schools. The National Education Sector Plan (2008 -2017) adds that most of the early childhood development ECD centres in Malawi are concentrated in urban and semi-urban. Therefore, rural areas have few or no opportunities for ECD. This concern calls for immediate action by stakeholders.

#### **4.2.4.5 Challenges in relation to supervision and support**

This sub-section deliberates challenges with regards to supervision and support. This will help readers to appreciate the role of supervision in teaching and learning.

##### **a) Teachers are not adequately monitored**

The research findings revealed that the professional boosting of teachers' experiences, creativity and subject knowledge in using and applying proper teaching skills, strategies and approaches was not supervised enough. Teachers were not adequately monitored, inspected, supervised and supported in schools. This was indicated as follows:

We are not doing monitoring *mokwanira bwino*. (We are not doing monitoring quite enough. Teachers are not being fully supported by PEAs. **(NRP official)**)

Headteachers of the four schools also confirmed that most of the schools in the rural were inadequately visited by PEAs. For example, the headteacher of school N explained that the zonal PEA visited his school in the opening week, checked and signed schemes of work and left. No any education official visited the school again. The head of section for the Junior section at school C also expressed her concern as follows:

We need to be guided on how best we can conduct coaching. But our PEA came long time back. I don't know when he will visit us again (**Teacher 7**)

The fear that the NRP official expressed above confirms what Matete (2009) found in her study. She found that there is inefficient inspection and monitoring of teaching and learning of the language in rural areas as compared to urban schools. In a study on challenges and reforms in supervision in Tanzania, Grauwe (2007) also found that there was a continuous lack of satisfaction both for teachers and school supervisors with the impact of supervision on classroom. Masina (2014) also regrets that much as the advisory system in education is an important department, its usefulness is not felt in schools. Malawi still faces an acute illiteracy levels in students in the lower classes of primary education. This is an indication that examining, monitoring and evaluating educational institution is no longer perceived. When the PEA was asked why inspection was not done in rural primary schools, he remarked as follows:

It's not easy to visit all schools. Our PEAs have mobility problems, the motor cycles are very old and are not on the roads of Malawi. If anything, then it's very difficult to supervise, monitor and strategize the system at its full potential. (**PEA 1**)

PEA 1's remark confirms Grauwe's (2007) research findings which indicate that lack of resources, especially vehicles and funds impeded travel to visit schools for inspection and monitoring. However, Dambudzo, (2015) argues that the supervisory system is not fulfilling

its roles partly because the inspectors themselves are not conversant with the content being taught in schools due to frequent changes of the curriculum. Campbell, (2015) concurs that the constant demands to change teaching practices and adaptation to new and apparently improved forms of pedagogy, and so forth, mean that there is a growing sense of frustration with constant change in many education forms and this disturbs both inspectors and teachers. Much as this is true, Matete, (2009) argues that research supports the monitoring of teaching and learning by inspectors and teacher advisors in education, as these have special knowledge of how to support teachers. When education advisors support teachers through the feedback they give to schools, teachers grow in knowledge, experience and quality, which enable them to improve class practices by engaging learners in evidence-based activities and develop a positive attitude towards their learners. According to Ololube (2014) school inspection is widely considered as an essential instrument for quality education to aid the nation to compete in the ever-changing world economy. It is the form of evaluation, which involves the measurement, testing, and evaluation of educational activities in school systems for the purpose of improving the standards and quality of education programmes offered. As such the absence of school inspection contributes to ineffective implementation of the National Reading Programme.

#### **b) Parents are not supportive**

Educating a child is a shared responsibility. Rowe (2005) and NRP (2016) propose that for children to learn to read and write effectively, it requires effort and commitment from many stakeholders including parents and parent organisations. However, data revealed that the community was not as supportive in the learning of their children as it was expected of them. The frequent absenteeism of learners to school, though, sometimes with genuine reasons, proved that most parents were not putting education of learners as an important priority in their lives. This was confirmed through the following comments:

Most parents are not educated here. So, it is not easy to convince them about importance of school for their child. *Amatha kubwera pakalasipo, nkumuyitanitsa mwana wao kuti azipita naye ku msika* (at times, parents come to class and demand for their children so that they go to the market) (T4)

Many parents, here, in rural areas are not able to contribute to their children's school learning because they are illiterate, having had little or no education themselves (**Headteacher school L**)

Chirwa (2009) states that parent education is related to learner achievement because educated parents can provide their children with reading materials, help a child to read at home and check his or her school academic progress. According to Berns (2016), learning which involves incorporating community service experiences into students' school work, has long been viewed as a positive educational reform option. Singh and Sarkar (2015) however, argue that large class sizes, poorly equipped schools, and low-literacy environments are some of the obstacles that teachers cannot overcome alone. Parents and communities need to be inspired to hold their schools and governments accountable so that their children will actually learn. Vygotsky (1978)'s theory attaches great importance to cooperation with more competent, parents and adults, fellow children and teachers in the process of development. Parents need to be trained that the education of the child begins from the family, teachers just complement on what children already have. Therefore, any effort to improve the teaching of reading must be supplemented by community- and policy-level dialogues to remove barriers to instructional practices.

### **4.3 Chapter summary**

This chapter has presented and discussed the findings of this study. The focus was on four main findings. Firstly, the results revealed that most teachers did not satisfactorily understand the aims, approaches, strategies and key elements of the NRP. Most of the key elements were not adequately observed during the teaching of language lessons, especially those in the junior section. Secondly, most teachers were not adequately trained and prepared for the reading implementation. The training of teachers followed Cascade Model, which put teachers at a disadvantage. Furthermore, although most teachers were not using the NRP approach, (*I do, we do, and you do*) effectively, especially teachers in the junior section, most of the reading instruction occurred along a continuum, beginning with the teacher modelling the desired behaviour concept, followed by the teacher and students engaging in shared activities as the teacher gradually allowed the children to gain increasing responsibility, and finally the children independently reading without support. This showed that most teachers used the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model approach. Finally, the study has unearthed several challenges that teachers experience in the course of implementing the reading programme. These have been summarised in table 4.1

The next chapter concludes the study by providing a summary of the findings, recommendations, limitation, suggestions for further research study and conclusion.



## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The purpose of my study was to examine how teachers implement the new reading curriculum in the rural primary schools. The basic research question was formulated as follows: *How do teachers implement National Reading Programme in the primary lower classes (standards 1 to 4)?* What I found was that although most learners are significantly improving their reading, especially Chichewa, as a consequence of NRP intervention, teachers implement the reading programme with difficulties. Apparently, the aims and goals of the reading curriculum may not be achieved to the best. Recommendations for improving the implementation of the reading curriculum have therefore been suggested in this study. This chapter provides a summary of the findings. It also presents the implications of the findings with respect to theoretical, and practical and educational considerations. The chapter also looks at recommendations, limitations and directions for further studies.

### **5.2 Summary of the findings**

This section presents summary of findings in –line with research questions.

#### **5.2.1 What do teachers understand about the National Reading Programme?**

It is evident from the findings that teachers did not fully understand the NRP approach. Most of them understood the NRP approach simply as a reading curriculum that is focussed on improving reading in classes 1-4 in primary schools without proving their knowledge about the reading curriculum content, its approach, strategies and elements of high impact. This was also demonstrated during the lessons where most of them, especially teachers in the junior section, failed to apply the NRP approach accordingly. Most of the elements that bring high impact in reading development, such as positive reinforcement and giving learners actionable feedback

were not observed. This had a profound influence on their classroom practices as learners were not adequately encouraged during the teaching and learning.

### **5.2.2 How are the teachers prepared for the implementation the National Reading Programme?**

The findings of this study reveal that NRP trained all teachers who teach in infant and junior classes in NRP early childhood approach and teaching strategies using Cascade Model. However, the main weakness of this model is the distortion of the messages transferred during the training, because they are passed down to many levels of training. Teachers were trained at the last level and they got altered and diluted information through miscommunication and different interpretations of the same messages. Teachers were trained by their fellow teachers known as key teachers, instead of the training specialists. The training period was short and most teachers, especially those in standard 3 and 4 were involved in training only once. Most of the required information was not rigorously demonstrated and practised enough for teachers to understand the tangible concept that could be reflected in the reading implementation exercise. Consequently, most teachers found it difficult to diagnose and offer relevant support to the learners during reading instruction.

Findings also reveal that NRP also introduced coaching and Teacher Learning Circles trainings to enrich and complement its trainings and help teachers improve their teaching skills in all schools. However, these exercises are rarely monitored, and are not done as scheduled. As a result, most teachers teach using old and traditional approaches basing on knowledge and skills they gained from the initial teacher training course.

### **5.2.3 How is the instruction best provided using the National Reading Programme approach to teaching reading?**

Although most teachers were not effectively using the NRP approach, most of the reading instruction I observed, especially in the infant classes (standard 1 & 2) occurred along a

continuum, beginning with the teacher modelling the desired behaviour concept, followed by the teacher and students engaging in shared activities as the teacher gradually allowed the children to gain increasing responsibility, and finally the children independently reading without support. From the findings of this study, it is apparent that the reading instruction is best provided using the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (GRRM).

#### **5.2.4 What challenges do teachers experience when implementing the National Reading Programme?**

The study reveals various categories of challenges which are hampering the reading implementation advancement (**Table 4.1**). Firstly, learner's books have small pictures, especially in standard 1 and the books themselves are in short supply. In the schools that I visited, the minimum material conditions for meaningful teaching and learning to take place were simply not fulfilled. Classroom observations exposed the stress that is placed on teachers trying to deliver under very poor conditions. Most schools in rural primary schools do not have the minimum equipment required for effective teaching and learning to take place, and consequently quality is compromised. Moreover, scripted lesson plans in teachers' guides have too many activities, which do not match with allocated teaching time. Secondly, most teachers have inadequate knowledge about the reading approach and strategies, an indication that they were improperly trained for the reading exercise.

Again, most teachers have poor language proficiency, which affect learners' progress in developing reading skills. Moreover, most of the teachers lack skills for assisting learners with special educational needs, demonstrating that most children with SEN in most schools receive little or no academic attention at all. There is rampant shortage and absenteeism of teachers, and much of the instructional time is wasted. Furthermore, there is frequent absenteeism of learners partly due to lack of parental support, cost of education, poverty, HIV/AIDS related

illnesses and distance to school. This defeats the goals of the reading curriculum implementation, since it cannot be exercised without the learner. Further, most schools have poor and inadequate infrastructure, resulting in most learners learning under trees. With the adverse winds, heat and cold weather, it is difficult to create a print rich environment when lessons are conducted under trees. Consequently, the implementation of reading is challenged. Additionally, the exercise is lacking monitoring and supervision, hence professional growth of teachers is hampered. Lastly, parental support is lacking in rural primary schools. It is obvious, therefore, that the goals and outcomes of the National Reading Programme, in rural primary schools may not be achieved to the maximum.

### **5.3 Implications of the findings**

This section presents theoretical, and practical educational implications of the study findings. Recommendations in relation to these implications are made.

#### **5.3.1 Theoretical implications**

Firstly, although the NRP curriculum design, content, teacher preparation and teaching are based, implicitly, on an educational philosophy of constructivism, the findings of this study provide evidence that constructivist teaching is not being observed, and this has resulted in learning practices that neither challenge students nor address their needs.

Secondly, given that teachers are well trained to understand what they teach, they will create a constructivist classroom, where learners are actively involved, the environment is democratic, the activities are interactive and learner centred, and the teacher facilitates and scaffolds the process of learning in which the students are encouraged to be responsible and autonomous.

