

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE USE OF THE
BALANCED LITERACY APPROACH TO IMPROVE
STANDARD FOUR PUPILS' ACHIEVEMENT IN
ENGLISH READING AND WRITING IN MALAWI**

By

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Declaration

I declare that **AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE USE OF THE BALANCED LITERACY APPROACH TO IMPROVE STANDARD FOUR PUPILS' ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH READING AND WRITING IN MALAWI** is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Summary

For several years specialists in reading have debated on how pupils should learn to read. The debate has focused on two methods of teaching reading, that is, the phonic method and the whole language method. Some researchers have identified five elements of reading instruction that are critical to achievement in reading, namely; that reading instruction should include phonics, phonemic awareness, reading fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. These are the components that make up what is termed a balanced literacy approach.

Although there is some debate on what constitutes the balanced literacy approach, this study adopted the understanding of the approach described above. The study investigated whether the use of the balanced literacy approach could improve standard four pupils' achievement in reading and writing in English. The targeted population consisted of twelve schools located in Zomba rural district. Pupils were tested before and after the intervention. Teachers in the experimental group were trained twice on balanced literacy approaches, first before the intervention and midway of the intervention.

Observational measures revealed that teachers generally implemented the treatment. The post intervention data indicated that pupils responded very well to the activities that were presented to them. The reading and writing achievement of pupils that were present for the post-test increased more than those of the control group.

The results obtained suggest that the balanced literacy approach improved the reading and writing achievement of standard four pupils in the experimental group.

Key terms:

instructional effectiveness; reading and writing achievement in English; balanced literacy approach; reading comprehension; phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary; reading improvement; reading instruction; Malawi primary schools; standard four pupils.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
EFA	Education for All
EFL	English Foreign Language
IEQ	Improving Education Quality
IPTE	Initial Primary Teacher Education
GAPSM	Gender and Primary Schooling in Malawi
GTZ	German Technical Cooperation
HIV	Human Immune Virus
JCE	Junior Certificate of Education
LAC	Literacy Across the Curriculum
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
MANEB	Malawi National Examinations Board
MASTEP	Malawi Special Distance Teacher Education Programme
MBTL	Malawi Breakthrough to Literacy
MIITEP	Malawi Integrated In- service Teacher Education Programme
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOEST	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
MSCE	Malawi School Certificate of Education
MTTA	Malawi Teacher Training Activities
PCAR	Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform
PEA	Primary Education Advisor
QUAL	Qualitative
QUANT	Quantitative
SACMEQ	Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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Chapter 1

Background

1.1 Introduction

Malawi is a land locked country situated in the south eastern part of Africa. The preliminary results of the 2008 Population and Housing Census (PHC) show that the population of the country is now pegged at 13,066,320 (National Statistics Office 2008). According to the National Statistics Office (2002) census report 86 percent of this population lives in rural areas (National Statistics Office 2002). The population of Zomba district is pegged at 670,533. A total of 583, 167 people live in the rural area of Zomba district while as only 87,366 live in the city (National Statistics Office 2008). Adult literacy rate for the country is 60.9 percent (MOE Education Statistics 2007).

Malawi is a multilingual country with thirteen languages (Kayambazinthu 1998). Out of the thirteen languages only Chichewa and English are given prominent positions. They are incorporated in the school curriculum right from primary up to the tertiary level. Chichewa is the national language. It is spoken as the first language by about 60 percent of the people in the country. It is the first language in the sense that people acquire it naturally as children whose parents use it as their language with them and with each other in the community. English is the official language. It is also the medium of instruction in schools from standard four onwards up to the tertiary level.

For a number of years Chichewa was used as medium of instruction in all public primary schools from standard one up to standard four. However, the government of Malawi changed its language policy in 1996. Presently the language policy is that local vernacular languages should be used as media of instruction in standards one to four. Chichewa and English should be taught as subjects (Ministry of Education 1996). However, schools have no text books written in local vernacular languages. It is not the intention of this study to pursue the debate on the teaching of Chichewa or local vernacular languages in standards one to four.

This study aims to examine whether teachers' use of the balanced literacy approach as an intervention in the instruction of reading and writing in English in the Malawian standard four classroom, can produce better pupils' achievement than the use of other existing instructional approaches.

Standard four is a threshold class for the Malawian pupil. Up to that level classroom instruction by the teacher is in a vernacular language. From standard five onwards all instruction is supposed to be in English. So, being able to read and write in English by the time a pupil reaches standard five is very important.

The ability to read and write is a process that begins early in ones' life before attending school and continues to develop throughout life (Lesaux and Geva 2006). This literacy development is influenced by contextual, individual and instructional factors that start before school entry and continue into adulthood (ibid.). Using the Malawian context, sections 1.2 and 1.3 of this study discuss factors that affect the development of literacy in English for Malawian standard four pupils. Section 1.2 particularly highlights the teaching and learning situation in Malawian primary schools. Section 1.3 highlights the formative years of teaching and learning English.

1.2 English language teaching / learning situation in Malawian primary schools

The Malawian school system consists of eight years of primary; four years of secondary and four years of tertiary education (Chimombo et al. 2005; Kadzamira et al. 2001; Milner et al. 2001). Primary education is divided into three phases; infant (standards one and two), junior (standards three to five), and senior (standards six to eight) phases (Chimombo et al. 2005; Milner et al. 2001).

Research indicates that the conditions for teaching and learning in primary schools are not favourable in many respects. There is a mismatch between ideal educational requirements and what is on the ground.

In 1994, the Government of Malawi introduced free primary education. As a result of this the population of primary school pupils rapidly rose from 1.9 million to nearly 3.2

million (MOE 1999). Figures for the years 2005, 2006 and 2007 show enrolment numbers going up again. In the year 2005, 3,200,646 pupils enrolled in primary schools. In 2006, 3,280,714 enrolled while in year 2007, enrolment rose to 3,306,928 (MOE Education Statistics 2007).

Although the introduction of free primary education improved access to education for Malawian children, the quality and internal efficiency of the system was compromised (Chimombo et al. 2005; Chimombo and Chonzi 2000; Kadzamira et al. 2001). Of late there has been a public outcry that the introduction of free primary education has done more harm than good to the country (The Daily Times 8 Dec. 2008). The teaching and learning environment in primary schools has inadequate facilities (Chimombo et al. 2005; Chimombo and Chonzi 2000; Jessee et al. 2003; Milner et al. 2001; The EFA (Education For All) 2000 Assessment Report; Williams 2007). There are high pupil/teacher ratios. Classrooms are overcrowded. Generally there is a shortage of physical and human resources (Maluwa-Banda and Kholowa 2002; Maluwa-Banda and Lunguzi 2002).

In its commentary entitled “May someone save our education from collapse,” The Daily Times of 8th December 2008 reports that as a result of high pupil enrolment numbers there was an immediate upsurge in demand for teachers. The normal two-year teacher training programme for primary school teachers was replaced with a crash training programme called Malawi Integrated In-service Teacher Education Programme (MIITEP) (Chimombo et al. 2005; Johnson et al. 2000; Kunje et al. 2003; Milner et al. 2001; Themu 2005). This programme was in place for ten years until in the year 2006 when it was replaced by the Initial Primary Teacher Education programme (IPTE).

The strategy of the MIITEP crash programme was to employ large numbers of untrained teachers and gradually train them while they remained in service (Lewin 2004). So an additional 22,000 untrained teachers were employed (Chimombo et al. 2005; Kunje et al. 2003; Milner et al. 2001). In his comment about the number of teachers required Lewin says “...the number of teachers needed as a result of universalising primary education has been so large that many trainees have been

accepted on to the MIITEP with only two years of secondary schooling” (2004: 8). The Daily Times of 8th December 2008, in its commentary report on recruitment of teachers says that the Malawi government panicked and recruited teachers without strict regard to their academic qualifications. Out of those recruited 55% were Junior Certificate holders, that is to say more than half the total number of those recruited had two years of secondary school education.

The recruitment procedure for MIITEP was open to all. People who had been dismissed or rejected by some employers outside the education system were also recruited (Themu 2005). Lewin (2004) describes those recruited into the programme as young adults who had had a gap since leaving school.

The (MIITEP) training programme comprised two-weeks orientation at a teacher training college, three months college based training, self-study distance education, and twenty months supervised teaching in primary schools under the guidance of head teachers, deputy heads and other senior school staff (Kunje et al. 2003; Themu 2005). After the two weeks orientation teachers were deployed to go and teach in primary schools. Mchazime (2008) says that the challenge for these teachers was to combine training and full classroom teaching. These were only released from teaching during the three months college based training. After the residential college training the teachers went back to schools and assumed their full load of teaching while reading at home (ibid).

In his discussion of the MIITEP programme Themu reports a number of challenges that the programme faced:

- The two week orientation course which was meant to give basic teaching skills to the recruits before they went for the actual teaching in the field was not done in some colleges. (This means that some untrained teachers started teaching without any orientation at all).
- In some colleges the orientation course was facilitated by secondary school teachers who had no background to primary education.

- Many college lecturers felt that the two-week orientation course was not adequate to prepare anyone for actual teaching in the classroom more especially for recruits who came from outside the education system.
- There was no proper guided teaching in the field for the student teachers. The student teachers got minimal assistance or none at all from the qualified teachers (2005).

The EFA 2000 Assessment country report for Malawi shows that teachers with minimum academic qualification constitute 98.6 percent of the whole teaching force in the country. Such a large percentage of primary school teachers with a low level of education implies that English is introduced to pupils by teachers who are not competent enough to do so. Such teachers are likely to have difficulty in using English as the medium of instruction (Kunje et al. 2003; Lewin 2004). Very often such teachers do not have sufficient command of the English language to teach it properly. Lewin (2004) also observed that the academic level of many entrants for the MIITEP programme was weak and that such recruits were (a) not likely to have secure grounding in core subjects at the teacher training college, (b) not likely to have mastered basic subjects at secondary school, and (c) not fluent in the language of instruction.

There is also the question of how the recruited MIITEP teachers were trained. Mchazime (2008), reports about some challenges during the three months residential course. The teacher trainees always complained of cramming. Because of this the MIITEP programme was perceived as failing to meet the required professional standards of teaching (ibid). The public perceived the MIITEP programme as having produced teachers with substandard skills (ibid). Lewin (2004) examined the academic expectations of the teacher education curricula and found that the expectations did not match the levels of achievement of new entrants, most of whom had two years of secondary education. Lewin was concerned that

...the difficulties of learning in a second language appear to be under-estimated (and under researched), and no real allowances are made for the difficulties that trainees will experience when they themselves are far from being fluent in the medium of instruction” (2004:14).

A qualitative study of the teacher training programme revealed that most students were struggling to keep up with the demands of the core subjects such as English, Mathematics and Science (The MUSTER synthesis report 2003). No distinction was made in the training program between teaching of infants in standards one and two and the upper phase's junior, and senior. During training, teachers were prepared to teach all subjects offered in primary schools. There was no specialisation. The training did not emphasise the teaching of reading, nor methodologies for teaching specific languages such as English. Teachers were not given specific preparation for working with English language learners. Teaching children to read English is a skilled activity that requires knowledge of the acquisition process (I Can Read 2006). Reed and Railsback (2003) point out that significant professional training is needed for someone to gain full understanding of second language acquisition. Raphael (2001) also says that teachers must have knowledge about language and literacy to teach pupils especially those in the elementary grades. Short and Echevaria (2004-5) point out that those teachers who are not trained in second language acquisition cannot understand the linguistic needs of pupils nor provide rich meaningful lessons that support the pupils' language growth.

Although the MIITEP programme provided a large number of untrained teachers quickly, there were concerns raised about the quality of the output of the program. Lewin (2004) pointed out that the programme was launched too quickly before all the enabling structures were in place. He said that schools were not given adequate preparation to support the untrained teachers. The Daily Times' commentary of 8th December 2008, on the MIITEP programme said that the recruited non-qualified teachers were trained under a failed cohort system. According to Mchazime (2008) the 22,000 teachers that had been recruited for MIITEP represented almost half the total number of teachers in the country. Mchazime has also observed that while many of these were trained further and certified, most of them remain under-trained to date. The Daily Times' commentary of 8th December 2008 agrees with Mchazime's observation. It bemoans the fact that a staggering five thousand (5000) under qualified teachers are still teaching in Malawi's classrooms.

Some studies have shown that there is a relationship between teachers' preparation and their measured effectiveness (Anders et al. 2000; Darling-Hammond 2000;

International Reading Association 2000, 2007; Taylor et al. 2000). Darling-Hammond (2000) examined the ways in which teacher qualifications and other school inputs were related to student achievement across the United States of America. Their findings indicated that measures of teacher preparation and certification are by far the strongest correlates of student achievement in reading and mathematics, both before and after controlling for student poverty and language status.

Talking about teacher training in general, Darling-Hammond et al. (2001) in their response to Goldhaber and Brewer (2000) who claimed that teacher certification has little bearing on student's achievement argued that on the contrary student trainees who have more education training appear to do better in producing student achievement than those who do not.

A synthesis of research studies also confirmed these findings. The International Reading Association (2007) synthesized the findings of research efforts focused on identifying essential qualities of effective teacher preparation programs for reading instruction. Results of the synthesis revealed that good teacher preparation programmes provide students with excellent instructional content; faculty and teaching field experiences. Teachers need to be aware of several theories that influence literacy development in English as a second language. They should take the theories into consideration when teaching in the classroom.

1.2.1 Pupil/teacher ratio

The introduction of free primary education in Malawi was not matched with an increase in recruitment of teachers. When free primary education was introduced there were 27, 748 teachers representing pupil/teacher ratio of about 100:1 (Ministry of Education Science and Technology and Malawi National Commission for UNESCO 2004). While there has been some success in attempts to reduce the pupil/teacher ratio over the years the Malawi government has not yet reached its official target of 60/1 (The EFA 2000 Assessment Report). Contrary to government wishes the pupil/teacher ratio is going up again. For instance in the year 2005 pupil/qualified teacher ratio was at 83:1 but the following year it went up to 84:1 while in 2007 it rose further to 88:1 (MOE Education Statistics 2007).

The high pupil/teacher ratios indicate that there are teacher shortages in Malawi primary schools. The problem of teacher shortage in primary education is combined with a fairly incoherent distribution (The World Bank 2010). Teacher allocation across divisions and locations is not even (ibid). More teachers are deployed in urban areas (46:1) than rural areas (86:1) (The World Bank 2010). In order to reduce the pupil/teacher ratio Malawi continues to utilise a large number of untrained teachers (The EFA 2000 Assessment report). The use of untrained or under trained teachers is bound to affect the teaching and learning of English in a negative way.

1.2.2 Pupil/Classroom ratio

The sudden increase in numbers of pupils in 1994 worsened the pupil/classroom ratio to the level of 154 pupils per classroom (The EFA 2000 Assessment Report). While some improvements have been registered in the pupil classroom ratio over the years (year 2000 with a ratio of 92:1; year 2005 with a ratio of 85:1) the ratios are going up again. In the years 2006 and 2007 the pupil classroom ratio was at 107:1 and 104:1 respectively (MOE Education Statistics 2007).

As a result of the massive enrolment numbers there was need for an additional 38,000 new classrooms. The government was not able to construct this number of classrooms to meet the shortfall. Schools created makeshift classrooms and overlapping shifts (The EFA Assessment 2000 Report; Milner et al. 2001). Makeshift classrooms and overlapping shifts have now become part and parcel of the primary schooling system (The EFA 2000 Assessment Report). Twenty three per cent of existing classrooms are used for overlapping shifts (The EFA 2000 Assessment Report) in order to maximize the use of classrooms.

The teaching of literacy in English requires basic equipment and materials, a print rich environment (a well-stocked classroom) with space where a teacher can pin pictures, magazine cuttings and pupils' work. Makeshift classrooms cannot provide this, even in cases where teaching and learning materials are available.

Malawi primary schools lack furniture for both pupils and teachers (The EFA 2000 Assessment Report; Milner et al. 2001; Williams 2007). The shortage of materials such as desks is so acute that 83-91 percent of pupils especially in the first four years sit on the floor (The EFA 2000 Assessment Report; Williams 2007). There is also an acute shortage of teaching and learning materials such as teacher's guides, textbooks, syllabuses and basic classroom equipment (Jessee et al. 2003; Mchazime 2003; Milner et al. 2001). Classrooms do not have supplementary reading materials. Teachers especially those in rural schools have no access to pictures or magazine cuttings. Williams correctly observes that "texts taken for granted in consumer societies, such as confectionery wrappers or newspapers, cannot be assumed to be so for all Malawian children" (2007:60). The results of a Gender and Primary Schooling in Malawi (GAPSM) survey conducted by the University of Malawi Centre for Educational Research in 1999 (Kadzamira and Chibwana 1999) showed that at the time of the study 21.1 percent of primary schools in Malawi had no text books. This is because government was not able to provide adequate resources commensurate with the number of pupils attending school.

Jessee et al. (2003) carried out a longitudinal study (1999-2002) under a project called Improving Education Quality (IEQ). Findings of the study showed that in the year 2002, 18 percent of the teachers in Balaka and Mangochi districts did not have teaching guides in some subjects including English. The lack of teaching guides for English is particularly significant when one considers the role that the English language plays in the education system; that of being the medium of instruction, and a passing subject in examinations (see section 1.4). Secondly, this is significant when one also considers that schools have large numbers of untrained teachers or minimally trained teachers. Teaching guides are important resource materials for all teachers more so for untrained or under trained teachers. Untrained or under trained teachers who have no access to teachers' guides are likely to be disadvantaged and are likely to have serious problems in their teaching. Jessee et al. (2003) have observed that text books and teaching guides can be a powerful tool in the teaching and learning process. They have also argued that the availability, distribution and proper use of these materials is likely to improve pupils' outcome.

1.2.3 Drop-out and repetition rates

Dropping out of school and repeating classes have been identified as some of the schooling problems in Malawi (The World Bank 2010). Drop-out and repetition rates are high especially in the lower grades of one to four (Chimombo and Chonzi 2000; Kadzamira and Chibwana 1999; Kadzamira et al. 2001). Kadzamira et al. report that “only half the children who start primary school reach standard four and only one-quarter complete the full primary school cycle” (2001:7). The retention rate improved from 23 percent in 2004 to 32 percent in 2007 but it remains insufficient (The World Bank 2010).

Studies that have looked at percentages of pupils repeating a grade in Malawian primary schools have found out that repetition is a big problem in the country (Chimombo et al. 2005; Kadzamira and Chibwana 1999; Milner et al. 2001). The percentages of pupils repeating a grade increased from 62.6 percent in 1998 to 66.1 percent in 2002 (Chimombo et al. 2005).

Several reasons are given to explain these trends. Some people argue that examinations that select pupils to proceed from one level to the next account for some of the repetitions. Jessee et al. report that pupils’ reasons for dropping out of school include lack of interest, marriage, initiation ceremonies, pregnancy, and no parental care (2003). Crowded classrooms, open-air or temporary classrooms, and incomplete schools (schools that do not provide the eight grades/standards of the primary cycle) have a negative effect on retention (The World Bank 2010). There are serious social implications when pupils drop-out of school before attaining permanent literacy (Jessee et al. 2003). These pupils who drop-out of school will one day become adults who cannot read and write.

The repetition and drop-out rates indicate the magnitude of schooling problems that are there in the Malawian primary school education system. At a personal level a pupil who drops out of school before reaching standard five is bound to eventually revert to illiteracy (Mchazime 2001). Such an illiterate person cannot participate fully in the development of the country as he/she cannot read printed information on various national emerging issues like; legislation related to human rights and

democracy, HIV and AIDS, agriculture, gender based violence just to mention a few. Jesse et al. say such a person will be “at greater risk for lower economic productivity” later in life (2003:4).

The implication of high pupil enrolment numbers and resultant large classes, pupil/teacher ratio and the use of untrained teachers is that primary school education in Malawi is in dire need of improvement. It is within this historical and contemporary impoverished atmosphere that the teaching and learning of English in the country is taking place. The next section discusses the formative years of English in primary schools.

1.3 The formative years of English in Malawian primary schools

1.3.1 Pre-school

The primary school represents the beginning of formal education for the majority of pupils in Malawi (Williams 1993). Pupils come to school without any experience of formal education. Although the government of Malawi recognises and acknowledges the special role pre-schools play in the acculturation and socialisation of a child (Ministry of Education Science and Technology and Malawi Commission for UNESCO 2004), there is no formal pre-school system in the country (Mchazime 2001). Pre-schools that exist are privately-owned and are found mostly in urban areas. However, the government of Malawi encourages the Local Education Authorities, none government organisations, churches and private entrepreneurs to be involved in the provision of early childhood development programmes (Ministry of Education Science and Technology and Malawi Commission for UNESCO 2004). Most children especially those in rural areas start their education in standard one without any pre-school experience (Mchazime 2001).

Children start school without being able to read and write even in the native language. Almost all children come to school without any literacy instruction at all (except those that attended pre-school). The ability to read and write does not come naturally (National Association for the Education of Young Children 2005). Malawian learners therefore need literacy instruction in both the native and English languages when they start school in standard one.

With 86 percent of Malawi's population living in rural areas (National Statistics Office 2002), it means the majority of pupils come from the rural areas and they start standard one without any exposure to pre-school experience. The implication of this is that most children in Malawi miss out on having literacy experiences in their first five years when they are cared for at home. Snow et al. 1998 assert that the quantity and quality of language and early literacy interactions during pre-school years profoundly affect the acquisition of the language building blocks that support reading.

Research has shown that pre-school experience (including nursery and playgroup) is associated with higher early literacy attainment than being cared for exclusively at home (Brooks 2000). Speaking at the National Literacy Trust's second annual conference in London, Brooks reported some research evidence relating children's pre-school experience to their attainment in reading and writing between the ages of 5 and 8 (Brooks 2000). Research findings suggest that the early childhood years from birth through age eight are the most important years for literacy development. During this period children need to have literacy experiences with books and stories.

1.3.2 Primary School

Malawian children officially start school at the age of six. Ordinarily the standard four classrooms should have 10 year-old pupils. However, there are variations in ages of pupils. Kadzamira and Rose (2001) report of pupils aged 4 to 18 in standard one. This means that by the time these pupils are in standard four the age range will be 8 to 22. In 2007 the age range of pupils in standard one was 6 years or less to 12 years (MOE Education Statistics 2007).

The age ranges have some implications for the English teacher. It is necessary for the teacher to understand the learning needs of the pupils at their different stages of development. For instance the attention span of the 10 year-olds is bound to be different from those that are fifteen and above. This will require the teacher to devise learning activities for the different age groups accordingly.

Most of the Malawian children come from homes with very few books (Milner et al. 2001) or from homes with no books at all (Chimombo et al. 2005). Such children depend heavily on teachers and the school to help them become readers and writers in English. Mmela acknowledges the classroom as the only place where pupils can learn English (2006:7). Lack of books to read at home puts the pupils at a disadvantage. Research elsewhere has shown that there is some positive relationship between reading habits out-of-school and performance in reading. Findings of a study by Leppanen et al. (2005) revealed that the amount of out-of-school reading at the end of grade one contributed to the development of word recognition skills among Finnish children during the first and second grades of primary school.

Pupils in Malawi cannot use English for communication in their communities outside the school hours because English is not spoken outside the classroom. Pupils especially those from the rural areas have no access to the radio, television or newspapers (Chimombo et al. 2005; Mchazime 2001; Milner et al. 2001) from which they can pick some English outside the classroom.

The teaching and learning of English begins in standard one for the majority of pupils (Williams 1993) especially those from the rural areas who have no access to the pre-schools. Standard one is where the foundation for learning English is laid. English is taught as a subject from standard one to standard four (first four years of primary education). From standard five onwards English is used as medium of instruction.

The standard one pupil in Malawi learns English as a second language. English is a second language in the sense that the pupil lives in a country where English is not the native language of the indigenous Malawian people but an official language used in commerce, government, and education. In addition English is a second language that the pupils learn after learning the mother tongue. Ellis (1997) defines a second language as any language that is learned subsequent to the mother tongue be it a third or fourth language learnt as a result of living in a country where the language is spoken or learnt in the classroom through instruction. Ellis' definition includes learning English as a foreign language. This study adopts this definition of second language because it includes the learning of a foreign language as well.

For the Malawian standard four pupils just as for other children learning a second language, there are some differences in their learning experiences between the learning of the first language and the learning of English. The first difference is that the pupils learnt to speak their first language as children when they were about two years old. They learnt their first language within a natural environment without anyone teaching them. When the pupils begin learning English in standard one, they are older and already experienced in speaking a first language. In addition they learn English in the classroom context which is not a natural setting. Unlike their counterparts, (English monolinguals) who naturally develop oral language proficiency in English, Malawian learners have to be taught how to speak in English in the classroom.

Koda (2007) argues that learning to read for second language learners is more complex than it is for first language learners. The reason Koda gives for this is that in second language reading two languages are involved, the first language the learner already has and the second language that the learner is learning. The involvement of the two languages means continuous interactions between the languages as well continuous adjustments in accommodating the different demands imposed by the two languages (ibid).

August and Shanahan (2006) explain that the development of literacy for such second language learners will be influenced by a number of factors including their language proficiency and literacy in their first language. August and Shanahan (2006) also point out that the nature of the first language, in our case Chichewa, and the second language in our case English, influences learners' language proficiency and literacy development. Learners whose first language skills are similar to those of the second language will have an added advantage in learning the skills in the second language unlike learners whose first language skills are in sharp contrast with the second language (August and Shanahan 2006). Chichewa is different from English. It is a tonal language while as English is an alphabetic language. So, Malawian learners will have intervening influences when developing literacy in the second language, English. August and Shanahan say that there is enough research evidence that shows that

...aspects of second–language literacy development (eg...) are related in important ways to performance on similar constructs in the first language; that common underlying abilities play a significant role in second-language development as they do in first language literacy development; that certain error types can be understood in terms of differences between the first and second languages; that well-developed literacy skills in the first language can facilitate second language development to some extent...(2006:14).

In addition August and Shanahan (2006) also report that second language literacy development is influenced by a number of individual difference factors such as phonological processes, second language proficiency skills, cognitive abilities, general intelligence, and educational background. Research evidence suggests that individual differences in phonological awareness such as phonological recording, affect the ability to spell in English regardless of first language background.

There are also other factors that are of great importance to second language learners (Norris-Holt 2001; Walqui 2000). A number of studies reaffirm the importance of attitude and motivation in the process of second language learning (Combs 2007; Masgoret and Gardner 2003; Steward-Strobelt and Chen 2003; Ushida 2005). The learner is going to be affected by social and psychological factors such as his/her attitude and motivation of learning the second language. The language attitude that the learner, his/her family, peer group, the school, the community at large has on the second language can have tremendous positive or negative effect on the second language learning process (Norris-Holt 2001; Rueda and Chen 2005; Walqui 2000). For example if the learners' parents feel that it is not necessary or desirable to learn English the learners' acquisition of English will be inhibited. A teacher though highly qualified and competent may be aided or hindered by factors beyond his/her own control in the teaching of English. Fortunately, in Malawi most parents and the community at large have a positive attitude towards learning English because of the position the language holds in the country. The majority of Malawians believe that being able to speak English is a mark of being educated and being civilised (Mchazime 2001). The attitude to English that Malawians have is not peculiar to Malawi only but shared in all developing countries. Paran and Williams observe that

Most families and students in developing countries are enthusiastic supporters of English-dominated education practices, seeing English as a bridge to the hoped-for salaried post... (2007:1).

Lesaux and Geva report that out of the many factors external and internal that influence the speed of literacy development in a child, instruction is a primary external factor that influences literacy development. They point out that “both formal instruction in phonological awareness, letter-sound correspondences, vocabulary, and comprehension processes, and the incidental instruction associated with language-and literacy-rich environment facilitate literacy development” (2006:58). Lesaux and Geva (2006) argue that for any child to be able to efficiently read and write will depend to a large extent on the schooling experience that the child has had, including exposure to appropriate instruction. I Can Read (2006) support this view that appropriate instructional approaches are important. They argue that in general poor reading skills are the consequence of ineffective and inadequate instructional approaches. They conclude by saying that in general children fail to learn to read English easily or well because they are not taught properly.

In Malawi approaches to the teaching of reading are inappropriate (Johnson et al. 2000; Williams 1993). Classroom observation of lessons in English indicates that there is very little teaching of reading that goes on in primary schools (Johnson et al. 2000; Williams 1993). Johnson et al. observe that teachers “are more concerned with correcting reading errors, rather than helping the child enjoy the book by drawing attention to characters, pictures, print and so on” (2000:17). Williams also observes that,

...reading proceeds through repetition of the text with insufficient attention being paid to the presentation of meaning and checking of understanding (1993:8-9).

In his report on Malawi’s education Williams and Cooke (2002) stated that Malawi’s children are weak in English. He points out that some of the weaknesses are attributed to teachers’ approaches that do not facilitate reading for understanding. Stuart (2002) also noted teachers’ use of inappropriate approaches to the teaching of reading.

One possible explanation for the said inappropriate instructional methods that teachers use could be that teachers themselves are not well trained to teach English

as a second language. Teachers do not have the necessary background to teach reading effectively. They need to know how children learn to read in English.

As has been mentioned earlier on, this study uses the balanced literacy approach to the teaching of reading and writing in English in order to find out whether standard four pupils' performance in reading and writing improves or not. Rural schools in Zomba district have been chosen because of the proximity of the schools with the place the researcher works. Secondly rural schools are more at a disadvantage in terms of availability of teaching and learning materials and provision of qualified teachers than urban schools (Mchazime 2001).

The sections that follow discuss observable trends in literacy in English in Malawian primary schools, the need for literacy attainment in English, the problem of the study, aims of the study, the justification of the study, followed by the research question and significance of the study. The last section of the chapter discusses assumptions made by the study.

1.4 Observable trends in literacy in English in Malawian primary schools

Observation of classroom activities indicates that Malawian standard four pupils do not have the desired levels of mastery in reading and writing in English for them to perform adequately in other subjects. In the year 2003 the researcher did a random study of scripts written by standard four pupils. Findings from the random study support the contention that pupils are indeed not capable of reading and writing in English as expected at this level.

A literature review of studies that have been carried out on literacy in English of Malawian pupils in these classes also supports the observations made by the researcher. According to studies carried out over the past twenty years or so, levels of literacy in English in Malawian primary schools are low (Chilora and Mchazime 2003; Milner et al. 2001; Chimombo et al. 2005; Williams 1993, 1998).

In the years 1998 and 2002, there was a countrywide survey of schools on levels of achievement for standards six and four pupils respectively in three domains of

reading literacy, carried out by the Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ). The surveys revealed deterioration in pupils' performance between the Milner et al. (2001) (1998 data) and the Chimombo et al. 2005 (2002 data). In the Milner et al. (2001) study, 19.4 percent of pupils reached the minimum level of mastery in reading while in the Chimombo et al. (2005) only 8.6 percent of them reached the minimum level of mastery in reading. This means that up to 80.6 percent of the pupils in the Milner et al. (2001) study and 91.4 percent of the pupils in the Chimombo et al. (2005) study did not reach the minimum level of mastery in reading prescribed by reading specialists in Malawi and the other SACMEQ countries. Malawian pupils perform far below expectations (The World Bank 2010).

A comparison of Malawi's grade four pupils' achievement in reading with the achievement of pupils in other African countries shows that Malawi's pupils performed far below the mean of all the African countries. The percentage of grade four pupils' reaching the desired literacy levels was one percent for Malawi (Chinapah 2003)¹. It is expected that pupils should be able to exhibit some basic competences in English at their grade level (Williams 1993). However, data collected by Williams on the reading proficiency in English from 480 primary school children of grades three, four and six in five schools in Malawi in 1993, showed that most pupils did not understand the English texts at their grade level (Williams 1993). Malawi has the weakest performance in English reading among countries whose pupils write the same SACMEQ standardised tests (The World Bank 2010). These low percentage figures of pupils' performance in reading and writing in English derived from various studies are an indication of the magnitude of the reading and writing problems that pupils are facing in Malawian primary schools.

1.5 The need for literacy attainment in English

The ability to read and write in English is crucial for pupils' success both at school and outside school. At school literacy is the key to academic success (August and Shanahan 2006; Jessee et al. 2003; Johnson 1999; Leppanen et al. 2005; Lesaux and

¹ The percentage of grade 4 pupils reaching desired literacy levels was, 4% for Niger, 6% for Botswana, 7% for Senegal, 7% for Zambia, 13% for Mali, 21% for Madagascar, 23% for Uganda and 35% for Mauritius.

Geva 2006; Pang et al. 2003; Walsh et al. 2006). Once learners are able to read and write in English, learning in other subjects can be attained.

In Malawi English is the official language while Chichewa is the national language. English is used in Parliament, trade and industry, the mass media and education. It is also considered a second language in spite of there being several other vernacular languages in the country. In education the medium of instruction is a local vernacular language during the earlier years of standards one to four. During these early years, English is taught as one of the subjects on the curriculum. English takes over as the medium of instruction from standard five at the primary school level and continues to secondary and tertiary levels. In addition to this, in order for a pupil to receive a full certificate at any level of his/her education (primary, junior certificate or ordinary “O” level certificate), that pupil must pass English (Malawi National Examination Board 2002). For entry into universities in the country, a student has to pass English in addition to other subjects passed at ‘O’ level. As English is the medium of instruction, knowledge of English is crucial for pupils’ educational success, since they have to move swiftly from a position of learning to read and write in English, to one of reading and understanding English to learn other subjects.

In the classroom, pupils need to read and understand a text, to recognize supporting points of an argument, to grasp essential details of different types of reports, and to understand subtle distinctions of meaning in texts. They should be able to read signs and notices, and to write notes and letters. After standard four, pupils have to continue their education through English, which means that they must also be proficient in the skills of reading and writing so that they can obtain information from books as well as record what they have learnt. All these are essential key factors that decide whether a pupil is literate therefore successful or not in their schooling. Pupils cannot successfully continue their education until they have acquired a basic knowledge of English.

In Malawi, examinations at all levels put emphasis on paper and pencil tests. All test items are written in English except those for Chichewa. During examinations pupils need to be able to write and express themselves in English, just as they need to read

the written language at a reasonable rate with some good understanding of what is written. Pupils need to explore and make clearer their own ideas and feelings through writing. Failure to read and write will prevent pupils from proceeding to secondary education and severely limit their chances of finding employment and becoming useful and productive citizens in the country. Malawi needs people with high-level literacy skills in English if it is to compete at an equal footing in the global village.

Since English is used as the medium of instruction in schools, poor performance in English means pupils are likely to have problems in learning the other subjects (Jessee et al. 2003; Mchazime 2001). Lack of competency in the skills of reading has been shown to affect acquisition of other curricular skills. The reading skill serves as the major foundation skill for all school-based learning (August and Shanahan 2006; Lyon 1997; Moats 1999). Boyer (1995) contends that school success also depends to a large part on how successful pupils are in learning how to read. While there is no explanation as yet as to why, in spite of free primary education in the country there still persists a drop-out rate of 17 percent, some studies carried out outside Malawi have shown that most pupils drop out of school when they find that they cannot read and write (Lyon 1997). So, we can safely assume that inability to read and write in English could explain this drop-out rate. Once Malawian pupils are out of school they lapse into illiteracy even in their own vernacular languages (Mchazime 2001). If the majority of pupils who enrol in primary schools leave school before they acquire permanent literacy, they cannot meet Malawi's needs for literate productive citizens and workers.

English is the official language for business since most business transactions are conducted in English. Those who cannot read and write in English are therefore often at a disadvantage when it comes to striking business deals. Ability to read and write in English would improve their chances of conducting successful businesses. The economy of Malawi is mostly dependent on smallholder agriculture. This depends on extension service support from government. Knowledge and information on health and agriculture are passed on to farmers through printed materials in the form of pamphlets and posters. Radio and television are also used, but they are not accessible to the majority of the people. So, reading and writing are very important skills. The

teaching and learning of English in Malawi is a question of ensuring that pupils have a complete mastery of the language so that they can use English as the language of learning.

1.6 The problem

The basic problem confronted by this study is the long-standing and persistent underachievement of Malawian pupils in reading and writing in English. Considering that English plays a central role in the country, it is a very big challenge to the Ministry of Education and educationists in general to ensure that literacy in English is achieved by all school-going pupils as early as possible in the school system (Milner et al. 2001). Some studies claim that pupils in Malawi reach as far as standard four (four years of primary school) without being able to read and write simple words from their English textbooks (Chilora and Mchazime 2003; Jere et al. 1999; Williams 1993).

While the studies cited above show that literacy levels are low, they do not say why this is so. It is possible that out of the many factors, teachers' instructional behaviour in the classroom could be a key one. Preliminary classroom investigations carried out by the researcher seem to suggest that the present methods of teaching literacy in English are not effective. The teaching of reading that is currently going on stresses accuracy and reading aloud rather than promoting reading as a process of acquiring meaning from a text. Not much attention is paid to the presentation of meaning and checking of pupils' understanding of what is being read. This is a problem that needs to be looked at critically if education is to improve in Malawi.

One way of meeting the challenge of promoting literacy in English among Malawian pupils could lie in improving the teachers' instructional approach to the teaching of reading and writing. This study therefore aims to design an instructional approach to the teaching of reading and writing which balances phonics and whole language approaches that could be used to raise reading and writing levels of standard four pupils in Malawian primary schools.

1.7 Aims of the study

This study aims to investigate whether the use of the balanced literacy approach will produce better results in pupils' achievement in reading and writing in English in the Malawian context. The study will focus on teachers' use of this instructional approach to the teaching of reading and writing in English in standard four. It will also look at how this leads to better net gains in pupils' achievement over time than those taught without it.

This research recognizes the role physical structures might play in the way a child responds and learns in school in general, but it does not consider this factor the most important. Rather, it considers the teachers' instructional approach as the most crucial element. The researcher believes that improvement of educational quality depends to a large extent on good interaction between teachers and students at the classroom level. In this regard the study agrees with Allington and Cunningham that

although we must recognise that children's homes and backgrounds influence failure or success, we must also realize that what happens in classrooms minute by minute, day after day, determines how much will be learned by how many children (2002:67).

1.8 Justification

This study is necessary because a large number of pupils in Malawi cannot read and write as well as they need to for them to succeed in school and in life, in general (Chilora and Mchazime 2003; Milner et al. 2001; Williams 1993, 1998).

In Malawi, over the past three decades there have been a substantial number of studies focusing on pupils' performance (Chilora and Mchazime 2003; Chimombo et al. 2005; Chinapah 2003; Milner et al. 2001; Williams 1993, 1998). These studies basically look at students' achievement in reading and writing. The studies are to a large extent, summative. They merely describe pupils' achievement in reading and writing. There are limited numbers of studies that have adapted existing instructional approaches that could be used to contribute to pupils' achievement in literacy. Determining the best instructional approaches to the teaching of reading and writing should be of particular concern to all concerned with the education of the child in

Malawi in light of the dismal national picture shown by the various studies cited above.

Recent studies in America have confirmed that instructional approaches that teachers follow have the potential to make a difference to pupils learning and therefore they warrant attention (Snow et al. 1998). Several research reviews on effective reading programmes in the United States of America conclude that methods of instruction may be more important than language of instruction for English language learners (August and Hakuta 1997; Christian and Genessee 2001; Slavin and Cheung 2003). As mentioned earlier on, research studies at the classroom level suggest that “how” teachers teach reading is also important to consider (August and Shanahan 2006) when seeking to make changes and improve achievement (Taylor et al. 2002).

This study will therefore focus on the instructional approach intervention as an area that might be used to improve students’ achievement in reading and writing. The instructional approach that will be used is the one referred to as the balanced approach (Grossen 1997; Wren no date). This is also known as the balanced literacy approach (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory 6 February 2007) or the balanced reading approach (Cowen 2003) or balanced reading instruction (Johnson 1999). The researcher believes that a balanced approach to literacy teaching and learning will provide pupils in standard four with the best opportunity to develop the reading, writing, and thinking skills necessary for academic success and personal satisfaction.

This approach, as an effective method of teaching literacy, has received overwhelming attention from educational researchers (August and Shanahan 2006; Burns et al. 1998; Diegmuller 1996; Dunist et al. 2007; Fisher 2005; Mishra and Stainthorp 2007; Novick 1998; Pressley 2002, 2003, 2005; Snow et al., 1998; Strickland 1998; Yeh and Connell 2008). A national survey in the United States of America found that 89 percent of the elementary teachers believed that skills instruction combined with literature and language-rich activities is bound to improve pupils’ literacy levels (NICHHD 2000). In California, after a decline in the reading test scores of its students, a report from the Reading Task Force called for a balanced

approach in the way reading is taught (Diamond and Mandel no date). Recent research in America has confirmed that a balanced literacy approach to the teaching of reading which combines phonics and phonemic awareness imbedded in reading and writing experiences, with whole text to facilitate the construction of meaning, improves the reading abilities of children (Snow et al. 1998).

In Malawi, research based knowledge on effective instructional approaches to the teaching of reading and writing is important. It has direct application to the teachers' way of teaching literacy in English. At the same time, such knowledge has potential for teacher educators, who can use it to design the teacher preparation curriculum. Studying the benefits of the balanced literacy approach in the Malawian context will provide information that is valuable to those working in the education system, such as teachers, tutors, those preparing the teacher training curriculum and policy makers.

Malawi, just like other developing countries, is striving to improve its quality of education. In the belief that teachers control classroom activities that are directly related to learning, the Government of Malawi has employed a strategy that aims to improve classroom instructional quality through teacher training. A number of teacher training programmes have therefore been introduced. These are: Malawi Special Teacher Education Programme (MASTEP), Malawi Integrated In-service Teacher Education Programme (MIITEP), and the recently introduced Initial Primary Teacher Education (IPTE).

While Malawi might recognise the critical role that teachers' instructional practice plays in the classroom as indicated by the cited programmes, there is still a need to understand what exactly happens in the classroom and what instructional approaches are used by teachers. Research on effective instructional approaches for teaching literacy in English is essential if the literacy levels of pupils are to be improved in Malawi. Currently there is little empirical evidence that links teachers' instructional approach in the teaching of reading and writing in the classroom to pupils' achievement in reading and writing.

There is a general concern in this country over inability of pupils to read and write

well enough to meet the demands of school life and day-to-day life in general (Milner et al. 2001; Chimombo et al. 2005). Both at school and in the work place Malawian children must be able to read various materials and use written materials to solve problems independently. The need to improve the rate of literacy in English is high on the agenda of educational improvement in Malawi (Milner et al. 2001; Chimombo et al. 2005). This is more so because of the high drop out rate from primary schools before children have attained permanent literacy. If the majority of pupils who enrol in primary school leave school before they acquire permanent literacy, the good intentions of the World Declaration On Education For All (UNDP 1990), which desire that everyone should be literate, can never be attained. Perhaps one way of meeting the challenge of promoting levels of literacy in English for Malawian pupils is in effective teachers' instructional practices that teach phonological skills while providing meaningful opportunities for children to interact with print.