Thirdly, the study has found that when the comprehension strategies are incorporated during instruction, constructivists' teaching should build on and expand children's prior knowledge

and experiences, both to scaffold learning effectively as it expands to new areas of content and skills and to inform practices that are individually and culturally responsive. Therefore, teachers should structure appropriately challenging activities that balance what a child already knows with what he or she wants and needs to learn, while introducing other rich experiences to support ongoing learning. And when explicit instruction is observed with elements of high impact, achievement of reading skills is high.

The results have further proved that acquiring basic skills is mostly a matter of filling the constructivist classroom with adequate text books, good-sized curriculum, varied supplementary reading materials and providing a literacy-rich environment with activities that engage and motivate the children to read on their own at their own time. This will assist in moving that knowledge beyond the primary content area.

Interestingly, the study has found that despite several challenges that are experienced in the reading implementation, most teachers, especially those in the infant classes (standards 1 and 2) are able to observe and follow the reading curriculum approach (GRRM) and its areas of high impact in the reading instruction. This is because infant class teachers were involved in more and continuous NRP trainings than the junior class teachers.

The study acknowledges that the key element in *constructivism* is that the learner is an active contributor to the learning process, and that teaching methods should focus on what the learner can bring to the learning situation as much as on what is received from the environment. Hence, the knowledgeable teacher should follow a constructivist approach and largely function as a coach, facilitator and observer. The teacher should be able to assess, scaffold, monitor, ask, solve problems, befriend learners and observe inclusive learning. Therefore the study finds it important to recognise and acknowledge teachers' efforts and motivate them for the task by

improving their incentives and school infrastructures (Osher et al. 2018). Finally, the study finds that corroborative teaching can help reduce minor challenges in schools.

### **5.3.2 Practical educational implications**

Firstly, the study finds that most teachers do not have a clear knowledge of NRP curriculum, and they do not understand *what why, how, and when* to use particular strategies. It is therefore suggested that the preparation of teachers to teach reading be focused much on an evidence-based and integrated approach that supports the development of oral language including instruction in phonemic awareness; phonics, fluency, vocabulary knowledge and text comprehension. The study, therefore, finds it a requirement for those who train teachers to need to focus on important foundational reading skills that are key for successful reading and comprehension abilities needed for learning content. These elements should be demonstrated in small quantities at a time in order for teachers to implement the programme with knowledge, skills and confidence. (World Bank 2017).

Secondly, the findings strongly support the argument for a change in a mode of giving knowledge, skills, capabilities, and information to teachers. The Cascade Model is not effective in helping teachers understand the new reading curriculum components, approaches and strategies. Accordingly, my study suggests that we need to abandon the Cascade Model and embrace a better way of training teachers.

Thirdly, as part of productive instructional strategies, my study offers suggestive evidence for the uniqueness of the gradual release of responsibility model (GRRM) as a meaningful approach that builds on learners' prior knowledge and experiences, since it actively engages them in rich, engaging tasks that help them achieve conceptual understanding and transferable knowledge and skills. Therefore, educators should accordingly present reading instruction in

such a way that they occur along a continuum, beginning with the teacher modelling the desired behaviour or concept, followed by the teacher and learners engaging in shared activities as the teacher gradually allows the children to gain increasing responsibility, and finally the children independently reading without support. Teachers should continue providing well-scaffolded and designed collaborative learning opportunities for learners to practice and apply learning that encourage learners to question, explain, and elaborate their thoughts and co-construct solutions.

Furthermore, the reading growth of individual children should be closely monitored through ongoing assessment. Teachers do not have to administer a formal assessment in order to check the reading progress of learners. Instead, they can check learners' understanding through daily lessons. Nearly every teacher-learner interaction should be considered an opportunity to informally assess. This should be ongoing and individual learners should have opportunities to receive timely and helpful feedback. According to Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, and Oort (2011), learners should be exposed to opportunities to develop metacognitive skills through planning and management of varied complex tasks, self-and peer- assessment, and reflection on learning. Teachers should select the instructional strategies that best suit children's needs and the content to be learned.

Having been properly trained, teachers should use productive comprehension instructional strategies that support motivation, competence, and self-directed learning. These curriculum, teaching, and assessment strategies feature well-scaffolded instruction and ongoing formative assessment that support conceptual understanding, take students' prior knowledge and experiences into account, and provide the right amount of challenge and support on relevant and engaging learning tasks.

Moreover, my study finds that for a reading curriculum to be successful, adequate and quality books should be available in schools. Classrooms should be as print-rich as possible to enable learners to continue learning on their own at their own free time. In fact, if this challenge of books continues to exist in schools, then education is doomed. The challenge of textbooks in rural areas contributes to the demotivation of teachers to teach in rural schools.

The study also finds that reading takes place through a strict sequence, where one skill builds on another (Marinelli et al. 2011). Therefore, absenteeism of learners affects the reading implementation because learners who are absent from school may not make sense of lessons as they are not able to link each new lesson to the preceding ones. Hence, parental support should be encouraged to make sure children come to school every day.

In order to promote growth in reading development, the study suggests that schools should provide extended learning opportunities that nurture positive relationships, support enrichment and mastery learning, and close achievement gaps and provide multiple systems of support to address learning barriers both in and out of the classroom based on a shared developmental framework uniting a capable and stable staff with families and support providers.

Accordingly, the fact that NRP is rolled out in all standard 1 to 4 classrooms in all schools across Malawi creates much chances for teachers all over Malawi to share experiences with regards to how they can overcome reading implementation challenges and improve the reading approaches. This is encouraging considering the fact that other comparable previous reading interventions only concentrated on limited number of schools in Malawi.