Malawi needs information on all aspects of teachers' instructional approaches to the teaching of reading and writing in English as a second language in general and teaching of literacy in English in particular. The results of trials of instructional approaches need to find their way into the classroom. For teachers to teach effectively they need an understanding of how children learn, more especially how children learn to read and write in English as a second language. It is such knowledge that can influence instructional approaches (August and Shanahan 2006; Ellis 1997; Short and Echevarria 2004-5; Stuart 1999; Tobin and McInnes 2008; Whiteley et al. 2007). An understanding of teachers' instructional approaches that affect pupils' literacy can help teachers, parents and society in general. No problem can be solved unless and until it has been identified. We need to identify some of the causes of illiteracy in English and then proceed to find the cure. Ideas from elsewhere can be useful stimuli, but cannot provide ready-made answers or recipes for the Malawian situation. The researcher, however, realises that only a small number of the multiple constraints to pupils' attainment of literacy in English can be addressed in a study such as this one.

1.9 Research question

While the use of balanced literacy approach in teaching reading and writing has led to

significant gains in pupils' literacy attainment in the United States of America, applying this to second language reading and more specifically to reading and writing in the Malawian context represents an expansion into instructional approaches that are not well understood at this time. This research brings some insights into instructional approaches for teaching English reading and writing to pupils whose first language is not English using the Malawian context. This study therefore, aims to investigate whether teachers' use of the balanced literacy approach as an intervention in the instruction of reading and writing in English in Malawian standard four classrooms, can produce better pupils' achievement than the use of other existing instructional approaches. In order to achieve this, the study examines the relationship between the use of balanced literacy approach and pupils' achievement in reading and writing skills.

The hypotheses of this study is that if the use of balanced literacy approach as an instruction in teaching reading and writing in English produces better pupils' achievement than the use of other existing instructional approaches then pupils taught through this approach will show a marked improvement in attainment of reading and writing skills among standard four pupils in Malawi in the post-tests. As of now we are not able to answer with confidence if the use of the balanced literacy approach in the teaching of English in Malawi leads to better results in pupils' abilities to read and write than the current instructional approaches.

1.10 Significance of the study

Although literature in Malawi indicates that teachers are using inappropriate instructional approaches in teaching reading (Stuart 2002; Williams 1993; Williams and Cooke 2002) not many studies have focused on instructional approaches in order to try and improve pupils' attainment of literacy skills. Owing to the limited number of studies in this area, this study aims at learning how the balanced approach can be used to improve pupils' literacy levels in English using the Malawian context. By conducting the research the researcher is able to describe how the balanced approach can be used to improve pupils' achievement in reading and writing. The analysis of teachers' instructional approaches in the classroom contributes important insights into the kind of interaction that goes on in the classroom.

Findings from this study can be used to guide policy and practice in schools. Having studied teachers' instructional approach in the classroom, this research will permit us to reflect on teachers' practice and suggest how it may be improved. This study will alert stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education, the Malawi Institute of Education and other relevant educational institutions to the usefulness of the balanced literacy approach in the teaching of reading and writing in English in Malawi's primary schools. The study will suggest improvements that can be taken on board by these educational institutions. Such suggestions will assist the Malawian English language teachers in improving their instructional practice. The ultimate aim of the study is to improve the learning of reading and writing skills in English in standard four.

1.11 Assumptions

We are making the following assumptions as we carry out this study:

- i) that the training provided to teachers in the experimental group improves their effectiveness,
- ii) that this improvement is observable and recorded in the observation checklist, and
- iii) that the gains in pupils' literacy development can be measured by means of written achievement tests in English.

This chapter gave some background information to the study. The next chapter discusses the literature that surrounds the learning and teaching of reading and writing. The chapter opens with a discussion on how different people define reading. This is followed by a discussion of learning and reading theories. A discussion on the philosophy behind the phonics, whole-word, and balanced literacy approach is then presented. The chapter ends with justification for instruction in phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

2.1 Definition of reading

There has been some controversy about what reading is. Educators, linguists, psychologists and information scientists interested in reading have all tried to define reading (Goodman and Goodman 1979; Gough 1972; Leipzig 2001; Pang et al. 2003; Snow et al. 1998; Wren 2005). The definitions provided have been contradictory, each emphasizing a different aspect of the reading process. For some scholars learning to read means learning to pronounce words. For others learning to read means learning to identify words and get their meaning. For yet others learning to read is learning to bring meaning to a text in order to get meaning from it (Foertsch 1998). From the above definitions we can conclude that the definitions fall into two categories. The first category is that of those that see reading as a decoding process. The other is that of those that see reading as a meaning making process. Although there are some differences in opinion about the exact definition of reading most educators agree that reading involves several activities. These are letter and word perception and recognition, comprehension of the concepts conveyed by the printed words and reaction to and assimilation of the new knowledge with the reader's prior knowledge and experiences (Foertsch 1998; Koda 2005; Leppanen et al. 2005; Snow et al. 1998). The Partnership for Reading (a) defines reading as a complex system of deriving meaning from print that requires:

the skills and knowledge to understand how phonemes, or speech sounds, are connected,

the ability to decode unfamiliar words,

the ability to read fluently,

sufficient background information and vocabulary to foster reading comprehension,

the development of appropriate active strategies to construct meaning from print, and

the development and maintenance of a motivation to read (17 Oct. 2005).

This study uses this definition of reading and the skills that it requires. The key elements mentioned here also define the content of instruction for the study. A teacher

needs to adjust his/her instruction in light of this definition as well as according to the instructional needs of the learners.

2.2 Theories of how children learn to read and write in English

There are several theories that describe how children learn in general, how they learn languages and how they learn to read and write. There are also theories of reading (Burt et al. 2003; Gourlay 2003). This study focuses only on four theories of learning, language and literacy that are linked to each other. These are constructivist learning theories according to Jean Piaget's (1969) theoretical framework, sociolinguistic learning theories as proposed by Vygotsky (1978), reader response learning theories according to Louise Rosenblatt (1978) theoretical frame work and interactive learning theories as proposed by Rumelhart (1977). These theories have affected the teaching and learning that goes on in the classroom.

2.2.1 Constructivist learning theories

Constructivist theories are drawn from the work of Jean Piaget. In his model of learning, Jean Piaget sees a learner being given opportunities to integrate new knowledge into his /her existing knowledge base through assimilation or creation of new constructs or knowledge concepts to add to existing structures (Feeney 2004). The learner interacts with the environment and solves those problems that are presented by the environment. He/She learns through taking action in solving these problems.

There are three major concepts in the constructivist theory. The first is that learning is an active process. Children are active learners (Tompkins 2003). Secondly learners learn by using previous knowledge, experience and new information to solve problems (Tompkins 2003). The third is that children organise and relate information in schemata (Tompkins 2003). Schemata are cognitive structures in human beings which help in acquiring, processing and retrieving information (Allington and Cunningham 2002; Al-Issa 2006; Nassaji 2007; Pearson 2001). For instance, in learning something new or attempting to understand something in greater depth a child uses prior experience and first-hand knowledge gained from new explorations. The child probes and inquires about or explores a phenomenon until the phenomenon

becomes less mysterious. As the child begins to investigate the new ideas, he/she puts together bits and pieces of prior explorations that seem to fit his or her understanding of the phenomenon under present investigation. Piece by piece the child builds knowledge. At times when the pieces do not fit together, the child has to break down old ideas and reconstruct them. The child extends his or her understanding through creative efforts. The clarity that the child gains in understanding a concept gives him or her ability to apply this understanding to new situations and new mysteries. This process is continuous and is at individual level. The child brings to each learning experience his or her developmental level, personal experience and personal style.

In the classroom constructivism promotes pedagogic approaches that encourage learning by doing. In these approaches learners are expected to discover or construct essential information for themselves (Downes 2007). It is believed that they learn best in an unguided or minimally guided environment (ibid). Learning is said to occur when learners are actively involved in a process of meaning and knowledge construction, not when they just listen to the teacher without doing anything. Learners learn new information by building upon the knowledge that they already possess. They bring to each learning experience their individual developmental level, personal experience and personal style.

The teacher provides to learners experiences that allow them to hypothesize, predict, manipulate objects, pose questions, investigate, imagine and create. Learners are given tasks that refer to knowledge and skills just beyond their current level of mastery. This is likely to motivate learners and build on learners' previous successes (Brownstein 2001). The teacher as a facilitator supports the learners from the back, guiding and creating an environment for the learner to arrive at his or her own conclusion. In this way learners develop some initiative and autonomy. In such a classroom, promotion of literacy will be achieved through integrating the need to read and write and learners being actively involved in asking and answering questions, reading, making predictions instead of passively listening to the teacher.

There is some research evidence which supports use of constructivism in the classroom (Dogru and Kalender 2007; Guthrie et al. 2004). Guthrie et al. (2004) investigated the extent to which an instructional framework of combining motivation support and strategy instruction impacted on reading achievement for third grade children. Findings of the study showed the constructivist approach as leading to better results in students' reading comprehension, cognitive strategies and motivation.

However, some educators have questioned the effectiveness of constructivism especially as regards the development of instruction for novices (Mayer 2004). They argue that novices do not have the underlying mental models or "schemata" to help in learning by doing. Kirschner et al. (2006) criticise constructivism for its underlying principle that children can direct their own learning given proper guidance, stimulation and learning environment. They say that approaches to minimally guided instruction (constructivism included) had failed in America (Kirschner et al. (2006). This argument led to a debate by the American Educational Research Association in which some constructivists agreed that some form of direct or explicit instruction may be useful for learners with little prior knowledge (Sweller et al. 2007). Others like Kuhn (2007) and Schmidt et al. (2007) agreed that some instructional guidance was necessary (Downes 2007) for such learners.

2.2.2 Sociolinguistic learning theories

Sociolinguistic learning theories bring in a cultural dimension to how children learn (Tompkins 2003). These theories claim that learning takes place in a social cultural environment. According to Vygotsky (1978) learning occurs through dialogue. He argues that initially a dialogue is an interpersonal act in a social community (intramental). This dialogue can take place between a teacher and a learner or between learners themselves, or between a text and a reader. Then the learner makes sense of what is said or written through an internal /personal (intermental) dialogue. This is referred to as transformational internalisation (Lantolf and Appel 1998).

Learning is thus not only interactive, in the sense that learners must interact with sources of ideas or knowledge in social settings but also in the sense that they must actively participate in reconstructing ideas or knowledge within their own minds.

Cognitive development in a child occurs through the child's contact with the environment and with others, as well as within the child's mind. These theories view reading and writing activities as social activities that reflect on the culture and community in which the children live.

One important element in Vygotsky's ideas is the notion of *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD). This is defined as the difference between what the child is capable of doing or solving on his/her own and his/her capability to do something or solve a problem with the assistance of another person (MacGillivray and Rueda 2001; Schutz 2004; Shrum and Glisan 2000). The zone of proximal development is where a learner can learn new things that are slightly above his/her current understanding with the help of an expert. The learner's progress from the actual development level to a higher potential developmental level is done through interaction with others. It includes all functions and activities that a learner can perform only with the help of someone. Those providing support can be teachers, adults, parents, older children or peers with expertise related to the task on hand. The concept of the ZPD allows for learning to be seen as a social experience which involves collaboration. It is not solely an internal mental process (Block 2003; Lantolf 2000).

Vygotsky's idea of zone of proximal development has some implications for those in the education sector. One of them is that human learning takes place in a sociocultural environment and is integrated. Whatever human beings learn, they learn not as isolated individuals but as members of a society (Wilson 2003; Yang and Wilson 2006).

The provision of support that enables the learner to move from the current level of development to the potential level of development is termed as scaffolding (Lantolf 2000; McGee and Richgels 2000). A scaffold is a temporary support used to assist a learner in learning and can be gradually withdrawn as the learner becomes more independent (Yang and Wilson 2006). The scaffold can be provided by teachers, peers, parents, or reference sources such as dictionaries which enable learners to perform increasingly well (ibid). For instance during the teaching of writing in the classroom, the teacher demonstrates the writing as the learner observes most of the

work being carried out by the expert. This is then followed by the teacher collaborating with the learner. Gradually the learner begins to takeover some of the work under the close supervision of the expert (International Reading Association 1998). As the child grows in experience and expertise in performing the task, the expert passes over more responsibility to the learner. Eventually the learner takes on full responsibility of the task. Using the example mentioned above the learner eventually writes independently.

It can be concluded that constructivist learning theories drawn from the ideas of Vygotsky (1978) focus on how learning takes place. They emphasise the way learning is enhanced through interaction with the environment. They also highlight the role that the teacher/expert plays in the learning process, that of providing appropriate challenge and support to the learner.

The constructivist theories provide a basis for communication and collaboration in the classroom among learners of all ages. Teachers can help by creating opportunities for learners to interact with each other around a subject. According to Vygotsky (1978) knowledge and understanding are not gained through the transmission of information but rather, are socially constructed through the process of active engagement with the subject matter and with others.

As for the scaffolding model mentioned above, it would be difficult to apply it in the Malawian context. The model is constructed around an ideal situation in which the expert (teacher) works with the novice (learner) on one-to-one basis. Malawi's classrooms are overcrowded and there is a short fall of teachers.

2.2.3 Reader response learning theories

Reader response learning theories are also known as transactional theories. In their purest form they are applied to the teaching of literature. They are associated with Louise Rosenblatt (1978). According to Rosenblatt a text is print on a page until a reader infuses meaning into it. Meaning of a text is a two-way process that resides in the transaction that occurs between the reader and the text. The reader comes up with own interpretation using his/her previous experiences and pre-occupations and also

guided by the text (Gambrell et al. 2000). There is no single fixed meaning in every literary work. Instead it is the individual reader who creates meaning through a *transaction* with the text depending on the reader's emotions, concerns, life experiences and knowledge about reading. The reader uses prior knowledge and experience to understand the text. At the same time the text shapes the reader by creating new experiences (Rosenblatt 1991).

An important key concept of the reader response theories is that a reading *event* is time, place, and reader specific (Collins and Smith 1990). If any of these three variables changes (time, place, and reader) the transaction that takes place also changes. The event will be new and different (Collins and Smith 1990). For instance, a teacher's reaction to a novel or a book that he/she reads today together with students will be different from the reaction that the teacher had hitherto.

Reader response theories recognise what a reader brings to the text when engaged in the reading process. This includes past and present experiences as well as their personality. Each interpretation of text is subjective and unique since each reader interprets the text according to their experiences and background knowledge. Prior knowledge about the subject, personal attitudes toward the subject, personal interests, and background experiences determine how a person will construct meaning from a text.

Another important feature of the reader response theory according to Rosenblatt (1978) is that readers do different things with different kinds of text (Collins and Smith 1990). Although a reader draws upon past experiences in order to construct meaning from words being read in a text, a reader requires different things from various texts. For instance, a reader will read a novel with pleasure. This will be different from when the same reader reads a book in anticipation of writing a test. Rosenblatt refers the different purposes readers have as they read a text to *efferent reading* and *aesthetic*.

Classroom techniques based on reader response theories encourage learners to explore their own thinking and to trust their own responses to a text they have read. The learners are engaged in three activities as they read namely reading, writing down their responses as they read (responses such as questions, notes, topics to bring up for discussion), reflecting on what they read through writing and talking about it as they share their responses with others.

When learners do this they are involved in *schema building* (Collins and Smith 1990). Teachers encourage learners to be aware of what they bring to the text as they read. This helps the learners to recognise their own cultural background and to work towards understanding the cultural background of other people such as those in the text. Learners on their part are thus active. They do not entirely rely on the teacher's interpretation of a text. Instead, the learners construct their own meaning by connecting the textual material to issues in their own personal lives and describing what they experience as they read. In this way the learners' responses are valued. As a result they begin to see themselves as having authority and responsibility to make evaluations about what they read.

The individual interpretation of a text constructed by several learners implies that there will be diverse interpretations and meanings to a text. Through interaction and sharing of these responses with other learners, learners move beyond their initial individual reaction and consider other people's interpretation. In this way the learners widen their views. Research findings have revealed that learners in reader-response classrooms read more and make richer personal connections with texts than those who use traditional methods (Mora and Welch no date). A reader-response classroom helps learners to become good critical thinkers.

It is important to note that not all learners' interpretations and responses are valid and appropriate. Meanings of texts cannot be entirely subjective (Mora and Welch no date). Therefore there is need for teachers to ensure that meanings are grounded in the text itself and in the context in which the text is read (ibid.).

2.2.4 Interactive learning theories

Interactive theories describe what readers do as they read (Tompkins 2003). Alderson describes interactive theories as those “...in which every component in the reading process can interact with any other component” (2000:18). Interactive theories stress that readers make meaning from what they read through a combination of text based information and the reader’s own background knowledge *schemata*. The theories recognise the simultaneous interaction of what are called bottom-up and top-down processes during reading (Grabe and Stoller 2002; Li et al. 2007; Tompkins 2003). Bottom-up theories refer to situations in which a reader derives meaning in the reading process by first noticing letters in the text and then combining these to form words and sentences to make meaning in the brain. Top-down theories say that a reader gets meaning from a text by first activating background knowledge and then noticing information in the text. Both top-down and bottom-up processes are required and are complementary to each other.

In the past educators argued on these two processes of reading (Tompkins 2003), that is whether readers moved from noticing letters in the text and combining these into words to make meaning in the brain, or the other way around, that is, activating background knowledge to noticing information in the text. Currently, educators agree that the two processes take place interactively at the same time (Tompkins 2003). Grabe and Stoller (2002) reaffirm that the bottom-up and top-down processes work together. They argue that during reading, word recognition which is a bottom-up ability to turn letters into sounds is informed by the top-down skills using background knowledge, inferencing and prediction.

Empirical studies have also shown that the top-down and bottom-up processes take place simultaneously and are essential to a skilled reader. The degree to which the top-down and bottom-up processes come into play in the interaction process depends on the purpose for reading. Skimming will not require the same mix as reading for pleasure, just as scanning will not require the same mix as critical reading (Urquhart and Weir 1998).

Many of the processes that fluent readers use are bottom-up and automatic. When automatic bottom-up processes are not enough for the reader to use in comprehending what is being read, top-down processes such as context and syntax cues can be activated (Grabe and Stoller 2002). The results of a New York University study (2007) show that letter-by-letter decoding is the dominant reading process accounting for sixty two percent of reading speed. Holistic word recognition contributes ten percent and whole language processes contribute twenty two percent to reading speed (ibid).

One important element of the interactive theories is that they echoed the importance of the schema theory (Tompkins 2003). Schema theory describes the process by which readers combine their own background knowledge with the information in the text in order to understand that text (Stott 2001). In other words, the background knowledge is like a file in the brain that is referred to as schema or schemata if there are more than one *file*. Exponents of this theory like Rumelhart (1980) claimed that human beings understand a new thing only when they can relate it or associate it with something that they already knew. Carrell explains that,

The process of interpretation, according to schema theory is guided by the principle that every input is mapped against an existing schema and that all aspects of that schema must be compatible with the input information (1983:1).

According to Anderson (1984) the schema helps a reader to understand the content of the text, attend to specific information in the text, fill in missing information within the text, and to recall the text. Brown (2001) in agreeing with Anderson says that a text does not by itself carry meaning. The reader brings schemata to the printed word that is to say, the reader brings with them their own information, knowledge, emotions as well as culture to the reading process. A reader's ability to understand a text therefore depends to a large extent, on how much related schema the reader has. The reader's knowledge and experience of the world affects the reader's comprehension of a text. Good readers make use of existing schemata and modify them with any new information.

The schema theory has been linked to Piaget's theory of development and the two types of learning: assimilation and accommodation (Pearson 2001). Piaget's theory stipulates that a learner integrates new knowledge into his/her already existing knowledge base through assimilation. When a learner assimilates new information he or she stores it in existing schema or creates new constructs or adds new information to existing knowledge structures referred to as accommodation. Accommodation of new information modifies the structure of the learner's schema to fit the new data (ibid).

The schema theory has been described as a major influence of the top-down theory of reading. This is because the schema theory views the meaning of a text being determined by the schemata that the reader brings to the text. All readers carry different schemata (background information) as they read a text (Stott 2001).

The schema explains why it is possible for people to disagree on an issue, an event, a story, and any other thing. People disagree because they approach an issue, an event, a story, and any other thing with very different background experience and knowledge (Pearson 2001).

According Li et al. (2007) there are three types of schemata: linguistic schemata, content schemata and formal schemata. Linguistic schema is the readers' existing language proficiency in vocabulary, grammar and idioms (ibid). Linguistic knowledge plays an important part in text comprehension. Content schemata includes being familiar with the subject matter of the text, understanding of the topic a text is talking about, and the cultural elements needed to interpret a text. Familiarity with the topic has a direct influence on readers' comprehension. The more a reader knows about a topic, the easier it is for the reader to comprehend the text. For instance if a reader is reading a text which contains words such as head teacher, chalkboard, desks, text books, worksheets and that reader is familiar with the school environment then the reader will be able to comprehend the text. That reader is said to have content schemata. Likewise, if a reader is not able to make sense of a text, it is caused by lack of schemata that can fit with the content of the text (Brown 2001). Formal schemata include knowledge about different text types and genres (Li et al. 2007).

Studies in various types of schemata (content, formal and linguistic) agree that when learners are familiar with the topic of the text (have content schemata), are aware of the structural make-up of the text (have formal schemata), and are skilful in decoding words and how the words fit together in a sentence (have linguistic schemata), they are in a better position to comprehend the text. If there is a deficiency in any one of the schemas mentioned above, the result will be comprehension deficit (Al-Issa 2006).

There are many aspects to content schemata which include background knowledge. According to Pang et al. 2003 background knowledge includes knowledge of the world, culture, subject-matter and linguistic knowledge. The background knowledge that a reader has depends on the lived experiences that the reader has had. Cultural background knowledge facilitates comprehension (Burt et al. 2003; Hirsch (Jr.) 2006; Pang et al. 2003). For example, for one to understand jokes and humour it depends on shared cultural knowledge between the person cracking the joke and the listener. Similarly understanding of jokes and humour in a text depends on shared cultural knowledge between the writer and the reader.

Burt et al. 2003; Hirsch (Jr.) (2006) explain that readers may not comprehend a text even when they know the meanings of all the words used in the text. This is because readers also need to understand the cultural context in which the text is written. Burt et al. cite an example of the words *tree house*. Although a reader might be familiar with trees and houses, the words will have no meaning if the reader has no experience of children making playhouses in trees.

Burt et al. (2003) observe that English language learners' understanding of a text may also be affected by their own culturally based schema. For example, a Malawian pupil (a Chichewa speaker) from the rural area learning the colours of the rainbow for the first time might find it difficult to name and appreciate some colours. The pupil comes from a culture whose language has five shades of colours, red, black, yellow, white and green. The pupil has no background knowledge of colours such as violet, indigo, maroon, sky blue, and navy blue just to mention a few. When reading an English text on colours Malawian learners will face a number of problems unlike when they are

reading a text in their native language. This is because the schema on the colours is culturally specific and not part of Malawian pupils' cultural background. As learners read they are interacting with a social artefact (the text and language of the text) embedded in a different socio-context which they are not familiar with. Stott (2001) argues that the readers' cultures can affect everything starting from the way the reader views reading itself, the content and formal schemata they hold, right down to their understanding of individual concepts.

In addition to cultural background knowledge, readers need to be familiar with how various text and genres are organised in order to comprehend a text. According to Carrell (1992) knowledge about different text structures and what to expect from these structures facilitates comprehension. Jiang and Grabe (2007) also agree that awareness of how texts are organised is part of a reader's overall comprehension abilities. Some researchers such as Goldman and Rakestraw (2000); Koda (2005) have also argued that awareness of text structure facilitates reading comprehension and recall. Goldman and Rakestraw (2000) after reviewing structural aspects of reading text, concluded that readers who are knowledgeable about text features and also have background knowledge about the text structure can better comprehend a text than those readers who are less the same.

Learners can read better in their second language if they learn text characteristics, and if they know how to handle a variety of strategies for getting meaning from text (Walter no date). A number of research studies have demonstrated that reader's awareness of text structure promotes reading comprehension (Carrell 1992; Dickson et al. (1995); Meyer and Poon 2001; Walter no date). Dickson et al. (1995) reviewed the reading comprehension literature and synthesised secondary and primary research on text structure and physical presentation of text and its relation to reading. The review showed the following:

- Well presented physical text facilitates reading comprehension.
- Text structure and student awareness of text structure are highly related to reading comprehension.

- Explicit instruction in the physical presentation of text and text structure facilitates reading comprehension.

Different text types are organised differently. First language readers often know unconsciously what type of information to expect and where it will occur (Walter no date). This is not the case with second language learners. The rhetorical conventions governing the organisation of a text type can be different from one language to another (ibid). In the classroom teachers can help second language learners to focus on the rhetorical organisation of various second language text types. Teachers can discuss with the learners text features such as titles, illustrations and the actual structure of a text. Being taught what type of information to expect and where it will occur can facilitate second language comprehension. For instance newspapers have features that can be used to enhance learners' skills in skimming, scanning and locating information. Teachers can use the newspapers text structure to teach strategies such as scanning, skimming and locating information. Teachers can also provide activities that may help learners distinguish for example a fairy tale from a newspaper article, a narrative story from an informative text. The more the learner knows about a topic or text the easier for the learner to get the information about the text.

The schema theory has had direct impact on the classroom. It provides a theoretical account of how humans learn. It also provides a theoretical and empirical basis for some teachers' instructional practices. For instance, the schema theory focuses on the role old knowledge plays in acquiring new knowledge. What this implies in the classroom is that teaching and learning has to start from what is already known to the unknown in order for a new concept to be understood. What is already known might be from the learner's experience. For example a standard four Malawian child from the rural area reading a text with the sentence: *The water was flowing* from the tap, will use his/her experience of water flowing in a river or on the ground after heavy rains to understand the concept of water flowing. He/She will use this experience or background knowledge to understand the new concept of water flowing *from a tap* although he/she might not have seen a tap before.

In cases where learners do not have sufficient background knowledge they need to be given some background knowledge from which to interpret the text. Instruction in the classroom therefore needs to address the specific background knowledge required by the learner in order for the learner to understand a text. The teacher needs to ask learners some questions about the topic or text and then gauge how much prior knowledge the learners have. Based on this knowledge the teacher can build the learners' background knowledge. The teacher can use pre-reading activities to build the learners' vocabulary. Words which are difficult for learners to understand using context cues are pre-taught. This will help learners build their schema and increase the learners' knowledge and cultural background which are needed to understand the text.

While the schema theory affects the comprehension of both first and second language readers, it has significant implications for second language learners who usually lack the background knowledge necessary to comprehend text in their new language (Stoicovy 2004). Investigations have been carried out to find out how useful the notion of schema theory is for second language reading (Keshavarz et al. 2007; Nassaji 2007; Rashid 2002; Yazdanpanah 2007). The results of this research have been used to improve instruction in the classroom (Al-Issa 2006; Nassaji 2007; Pearson 2001). Rashid (2002) investigated the effect of background knowledge on engineering students learning English as a foreign language. The results confirmed that background knowledge plays a role in reading comprehension. Keshavarz et al. (2007) investigated the effects of linguistic simplification and content schemata on reading comprehension and recall. Results from data analysis showed a significant effect of the content and English Foreign Language proficiency but not of the linguistic simplification on reading comprehension and recall.

Studies on the schema theory have helped in understanding reading comprehension in both first and second language teaching and learning. The theory has been used to explain a number of cognitive processes such as inferencing, remembering, reasoning and problem solving. The major contribution that the notion of schema has made is that it has drawn scholars' attention to the constructive nature of the reading process, the role of the reader and the interaction between the text and the reader's background

knowledge. These developments have impacted on second language comprehension research and instruction.

Despite the insights brought by the schemata theory there are some limitations in the use of schema theory in second language teaching. Psychologists and psycholinguists such as Adams, (1990) question the explanatory usefulness of schema-driven explanations for reading ability. Other people question the role of schema theory as a research theory. They argue that it is difficult to know exactly how background knowledge is called upon and used during reading. Walter challenges the idea that background knowledge is codified into mental schemata (as proposed by Carrell (1983). Walter argues that there is no empirical evidence that shows background knowledge codified into mental schemata (Walter no date).

Nevertheless the researcher agrees with Burt et al. (2003) that the interactive theories seem to be viable especially for second language learners who are not fluent in reading. Brantmeier (2004) also confirms the viability of the interactive theories in her review of the interactive model that captures both bottom-up and top-down processing. Brantmeier (2004) discusses how new research with adult learners of different languages across stages of language instruction, validates the interactive theory.

2.2.5 Theoretical orientations that affect the teaching of reading and writing

Theories of how children learn, particularly how children learn to read and write, influence instructional approaches that teachers use (Chatry-Komarek 2003; Cziko et al. 2000; Guthrie 2004; Tompkins 2003; Williams 2007; Yang and Wilson 2006). The theoretical orientation to reading that a teacher has, determines the goals the teacher sets for the classroom reading lesson and what is perceived as good reading behaviour. For instance, early theories of reading assumed reading to be passive and bottom-up (Dechant 1991; Gough 1972). Reading was viewed as a decoding process of recognizing the printed letters and words, building up meaning for a text from the smallest textual units at the bottom (letters and words) to larger units at the top (phrases and clauses) (Dechant 1991). Through this theory the reader was viewed as passive. For instance, when a child was able to decode a text it was believed that the

meaning and understanding would follow. The text contained the message/meaning of the text and through decoding the text the child /reader discovered what that message was (Hirsch 2006). Stanovich and Stanovich (1999) said that the ability to decode text by knowing how sound is represented in print is very important for success in learning to read. In the classroom learners are taught the alphabetic principle and how to manipulate phonemes in words. Problems of reading in a second language situation were viewed as decoding problems (Wray 1994).

The bottom-up view of reading however, had some limitations. One limitation was that of viewing reading as a linear process. According to Gough (1972) during reading, comprehension took place in a linear order of processing from individual letters to words, phrases to sentences and comprehending the message conveyed by the writer through the text. The theory viewed reading as a passive process of reconstructing meaning of the text. The meaning of the text was supposed to come naturally as the code was broken. Reading was considered a sequential process moving from parts to whole. In reading the emphasis was on decoding, meaning was secondary. In addition the theories do not recognize the contribution of the reader. For the reader to comprehend the text it requires the reader's knowledge of the language and how the language works, previous reader's experience and knowledge.

The second group of theorists viewed reading as a *top-down* process. The theory emphasized what the reader brought to the text. Theorists in this group held the view that comprehension begins in the mind of the reader who already has some ideas about the meaning of the text (Carrell et al. 1992) and proceeded from whole to part. Reading was seen as an active process of constructing meaning. The meaning of the text was dependent upon the background knowledge and understanding that the reader brought. If a reader had background knowledge about a topic, the reader was likely to form a hypothesis about what the text meant and relied on fewer clues in the text. So meaning was brought to print and not derived from print. The reader formed hypotheses and made predictions and sampled the text to confirm or reject predictions (Carrell et al. 1992; Pressley 2000).

Kenneth Goodman contributed much to the meaning-based approach although he claimed not to be the founder (Goodman 1992). Goodman described reading as a 'psycholinguistic guessing game', in which the reader reconstructed ... a message which has been encoded by a writer as a graphic display" (1967: 126-35). Through an analysis of children's reading errors (which Goodman called *miscues*) he and his colleagues produced evidence that supported the contention that children instinctively tried to make sense of what they were doing when they read.

According to Goodman there were three cues that helped a good reader to decode words in a text. These were; semantics, syntax and the graphic-phonemic cues. The most important of these three was semantics while as the least important was the graphic-phonemic cue. This theory viewed reading as an active process in which there was interaction between the author and the reader. For instance, when a reader was reading a text and came across a word that was difficult to read, he tried to guess what the word was, based on the context first. The reader could then try to guess what the word was, based on syntax. If these two cueing systems failed to provide an appropriate word, the reader would now focus on the letters of the word and try to pronounce it. In this process, the reader was to interpret the text (Carrell et al. 1992; Wray 1994). In his theory Goodman asserted that good readers depended on context for word recognition and that they made less use of letter information than poor readers.

Smith (1994) agreed with Goodman. He defined reading as essentially a meaning-making process. In order for a reader to receive the printed message, the reader must perceive, interpret, hypothesize, and evaluate. The reader also used his background knowledge and the clues in the text provided by the writer (Carrell et al. 1992; Wray 1994).

Some researchers on reading such as Stanovich (1986) and Adams (1990) have challenged Goodman's theory of reading as a result of his inadequate account of word recognition. Stanovich and Adams pointed out that although Goodman asserted that good readers depended on context for word recognition and that they (readers) made

less use of letter information than poor readers, it was the good readers who did not need to use context in order to decide upon a word. It was difficult for poor readers to recognize a word straight away. They needed context to help in word recognition. Poor readers used a lot of valuable processing capacity to recognize a word. When poor readers did this very little processing capacity was left for comprehension. This is because individuals possessed limited amount of processing space, and the more space devoted to word identification the less space there is available for comprehension.

Empirical studies have falsified the top-down theories. Studies have shown that good readers do not sample portions of the text. Instead they process the entire text rapidly and automatically. The top-down theories do not apply well to second language learners. Readers reading topics which are completely new and foreign and have no background knowledge may find it difficult to predict ahead (make hypothesis) and may need to rely heavily on processing information on the printed page.

The view of the top-down theory on background knowledge gives a misleading notion to second language teachers. It assumes that once learners are provided with background knowledge and are allowed to use that knowledge then learners will be able to decode and comprehend text. Studies have shown that it is not only background knowledge which is required in reading but also oral proficiency in the target language. Well developed second language oral proficiency is associated with well-developed reading comprehension skills (August and Shanahan 2006).

Other people have also questioned the role of schema theory as a research theory. They noted that it is difficult to know exactly how prior knowledge is called upon and used during reading (Grabe 1991).

The third group of theorists, whose ideas were widely adopted, viewed reading as an interaction of bottom-up and top-down processes simultaneously throughout the reading process (Stanovich 1980). These theorists assumed reading to be interactive in a number of ways. First they argued that there is interaction between the reader and

the text. As a reader reads, many skills work together simultaneously in the process. Good readers allocate less processing capacity for word recognition and hence freeing more capacity for comprehension. If there are problems with word recognition more capacity is created for this (word recognition) at the expense of comprehension.

Secondly, when reading a reader derived meaning from within the text s/he read through decoding the individual words, sentences to paragraphs, and by bringing what s/he knew to the text. The more background knowledge or prior knowledge a reader had about the subject matter of a particular reading text, the more understanding of the text the reader would have.

Research findings in cognitive science clearly suggest that reading comprehension requires a learner to possess a lot of background knowledge and vocabulary (American Educator 2006). If a reader is not able to make sense of a text, it is caused by lack of appropriate schemata that can fit with the content of the text (Brown 2001). Park (2004) investigated the roles of linguistic knowledge and background knowledge, and question types in both second language (L2) listening and reading. Findings showed that second language readers processed factual information more easily than inferential information, but the reverse was true for second language listening. The data revealed that linguistic knowledge plays a significant role on both skills. However, background knowledge played a significant role for listening but not reading. Other people have also found background knowledge to be important in comprehension. They say the richer the background knowledge a reader has the richer the comprehension (Hirsch (Jr.) 2006; Pressley 2000).

One crucial thing is being acknowledged in all the three different groups of theorists on reading although the three groups emphasize different components involved in the reading process. They all underscore the importance of reading to get meaning. They all agree that the ultimate goal or reason for one to read is to get meaning.

The implication of the interactive theory in the classroom situation is that it is the pupils who have to do the reading and the writing. They need to read and to work out the meanings of words. The role of the teacher in the classroom is to make the process of reading words from a text effortless and automatic so that the mind is free to reflect on meaning (IRA and NAEYC 1998; Snow et al. 1998). It is important for the teacher to help in activating knowledge about a topic for the second language readers. The teacher should help learners to focus on features of the text that can facilitate building a scaffold for what learners will read. Features of the text such as titles, illustrations and the actual structure of the text can be used.

2.3 Instructional approaches to the teaching of reading and writing

Instructional approaches to the teaching of reading have changed considerably in the past twenty-eight years. This has been a result of theories such as constructivist, interactive, sociolinguistic, and reader response theories that have come up over the years (Tompkins 2003). For a long time there have been conflicting opinions on the best instructional approach to the teaching of reading and writing (Cowen 2003; Johnson 1999; Pearson 2004; Snow et al. 1998; Stanovich 2000; Wren no date). The debate has focused on two methods of teaching reading, that is, the phonic method (also called skill-based approach) and the whole language method (also known as meaning-based approach). The two methods reflect different underlying philosophies.

2.3.1 The Phonic Approach

This is an instructional approach that helps pupils to read by sounding out parts of words according to common pronunciation of their letters. The goal of the teacher using the phonics method is to instil in pupils the phonics rules and the common sound spellings. Once pupils have been instructed they may become independent in their reading, especially in reading new words that are spelt regularly in English. Phonics instruction is based on the theory that pupils need to break down a complicated skill such as reading into small components like letters before moving on to tackle larger components such as sounds, words and sentences. Right at the elementary level, pupils need to learn the relationship between the 44 sounds of spoken English (the phonemes) and the 26 letters of the alphabet. While this is so, it has been pointed out that children are not born with this insight and that the insight itself does not develop naturally either. Instead, it has to be taught (Lyon 1997). Pupils have to be taught letter sounds from which they can sound out all the new

words they need. Pupils have also to be taught syllables from which they can build up and recognise new words. The ability to decode words is important and critical for all learners be it first or second language learners. Learners need to be able to identify words independently and rapidly for them to read fluently with understanding.

The phonic approach was influenced by the work of Jeanne S. Chall (Snow et al. 1998). Chall intended to identify effective practices in reading instruction. She concluded that reading programmes that included systematic phonics had substantial advantages (Chall 1967). Research findings about teaching phonics (Adams 1990) also suggest that instructional approaches that include systematic phonics lead to higher achievement in both word recognition and spelling at least in the early grades. In their study Foy and Mann (2006) report that letter sound knowledge, phonological awareness are highly predictive of pre-school children's reading acquisition. Supporters of skill-based/phonics instruction have argued that children are better able to decode words on their own after learning how to decode letters, sounds and letter groupings (Armbruster et al. 2001; Blaiklock 2004; Foy and Mann 2006).

Research has shown that explicit, systematic phonics instruction is effective for beginning readers (NICHD 2000). In the classroom a body of phonics content such as letter-sound patterns is identified, presented in a logical sequence and directly taught for about ten minutes on each day during a reading lesson. The teacher teaches phonics in context rather than in isolation. The teacher does this so that learners make connections between letters, sounds and meaning. Phonics instruction in the classroom is used as a means to an end, the end being pupils' ability to read and comprehend the text they are reading.

However, phonics cannot be used as the only method of teaching reading. There is a possibility that pupils taught using phonics may become so busy making the sound of letters that they fail to understand the meanings of words, phrases or sentences they are reading. If a pupil does not recognise words quickly enough when reading, the meaning will be lost (Lyon 1997).

Malawian children start school without being able to read or write in English or any local language. Therefore, learning to read in a language such as English is likely to be problematic for many Malawian children. This is because the language that pupils speak and know best is different from the English language used by teachers and textbooks in schools. Most children do not speak English outside school. They experience English only in the classroom so their experience of English is very limited. Children start school without the concept of what printed words and letters are. They do not realise that a reader looks at print from left to right or that the print on a page is a source of information needed for reading. The reading that most children will do is in the classroom. They are likely to have no books at home to provide them with extra language experience (Mchazime 2001).

From these observations we may predict that without effective instructional approaches in teaching reading and writing, large numbers of these pupils will have problems in learning to read and write. Such learners depend on effective instructional approaches to help them become readers and writers. In school the Malawian child will need to learn very fast how English letters sound and how to combine them to form words. The learning will also demand the child's ability to form letters, ability to combine these letters to make words and the words to make sentences. The child is expected to do all these manipulations while using correct English structures.

In addition, the syllable method used in the teaching of Chichewa may cause some confusion when used to teach pupils their first reading words in English. The sounds in Chichewa are different from those in English. Unlike in Chichewa, many letters in English have several possible sounds. For example the letter *o* has one sound in Chichewa. In English the same letter *o* has several sounds such as in /bɔi/, /'wʊmən/, /'wɜ:d/, and /bʊk/. This might be confusing to a ten year-old child learning to read its first words in English. A comparison of the Bantu languages to which Chichewa belongs will reveal that the basic building block for Chichewa is the syllable, while for English it is the letter or phoneme. The sound differences in Chichewa and English may constitute an area of difficulty for pupils learning English. Consequently, teaching English as a second language will require ensuring that pupils understand the

stream of speech, so that they are able to hear the distinctive sound features and to approximate their production. Despite the contrast in the two languages the use of the phonic methods in the elementary grades may be useful with the possibility that similar underlying processes will help children decode and read words in Chichewa and English. In their research Liberman and Liberman (1990) observed that although teaching students to phonologically decode words is difficult and demanding, it is achievable. Once this ability is achieved, it has long lasting effects.

2.3.2 The Whole Language Approach

The whole language approach is also known as the meaning-based approach. The approach emphasises oral and silent reading as well as reading authentic literature. It focuses on whole words and drawing meaning from the context of words within sentences and paragraphs.

This approach was influenced by the work of Kenneth Goodman. Goodman said that reading was a natural process which can be learned by a child, just as a child is able to learn to speak, without being taught the rules and conventions of printed text. Just as the need to communicate orally prompted children to master vocabulary and learn to piece whole sentences together, children could be motivated to learn to communicate in written form (Coles 2000). Goodman argued that reading was a *guessing game* in which the reader made use of context clues like recognising words printed on the page, word meanings, grammatical clues, and reading strategies such as predicting, guessing, and reading silently.

In the classroom, whole language instruction focuses on the flow and meaning of the text. Pupils are encouraged to decode each word through its larger context. Pupils focus on whole words and draw meaning from the context of those words within sentences and paragraphs. The teacher is expected to foster in pupils a love for reading authentic and connected text and to let pupils read real books alone and with

others. A pupil is said to be a good reader when he/she can use a series of context clues and reading strategies to understand by himself/herself a text he/she has not seen before. Good readers, according to Lyon are able to relate what is on the page to what they already know. They have good vocabularies and are able to summarise, predict

and clarify what they read. Good readers are also able to employ the sentence structure within the text to enhance their comprehension (Lyon 1997).

2.3.3 The Balanced Approach

In spite of the various arguments given in support of these two approaches (phonics and whole language); classroom practice shows that both have advantages and disadvantages as regards their use. This is especially evident in English as a second language context like that of Malawi. It has been argued that the use of phonics may create problems in pupils' understanding of the full meaning of a text, as a result of constantly breaking down words into parts (Devine 1984). In the Malawian situation, a pupil enters school with limited or no exposure to the English language; hence s/he hardly has prior knowledge of concepts related to phonemic sensitivity, letter knowledge, print awareness, the purposes of reading, general verbal skills, and vocabulary. Indeed, it can be argued that at this elementary stage, the Malawian pupil needs to learn English through the whole word approach first before phonics can be used. This approach could help pupils to read their first words in English through memorizing the shape of every word they learn. However, such pupils may not be able to read every new word they encounter by memorizing the words by shape.

Although the whole language approach provides a better understanding of the text and a more interesting approach to reading than the phonics one, on its own it cannot help pupils to read, especially in a second language situation. There are too many words in the English language for learners to rely on memorization as a primary word identification strategy. Therefore the use of the whole language method is also likely to be problematic. In this method the meaning of the text is dependent upon the background knowledge and understanding that the reader brings to the text (Hirsch (Jr.) 2006). For the Malawian pupil there is no understanding that the reader can bring because there is no connection between the written text and the speech of the text. Even if a pupil is able to decode a word that word has no meaning. Thus the Malawian pupil will have difficulty in understanding the connection between text and speech. Wren says,

When children have limited English...vocabulary,
teaching them to decode the few words they know

probably won't help them much. The act of reading is really all about getting meaning from text, children who can only read a few words are not likely to learn that text has a function or to develop an appreciation for the value of that function (no date: 2).

Although there have been conflicting claims about instructional methods that constitute effective teaching of reading and writing in English, it has been argued that neither of the two approaches (phonics or whole-word) can be successful with all children. Torgesen et al. (2007) argue that no single approach to teaching is appropriate in all situations. According to Access Center (2004); MacGillivray and Rueda (2001); Torgesen et al. (2007); Tomlinson (2000); effective teaching requires alternative strategies to accomplish different goals.

Learning to read and write is a complex, multifaceted process that requires a variety of instructional approaches (IRA and NAEYC 1998; Snow et al. 1998). Teachers who use a variety of teaching approaches can safely accommodate differences in students' learning needs (Levine 1990; Shann 1990; Tobin and McInnes 2008). Some children learn by means of one approach whereas others learn through another. A mixed approach that combines phonics with whole language is likely to be beneficial to most children (Curtis 1997; Tobin and McInnes 2008). This suggests combining the two approaches may lead to optimal results.

A combination of the two instructional approaches is bound to have advantages over and above either one of the two approaches. For instance, whereas one learner may need little or no phonics to identify unknown words, another learner may need much phonics to become a proficient reader. Similarly, visual learners are likely to benefit from the whole language approach while auditory students are likely to benefit more from phonics (Curtis 1997). According to Braunger and Lewis (1997) children learn best when teachers employ a variety of strategies to model and demonstrate reading knowledge, strategy, and skills. Research findings suggest that the best approach to the teaching of reading and writing is to combine phonics and whole language approaches (NICHD 2000; Snow et al. 1998). Research has shown that teachers who use a variety of approaches to teach reading and writing are more likely to

succeed in their efforts (Taylor et al. 2002; Tobin and McInnes 2008) than those who do not. A study at New York University (2007) confirmed that the three reading processes: phonics in which words are decoded letter by letter; holistic word recognition, in which words are recognized by their shape and whole language in which words are recognized by the context of the sentence work together to increase speed.

A debate on effective instructional approaches to reading has evolved over the past ten years or so (Anderson 2000; Pearson 2004). Researchers and educators now agree that no single approach to reading is superior to all the rest (NRP 2000; Pearson 2004; Taylor 2008). Educators have celebrated the balanced reading approach for a number of reasons. First the balanced approach offers an alternative to the two extremes of either phonics or whole language. Secondly it provides an effective combination of instructional approaches. A combination of teaching methods used together will teach a greater range of learners. Thirdly the balanced approach recognises that children come to the classroom with different learning styles and so accommodates various learning styles. Auditory learners are likely to benefit from phonics instruction. Visual learners on the other hand are likely to benefit from whole word approach. In addition, there are different stages of reading acquisition such as spelling-sound and automatic. These different stages of reading require different approaches. Each learner enters the classroom with different skills and different level of skills. Each learner is likely to learn at different rates. As a result of such differences Gunning (2003); Pressley (2002) emphasise the need to use a variety of instructional strategies to address the needs of the individual learners.

Instead of focusing on which of the two (phonics or whole language) is a better approach, the debate now centres on the essential components of a balanced literacy approach. Some people such as Jeanne S. Chall and Marilyn J. Adams strongly feel that skill-based instruction should be emphasized within a reading curriculum while others such as Kenneth S. Goodman feel that more emphasis should be placed on authentic reading tasks (Snow et al. 1998). A number of educators have called for a *balanced approach* to the teaching of literacy especially in the early years of

education (Arkebauer et al. 2002; Cesaron 2001; Cowen 2003; Gunning 2003; Pressley 2000, 2002, 2003, 2005).

It should be noted however, that the term *balanced* itself has become the centre for discussion. There is no agreement on what constitutes the term *balanced* approach. For some people, it means having instruction in phonics balanced with whole language instruction (Grossen 1997). For others, it means starting with phonics at the elementary grades followed by whole language or vice versa. It is not clear how exactly this mixture should be accomplished in the classroom situation. For Pressley (2002) balanced instruction is that which integrates skills instruction and holistic literacy opportunities. According to Pressley, the integration should include the development of decoding skills, sight words and rich vocabulary development, specific comprehension skills, and reading within a sociocultural context. Spiegel (1998) on her part departs from the debate of phonics versus whole language. For her, the balanced approach is an approach built on research. It views teachers as informed decision-makers. It is therefore flexible, and it is built on a comprehensive view of literacy. According to Spiegel “this comprehensive view of literacy is inclusive”. She argues that:

- literacy involves both reading and writing;
- reading is not just word identification, but word identification is part of reading;
- readers must be able to take different stances in reading: aesthetic and efferent;
- writers must be able to express meaningful ideas clearly;
- writing is not just grammar, spelling, and punctuation, but those are all part of effective writing;
- a comprehensive program develops life-long readers and writers.

Snow et al. 1998 are not happy with the use of the term *balance*. They suggest the use of the term *integration* rather than *balance*. They argue that an integrated approach brings into sharper focus all requirements necessary for understanding reading instruction. Strickland (1998) seems to agree with this view when she cautions against using instructional extremes. In order to avoid future debates she advises against advocating either phonics or whole language instruction.

The National Reading Panel (NRP) in America synthesised the extensive research on teaching students to read (Pressley 2001(a)), focusing on children from kindergarten age to third grade. The panel concluded that both phonics and whole language are important in teaching children how to read (NRP 2000). In its report, the panel contended that these two strategies-phonics and whole language-along with a good deal of time for children to read, to be read to, and to write, are important components of balanced reading instruction.

2.4 Research-based critical skills and effective approaches in teaching reading

Over the last sixty years, scientists from many fields including psychology, linguistics, paediatrics and education have been studying the reading process (Walsh et al. 2006). This science of reading has led to a number of breakthroughs (Walsh et al. 2006) which can help in developing literacy in children. In their synthesis of research, the National Reading Panel identified key skills and methods that are critical to achievement in reading. The Panel identified explicit and systematic instruction in five components as essential to effective reading instruction (Pressley 2001). Five of the six elements of reading instruction the Panel researched yielded positive results in reading achievements. In other words, explicit and systematic teaching of these five components was found to be crucial to effective reading instruction and achievement in reading. These elements included phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (NRP 2000; Pressley 2001 (a)).

August and Shanahan (2006) also report that instruction that provides coverage of the key components of reading identified by the National Reading Panel has clear benefits for language-minority students. Furthermore, the different stages of acquiring reading such as letter-sound, word recognition and automatic require different instructional approaches. This study would like to adapt these five elements: phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension as the components of its balanced approach.

2.4.1 Instruction in phonics

Phonics instruction teaches pupils the relationship between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language (Armbruster et al. 2001; Texas Education Agency 2002 (a); Wren 2002). Thus

through systematic and explicit instruction in sound/symbol relationships (phonics), pupils learn the relationship between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken words (Moats 1999; Texas Education Agency 2002 (a). While not sufficient in itself for reading success, knowledge of the alphabet principle that is, letters in written words representing the phonemes in spoken words, is important for learners to develop good decoding skills. Equally important is learners' knowledge of the letters in English. The letters in English are the basic units of reading and writing. Several studies have demonstrated that familiarity with the letters of the alphabet is an indicator of future reading success.

Research on phonics has indicated that letter-sound knowledge is a prerequisite to effective word identification. The ability to identify words in print is the foundation for reading. Research findings on instruction in phonics also indicate that awareness of the relation between sounds and the alphabet can be taught (Liberman and Liberman 1990). Phonics instruction is important because skill in phonics helps pupils to recognize familiar words and decode unfamiliar ones. This ability significantly improves pupils' word recognition, spelling, and reading of words and sentences (Moats 1999; Learning First Alliance 2000; Texas Education Agency 2002 (a). Moats (2005) asserts that learning to spell and learning to read rely on much of the same underlying knowledge such as the relationships between letters and sounds. According to Learning First Alliance (2000); Texas Education Agency (2002 (a) a primary difference between good and bad readers is the ability to use letter-sound correspondence to identify words. Students who acquire and apply the alphabet principle early in their reading careers reap long-term benefits (Babayigit and Stainthorp 2007). A Houston-based study in America concluded that at-risk students performed better when explicit, systematic phonics instruction was taught first in their reading curriculum (Foorman et al. 1998).

Many studies have shown that learners in kindergarten through the sixth grade benefit from systematic and explicit instruction in phonics (NRP 2000). Improvement in phonological awareness positively impacts on word identification skills which in turn lead to improved comprehension skills. Koda (1999) explains that phonological decoding skills are a necessary part of instruction especially for second language learners who are not literate in English. Koda (1999) points out that, phonological

processing skills are amongst important reading skill components that distinguish native English readers from non native English readers.

A variety of approaches to systematic phonics instruction have been shown to be effective (August and Shanahan 2006; Juel and Minden-Cup 2000; NRP 2000). The National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) reported that direct instruction in phonics was highly effective under a variety of teaching conditions with a variety of children. Instruction in phonological awareness helps learners to identify the alphabetic principle. Simultaneously, learning to read alphabetic script also develops phonological awareness. Although the alphabetic skills are critical as foundation skills and primary focus of beginning instruction, all the five components phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension reinforce each other and so develop simultaneously (Kruidenier 2002) in facilitating comprehension. In the classroom teachers need to focus on all the five components (ibid).

2.4.2 Instruction in phonemic awareness

Phonemic awareness is being able to hear, identify and manipulate individual sounds also known as phonemes in spoken syllables and words (Adams 1990; Armbruster et al. 2001; Moats 1999). Phonemic awareness instruction is important because it helps pupils to spell (Babayigit and Stainthorp 2007). It also improves pupils' word reading and reading comprehension (Armbruster et al. 2001; Chia-Hui 2001; Pressley 2000; Spear-Swerling and Sternberg 2001). Research findings reveal that phonemic awareness instruction is effective in promoting reading (such as word reading and comprehension) and spelling skills (Adams 1990; NRP 2000). There is a substantial body of research studies that investigated issues important to the teaching of phoneme awareness (Babayigit and Stainthorp 2007; Pressley 2001 (a); Stuart 1999), and that significant gains in phonemic awareness can be achieved with teaching (Pressley 2001(a)). Findings suggest that learning such skills leads to significantly greater success in learning to read. Research findings from studies on kindergartners from diverse linguistic backgrounds also confirm that the alphabetic knowledge and phonological awareness are best predictors of success in early reading (August and Shanahan 2006; Chiappe et al. 2002; Muter and Diethelm 2001).

If phonemic awareness is a critical skill in learning to read and yet cannot be acquired naturally, this is an indication of how important it is to have it taught so that learners acquire reading and writing abilities. Adams 1990; Adams et al. 2004; Chia-Hui 2001; and Yopp 1992 offer helpful suggestions and activities for developing phonemic awareness in pupils.

Kame'enui et al. (1997) assert that one of the most compelling and well-established finding in research on initial reading are that there is an important relationship between phonemic awareness and reading acquisition. The findings show a high correlation between knowledge of letter sounds and success in learning to read (Adams 1990; Mishra and Stainthorp 2007; Stuart 1999; Torgesen et al. 2007). It is therefore important that children develop the concept that printed words are composed of letters. Knowledge of letter names appears to facilitate the development of word-recognition. Lack of phonemic awareness suggests a strong likelihood of failure to learn to read. When children cannot manipulate the sounds in spoken words, it will be difficult for them to match such sounds to letters and letter patterns, that is, they will not be able to decode (Adams 1990). Pupils who are beginning to learn to read need to learn that spoken words are composed of a limited number of identifiable, individual sounds or phonemes. This understanding, also referred to as phonemic awareness, is an important contributing factor towards learning to read successfully (Hatcher et al. 2004). A number of research findings suggest that phonemic awareness is not only the most powerful predictor of success in beginning reading but also a necessary prerequisite to learning to read (Adams 1990; Hatcher et al. 2004; Hulme et al. 2002). Wise et al. (1990) concluded that first grade readers who learned to read words by segmenting them into onset and rime subunits remembered how to read the words better than readers who segmented the words into other units. In her study Adams (1990) concluded that an analogy approach is not only an effective method for teaching pupils to decode but also a strategy, which is used by skilled readers. For instance, a pupil who is able to read *gear* will be able to learn to read *clear, bear, ear, fear, near, smear* (Adams 1990). In their study Yeh and Connell (2008) showed that instruction that emphasises phoneme segmentation not only promotes phoneme segmentation skill, but also promotes future reading ability than rhyming or vocabulary activities. It is therefore, important that children understand phonemes and

be taught to identify and manipulate these sound units. Researchers suggest that a combination of instruction in phonemic awareness and letter-sounds appears to be the most favourable for successful early reading (Haskell et al. 1992).

Other research findings suggest that better results are achieved when phonemic awareness is taught to small groups of learners (Armbruster et al. 2003; Collins 2005; Whiteley et al. 2007). Use of small groups in a classroom will be a major challenge for this study. Although the teacher/pupil ratio varies from school to school and between urban and rural schools, most schools in Malawi have a teacher/pupil ratio of over 60 pupils to a teacher. Mchazime and Siege (1998) observed that in urban areas one can find a teacher/ pupil ratio of 1:38 while in rural areas it can be as high as 1:72. In some cases it can go up to 1:100. It is therefore not possible for the study to split the number of learners in a large class into small groups. Authorities do not allow this to happen.

Research evidence on phonemic awareness shows that phonemic instruction that focuses on one or two types of phonemic awareness gets better results (Armbruster et al. 2003). The findings suggest that blending and segmentation are fundamental skills that must be taught especially at the kindergarten or elementary levels. The research findings also suggest that instructional effectiveness is increased when manipulation of letters is added to these two phonemic awareness tasks (blending and segmentation) (Armbruster et al. 2003). As regards phonemic awareness instruction, this study will focus on rhyme and initial sound identification, which are at the beginning of the phonological awareness development continuum. Considering that the study is dealing with grade four pupils in Malawi who are well above kindergarten or grade one pupils in America, it will also focus on phoneme deletion and manipulation which are tasks at the end of the phonological awareness development continuum (Armbruster et al. 2003).

2.4.3 Instruction in fluency in reading

Fluency in reading can be defined as an ability to recognise words and sentences rapidly, precisely and efficiently (Armbruster et al. 2001; Moats 1999; Perfetti and Hart 2001). According to Rasinski (2003) fluency is the ability to read accurately, quickly, effortlessly and with appropriate expression and meaning. Samuels agrees

with this definition of fluency in readers. He says “fluent readers are characterised by the ability to read orally with speed, accuracy and proper expression” (2002:167). Fluency is important because of the influence it has on comprehension. Learners need to identify words accurately and quickly for them to comprehend what they read. This is because as human beings we possess a limited amount of processing space, and the more space we devote to word identification the less space we have available for comprehension. So indeed, fluency provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension (Armbruster et al. 2001; Pikulski and Chard 2005).

Rasinski (2006) goes a step further and says that fluency is a bridge between phonics and decoding on one hand, and vocabulary and comprehension on the other. Readers who are fluent recognise words automatically (Moats 1999) and group these words quickly in order to gain meaning from what they read. Fluent readers are able to make connections among the ideas in the text and between the text and their background knowledge. On the other hand readers who are not fluent in reading focus their attention on decoding word-by-word. Such poor readers use large portions of the available resources for word decoding. This results in resources not being available for comprehending the text (Armbruster et al. 2003). Samuels (2002) in his discussion of the theory of automaticity in reading says that proficient word decoding occurs when readers move beyond conscious accurate decoding to automatic, accurate decoding. At this automatic level, fluent readers decode words with minimal attention to the activity of decoding. Such readers do not have to sound out most of the words they read. Instead they instantly and accurately recognise the words they read on sight. Fluency enables readers to understand what they read by focusing their attention on the meaning of the text rather than concentrating on decoding the words as less fluent readers do.

Although word recognition is important in reading, on its own it is not sufficient for fluent reading. In addition the reader needs to construct meaning from the recognised words. Fluent readers are able to do both tasks that is, recognise words and construct meaning at the same time. Such fluent readers are able to do this because of efficient word recognition and oral language skills (Pang et al. 2003). Texas Education Agency

(2002 (b) offer some strategies for developing reading fluency in pupils. Grabe and Stoller (2001) say that fluency can be built through exercises such as timed and paced-reading activities, word recognition exercises, read-aloud group and pair work, re-reading and extensive reading.

Research recommends the use of two instructional approaches (Armbruster et al. 2003) to teach fluency. One is guided repeated oral reading (NRP 2000; Texas Education Agency 2002 (b). In its report, the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) concluded that repeated oral reading had a positive impact on learners' word recognition, fluency and comprehension. Studies have shown that even adult learners benefit from repeated reading (Gorsuch and Taquchi 2008). In repeated reading the teacher encourages pupils to read out passages aloud while giving pupils systematic and explicit guidance and feedback. The other approach is allowing pupils to read silently on their own inside and outside the classroom with little guidance or feedback from their teachers (Texas Education Agency 2002 (c)). This latter approach will be a big challenge in the Malawian context where there are no supplementary reading materials besides textbooks (Milner et al. 2001; Chimombo et al. 2005).

The National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) reported that instructional approaches that improve fluency have a positive impact on word recognition and comprehension. Teachers need to develop both accuracy and fluency in the learners. Carnine and Carnine (2004) point out that when teachers emphasise on accuracy during early reading learners will develop habitual accuracy. Habitual accuracy in turn will contribute towards accurate reading without great effort from the learners.

2.4.4 Instruction in vocabulary

Vocabulary is the knowledge of words and word meanings (Diamond and Gutlohn 2006). According to Stahl (2005) and Scott (2008) vocabulary knowledge is knowledge of a word that includes its definition and how that word fits into the world. Learners need to learn not only new words but also deepen their knowledge of the words they already know. Vocabulary is a crucial component skill that supports early reading comprehension development (Grabes 2006; Hirsch (Jr.) 2006; NRP 2000; Stahl 2005). The NICHHD describes vocabulary as “occupying an important ground

in learning to read (2000: 4-15).

McShane (2005) says vocabulary is vital to reading comprehension in two ways. The first is oral vocabulary. In the process of learning to read a learner learns to connect printed words with words in his/her vocabulary. One way of making that connection is through decoding. Using letter sounds the learner translates the printed symbols into meaningful words. Decoding will be useful especially when the words are already in the learners' oral vocabulary. Oral vocabulary is critical for meaningful reading. According to McShane (2005) the second link between vocabulary and reading is that readers cannot comprehend a text unless they understand the meanings of most words in the text. Readers understand the text by assembling and making sense of the words in context. Several research studies have documented the strength of the relationship that is there between vocabulary and comprehension (Carlo et al. 2004; Hui-Tzu 2008; NRP 2000; Proctor et al. 2005). The more vocabulary knowledge a reader has the more likely that reader will be able to comprehend a text.

Vocabulary in reading includes oral language development and the development of reading vocabulary (Armbruster et al. 2001). A competent reader needs to have reading vocabulary in order to communicate effectively. An example of reading vocabulary would be words that a pupil can identify in print whereas oral vocabulary refers to words that he/she uses in speaking or recognises in listening.

The importance of vocabulary knowledge for school success in general and reading in particular is well documented (Boulware-Gooden et al. 2007; Burt et al. 2003; McGee and Schickdanz 2007; NRC 1998; Scott 2008; Stahl 2005). Learners cannot understand the content of what they read unless they understand the meaning of the majority of words in the text (Antunez 2002; Armbruster et al. 2001). Studies on vocabulary instruction reveal that most vocabulary can be learnt indirectly, and that some vocabulary must be taught. There are a number of instructional approaches to the teaching of vocabulary which have been found to be effective (Taylor 2008). Direct vocabulary learning includes explicit instruction in both individual words and word learning strategies. Instruction in vocabulary before learners read a text is important. It helps both in vocabulary learning and understanding of the material to be read. Pre-reading activities help in increasing learners' word knowledge and enables

them to know what most of the words mean before they can understand what they are reading. English language learners who have deficits in their vocabulary are less able to comprehend text at grade level than their English-only peers (August et al. 2005).

Increasing the vocabulary for learners is part and parcel of the learning process. It is said that vocabulary instruction is important for all learners, be it first or second language learners (Blachowicz et al. 2005). Vocabulary development is especially important for those learning English as a second language (Diamond and Gutlohn 2006). Besides affecting reading comprehension vocabulary knowledge also helps in the way a learner participates in expressing themselves in the classroom. Vocabulary instruction can also improve learners' knowledge acquisition and understanding of the world around them (Blachowicz et al. 2005). This includes learning in other subjects such as science, social studies besides English. The learners need to recognise the words in print and match the recognition with their oral proficiency in English. Vocabulary knowledge helps improve reading, and reading experience leads to gains in vocabulary knowledge (Armbruster et al. 2001; Burt et al. 2003; Grabe 2006). According to Blachowicz et al. "Whatever a student's achievement level in a particular area of study, be it minimal, moderate, or advanced, vocabulary instruction will promote further learning" (2005: 2).

There are several other ways of helping learners develop their vocabulary. One effective way is by fostering word consciousness (an awareness of and interest in words; the ability to reflect on and manipulate words as units of language) (Scott and Nagy 2004). Scott (2008) argues that word consciousness helps students become aware of words in ways that go beyond a particular set of words. She also asserts that words are the building blocks of communication. English language learners have to therefore, learn both basic words for communication in English and academic language which is found in schools and books (Scott 2008). Some researchers suggest that vocabulary can be built through extensive reading. Hui-Tzu (2008) carried out a quasi-experiment to compare the effectiveness of reading plus vocabulary-enhancement activities and narrow reading among English as foreign language students. The findings suggest that reading plus focused vocabulary exercises are more effective and efficient than the narrow reading approach in facilitating target vocabulary acquisition and retention among EFL students. Blachowicz et al. (2005);

Scott (2008); and Yates (2008) offer some suggestions on how to increase learners' vocabulary.

In addition other ways of developing learners' vocabulary through instruction are using new words in many different contexts; identifying words inside other words for example other words from the word fisherman- *fish, fisher, is, she, he, her, man, an*; using word roots, prefixes and suffixes, and using the sound of the word. The more learners use new words in a different context the more likely they are to learn the meanings of the new words and how to use them. A number of studies that investigated issues important to vocabulary have been carried out (Carlo et al. 2004; Kuhn and Stahl 1998; Robbins and Ehri 1994). Cognitive science research also suggests that reading comprehension requires a learner to possess a lot of vocabulary and a lot of background knowledge (American Educator 2006; Hirsch Jr. 2006). Some studies on vocabulary development indicate that learners can develop their vocabulary through (a) engaging daily in oral language, (b) listening to adults read to them, (c) reading extensively on their own (Armbruster et al. 2001).

Blachowicz et al. 2005; Lesaux and Geva 2006 explain what research has shown as regards vocabulary development. They say that research has revealed that the biggest factor that differentiates the reading performance of first language learners from second language learners in English is language vocabulary knowledge. First language learners surpass second language learners. Investigations that try to address the vocabulary needs of English language learners have been carried out (Carlo et al. 2004). Findings reveal that by teaching word analysis and strategies for vocabulary learning reading comprehension for learners improves.

These findings have serious implications for the Malawian pupil learning vocabulary. Most of the parents and adults close to pupils' lives are not fluent in English. Very few households help their children with schoolwork (Chimombo 2005; Mchazime 2001). There is little of a reading culture in primary schools. Primary school teachers in Malawi do not seem to regard the home as a complementary partner in the teaching/learning process (Chimombo 2005). Schools are not well resourced in terms of teaching aids (Chimombo 2005). Most pupils' homes, especially those in rural

areas, lack radios from which they can listen to English being spoken (Chimombo 2005).

Fortunately vocabulary instruction which is appropriate for the age and ability of learners has been shown to lead to gains in learners' comprehension (NRP 2000). As indicated earlier on, one way of meeting the challenge of promoting literacy in English among Malawian pupils could lie in improving the teachers' instructional approach to the teaching of reading and writing. This is all the more reason why teachers in this study need to be trained to use effective instructional approaches, to know and incorporate ways that help pupils learn vocabulary directly.

Instruction that promotes active engagement with vocabulary is beneficial (Armbruster et al. 2001; Diamond and Gutlohn 2006; Stahl 2005). Such instruction includes explicit teaching of vocabulary before pupils read a text, using prefixes and suffixes to decipher word meaning and context cues (Armbruster et al. 2001). However, not all words can be directly taught in class (Armbruster et al. 2001; Diamond and Gutlohn 2006; NRP 2000; Scott 2008). There are more than 600,000 words in the English language.

2.4.5 Instruction in comprehension

Comprehension is the ability to understand and gain meaning from what has been read (Armbruster et al. 2001). According to Pang et al. (2003) comprehension involves word knowledge (vocabulary), thinking and reasoning. McShane (2005) agrees with this definition of comprehension and says that comprehension requires active, strategic thinking and also basic reading skills such as decoding (word identification), fluency, and vocabulary. When a reader is not able to decode automatically and read fluently then his/her comprehension suffers. According to Pressley (2001 (b)) comprehension is the culmination of a series of processes which begin with letters and sounds, proceeding to identification of words, fluent use of those skills (that is, processing of letters, sounds and word identification), and understanding of the meanings of words and sentences.

The Rand Reading Study Group (2002) defines comprehension as a process where a

reader extracts and constructs meaning from a text. The group uses the words extract and construct in order to emphasise the fact that it is not the text that determines comprehension (ibid). According to the Group comprehension involves three elements; the reader who does the comprehension, the text that has to be comprehended and the activity itself in which comprehension is a part.

Comprehension is important because it is what reading is all about. Every reader who reads a text, reads it for a purpose and reading itself is active (Moats 1999). The National Reading Panel (NRP) acknowledges this active process of reading. It says “a reader reads a text to understand what is read, to construct memory representations of what is understood, and to put this understanding to use (2000: 4). Readers make use of their experience and knowledge of the world, vocabulary and language structure, and knowledge of reading strategies in order to understand a text (Armbruster et al. 2001; Moats 1999).

Wren (2008) says there are two equally important components to comprehension. One part is decoding which is the ability to translate written text into speech. The other part is the ability to understand spoken language. Struggling readers including those learning English as a second language have problems with either language comprehension or decoding or both these (Wren 2008). In order to be able to read and understand a text a learner needs to be able to understand the language of the text. For learners to understand language they need to have knowledge of the mechanics of that language (ibid). By implication learners need to have an implicit knowledge of the English language structure in order for them to have language comprehension. Wren (2008) points out that speech is the most typical form of language. In order to understand speech a learner should be able to clearly hear, distinguish, and categorise the phonemes within the speech (ibid). A learner who has problems in distinguishing the English phonemes will not be able to hear the difference between some words such as *this, with; things, wings, fins; bread, bled*.

Good readers use comprehension strategies in order to comprehend a text they are reading. Research has shown that different methods are effective in teaching comprehension (Pang et al. 2003). Text comprehension can be developed through teaching comprehension strategies (Adler 2004; Armbruster et al. 2001; Pressley

2000, 2001(b)). Comprehension strategies help learners to have a purpose for reading and to be active and in control of their reading (Adler 2004).

Adler (2004) discusses the following seven strategies that learners can be taught, monitoring comprehension, thinking about thinking, graphic organisers, answering questions, generating questions, recognising the story structure and summarising. Teachers can teach learners these strategies. Instruction in monitoring comprehension will assist learners to be aware of what they understand and not understand as they read. When they have problems in comprehending the text they find strategies to resolve the problem. When using thinking about thinking strategy learners will have a dialogue as they read to identify where they have a problem, and put in their own words the difficult sentence. Instruction in graphic organizers can help learners to focus on the text structure. Graphic organizers will provide learners with tools they can use to examine and show the relationship in a text. For example when there is a picture or illustration at the beginning of text learners can use this picture to predict what the story is about. Instruction in answering questions will give learners a purpose for reading, will help learners to focus attention on what they are to read and they will be actively involved in the reading as they read and answer questions. A strategy in generating questions will help learners to ask questions about the main ideas of the text. Instruction in recognising story structure will help learners identify the categories of content such as characters, settings, plot and theme. When analysing the story structure the reader becomes aware of elements of the story. It is this awareness that will facilitate comprehension and memory. It has been mentioned earlier on that instruction in story structure improves comprehension. Teaching learners to summarise will help learners to put into their own words what they have read. For learners to be able to summarise they will have to determine the main ideas in a text and put these into their own words. As they summarise learners will remember what they read. Research has shown that learners who are able to summarise information are better at recalling the summarised information and more successful in answering questions about the text than those not taught to summarise (NICHHD 2000). Ahmad and Asraf (2004) examined reading comprehension strategies of four readers of first (L1) and second (L2) languages. Findings support the importance of teaching comprehension monitoring strategies and vocabulary.

In addition to using strategies there are a number of other ways to increase comprehension skills in pupils through instruction (Baker et al. 2002; Boulware-Gooden et al. 2007). In their study Baker et al. (2002) showed how to provide meaningful access to the general education curriculum for students with learning disabilities. They report that the presentation of challenging content to academically diverse learners can be demystified using content enhancement techniques. Gibson (2004) provides techniques for helping learners acquire comprehension skills and strategies.

It is critical for pupils to achieve text comprehension, especially when they move from one grade/class to another. For instance in the Malawian situation the need to be able to read in English is especially felt from standard five onwards where all text books are written in English (except the Chichewa texts) and the medium of instruction is also in English. Good command of reading skills in the English language is essential for pupils to access information written in textbooks. Consequently the ability to read in English becomes crucial for pupils in standard four before they move to standard five in order for them to be successful at school and in life in general.

The next chapter discusses the methods and procedures that were used to carry out the study. The discussion includes an overview of the study, background to the study and its genesis, how the research was set up, what happened to the participants, what methods of data collection were used and what data were collected.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology of Study

3.1 Overview of the study

The purpose of conducting this research was to investigate whether or not teachers' use of the balanced literacy approach as an intervention can improve pupils' achievement in reading and writing in English. The researcher expected to observe an increase in pupils' reading and writing abilities as manifested in previous research as the pupils responded to instructional approaches that emphasized phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The results of the investigations would either support or would not support the findings of other researchers on the use of the balanced literacy approach and its role in student learning to read.

This chapter gives details of how and why the study came to take its current form. The chapter also describes various research methods so as to highlight those aspects of research design that have practical implications to the design adopted in this study. The chapter ends by defining the research design and presenting the procedure through which the study was carried out. The background to the researcher, co-investigator and research assistant is also presented. This is done in order to show the relevance of the researchers' background to the role they played in this study.

3.2 Background to the study and its genesis

From time to time, as a curriculum specialist, the researcher went to visit schools to get first hand experience of how the curriculum in general was being implemented. In the recent past the researcher and a colleague visited some schools in the Phalombe district of Malawi to monitor and evaluate gender sensitivity among teachers in their day-to-day teaching after their training at the Malawi Institute of Education. On one such visit, the researcher witnessed an English reading lesson in a class. The teacher was teaching reading of a passage followed by dictation from the book (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools*. The teacher wrote on the chalkboard:

Teleza is / at Kulini secondary school. /

Her best friend / at school / is Jane. /
Both girls/ are in form two. / (Chilora et al. 1994:20)

The teacher went over the passage orally with the pupils. Initially pupils read the passage aloud in unison, guided by the teacher. Pupils were then asked to read the passage in rows guided by the teacher. The teacher asked some individual pupils to come to the front to read. Three quarters of the pupils raised their hands to volunteer. The teacher selected one pupil at a time. A total of ten pupils were selected. None of the ten pupils selected were able to read on their own.

The teacher erased the passage from the chalk board and dictated it to the pupils, pausing at each slash to give the pupils time to write. While writing the dictation, at each pause, pupils raised their hands and shouted “Teacher, teacher, finish! (sic)” (Pupils were telling the teacher that they had finished writing a dictated phrase so the teacher could continue dictating to the pupils the next phrase in the passage as required). Finally the teacher read the passage once more at normal speed for pupils to check what they had written. The teacher then asked pupils to exchange their books and mark each others’ work.

The researcher went around the enthusiastic class to see what pupils had written. The researcher noticed that pupils were not able to write in a straight line. They were not able to form letters of the alphabet. They did not know when to use capital letters or punctuation marks. What was even worse was that the researcher was not able to recognise a single written word in twenty exercise books that she checked at random out of a class of seventy pupils. The pupils whose lesson was observed were lively and eager to learn but they did not have the required reading and writing abilities. From what the pupils had written on that day, could one have claimed that any learning had taken place? Why were pupils not able to read and write in English?

Subsequent visits to other primary schools in the same district confirmed that the problem was widespread. A further literature study indicated that the inability to read and write at this grade level was not peculiar to the class that the researcher observed but nation-wide. Why was it that after four years of learning English pupils were not

able to read and write simple words? How would the pupils cope in standard five where the medium of instruction is English? What can be done to help standard four pupils to read and write before they get to standard five? The researcher was amazed at the pupils' motivation and willingness to try to read. The researcher's interest came from these classroom observations. She wondered what instructional approach could help these pupils to read and write in English.

The researcher was aware of the many factors that impede learners' achievement in the English language class. Some of these are serious shortages, for example of teaching and learning materials like books, but also of desks, chairs and classrooms. There are also high pupil-teacher ratios. The researcher was also aware of the background to these shortages in a typical Malawian classroom. There was no possibility within the system of reducing the class sizes or providing the teaching and learning materials that were in serious short supply in schools. To improve the situation the researcher chose the relatively easier option of using teachers. The reason for deciding to use teachers was that teachers are "the strongest influence on learning" (UNESCO 2000 (a)). Although there were some teacher shortfalls in most schools in the country, at least all schools had a teacher to teach one or two classrooms. N'Namdi (no date) says, teachers are directly responsible for creating and applying techniques and strategies that lead to reading comprehension. Therefore, this researcher decided to use teachers in the study.

Initially the researcher thought of investigating how effective the teachers were in teaching reading. The idea was dropped when the researcher reasoned that such a study would have no immediate direct effect on the standard four pupils. The researcher's argument then was that even if the teachers were found to be effective in their teaching, there would be no immediate benefit of the results to standard four pupils. The researcher decided to work on the teachers' instructional approach. A UNESCO (2000 (b)) report on inclusive education says "the way teachers teach is of critical importance in any reform designed to improve quality". Taylor et al. (2002) confirm this when they say that how children are taught is as important as what they are taught. Pupils in Malawi learn to read and write through the teaching that goes on in the classroom. Therefore the way teachers handle their classes and the way pupils

respond to this must play a part in determining to what extent the pupils learn to read and write. The many questions that the researcher initially raised were now narrowed down to “What instructional approaches can help these learners to be able to read and write in English?”

Through the print media the Malawi National Research Council called for proposals from institutions to carry out research on serious issues in education in Malawi. The researcher responded to the call. The researcher felt that indeed the inability of standard four pupils to read and write in English was an issue of great concern to the country which required urgent intervention. Since reading ability forms the basis for other areas of learning it is important to ensure that pupils in primary school attain proficiency in reading. As was required by the National Research Council of Malawi the researcher was joined by a colleague in writing the research proposal. The title of the proposal was “Improving literacy in English through the use of the balanced approach”. The research proposal was successful (Appendix 8).

Through a letter signed by the then Director of the Malawi Institute of Education permission was sought to carry out the research in Zomba district rural area (Appendix 9). The Division Manager was receptive to the idea of carrying out the research in Zomba district rural area. He pointed out that most of the interventions that had taken place before were all done in Zomba district urban area. The intervention in Zomba district rural area was a very welcome idea as far as he was concerned. He promised to do everything possible in his powers to ensure that the project started and ran smoothly to the end.

It is during this meeting that the researcher indicated what was required for the study to start off such as standard four pupil enrolment numbers for each school in Zomba district rural area, a list of standard four teachers with their academic qualifications, mode of training and the number of years they had been teaching and the schools at which they were teaching. The standard four pupil-enrolment numbers for each school were required in order to prepare the right quantities for the pre- and post-tests. The list of standard four teachers was required for random assignment of teachers to the experimental and control schools.

Four weeks after the meeting with the Division Manager the school statistics were made available to the researcher. The researcher went to collect the statistics from the District Manager. Prior to the research team visiting schools the District Manager's office notified head teachers about the researchers' intention to visit and the need for head teachers to cooperate with the research team.

With the blessing of both the Division and District Managers, the researcher piloted four schools in Zomba district rural area for a period of two terms (sixteen weeks). Having learnt some lessons from the pilot experience, the following year twelve more schools from Zomba district rural area were randomly selected for the study to be repeated. Details of the pilot and the study are presented later on in this chapter.

3.3. Research methods used in studying reading and writing

There are many approaches to dealing with research (Mackey and Gass 2005) in any subject area including studying reading and writing. The most common ones are known as quantitative and qualitative methods (ibid). Lyon and Chhabra (2004) also agree that quantitative and qualitative methods are the two major types of research methods. However, Johnson et al. (2007) add mixed research methods as a third distinct research tradition. They say that mixed methods research is a new movement or a paradigm that appeared in the first sixty years of the 20th century "in response to the currents of quantitative research and qualitative research" (Johnson et al. (2007:113). Creswell (2009) agrees with Johnson et al. (2007). Creswell (2009) says that there are three types of designs namely: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods design. Mixed method research is presented later on in the chapter but first to be discussed are quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Quantitative methods dominated social and behavioural research during the 20th century (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003). At this time positivism was the dominant world view. Value neutrality was widely expected of researchers. Methods of studying behaviors and social interactions relied heavily on objective measures (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003: ix). The authors say that during the last two decades research methods underwent some changes. The changes had an effect on the

purposes, world views and methods of studying behavior programs and social interaction (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003: ix).

Qualitative methods emerged as a reaction against the dominant quantitative methods of the time (ibid). The qualitative approach to research promoted a subjective approach to studying behaviors and social phenomenon. The qualitative approach became popular among those who were dissatisfied with the then established quantitative research methodology (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003).

Quantitative and qualitative paradigms rest on different assumptions about the role of the researcher and the nature of the world (Creswell 2009). The differences in assumptions also guide the instruments used and procedures followed to find the type of data required (ibid).

The assumptions of quantitative research are that social facts have an objective reality. “The role of the researcher is detached from the field of enquiry” (Lloyd-Jones 2003). The researcher is an observer who does not participate or influence what is being studied (Creswell 2008). Methods of carrying out the research are of primary importance. They need to agree with the purpose of research (McMillan and Schumacher 2010). The variables involved can be identified and relationship measured. Quantitative methods deal with numbers and anything that is measurable (McMillan and Schumacher 2010). Diem describes quantitative research as methods that focus on measurement, and counting, attempting to categorize and summarize using numbers and labels (2002: 1). The main goal of quantitative research is to develop generalizations that contribute to theory that enable the researcher to predict, explain and understand some phenomenon (Creswell 2009; McMillan and Schumacher 2010).

Quantitative research uses deductive inquiry (Creswell 2009; McMillan and Schumacher 2010). It focuses on individual variables and factors, and makes comparisons (Creswell 2009). Hypotheses are tested in a cause-effect manner (McMillan and Schumacher 2010). The goal of quantitative research is to establish whether the predictive generalizations of a theory hold true (Dobbin and Gatowski 1999; McMillan and Schumacher 2010; Wiersma 2000). For example, in order to

establish whether or not an intervention produces significant gains in pupils' achievement researchers have to use specific type of quantitative research known as experimental or quasi-experimental methods. Next the researchers come up with hypotheses which predict what will happen to the theoretical model that is being used. An appropriate method for the hypothesis is then identified. Finally data are collected, analyzed and findings reported.

Experimental studies are examples of studies that use quantitative methods “that attempt to empirically test a hypothesis by using ‘hard’ data and statistical techniques” (Dimsdale and Kutner 2004:7). Experimental research is used in such instances where a researcher would like to evaluate or test the effectiveness or impact of an instructional approach or product, where a researcher is interested in the amount of change as a result of treatment or intervention (August and Shanahan 2006; MacMillan and Schumacher 2010).

Qualitative research is a generic term for study methodologies described as ethnographic, naturalistic, anthropological field, or participant observer research. It focuses on having a complete picture of a situation or context or human social interaction (Cohen et al 2007; Creswell and Piano 2007; Creswell 2009). It is descriptive and it provides in-depth understanding of a situation or group of people (Creswell 2009). It is primarily concerned with the process rather than out comes or products as in quantitative research. The researcher using this approach relies on observation and description of events so has to physically go to the site or setting to observe or record human behaviour in natural settings (Creswell and Piano 2007, Creswell 2009). Qualitative research aims at thoroughly describing a situation or explaining reasons for a problem or circumstance (Creswell 2009; Diem 2002; McMillan and Schumacher 2010). The qualitative researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through human instrument and not through inventories, questionnaires or machines as is done in quantitative research. The process of qualitative research is inductive. From the descriptions the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses and theories (Creswell 2009; McMillan and Schumacher 2010).

The assumptions of qualitative research are that reality is socially constructed. It is thought that the researcher can learn most about a situation by participating and being immersed in the research. The subject matter to be studied is of prime importance and needs to be captured holistically in a natural setting (Creswell 2009; McMillan and Schumacher 2010). For instance human behaviour can be influenced by the setting in which it occurs. Within the setting there are norms, traditions, roles and values that are crucial contextual factors that may influence social behaviour. Research must be conducted in a setting where all contextual variables are operating (Cohen et al. 2007; McMillan and Schumacher 2010). It is assumed that a researcher cannot understand human behaviour without understanding the framework in which subjects interpret their thoughts, feelings and actions. The researcher needs to understand the framework (Cohen et al. 2007; McMillan and Schumacher 2010).

Despite the merits that both quantitative and qualitative approaches have, proponents from one camp have criticized the other camps' methods of study, the rigor of procedures, and the validity of the outcomes (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003). Those in the quantitative research camp claim that their data are hard, rigorous and scientific. Those who favour qualitative research claim that their data are sensitive, detailed and contextual (ibid). The arguments raised by each group against the other suggest that each type of design carries with it some strength and weaknesses.

It is important for a researcher to understand the strengths and weaknesses of any research methods. The knowledge gained in understanding the strength and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative research methods helped this researcher to conceptualize a design that would maximize on the strength of the two research methods. However, the combination of two methods posed some challenge for the researcher in the sense that she had to be familiar with both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Besides understanding the strength and weaknesses of research methods it is important for a researcher to also understand and identify the research approach that underlies any given study.