The study finds that systematic support for classroom teachers to build the appropriate skills to teach reading effectively, is clearly inadequate. This calls for a major focus on teacher quality, and building capacity in teachers towards quality evidence-based teaching practices that are



demonstrably effective in maximising the developmental and learning needs of all children. Hence the issue of how to update and support the knowledge and skills of teachers may need to be addressed in terms of how much CPDs are conducted and improved through a reflective and continual monitoring of the reading implementation in rural primary schools. Such measures ensure that teachers correctly apply what they have learned in training (Kim et al. 2016).

Finally, these findings highlight the fundamental fact that learners are significantly improving their reading as a consequence of NRP intervention, however they still cannot attain reading fluency. I believe that this fundamentally optimistic picture nevertheless leaves the NRP as fruitful ground for further study aimed at refining the programme to the point where it is a model of educational excellence. The study has made some recommendations (5.4) which could be used in the improvement of the implementation of the reading curriculum.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

Basing on the findings of the study, I make the following recommendations with a view to improve the implementation of the reading curriculum in rural primary schools:

First, for teachers to understand NRP curriculum, they should be used as main agents in the curriculum implementation process. The curriculum is best developed by practising teachers, rather than non-teaching research experts. Teachers have a wider knowledge of the needs of learners more than any of the stakeholders. Therefore, they can be a rich source of what a curriculum should be.

Secondly, the training designers should review and replace the Cascade Model with a more sustained programme in which training of teachers should be conducted by trainer of trainers or subject specialists and not key teachers.

During the training, teachers should be rigorously involved in foundational reading skills that are key for successful reading and comprehension abilities needed for learning content, and these elements should be introduced to teachers in bits.

Furthermore, teachers should be adequately supervised and monitored. With the introduction of the NRP approaches and strategies in the lower classes of primary education, language teachers need to be monitored, evaluated and supported in how to apply the approaches effectively. Frequent inspection of schools will assist in boosting teachers' knowledge and experience in the use of NRP strategies through the recommendations that follow inspection exercise.

Recognizing the value of the books to teaching, the government should prioritise the factor in its yearly plans for education to reduce the stress teachers' experience. In addition, the MOEST should consider reducing lesson content activities in the teachers' guides to match it with the teaching allocated time and make it more flexible so that they are able to accommodate all kinds of learners.

Since teaching is a life-long learning process, PEAs should encourage collaborative teaching and involve teachers in various kinds of in-service training to keep them updated and acquire new classroom skills. Problems of handling large classes, class management and use of varied strategies can be shared among teachers of all subjects. For example, teachers with specific skills or expertise in particular subject areas, such as Music, PE and Art, could share their expertise with teachers who handle language in lower classes. Opportunities for teachers to learn from each other in large class management need to be provided for in the system. During

staff meetings, headteachers can dedicate part of sessions to teachers to share good practices and their ideas on what works in their classrooms.

Educating a child is a shared responsibility. Education and school leaders should train and educate parents on how they can support teachers in school development and encouraging their children to come to school. Parents and communities need to be inspired to hold their schools and governments accountable so that their children should actually learn. Large class sizes, poorly equipped schools, and low-literacy environments are some of the obstacles that teachers cannot overcome alone.

### **5.5 Limitations of the study**

Several limitations were experienced. Firstly, accessibility of participants at the DEMs office was a problem. Most of them had other responsibilities outside their offices, so I had to attend the same office several times, in an effort to meet them. Secondly, other officers were always in a hurry to the extent that they were giving data while working, at times pausing to attend to other people, or responding to phone calls. This affected the provision of useful data for this study. The collection of data was further affected by public functions such as the writing of Primary School Leaving Certificate examinations and the national voting exercise. These activities involved the very same teachers that I needed to participate in my study. The other possible limitation or weakness of the study is that there may be some implicit value judgments in the collection and presentation of the data. However, these effects were reduced by the triangulation method of data collection that was engaged.

### **5.6 Suggested topics for further study**

The study suggests that further research be carried out in the following areas:

- Expanding the research by examining the implementation of the NRP by the teachers of lower classes in the urban primary schools
- Exploring the impact of pre-school education on the effectiveness of reading in the early grade learning
- Examining the impact of leadership and management support in the effectiveness of reading implementation

### **5.7 Chapter summary**

It is imperative that children learn to read in the early grades, yet most of them fail to do so in developing countries. NRP interventions have emerged as a possible solution to this problem. In order to develop a better understanding of how effective NRP is as a solution, the study reviewed the evidence from Read Malawi and Early Grade Reading interventions, which occurred across a large variety of contexts. These interventions had a significant impact on Chichewa and English literacy subtasks even though they focussed on few districts and where most children had not attained the required fluency.

These findings make it clear that, although, the National Reading Programme made strides to train all teachers and introduce the reading intervention across the whole country, is not a guaranteed means to improve reading and it rarely leads to fluency over a short span of time, it is a mostly reliable means to make significant improvements in literacy, and accelerate learning in contexts where very little learning is taking place. That being said, NRP seems to be only a partial solution, as it does not typically create fluent readers (at least not over one-year periods). So, improvements to other aspects of education systems – including teacher incentives, school infrastructure, proper distribution of teachers, and community involvement etc. are certainly necessary to achieve universal literacy. The NRP could be a foundation for additional progress, but it is not a panacea. Therefore, it is only through everyone's hard work

and commitment that will realise the important goal of ensuring that all Malawian children can read and write.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE PEAS

Name..... 1. Sex: .....