Dimsdale and Kutner (2004) recommend that studies should be methodologically appropriate for both the research questions guiding the study and the findings resulting from the study. A researcher needs to design a study in order to answer a

question that the researcher thinks is important, not to create a question to fit the design (Towne and Hilton 2004). Diem (2002) supports this contention when he says that one of the determining factors for the choice of any research design is the research question. For a research study to be valid, the research design must match the research question (ECS and McREL 2004). Shavelson and Towne (2002) in their discussion on scientific research in education point out that questions, and not methods should drive research designs. They recommend researchers to use designs that permit direct investigation of a question or questions. August and Shanahan point out that “one of the hallmarks of scientific inquiry is the application of appropriate methodology to the questions being asked” (2006:9).

However, it is also important for a researcher to realize that some designs are more appropriate for answering certain kinds of questions than others. The task of the researcher is to develop a design that matches the question(s) being asked and appropriately answers the research question(s). In conceptualizing such an appropriate design the researcher was compelled to use a design that not only answers or matches the research question but also maximises on the strengths of quantitative and qualitative methods.

The research question in this study was to investigate whether or not the use of the balanced literacy approach would produce better results in pupils’ achievement in reading and writing in English in the Malawian context. Since the aim of the research was to find the effectiveness of the balanced literacy approach on pupils’ reading and writing achievement, the adoption of mixed methods research that gave priority to quasi-experimental methods which focused on whether a causal relationship existed was seen to be in line with the question. In their discussion about a quasi-experimental design Shanahan and Beck say that such a design “allows the effectiveness of an approach to be compared with no treatment or an alternative-treatment control” so that “outcomes due to the use of an approach will not be confounded with the effects of normal maturation” (2006:417).

A report by the National Research Council (NRC) entitled *Scientific Research in Education* points out the importance of research methods as follows:

...if the design directly addresses a question that can be addressed empirically, is linked to prior research and relevant theory, is competently implemented in context, logically links the findings to interpretation ruling out counter interpretations, and is made accessible to scientific scrutiny, it could then be considered scientific (Shavelson and Towne 2002 (b): 97).

Besides considering appropriateness of methodology a researcher needs to also consider the suitability of sampling procedures (Cohen et al. 2007). Fairfax County Department of Systems Management for Human Services (2003) say that it is important for a researcher to choose a suitable sampling strategy and to realise its limitations as well because sampling can be a powerful tool for accurately measuring characteristics of a population. Along with appropriate methodology, suitable sampling procedures contribute to the quality, validity and usefulness of inferences drawn from a sample of a population (see, for example, Cohen et al. 2000). It is therefore necessary for a researcher to know the sampling procedures that are available for research in order for the researcher to choose the most suitable for the study being undertaken. A discussion of various sampling procedures relevant to this study is presented. The discussion is presented in order to demonstrate why one or two relevant sampling procedure(s) was (were) chosen for the study. The discussion focuses on probability samples. Emphasis is placed on the underlying ideas and methods rather than on mathematical derivation.

It is not possible for researchers to obtain information from individuals in a population especially when the population is large because this would be expensive, difficult, time consuming and not practical (Cohen et al. 2007). Instead researchers need to obtain data from a smaller group or subset of the total population in such a way that the knowledge gained is representative of the total population under study. This smaller group is called a sample. A sample should yield valid and reliable information if a suitable sampling strategy is used and necessary precautions taken to reduce on sampling errors.

According to Cohen and Holliday (1996) there are two main methods of sampling. A researcher has to decide to use either a probability sample (also known as a random sample) or a non probability sample which is also known as a purposive sample

(Cohen et al. 2007). Probability samples have a measure of randomness built into them and less risk of bias than a non-random probability sample (Cohen et al. 2007; McMillan and Schumacher 2010). Probability samples are useful especially in instances where the researcher wishes to make generalizations to the wider population (Cohen et al. 2007; Creswell 2008).

Under probability samples there are four types of sampling procedures that are commonly used. These are simple random, systematic sampling, cluster and stratified (Cohen et al. 2007; McMillan and Schumacher 2010; Mertler and Charles 2011). The sample in a simple random is drawn in such a manner that each person has an equal chance of being drawn during each selection round (Cohen et al. 2007; McMillan and Schumacher 2010; Mertler and Charles 2011). In this way the random sample of the general population becomes representative of the larger whole. Random sampling helps in eliminating bias that the researcher might have. However one disadvantage of the strategy is that at times a list of the entire population might not be available.

Systematic sampling involves selecting one unit on a random basis and choosing additional units at evenly spaced intervals (systematically selecting every x th unit from the list of n units) until the desired number of units is obtained (Cohen et al. 2007; Creswell 2008; McMillan and Schumacher 2010). One advantage of this strategy is that it is easier to draw and execute (Fairfax County Department of Systems Management for Human Services 2003). This strategy can spread the membership more evenly across the entire population than random sampling.

In cluster sampling groups instead of individuals from the population are used for the sample (Cohen et al. 2007; Creswell 2008; McMillan and Schumacher 2010). The researcher lists and identifies all clusters that comprise the population and estimates the number of population members per cluster in order to determine the number of clusters required for the sample. Cluster sampling is convenient when the population is very large. In a large population it is more manageable to use clusters because of time, expense and convenience. Usually schools are used as clusters.

In stratified sampling the researcher divides the population into homogenous groups (strata); each group contains subjects with similar characteristics (Cohen et al. 2007;

Creswell 2008; McMillan and Schumacher 2010). Then the researcher randomly selects samples from each stratum. In order to organise a stratified sample the researcher has to identify characteristics in the wider population which must also appear in the sample. One advantage of this strategy is that it can be combined with other sampling techniques. However, it can be biased if strata are given false weights, unless weighting procedure is used for analysis.

Having gained some knowledge and insights from the various sampling strategies the study made use of some sampling procedures. These are discussed in more details later on in this chapter.

A number of researchers in education bemoan the fact that there are few true experimental studies carried out (August and Shanahan 2006). Very few have been carried out on explicit instruction in the five literacy components (phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension) with second language learners (Shanahan and Beck 2006). In their review of effective literacy teaching studies, these authors found more than 400 studies on the five core elements for native speakers. However, they found only 17 studies addressing effects of explicitly teaching the same five core elements of literacy with minority children. A worse scenario exists in Africa as regards research on literacy development. Pretorius and Mampuru (2007) observe that there is little research on literacy development on the continent. In addition there is no academic journal dedicated to reading (ibid).

There are several reasons that can be presented for having few or no research studies carried out on literacy development be it in Africa or elsewhere. However, one reason relevant to this study is given. In places where there are few experimental studies part of the reason is that in educational studies it is difficult to have true experimental conditions similar to those of the laboratory (Shadish et al. 2002). Educational studies deal with human beings outside laboratory settings. However, in their report on scientific research on education, the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) in America observed that there is no reason why studies in education could not be subject to the same scientific methods as in the sciences.

In his discussion about designing high-quality research in Special Education Gersten (2000) points out that it is critical to judge how and when to modify standards developed from laboratory psychology studies without compromising the integrity of designs. He says that there is need to sensibly negotiate a balance between design components that satisfy laboratory standards and those that reflect the complexities of real-life classroom teaching. The researcher believes that such a design that can provide a balance between design components that satisfy laboratory standards and those that reflect the complexities of real-life classroom teaching is the quasi-experimental design when it is combined with qualitative method. An experimental design might satisfy laboratory standards but it cannot reflect the complexities of real-life classroom teaching. A quasi-experimental design allows a researcher to work with existing groups without disrupting the groups. So researchers, who want to avoid disruption of a classroom setting, use quasi-experimental methods and work with existing groups of learners in the classroom. Use of qualitative methods will enable the researcher to be able to reflect real-life teaching. However, a quasi-experimental design has a weakness of not randomly assigning subjects. One approach to improve the quasi-experimental design is for the researcher to randomly assign groups (and not individuals) to receive or not receive the treatment (Mackey and Gass 2005).

An increasing number of quasi-experimental designs are being employed that use intact classrooms as the means of assigning participants to conditions (Hunt and Goetz (1997). This is because it is much easier to compare groups that already exist than to disrupt the groups through randomization. Secondly use of intact groups provides natural settings, real world conditions and so minimizes threats to external validity as natural environments do not suffer from problems of artificiality. Additionally since quasi-experimental studies use natural settings, findings in a study may be applied to other settings and subjects and hence allow some generalizations to be made about populations.

Experiments and quasi-experimental designs are the only research methods that try out a technique to determine their impact on learning (August and Shanahan 2006). The authors reiterated a point made by Feuer et al. (2002) that experiments using randomized trials are the single best methods that permit the effectiveness of a technique or an approach to be compared with the control group. Gersten (2000)

concluded with the above assertions when he mentioned that studies that use group designs remain the primary means for assessing whether educational interventions have beneficial effects on learners. However, August and Shanahan observe that there is dearth of research in reading instruction with second language learners in contrast to the large numbers of studies in reading instruction involving native English speakers. They point out that there are not enough quasi-experimental and experimental studies that could provide a thorough prescriptive description of how best to teach literacy to language minority students (2006:353).

Although Long et al. (2007) pointed at the dramatic increase of research on English language learners in the past decade; they were quick to say that this research had focused on English language learners who were native speakers of Spanish. They said that other languages besides Spanish needed to be studied as well. The authors also bemoaned the dearth of research on instructional approaches and interventions for English language learners that can inform practice and policy.

The literature in teaching reading is extensive but few studies have examined effective instructional approaches in second language reading situations (August and Shanahan 2006). Few empirical data exists about instructional approaches that are associated with improving reading in a second language situation (ibid). There have been continued calls to carry out more research on the development of reading and writing abilities amongst second language learners (August and Shanahan 2006). This study is a response to such a call.

Existing research has shown that all learners regardless of their native language or their economic status need to learn the essential reading skills (August and Shanahan 2006; NRP 2000). Most reading problems can be prevented through provision of effective instruction and intervention starting from the pre-school up to primary grades (Snow et al. 1998). Research has shown that instruction in the five core elements leads to success in reading (August and Shanahan 2006; NRP 2000). There is less research on the best practices for teaching literacy to Malawian pupils. In order to address this gap this study uses the balanced literacy approach to improve the reading and writing abilities of standard four pupils in Malawian primary schools.

Some investigations have been carried out on instructional approaches aimed at enhancing teaching of phonics/phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension in order to improve the reading and writing abilities of learners (Babayigit and Stainthorp 2007; Gunn et al. 2000, 2002; Mishra and Stainthorp 2007; Muter and Diethelm 2001; Shames 1998; Stuart 1999; White 2005; Yeh and Connell 2008). It has been argued earlier on that in order to find out the effectiveness of an intervention the best design to answer such a question is an experimental or quasi-experimental design. This study too placed its emphasis on quasi-experimental methods within a mixed research method design in order to be able to find out how effective as an intervention the balanced literacy approach was. Therefore studies that used experimental or quasi-experimental methods to find out the effectiveness of an intervention were felt to be the ones that were relevant to this study. Examples of such studies are discussed below. The first to be presented are studies that used experimental design with random assignment of participants. These are followed by a description of studies that used quasi-experimental design.

Linan-Thompson et al. (2007) studied 81 English language learners in grades one and two. Their study used an experimental design with random assignment and matched control group. The intervention model was comprehensive, intensive reading skills intervention in either Spanish or English depending on the language of instruction that was used. The intervention model also focused on reading fluency, phonological awareness, comprehension and vocabulary. The results reported were that at the end of grade one the intervention group outperformed the control group on phonological awareness, fluency, comprehension, and spelling. The study by Linan-Thompson et al. (2007) is similar to this study in terms of what it focused on, phonological awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. However, the study differs from this one in terms of not only the designs used but also the participants involved, the number of participants, the grades, and measures used in the studies.

A study by Vaughn et al. (2006) used an experimental design with random assignment and matched control group. The researchers studied 41 English language learners in grade one. Their study focused on alphabetic knowledge and skills, corrected text practice, comprehension, oral skills, and vocabulary in English. The findings revealed significant differences for the intervention group in phonological awareness, listening

comprehension, word attack, word identification, and passage comprehension. The point of focus on phonological awareness, comprehension and vocabulary for the study done by Vaughn et al. (2006) is similar to this study. However, this study adds fluency as a point of focus. The major differences between the two studies are in the designs, the participants used, the number of participants involved, and the grade levels studied.

Kamps et al. (2007) used an experimental design with experimental comparison group to study 170 grades one and two English language learners and 148 English only students from six elementary schools. Schools in the experimental group implemented a three-tier model of intervention. Besides primary-tier reading instruction, the second-tier small-group experimental intervention focused on direct instruction reading curricula that explicitly targeted phonological/phonemic awareness, letter-sound recognition, alphabetic decoding, fluency and comprehension skills in small groups of 3 to 6 students. Students in comparison schools were not exposed to a three-tier intervention. Instead they received balanced literacy instruction which focused on word study, group and individual story reading and writing activities in small groups of 6-15 students. The results showed greater outcomes for English language learners in the intervention schools, especially those that participated in secondary-tier interventions using curricula with direct instruction approach and delivered in small groups. The students who received explicit instruction in phonemic awareness got higher fluency results than the balanced literacy control group. The design used in the study by Kamps et al. (2007) was experimental that used a three-tier intervention therefore different from this study. The other differences in the two studies are in the participants themselves, the number of participants involved, the measures used and the grade levels studied. The two studies are similar in provision of direct instruction in phonemic awareness, fluency and comprehension skills.

In their study Leafstedt et al. (2004) used a quasi-experimental design with a matched control group to investigate the effectiveness of explicit phonological awareness instruction given to 64 kindergarten English language learners. The results were that students across three ability groups (low, middle and high) improved in both early and late phonological awareness and word reading, in Spanish and English at different

rates. The high ability group demonstrated the most gains. The similarity of the study by Leafstedt et al. (2004) and this study are in the use of a quasi-experimental design and provision of phonological awareness instruction. The differences lie in the population used, the size of the population, the grade level and the measures used. The measures in the study by Leafstedt et al. (2004) included both Spanish and English onset and rime identification and segmentation.

Another study that used a quasi-experimental design with a non-matched control group was carried out by Gerber et al. (2004). The participants in this study were 43 kindergartens up to grade one English language learners. The focus of the study was on explicit instruction, correction staircase to learn and practice reading skills intervention in Spanish in kindergarten, then language of instruction in (English) for all grade one students except 14 of them. The measures used were onset and rime detection, phoneme segmentation, combined both language measures of onset and rime for early phonemic awareness, and both language measures of segmentation for late phonemic awareness. The findings revealed that both groups gained in Spanish and English over time, but intervention students caught up to non-intervention peers by end of first grade despite differences in kindergarten. The study by Gerber et al. (2004) is relevant to this study in terms of provision of explicit instruction in onset and rime for phonemic awareness although this study adds four other core elements. The designs are similar. However, the studies differ in terms of the participants, the number of participants, the grade levels used and the research environment.

A relevant study to this study, which used classroom teachers to implement an intervention, was carried out by White (2005). White used analogy-based phonics to teach students to decode unknown words just as this study did. The participants in White's study were 15 teachers, 280 students in grade two classrooms in four public elementary schools in Hawaii. The teachers in the study were trained to implement the Kamehameha Elementary Education Programme (KEEP). The KEEP programme was a comprehension-based reading programme which targeted Hawaiian students at risk for educational failure. Each teacher who was involved in implementing KEEP received school-based support from a consultant. The measures used in the study were reading comprehension, sight vocabulary, and phoneme/ grapheme consonants. The programme had significant positive outcomes on students involved in the

intervention. The study by White (2005) has a number of things that are relevant to this study. Not only are the designs similar but also the use of classroom teachers to implement the intervention, the training and the giving of support to the experimental teachers. The major differences in the two studies are in the point of focus, the participants involved and the grade levels studied. The study by White (2005) uses analogy-based phonics to teach students to use known words to decode unknown words. This study adds the teaching of phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension to the teaching of analogy-based phonics.

The fact that the findings of the above cited studies revealed the benefits students received from instruction using any of the five core elements encouraged the researcher to investigate the use of the same core elements in a Malawian context and observe the effects. On their own the above-mentioned studies give limited insight into the realities of the classroom and the experience of teachers and students that can contribute to improved practice in the teaching of literacy in English in Malawi. There is less research on the best practices for teaching literacy to Malawian pupils. The studies cited here were carried out outside Malawi in different contexts, and done in a variety of ways. These studies varied in types of teachers and pupils included and the kinds of variables addressed and methods used across studies. The methodologies used by various studies were different. Some were experimental with random assignment of participants while as others were quasi-experimental. The intervention models for the studies were also different. Some intervention models had tiers while as others did not. The duration of treatment or intervention period was different. The studies done by White (2005) and Shames (1998) covered an entire school year. The study by Muter and Diethelm (2001) was longitudinal and it covered a two-year period while as the study by Stuart (1999) covered 12 weeks only. The participants chosen for the studies ranged from kindergarten/pre-school, elementary, to grades above grade four. The following examples illustrate the point. Denton et al. (2004) worked with grades two to five English language learners. Gunn et al. (2000) worked with grades K to three Hispanic, non Hispanic and English language learners. Kamps et al. (2007) studied grades one to two English language learners and English only students. A study by Gerber et al. (2004) used English language learners in grades K to one. An examination of the cited studies' populations reveals that the population sizes also varied. Just to give two examples, the study by Muter and Diethelm (2001)

was on 55 children from multilingual background being educated in English while as that of Gunn et al. (2002) was on 256 kindergartens through grade three Hispanic and non Hispanic pupils. The teachers involved in the studies ranged from generally trained teachers to intensively trained reading specialists. The pupils identified in the studies as underachievers varied widely in abilities and age, and they were *taught* in a range of teacher-pupil ratios. The instructional materials and techniques varied from teacher-to-teacher, from school to school and then of course from country-to-country. The pupils involved in the various experimental conditions not only had qualitatively different instructional experiences compared to the Malawian pupil, but also a qualitatively different environment. One therefore needed to carry out the experiment in a Malawian context to see what it might have revealed.

It has already been mentioned that very few experimental and quasi-experimental studies have been carried out on explicit instruction in the five literacy components (phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension) with second language learners (Shanahan and Beck 2006). Despite the existence of the above cited studies the researcher was not able to identify a quasi-experimental study that combined all the five essential elements, phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension as did this study. The above cited studies dealt with one, two, three or four of the five essential elements. This study chose to use the five core elements because of the National Reading Panels' recommendations that these five core elements help in learners' literacy development. The reason for combining the five core elements was in the hope that the elements might interact synergistically with the hope that implementing the five may be more than the sum of the effects of the five core elements implemented separately.

The next three sections that follow discuss experimental, quasi-experimental and mixed research methods. These methods have a bearing on the methods chosen to investigate the use of the balanced literacy approach in improving pupils' achievement in reading and writing. In other words the sections discuss the theoretical orientations that guided the researcher to choose a research method which in turn influenced the data collection instruments the researcher was to use in finding out the effects of the balanced approach.

3.3.1 Experimental research methods

It has already been mentioned that experimental studies are examples of quantitative studies “that attempt to empirically test a hypothesis by using ‘hard’ data and statistical techniques” (Dimsdale and Kutner 2004:7). Experimental research is used in instances where a researcher would like to evaluate or test the effectiveness or impact of an instructional approach or product, where a researcher is interested in the amount of change as a result of treatment or intervention (Creswell 2008, 2009; McMillan and Schumacher 2010; Mertler and Charles 2011). The researcher requires two groups of subjects. One group is given the instructional approach or treatment also referred to as an intervention. The other group, which is called the control group, continues using the traditional approach that they have been using. The researcher assigns the two groups of participants to the experimental and control groups using a random procedure (Stanovich and Stanovich 2003). The random assignment of subjects gives every subject an equal chance to be assigned to either of the two groups and makes it very likely that any differences in the groups will balance each other out. The importance of random assignment of groups is that it prevents the unintended biases of the researcher from influencing the composition of groups. Random assignment also helps in increasing the internal validity of the study (Creswell 2008; McMillan and Schumacher 2010; Mertler and Charles 2011). It is agreed that a randomized experiment is the strongest as regards internal validity, particularly for assessing the cause-effect relationship that might exist between a program and its outcomes (Cohen et al. 2000; Dimsdale and Kutner 2004; Mackey and Gass 2005; McMillan and Schumacher 2010). There is increasing confidence that any observed outcomes are the result of an intervention or treatment and no extraneous variables (McMillan and Schumacher 2010; Mertler and Charles 2011).

An experimental design attempts to control the research environment to a considerable degree. This control allows the researcher to work on a particular variable and determine its effect on other variables. It is this control that enables the researcher to claim any degree of causality (Mertler and Charles 2011). It has been argued that experimental designs offer greater internal validity for learning the effects of a programme (Mertler and Charles 2011; Sherman and Strang 2004) than quasi-experimental designs.

Although experimental designs allow the researcher a great deal of control over the research groups and the research environment and therefore enable the researcher to make causal predictions about the outcome, it is also argued that experimental results have no *real world* meaning (Dobbin and Gatowski 1999). The act of controlling the situation in order to eliminate extraneous variables might make the situation far removed from the real world. As such the results have no *real world* meaning (ibid).

Dobbin and Gatowski (1999) are not alone in observing such a weakness of true experimental research. Dimsdale and Kutner (2004) say that experimental research in education has too many contextual variables involved for experiments to be useful. Unlike molecules or chemicals in a laboratory setting, human beings do not always respond in the same predictable manner. In addition human beings come from such a wide variety of backgrounds that no two schools would respond to the same treatment in the same way (Dimsdale and Kutner 2004). It is virtually impossible to control all variables in a research situation involving human beings. The researcher agrees with the authors' observations.

3.3.2 Quasi-experimental research methods

A quasi-experimental design is a form of experimental research (McMillan and Schumacher 2010; Shuttleworth 2008). Quasi-experimental designs are similar to experimental designs in that both are used to show cause and effect (Cohen et al. 2007; Creswell 2008; McMillan and Schumacher 2010; Mertler and Charles 2011). Secondly, both have an independent variable (cause) linked to a dependent variable (effect) (Mertler and Charles 2011). The major difference from experimental design is that it lacks random assignment of participants to groups (McMillan and Schumacher 2010; Mertler and Charles 2011). The other difference is that quasi-experimental designs use naturally formed (pre-existing) groups. 'A common situation for implementing quasi-experimental research involves several classes or schools that can be used to determine effect of curricula materials or teaching methods' (McMillan and Schumacher 2010: 22). For instance this study uses pre-existing classes to find out the effects of implementing the balanced literacy approach. Use of existing classes is in agreement with what Mackey and Gass say, namely that

...in second language research we often need to use intact classes for our studies, and in these cases the participants cannot be

randomly assigned to one of the experimental or control groups (2005: 142).

In other words the classes used in the studies are left intact. They are organized for an instructional purpose and have different teachers (McMillan and Schumacher 2010).

Generally, as in an experimental design, a quasi-experimental design involves selecting groups (two or more comparison groups). An independent variable is then tested without any random assignment of the participants to the groups (McMillan and Schumacher 2010). An experiment (treatment or intervention) is carried out over a period of time, just like it is done in the experimental design.

Another characteristic of the quasi-experimental design is that the testing environment may not be as controlled as is done in the experimental one. Instead of the testing being done under laboratory settings as is the case in true experiment, the testing is done on site. For example, in this study the testing environment is the actual classroom, which is a natural setting.

Quasi-experimental designs have some advantages for example they are useful in areas where it is unethical or not feasible or desirable to have an experiment with randomized controlled trial. However, despite the advantages that quasi-experimental research methods have, they too have their shortcomings. For instance, a quasi-experimental design does not randomly assign participants into groups. The implication of this is that the pre-existing characteristics of the comparison groups are not taken into consideration. Since subjects were not randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups, it is difficult to be absolutely certain if the changes that occurred were due to the intervention or due to changes in the individuals (Mertler and Charles 2011). Furthermore there is a probability that the groups may be different prior to the study. The prior differences of the groups may affect the outcome of the study (Trochim 2006). The results of such a study cannot stand up to rigorous statistical scrutiny because the researcher needs to control other factors that might have affected the results. It is hard to control all other factors properly (Shuttleworth 2008). Because of this lack of control a researcher has to be cautious in making causal inferences.

Although quasi-experimental designs may be weak in controlling for threats to internal validity, they can be strong in controlling for threats to external validity. For instance this study takes place in a classroom which is a natural setting with real world conditions. It may be generalized to similar classroom settings. In addition to this, pre-tests can be administered to the two groups (the experimental and comparison groups) in order to establish the matching of the two groups before the treatment. Shadish et al. (2002) encourage researchers such as those interested in investigating applied research questions to move beyond true experimental designs and take advantage of the possibilities inherent in quasi-experimental designs.

Although true experimental designs produce more reliable results than quasi-experimental designs, both approaches enable researchers to determine cause and effect (Lyon and Chhabra 2004; McMillan and Schumacher 2010). However, according to Gersten (2000) the major problem with using either experimental or quasi-experimental designs in instructional research is that efforts to control, manipulate and understand a defined independent variable rarely result in a deep understanding of the realities of classroom implementation. The designs do not reveal how the independent variable, interacting with other aspects of instruction, contributes to learning of content. He suggests that one partial solution is to carry out studies that allow for deeper understanding of what an independent variable is. Gersten (2000) seems to be suggesting that in addition to using experimental or quasi-experimental designs researchers need to describe in detail the actions and behaviours that take place in the classroom during lessons. Gersten (2000) argues that it is only through an analysis of what transpires in a lesson that enables a researcher to find out which elements led to a specific outcome. The researcher borrowed Gersten's ideas by using quasi-experimental methods and adding description of actions and behaviours that take place in the classroom during a lesson. In other words the researcher used mixed research methods (quantitative and qualitative) in order to reveal how the independent variable, interacting with other aspects of instruction contributed to pupils' achievement.

3.3.3 Mixed research methods

Mixed research methods combine qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell 2005, 2009; McMillan and Schumacher 2010; Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2004). The researcher decided to use mixed research methods, in a bid to overcome the weaknesses that come from the use of one method only (Creswell 2005, 2009; Hunt 2007; Johnson et al. 2007; McMillan and Schumacher 2010; Mertler and Charles 2011) despite the challenge that the researcher had to face, that of being familiar with both types of data collection and analysis (Mertler and Charles 2011).

Since different research methods have their weaknesses and strengths Niglas (2000) recommends the use of triangulation to overcome the weaknesses of any single method. Niglas (2000) further argues that if researchers use several different methods to investigate a phenomenon and the results provide mutual confirmation, the researcher can be sure that the results are valid. Different approaches allow the researcher to know and understand different things about the world. Triangulation increases the validity of research findings by allowing the researcher to examine the phenomenon in different ways (McMillan and Schumacher 2010; Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2004). Quantitative and qualitative research provides complementary information (Creswell 2005, 2009; Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2004). According to Barr descriptive research “complements the research on effectiveness by revealing how an instructional approach works and how teachers differ in using it” (2001: 406). The researcher agrees with the use of both quantitative and qualitative research in a study.

3.4 Rationale for the research design

As was mentioned earlier, the purpose of a research design is to specify a plan for generating empirical evidence which will be used to answer the research question (s) (McMillan and Schumacher 2010). In other words a design is chosen on the grounds that it draws the most valid, credible conclusions from the answers to the research questions (McMillan and Schumacher 2010). Hence for this study it was felt that a mixed method design was the best that could answer the research question.

It is argued that mixed methods research maximizes on the advantages of the single qualitative and quantitative methods and minimizes on their weaknesses (Creswell 2005, 2009; Johnson et al. 2007). Long et al. (2007) acknowledge that research

addressing the effectiveness of instructional approaches or interventions requires experimental or quasi-experimental methods. However, the authors point out that other research methods such as qualitative methods are also required in research. These qualitative methods can answer questions regarding how and why these approaches work, for which learners, and under what conditions. They can also provide descriptions of the context in which instruction or intervention was delivered. The researcher borrowed these ideas and used them in the study. More than one approach was used in order to provide methodological triangulation (Cohen et al. 2000; Lyon 2000; Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2004), complementarity, and initiation (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2004). Triangulation may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in a study (Cohen 2000:112). Triangulation which seeks convergence, corroboration, and correspondence of results from different methods (Johnson et al. 2007; Creswell and Piano 2007) was used in order to be able to explain fully the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one stand point (Hunt 2007). Other reasons for using triangulation were that it was not possible to collect data for example, on teacher' perceptions and attitudes towards the instructional approaches they used, using quantitative methods only. In the study classroom observation (which was qualitative) added information about the teaching of reading and writing and qualified pupils' scores and statistics. Teacher interviews (which were qualitative) provided insights on how the balanced literacy approach as an intervention was perceived and valued in the experimental group.

3.5 Description and discussion of the research design

Mixed research method is said to be “the class of research where the researcher combines qualitative and quantitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study” (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004:17). It is the third research paradigm in educational research after quantitative and qualitative research methods (Creswell 2009; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). Studies that use mixed methods research differ on the basis of the sequence in which the qualitative and quantitative components occur and the emphasis given to each (Creswell and Piano 2007; Creswell 2009). Within a study the qualitative and quantitative components may be performed concurrently or sequentially. Priority might be given

to either of the two components or equal weight might be given to both (Creswell 2005, 2009; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004).

This study employed a mixed method research design with primary emphasis on quasi-experimental methods to discern the impact of the intervention on pupils in participating schools. The mixed research method employed in the study is quantitative dominant and relies on the post positivist view of the research process, while at the same time recognizes that qualitative data and approaches can enhance the validity of the study. The rationale for this approach was that the quantitative data and analysis provided the main focus of the results while as the qualitative data and analysis explained the quantitative findings (Creswell 2005) and also provided insights on how the balanced literacy approach as an intervention was perceived and valued in the experimental group. Below is a notation for the mixed methods used in the study:



The capital letters signify that the methodology is dominant, small letters signify that the methodology is less dominant. The arrows signify that there is a sequential implementation of the different methods (Greene no date; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004).

The notation above shows that the study gave priority to the quantitative methods over qualitative methods. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used in different phases of the study (Greene no date; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). Quantitative methods were used at the beginning and end of the study. Qualitative methods were used during the sixteen weeks of the study.

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected separately in three different phases. Quantitative data were collected at the beginning and end of the study while as qualitative data were collected during the study as shown above. Data triangulation was achieved through a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data showed that change occurred or not in the reading achievement of pupils and

how much change took place in the classroom. Qualitative data described the learning environment, classroom interaction and helped the researcher understand why change occurred or not. However, more emphasis was given to the quantitative data than qualitative data. The table below shows quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and types of data collected in the study:

Table 1: Quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and types of data.

Quantitative research methods		Qualitative research methods	
Methods of data collection	Data collected	Methods of data collection	Data collected
Pre-tests	Numerical scores	Classroom observation checklist	Text data + numerical data
Post-tests	Numerical scores	Teacher interview schedule	Text data from interviews

Adapted from Creswell 2005:519

It was mentioned earlier on that this study used mixed method design with priority given to quantitative data collection. In addition there was sequential implementation of the different methods with quantitative methods preceding qualitative methods.

During the quantitative phase quasi-experimental methods were used. As already described in section 3.3.2, quasi-experimental methods are similar to the experimental ones with the difference that there is no random selection of participants to the experimental and control groups in the quasi-experimental methods. Quasi-experimental methods were adapted in order to be able to use intact classes in a natural setting although such methods limit the conclusions that can be drawn as regards the impact of an intervention (Diem 2002). However, quasi-experimental methods are useful in providing evidence on the impact of an educational programme (August and Shanahan 2006; Diem 2002). Under quasi-experimental methods the

study used the pre-test and post-test design with non-equivalent groups which can be represented by the following diagram:

0 x 0

.....

0 0

where

0 means both groups are given a pre-test

x means the experimental group is given the experimental treatment

..... means experimental and control groups are not randomly selected

0 means both groups are given a post-test that measures the dependent variable (Borg et al. 1993).

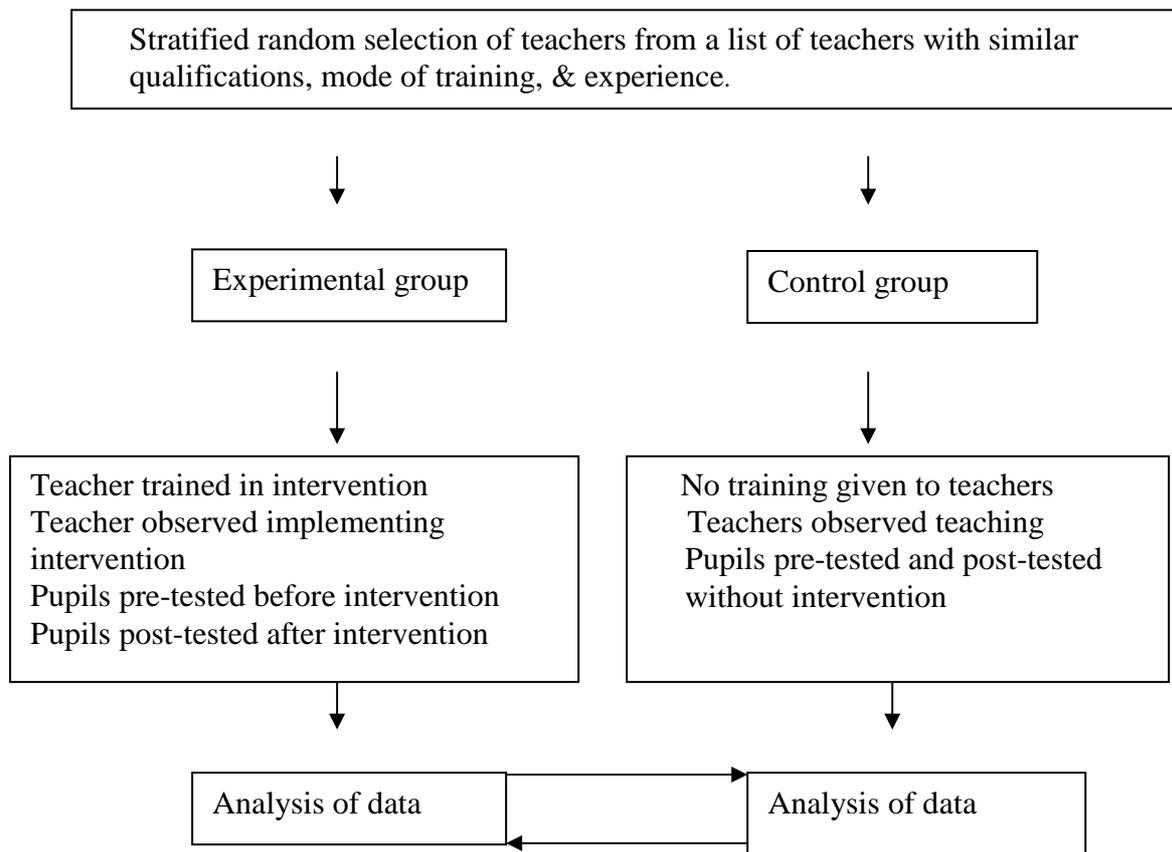
However, in this study subjects were not randomly selected to the experimental and control groups. Both groups were given pre-tests before intervention and post-tests after.

According to Trochim (2006) the non equivalent groups design “is probably the most frequently used design in social research.” An educational study such as this one is included in social research. In situations where random assignment of pupils is not feasible, random assignment of teachers can be an excellent alternative Gersten et al. (2005). It is for this reason that the researcher randomly assigned twelve teachers from primary schools in Zomba rural area participating in the study to one of the two groups experimental and control group.

Precautions within the design were taken to ensure that the results of the study were not due to variations in teacher properties. The assigned teachers had similar qualifications, and mode of training and teaching experience. Six of the teachers were placed in the control group while the other six were in the experimental group. Those in the experimental group were trained in balanced literacy approaches while those in the control group were not trained but were observed teaching. At the onset of the intervention teachers in the experimental group were observed as they implemented the balanced literacy approaches in the classroom on a regular basis. Those in the

control group too were observed in order to determine their characteristics. In order to improve the design the researcher administered a pre-test at the beginning of the study. One reason for conducting the pre-test in both the control and experimental groups was to determine pupils' literacy levels before the onset of the study. The second reason for administering the pre-test was to establish a baseline from which gains on the post-test could be measured. At the conclusion of the study post-tests were administered to both groups of pupils (experimental and control groups), to determine any literacy achievement in pupils. A diagrammatic overview of how the experimental and control groups were treated during the study is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: How the control and experimental groups were treated during the study



During the qualitative phase, the study examined teachers' use of the instructional approach in a natural setting that already existed in the school. It covered sixteen weeks in regular classrooms composed of between fifty and sixty pupils each. The duration of the study was felt to be short enough to allow the claim that any changes in student's performance were a result of this specific approach namely, the balanced

literacy approach. This agreed with what Gestern says "...the shorter the length of the study, the more precision there is in attributing changes in students' performance to the instructional intervention" (2000: 2).

The term *instructional approach* refers to the strategies and methods used by teachers in order to promote learning in pupils. This study examined whether or not the balanced approach leads to improved results in terms of pupils' achievement in reading and writing in English more than is the case when pupils are taught without the balanced approach. The effectiveness of the balanced literacy approach was identified according to measures of pupils' reading and writing achievement over time. A pre-test and a post-test were administered to pupils. Quantitative data was collected through these pre-tests and post-tests. The pre-tests and post-tests were based on the standard four English textbooks that schools used. The pre-tests revealed that the groups were not of comparable standard. Pupils' pre-test scores were therefore used as a covariate in order to control for pre-existing differences between the groups.

During the qualitative phase a teacher observation checklist was used as an instrument for collecting qualitative data on teachers' observable instructional approaches. The reason for using a checklist was in order to be consistent in collecting data across all schools.

Some qualitative data was collected from teacher interviews. Participating teachers were interviewed on one-to-one basis. A structured interview schedule was used to collect data. The reason for using a structured interview schedule was to be consistent in interviewing the sampled twelve teachers. The structured interview schedule focused on a wide range of issues. For example the questions touched on teachers' familiarity with and experience of English teaching theory and the balanced approach, their attitudes and perceptions regarding the balanced approach, the resources available to them in terms of availability of a library at the school, materials that teachers use in teaching English, the number of desks against the number of pupils in standard four. In addition to the above themes teachers in the experimental group had

the following themes: teacher's experience in the use of balanced approach, benefits of using the balanced approach, problems experienced during the implementation of the balanced approach, and suggestions for improving the balanced approach. Teachers in the control group were required to report on similar issues. They were asked to tell their experience in the instructional approach they were using, the benefits of using the approach they took, the problems they experienced in using their approach, and their suggestion on how the approach could be improved upon. In order to fulfil the objectives above, the research methods used included both qualitative and quantitative. They involved the following:

- a desk study of all materials that teachers used for their English classes,
- observation of all the teachers' instructional approaches in the teaching of reading and writing,
- an assessment of teachers' instructional strategies and approaches,
- observation of the 'experimental group' teachers' implementation of balanced approach instruction,
- assessment of pupil's gains in reading and writing skills in both groups.

3.5.1 Population

The sample population was standard four pupils attending school in rural areas of Zomba district. Standard four was chosen because this is a transition grade in terms of medium of instruction. From standard five onwards, the medium of instruction is English in Malawian primary schools. The study was conducted in the classrooms of teachers and pupils from twelve schools. The sample included a representation of rural schools in the Zomba district of Malawi. Zomba district rural classrooms were chosen for two reasons. The first reason was that the schools were close to where the researcher was working on a full time basis. The proximity of the schools to the researcher's work place was convenient for the researcher. It was easy for the researcher to visit schools. Secondly the schools were in the rural area where no intervention had taken place before. Twelve standard four English teachers and their pupils served as a sample to represent a wider teacher/pupil population currently teaching and learning English in primary schools in Zomba district rural area. The sample size of the study was 997 pupils from the twelve schools. Table 2 shows the pupil entries for both pre-tests and post-tests from the sample schools.

Table 2: Number of pupils writing pre-tests and post-tests from twelve schools

Name of Primary Sch.	Pre-test Girls	Pre-test Boys	Pre-test Total	Post-test Girls	Post-test Boys	Post-test Total
Chiphoola	49	46	95	58	58	116
Domasi CCAP	26	17	43	37	23	60
Matawale	41	29	70	33	22	55
Naisi	64	59	123	71	59	130
Namiwawa	35	31	66	59	52	111
Ntondo	29	26	55	32	34	66
Totals for exp schs	244	208	452	290	248	538
Lomoni	17	11	28	17	9	26
Malemia	34	35	69	31	33	64
Mbidi	10	12	22	14	14	28
Mchengawedi	52	55	107	37	41	78
Mulunguzi	35	54	89	35	41	76
Namilambe	14	19	33	14	15	29
Totals for control schs	162	186	348	148	153	301

Table 2 above shows the number of pupils who wrote the pre-test and those who wrote the post-test fluctuating during the period of intervention. The number of pupils who wrote post tests is either higher or lower than the number of pupils who wrote the pre-test. The reason for this was pupils' absenteeism, drop-out or transfer from one school to another. As it is shown in the table, attrition of pupils took place in both experimental and control schools. Generally the attrition rate between the experimental group and the control group seems not to be substantially different. However, only pupils who wrote both the pre-test and post-test were considered in the data analysis of the control and experimental groups.

The number of boys and girls in each sample school is shown in Table 2. In terms of numbers between girls and boys there is gender inequality. The table shows that in the experimental group more girls than boys wrote both the pre-test and post-test. In the control group more boys than girls wrote both the pre-test and post-test. The fact that there are differences between the number of girls and boys in schools is not strange at all. Gender disparities in terms of figures are in line with what is nationally expected. Generally some studies have shown that enrolment numbers of boys and girls in the lower classes from standard one to four do not differ very much (Please refer to Chapter 1). It is in the upper classes from standard five onwards when the numbers of girls begin to dwindle. However the instructional settings and background characteristics of the pupils in both the control and experimental groups were similar.

It has been pointed out that the number of pupils that wrote the pre-test and post-test either increased or decreased by a few figures in all the twelve schools. However, at Namiwawa the number of pupils increased by almost 100 percent between the writing of pre-test and post-test. The number of pupils enrolled increased from 66 to 111. One possible reason for this increase is that after the pre-tests were administered and teachers in the experimental group trained, the Department for International Development (DfID) began to construct modern classroom blocks at the school. It is possible that parents from nearby schools transferred their children to this school to secure a place in advance before construction was completed. It is likely that the influx of learners to the school had some effects on the performance of standard four pupils at the school. It has been argued elsewhere that the more pupils there are in a class the less is the interaction between the teacher and individual pupil. Small classes (of at least less than thirty pupils to one teacher) help in individualised learning. Teachers get to know pupils better and can easily tailor instruction to individual pupil's needs. According to the Tennessee study reducing class size seems to have a salutary effect on pupils' achievement. Findings from this Tennessee study revealed that students in small classes (under 13-17 students) out performed students in the other classes (Mosteller 1995).

3.5.2 Sampling

This study used stratified sampling for selecting teachers. Stratified sampling was used because it was the best strategy to provide a relevant representative sample (from subgroups) of teachers more than any other sampling strategy. The characteristics of the wider population that needed to be identified by the researcher were standard four teachers teaching in Zomba rural schools; teachers who had similar academic qualification, had undergone similar mode of in service training and had similar teaching experience. Then the researcher randomly selected twelve teachers as a sample from within these subgroups. Teachers and the schools they were teaching at were used as the unit for random assignment. Using the sampling frame of standard four teachers with same academic qualifications, similar mode of training, similar number of years of teaching experience, twelve teachers representing twelve schools were randomly selected for the study. The indicators of teachers' background characteristics included teachers' professional training, level of education/certification, and level of teaching experience. Information on teachers' background characteristics was collected from education authorities in Zomba district.

The location of the schools (urban/rural), economic status of the community surrounding the school, ratio of desks/tables to pupils, number of text-books available and number of pupils to a class were some of the factors that were also considered.

Indicators for pupils' background characteristics included age, sex, socioeconomic status, and home language. The educational level of the father/mother indicated the socioeconomic status of the pupil. Information on pupils' background characteristics was collected from teachers and pupils themselves during the administration of the pre-tests and post-tests.

The sample size was determined by economic and time factors. The researcher had a limited budget to cover both the pilot and the main study therefore could not cover too many schools beyond twelve. Coverage of twelve schools meant twelve days of visits to each school per month per each researcher. Each visit meant taking time off at the researchers' work place (the whole day). So the figure twelve was felt to be

reasonable. Whereas it was possible to randomly assign teachers to the control and experimental groups, it was problematic to randomly assign pupils to the experimental and control groups. School authorities do not permit researchers to do this. Instead, pupils were assigned according to their teachers. It was felt that this was less disruptive to the school routine.

a) Characteristics of teachers

A total of twelve teachers were included in the sample, two female teachers and ten males. All the twelve teachers were holders of Malawi Junior Certificate of Education (awarded after two years of secondary education). They were all trained under the MIITEP programme. In Malawi there are five public teacher training colleges and three private ones. All the twelve teachers were trained in one of the five public colleges. The teachers were all experienced teachers who had taught for not less than ten years. The number of years of teaching experience ranged from eleven to fifteen. Four teachers had taught for eleven years, three teachers for twelve years, the next three teachers for fourteen years and two teachers for fifteen years. All the twelve teachers indicated that they had learnt theories of how to teach reading such as whole word and phonics while on training at college. Seven of the sample teachers pointed out that the training period at college was so short that they did not go into details of how to teach phonics. Instead they read about teaching phonics from the handbooks that they were given.

b) Characteristics of schools

i) Resources

The twelve sample schools were all in low socioeconomic status areas. From classroom observations and interviews with teachers the primary schools in the sample had scarce resources such as desks, books and teaching and learning materials. The schools were not provided with adequate basic classroom resources such as text books, desks, classroom library, charts, book shelves, supplementary readers, teacher's table and chair. Table 3 below seems to suggest that the education system is struggling to make adequate provision for resources when one compares schools' enrolment numbers with availability of resources in the sample schools.

Table 3: Enrolment numbers against availability of some resources

Name of school	No. of pupils	No. of Eng text books	No. of desks	Availability of library at school
Chiphoola	135	35	none	none
Domasi C.C.A.P.	60	none	none	none
Lomoni	27	4	none	none
Malemia	91	15	none	Yes
Matawale	169	30	none	none
Mbidi	30	none	none	none
Mchengawedi	108	49	available	Yes
Mulunguzi	108	11	none	none
Naisi	146	16	none	none
Namilambe	45	none	none	none
Namiwawa	115	40	none	Yes
Ntondo	80	2	none	none

The 1997 MOEST Education statistics showed that there were 119 pupils to a permanent classroom, 38 pupils per desk, 48 pupils per chair and 24 pupils per text book (English, Mathematics and Chichewa). The situation has not improved that much to date. Between the years 2004 and 2006 the pupil/classroom ratios were on average about 107 pupils to a classroom. In the year 2007 the pupil/classroom ratio went down slightly to 104 pupils to a classroom (MOEST and Malawi National Commission for UNESCO 2008). Table 3 above indicates and confirms acute shortage of resources in the sample schools. Out of twelve sample schools, only one school had desks for pupils. Eleven schools had no desks. Pupils sat on the floor in rows and used their laps for writing. As can be seen from the table above, in schools where pupils were more than sixty, pupils were so crowded that it was difficult for the teacher or an observer to move around the classroom to see how pupils were carrying out an activity.

A desk study of all materials that teachers used for their English classes revealed scarcity of teaching and learning materials in all schools. There were few text books that had to be shared among pupils. Besides the few text books available there were no supplementary materials that could be used for teaching literacy. Instead of pupils being given the available text books to read at home the books were stored away after classes awaiting the next English lesson. The implication of this is that teachers could not give homework to pupils. Secondly pupils could not practice reading outside the classroom. So the only exposure to reading books and learning that pupils received was in the classroom. Research has established that time spent reading beyond the classroom can promote reading enjoyment and build pupils' fluency.

The change of the curriculum had some effect on the availability of the English text books (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools* in schools. Schools were not encouraged to replenish books for the old curriculum when books for the new curriculum were already available in schools for grades one, two, three, five, six, and seven then. In addition to the scarcity of text books nine out of twelve sample schools had no library at the school where pupils could go and read supplementary books besides text books. For schools that had no library at the school, the distance to the nearest library ranged from four to thirteen kilometres away. Pupils could not use such libraries that were far away from them during class time.

ii) Physical school structures

Schools had poor physical facilities and infrastructure. In ten schools the school structures were in a dilapidated condition. Buildings, walls and floors needed some repairs. There was no adequate classroom space. Two of the sample schools (one in the experimental the other in the control) had serious classroom space shortage. In one school standard four pupils were learning outside and literary sat on the floor with sacks used as mats. Some pupils sat on mounted bricks or rocks. In the other school learners were also learning outside but under a big tree. At this school learners used bricks as their stools. The class teacher did not have a table or a chair to sit on. Schools that had classroom space did not have the required furniture such as desks for pupils and the class teacher, storeroom and chairs. Classrooms for eleven schools out of the twelve in the sample had no desks for pupils. Pupils sat on the floor. A number of schools were not endowed with school buildings such as head teacher's office, staff

room, and library. Head teachers of four schools in the sample used a classroom as their office. The same classroom was used for learning. Eleven sample schools did not have a staffroom. This meant that teachers had nowhere to prepare lessons except in the headmaster's office if they were allowed to do this or at their homes. All the sample schools did not have electricity. However this is regular for rural schools in the country. The majority of rural schools have no electricity. Despite these short falls schools had large classes. Eight out of twelve sample schools had more than sixty pupils enrolled in standard four against one teacher.

iii) Time allocation

All primary schools in Malawi including those in the sample follow one time table. The timetable is centrally controlled. The Ministry of Education allocates time period for each subject or learning area for all schools to follow. Currently standard four is allocated eight English periods per week. Each period lasts thirty five minutes. Reading is given four periods a week. Instructional time in this study was therefore similar in both control and experimental schools. Malawian schools have a strong tradition of whole-class instruction. So both control and experimental schools used whole-class instruction. All schools used textbooks prescribed by the government hence schools selected in the study used a prescribed common English textbook (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools*.

c) Characteristics of pupils

i) Pupils' age and language spoken at home

Pupils involved in the study aged in range from 7 years to 19 with a mean age of 11.84 and mode of 12. The home and first languages of pupils were Chichewa, Chiyawo, Chilomwe, Chinyanja, Chingoni, Chitumbuka. The majority of pupils spoke Chichewa. About 81 percent of pupils spoke Chichewa followed by about 16 percent who spoke Chiyawo. The rest of the pupils, 2.6 percent, spoke Chilomwe (.6 percent), Chinyanja (1.5 percent), Chingoni (.2 percent), and Chitumbuka (.3 percent).

ii) Pupils' attendance

An examination of the attendance register revealed that standard four pupils in the study absented themselves from school. On average pupils in the experimental group were absent from school for about 18 days during the time of treatment. Those in the

control group on average were absent from school for 9 days during the same time. A number of reasons were given for pupils' absenteeism such as attending initiation ceremonies, getting married, being sent to the market during market days, helping with household chores especially girls. The mean for the pupils in the experimental group is two times higher than that in the control group. One possible explanation for this is that the entry number from the experimental group is far higher than that of the control group. The experimental group also has more girls than boys. In terms of absenteeism girls are more likely to absent themselves from school than boys. In their report the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST) and Malawi National Commission for UNESCO (2008) say that the primary school completion rate for girls is lower than that of boys, at 37 percent for girls and 46 percent for boys. It is not surprising that pupils were absent from school for so many days. This is consistent with other research findings. Chapter 1 indicated that absenteeism is one of the major problems in primary schools in Malawi. A comparison of Malawi on rate of learner absenteeism with other African countries such as Kenya, Mauritius, Namibia, Zambia, Zanzibar, and Zimbabwe shows Malawi with highest rate of absenteeism (Director-EMAS 2005).²

Pupils came from homes where there were few or no books to read. About 90 percent of pupils in the study indicated that they had no books to read at home. This is not surprising at all. When Malawi is compared with other African countries, it has the lowest percentage of books at learners' homes as shown here: (Kenya 38 percent; Mauritius 38 percent; Zambia 32 percent; Namibia 28 percent; Zimbabwe 24 percent; Zanzibar 15 percent; Malawi 13 percent) (Director-EMAS 2005).

iii) Pupils' enrolment in the research groups

Out of a total enrolment of 20,383 pupils in standard four in Zomba rural area schools 997 pupils were involved in the writing of the tests, 482 boys and 515 girls. However, only 628 pupils making 63 percent of the total number of pupils (997) wrote both the pre-test and post-test. The enrolment numbers show gender imbalance with more girls than boys enrolling in the experimental group and more boys than girls in the control

² Rate of absenteeism in Kenya (2%), Mauritius (1.2%), Namibia (1.6%), Zambia (2.2%), Zanzibar (1.7%), and Zimbabwe (1.5%) shows Malawi with highest rate of absenteeism at (3.7%).

group. However, having more girls than boys or having equal numbers of boys and girls in the lower classes is in line with what other studies have indicated (see Kadzamira et al. 2001). The enrolment numbers for girls begin to drop sharply in the upper classes from standard five onwards.

iv) Pupils' home background

About 15.75 percent of pupils did not respond to the question about their father's education. A majority of the pupils however, indicated that their father had primary education (44.13 percent); secondary education (33.20 percent). Few of pupils' parents had a diploma (0.30 percent). A further few of the pupils' fathers did not go to school (5.82 percent).

Just like with the pupils' fathers, the highest level of academic qualification for the pupils' mothers was primary education. About 57 percent of pupils' mothers had primary education followed by 19.76 percent with secondary, and .10 percent diploma. Some pupils' mothers had a diploma as their highest level of education (.10 percent). About 15 percent of pupils did not respond to the question about their mothers' highest level of qualification.

About 15.65 percent of the pupils did not respond to the question about their father's occupation. Nearly half of the pupils' fathers were subsistence farmers (47.54 percent). A further 14.24 percent of the pupils indicated that their fathers were artisan. Others were civil servants (9.23 percent), entrepreneurs (7.02 percent), watchmen (3.01 percent), and drivers (2.51 percent).

About 15.65 percent of pupils did not respond to the question about their mothers' occupation. The majority of the pupils' mothers were subsistence farmers just like their fathers. More than half the pupils' mothers were subsistence farmers (68.10 percent). A further 0.70 percent of pupils indicated that their mothers were artisans. Others were civil servants (4.11 percent), entrepreneurs (11.13 percent), drivers (.10 percent), and deceased (.20 percent). A higher percentage of pupils' mothers were involved in entrepreneurship (11.3 percent) more than the fathers (7.02 percent).

The data suggests that about half of the pupils' parents had primary education as their

highest level of education. More of the pupils' mothers were involved in small businesses than the fathers. There were fewer pupils' mothers with secondary education than fathers. The gender difference in academic level of achievement is consistent with known patterns of boys and girls, males and females achievement in the country.

3.5.3 Validity issues affecting the research design

Some measures were taken to improve upon the shortcomings that are likely to be in a study. These are presented in this section.

Some people believe that the classroom is too complex a phenomenon to study systematically and generalize the results to other classrooms. Reyna points out that "classroom observation under the best of circumstances (systematic and reliable observers) does not even permit generalizations to other classrooms" (2004: 54). While we accept that the classroom is indeed a complex phenomenon, it does not follow that researchers should not attempt to understand and explain it. The use of intact classes can enhance the face validity of certain types of classroom research (Mackey and Gass 2005). For instance in cases where a researcher is investigating the effectiveness of an instructional method, an existing classroom would provide the best setting for the research (ibid). In instances where intact classrooms are used in a study, Mackey and Gass suggest "a semi-randomization procedure by arbitrarily assigning classrooms to one treatment or another" (2005:143). This is why teachers and not individual pupils were randomly selected to the experimental and control groups.

While we cannot claim that the study was able to prevent distortions of the investigation due to infiltration of a number of other variables such as some teachers being naturally good at teaching and others not, some learners being motivated to learn and others not, the researcher feels that as much control as can realistically be expected in a classroom-based study was exercised. Without wanting to diminish other existing confounding variables such as those cited above, we worked on the assumption that such factors would be randomly distributed through the random selection of teachers to the experimental and control groups. This is to say that in any of the two groups (experimental and control), influences or differences in factors affecting the data would be almost the same.

In order to maintain as much consistency as possible in instruction across classrooms a common prescribed text book for teaching English was used in both experimental and control schools.

The time table was centrally controlled. The Ministry of Education provided a timetable matrix which all schools had to follow. This means that the duration of English lessons was the same in all schools. It also means that all schools taught the same number of English lessons in a week. Therefore the amount of time spent on teaching English was the same in both groups.

In order to control teacher characteristics that might have affected pupils' achievement, the sampled teachers had similar academic qualifications, mode of training and similar teaching experience.

A number of studies in second language administer pre-tests in order to make sure that there is comparability of the participating groups before the intervention (Mackey and Gass 2005). This study had pre-test measurements that checked on equivalency of control and experimental groups. Pre-existing differences in achievement between the control and experimental group were statistically controlled. However, pupils in the study shared similar backgrounds in terms of age, home language and social economic status. An examination of the post-test results and those of the pre-test made us conclude that there was no test-wise effect, as there was a five months gap between the time the pre-test was administered and the post-test. However, practice effect might have been present in all the two groups since schools were using the prescribed text books throughout the academic year. Validity and reliability were further ensured through triangulation of data collection methods.

3.5.4 Data collection instruments

Both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments were used. Data collection instruments were different from one another. Some instruments collected quantitative data while as the other collected qualitative data. The instruments were used in different phases. First to be used were quantitative data collection instruments followed by qualitative data collection instruments. After the intervention quantitative

data collection instruments were used. However, each instrument collected data which provided a particular perspective on the research question. Data collection instruments included classroom observation checklist and two different interview schedules which were used to collect qualitative data from teachers. Written, reading and auditory instruments were used to collect quantitative data on learners' achievement levels in phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Classroom observation checklist was used to collect qualitative data on observable teachers' instructional practice. One interview schedule was used to collect qualitative data from the teaching and learning environment. A second interview schedule was used to collect qualitative data on the use of the balanced literacy approach from teachers in the experimental group.

a) Observation instruments

The researcher used a classroom observation checklist as one instrument for collecting data. The classroom observation instrument was structured. It was used to code classroom activities and to provide quantitative measures of classroom activities (Appendix 2). The observation checklist was rated on a 1 to 5 equal appearing interval scale with 0 representing *not done*, 1 representing *very poor* and 4 representing *outstanding*. This provided a common set of measures for each teacher. The areas of focus were planning and preparation of lessons, lesson delivery, and instructional approaches used. Ratings of specific characteristics were completed during observation. It was hoped that use of a structured observation instrument would reduce the possible bias of unstructured classroom observation. This instrument was used to collect qualitative data on the teachers' classroom practice in teaching reading.

In order to increase the validity of observation each teacher was observed on a regular basis, once every month, by two people for thirty-five minutes' observation periods, during the sixteen weeks of the investigation. It was not possible to have three people involved in observing teachers as originally planned because of pressure of work and time constraint at the work place. The researcher, together with a co-researcher who was conversant with the balanced literacy approach observed teachers teaching. Before each observer observed alone, the two of us had to achieve a criterion of 80 percent agreement on all major sections of the observation checklist.

Besides classroom observation there was also an examination of documents such as lesson plans. An examination of the daily lesson plans provided a broader spectrum of teachers' instructional approach, which included not only performance in the classroom but also what the teachers intended to have happened. The multidimensional assessment of the teachers' approaches was likely to capture enough information and thus increase levels of reliability and validity. Training in observation skills for the researcher was not necessary. The researcher has been a secondary school English teacher for more than ten years. She has also used observation instruments before for more than five years during teaching practice moderation in Teacher Training Colleges. The other observer works for the Malawi Institute of Education as well. He too has been involved not only in teaching practice moderation but also in various research activities concerning literacy in Malawi. His background is presented in the last section of this chapter.

There were consistent results among researchers who rated the teachers in the classrooms. Observation data had an inter-observer reliability coefficient of .80.

b) Teacher interview schedules

Structured teacher interview schedules were used to collect some qualitative data in order to substantiate the findings of the quantitative data. One interview schedule collected data on the teaching and learning environment such as availability of books, desks and library at school. In addition to the above interview teachers in the experimental schools were interviewed in order to find out

- (a) whether or not they understood exactly what the balanced literacy approach meant and what it involved,
- (b) their experience in the use of the approach,
- (c) what in their opinion were the benefits of using the approach,
- (d) besides lack of books, desks any problems that teachers might have experienced as they implemented the approach,
- (e) ways teachers thought would resolve the problems,
- (f) what improvements did they think were required if the balanced literacy approach were to be repeated,
- (g) what they enjoyed doing most as they implemented the balanced literacy approach.

Teachers in the control group were asked similar questions that touched on

- a) Their understanding of the instructional approach they used in teaching reading and what it involved,
- b) their experience in the use of the approach,
- c) what in their opinion were the benefits of using this approach,
- d) besides lack of books, desks any problems that teachers might have experienced as they used their instructional approach,
- e) ways teachers thought would resolve the problems,
- f) what improvements did they think their approach required for it to work well,
- g) what they enjoyed doing most as they taught reading using their instructional approach.

The interviews were carried out during the last two weeks of the intervention. The interview questions were formulated in such a manner that, teachers' responses would bring out aspects of using the balanced literacy approach that could not be revealed by classroom observations alone. The interview data and classroom observations were used in order to provide methodological triangulation.

c) Pre-tests and post-tests

The pre-tests and post-tests form part of the process of evaluating the effectiveness of the balanced literacy approach in the teaching of reading and writing in English to standard four pupils in Malawi. The intervention's aim was to provide an instructional approach, which would raise pupils' learning achievement in reading and writing. The post-test was administered after the balanced literacy instruction was completed. A comparison of the pre-test and post-test results ruled out memory effect. There was a gap of sixteen weeks between when the pre-test and post-test were administered.

During the quantitative phase of the study pre-test and post-test instruments were used to collect data. Achievement tests were administered at the beginning and conclusion of the research (see Appendices 3 and 4). The objective of the tests was to find out if the intervention would result in the improvement of performance of grade four pupils in literacy in English in the selected experimental group. The pre-test was administered to check whether the entry points of participants were the same. It also provided a benchmark that was used at the end of the post-test. At the end of the study

a post-test was administered to both groups of participants to measure any pupils' gains in learning as a result of the intervention. Test items were adapted from Pupils' Book for standard four (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools*. Before writing the test learners were asked to provide the following information about them; name, sex, age, language spoken at home, mothers highest level of education, mothers' occupation, fathers' highest level of education, fathers occupation. Teachers were asked to verify the information pupils gave. Teachers were also asked to provide information on pupils' attendance during the intervention.

Issues of validity and reliability in test instruments used in a study need to be considered. Validity refers to how well test items measure what they are supposed to measure. Without validating a test or tests one cannot generalize with confidence the end results of testing. Dimsdale and Kutner say that "a successful study should use an assessment instrument that directly measures the skills being taught by the intervention" (2004:11). For the test items to be valid in this study they should measure pupils' knowledge and skills in phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Secondly valid test items should have adequate sampling of the content (Cohen et al. 2000). The validity of the test items was determined in terms of what Norcini and Grosso (1998) recommended. Norcini and Grosso say that one way of ensuring relevance of test items is to collect ratings of item relevance from job incumbents. In following this recommendation ten subject matter experts were asked to match the test items against the content measured as well as to determine the item relevance. Each of the ten subject experts were asked to make a judgement regarding the relevance of each of the five content areas (phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension) using a five-point scale where a rating of 1 indicated *not at all relevant* and a rating of 5 indicated *highly relevant*. The subject experts were also asked to use the numbers 2 through 4 to indicate intermediate degrees of relevance. (Please see Appendix 6 for more details on how this was done).

The level of agreement among subject experts as regards test items' relevance was that seven out of ten said that the test items on phonics and phonemic awareness were highly relevant while as the other three said the items were intermediately relevant. The level of agreement among the subject experts as regards relevance of test items

on vocabulary, fluency and comprehension was that all the ten said the test items were highly relevant. Generally the ratings collected from the ten subject experts regarded the test items as highly relevant. The ratings were more than 4 on average on a 5-point scale. The test items especially the written test and reading text were believed to have content validity because the items covered the curriculum that was being taught and pupils were likely to have been familiar with them.

In order to find the reliability coefficient of the test items the KR21 formulae was used. The reason for using this formula was that the formula is used for a single test. The study did not use test retest on pupils to avoid practice effect and familiarity with the content. The reliability coefficient of the written test was found to be .70, while those of the auditory and reading fluency tests were at .75.

i) Test instruments

Three tests instruments were used to collect data from pupils, written tests, reading texts and auditory. The written test instrument collected data on pupils' abilities in phonemic awareness, vocabulary and reading comprehension. The auditory tests collected data on pupils' abilities in phonics. The reading texts collected data on pupils' reading fluency.

ii) Test items

The test items measured literacy achievement through different types of tasks and ways of scoring. The test items were designed to capture a picture of the learner's achievement in phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency and text comprehension. It is claimed measures in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and text comprehension are linked to one another both theoretically and psychometrically and have been found to be predictive of reading proficiency (Big Ideas in Beginning Reading no date). The test items focused on those skills that are essential in early reading.

- **Phonics and phonemic awareness**

The phonemic awareness task tested pupils' ability to hear and manipulate sounds in words. Phonemic awareness is auditory (Antunez 2002; Big Ideas in Beginning Reading no date) therefore the tasks were administered individually that is, one-on-

one. The test administrator read an auditory prompt to a pupil, asking the pupil to respond either by identifying or manipulating a specific phonological unit in a word. Just to give few examples, Question A in the pre-test tested pupil's ability to identify words that end with the same sound (rhyming words) such as *cat* and *mat*. Question B, in the same pre-test tested pupil's ability to manipulate sounds in words for example substituting the /b/ sound in *bat* with /r/ to make *rat*. Question A in the post-test asked the pupil to identify the initial sounds in words for instance to say whether the initial sounds in *fat* and *fun* are the same or different. Question B in the post-test was on phoneme deletion. In this question a pupil was asked to say a word without the first sound for example, *win* without /w/ to make *in*.

Cassady et al. (2005) argue that this method, that is, having a test administrator read an auditory prompt to a pupil, presents a threat to validity and reliability in assessing phonological skills. This is more so where there are a number of test administrators involved in reading the auditory content to the learner. Cassady et al. (2005) argue that administrator's dialects, speech rate, enunciation, diction or accents are bound to vary and this can provide a different test stimulus to the learners. In order to limit the threat to validity and reliability posed by the involvement of multiple administrators for questions A and B, this study included writing tasks (Please see Question C). In addition one test administrator was used for the auditory and reading test items.

Question C measured pupil's ability to make analogies between the spelling patterns in words. For instance pupils could be given the word *beak* to create new words such as *peak* and *speak*. In the classroom pupils can use analogy to read new words such as already cited. Research findings have shown that children can use analogy to decode new words (White 2005). The research findings also suggest that analogy has a role to play in the initial stages of reading acquisition.

- Fluency

The test item on fluency (Task G in Appendices 3 and 4) is a task where an individual learner was asked to read English material from the prescribed standard four textbook (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools*. The task measured pupil's ability to read grade level text quickly and accurately. Pupils read aloud a passage from their grade level textbook for one minute. A stopwatch was

used to determine the number of words a pupil read in one minute. A score was given representing the number of words the pupil read correctly. (For further details on administration and scoring please see Appendix 7). Correctly read words (CRW) per minute and errors per minute were used to determine fluency. A word was scored as an error each time it was omitted, mispronounced, or substituted. According to the Partnership For Reading (b) this procedure is valid and reliable and strongly correlated with reading comprehension (The Partnership For Reading 12/14/2005). It was easy to monitor pupil's progress overtime in reading prescribed grade level text book by seeing if there was any increase in words read correctly per minute from the pre-test to the post-test. The length of the pre-test passage *Khumbo and the grasshopper* was 184 words, while that of the post-test *Timba the beautiful bird* was 185 words.

- Vocabulary

Questions D and E were writing tests on vocabulary. In one task pupils were given pictures and a list of names/words relating to the pictures. Pupils were expected to match the picture with the appropriate name/word. In the other task, pupils were given a definition in a sentence. Pupils had to select from a group of words, the correct word to which the definition referred. This later task came from the prescribed text book (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools*.

- Comprehension

The reading comprehension task (Question F) was a writing test used to measure pupil's level of understanding of a written passage or text. Pupils were asked to read a passage from their grade level prescribed textbook (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools* and respond to written questions after reading. The letter that Teleza wrote to Jane was used for the pre-test while as the letter that Juliet wrote to Maria was used in the post-test. Marks were awarded for each comprehension question that was answered correctly. (For scoring of marks please see Appendix 7).

3.5.5 Pilot testing

A small scale trial study of four schools was carried out for a number of reasons. It

was felt that the trial study would help to identify any problems that might have been there in the design and to try and address these before carrying out the main study; problems such as those that might have been in the procedure (practicality of procedures), materials (the reliability and validity of the test items) and methods. Pilot testing is “an important means of assessing the feasibility and usefulness of the data collection methods and making any necessary revisions before they are used with the research participants” (Mackey and Gass 2005: 43). Cohen et al., say in cases where observational research is being done, “a pilot must be conducted to ensure that the observational categories are appropriate ...unambiguous and effectively operationalise the purposes of the research” (2000:129). Pilot testing was also used to train the research assistant in as many elements of the research process as possible.

Since it was not practical for the study to randomly assign pupils to the experimental and control groups a quasi-experimental design was used during the quantitative phase of the study. Four schools in Zomba rural were pilot tested for a period of sixteen weeks (two terms with a one month holiday in between). The sixteen weeks excluded four weeks of administering pre-tests and post-tests. Two schools out of four were randomly placed in the experimental group while the other two were placed in the control group. A total of 294 pupils were initially included in the sample. Out of this 124 pupils were in the experimental group while as 170 pupils were in the control group. Table 4 below shows details of pupils who wrote the pre-test and post-test in the pilot study.

Table 4: Number of pupils who wrote the pre-test and post-test in the pilot study.

Name of School	Pre-test Girls	Pre-test Boys	Pre-test Total	Post-test Girls	Post-test Boys	Post-test Total	Both Pre- & Post-test
Mwanje Exp.	24	30	54	32	36	68	38 17G+21B
Khuluvi Exp.	28	42	70	17	18	35	24 14G+10B
Kanjuli Control	23	32	55	23	35	58	38 17G+21B
Namadidi Control	75	40	115	48	33	81	61 41G+20B
TOTAL	150	144	294	120	122	242	161

Just as in the main study the number of pupils writing the pre-test and post-test in the pilot study was not constant. It either increased or dropped during the post-test. As was mentioned earlier on the dropping or increasing of pupils' numbers was a result of pupils' absenteeism, drop-out or transfer to other schools.

There was no gender balance in the number of girls versus that of boys who wrote the tests. In the pilot experimental schools there were more boys than girls. However, in one of the pilot control schools the number of girls was almost two times that of boys. There were seventy-five girls against forty boys.

The pupils' age range in the pilot study was almost the same with that of the main study. The pupils' ages ranged from eight to nineteen years. Pupils spoke Chichewa, Chiyawo, Chilomwe, Chinyanja and Chingoni. About 80 percent spoke Chichewa, followed by 16 percent who spoke Chiyawo. The remaining 4 percent was shared by pupils who spoke Chilomwe, Chinyanja and Chingoni. The majority of the pupils' fathers and mothers were subsistent farmers. The highest educational level for the majority of the parents was primary school (about 60 percent).

Two teachers from the pilot experimental group were trained twice in the use of balanced literacy approach, first before the intervention and midway of the

intervention. The training was done mid way of the intervention in order to ensure that teachers understood the balanced approach if they did not during the first training and they were able to implement it in the classroom. Teachers in the pilot experimental group were monitored and given support once every month as they implemented the balanced literacy approach. The implementation checks were carried out for two reasons. The first reason was to allow the research team to check for unplanned deviations from the intended instructional approach. The second reason was to react to any difficulties that the teachers might have encountered in implementing the treatment. Classroom observations also assisted in determining what the needs were for the mid intervention training. Teachers in the pilot control group were also observed teaching in order to find out which instructional approaches they used in teaching reading.

At the end of the pilot intervention, which was also the end of the school term and year, quantitative data was collected through the post-tests which were administered to pupils. The post-test intervention data indicated that pupils responded very well to the activities that were presented to them. The reading and writing abilities of pupils that were present for the post-test increased more than that of the control group. However, the results obtained were not conclusive because of inadequate data. In one pilot experimental school only thirty-five pupils out of seventy presented themselves for the post-test. (The post tests were administered after pupils had already written their end of term/year tests two days before closing the term. An interview with the teachers at the school revealed that after writing end of term tests a number of pupils stopped attending classes till the closing day when they went to hear the results of their performance in the tests).

a) Issues arising from the pilot study

A number of issues arose from the pilot study. There was shortage of English text books in all the schools. In one school eighty-five pupils shared twenty-five books amongst themselves. Besides shortage of English textbooks there was also an absence of supplementary materials and other instructional materials such as chart paper, pens, pictures and drawings. Generally teachers used the prescribed text book and the teacher's guide available for teaching English or literacy and nothing else.

Another issue highlighted in the pilot study was large classes. During the pre-test period all schools had more than fifty pupils to a teacher with one school having three times more (one hundred and fifteen pupils) to one teacher. It was argued earlier on that the more number of pupils there are in a class the less interaction there is between the teacher and an individual pupil.

Teachers and pupils in the pilot study absented themselves from school. Reasons for pupils absenting themselves from school have already been presented in the main study. The most common reason for teacher absenteeism was illness due to a number of factors including the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Teachers' absenteeism affected the classes involved in the study. When a teacher was absent another teacher was relocated to a class without regard for continuity in the former class which might have been involved in the study. Table 4 above testifies the problem of pupils' absenteeism, drop-out, and transfer from one school to another. There were a total of 294 pupils who wrote the pre-test. The figure went down to 242 during the post-test, a drop of 52 pupils. The figure went down even further to 161 when we consider pupils who wrote both the pre-test and post-test a drop of 133 from the original figure of 294.

During the pilot testing period the researchers learnt of the need to modify the way to administer the tests. Because of pupils' absenteeism, transfer to other schools and drop out administration of the written, auditory and reading tests at a school needed to be completed within a day. The implications were that it was not possible to administer the auditory and reading tests to all pupils at a school on one-to-one basis before 1 o'clock noon when pupils knocked off. So instead of all pupils reading a passage and doing the auditory test only twenty pupils were selected from a school to do the auditory and reading tests. After pupils wrote the written tests the researchers used systematic sampling strategy to select ten girls and ten boys for the auditory and reading passage tests. Systematic sampling was chosen for a number of reasons. The first reason was that it would be easy to draw and execute. Pupils were asked to form two queues one for girls and the other for boys. After randomly selecting the first pupil on the queue, nine more pupils were systematically selected as required in a systematic sampling procedure mentioned earlier on. Secondly it was felt that this strategy would spread the membership more evenly across the entire classroom

population than random sampling. Hence it would be more representative of the classroom population and more precise. So in all schools both experimental and control schools, ten girls and ten boys were systematically sampled to carry out the auditory and reading tasks.

The pilot study also revealed the problem that was there as regards the teaching of phonics. Teachers revealed that they did not know the sounds of the alphabet letters and that they could not teach blending and segmentation of words. A decision was made to use analogy-based phonics instead.

3.5.6 The research process

a) Teacher training

The training of teachers in the main study just as in the pilot study focused on how to deliver instruction effectively using the balanced approach at the same time using the text book (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools*. The training included the use of the intervention materials that teachers were to use (see Appendix 1).

The researcher and two other experts in the balanced literacy approaches trained six teachers in the experimental group. The six teachers received a total of six days intensive training in the use of the balanced literacy approach. Three days of training were at the beginning of the intervention. Each day covered six-hour sessions. The other three days of training were midway of the intervention. The second training concentrated on areas where teachers were found to be weak during the first eight weeks of implementing the balanced literacy approach. Trainings were carried out on weekends Saturdays and Sundays plus one working day which was a Monday. This was done in order to reduce the number of days teachers were absent from school because of the training. During the training microteaching was carried out. The trainings took place at the Malawi Institute of Education. The goal of the training was to allow the six teachers to master the use of the balanced literacy approach and successfully implement it in the classroom. Only teachers who underwent the use of the balanced literacy approach training were included in the sample. The training of teachers was provided by three people all from the Malawi Institute of Education

including the researcher. The trainers were conversant with the balanced literacy approach. The researcher was present at all training sessions.

i) Phonics instruction

In the classroom situation teachers had to provide activities that would help pupils develop phonemic awareness through hearing, identifying and manipulating the individual sounds, or phonemes, within spoken words. Some of the activities that were to be practiced were:

- phoneme isolation for eg. What is the first or last sound in *mitt*? The first sound is /m/ the last sound is /t/,
- phoneme identification e.g. Which sound is the same in *man, mitt, mess*? /m/ is the same,
- phoneme substitution,
- phoneme deletion,
- phoneme manipulation.

ii) Phonemic awareness instruction

Teachers were trained to provide any of the following phonemic awareness instruction after, during or before a reading lesson.

- rhyming words such as *fan; tan; man*
- group of words with the same beginning for example *star; story; staircase*
- group of words with the same middle sound such as *bag cat*
- group of words with the same ending for example *bat; sat; mat; pat; that;* or *pinch; lunch; punch*
- make analogies such as *table; stable; able; cable; gable; fable*

Teachers were trained to teach this explicitly starting with the initial sounds and moving on to the middle. Teaching aids could be a chart or pictures. The teacher could use games, rhymes, alliterations, assonance, or any other language that focused on the sounds in words. The focus of the lesson might have been oral language or this could be combined with looking at letters. After the teacher had modelled the skill, pupils were expected to practice actively. The activity could be done individually or in groups.

iii) Fluency instruction

Teachers were trained in the use of two major instructional approaches as regards fluency. The first one was a teacher providing models of fluent reading to pupils. Through listening to the teacher reading effortlessly and with expression, pupils were expected to learn how a readers' voice can help a written text make sense. Thus reading aloud would increase pupils' knowledge of the world, their vocabulary and their familiarity with written language. The second one was a teacher giving pupils repeated oral practice while guiding and giving them feedback. The repeated practice was expected to improve pupils' word recognition, speed and accuracy as well as fluency. Fluency would develop as a result of several opportunities given to pupils to practice reading on their own. The teacher was to demonstrate fluent oral reading. Pupils were to practice reading fluently through repeated oral readings.

iv Vocabulary instruction

Teachers in the experimental group were trained to teach word recognition, meaning of words and giving pupils an opportunity to practice using the new words in various contexts. Training activities were taken from the book (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools*. Research has shown that most vocabulary is learned indirectly. Pupils can learn new words indirectly through their engagement in oral conversations, listening to other people speak or read to them, and from their engagement in silent reading. Some vocabulary however, must be taught directly. Direct instruction helps pupils learn difficult words. Teaching learners difficult words from a text before they read it is helpful in comprehending the text in addition to learning new words (Partnership for Reading 2001). Direct instruction can also be used in teaching pupils word learning strategies. There are several word learning strategies that can be used such as cueing systems like sight vocabulary, context cues, and word attack cues.

v) Comprehension instruction

In giving instruction in text comprehension teachers were trained to:

- Introduce key ideas and concepts in the text before reading and after reading.
- Help pupils to understand how the text was structured.

- Prompt pupils to use strategies when reading such as predicting what will happen in the story using clues given in the text like illustrations and titles found at the beginning of a passage in their text book, making questions about the main idea of a text, re reading or asking questions about part of a text they did not understand, connecting the events in the text to what they already knew.
- Extend pupils understanding of the text through asking pupils to write, retell, summarise the story in the text.

After training teachers were given the training manual that had details of the treatment. The training manual provided a base for teacher reference whenever necessary.

b) Observation of teachers' teaching

Teachers in both experimental and control groups were observed teaching reading and writing in English to standard four pupils in rural primary schools in Zomba district area. After training teachers in the experimental group were observed teaching reading in the classroom. The purpose of the visits was to observe how the teachers were implementing the use of the balanced literacy approach and to respond to teachers questions and react to any problems that they might have had. Each time after observation teachers were provided with feedback on their lessons to ensure that their lessons were in accordance with the training they had received. Previous lesson plans and learners' books were also examined to see whether teachers were implementing the balanced literacy approach even when there were no visits from researchers.

Teachers in the control group were told that there was some research which was to find out the best teaching method which would improve pupils' achievement in reading. They as teachers were being asked to use the best methods they knew for teaching reading, and to expect some people coming to observe them teaching and perhaps copy their methodology. Teachers were also told that some educationists in the Ministry were interested in finding out which teaching methodology was the best for pupils. Each teacher in the control group was also observed teaching in order to see which methodology they used in teaching reading.

c) Data entry and analysis

Data were entered into an SPSS database. All data were entered by one person to ensure consistency in data entry procedures. Data were analysed by a statistician from the Research Department of the Malawi Institute of Education. The same person from the Research Department conducted statistical comparison between the control and experimental groups. Analyses of data were based on pupils who were present throughout the treatment.

Data from all the sample schools were analysed using raw scores on the pre-tests and post-tests. A t-test was used to compare pre-test and post-test mean scores within the experimental group. A one-way analysis of covariance was conducted to measure the effectiveness of the balanced literacy approach on learners' literacy levels. The independent variable was the treatment. The dependent variables were learners' post-test scores in phonics, phonemic awareness, reading fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Pupils' pre-test scores were used as a covariate in order to control for pre-existing differences between the groups. The analyses enabled the researcher to determine the effects of the treatment.

3.5.7 The roles of the researchers in the study

a) The researcher

The researcher is a graduate of Chancellor College which is a constituent college of the University of Malawi. She holds a Bachelor of Social Science degree with majors in English and Sociology and a minor in Psychology, a University Certificate in Education from the same college with majors in Education, English and Chichewa language teaching, and a Masters degree in Educational Studies from the University of Hull in the United Kingdom. In 1999 while in Harare, Zimbabwe (on Leave of Absence) the researcher enrolled for a computer course, and was awarded an Advanced Certificate in Personal Computer Applications at the end. As a result of this computer training the researcher gained knowledge and skills that were relevant to this study. Knowledge on the use of computer allowed the researcher to access various resources. She was able to browse the internet and search through databases with rich amounts of scholarly articles that have extensively been used in this study. Information Communication Technology (ICT) and internet have also aided in her

long distance studies by allowing easy and instant communication with the University of South Africa (UNISA), the UNISA library and her supervisor.

The researcher has been working in various capacities since she left college. Immediately after graduating at Chancellor College the researcher joined the Civil Service as a secondary school teacher teaching English. As a secondary school teacher her responsibilities included that of being an assistant examiner and an item writer for the Malawi School Certificate Examinations which are written after four years of secondary school education (equivalent to ordinary Cambridge *O* level). She was a marker for the Malawi Government Junior Certificate Examinations (written after two years of secondary school education). As an assistant examiner and an item writer she developed skills of marking *O* level national English examination papers and what goes into item writing for the same examinations. This experience was relevant to this study when the researcher was developing test items.

After teaching the researcher joined the Malawi National Examinations Board (MANEB) where she rose from the rank of subject officer to that of Director for the Examinations department. As a director of the examinations department her special duties included: implementing Board's policies embracing the development of examination syllabuses and national examinations; co-ordinating all the activities of the Examinations Department from various sections. While working for MANEB the researcher was on yearly bases called upon to participate in the Teaching Practice Moderation Exercise for teacher training college students. The exercise involved observing pre-service college students teach in a primary school classroom, evaluating and awarding a mark to the student observed. The researcher's experience at MANEB helped her to obtain a number of skills such as observation skills, to be conversant with content construct validity of test items and reliability issues. These skills became handy when carrying out this study. Besides the above mentioned skills she also was familiar with the teaching syllabuses of all levels, primary, secondary and teacher training colleges. She also had general knowledge of pupils' performance at various levels be it primary, secondary and teacher training.

After leaving MANEB the researcher joined the Malawi Institute of Education (MIE) as a Curriculum Specialist (Education). Her responsibilities at MIE included planning, designing, organising and conducting in-service courses and seminars for primary education advisors, primary school head teachers and other education personnel; conducting research and evaluation of educational programmes; writing instructional materials; trying instructional materials; planning and organising writer's workshops in the various subjects; undertaking consultancies on behalf of the Malawi Institute of Education. Besides being a principal curriculum specialist the researcher is also a Coordinator for Initial Primary Teacher Education Reform (IPTER) and a member of the Secondary School Curriculum and Assessment Reform (SSCAR) here at MIE. As a Coordinator for the Initial Primary Teacher Education Reform the researcher has been involved in planning, organising, and facilitating all activities of the Teacher Training Curriculum. She also acts as a liaison officer between Malawi Institute of Education, Department of Teacher Education Development (DTED) and Education Methods and Advisory Services (EMAS) in the Ministry of Education headquarters. As a Curriculum Specialist she has been involved in the development of instructional materials at primary and teacher training levels. To this effect she has co-authored English pupils' text books and teachers' guides for standards one, two, three, four, six, seven and eight.

Recently the researcher was delighted to join the Read Malawi group. Read Malawi is a joint programme that exists between The University of Texas at San Antonio and MIE/Malawi whose objective is to produce supplementary textbooks and learning materials for primary schools in Malawi. To this effect the researcher has developed and supported a number of stories in English and translated some into Chichewa as her contribution to the programme. The programme is to run for three years. It is the researcher's hope and wish that the books will go a long way in helping Malawian children learn to read and write in English.