2. Educational level.....

3. Age...

4. Work experience.....

5. For how long have you been a chief inspector of schools?

7. How many schools do you inspect in an academic year.....?

8. Do you manage to visit them all? Yes.....No..... If not, what are the reasons?

9. What kind of support do you provide to teachers when you visit schools?

10. What do you understand about the National Reading Programme?

7. How many schools do you inspect in an academic year?

9. How are teachers prepared for the implementation of the reading programme in schools?

10. How is the reading instruction best provided using the National Reading Programme approach?

12. What challenges do teachers experience in the course of implementing the reading programme?

## **APPENDIX B. NRP OFFICIAL**

1. What is your name madam/ Sir?
2. What is your role as a DC in Blantyre Rural?
3. How do you equip teachers in the NRP approaches of teaching reading in the lower classes of Primary School?
4. What are the teachers expected to understand about the National Reading Programme in order to implement it?
5. How is the instruction best provided using the National Reading Programme approach to teaching reading?
7. How are the teachers supported in the course of implementing the National Reading Programme?
9. What challenges do teachers experience when implementing the National Reading Programme?

**APPENDIX C: SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: HEADTEACHER**

1. What is your name, Sir/Madam.....

2. How long have you been heading this school.....

3. How far is this school from the trading centre.....?

4. What is the enrolment of your school?

Boys.....Girls.....Total.....

5. How many members of staff do you have.....

6. How many members of staff are in the infant and junior classes.....

.....

7. Do all your members of staff in the infant and junior classes attend the NRP Trainings about its approaches to teaching and learning of Languages.....?

8. What are the teachers expected to understand about the National Reading Programme in order to implement it?

9. How is the instruction best provided to learners using the National Reading Programme approach to teaching reading?

10. How are the teachers supported in the course of implementing the National Reading Programme?

11. What challenges do teachers experience when implementing the National Reading Programme?

## APPENDIX D. SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONS: TEACHERS IN STANDARDS

1-4

1. What is your name, Sir/Madam.....?
2. Qualifications.....
3. Which class do you teach.....?
4. How many learners do you have in your class?  
  
Boys.....Girls.....Total.....
5. How long have you been teaching at this school?..... In which class.....?
6. What do you understand about the National Reading Programme?
7. How were you prepared to implement the reading the programme?
8. How is the instruction best provided using the National Reading Programme approach to teaching reading?
9. How are you supported in the course of implementing the National Reading Programme?
10. What challenges do you experience when implementing the National Reading Programme?

## **APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW-GUIDE FOR TEACHERS IN**

### **STANDARDS 1-4**

2. What do you understand about the National Reading Programme?
3. How were you prepared to implement the reading the programme?
4. How is the instruction best provided using the National Reading Programme approach to teaching reading?
5. How are you supported in the course of implementing the National Reading Programme?
6. What challenges do you experience when implementing the National Reading Programme?

**APPENDIX F: CLASS OBSERVATION TOOL: STANDARD ONE AND THREE**

COMPONENT	COMMENT
<p><b>Lesson preparation:</b></p> <p>Does the teacher study the lesson content in advance to prepare materials and varied approaches and strategies of teaching?</p>	
<p><b>Effective teaching:</b></p> <p>Does the teacher model concepts (I do) and skills using real materials, role playing or gestures/miming etc. to facilitate and reinforce learner understanding?</p> <p>Does the teacher use varied strategies in the reading lessons?</p> <p>Does the teacher code-switch where necessary?</p> <p>Does the teacher model the skill again with learners? (We do)</p> <p>Does the teacher provide sufficient time for learners to practice the skill (you do)?</p>	
<p><b>Checking for understanding:</b></p> <p>Does the teacher assess learners as the lesson progresses? How?</p>	

<p>Does the teacher move around to watch and check if individual learners are practising the skill correctly?</p> <p>Does the teacher examine mistakes as clues to where the learners are, in the learning process?</p> <p>Does the teacher make random spot checks, such as watching closely who in the group, row, pair, responds quickly, confidently and accurately, and who hesitates?</p> <p>Does the teacher involve both boys and girls equally?</p> <p>Does the instruction offered accommodate Learners with special needs?</p>	
<p><b>Responsive instruction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Positive reinforcement</b></li> </ul> <p>Does the teacher encourage and praise learners for their efforts and progress, even if they have not yet fully mastered a skill?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Actionable feedback:</b></li> </ul> <p>Does the teacher provide clear actionable feedback, to both boys and girls, if they give an answer that is partially correct, by affirming the part that is correct and scaffold the learner to correct the other part?</p>	

<p>Does the teacher give clear instruction and repeat them to learners often?</p> <p>Is the classroom environment safe?</p> <p>Do learners learn without fear?</p> <p>Does the teacher know learners' names?</p> <p><b>Encouraging learners to read in class:</b></p> <p>Does the teacher use a print-rich classroom to promote learners' interest and practice of reading?</p> <p>Does the teacher give learners frequent opportunities to read/ use their Learner Books?</p> <p>Does the classroom show learners work pasted on walls?</p> <p>Do learners read the work pasted on walls?</p> <p>Is there an obvious centre in the classroom containing other books apart from the prescribed ones?</p>	
<p><b>Demonstration of inclusive and effective classroom practices</b></p> <p>Does the teacher speak clearly and look at learners when speaking to facilitate learning by all learners in class?</p>	



**APPENDIX G: DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS**

<b>DOCUMENT</b>	<b>AVAILABLE</b>	<b>NOT AVAILABLE</b>
Schemes of work for English		
Class register		
Lesson plans		
Learners' books		
Supplementary books		
Records of borrowing and returning of supplementary books		
Reading assessment records		
Time book		
Library records		
Supervisory records		

## APPENDIX H: LETTER OF PERMISSION TO COLLECT DATA IN BLANTYRE RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS



**MZUZU UNIVERSITY**

OFFICE OF THE DEAN  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Private Bag 201  
Luwingu  
Mzuzu 2  
MALAWI  
Tel: (265) 01 320 722/575  
Fax: (265) 01 320 505

Ref.: MU/1/D3.0

11<sup>th</sup> April 2019

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam

### PERMISSION TO COLLECT RESEARCH DATA

Getrude Mbale is a registered Master of Education (Teacher Education) Program student at Mzuzu university. She is supposed to collect research data for a study titled *Examining the implementation of the National reading programme by teachers in the lower primary classes: A case study of selected schools in Blantyre rural*. The Faculty of Education at Mzuzu university has approved and cleared this research proposal.

Kindly assist her accordingly.

Yours faithfully,

Associate Professor Victor Mgombezulu  
Dean, Faculty of Education.

**APPENDIX I: LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM DISTRICT EDUCATION  
MANAGER, BLANTYRE RURAL**

**Mzuzu University**

**P/Bag 201**

**Luwinga.**

**The District Education Manager**

**Blantyre Rural**

**Dear Sir/Madam,**

**RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT A RESEARCH IN YOUR  
SCHOOLS**

I write to ask for your permission to carry out a research in your schools. I am a post graduate student, pursuing a Master of Education in Teacher Education at Mzuzu University.

My research topic is **EXAMINING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL  
READING PROGRAMME BY TEACHERS IN THE LOWER PRIMARY CLASSES.**

The study will involve all teachers in the infant and junior classes of the Primary school.

The study will involve English lesson observation in standards 1 and 3, where I will be a passive participant. I will video record and make field notes whilst the teacher is conducting the lesson.

The study will also involve teachers in semi-structured and focus group interviews, which will take place after school hours. The information obtained during the research project will be treated with the strictest confidentiality, and will be used solely for this research. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the school, teachers and learners. All the information

collected will only be viewed by my supervisor and myself, and then will be securely stored in line with the University of Mzuzu's regulations. The video recordings will never be reproduced or broadcast to any third party, now or in the future. Participation is voluntary and teacher may withdraw at any time during the process. The learners in the class will not be interviewed during the classroom observations. Attached is the introduction letter from Mzuzu University.

If you agree that I conduct a research in your schools, please fill in the consent form below. If you have any question, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Yours sincerely,

GETRUDE MBALE.

Student (0888514265)

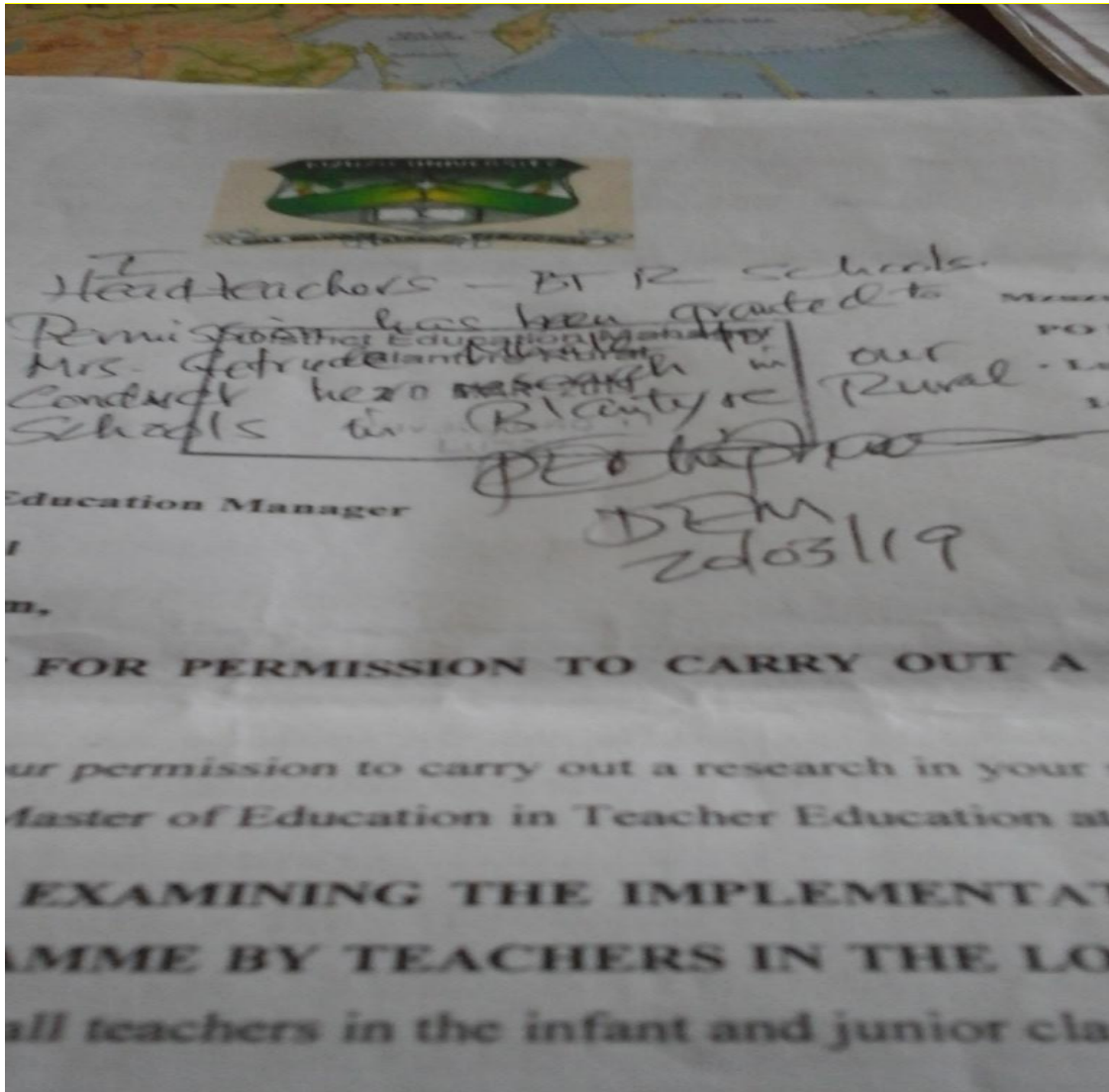
[Getrudembale1@gmail.com](mailto:Getrudembale1@gmail.com)

Dr AGNESS HARA

SUPERVISOR

0881053459

**APPENDIX J: LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM DISTRICT EDUCATION  
MANAGER, BLANTYRE RURAL**



**APPENDIX K: HEADTEACHER- REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT  
A RESEARCH IN THE SCHOOL**



**Mzuzu University**

**P/Bag 201**

**Luwingu.**

**The Headteacher**

**XX Primary School**

**Dear Sir/Madam,**

**RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT A RESEARCH IN YOUR  
SCHOOL**

I write to ask for your permission to carry out a research in your school. I am a post graduate student, pursuing a Master of Education in Teacher Education at Mzuzu University.