The major role of the researcher in this study was to provide leadership and ensure that the various activities being carried out during the study followed the design of the study. The leadership skills I obtained while at MANEB and here as a Coordinator of the IPTER programme were relevant during the research period. Other roles included setting the pre-test and post-test items for pupils, training teachers and the research

assistant in the balanced literacy approach and observing teachers teach in the classroom. The researchers' experience as a secondary school teacher, director at MANEB and here at the institute were tapped from during training and classroom observation. The researcher also acted as a liaison officer between the National Research Council and the Malawi Institute of Education. Because of her experience at MANEB it was not difficult to liaise between the National Research Council (NRC) and the Malawi Institute of Education.

b) The co-researcher

The co-researcher holds a Masters degree in Educational Studies (with distinction) specialising in language and literacy studies from the University of Cape Town. He also holds a Bachelor of Education degree (English) from Exeter University, a Diploma in Education (English and History) from the University of Malawi, a certificate in English language teaching (ELT) from the United Kingdom and a certificate in primary school teaching from Malawi.

The co-researcher taught as a primary school language and literacy teacher for four years before he moved to teach English language and literature in secondary school. After some years of secondary school teaching he joined the teacher training colleges where he trained pre-service primary school English language and literacy teachers for over ten years. He is now at the Malawi Institute of Education as the principal curriculum specialist and head of the languages and literacy section in the Department of Curriculum Development where he develops English instructional materials and conducts in-service courses for primary and secondary school teachers

The co-researcher has been involved in numerous research studies on language and literacy. For instance he was the researcher responsible for the assessment of learning and literacy achievement in the USAID's funded Improving Education Quality (IEQ) project from 1998 to 2003. He has also directed two national research projects in Malawi on language and literacy studies. These are the Malawi Breakthrough to Literacy (MBTL) study that was funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Literacy across the curriculum (LAC) study that was funded by the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ).

The co-researcher has co-authored two sets of primary school English books, namely the Activities with English series and the current Primary English series for Malawi. In addition, he has published some children's story books, secondary school Chichewa books and other academic books on language. He has also presented numerous papers at national and international conferences. Some of his papers have been published in conference proceedings. The co-researcher has a lot of experience in research. His role in this study was training teachers in the balanced approach and observing teachers teach in the classroom.

c) The research assistant

The research assistant Linda Chikaipa is a University of Malawi graduate. She graduated in September 1999 with a bachelor's degree in Education (Humanities) majoring in Home Economics and History as a minor. During her college vacations, she used to work as a research assistant with the Centre for Social Research in Zomba. In August 1999 she was part of a team that conducted a study titled *An Assessment of Decentralised Governance in Malawi*. In this study she played the role of an Assessment Participatory Expert responsible for data field collection. Her duties included assisting in the formulation of questionnaires, training research assistants in the data collection methods, facilitating the data collection process in the field and writing field reports and presenting the findings to the core researchers. This exposure prepared her for the role she played in this study that of administering tests to all sample schools.

The research assistant was trained in the use of the balanced approach. She played a role in this study because of her experience in data collection. The research assistant was not aware of which schools or classrooms were assigned to the experimental or control groups. She marked pupils' answers and responses to the auditory test, reading text and written tests. She recorded the marks on to the pupils' performance summary sheet (Appendix 5). Pupils' test results were submitted to the research department for analysis.

Chapter 4

Results and Findings

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 argued that there is evidence that shows standard four pupils in Malawi as not able to read and write in English. The chapter further argued that without such reading and writing skills standard four pupils' overall academic achievement is bound to be affected negatively. This is especially so from standard five onwards when the medium of instruction becomes English. There is therefore a challenge for the Malawian primary school teacher in how to address this problem. Some people have argued that reading intervention at an early stage is better than remediation later on (Burns et al. 1998). One such intervention that can be implemented at a relatively early stage is the balanced literacy approach.

The purpose of this study was thus to document an example of the implementation of the balanced literacy approach as an intervention for standard four Malawian pupils learning to read and write in English and to examine the pupils' outcomes. This chapter reports on the effectiveness of using this approach in teaching reading and writing in English as an intervention in standard four in the Malawian primary schools. The chapter describes the outcomes of implementing the balanced literacy approach in twelve primary schools in Malawi for the sixteen weeks of the study. It also discusses the limitations of the study and the successes of the study as well as outlining areas of future research.

Fidelity of implementation (also known as treatment fidelity, or treatment integrity) is an important aspect of research validity (Cohen et al. 2000: 106). It refers to the degree in which an intervention has been implemented as intended. Information on the extent to which an intervention has been implemented is essential in understanding the relationship between an intervention and outcomes (Gersten 2005). Gersten argues that without evidence about whether an intervention was actually implemented as planned, it is not possible to establish this relationship unequivocally (ibid). If one is to argue that an intervention worked or that it is responsible for a change, it is important to show that teachers involved in the intervention exhibited

more of the classroom behaviours related to the treatment than did the teachers in the control group. The degree to which teachers have been faithful to an intervention should be measured in order to ensure that comparisons are not rendered invalid by poor implementation (ibid). Research findings have revealed that teachers involved in an intervention can make modifications even in instances where program developers have demanded strict compliance (Datnow and Castello 2000). Fidelity implementation helps researchers to determine if unsuccessful outcomes are due to a failure to implement the model or are due to a failure of the model itself.

Researchers should observe the intervention using a checklist of treatment components and record whether or not the most central aspects of the intervention occurred (Gersten 2005: 157). This study followed the recommendations stated above as regards fidelity implementation. In order to capture the implementation of the balanced literacy approach in the classroom, a structured observation schedule was used. Classroom observation took place during times designated as English periods over a sixteen-week period. Each observation was for a thirty-five minute period in length. Ninety-six lessons were observed. The observations entailed qualitative data-gathering sessions. The central aspects of the intervention that needed to be captured were the teachers' inclusion of the five core elements phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension in the lesson plan and during teaching of reading.

Procedural fidelity measures were used to determine the levels of implementation during intervention across the sample schools. Fidelity ratings consisted of an observation checklist which covered the following teachers' instructional behaviour in the classroom:

Under phonics, the teacher was to

- teach the relationship between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language, and
- provide systematic instruction in phonics.

The plan of instruction was to include a selected set of letter-sound relationships that were organised into a logical sequence from easy to difficult. Instruction was to

- make pupils apply letter sounds to daily reading,
- teach strategies to decode multisyllabic words using word parts such as affixes for example *pre-*, *mis-*, *-tion*, and
- give pupils practice in the application of phonics to the spelling of words.

Under phonemic awareness the teacher was expected to

- provide explicit instruction in phonemic awareness,
- teach phoneme identification, phoneme deletion or addition or substitution to form new words, and
- focus on rhyming words and analogies.

In providing instruction in fluency the teacher was expected to

- model fluent reading,
- provide opportunities for oral, repeated reading, and
- give support and feedback.

In teaching vocabulary the teacher was supposed to

- provide direct explicit instruction in the meaning of words and in word learning strategies,
- engage pupils in daily interaction that apply new vocabulary in both oral and written work,
- explicitly teach both individual words and word learning strategies, and
- integrate words into sentences and ask pupils to tell the meaning of the word in the sentence and to use it in a variety of contexts.

In providing instruction in comprehension the teacher was supposed to

- activate pupils' prior knowledge (background information),
- provide comprehension instruction before during and after reading a text, and
- teach the following comprehension strategies: finding main idea, predicting, retelling the story (summarising), and guessing meaning of unfamiliar words.

The observer in the classroom was to indicate which items, and to what extent the teacher included these in teaching reading. The fidelity instrument used a rating of a

1 to 5 equal appearing interval scale with 0 representing *not done*, 1 representing *very poor* and 4 representing *outstanding* (see Appendix 2). Data on how teachers gave instruction on reading was collected by two researchers once every month. The observation checklist instrument was preferred because it enabled an observer to record the occurrence of the most central aspects of the intervention and determine whether the experimental and control groups received different instructions. In addition, as mentioned earlier on, it allowed the researcher to compare behaviours across research contexts in a consistent manner. Findings indicated that teachers in the experimental group were able to effectively implement the use of the balanced literacy approach. Observation data had an inter-observer reliability coefficient of .80.

4.2 Summary of findings

The results presented in this chapter are from three sources: (i) classroom observations from both experimental and control schools, (ii) sets of data from teacher interviews on the use of the balanced literacy approach and the use of the traditional method, and (iii) sets of data from pupils' pre-test and post-test results.

4.2.1 Experience of the balanced literacy approach in the Malawian classrooms

This section presents results from classroom observation following sixteen weeks of implementing the balanced literacy approach. In their observation, researchers did not disturb the teacher when he or she was teaching nor did they interact with the pupils during lessons. The researchers limited their attention to the teaching and learning processes. Teachers in all the classes observed were comfortable to teach while being observed by the researchers. This is because they were used to being observed by various people that included Primary Education Advisors (PEA's), Ministry of Education officials who observe primary school teachers on a regular basis.

4.2.2 Classroom observation results

Here we present classroom observation results from schools which (a) implemented the balanced literacy approach and (b) schools which did not implement the balanced literacy approach. Observation results from schools which used the balanced literacy approach are presented first.

a) Classroom observation results (Experimental schools 1)

In the first classroom observation results, the teacher was teaching Unit 16 the title of which was *Elisa and Kitty* (Appendix 10 a) from the book (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools*.

In the introduction the teacher activated learners' prior knowledge by asking pupils if they kept animals at home and the reasons why they kept the animals. He started to teach from what pupils knew and broadened pupils' experiences. (For example the issue about chickens being birds and not animals; and for those that have cats at home asking them what they do with their cats). (For details of the lesson see Appendix 11). The teacher aroused pupils' interest and curiosity by asking them what they thought the story was about. During reading pupils would have been interested to find out whether their prediction was confirmed or not. This was one way of engaging pupils in the topic and to find out what they already knew. Activating knowledge about a topic is important especially for second language learners. It can help learners to focus on features of the text that can be handy in building a scaffold for what learners will read in a text.

The teacher proceeded to discussing the title and illustration of the story. He used the illustration to get pupils to predict what the content of the story would be about. Here again by asking pupils to predict the teacher was getting pupils to think and helping pupils to develop one of the effective strategies for reading comprehension. There was also some discussion of new vocabulary that pupils met in the story for instance when pupils were asked to identify the items in the illustration such as a bench (and not a chair), a girl, and a cat. The teacher activated and built pupils' background knowledge through the use of such pre-reading activities. Class discussions held around illustrations, and title of the story might have helped pupils to have a framework for understanding the text. They could confirm or not confirm their predictions.

The teacher taught learners the scanning skill by asking pupils to put a finger on some words found in the text. Pupils were also asked to guess the meanings of words as they were used in the passage. It was observed that it was difficult for learners to guess the meanings of words as they were used in the text. There are two possible

explanations for this. The first is that learners might not have had adequate vocabulary for them to express their ideas. The second is that it is possible that learners did not grasp the concept of context cues. In this step the teacher lost an opportunity in using realia for teaching vocabulary or explaining some. Although he indicated dolls in the teaching and learning material area of his lesson plan and actually brought a small doll to the class he forgot to match the written word and the actual doll in the presence of learners. The doll that he brought to the class was made of clay and not plastic as it is in the passage. An interview with the teacher after the lesson revealed that he did not use this doll for not wanting to confuse the pupils with the word plastic. He was not able to buy a plastic doll. There are no plastic dolls made within Malawi. The ones available in shops are imported and expensive for the majority of the people.

The teacher then wrote some pre-questions on the chalkboard. The writing of the questions on the board before pupils read not only gave pupils a purpose for reading but also allowed pupils to focus their attention on what they were to learn. The questions also helped pupils to think actively as they read. They (questions) also guided the pupils in finding the main points of the story and gave them practice in finding the answers to the questions. Before reading the text, some pupils were asked to read the pre-questions aloud. In asking some pupils to read aloud the questions written on the board the teacher was ensuring that the pupils understood the questions before they read the story.

The teacher read a passage aloud followed by pupils. The reading aloud of the passage by the teacher had the advantage of letting learners listen to how to pronounce words in the passage. The reading aloud of the passage by the pupils reinforced the pronouncing of words that pupils had just listened to as the teacher read. The teacher too could check whether or not pupils recognised words correctly although the teacher could not tell at this moment whether the pupils were reading with understanding or not. However, the reading aloud of the passage in a chorus form had the danger of some learners just parroting after the teacher without any understanding at all.

The lesson continued with a discussion of the multiple meanings of the various words

made using a grid *round, sound, bound, ground* and *pound* (see Appendix 11). After discussing the meanings the teacher asked the learners to use the words in sentences of their own and to read the sentences aloud to the class. This part of the lesson gave pupils explicit instruction in oral language development, as well as a discussion about word meanings which was likely to have contributed towards pupils' vocabulary development. Using analogy-based phonics the teacher explicitly taught phonics to the pupils. He let pupils be aware of the strategy being used in making new words by asking pupils to scan for the word, spell the word, pronounce the word and asking learners to come with other words that sounded the same at the end as the word *found* using the grid. Then he allowed the pupils to practice using the strategy. Eventually pupils practiced in transferring strategies to new tasks. They wrote sentences of their own using the new words they had just learnt and shared their writing with fellow pupils by reading aloud what they had written. Research on reading instruction has strongly argued for explicit instruction in teaching reading skills (NRP 2000; Pressley 2000).

b) Classroom observation results (Experimental schools 2)

The teacher was teaching Unit 18 whose title was *Birds* (Appendix 10 b).

The teacher started with pre-reading activities. He selected a picture of a bird which was a key idea in the story which was about to be read. Use of real objects in teaching meanings of new words can be effective because objects consist of their natural characteristics. It is easy for learners to understand the meaning of new words because there is a direct link between the meanings and the objects. In their research review Waxman and Tellez (2002) found that provision of multiple representations such as realia, pictures and graphic organisers were strategies that made classroom instruction meaningful for second language learners learning English.

The teacher and pupils held a discussion around the topic related to what pupils were to read. Here the teacher built pupils' background information by activating relevant prior knowledge through the picture and asking questions about birds such as how many legs, eyes, and wings birds have, and where birds live. The teacher pre-taught words and concepts that would help learners to understand the story. He was bridging the gap between what pupils already knew and what they needed to know

for them to read. One way of dealing with reading problems is for teachers to bridge the gap between what pupils know and what they will need to know for them to successfully read a text (Eskey 1997).

The teacher showed the class some real birds' feathers and asked learners to say what it was. Some pupils said *feethers* (sic) while others said *feathers*. The teacher pronounced the word for the pupils and said *feathers*. He repeated pronouncing the word and asked pupils to say the word after him. He asked a volunteer to spell the word. He asked another learner to write the spelt word on the chalkboard for all learners to see how the word was spelt. He asked the learners to read the word from the chalkboard.

The teacher then showed learners a real *bird's nest, an insect, an egg* and asked learners what they thought these things were. In teaching the vocabulary (concept) for these the teacher started with pronouncing the words, asking pupils to say after him, asking pupils to spell the word, to write the words on the chalkboard and to read the words from the chalk board. The teacher then flashed word cards with the words written on and asked the pupils to read the words: *nest, insects, feathers, an egg, wings* and *beaks*. The teacher and pupils discussed the words. The teacher once more flashed word cards with the same words *nest, insects, feathers, an egg, wings* and *beaks* and asked learners to find each of the words in the passage.

This was followed by a discussion of the illustration at page 105 in the book (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools* guided by the following questions:

How many birds are there in the picture?

How many legs, eyes, and wings do all birds have?

What do birds use to catch insects?

What covers the body of the birds?

What do you think you are going to read about in the story?

What is the title of the story?

When asked about how many birds there were in the picture (illustration), how many legs, eyes, and wings do birds have pupils responded to all the questions correctly and

made a correct guess that the story was about birds. The teacher made a link between what pupils knew about birds and what they could actually see in the illustration in their text-book. Next the teacher asked pupils to predict what they thought the story would be about. Pupils then read the text and compared what was in the text and their prediction. From the introduction to asking of questions about the illustration in the text the teacher was activating pupils' prior knowledge. The activation of prior knowledge was one way of enhancing the development of effective comprehension strategies.

The teacher read the first paragraph of the story aloud while pupils listened. He demonstrated the strategy of summarising a text such as re telling what one read by including important information only, using key words from the text leaving out details that were less important. The teacher explained why pupils had to learn the strategy. He asked pupils to practice the strategy using very short paragraphs. Pupils read a passage and summarised it orally then read the passage silently. The teacher and learners discussed the answers to the questions on the chalkboard orally.

In the next step the teacher asked learners to go through the passage and identify all words which started with the sound /s/ at the beginning (which started with the letter s). Pupils scanned for words: *sand, some, see, and slowly*. The teacher then asked learners to identify their own words which started with the /s/ sound (which started with the letter s). Pupils came up with the following words: *sun, sin, same, sick, sit, sat, soap, story, see, and school*. Pupils read the words to the class and wrote them on the chalkboard. Pupils used the words they identified in their own sentences.

In the concluding part of the lesson pupils were asked to match the following words with the objects: *egg, nest, feathers, and insects*. The teacher asked learners to say one sentence each one of them about what they had read in the story. Pupils gave one sentence each about the story. The teacher here was trying to teach learners the ability of picking an idea from the story. This would lead to learners' ability to identify the main idea of the story and summarise.

Teachers in the experimental schools started their reading lessons by activating learners' background knowledge (prior knowledge) in order to help learners interpret

the text. Instruction in the classroom addressed specific background knowledge required by the pupils in order for the learners to understand a text. Teachers asked some questions about the topic in the text, such as how many legs, beaks a bird has. Through asking some questions about a topic teachers were able to build the learners' background knowledge. Learners used realia, pictures or illustrations found at the beginning of each story to predict what the story was about.

Teachers also used pre-reading activities to build learners' vocabulary. Words which were difficult for learners to understand a text were pre-taught. This helped learners build their schema and increased the learners' background knowledge which was needed to understand a text. The teaching of individual words can deepen pupils' knowledge of word meaning. In-depth knowledge of word meanings can help learners' understand what they are hearing or learning (Snow 2002: 63).

Teachers taught learners to identify specific sounds at the beginning, and middle of words. They also asked learners to identify the word that remained when a phoneme was deleted or to substitute a phoneme with another. So learners made a new word by replacing a particular phoneme with another. Learners were also able to use the idea that a cluster of letters such as *-ound*, *-aid*, *-all* could be used in several different words to represent the same series of letters. This helped learners to recognise new words by analogy with familiar words and drew attention to letter sound correspondences as they occurred in a text. Systematic phonics instruction that learners received is likely to have brought about the greatest improvement in learners' reading ability (NRP 2000). Reading experts say that awareness of sound at word, rhyme and phoneme levels is one of the most important indicators of early reading success (Adams 1990).

The reading aloud of the passage by the teacher not only helped learners to develop listening skills but also provided a model for pupils' in pronunciation and expression. However, the intonation and tone used by the Malawian teacher was not exactly modelled on the Queen's reception of the English language.

Comprehension instruction given to learners was direct and explicit. It focused on some strategies such as making predictions, answering questions and summarising.

Teachers demonstrated to the learners how to use some strategies. The demonstration and instruction in comprehension strategies were likely to have helped learners to be aware of what they did understand during reading; to identify what they did not understand; and to use strategies to resolve the problems. The National Reading Panel (2000) determined that comprehension is improved when teachers use a combination of reading strategies such as question answering, summarisation (retelling) and prediction. When learners are able to use these reading strategies successfully they perform well in recall and answering questions.

Teachers in the experimental group incorporated all the five research-based core elements in teaching reading. The use of the five core elements represented five different approaches to teaching pupils to read. It was envisaged that to be successful in teaching all pupils to read and write, teachers needed to incorporate in their instruction these different approaches to beginning reading. By using the five core elements teachers were acknowledging that learners do not learn in the same way, therefore they as teachers needed to plan a variety of instructional approaches in order to meet the needs of the majority of learners.

Review of literature (NRP 2000) has shown that successful interventions for struggling readers has included the teaching of any of the five core elements, phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, fluency and comprehension in early literacy (Snow et al. 1998; NRP 2000). Research findings suggest that in general the types of instruction that help monolingual English speaking pupils to learn to read also help second language learners (August 2002; August and Shanahan 2006; Garcia 2000).

c) Classroom observation results (Control schools 1)

Just as fidelity of implementation needs to be tracked in the experimental group, instruction in the control group too needs to be observed and described. Below are descriptions of instruction in two of the control schools. In this lesson the teacher was teaching Unit 18 whose title was *Birds* (Appendix 10 b).

The teacher introduced the lesson by asking pupils to spell the words from the previous lesson such as *meat, eat, need, heart* and *gave*. He started the lesson by

connecting it to what was previously taught that is, spelling of words. It was observed that there were no clear spelling patterns in the words that were spelt. It was not clear why the teacher chose these particular words. The words spelt had no direct link with what pupils were going to read later in the lesson. The *Teachers' Guide for standard four* advised the teacher to pre-teach the words *feathers*, *beaks*, and *insects*. But the teacher did not do that. Instead he started with spelling of words. Spelling of irrelevant words to the passage was not going to help pupils understand the vocabulary used in the passage.

The teacher wrote some pre-questions on the chalkboard. The writing of the questions on the chalkboard guided learners on what answers to look for as they read the passage. However the teacher needed to activate learners' background knowledge about birds and their characteristics in order to help learners understand the text better.

The teacher read the pre-questions to pupils. Instead of the teacher reading the pre-questions pupils should have been given an opportunity to read the pre-questions on their own and so practice reading. This would have helped the teacher to establish whether pupils were able to read at sentence level or not and understand the questions. Learners should have been involved in doing activities rather than listening to the teacher and parroting after him.

After reading the questions to the pupils the teacher read the passage and asked learners to repeat after him. Some pupils repeated after the teacher as if they were singing a song, without giving attention to what was being read. Although pupils' reading aloud could have enabled the teacher to check pupils' ability to decode and pronounce words correctly, the observed reading aloud by pupils left a lot to be desired. It was more of learners barking at words rather than reading. Not only was there no attention given to the meaning of what pupils read but also no attention was given to understanding of what was read.

It was observed that the teacher concentrated on having pupils pronounce words correctly. However, the teacher did not make any effort to establish whether or not pupils understood what they read. Although one of the objectives of the lesson was

for pupils to answer the comprehension questions correctly, this objective was not fulfilled. Pupils were not able to answer the comprehension questions. One possible explanation for this would be that pupils did not understand what they read hence could not answer questions.

d) Classroom observation results (Control schools 2)

The instruction given focused on Unit 6 whose title was *Invitation to the wedding* (Appendix 10 c).

The teacher started the lesson from what is already known and attempted to move to what is not known by asking pupils to sing a local wedding song. Weddings and wedding songs are common in the country be it in the villages or in towns. The teacher was tapping on learners' background knowledge when she asked learners to sing a wedding song. However, she did not link the song with what learners were going to read. She did not fully activate learners' background knowledge by linking the song with learners' experiences. She did not provide any pre-reading activities that were going to help learners read the text (see Appendix 11).

The teacher asked learners what they saw in the illustration at the beginning of the story. When a pupil responded to say *A man and a woman standing next to each other*, she did not ask pupils further questions about the picture. In normal circumstances a man and a woman standing next to each other are not always getting married. The illustration in the book had other details that indicated that the man and woman were getting married (see Appendix 10 c). The teacher should have continued to probe pupils on the details in the picture.

The teacher then asked learners to scan for some words in the passage. Scanning is a reading skill which good readers use when they are looking for specific information in a text. So the teacher was trying to develop this skill when she asked learners to look for the words *invite, decided, bridesmaid, wedding, and shelter*. The teacher then wrote some pre-questions on the chalkboard. The writing of the pre-questions was also good in the sense that it gave learners a purpose for reading and directed learners on to what information they were to look for as they read. However, the reading aloud of a whole class had the disadvantage that it might have led to some learners barking

at print. Classroom observation showed some learners reading aloud after the teacher, with their eyes looking away without reading from the book.

It was observed that there were limited activities in the control group designed to help pupils to read on their own. Teachers did not provide instruction in phonics or phonemic awareness. The teaching of analogies, identification of words within words, phoneme substitution and manipulation were absent in their lesson presentations and lesson plans. None of the teachers in the control schools combined the teaching of whole word with that of skill-based approach. It can safely be concluded that although teachers in the control group used their best method for teaching reading they did not use the balanced literacy approach. Further details of classroom observations for both experimental and control schools are in Appendix 11.

4.3 Teacher interview

Teachers in both control and experimental schools were interviewed in order to get some information about their in service training and their perceptions and attitudes towards the instructional approaches they were using in teaching reading. The structured interview schedule also focused on broad themes such as materials that teachers used in teaching English, whether or not teachers had learned theories of how to teach English during pre-service training, availability of a library at the school or near the school and the number of desks against the number of pupils in standard four. Chapter 3 discussed some of the responses to these questions. The interview schedule was used to bring in some triangulation to the study. Secondly the interview was used to get information which was difficult to obtain through classroom observation, information such as teachers' attendance of in-service training just to give one example.

When the teachers were asked whether they had attended in-service training or seminars in connection with their teaching of English in the past five years, ten teachers said they had not attended in service training. One teacher in the control group said she had attended a one week orientation course to the standard five Primary Curriculum and Assessment Reform (PCAR) teaching and learning materials, which covered all subjects in standard five, including English. The post-

test results show that the teacher's orientation to standard five PCAR teaching and learning materials did not have any effect on the reading abilities of the learners taught by this teacher. Another teacher in the control group said she had attended in-service training under the Malawi Teacher Training Activity project (MTTA). (The project was responding to the need to improve the quality of education in the country through the improvement of the professional skills of primary school teachers at the pre-service and in-service levels in four target districts Kasungu, Machinga, Mzimba South and Phalombe. Specifically the MTTA project was strengthening teachers' content knowledge in mathematics, science and English) (AIR 2005). Again pupils' post-test results for the teacher trained under the MTTA project show that there was no influence on pupils' reading abilities. This is expected because the project focused on content for English not on method for teaching reading.

4.3.1 Teachers' reaction to the balanced literacy approach

This section provides qualitative data from teachers' interviews. A descriptive overview of teachers' views and perceptions on their use of the balanced approach is presented. The data was collected in order to answer one aspect of the research question, that of implementing the balanced approach. Six teachers in the experimental group were interviewed. At the time of the interview all the teachers were teaching standard four pupils. The following is a table detailing the teachers' demographics.

Table 5: Biographical details of teachers in the experimental group

	Sex	School	Teaching experience	No. of years taught standard 4	Attendance of seminar or in-service training	No. of pupils in class
Teacher 1	Female	Ntondo	12	1	once	80
Teacher 2	Male	Chiphoola	12	1	None	135
Teacher 3	Male	Domasi CCAP	11	3	None	60
Teacher 4	Male	Namiwawa	14	3	None	115
Teacher 5	Male	Matawale	14	5	None	169
Teacher 6	Male	Naisi	11	1	None	146

a) Teachers’ understanding of the balanced literacy approach

It was obvious from the interviews that teachers were aware of what the balanced literacy approach was and what it involved in the study. Teachers were able to describe the balanced literacy approach and say exactly what they were supposed to do when teaching reading. They were aware that the approach emphasises inclusion of phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension in lessons. They were aware that these methods or approaches were research-based and were found to be effective regardless of the socioeconomic status of learners learning literacy. Teachers also displayed an understanding of what they were expected to do as they taught reading. However, it was apparent during training that teachers were encountering the approach for the first time. The concept of using the said approach in conjunction with the Teachers’ Guide was entirely new to them.

b) Teachers’ experience in using the balanced literacy approach

Teachers had a positive attitude towards their use of the balanced literacy approach. They spoke highly of the approach as Teachers 1, 3 and 4 demonstrate:

The use of the balanced literacy approach as a way of teaching learners to read and write is very good for the following reasons: Learners were taught more than one area during a lesson. Pupils learnt vocabulary, phonemic awareness, word patterns, fluency and comprehension strategies within one lesson (Teacher 1).

It was a miracle to see that within a short period of using the balanced literacy approach learners who were not able to read even at word level (sic) were now able to read. Some learners were able to pronounce difficult words that they were not able (sic) to pronounce earlier on. Some learners were able to read sentences and answer questions orally. Some few learners were able to read a paragraph and answer comprehension questions (Teacher 3).

After using the balanced literacy approach teaching became easier because learners were able to read on their own. Learners were fully participating in lessons especially when they were asked to make words using phonics. They were able to make words as well as read the words. Balanced literacy approach made lessons to be lively (sic). During lessons learners were more involved in carrying out activities. I just guided them (Teacher 4).

c) Teachers' opinion on the benefits of using the balanced literacy approach

Teachers unanimously said that they as teachers benefitted a lot from the use of the balanced literacy approach just as did their learners. As teachers they learnt the techniques for teaching recognition of new words. They learnt skills of assisting learners who were not able to read at word level, sentence level and paragraph level to be able to do so. They learnt skills which assisted learners to understand a passage and answer questions.

From the teachers' point of view learners too benefitted a lot. They were able to read and answer questions within a short time of being taught using the balanced approach. They strengthened their vocabulary. They were able to read and write English words. They were able to spell words correctly. Some learners were able to read passages and answer comprehension questions. Answering of comprehension questions was an indication that they (pupils) understood what they were reading.

Although teachers acknowledged that they acquired new skills in teaching reading, what remained was to see whether or not this would be borne out by the performance of their pupils in the tests that were administered at the end of the intervention.

d) Problems that teachers experienced as they implemented the balanced literacy approach

All six teachers met some challenges as they implemented the balanced literacy

approach. The challenges that teachers faced were lack of lockable doors so that they could safely keep their teaching and learning materials without losing them, teaching large classes, absenteeism of both teachers and learners, shortage of text books and pupils' indiscipline. (For further details on what each teacher said see Appendix 13 a). Despite these problems teachers continued implementing the balanced literacy approach to the end of the intervention.

e) Teachers' suggestions on ways of resolving some problems

Teachers also suggested ways of resolving the problems such as the community helping in the provision of lockable rooms in which teachers could store teaching and learning materials, and training more teachers in order to reduce the pupil/teacher ratio. (Please see Appendix 13 b for further details).

f) Teachers' suggestions on how to implement another programme using the balanced literacy approach.

Teacher 1, Teacher 4 and Teacher 5 suggested that the training period be increased so that they would be thoroughly trained in how to teach phonics. Teacher 4 suggested that the training should be done in five days each time instead of three as was the case, while as Teacher 1 suggested that the training be extended to three months. The teacher who wanted a three months extension said:

If I were to implement another programme using the balanced literacy approach I would like to be thoroughly trained in how to provide phonics instruction that focuses on the alphabet letters and their sounds and uses blending and segmentation. We were not taught phonology during the three months residential course that we had in college during our pre-service training. We read about this on our own from the modules that we were given for the course. It was difficult to grasp the sounds without models. So I want to be trained for another three months.

Phonics that focuses on the relationship between the alphabet letters and their sounds was an area of difficulty for a number of reasons that are discussed later in this chapter. During the pre-service training teachers were not adequately trained in teaching phonics especially synthetic phonics in which learners are taught to sound out words by matching sounds to letters and then blending the sounds to form words. The researchers felt that an addition of two days to the intervention training periods would not be adequate either, to teach all English sounds and their symbols that

would enable teachers to teach blending and segmentation. Secondly there was no equipment such as tape recorders to provide models for teachers to listen to the alphabet letter sounds.

Teacher 2 and Teacher 3 suggested that next time other reading materials such as newspapers, book maps, dictionaries, street signs should be made available. They said,

During intervention training we learnt about teaching learners the different genres that are there. It was difficult for us to teach this in the absence of materials such as newspapers, dictionaries and supplementary readers. Next time the balanced literacy approach is repeated let these things be made available.

g) What teachers enjoyed doing most as they implemented the balanced literacy approach

All six teachers said they enjoyed giving instruction in making words from other words such as *everywhere*, or *unfortunate*. For example other words produced from *everywhere* and *unfortunate* would be

everywhere

every here
eve he
ever her where

unfortunate

un for
or fortunate
at ate

From the example above seven other words can be made from the word *everywhere* while as six other words can be made from the word *unfortunate*.

Teacher 1, in addition to the above, enjoyed giving instruction in phoneme deletion or substitutions to form words. For example “Take away the first letter in *gear* what word remains?” The word is *ear*. All six teachers indicated that they enjoyed giving instruction in making analogies and modelling comprehension strategies. They found this to be fun and enjoyable.

Such findings on teachers’ views and perceptions on the balanced literacy approach helped to explain how teachers implemented the approach. How teachers implemented the approach had a bearing on learners’ achievement.

4.3.2 Teachers' reaction to the traditional method of teaching reading

Teachers in the control group were asked similar questions on the instructional approach they used to teach reading.

Table 6: Biographical details of teachers in the control group

	Sex	School	Teaching experience	No. of years taught standard 4	Attendance of seminar or in-service training	No. of pupils in class
Teacher 7	Female	Mchengawedi	12 years	1	Once	108
Teacher 8	Female	Mulunguzi	15 years	1	None	108
Teacher 9	Female	Malemia	11 years	1	None	91
Teacher 10	Female	Mbidi	14 years	5	None	30
Teacher 11	Male	Lomoni	11 years	1	None	27
Teacher 12	Male	Namilambe	11 years	1	None	45

a) Teachers' instructional approach in teaching reading and what it involved

Four teachers out of a total of six teachers were able to tell what method they used for teaching reading. Two teachers were not able to name the method they used. Teacher 7, Teacher 8, Teacher 9 and Teacher 11 said that they used the *look and say* method in teaching reading. In describing what was involved they said that the method involved reading aloud to the learners and asking them to read after them. When they read aloud they demonstrated to the learners how a good reader should read. Through their reading pupils learnt how to pronounce the English words and how to look up while reading. Teacher 10 and Teacher 12 were not able to name the method they used to teach reading. They said they had forgotten the name. However, they were able to explain what was involved in the approach. From their explanation they too were using the *look and say* method.

Teachers acknowledged that they used the *look and say* method in teaching reading. This is a method that emphasises learning to read through repetition of phrases and

sentences. Unfortunately, in Malawi teachers generally use this method without emphasising whether learners understand what they read or not.

The *look and say* method to teach reading that the four teachers mentioned was intended for native English language speakers. It does not give attention to presentation of meaning or checking of understanding (Williams 1993:26). The approach is allied to a behaviourist *pattern drill* approach to foreign language teaching (ibid).

b) Teachers' experience of using the approach

The four teachers mentioned above have used the method for a long time, more than ten years now. For example Teacher 11 had this to say,

I have used the method for a long, long time since I started teaching. I like the method because when I ask the learners to read aloud I am able to know which learners are good at reading and which learners have problems to read. I am able to check their pronunciation. I can also see whether they are reading with expression or not. Actually I know no better method of teaching reading here in Malawi than this method.

Teacher 11 seemed to mention on behalf of all the teachers in Malawi that they use no other method in teaching reading rather than the *look and say* method. Finding out what method teachers in the entire country use in teaching reading would make an interesting subject for research done on a large scale outside this study.

c) Teachers' opinion on the benefits of using this approach

Teacher 9 said

Every learner is able to hear my voice when I read aloud. Learners repeat after me as I read. Even in the absence of books learners are able to read after me. Some learners are able to read aloud to the entire class without being shy. They have actually stopped pointing at each word with a finger when they read a text. This I think is a result of copying from my reading. When I read to them I do not point a finger at each word.

Teacher 9 seemed to be offering her definition of reading, that it is saying words aloud and repeating after the teacher. Teacher 9 seemed to suggest that barking at words is synonymous with reading. This definition is not any close at all to the definition of

reading provided in Chapter 2.

d) Problems that teachers experienced in implementing the instructional approach besides lack of books and desks.

Four teachers in the control group met some challenges just as those in the experimental group did. Their challenges included teaching large classes, shortage of text books, learners' absenteeism and dropping out of school. However two teachers said that they did not have any challenges at all except for the usual problems that have been there for some time now such as lack of books, teacher/pupil ratio. (For details on the teachers' exact words see Appendix 13 c).

e) Teachers' suggestions on how to resolve the problems.

Teachers in the control group also offered a number of suggestions in order to resolve the problems. Their suggestions included training more teachers so that the teacher/pupil ratio is reduced, provision of enough text books and other teaching and learning materials for effective teaching and learning to take place, pupils to go to school on time and not be absent, sensitizing the community on the importance of keeping the girl child in school and making some effort to attract girls that dropped out of school to come back. (Please see Appendix 13 d for further details).

f) Improvements that teachers thought were required for their approach to work well.

One teacher, Teacher 12 felt that the major improvement that was required for his method to work very well was availability of books. He argued that availability of books would enable learners to read properly. He observed that when learners use one book in a group of ten pupils they cannot follow properly.

Three teachers Teacher 11, Teacher 9, and Teacher 8 said that they were happy with the approach they were using. They did not think that some improvement was required. Two teachers (Teacher 10 and Teacher 7) said that the approach had worked very well for them.

g) What teachers enjoyed doing as they taught reading using the instructional approach

All six teachers said that they enjoyed reading aloud to the learners. It was interesting to note the amount of value that teachers in the control group placed on reading aloud to the learners.

This interview schedule enabled the researcher to identify the methods that teachers in the control group were using. It also enabled the researcher to know teachers' views and perceptions about the method they were using to teach reading. It was not possible to collect this data using quantitative methods hence qualitative methods were used.

4.4 Nature of the balanced literacy approach in the Malawian classrooms

The balanced literacy approach was implemented in normal classrooms in the experimental group. The approach was implemented during the four reading periods in a week. The implementation was done over sixteen weeks, not including two weeks for administering pre-tests and another two weeks for administering post-tests. Each teaching session lasted 35 minutes. The languages used for instruction were a mixture of Chichewa and English. Just as it was in control schools instruction in the experimental schools was provided by one teacher to a class although the teacher might have formed groups within the classroom. The prescribed learners' text book (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools* had 140 pages with 24 units that had to be covered in one academic year.

Teachers in the experimental group incorporated all the five core elements: phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension in teaching reading while at the same time using the prescribed textbook, (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools*. In other words teachers offered balanced skills instruction with whole word instruction. A lot of explicit teaching took place. Pupils were taught word recognition skills, techniques that could be used before, during and after reading that helped in comprehending texts. Teachers demonstrated wherever it was necessary to do so.

4.4.1 Phonics instruction

In providing instruction in phonics, teachers needed to teach the relationship between the letters of the alphabet and their sounds. However, teachers in the sample schools were not able to teach the relationship between the letters of the written language and sounds of spoken language properly. Instead of using sounds of the alphabet letters teachers used the names of the alphabet letters, for example when substituting phonemes instead of asking pupils to: “Change the /p/ in *pig* to /f/ and say the new word,” teachers asked learners to “Change the *p* in *pig* to *f* and say the new word.”

Although research has shown that learning the sound of each alphabet letter makes it easier to learn to blend letter sounds together to read words, teachers in the study taught pupils what sound each letter made within words. In other words teachers and learners focused on sounds inside words. For instance they taught initial sounds (initial letters) first, then moved to middle sounds (letters), before moving to the end sounds (letters).

However, teachers also focused on analogy phonics in which students detected and blended word parts that are larger than phonemes (units such as onsets and rimes and spelling patterns). Instruction in analogy phonics is said to be just as effective as synthetic phonics in bringing about the greatest improvement in reading ability (Learning Point Associates 2004: 12). Teachers identified useful series of cluster sounds (letters) and taught these in a logical sequence from easy to difficult. Instruction in phonics included the teaching of strategies to decode multisyllabic words using word parts such as affixes for example: *pre-*, *mis-*, *-tion*.

Pupils developed phonics skills through listening to teachers pronounce words and rhymes and read aloud to the learners. Teachers explicitly demonstrated and illustrated rhyming words. They pronounced words that featured various sounds such as initial sounds (letters), middle sounds (letters) and end of words sounds. For example teachers would say something like:

We have been reading about words that start with the letter *s* like *sun* and *sin*. Can you pick some words from the passage we have just read *Timba and the beautiful bird* that start with the same letter *s* and sound the same as what we hear in *sun* and *sin*?

Learners would pick words such as *sit, sat, see, saw, some, said* from the passage in the book (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools*. By extension it is likely that pupils who were able to pick and read the word *sit* would be able to read the word *pit* if they saw it for the first time. Likewise pupils who were able to pick and read the word *said* would be able to read words such as *paid, maid* and *laid*. Pupils used analogy to sound out unknown words. Researchers agree that analogy, a form of phonics that utilizes spelling patterns, has proven to be an equally effective phonics approach (Pressley 2002; McKay 2003; White 2005).

4.4.2 Phonemic awareness instruction

Teachers provided activities that helped learners to develop phonemic awareness. Instruction in phonemic awareness focused on rhyming words such as *bin, fin, kin, pin, sin*; analogies such as *able, cable, fable, gable, stable* and *table*. Instruction also included phoneme isolation of the initial sound (words that begin with the same sound) *sat sit sin soap; hat, hit, hot*; phoneme isolation of the medial sound such as *book, cook, hook look, took; sit, pig, pin, fit, lip*. Teachers used the same activities to point out common spelling patterns and asked pupils to think of other words that follow the pattern. It is said that giving learners experience in rhyming words is an effective way of building phonemic awareness.

Teaching strategies for phonemic awareness included asking pupils to identify a particular sound (alphabet letter) in a word; asking pupils to recognize the same sound (letter) in other words; asking pupils to manipulate sounds (letters) for example through substitution, addition and deletion of other sounds (letters) to create new words.

4.4.3 Fluency instruction

Teachers read passages aloud to pupils a few times. They provided learners with opportunities to listen to them as the teachers read passages from the text and the learners followed along. Teachers gave pupils repeated exposure and practice in reading in order to help learners develop the ability to identify words that the learners saw in their books. The idea behind this was for pupils to understand the passage well through interaction between the teacher and pupils as the teacher read the story. The

other objective for the teacher to read the story aloud was for the learners to hear the sounds and the pronunciations of words in the text. After reading the text to pupils, pupils could read it together with the teacher and then practice reading the text aloud to others in the class. Research findings suggest that repeated practice with familiar text at a learners' independent reading level can improve fluency and in turn improve comprehension (Samuels 2002).

4.4.4 Vocabulary instruction

In the study Malawian learners learnt vocabulary mostly through explicit instruction and through listening, participating and interacting in the classroom. Pupils learnt the meaning of words through the use of phonics, concrete objects, pictures, movements, and experiential activities. Pupils learnt the meanings of words through various means such as teachers' explicit explanation, classroom discussion and pupils' practice in word analysis.

Pupils in the sample schools needed as much as possible direct instruction of vocabulary. This is because the school was the only place pupils could listen to, learn and practice use of new vocabulary. At home a totally different language was used.

Vocabulary was taught and extended through oral activities before reading a text. First of all teachers would pronounce the new word and ask learners to repeat after them. Teachers introduced new words in a familiar meaningful context. They also provided opportunities for learners to demonstrate the meaning of the vocabulary by asking learners to use the words in sentences. At times vocabulary was taught through phonics activities, especially in instances where learners were asked to come up with words with similar initial or middle sounds. At other times teachers used realia, pictures or drawings to teach new concepts or to show what the words meant. Writing was used to teach and extend word identification skills.

In teaching vocabulary teachers used a number of techniques and contexts for teaching recognition of new words such as

- a) using the letters of the alphabet (phonics) for example: "Find other words from the passage that start with the sound /s/."
- b) identifying words within words they already knew such as *everywhere* which

has *eve*, *every*, *where*, *here* and *he*. Identifying words within words was quite popular among teachers in the experimental group. Identification of words within words appeared in the lesson plans of all the teachers in the experimental group.