My research topic is **EXAMINING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL READING PROGRAMME BY TEACHERS IN THE LOWER PRIMARY CLASSES. A CASE OF SELECTED SCHOOLS, IN BLANTYRE RURAL.** The study will involve all teachers in the infant and junior classes of the Primary school.

The study will involve English lesson observation in standards 1 and 3, where I will be a passive participant. I will video record and make field notes whilst the teacher is conducting the lesson.

The study will also involve teachers in semi-structured and focus group interviews, which will take place after school hours. The information obtained during the research project will be treated with the strictest confidentiality, and will be used solely for this research. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the school, teachers and learners. All the information collected will only be viewed by my supervisor and myself, and then will be securely stored in line with the University of Mzuzu's regulations. The video recordings will never be reproduced or broadcast to any third party, now or in the future. Participation is voluntary and teachers may withdraw at any time during the process. The learners in the class will not be interviewed during the classroom observations. Attached is the introduction letter from Mzuzu University.

If you agree that I conduct a research in your schools, please fill in the consent form below. If you have any question, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Yours sincerely,

GETRUDE MBALE.

Student (0888514265)

[Getrudembale1@gmail.com](mailto:Getrudembale1@gmail.com)

Dr AGNESS HARA

SUPERVISOR

0881053459

**APPENDIX L: THE TEACHER- REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

**Mzuzu University**

**P/Bag 201**

**Luwinga.**

**The teacher**

**XX Primary School**

**Dear Sir/Madam,**

**RE: REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

I write to ask for your permission to participate in my research programme at your school. I am a post graduate student, pursuing a Master of Education in Teacher Education at Mzuzu University.

My research topic is **EXAMINING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL READING PROGRAMME BY TEACHERS IN THE LOWER PRIMARY CLASSES.**

The study will involve all teachers in the infant and junior classes of the Primary school.

The study will involve English lesson observation in standards 1 and 3, where I will be a passive participant. I will video record and make field notes whilst the teacher is conducting the lesson.

The study will also involve teachers in semi-structured and focus group interviews, which will take place after school hours. The information obtained during the research project will be treated with the strictest confidentiality, and will be used solely for this research. Pseudonyms



will be used to protect the identity of the school, teachers and learners. All the information collected will only be viewed by my supervisor and myself, and then will be securely stored in line with the University of Mzuzu's regulations. The video recordings will never be reproduced or broadcast to any third party, now or in the future. Participation is voluntary and teachers may withdraw at any time during the process. The learners in the class will not be interviewed during the classroom observations. Attached is the introduction letter from Mzuzu University.

If you agree that I conduct a research in your schools, please fill in the consent form below. If you have any question, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Yours sincerely,

GETRUDE MBALE.

Dr AGNESS

HARA

Student (0888514265)

SUPERVISOR

[Getrudembale1@gmail.com](mailto:Getrudembale1@gmail.com)

0881053459

## **APPENDIX M: PEA- REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

**Mzuzu University**

**P/Bag 201**

**Luwinga.**

**The Primary Education Advisor**

**XX Zone, Blantyre Rural.**

**Dear Sir/Madam,**

**RE: REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

I write to ask for your permission to participate in my research project. I am a post graduate student, pursuing a Master of Education in Teacher Education at Mzuzu University.

My research topic is **EXAMINING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL READING PROGRAMME BY TEACHERS IN THE LOWER PRIMARY CLASSES. A CASE OF SELECTED SCHOOLS, IN BLANTYRE RURAL.** The study will involve all teachers in the infant and junior classes of the Primary school.

The study will involve English lesson observation in standards 1 and 3, where I will be a passive participant. I will video record and make field notes whilst the teacher is conducting the lesson. The study will also involve teachers in semi-structured and focus group interviews, which will take place after school hours. The information obtained during the research project will be treated with the strictest confidentiality, and will be used solely for this research. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the school, teachers and learners. All the information

collected will only be viewed by my supervisor and myself, and then will be securely stored in line with the University of Mzuzu's regulations. The video recordings will never be reproduced or broadcast to any third party, now or in the future. Participation is voluntary and teachers may withdraw at any time during the process. The learners in the class will not be interviewed during the classroom observations. Attached is the introduction letter from Mzuzu University.

If you agree that I conduct a research in your schools, please fill in the consent form below. If you have any question, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Yours sincerely,

GETRUDE MBALE.

Student (0888514265)

[Getrudembale1@gmail.com](mailto:Getrudembale1@gmail.com)

Dr AGNESS HARA

SUPERVISOR

0881053459

**APPENDIX N: NRP OFFICIAL- REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

**Faculty of Education**

**Mzuzu University**

**P/Bag 201**

**Luwinga.**

**The District Coordinator,**

**Blantyre Rural.**

**Dear Sir/Madam,**

**RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT A RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOLS**

I write to ask for your permission to carry out a research in your district schools. I am a post graduate student, pursuing a Master of Education in Teacher Education at Mzuzu University.

My research topic is **EXAMINING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL READING PROGRAMME BY TEACHERS IN THE LOWER PRIMARY CLASSES.**

The study will involve all teachers in the infant and junior classes of the Primary school. The study will involve English lesson observation in standards 1 and 3, where I will be a passive participant. I will video record and make field notes whilst the teacher is conducting the lesson.

The study will also involve teachers in semi-structured and focus group interviews, which will take place after school hours. The information obtained during the research project will be treated with the strictest confidentiality, and will be used solely for this research. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the school, teachers and learners. All the information collected will only be viewed by my supervisor and myself, and then will be securely stored in line with the University of Mzuzu's regulations. The video recordings will never be reproduced

or broadcast to any third party, now or in the future. Participation is voluntary and teachers may withdraw at any time during the process. The learners in the class will not be interviewed during the classroom observations. Attached is the introduction letter from Mzuzu University.

If you agree that I conduct a research in your schools, please fill in the consent form below. If you have any question, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Yours sincerely,

GETRUDE MBALE.

Dr AGNESS HARA

Student (0888514265)

SUPERVISOR

[Getrudembale1@gmail.com](mailto:Getrudembale1@gmail.com)

0881053459

## **APPENDIX O: DECLARATION OF CONSENT**

Please sign this letter as declaration of the consent to indicate that you understand that your participation in this project is voluntary and that you may withdraw at any time. Under no circumstances will the identity of the school or research participants be disclosed or published to any party/organization that may be involved in the research process.

I ----- (Your name) .....of ----- agree to allow Getrude Mbale to conduct research in this school. The topic of research, being, **EXAMINING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL READING PROGRAMME BY TEACHERS IN THE LOWER PRIMARY CLASSES**. I allow the researcher to take the video/audio recordings of lessons and interviews with the participating teachers. I understand that the researcher subscribes to the following principles:

### **Voluntary participation**

Participants may withdraw from the research at any time during the study.

### **Informed consent**

Participants will be at all times be fully informed about the research process and purposes.

Must give consent to their participation in this research.

### **Safety in participation**

Participants will not be placed at risk or harm of any kind.

### **Privacy**

The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants will be protected at all times.

### **Trust**

Participants will not be subjected to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

Signature.....

## APPENDIX P- S: SCHOOL PARTICULARS

### Appendix P: School C

Participant code	Class teaching	Designation	Grade	Teaching experience
HM		Headteacher	PT2	23 years
Teacher 1	Standard 1	Key teacher	PT3	25 years
Teacher 2	Standard 2	Head of infant section	PT4	10 years
Teacher 3	Standard 3	Key teacher	PT3	22years
Teacher 4	Standard 4	Head of Junior section	PT4	5 years

### Appendix Q: School K

Participant code	Class teaching	Designation	Grade	Teaching experience
HM		Headteacher	PT2	18
Teacher 5	Standard 1	Key teacher	PT4	13
Teacher 6	Standard 2	section head	PT3	22
Teacher 7	Standard 3	Section head	PT4	11
Teacher 8	Standard 4	Deputy head	PT3	19



**Appendix R: School L**

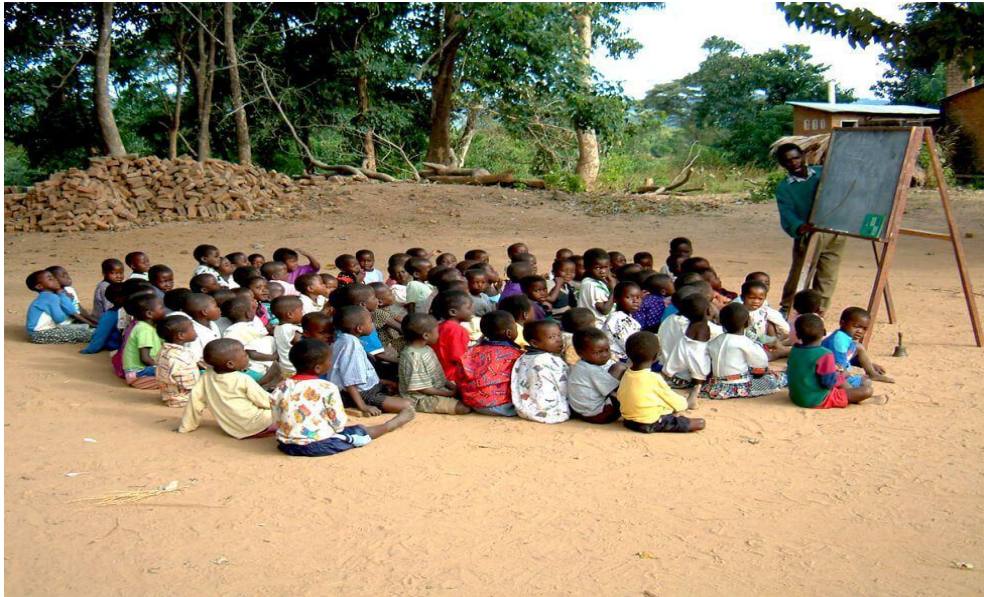
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Teaching experience</b>
Teacher 9	Standard 1	Section head	PT3	22 years
Teacher 10	Standard 2	Standard 2 Key teacher	PT2	24 years
Teacher 11	Standard 3	Standard 3	PT4	13years
Teacher 12	Standard 4	Standard 4 Section head	PT3	19 years
Headteacher		Headteacher	PT2	22 years

**Appendix S: School N**

<b>Participant code</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Teaching experience</b>
Headteacher		Headteacher	PT1	25 years
Teacher 13	Standard 1	Key teacher	PT3	16 years
Teacher 14	Standard 2	Section head	PT3	19 years
Teacher 15	Standard 3	Section head	PT2	23 years
Teacher 16	Standard 4	Standard 4	PT2	27 years

## APPENDIX T-U: CONDITION OF SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

### Appendix T: Children learning in the open air



### Appendix U: A School structure



Appendix V: Pictures in Standard 1 English Book