- c) using word root, prefixes and suffixes e.g. *dis / own*;
un/ interest/ ing ; *re/ sell* ; *protect/ ion*; *re/ pay/ ment* ; *difficult/y*;
hit/ hits / hitter/ hitting; *sub/ com/ mi /tee*

Teachers used techniques for teaching meanings of new words such as showing a real object (realia). Use of real objects in teaching meanings of new words was likely to be effective because objects consisted of their natural characteristics. It was easy for learners to understand the meaning of the new word because there was a direct link between the meaning and the object. Other techniques teachers used were

- a) showing a picture/drawing or a model.

It is not possible to always use real objects in the classroom because of a number of reasons. For example some realia are dangerous or fixed in one place or cumbersome to carry to the classroom. In such instances a picture, or drawing or a model could be used. In some classrooms the meanings of new words such as *fisherman* and *canoe* were taught using a clay model and a baobab fruit shell respectively.

- b) using the new word in sentences that reveal the meaning of the new word.

Examples: All creatures were created by *God*.

Human beings were created by *God* too.

God created the world for people to live in.

Many people go to church to pray to *God* their creator.

- c) defining or explaining the new word.

Examples: Who is a *fisherman*? How does a *fisherman* catch fish?

A *fisherman* is a person who catches fish.

A *fisherman* uses a net to catch fish.

A *fisherman* can also use a hook to catch fish.

- d) demonstrating the new word wherever possible through miming and acting.

Miming or acting out, followed by, for example sentences for practice by learners, can be an effective way of teaching meanings of new words. In one of the classrooms it was demonstrated that the word *canoe* can be taught through miming. For instance a teacher mimed paddling a canoe with a stick. In another class a teacher mimed being afraid using a snake model.

e) using the context in which the new word is used.

The words with which the new word is used make the context of the new word. In order to demonstrate teaching of new words using the context an example from Unit 20 : *Abudala and his father* were used. The new word was *poor*.

A long time ago there lived a man and his son. They were very *poor*... Abudala and his father had a very small net and a very small canoe. They did not catch many fish. Everyone laughed at them. Abudala's father was very sad. But Abudala told his father to be happy. He told him that it was the wish of God that they were *poor*. Abudala and his father prayed to God for help (Chilora et al. 1994: 113).

The meaning of the word *poor* in this context is lacking or without many things. Another clue is that *poor* people are not happy.

f) expanding knowledge of multiple word meanings.

Pupils learned that one word may mean several things depending on how the word is used. At times change of meaning comes as a result of change in pronunciation. Here are some examples used to illustrate the point:

Change of meaning according to change of pronunciation.

My father killed a lion with a *bow* and an arrow.

Chimwemwe made a *bow* as he received his prize.

Few plants grow in a *desert*.

A number of boys *desert* manual work.

The *wind* is blowing from the east.

Please teach me how to *wind* this clock.

g) Other sample activities for teaching vocabulary selected from the learners' book for standard four that were used during the intervention were as follows:

word matching using cards and strings,

word matching using a master card and smaller cards,

word recognition by playing the Bingo game. In this game players (learners) identified words from a master card that the teacher called out and covered the words identified with smaller cards. The winner was the one who correctly covered all the

words that had been called out as quickly as possible. At the end of the game the winner shouted Bingo to announce his or her victory. The game was played in groups instead of by individual learners.

4.4.5 Comprehension instruction

Teachers in this study helped pupils increase their comprehension by using several strategies. They explicitly explained and demonstrated comprehension strategies such as asking and answering questions, summarizing and making predictions. Teachers started by explaining the purpose and characteristics of a strategy. Then they demonstrated how the strategy could be used when a text is read. Then they allowed pupils to practice using the strategy while the teachers themselves gave support and feedback. In their instruction teachers provided pre-reading, reading and post-reading activities to help learners comprehend the text.

Teachers built their pupils' background knowledge through pre-reading activities that is, through discussing illustrations and titles and then predicting what the story would be about. Making predictions allowed pupils to check and reflect on their predictions while reading a text and even after. Class discussions on the predictions provided opportunities for pupils to understand the purpose of reading. Teachers explained new concepts to pupils prior to reading the text and also provided pre-questions about the text. This created a reason for pupils to read because pupils read the text in order to look for answers to the pre-questions. In turn the questions helped learners understand the main ideas in the text. Pupils were taught the ability to differentiate main ideas from minor ones. In the end the aim was for pupils to be able to summarise. To achieve this aim they had to be able to synthesise the information and notice the main ideas. The teacher initiated the process by means of the pre-questions.

4.5 How to implement the balanced literacy approach in the Malawian classrooms

It was observed that it was crucial to train the teachers who were to implement the balanced literacy approach. It is through training that teachers understood the instructional approach, how to follow the lesson model and at the same time use the prescribed text book. Using the model, teachers were expected to create interesting

learning situations that were child-centred.

The book (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools* has a number of activities that include: reading passages and comprehension questions; word formation, completing dialogue, puzzles, opposites, comparing actions, sentence completion, sentence structure, parts of speech, writing exercises, poems, riddles, spelling, matching, letters, writing, gap filling, tenses, comparatives, and punctuation. It is only during reading that teachers had to coordinate their lesson to include the balanced literacy approach. The model for teaching reading would be as follows:

4.5.1 Introduction

In the introduction the teacher could ask some questions to find out what pupils knew about the topic. The teacher could ask some questions about the title and illustration to get pupils to predict the possible content of the story.

4.5.2 Presentation

In the presentation the teacher drew upon pupils' prior knowledge about the passage that was to be read. He or she asked some questions about the illustrations and the titles of the text. This was followed by teachers asking the learners to predict what the story would be. Next the teacher pre-taught some words or concepts that would help the learners to understand the story. However, the teacher did not have to pre-teach new words every time. The teacher could decide that pupils should use context clues that is, using information in the story, to guess the meanings of certain unknown words or ideas in the story. If new words hampered pupils' understanding of the passage then the teacher could pre-teach these in order to make it easier for pupils to understand the story.

4.5.3 Practice stage

The teacher wrote some pre-questions on the board. Some pupils read the pre-questions aloud. The teacher read the story or passage aloud while pupils followed along and listened to the phrasing, and expressions that a good reader uses. Pupils read the passage silently, guided by the pre-questions. The questions focused on the main points of the story. As pupils read silently they looked for the answers. The

questions written on the board provided a purpose for reading. After silently reading the passage pupils answered more comprehension questions, which would necessitate pupils' re-reading of some parts of the story in order to check their understanding of the passage.

4.5.4 Production stage

Pupils were asked to practice what they had learnt. Activities that were included in this production stage were:

- summarising the text through retelling the story,
- role playing,
- formulating a series of questions on a story in groups in order to ask another group,
- looking for answers to questions that require rapid re-reading of the story,
- reading games,
- writing answers to comprehension questions based on the story,
- manipulating letters and words, and
- building vocabulary through writing sentences using some new words.

4.6 Extent of teachers' use of the balanced literacy approach

Classroom observation revealed that initially teachers in the experimental group had problems to follow the activities in the teachers' guide and at the same time combining this with the balanced literacy approach within one lesson. Teacher 4 revealed: "I find it difficult to follow the activities given in the Teachers' Guide and at the same time include the balanced literacy approach in a lesson".

Although the researchers felt that the problem was resolved during the researchers' visits to the school, through the mid intervention training, and through classroom observation, the possibility remained that the teacher might not have understood exactly what he was supposed to do. Although classroom observation results suggested that generally teachers in the experimental group performed more of the treatment behaviours on all scoring definitions than did the teachers in the control group, nevertheless, pupils' results suggest that teachers in the experimental group implemented the balanced literacy approach with varying intensity.

Some schools did better than others in the post test. The results show that one school did better than others in phonics, another school in phonemic awareness and other schools in fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. A comparison of the difference between pre-post mean in the five core elements among experimental group shows one school having the highest pre-post mean in vocabulary, another school being highest in phonemic awareness, and other schools having the highest pre-post mean in comprehension, fluency and vocabulary.

One school was consistently at the bottom of all the schools in the experimental group. The pre-post means of the school that had had a 100 percent increase in pupils' enrolment numbers was consistently below the other schools' pre-post means in vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and phonemic awareness (see Appendix 12). However, several other factors besides pupils' increase in enrolment numbers could have affected the pre-post mean scores for the school. For instance, one other school in the experimental group with more pupils enrolled (130 pupils) performed better than the mentioned school. On the other hand, four schools in the control group had less than 100 pupils enrolled (see Table 2) but their performance was below the mentioned school.

4.7 Possible problem areas in implementing the balanced literacy approach

For the Malawian pupils learning English as a second language, understanding of the relationship between letters of the alphabet and their sounds was critical if they were to learn to read easily. Research evidence has revealed that teaching children to manipulate the sounds in language helps them to learn to read. This is so under various teaching conditions and with a variety of learners across a range of grades and age levels (August and Shanahan 2006). Research findings confirmed that teaching learners how to use sound-letter relationships to decode words led to improved early reading achievement (NRP 2000).

Learners needed to detect, isolate component sounds, recognise, manipulate and substitute the sounds that make up words. Most of the sounds were new to the pupils. Pupils were not likely to have heard or spoken the sounds before as meaningful units of speech. Malawian teachers needed to teach the relationship between the alphabet letters and their sounds.

Teachers in the study used the alphabet letters rather than their sounds to teach phonics because they themselves were not clear about the sound-letter relationships in English. The teachers' and learners' language background is very different from the English language. For example, Chichewa has five vowel letters (*a, e, i, o, u*) just like all other Bantu languages. Each vowel has one sound. When a vowel is combined with a consonant it forms a syllable. The combination of vowels with consonants is done in a regular manner. A combination of syllables forms words in a regular manner as well. In other words Malawian second language learners come from a language background where sound-letter relationships are more constant and there are no irregularities. The contrast in the sound-letter relationships between Chichewa and English is bound to have affected instruction in phonics. Nevertheless in order to help the learners develop phonological skills, teachers in the study directed pupils' attention to a number of activities such as rhymes, alliterations and teaching the pupils unfamiliar words by analogy to known words. For example teachers taught pupils to read the word *punch* by analogy to a known word such as *lunch*. Teachers pointed out the common spelling patterns and asked pupils to give other words that followed the same pattern for example *came, fame, game, name, same* and *tame*.

The National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) also points out that segmenting words into phonemes and blending phonemes into words contribute more to pupils' learning to read and spell than any of the other phonological skills. Segmenting is breaking apart whole words into component sounds. Blending is an ability of putting together two or more discrete sounds into a complete whole. For the Malawian teachers to teach blending and segmentation the teachers themselves needed to understand the system of speech sounds that make up English. This was a big challenge since all the teachers were not familiar with the sounds of the alphabet letters although they were able to read passages in English. In an interview one teacher actually confessed that she had problems in pronouncing some words from the prescribed text book. Teacher 1 confessed:

I had problems when reading aloud to learners. I was not able to pronounce some words correctly. I felt guilty when learners blindly followed my reading.

Linan-Thompson and Vaughn (2007) acknowledge that the orthography of a

language has a role to play in the reading of learners. The authors point out that when the relationship between letters and sounds in a language is consistent (has few exceptions and few relationships) pupils do not have much difficulty in learning to read in that language. However, if a language has many inconsistencies such as the English language, learners get puzzled in learning to read the language. The English language has fourteen consonants whose sounds are closely related to their names, namely *b, d, f, j, k, l, m, n, p, s, t, v, x, and z* (Fondrk and Frasca 2001). It is possible to hear and teach these consonants. Then there are seven consonants: *c, g, h, q, r, w,* and *y* whose sounds we do not hear in the letter names (ibid). In such instances learners need to learn the sounds of the letters and remember which letters have consistent relationships, which ones do not have and when to apply the rules that govern them. This can be quite confusing for the Malawian learner. It was difficult for teachers in the experimental group to teach learners the relationship between the letters of the alphabet and their sounds and how to apply this knowledge to reading and spellings.

However, for the large proportion of Malawian English language learners who were learning to read in an inconsistent orthography like English, teachers' instruction used analogy-based phonics. Teachers taught and learners used analogy to sound out unknown words. The grid in the first classroom observation lesson is a case in point (see Appendix 11). Once learners learnt to pronounce the word *found* they could use this knowledge to sound out other words such as *bound, ground, hound, mound, pound, round* and *sound*. Linan-Thompson and Vaughn (2007) acknowledge that using analogy-based phonics provides learners with a strategy for reading a larger number of words as learners build their English vocabulary and oral language skills.

Some explanations can be given for the problems of Malawian teachers and learners in teaching and learning the English sound symbol relationship besides those already discussed above. In English there is a difference between the pronunciation of the alphabet letters in isolation and the sounds represented by the same letters in a word. Some letters correspond to more than one sound (McGuinness 2004). English has an opaque writing system (McGuinness 2004). For example the letter c is pronounced differently in the words could; cite; special; and necessity. In addition there are also multiple spellings of the same sound such as in beat and bit. Multiple spelling

problems are compounded by the fact that there are a number of exceptions to the spelling rules in English. In contrast Chichewa has transparent alphabet codes. Each letter corresponds with one specific sound. Literacy in Chichewa is taught through the syllabic method where consonants are combined with a vowel to form a syllable and a combination of syllables forms words.

A second possible reason for this is that teachers were not well trained to teach learners the English alphabet letter sounds. During teachers' in service training teachers were not fully taught English phonemes during the three months residential course. They had to read about this from their course material. The result was that teachers could not teach sounds of the letters competently. The six-day training provided by the researcher was not enough either to cover the teaching of the sounds of 44 phonemes in English. Teachers were not able to master the distinctions among the various sounds of the alphabet letters. They were also not able to shape their mouths and tongues to produce the unfamiliar sounds of the alphabet letters. In such a case teachers could not teach the sounds of the letters competently. So teachers and learners were not able to match the letters of the alphabet (that they already knew) with their sounds which they did not know.

Thirdly, even though during in-service training teachers might have been taught how to teach reading using phonics and the whole word approach, the sounds of the alphabet letters (phonetic symbols) are not used with the learners in all primary schools in Malawi. An examination of the Teachers' Guide of the prescribed text book (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools* for standard four reveals that the guide is silent on the teaching of the sounds of the alphabet letters. Even if the sounds of letters were to be used with learners, primary schools have no access to tape recorders and cassettes which teachers could have used to practice auditory activities. In the absence of audio equipment and tape recorders in schools, teachers did not have any models to listen to and emulate. McGuinness (2004) says when children are taught letters rather than phonemes they have problems in understanding where the extra sounds come from, so that is likely to be why Malawian children had problems in understanding the sounds of the alphabet letters.

Other major obstacles encountered in the study were large classes, absenteeism, the difference between the language spoken at home and the language spoken at school and shortage of teaching and learning materials. The impacts of these other obstacles are briefly explained below.

Large classes were an obstacle to the effective teaching of reading in the sample schools. Some of the key findings by the National Reading Panel are that phonemic awareness instruction helps especially when taught in small groups of 5 to 7 pupils. It was practically impossible for teachers in the study to teach using small group instruction, especially faced with the problem of inadequate teaching and learning resources as described in Chapter 1. In addition classes had large numbers of pupils taught by one teacher.

Absenteeism of pupils affected the progress of teaching. Chapter 3 indicated that one of the experimental schools had the highest rate of absenteeism amongst the sample schools. The affected teacher had to decide either to keep on repeating lessons that some learners had missed or to proceed in his systematic presentation of reading skills and not take on board learners that were regularly absent. Unfortunately, having noticed that some learners were absent on regular bases for a number of weeks, he decided to make progress with the majority of the learners that were present.

Research elsewhere has shown that continuity between literacy developments in school and at home is an issue that helps in pupils' development of literacy skills at school. Most of this research on literacy development has been carried out with children from print-rich homes, where parent-child interactions provide experiences similar to that of the classroom. Through parents' involvement in their children's literacy development at school the children are encouraged, motivated and given support by the parents. In such an environment children learn to read even before they start to go to school. In this study the scenario was the opposite of the ideal situation. There was no continuity between literacy development in school and at home. Learners learnt to read at school only. Most of the parents were peasant farmers who could not afford to buy books for their children to read at home. Most of them were not in a position to help their children to read even if the books were

available.

The biggest challenge was the acute shortage of books and other reading and writing materials in the sample schools. The shortage of teaching and learning materials has already been discussed in the preceding chapter. However it is necessary to mention here that lack of reading materials made it difficult to create an effective teaching and learning environment. Schools did not have enough text-books to go round. As a result learners worked in groups in order to share a book. The groups that were formed were big about eleven pupils to a book. The scarcity of books was problematic since learners learn to read through reading and it was practically difficult for learners in the study to learn to read through sharing one book. Some learners were not able to write class exercises because of lack of writing materials such as ball pens or exercise books. Related to this was lack of storage facilities in schools. In the absence of storage facilities one would have thought that teachers could still use classrooms to hang some charts for pupils to read. However classrooms were not secure either since they had no lockable doors. In addition, in order for pupils to be exposed to different genres, schools should have had a variety of reading materials such as newspaper articles, magazines, book maps, song lyrics and street signs.

4.8 Discussion of collected data

Classroom observation revealed that there was balancing of skill instruction and whole language in the experimental group. Elements of both whole language and skill-instruction were present in lessons. Pupils were taught word recognition skills and comprehension strategies using a number of techniques. Just to give an example, teachers taught learners to attend to a number of cues such as letter and sound clues (as they taught rhymes and analogies), pictures and semantic context (as they taught vocabulary and predictions using illustrations and titles of the stories) and syntactical cues (as they taught learners comprehension strategies such as questions and answers, predictions and summarising). Teachers gave this balanced instruction without necessarily giving priority to either the whole word approach or skill-based approach. However, theoretically, assessment of each individual learner's progress was supposed to be part and parcel of the teaching process. It was difficult for teachers to be able to do this effectively given the high pupil teacher ratio that was there in

schools.

4.8.1 The teachers' perspective

Teachers in the experimental group provided instruction that is supported by reading research such as teaching essential skills and strategies, providing explicit and systematic instruction with a lot of practice and providing opportunities to pupils to apply the skills and strategies. Teachers taught pupils words with various meanings and also taught word analysis skills that included roots and affixes. However, teachers in the study were not able to provide this instruction wholesale as described in the ideal version of the balanced literacy approach based on research (Denton no date). Some adaptations were made because of the constraints of actual conditions. Theoretically teachers were expected to provide differentiated instruction that was based on the results of their assessment of pupils, and accordingly adapt their instruction to meet the individual needs of the pupils (Denton no date). But teachers were not able to provide instruction that met the individual needs of the learners in every lesson, because of the high pupil teacher ratio. A number of classrooms had more than 100 pupils taught by one teacher.

4.8.2 Building on prior knowledge

Teachers started teaching by activating prior knowledge in their pupils. They gave instruction that started from what pupils already knew and built on the knowledge that pupils had. This concept of starting from the known is not peculiar to Malawian classrooms. It is an educational principle that has been emphasised by a number of people since education began (see Dewey 1938:74).

Reed and Railsback (2003) say that all students, regardless of their proficiency in English, come to school with a valuable background of experience and knowledge on which teachers can capitalise. Malawian children also come to school with some background knowledge that teachers can build on. They come to school knowing something about birds, animals, human beings and a number of other things. For English teaching the major difference would be that the standard four pupils display or express this knowledge through a local language, not English. The role that prior knowledge plays in the classroom today is still important, especially for teachers teaching second language learners like Malawian children. Stoicovy (2004) says that

what learners already know about the events, ideas or objects described in a text, influences the meaning they construct from the text. Findings in the present study bear out Stoicovy's observation. For example, in the lesson on birds provided by a teacher in the experimental group where the teacher discussed the characteristics of birds using realia, the teacher was able to connect what learners already knew about birds with what learners were about to read from the text. He started from what pupils already knew and linked this with what learners were about to read, the text. Learners were therefore, able to answer some comprehension questions better than pupils in the control group who read the same passage. The teacher in the control group did not activate learners' background knowledge.

In normal circumstances teachers teach comprehension strategies one strategy at a time utilising a text that lends itself to a particular strategy explicitly. In the case of this study only one text was used. The standard four text book, (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools* did not fully accommodate the many reading strategies that are available. In order for teachers to help learners to read at different levels they needed to let pupils practice reading text at different reading levels. In the absence of supplementary materials in schools, teachers were not able to provide pupils with diverse texts that presented a wide range of topics at a variety of reading levels. With a great scarcity of newspapers, magazines, directories or dictionaries, it was also difficult to present various types of text structures to learners.

4.8.3 The learners' perspective

Before the intervention, pupils' levels of reading skills were very low in both experimental and control schools (see pre-test results on the pages that follow). Learners' skills in phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and fluency were very low. They were not able to recognise words (or decode). Their control of the English language structure was very limited. As a result pupils did not understand the passages they read and so did poorly in answering comprehension questions. Pupils did not read English well enough to be able to understand it and study other subjects in English. At the conclusion of the intervention, which was also the end of the year, pupils' reading abilities in the control group did not improve that much despite them having repeated reading aloud after the teachers on several occasions throughout the

academic year. Their reading abilities in English were still too low for them to be able to cope with their English text book. For the majority of the learners in the control group the task of learning to read in English without a grasp of the English language was so difficult that it impacted on their fluency and their gaining meaning from accurately decoding text. Some learners read the passages as if they were written in Chichewa.

The experimental group started on a similar basis with the control group. They too performed poorly in the pre-test. However, they slowly improved as they learned from teachers trained in the use of the balanced literacy approach. They learnt to identify words by decoding words using word families, pre-fixes, and suffixes; through knowing the meanings of the words that surround an unfamiliar word. They also learnt to read through use of realia and pictures. In learning various things pupils were given opportunities to share their literacy experiences with the whole class and the teacher. Teachers gave learners rhyming activities, analogies and words that begin and end alike. Such learning of word families and rhymes helped pupils to see patterns in words and allowed them to add to their reading vocabulary. Learners heard rhymes and analogies from teachers. Listening to rhymes and analogies from teachers provided pupils with the auditory experiences they needed to pronounce and read English. Pupils on their part produced rhymes and analogies for given words which compelled them to focus on the sounds inside the words. Classroom observation showed that learners enjoyed working on rhymes and analogies.

Learners were given explicit instruction in word analysis skills such as word roots, and the meanings of common prefixes and suffixes. The use of word roots and learning the meanings of common prefixes and suffixes helped learners to understand many unfamiliar words. Pupils were given opportunities for repeated exposure to new words in a number of contexts. In learning fluency pupils practiced phrased oral reading and were given support by the teacher. Pupils practiced fluency through repeated oral readings.

4.9 The impact of the balanced literacy approach

Table 7 below indicates a lower mean achievement score in the pre-tests for both the control and the experimental groups before the intervention. However, the figures in

the same Table 7 show that after 16 weeks of intervention the mean for the experimental group increased in all the core areas of phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The rise of the mean indicates that in the 16 weeks of the intervention, the experimental group showed a large gain in achievement. Although the control group also gained, the gains do not match those of the experimental group. These findings therefore suggest that the use of the balanced literacy approach was effective for teaching literacy skills in English to standard four pupils in the Malawian context. The results were consistent with the general findings from other research indicating the benefits of using the core elements.

4.10 The research results

At the inception of this study a hypothesis was made. The hypothesis was: If the use of the balanced literacy approach as an instruction in the teaching of reading and writing in English produces better pupil achievement than the use of other existing instructional approaches, then standard four pupils in Malawi taught through this approach would show a marked improvement in their attainment of reading and writing in the post-tests. Data addressing this hypothesis was procured based on the five constructions: phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The findings are presented and discussed below:

4.10.1 Pre-test and post-test scores

Pupils in both the experimental and control groups underwent a pre-test measurement consisting of literacy skills in phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension in English before the intervention. Table 7 below presents the pre-test mean scores for the pupils in the five core elements: phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.

Table 7: Pre-test mean scores for pupils in different skill areas by design

Skill area	Experimental			Control		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Phonemic awareness	451	1.71	2.07	338	1.34	1.95
Vocabulary	451	5.58	2.26	338	5.36	2.72
Comprehension	451	0.91	1.46	338	0.65	1.29
Phonics	120	4.83	2.00	119	4.58	2.26
Words read/minute	119	26.11	21.40	120	11.36	14.09

Key N = number; SD = standard deviation

Table 7 above indicates that standard four pupils in the experimental group performed better in the pre-test in all the five core areas than their counterparts in the control group, with the widest margin in words read per minute. A T-test was used to detect differences in mean scores on different skill areas (phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension) between the experimental group and the control group. Table 8 below presents the findings:

Table 8: T-test of the pre-test scores

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Phonemic awareness pre-test score	2.544	787	.011	.370	.145	.085	.656
Vocabulary pre-test score	1.207	645.465	.228	.220	.182	-.138	.578
Comprehension pre-test score	2.622	764.956	.009	.257	.098	.065	.450
Phonics pre-test score	.887	237	.376	.245	.276	-.299	.790
Words per minute/fluency pre-test score	6.287	203.915	.000	14.751	2.346	10.125	19.377

Key. df= degree of freedom; F= Fisher test; Sig.= Significant;

Although learners in the experimental group performed better than those in the control group, as shown in Table 7, no statistically significant differences were found between the groups in vocabulary, $t = 1.21 (645) p < .05$; and phonics, $t = .89 (237) p < .05$) as shown in Table 8 above.

The two groups also underwent a post-test measurement consisting of the same literacy skill areas (phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension). Table 9 below presents the post-test mean scores for the learners in different skill areas by design.

Table 9: Post-test mean scores for the learners in different skill areas by design

Skill	Experimental			Control		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Phonemic awareness	537	3.83	2.16	299	1.86	1.83
Vocabulary	537	6.46	2.49	299	4.52	2.74
Comprehension	536	2.82	2.19	300	1.12	1.41
Phonics	120	7.00	2.44	120	5.05	2.31
Words read/min	120	49.33	30.74	119	21.45	22.80

Table 9 above indicates that standard four learners in the experimental group performed better in all the skill areas than their counterparts in the control group, with the widest margin in words read per minute.

Tables 10 to 15 below present one-way analysis of covariance that was conducted to measure the effectiveness of the balanced literacy approach on pupils' literacy levels. Analysis of covariance was also conducted in order to remove part of the variance in the post-test scores (portion that was systematically associated with pre-test variance) that was not due to the treatment. Preliminary checks were conducted to ensure that there was no violation of the testing assumptions.

Table 10: One-way analysis of covariance on phonemic awareness

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power(a)
Corrected Model	745.092(b)	2	372.546	93.844	.000	.231	187.688	1.000
Intercept	2750.185	1	2750.185	692.768	.000	.526	692.768	1.000
P A PRE-	73.947	1	73.947	18.627	.000	.029	18.627	.991
Des	631.344	1	631.344	159.035	.000	.203	159.035	1.000
Error	2481.156	625	3.970					
Total	9866.000	628						
Corrected Total	3226.248	627						

There was a significant difference between the balanced literacy approach and traditional approach on pupils' post-test scores on phonemic awareness, $F(1,625) = 159.04$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .20$. There was a weak relationship between the pre-

test and post-test scores on phonemic awareness by an eta squared value of .03.

Table 11: One-way analysis of covariance on vocabulary

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power(a)
Corrected Model	1584.033	2	792.017	170.417	.000	.353	340.834	1.000
Intercept	976.406	1	976.406	210.092	.000	.252	210.092	1.000
VOCPRE	868.512	1	868.512	186.877	.000	.230	186.877	1.000
Des	644.517	1	644.517	138.680	.000	.182	138.680	1.000
Error	2904.698	625	4.648					
Total	27253.000	628						
Corrected Total	4488.731	627						

There was significant difference between the balanced literacy approach and traditional approach on learners' post-test scores on vocabulary, $F(1,625) = 138.68$, $p = .000$, *eta squared* = .18. There was a weak relationship between the pre-test and post-test scores on vocabulary by an eta squared value of .23.

Table 12: One-way analysis of covariance on comprehension

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power(a)
Corrected Model	802.336(b)	2	401.168	121.082	.000	.279	242.164	1.000
Intercept	1365.853	1	1365.853	412.248	.000	.397	412.248	1.000
COMPPRE	295.647	1	295.647	89.233	.000	.125	89.233	1.000
Des	444.199	1	444.199	134.070	.000	.177	134.070	1.000
Error	2070.741	625	3.313					
Total	6314.000	628						
Corrected Total	2873.076	627						

There was a significant difference between the balanced literacy approach and traditional approach on pupils' post-test scores on comprehension, $F(1,625) = 134.07$,

$p=.000$, $\eta^2 = .18$. There was a weak relationship between the pre-test and post-test scores on comprehension by an eta squared value of .13.

Table 13: One-way analysis of covariance on phonics

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power(a)
Corrected Model	476.992(b)	2	238.496	51.354	.000	.305	102.708	1.000
Intercept	574.833	1	574.833	123.775	.000	.346	123.775	1.000
PHPRE	250.049	1	250.049	53.841	.000	.187	53.841	1.000
Des	198.989	1	198.989	42.847	.000	.155	42.847	1.000
Error	1086.737	234	4.644					
Total	10192.000	237						
Corrected Total	1563.730	236						

There was a significant difference between the balanced literacy approach and traditional approach on learners' post-test scores on phonics, $F(1,234) = 42.85$, $p=.000$, $\eta^2 = .16$. There was a weak relationship between the pre-test and post-test scores on phonics by an eta squared value of .19.

Table 14: One-way analysis of covariance on reading fluency

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power(a)
Corrected Model	148977.687(b)	2	74488.844	266.920	.000	.696	533.840	1.000
Intercept	20320.233	1	20320.233	72.815	.000	.238	72.815	1.000
FLUPRE	105555.317	1	105555.317	378.242	.000	.619	378.242	1.000
Design	4785.806	1	4785.806	17.149	.000	.069	17.149	.985
Error	65022.889	233	279.068					
Total	510710.000	236						
Corrected Total	214000.576	235						

There was a significant difference between the balanced literacy approach and traditional approach on pupils' post-test scores on reading fluency, $F(1,233) = 17.15$, $p = .000$, *eta squared* = .07. There was a weak relationship between the pre-test and post-test scores on reading fluency by an eta squared value of .62.

A t-test was also used to detect differences in pre-test and post-test mean scores on different skill areas (phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension) within the experimental group. Table 15 below presents the findings from the t-tests.

Table 15: T-test on pre-test and post-test mean scores on different skill areas within the experimental group

	Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Dev	SEM	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Phonemic awareness pre-test score - Phonemic awareness post-test score	-2.281	2.705	.136	-2.549	-2.013	-16.757	394	.000
Vocabulary pre-test score - Vocabulary post-test score	-1.203	2.411	.121	-1.441	-.964	-9.914	394	.000
Comprehension pre-test score - Comprehension post-test score	-2.155	2.145	.108	-2.367	-1.942	-19.944	393	.000
Phonics pre-test score - Phonics post-test score	-2.175	2.513	.229	-2.629	-1.721	-9.482	119	.000
Words per minute/fluency pre-test score - Words per minute/fluency post-test score	-22.798	18.812	1.725	-26.213	-19.383	-13.220	118	.000

Key: SEM = Standard Error of Measurement; Std. Dev = Standard Deviation

It can be observed from Table 15 above that there were statistically significant increases in all the skill areas (phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension) at a level of significance of 0.05. For example, there were statistically significant increases in phonemic awareness scores, $t(394) = -16.76$,

$p=.000$; phonics scores, $t(119) = -9.482$, $p=.000$; comprehension, $t(393) = -19.94$, $p=.000$; fluency scores, $t(118) = -13.220$, $p=.000$; and vocabulary scores, $t(394) = -9.914$, $p=.000$.

Further analysis revealed eta squared statistics of 0.42, 0.43, 0.50, 0.60, and 0.20 in phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, fluency and vocabulary respectively. The figures indicate large effect sizes.

4.11 Discussion of the research results

The purpose of the study was to investigate if the use of the balanced approach would increase the reading and writing achievement of pupils. The study results confirm the hypothesis that if the use of the balanced literacy approach as an instruction in the teaching of reading and writing in English produces better pupil achievement than the use of other existing instructional approaches, then standard four pupils in Malawi taught through this approach would show a marked improvement in their attainment of reading and writing abilities in the post-tests. The study found out that the use of phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension was significantly related to learners' reading and writing achievement in English.

The results of the study indicated that there were significant differences in the standard four pupils' achievement in phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension between the experimental and control groups. Pupils in the treatment group had higher adjusted scores. The treatment and control groups showed many differences in teachers' instructional approaches in teaching reading that were expected on the basis of the treatment, although not all parts of the balanced approach model were implemented fully by the treatment group. Teachers in the treatment group exhibited more of the instructional approaches in reading that were associated with pupils' achievement. These instructional approaches to reading account for the differences in achievement between the two groups.

The results are consistent with other similar intervention studies that provided instruction in phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, or comprehension (Gerber et al. 2004; Gunn et al. 2000; Kamps et al. 2007; Linan-Thompson et al. 2007; Mathes et al. 2007). The major difference is that previous studies used small

group instruction while as this study used whole class instruction with more than sixty pupils to one teacher. The other difference is that previous studies used one, two, three or four of the five core elements with learners outside Malawi, in an environment which was qualitatively different. This study used all the five core elements with Malawian standard four pupils from rural schools learning in a poverty stricken environment.

The results indicate that as individual pupils were able to identify a particular sound (letter) in a word, were able to recognise the same sound in other words, were able to manipulate sounds through addition and deletion of other sounds to create new words, they were developing phonemic awareness. Reading experts say awareness of sounds at word, rhyme, and phoneme levels is one of the most important indicators of success in reading (Stanovich 1996; NRP 2000).

The study has shown that it is possible to produce better pupils' achievement in reading and writing in English when using the balanced literacy approach than with the use of other existing instructional approaches in the Malawian standard four classrooms. It is important to note that the gains in reading achievement were made in rural schools. Rural schools are generally not expected to do well at all. What the study has revealed is that the balanced literacy approach, when implemented in teaching reading and writing, has positive effects on learners.

The results suggest that the highest percentage of variance that could be attributed to the intervention was in phonemic awareness (20.3%). However, the lowest percentage of variance that could be attributed to the intervention was in fluency (6.9%). The small contribution to improvement made by the intervention on fluency could be a result of learners' not practicing reading well enough on their own outside the classroom because of not having enough text books to go round. It was mentioned earlier on that findings from research suggest that repeated practice with familiar text at a learners' independent reading level can improve fluency (Samuels 2002).

A possible explanation for the effectiveness of the balanced literacy approach in this study was the combination of the five essential elements: phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension, in teaching reading and writing

in English. Instruction in these five core elements contributed towards learners' achievement. In addition, teachers' classroom practices and their responses to the questions on the use of the balanced literacy approach demonstrated that teachers understood the approach and what it involved in terms of implementation.

It is important to rule out rival explanations in a study such as this one before a researcher can make claims that an intervention / treatment had an effect. A number of factors can account for rival explanations.

4.11.1 Threats to internal validity

According to Grove (2005) control of variables in a research study is very important especially in experimental and quasi-experimental studies. Grove says, "The greater the amount of control the researcher has of the study situation the more credible the study findings" (2005:214). There are two major categories of threats to experimental validity. These are threats to internal validity and threats to external validity. Internal validity refers to the extent to which we can say clearly that the observed outcome differences of an intervention are a result of the intervention itself and not other outside factors (Mertler and Charles 2011). A study is internally valid when the findings are attributable to the independent variable and not to outside factors. External validity refers to the degree to which the findings of the study can be generalised to groups beyond the study sample.

There are a number of factors that could have limited the validity of this study such as subject variability, history, maturation, testing, instrumentation and mortality. A discussion of how threats to internal validity were minimized is presented first followed by threats to external validity.

a) History

According to Gay and Airasian, (2000) the concept *history* refers to possible unexpected events which may occur between the pre- and post-test period that might affect the dependent variable in a study. In this study both experimental and control groups were involved in the programme for a period of sixteen weeks and no school or pupil was involved in the study for an extra period of time. History therefore did not affect the results of the study.

b) Maturation

Maturation, according to Gay and Airasian (2000) refers to the changes that take place in the sample population, changes such as growing older or more experienced during the study. The age ranges of the sample population were similar both in the control and experimental groups. Maturation occurred equally in both groups during the study. Therefore maturation could not have affected the results of the study.

c) Testing

Testing may affect internal validity when changes in test scores occur, not because of an intervention but because of repeated testing. This is more so when researchers administer identical pre- and post-tests within a short period. In this study testing did not affect the results. The pre- and post-tests were not identical. Alternative forms of the same tests were administered, and the types of questions and level of difficulty of the two tests were equivalent. In addition there was a gap of sixteen weeks between the writing of the pre-test and post-test. Testing therefore did not affect the results of the study.

d) Subject variability

Within the design of the study careful consideration was given to ensure that the results were not due to variation in teacher professional training. In order to guard against threats to internal validity in the form of subject variability, the researcher ensured that there was no variation with respect to the professional preparation of teachers serving both experimental and control schools. All teachers in the study had similar academic qualifications: they all had JCE qualifications, they were trained under the MIITEP programme and their teaching experience was not less than ten years. The pupils too came from similar backgrounds and they had similar age ranges. A pre-test, administered before the intervention, allowed the researcher to have some idea of how similar the control group was to the treatment group before the intervention was introduced. The pre-test results showed that there was no significant difference in pupils' achievement on the pre-test between pupils in control group and those in the experimental group. Therefore teacher variability in terms of professional development could not have influenced the results just as pupils' background and aptitude did not.

e) Hawthorne/motivational factors

Hawthorne effect is said to be when participants in a study show high levels of performance as a result of knowing that they are being studied (Macefield 2007; MacMillan and Schumacher 2010). In this study the Hawthorne effect seems to have been reduced. Teachers and pupils in both control and experimental groups are on regular basis observed by PEAs. So observation carried out by the researchers was not a new thing happening to them and is not likely to have increased the participants' desirable behaviour simply because they knew they were receiving special treatment.

4.11.2 Threats to external validity

External validity involves generalisation of the research findings from a study to a wider population. External validity is influenced by a number of things that include population characteristics. In order for external validity to exist, the sample population needs to have similar characteristics to those of the wider population to which the research findings will be generalised. In this study the sample population consisted of standard four pupils learning to read and write in English in rural schools in Zomba district. The findings of the study can therefore be generalised to other pupils in Zomba rural schools learning to read and write in English.

One aspect of this study which contributes positively to external validity is that it was conducted in real classrooms using an already existing curriculum. This means that the findings of the study can be generalised to other schools in Zomba rural. However, the researcher is cautious not to apply the findings to urban schools in Zomba district.

4.12 Limitations of the study

Teachers' instructional practice is bound to affect various aspects of pupils' learning. Heneveld (1994) suggests four types of learning outcomes, namely academic achievement, social skills, economic success after school and participation in school through to completion. This study did not consider all these learning outcomes although they are valuable educational goals. Instead attention was given only to academic achievement in reading and writing.

In order to determine whether the balanced literacy approach could lead to increased pupils' achievement in reading and writing, this research limited itself to the acquisition of skills such as phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The study did not give much attention to the acquisition of creative reading and writing skills, which are certainly also important goals of education. According to Ross and Mahlek (1990), many studies that collect data on student achievement focus on the acquisition of traditional knowledge and skills (cited in Johnson et al., 2000). Attainment of more complex educational objectives is rarely evaluated (Ross and Mahlek, 1990 cited in Johnson et al., 2000). Ross and Mahlek have argued that complex educational objectives such as creative reading and writing skills are difficult to measure. This study too did not examine the acquisition of creative reading and writing skills for the same reason.

The data in this study were based on a sixteen weeks intervention. The effects of using the balanced approach for a longer period than 16 weeks were not examined. The findings provide the reader with a deeper understanding of the problems that both teachers and pupils face in teaching and learning to read in Malawian classrooms today, and may serve as a basis for further investigations. Further investigations (replications) are required to enhance confidence in the findings of the study.

4.13 Contribution of the study to the teaching of reading and writing in English

Very few true experimental and quasi experimental studies have been carried out on explicit instruction combining the five literacy components (phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension) with second language learners (Shanahan and Beck, 2006). In their review of effective literacy teaching studies, these authors found more than 400 studies on the five core elements for native speakers. However, they found only 17 studies addressing the effects of explicitly teaching the same five core elements of literacy with minority children. This study makes a contribution towards literature that addresses the effects of explicitly teaching the five core elements to second language learners, specifically standard four pupils learning English in Malawi.

Although the use of the balanced literacy approach has been investigated elsewhere,

there is still a need at international levels for studies on ways to improve the reading and writing abilities amongst second language learners using experimental and quasi experimental methodologies. This study addresses such calls by investigating the use of the balanced literacy approach in teaching English to standard four pupils in Malawi. Unlike similar studies such as Carlo et al. 2004; Gunn et al. 2000; Muter and Diethelm 2001; Linan-Thompson and Vaughn 2007 this study is unique in the sense that it was carried out in an environment that had high pupil teacher ratios. Teachers provided instruction to whole classes despite the high pupil teacher ratio. In addition teachers provided instruction in a poverty stricken environment.

Malawi has had a persistent problem of pupils not being able to read and write at grade level for a number of years now. The study has dealt with a possible solution to the national problem. It contributes towards the identification of an intervention that can help in improving the reading and writing abilities of learners in Malawi. The present research has generated knowledge that can inform policy and practice. It provides policymakers and practitioners with a potential means to enhance literacy development in English in primary schools in Malawi.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The goal of this study was to examine whether or not teachers' use of the balanced literacy approach as an intervention in the instruction of reading and writing in English in the Malawian standard four class room, could produce better pupils' achievement than the use of other existing instructional approaches. The major question that the study addressed was whether the use of the balanced literacy approach as an instructional method in teaching reading and writing in English produces better pupils' achievement than the use of other existing instructional approaches. It was argued that, if it did then pupils taught through this approach would show a marked improvement in attainment of reading and writing skills among standard four pupils in Malawi in the post-tests. The investigation employed a mixed method design in the implementation of the balanced literacy approach.

The first chapter described the importance for Malawian pupils of being able to read. The chapter established that ability to read is the major avenue to learning and to writing examinations. Standard four is a threshold class for the Malawian pupil. Up to that level classroom instruction by the teacher is in a vernacular language. From standard five onwards all instruction is supposed to be in English. So, being able to read and write in English by the time a pupil reaches standard five is very important.

The reading literature has suggested that the ability to read and write is a cornerstone for a child's success in school and after school. Research on reading instruction has demonstrated that the provision of reading instruction that includes research based characteristics increases learners' reading abilities. There is scientific evidence that shows that teaching children phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension skills helps children to read and understand what they read. This is so under a variety of teaching conditions and with a variety of learners. Vaughn et al. (2006) studied forty-one grade one English language learners. The researchers used random assignment and matched control group experimental design. The results

showed significant differences for the treatment group in phonological awareness, listening comprehension, word attack, word identification and passage comprehension. Linan-Thompson and Vaughn (2007) carried out a study on 81 grades one and two English language learners. The study used an experimental design with random assignment and matched control group. The results showed that at the end of grade one the treatment group outperformed the control group on phonological awareness, fluency, comprehension and spelling.

The design of this study was mixed method research that put emphasis on quasi-experimental methods. As was mentioned earlier, a quasi-experimental method was chosen because it provided an opportunity for carrying out the study in natural real world conditions, the classroom. In order to collect data, Malawian standard four pupils in both experimental and control schools were pre-tested and post-tested for their phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension skills. Teachers in both experimental and control groups were observed teaching reading. Teachers were interviewed in order to provide information on the teaching and learning environment. In addition teachers in the experimental and control groups were interviewed in order for them to provide information on their views and perceptions about their use of the method they were using to teach reading. The use of pre-tests and post-tests, teacher interviews and classroom observation brought in some element of triangulation in the study. The reason for bringing in this triangulation was to increase the validity of the conclusions made from the findings of the study. Paired t-tests were carried out in order to test the research hypotheses. The t-tests results showed that there was a significant difference in pupils' achievement between the experimental and control groups in the follow up tests. The experimental group had higher scores. Teachers in the experimental group exhibited a lot more use of the balanced literacy approach associated with pupils' achievement than the control group.

The most reasonable interpretation that the researcher can give is that the balanced literacy approach when implemented has a positive impact upon learners' achievement. The magnitude of the treatment effect demonstrates that it is possible to intervene successfully in the reading and writing achievement of learners. Just as in the other similar research, which has been cited above, this study provided evidence

that the use of balanced literacy approach can effectively increase pupils' achievement in reading and writing. The findings from this study make a contribution to the body of literacy knowledge in a number of ways.

First of all for a long time in Malawi teachers used reading methods that did not help learners to achieve much in reading and writing in English. The balanced literacy approach infuses all dimensions of reading ability at the same time, in an engaging and interactive manner. Pupils learn phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension simultaneously.

Secondly, the findings of the study suggest that pupils can achieve much in reading and writing in English through the use of the balanced literacy approach despite the challenges that are there in the teaching and learning environment, such as large classes, a shortage of books, and an impoverished classroom. The balanced literacy approach did not only face these challenges but also produced significant levels of literacy achievement despite the challenges.

Thirdly, the research findings have demonstrated that the use of the balanced literacy approach produces higher levels of achievement in learners than the traditional methods of literacy instruction. In the study learners who received the balanced literacy instruction significantly outperformed learners who received literacy instruction in the traditional methods. The intervention in this study, unlike interventions in similar studies elsewhere, occurred in classrooms with higher pupil teacher ratios, sixty pupils and above rather than small groups of five to seven pupils as has been the case with other research.

The findings of the study suggest that there is a link between teachers instructional approach in the teaching of reading and writing in the classroom to pupils' achievement in reading and writing. In an environment which has no books for children to read at home, to provide learners with extra language experience, effective instructional approaches will help pupils learn to read and write. I Can Read (2006) support the view that instructional approaches are important. They argue that generally poor reading skills are the consequence of ineffective and inadequate instructional approaches. They conclude that in general children fail to learn to read

English easily because they are not taught properly.

The findings of this study have some implications for the classroom. The findings have shown that it is possible to incorporate the use of the balanced literacy approach into the curriculum without revising the curriculum itself. The balanced literacy approach was incorporated into the curriculum without adjusting the curriculum. The prescribed standard four English textbook was used without any adjustment. This study contributes towards the number of studies of explicitly teaching the five core elements with second language learners using standard four pupils learning English in Malawi.

The study supports other research that having prior knowledge such as knowledge about the world or subject matter knowledge helps learners to understand a text. The findings of the study have practical implications for the classroom. When teaching reading teachers need to activate learners' prior knowledge through discussing with the learners what learners know about the topic they are about to read. Teachers need to also discuss new words and concepts found in the text they are about to read. This is helpful especially for second language learners. It helps to activate prior knowledge and enhances comprehension.

Teachers can develop learners' phonological skills by involving learners in a variety of activities such as asking learners to identify sounds at the beginning, middle, and end of words; asking learners to identify rhyming words; asking learners to identify the word that remains after a phoneme has been deleted; asking learners to make a new word by replacing a specified phoneme with another. Mastery of these phonological skills is one of the best predictors of how well pupils will learn to read later on in life (NRP 2000).

Instruction in vocabulary is important for learners especially second language learners. The more words learners know the more they are able to communicate effectively. Learners will be able to listen, speak, read and write using the vocabulary they know. It is important for teachers to use realia, or pictures in order to help learners understand the concepts being taught. Teachers need to give learners opportunities to practice with new words or words that are important to understand a

concept or text, and words that learners will frequently come across. It has already been pointed out that teaching of individual words can deepen learners' knowledge of word meanings (Snow 2002: 63).

In order for learners to be good readers they need to identify words quickly and easily (Samuels 2002). They also need to construct meaning from the words they recognise. So teachers need to teach word recognition skills as a first step towards fluency. Learners benefit from fluency instruction that addresses effortless decoding of words in isolation and within text (Linan-Thompson and Vaughn 2007). In order to be able to do this learners need opportunities for oral repeated reading with support and feedback from their teachers. Research findings confirm that repeated practice with a text at a learners' independent reading level can improve comprehension.

For learners to understand what they read it is important that their reading is purposeful and active. Learners need to know why they are reading and have strategies for understanding a text as they read. Teachers need to ask questions to guide learners to understand a text. Teachers need to teach learners how to predict and identify main idea of a text. The use of explicit instruction and the teaching of comprehension strategies are bound to enhance learners' understanding of what they read as they go through a text.

Amongst the findings cited by the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) report on systematic phonics were the facts that systematic phonics produced gains when used in various grouping patterns such as one-on-one tutoring, small groups and whole class instruction. This study confirmed the research findings. It used systematic phonics with whole class instruction. The systematic phonics instruction produced gains to the amazement of the researcher. It was mentioned earlier on that teaching learners how to use sound-letter relationships to decode words led to improved early reading achievement (NRP 2000). Teachers in the study were not able to do this in a satisfactory manner. They adjusted and used analogy phonics. Despite this problem learners in the experimental group improved in their reading and writing achievement better than those in the control group.

However, the study faced some challenges. It is recommended that in teaching

reading teachers need to understand the individual needs of learners at their different stages of development and provide differentiated instruction accordingly (Ivey 2000). For instance, the ages of the learners in this study ranged from 8 to more than 19 years. The attention span for the different ages was not the same. So teachers needed to devise learning activities for the different age groups accordingly. Because of the large numbers of pupils against one teacher it was not easy to implement this.

In conclusion, despite the shortcomings, findings of the study demonstrate that the use of the balanced literacy approach can be effective for standard four pupils in Malawian primary schools within a short time of sixteen weeks. This would be possible when letter-sound relationships, spelling patterns, modelling of skills and strategies and processes are taught explicitly, in a systematic manner, and implemented by teachers who are trained in how to implement the balanced literacy approach and when learners are given opportunities to practice what they have been taught.

5. 2 Recommendations

The findings of the study show that training of classroom teachers is an essential component to help teachers get used to the model in the study. Trained teachers require ongoing support during the intervention in order to build their capacity to implement the balanced literacy approach and to assist teachers whenever there are problems. It is also important to monitor the teachers throughout the intervention in order to ensure that teachers are indeed implementing the design accordingly. A three-day training of teachers before the intervention and another three-day training mid-way of the intervention will suffice. However, the conditions in Malawi should be borne in mind as regards training teachers in phonics instruction which teaches a child to convert letters into sounds and blend the sounds needed to make words versus analogy-phonics which teaches children to detect and blend word parts that are larger than phonemes (units such as onsets and rimes and spelling patterns).

The training of teachers is in line with Darling-Hammond et al. (2001) who argued that student trainees who have more education training appear to do better in producing student achievement than those who do not. The results of the study seem to confirm this. The implementation of the balanced literacy approach required that

teachers be trained. Teachers in the experimental group had initial training before the intervention. They were trained again midway of the intervention. The teachers were also monitored and given support by the researchers as they implemented the balanced literacy approach. An essential implication of the study is that the balanced literacy approach can be implemented by classroom teachers as long as the teachers are trained and given support as they implement the programme. The findings suggest that even teachers with JCE qualifications (two years of secondary education) can understand the balanced literacy model and increase learners' achievement. Learners whose teachers were trained did better than those whose teachers were not trained.

It has been mentioned earlier on that Malawi has had a persistent problem of pupils not being able to read and write at grade level for a number of years now. This study has revealed what needs to be done in order to improve the reading achievement of learners in English. It has dealt with a possible solution to the national problem. Stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education, the Malawi Institute of Education and other relevant educational institutions need to be alerted to the usefulness of the balanced literacy approach in the teaching of reading and writing in English in Malawi's primary schools. The study suggests some improvements that can be taken on board by these educational institutions. The suggestions are likely to assist the Malawian English language teachers in improving their instructional practice and thereby improving the reading and writing abilities of learners in English.

In order to help schools and teacher training colleges begin to use the balanced literacy approach the Ministry of education needs to include the use of the model in its policy and notify schools and colleges on the same. Teacher training colleges need to take the balanced literacy approach on board so that pre-service teachers are trained before they are deployed after their training. The Malawi Institute of Education could provide in-service training to teachers who are already in the field. Malawian teachers need to adopt the use of the balanced literacy approach in teaching reading and writing if the reading and writing achievements of Malawian standard four learners are to improve.

The data support a number of conclusions that have important implications for the

classroom. In the classroom teachers need to incorporate all the five research-based core elements in teaching reading. They need to develop pupils' phonological skills through rhymes, analogies, phoneme substitutions, and manipulations and teach these in an explicit and systematic manner. Pupils need to be given opportunities to read orally in order to develop their reading fluency. Teachers need to use various methods to develop pupils' vocabulary. They need to promote pupils' reading comprehension through provision of instruction in research-based techniques and explicit instruction.

The findings of the study have shown that pupils who were given instruction in the balanced literacy approach achieved better scores in reading and writing in English than those learners who did not. Teachers need to integrate systematic phonics with other four reading instructions phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension to create a complete balanced literacy approach.

Findings of this study invite further investigations on the many unanswered questions about successful intervention strategies for English language learners in Malawi. There is need to repeat the study in order to triangulate the findings of this study. Further studies need to be carried out in order to determine the effects of using the balanced approach for a longer period than sixteen weeks both in rural and urban areas. It is also important to establish which core element amongst phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary and fluency is the most important in influencing pupils' reading and writing abilities in the Malawian context.

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APPENDICES

Training manual for standard four teachers of English

Introduction

The ability to read and write in English is an essential skill for the Malawian pupil. If a pupil is not able to read and write by the end of standard four, that pupil will not be able to learn other subjects in standard five and onwards when the medium of instruction is English. There is enough research evidence that indicates that Malawian children are not reading and writing well enough to succeed in school.

This course aims at training teachers in methods and approaches that have been found through research to have worked well and caused reading improvement for a number of children elsewhere. It is hoped that this training will strengthen teachers' abilities to design instructional activities on phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension, which could improve literacy development of pupils. The course is firmly based both on practice and theory. It is participatory, and action oriented so as to produce concrete results at its conclusion. The following strategies will be used for facilitation: group / pair work, individual work, plenary sessions, discussion, demonstration and brainstorming.

Participants

The participants involved in the training course will be standard four English teachers in the experimental group.

Duration of the training

The training will be conducted on a weekend for two days, covering six hours each day.

Objectives

The objective of the course is to strengthen skills for standard four teachers of English in:

- Reflecting on the standard four (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools* Pupils' and Teachers' Guide textbooks,
- Evaluating the contents of the textbooks in terms of coverage of reading and writing skills,

- Discussing different methods of teaching reading and their limitations,
- Devising instructional approaches that can be used to speed up phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension skills,
- Planning a number of activities on reading and writing using balanced literacy approach and the core textbook,
- Creating lesson plans for reading and writing using balanced literacy approaches, and
- Teaching reading and writing using balanced literacy approach.

Activities

In order to achieve these objectives teachers will:

- Analyze the standard four (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools* Pupils' and Teachers' Guide text books,
- Reflect on the contents of the text books in terms of coverage of reading and writing skills,
- Compare and contrast various approaches for teaching reading and writing and discuss their merits and demerits,
- Discuss reading skills that can be used to help learners read any text. Write major steps of a reading lesson,
- Discuss the sub skills that are needed for effective reading for close understanding,
- Use a variety of techniques for teaching reading skills,
- Demonstrate cues and strategies that pupils need in reading comprehension,
- Plan micro- lessons on word- identification,
- Prepare micro lessons in which reading skills are demonstrated,
- Practice balanced instructional approaches in teaching reading and writing, and
- Analyze the micro lessons.

Core textbook

Currently there is one core-textbook for teaching English that was approved for use in all primary schools in the country, (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools*. This is the textbook that teachers will use for developing literacy in English in pupils.

Activity 1

- a) How do the core textbook and the teachers' guide help in learning?
- b) Examine one unit of the pupils' textbook and
 - i) identify the different parts of the unit
 - ii) skim through four other units and find out if the material is presented in the same way
 - iii) find out the opportunities if any, for pupils' participation
 - iv) think of the English language lessons you have been teaching. How much of each lesson was spent teaching reading and writing skills? Was this enough?
- c) What is the difference between literacy teaching and language teaching?

Feedback for Activity 1

- a) Ways in which Text Books/ Teachers Guides enhance learning:
 - provide guidelines for teaching and learning
 - provide alternative source of information
 - promote active participation.
- b) Pupils' text book
 - Textbook covers at least 80 percent of the syllabus
 - The structure of the textbooks includes participatory activities for pupils.
 - Contents of the textbook include:
 - reading passages and comprehension questions,
 - word formation, dialogue, puzzles, opposites,
 - sentence completion, sentence structure, parts of speech, writing exercises, and
 - poems, riddles, spelling, matching, letters, writing, gap filling, tenses, comparatives, punctuation.
- c) The difference between literacy teaching and language teaching:

Both literacy and language teaching deal with communication. Both involve the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The two complement each other, that is, one cannot teach literacy without touching on language, just as one cannot

teach language without touching on literacy. However, literacy teaching and language teaching differ in point of focus. In language teaching the point of focus is on teaching grammar, sentence structure, parts of speech, and vocabulary using the four language skills, speaking, listening, reading and writing. In literacy teaching, the point of focus is on the process of reading and writing, such skills as how to make meaning from printed words, and how to put one's thoughts on paper in a written form.

Activity 2

Ordinarily standard four pupils should be able to read simple stories in English silently and with understanding. However, a number of pupils have considerable reading problems.

As a group brainstorm on the reasons why standard four pupils:-

- (i) still read too slowly one word at a time.
- (ii) cannot answer simple comprehension questions to show that they have understood the meaning of what they have read.
- iii) are not able to read silently with confidence.
- iv) Recall your own experience in learning to read. How did you feel about how you were taught reading? Now as a teacher what do you think is the best way of teaching reading?

Feedback for Activity 2

Possible reasons for pupils failing to read:

- Pupils not given enough time for silent reading. Perhaps there is too much emphasis on reading aloud.
- Pupils having mastered one reading speed for everything they read. They have not mastered scanning, skimming, predicting and silent reading skills.
- Pupils having not mastered answering comprehension passages.
- Another reason could be pupils do not know how to work out words for themselves.

In teaching reading there should be the following stages: Introduction, Presentation, Practice and Production stages.

Introduction

In the introduction the teacher can ask some questions to find out what pupils know about the topic. The teacher can ask some questions about the title and illustration to get pupils to predict the possible content of the story.

Presentation

In the presentation the teacher can include some of the new words to be discussed and understood by pupils. However, the teacher does not have to pre-teach new words every time. The teacher can decide that pupils should guess the meanings of the words in context so he/she will not have to pre-teach new words. When new words hamper understanding of the passage then the teacher can pre-teach these in order to make it easier for pupils to understand the story by giving pupils some idea of what to expect, and to get pupils thinking about what the story content might be.

Practice stage

The teacher writes some pre-questions on the board. Pupils read passages silently guided by the pre-questions. The questions focus on the main points of the story. As pupils read silently they look for the answers. The questions written on the board provide a purpose for reading. After silently reading the passage pupils answer more comprehension questions, which will necessitate pupils' re-reading of some parts of the story in order to check their understanding of the passage better.

Production stage

The production stage should come in later lessons. Pupils should be asked to use what they have learnt. Activities that can be included in this production stage are:

- role playing,
- forming a series of questions on a story in groups in order to ask another group,
- looking for answers to questions that require rapid re-reading of the story,
- reading aloud,
- reading games, and
- writing answers to comprehension questions based on the story.

Activity 3

- i) Discuss reading techniques which can help pupils to read at different speeds for different purposes,
- ii) Produce four lesson plans, which focus on the teaching of scanning, skimming, predicting, and silent reading,
- iii) In pairs choose and teach one of the four lessons, and
- iv) As a group analyze each one of the lessons.

Feedback for Activity 3

A number of reading techniques can be used during silent reading to help pupils read at different speeds for different purposes. These techniques are scanning, skimming, predicting and silent reading.

Scanning

Scanning is used when looking for specific information in a book, newspaper, directory etc. In the classroom pupils are asked to find specific words, phrases, and sentences from a text they are about to read. Pupils do not read everything but only look for the information, which is needed.

Skimming

Skimming is reading a passage quickly in order to get the gist or the main ideas of the story before one reads for detailed information. The type of reading here is different from scanning. Readers are not interested in the finer details but in getting the gist of the story. In the classroom the teacher gives pre-questions before pupils begin to read. For a teacher writing questions before pupils read a passage is one way of allowing pupils to focus their attention on the main points of the story and letting them read for a purpose.

Predicting

Predicting is making informed guesses as one reads, which can be confirmed or disconfirmed after reading. Before pupils start reading a passage there is a discussion about the title and the illustration. Pupils are asked questions such as "What do you think is going to happen in the story?" "After this what do you think will happen next?"

Silent reading

Silent reading is a skill intended to help one get the message. The skill is used during intensive reading for comprehension. One has to read with care and think about what one is reading. In order to read effectively it is important that one interacts with the text. Activities that can be done to enhance understanding in reading are:

- finding main ideas,
- checking comprehension,
- understanding text organization,
- predicting,
- inferring,
- guessing meaning of unfamiliar words,
- evaluating a text,
- following instructions, and
- writing summaries.

One view to learning to read is that a pupil is able to read when he/she can use context clues and reading strategies to understand by himself/herself a text he/she has not seen before. When reading a reader makes use of

- context clues such as:
recognizing words printed on the page,
word meaning, and
grammatical clues.
- reading strategies such as
predicting,
guessing, and
reading silently,

Activity 4

Brainstorm about ways of helping your standard four pupils become good readers.

Feedback on Activity 4

How to help pupils become good readers

Teacher should emphasize on

- silent reading,

- getting pupils to read at different speeds for different purposes,
- getting pupils to read passages and answer comprehension questions, and
- getting pupils to guess words for themselves.

Activity 5

In groups compare and contrast phonics and whole language approaches and discuss their merits and demerits.

Feedback for Activity 5

Phonics

It is an approach that helps pupils learn the way letters of the alphabet are pronounced in English, and sounding out words according to common pronunciation of these letters.

Advantages

Pupils become aware of individual letter sounds.

It helps pupils to read words with similar sound-spelling relationship on their own.

Pupils are able to read independently as they work out new words on their own.

The method supplements whole-word method also known as "look and say" method.

Limitations

Pupils become pre-occupied with sounding out parts of words, therefore understanding of

meaning may be lost.

English has many irregular words so it is not possible to teach all words using phonics.

Whole-word/look and say

It is an approach that helps pupils read the whole word through recognition of the shape

and size of the word.

Advantages

It is possible to teach reading of a word and its meaning at the same time. Pupils remember the size and shape of the whole word.

Limitations

New words that they come across are difficult for pupils to read on their own.

It takes a longer period for learners to accumulate an adequate amount of vocabulary.

Pupils have to memorize the shapes and patterns of words.

It is not possible to teach all words in English using this method.

Activity 6

Devise instructional approaches that can be used to speed up phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. Report in a plenary.

Feedback for Activity 6

Phonics

Phonics is the understanding that there is a relationship between the sounds of spoken language (phonemes) and the letters of the written language (graphemes). Pupils need to acquire knowledge of the alphabet to become good readers.

Phonics instruction

In the classroom the teacher has to provide systematic and explicit phonics instruction. Teachers need to organize reading instructions in a logical order moving from simple to more complex skills.

Instructional approaches that let pupils:

- give rhyming words e.g. *fan; tan; man*
- divide words up into syllables e.g. *hel / i / cop / ter; sn / ake*
- notice that group of words have the same beginning e.g.. *star; story; staircase*
- notice that group of words have the same middle e.g. *bag; cat*
- notice that group of words have the same ending e.g. *bat; sat; mat; pat; that; or pinch; lunch; punch*
- identify and work with onsets and rimes e.g. *cat c is the onset at is the rime; splat*

spl is the onset *at* is the rime

- make analogies e.g. *table; stable; able; cable; gable; fable*.

Phonemic awareness

Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, identify, and play with individual sounds in spoken words. Instruction in phonemic awareness is important because pupils who have these skills are likely to learn to read and spell words more than children who do not.

Phonemic awareness instruction

In the classroom situation the teacher has to provide activities that will help pupils develop phonemic awareness through hearing, identifying and manipulating the individual sounds, or phonemes, within spoken words. Some of the activities to be practiced are:

- phoneme isolation e.g. what is the first or last sound in *mitt*? The first sound is /m/ the last sound is /t/,
- phoneme identification e.g. which sound is the same in *man, mitt, mess*? /m/ is the same,
- phoneme categorization e.g. which word does not belong *fat, fan, tap*? *tap* does not belong,
- phoneme blending or combining e.g. what word results when you blend these separately pronounced individual sounds to make a word /m/ /a/ /n/? The blended sounds make the word *man*.

The teacher teaches explicitly. Teaching aids can be a chart or pictures. The teacher can also use games, rhymes, alliterations, assonance, or any other language that focuses on the sounds in words

(http://www.lesley.edu/crr/content/lc/research_white_paper.pdf). The focus of the lesson may be oral language or this can be combined with looking at letters. After the teacher has modelled the skill, pupils need to practice actively. The activity can be done individually or in groups. Research findings have shown that phonemic awareness instruction is most effective when it focuses on manipulation of one or two phonemes (Armbruster et al., 2003).

Fluency

Fluency is the ability to read accurately, quickly and with proper expression and comprehension (The Partnership for Reading).

Fluency instruction

Research has revealed two major instructional approaches as regards fluency. The first one is a teacher providing models of fluent reading to pupils. Through listening to the teacher reading effortlessly and with expression, pupils will learn how a reader's voice can help a written text make sense. Thus reading aloud will increase pupils' knowledge of the world, their vocabulary and their familiarity with written language. The second one is a teacher giving pupils repeated oral practice while guiding and giving them feedback. The repeated practice improves pupils' word recognition, speed and accuracy as well as fluency. Fluency will develop as a result of several opportunities given to pupils to practice reading on their own.

The teacher should demonstrate fluent oral reading, help expand pupils' listening vocabulary and give support to pupils. Pupils should practice to read fluently through repeated oral readings.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is the words that a pupil must know in order to communicate effectively. Vocabulary plays a critical role in learning to read. Pupils who are just learning to read will need to use their oral vocabulary to make sense of the words they see in print. They will not be able to understand what they read without knowing what most of the words mean.

Vocabulary instruction

Research has shown that most vocabulary is learned indirectly. Pupils can learn new words indirectly through their engagement in oral conversations, listening to other people speak or read to them, and from their engagement in silent reading. Some vocabulary however, must be taught directly. Direct instruction helps pupils learn difficult words. Direct instruction can also be used in teaching pupils word learning strategies. There are several word learning strategies that can be used such as cueing systems like sight vocabulary, context cues, and word attack cues. The teacher needs

to teach word recognition as well as meaning of words and give pupils an opportunity to practice using the new words in context.

Techniques for teaching recognition of new words are

- using the sound of letters (phonics),
- identifying words within words they already know such as *soil* which has *s* and *oil*; *become* which has *be* and *come*; *because* which has *be* and *cause*; *woolen* which has *wool* and *en*; *weight* which has *w* and *eight*; *village* contains *v*, *ill* and *age*, and
- using word root, prefixes and suffixes e.g. *dis / own*; *un / interest / ing* ; *re / sell* ; *protect / ion*; *re / pay / ment* ; *difficult / y*; *hit / hits / hitter / hitting*; *sub / com / mi / tee*.

Techniques for teaching meanings of new words are

- showing a real object/picture/drawing/model,
- using the new word in sentences that reveal the meaning of the new word,
- defining or explaining the new word,
- demonstrating the new word wherever possible through mining, acting,
- using the context in which the new word is,
- using the sentence patterns and the kind of word/s used e.g. nouns, adjectives,
- using the sound of the new word e.g. bees buzzing, snake making s-s-s-s- sound,
- using the senses, and
- expanding knowledge of multiple word meanings.

The teaching of word-identification should not be done as an end in itself, but should be done to help pupils in the process of constructing meaning as they read. For instance, pupils should be taught sound symbols not because that knowledge is important in itself, but so that the process of constructing meaning goes on as effortlessly as possible. Thus helping children understand what they read is the rationale for and focus of word identification lessons.

However, the teacher cannot teach all new words. Pupils should be encouraged to guess the meanings of new words from the context. Only words which are necessary to understand to understand the text should be taught.

Text comprehension

Comprehension is the ability to understand and gain meaning from what has been read (Armbruster et al. 2001). Every reader who reads a text reads for a purpose and reading itself is active (Moats, 1999). Good readers are active as they read. They make use of their experience and knowledge of the world, vocabulary, language structure and knowledge of reading strategies in order to understand a text (Moats, 1999). Text comprehension can be developed through teaching comprehension strategies. Instruction in comprehension is important because an understanding of what is being read from a text is essential for proficiency in reading and learning from printed materials.

Instruction in text comprehension

The teacher needs to do the following:

- introduce key ideas and concepts in the text before reading and after reading,
- help pupils to understand how the text is structured,
- prompt pupils to use strategies when reading, and
- extend pupils understanding of the text through asking pupils to write, draw, retell, summarise the story in the text.

Activity 7

Prepare and teach micro-lessons on reading.

Feedback for Activity 7

Steps of a reading lesson

As part of a balanced literacy approach program phonemic awareness activities should be integrated with decoding, comprehension, writing and spelling activities. It is important that pupils perceive the connection between oral and written language.

Introduction

Discuss the title of the story and any illustration or picture/ by drawing on the pupils' knowledge of the world and on their opinions and experiences in order to get them (pupils) to predict the possible content of the story.

Step 1

Recognize and practice new reading words in order to provide some language preparation for the text.

Step 2

Write questions on the board before silent reading in order to motivate learners by giving a reason for reading

Step 3

Discuss the story orally with pupils.

Step 4

Pupils practice reading especially weaker pupils. Pupils can read loudly within their groups or to the teacher.

Conclusion Give spelling exercises

Activity 8**Analyze the lessons**

Notes for teachers

Instructional approaches that can assist pupils meet their reading requirements are as follows:

- Teachers are to make it clear to all pupils what they are expected to learn and the outcome they are expected to achieve. Starting point for teaching is to be the pupils' existing knowledge, skills, interest and understanding derived from previous experience in and out of school.
- Use teaching methods that encourage pupils' participation in class,
- Engage pupils in productive use of the English vocabulary which can improve their oral and written competences,
- Help pupils distinguish words through writing,
- Organize learning in a variety of ways: individual work, group work, whole class, visual aids, all these selected to suit the class in hand,
- Use a variety of techniques such as direct question, demonstration, helping, guiding and supporting pupils, problem solving, drama, role-play, games, songs, rhymes,

- Provide systematic and explicit instruction in sound/symbol relationships (phonics), phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension,
- Help pupils develop effective strategies for reading,
- Encourage silent reading,
- Provide opportunities for pupils to engage in reading and writing simple stories and sentences,
- Encourage writing by listening to the stories children tell,
- Provide opportunities for pupils to experiment with writing,
- Help pupils build sight vocabulary, and
- Monitor pupils' progress through appropriate formative assessment.

What requirements do pupils learning to read and write in English need?

In reading pupils need to master

- Letters *a b c d* up to *z* and recognize these in words,
- correct letter formation,
- Rules of punctuation,
- Reading from left to right and top to bottom,
- Interpretation of texts for literal meaning, and
- Knowledge that both text and pictures contain meaning.

In writing pupils need to master

- Handwriting,
- Letters and shapes,
- Words with gaps in between, and
- Joined up writing using various formats.

Activities that can nurture pupils reading and writing skills in English are as follows:

- Listening, discussing, reading, writing, working on a task, practicing, demonstrating, role playing and dramatizing,
- Singing, hearing rhymes or alliterations,
- Substituting one phoneme for another eg. Change /h/ in *hot* to /p/,
- Deleting phonemes from words eg. the /c/ from *cat*, and

- Identifying words within words//using word root, prefixes and suffixes.
 - Teachers should read short pieces that pupils like so as to provide models of reading. This will also let pupils see that reading can be pleasurable and a useful thing to be able to do.
 - Teachers to ask pupils wh- questions about what teachers are reading to them e.g. what did Khumbo like playing with? Where did Khumbo live?
 - Teachers should encourage pupils to make inferences about what is being read to pupils eg. Do you think Khumbo was happy in the forest?
- Teachers to provide pupils with opportunities for silent reading,
 Teachers need to demonstrate and model strategies for pupils to use when comprehension breaks down.
 Teachers to provide opportunities for pupils to dramatize a dialogue from a story or role-play,
 Teachers extend pupils knowledge of the correct use of writing conventions,
 Teach strategies for spelling new and difficult words,
 Teach pupils to write in multiple forms eg. stories, filling forms, letters, personal diaries,
 Pupils to be given opportunities to play word games,
 Pupils to create word banks, and
 Encourage print recognition in everyday situation eg. reading various labels and signs.

Expected outcomes of the training are:

- Trained teachers,
- Production of training / teaching materials, and
- Improvement of pupils' literacy in English.

Expected specific outcomes on pupils are pupils being able to:

- develop knowledge of letter names and shapes,
- understand that spoken words are composed of sounds and that letters correspond to these sounds,
- use letter-sound associations, word parts, and context to identify new words,
- recognize letters and letter-sound matches,
- recognize beginning, middle and end sounds of words (discriminate rhymes),
- read and write rhyming words such as cat, rat, mat, goat, boat, coat etc,

- identify an increasing number of words by sight,
- read and write simple words such as *is, like, green, we, are, that, this, big boy, teacher* etc,
- read write simple sentences such as *He is standing. The boy is sweeping. My name is... I am six years old.*
- read and retell stories,
- use reading strategies such as re-reading, predicting, questioning, contextualising, when comprehension breaks down,
- write simple sentences about what is true to them,
- write in many different forms,
- spell words correctly,
- develop print concepts such as reading from left-to- right and top-to-bottom,
- demonstrate knowledge on use of capital letters at the beginning of sentences and proper names, and
- answer written comprehension in simple complete sentences.

Standard four English-teacher observation checklist

Teacher's name: _____ School name: _____

Standard: _____ Teacher code: _____

Sex: Male/female

Topic: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Evaluation item	0 = not done	1 = very poor	2 = weak	3 = good	4 = outstanding
PLANNING AND PREPARATION					
1 Suitability of objectives					
a) Are objectives specific?					
b) Are objectives measurable?					
c) Are objectives attainable?					
d) Are objectives realistic in terms of time?					
2 Selection of instructional approaches Are the following critical skills & approaches planned for?					
a) phonics					
b) phonemic awareness					
c) fluency					
d) vocabulary					
e) comprehension					
LESSON DELIVERY					
1 Instruction in phonics					
a) teaches the relationship between the letters of written language and sounds of spoken language					
b) provides systematic instruction in					

phonics- the plan of instruction includes a selected set of letter –sound relationships that are organised into a logical sequence easy to difficult					
c) makes pupils apply letter sounds to daily reading					
d) teaches strategies to decode multisyllabic words using word parts such as affixes eg. pre-, mis-, -tion					
e) gives pupils practice in the application of phonics to the spelling of words					
2 Instruction in phonemic awareness					
a) provides explicit instruction in phonemic awareness					
b) teaches phoneme identification					
c) teaches phoneme deletion or addition or substitution to form new words					
d) focuses on rhyming words/analogies					
3 Instruction in fluency					
a) models fluent reading					
b) provides opportunities for oral , repeated reading					
c) gives support and feedback					
4 Instruction in vocabulary					
a) provides direct instruction of specific concepts & vocabulary					
b) provides direct explicit instruction in the meaning of words and in word learning strategies					
c) engages pupils in daily interaction that apply new vocabulary in both oral and written work					

d) explicitly teaches both individual words and word learning strategies					
e) integrates words into sentences and asks pupils to tell the meaning of the word in the sentence and to use it in a variety of context					
5) Instruction in comprehension					
a) teaches background information (activates prior knowledge)					
b) provides comprehension instruction before, during & after reading a text					
c) teaches the following comprehension strategies					
finding main idea					
monitoring comprehension					
predicting					
retelling the story (summarising)					
inferring					
guessing meaning of unfamiliar words					
APPROPRIATENESS OF CLOSURE					
a) summarises main points of the lesson					
b) uses questions to enhance understanding of main points of lesson					
TOTAL SCORES					
OVERALL AVERAGE:					

Adapted from Teacher Observation Checklist for Domasi Teacher Training College

English pre-test for standard four

Name of School _____ District _____
 School Code _____ Pupil's Name _____
 Pupil's Code _____ Teacher Code _____

Assessments in Questions A and B are auditory. They should be given one-on-one. It is important that you have a non-distracting, comfortable testing environment for pupils.

Question A

Researcher: "Do you know what rhyming words are?" If the pupil says *yes* ask him or her to tell you two rhyming words. If he or she answers *no* or incorrectly then explain: "Rhyming words are words that end with the same sound. For example, the words *cat* and *mat* rhyme. I'm going to say two words. I want you to tell me if they sound alike at the end."

Researcher: "Do the words *Sun* and *Fun* sound alike at the end?"

Say each word pair listed below. If the pupil responds correctly, circle *Yes*. If the pupil responds incorrectly, circle *No*.

Do these two words sound alike at the end?			Pupil's Response	
1.	dog	bin	Yes	No
2.	hat	mat	Yes	No
3.	book	mad	Yes	No
4.	mother	father	Yes	No
5.	mice	rice	Yes	No

Question B

Researcher: "Let's play another word game. I'm going to tell you a word. I want you to say the word with the /m/ sound at the beginning. Let's do a practice one. If I said the word *bat* you would say *mat*. Let's try another."

Can you say this word with the /m/ sound at the beginning?	Correct Answer	Pupil's Response
1. pay	may	Correct Incorrect
2. ten	men	Correct Incorrect
3. kill	mill	Correct Incorrect
4. tail	mail	Correct Incorrect
5. sad	mad	Correct Incorrect

Adapted from Reading Rockets (2004)

Questions C to F are writing tests.
Answer all questions

Question C

Write five words in *column 1* that sound the same (rhyme) as *in*. In *column 2* write five words that sound the same as *ear*. Examples have been shown.

Column 1

in

Example bin

1.) _____

2.) _____

3.) _____

4.) _____

5.) _____

Column 2

ear

Example gear

6.) _____

7.) _____

8.) _____

9.) _____

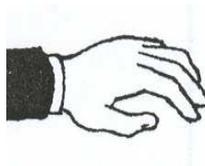
10.) _____

(10 marks)

Question D

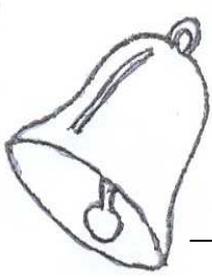
From the list of words given, choose a word that matches the picture: **tailor, woman, bell, river, farmer, hand.**

Example



_____ **hand** _____

1)



2)



3)



4)



5)



(5 marks)

Question E

Complete the following puzzle. Fill the answers into the blocks that start with the number of the 'clue'. You may choose answers from the list given below:

wives worker calves leaves thieves knives

w	o	r	k	e	r		
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							

Example A person who works for others. The answer is **worker**.

1. Baby cows.
2. Cutting instruments.
3. Partners of husbands.
4. They grow on trees.
5. People who steal.

(5 marks)

Question F

Read the letter below and answer the questions that follow:

Chawawa F. P. School
P.O. Box 17
Katundu.
28th August, 1992

Dear Jane,

It's a month now since I saw you. I hope you're well.

My elder sister, Amanda, is getting married next month on 21st September. The wedding will be here at home. My parents and I would like you to come. My mother wants to know if you can be my sister's bridesmaid.

Since this is the first time you are coming here, this is how to get here:

From Mkande, take the bus to Kulongwe. At Kulongwe bus station, there are four bus shelters labeled A, B, C and D. Go to shelter B to take a bus to Mpanda. Wait for bus number 210 or 127 or 116. All these buses go to Mzimbe through Mpanda. I will meet you at Mpanda if you let me know what day you will come. We will walk back to my home together.

I hope you can come. I am looking forward to seeing you.

Yours,

Teleza.

Answer these questions

- 1) Who is getting married? _____
- 2) Who did Teleza invite to the wedding? _____
- 3) Why is Teleza inviting this person to the wedding? _____
- 4) Where does Teleza live? _____
- 5) Where does Jane live? _____

(10 marks)

Question G/Fluency**English reading passage**

School _____ Dist. _____

Code _____ Pupil's Name _____

Pupil's Code _____ Date _____

Pupil's Sex: *Male/Female*

Khumbo and the grasshopper	4
A long time ago, there was a boy called Khumbo who lived in	17
Mchoroma Village. Khumbo was ten years old. He was in standard	28
four. At home, he was a good boy. He always helped his mother.	41
He was quiet and did not like fighting with his friends. He liked playing	55
with grasshoppers and other insects.	60
At school, Khumbo was not a very good boy. He was clever and did	74
very well in class but he often missed lessons. He usually went out	87
to look for grasshoppers and other insects. When he saw a big	99
grasshopper he chased and caught it. He put all the grasshoppers	110
in a box which he always carried in his school bag. Sometimes, he	122
hunted grasshoppers all morning until his friends came out of class.	133
“Where have you been Khumbo?” his friends would ask. “The	143
teacher was looking for you.”	148
“I was in class. Didn’t you see me?” Khumbo would lie.	159
One day, on his way to school, he saw a very big grasshopper flying	173
over his head. It had red wings. It was very beautiful.	184

Number of words correct in one minute: _____

Total number of words correct: _____

Percent of words correct (# / 184) _____

Appendix 4

English post-test for standard four

Name of School _____ District _____
School Code _____ Pupil's Name _____
Pupil's Code _____ Teacher Code _____

Assessments in Questions A and B are auditory. They should be given one-on-one. It is important that you have a non-distracting, comfortable testing environment for pupils.

Question A

Researcher: "Sometimes words start with the same sound, like in the words: *fat* and *fun*. Both of these words start with the sound /f/. I'm going to say two different words, and I want you to tell me if the words start with the same sound. Let's try one."

Researcher: "Do the words *bag* and *boat* start with the same sound?"

Say each word pair listed below. If the pupil responds correctly, circle *Yes*. If the pupil responds incorrectly, circle *No*.

Do these two words start with the same sounds?		Pupil's Response	
1.	sat home	Yes	No
2.	poor pail	Yes	No
3.	book them	Yes	No
4.	hut hop	Yes	No
5.	sun sin	Yes	No

Question B

Researcher: "Let's play another word game. I'm going to tell you a word. I want you to say the word without the first sound. Let's do a practice one. If I said the word *fan* you would say *an*. Let's try another."

Can you say this word without the first sound?	Correct Answer	Pupil's Response
1. win	in	Correct Incorrect
2. hand	and	Correct Incorrect
3. pup	up	Correct Incorrect
4. tape	ape	Correct Incorrect
5. rake	ake	Correct Incorrect

Adapted from Reading Rockets (2004)

Question C to F are writing tests
Answer all questions

Question C

Write five words in *column 1* that sound the same (rhyme) as *cat*. In *column 2* write five words that sound the same as *ground*. Examples have been shown below as follows:

Column 1
cat

Column 2
ground

Example bat

Example aloud

6.) _____

6.) _____

7.) _____

7.) _____

8.) _____

8.) _____

9.) _____

9.) _____

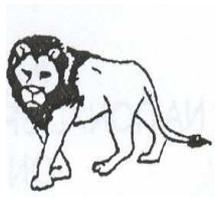
10.) _____

10.) _____

(10 marks)

Question D

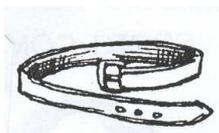
From the list of words given, choose a word that matches the picture: **car, belt, bicycle, lion, sleeping, cow.**



Example

lion

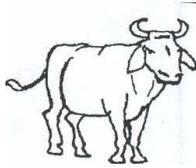
1)



2)



3)



4)



5)



(5 marks)

Question E

Complete the following puzzle. Fill the answers into blocks that start with the number of the 'clue'. You may choose answers from the list given below:

owner priest singer player teacher hunter

p	r	i	e	s	t		
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							

Example A person who preaches in church on Sundays. The answer is a **priest**.

- 6. A person who kills animals for food.
- 7. A person who owns something.
- 8. A person who sings.
- 9. A person who teaches others.
- 10. A person who plays in a team.

(5 marks)

Question F

Read the letter below and **answer** the questions that follow:

Mangochi Model School,
P.O. Box 74,
Mangochi.
10th December, 1992.

Dear Maria,

How are you? I'm fine.

We arrived in Mangochi safely. I have started school at the model school. The school is very near our new house. There are two thousand pupils altogether and thirty teachers. I like my new school. I have some new friends, too. One of them is called Linda. I'll tell you about her another time.

Mangochi is a beautiful place. I enjoy swimming in the lake and I enjoy eating chambo.

How is our old school? Do you have a new teacher now in Standard Four? Tell me about any new things at Misesa. I miss you all. I'll write you more later. Please write back soon.

Love from,

Juliet.

Answer these questions

- 6) To which school does Juliet go? _____
- 7) Is the school a small school or a big one? _____
- 8) Linda is one of Juliet's friends. Name Juliet's other friend. _____
- 9) What is the name of Juliet's old school? _____
- 10) Why do you think Juliet calls Mangochi a beautiful place? _____

(10 marks)

Name of School _____ District _____

Code _____ Pupil's No. _____

Pupil's Code _____ Date _____

Pupil Sex: *Male/Female***Timba the beautiful bird**

A long time ago, there was a beautiful bird. Her name was Timba.	13
She lived in a big forest. She was happy. Other animals admired	25
Timba. They all wanted to be beautiful like her.	34
One day, Leopard went to Timba's home and asked her for the	46
medicine which she used to become beautiful. Timba said,	55
"I'll give you some. But first I want you to sit on my ten eggs for	71
fourteen days until they all hatch."	77
Leopard sat on the eggs for fourteen days. On the fourteenth day,	89
Timba came and saw her ten little ones. She was happy to see	102
them. She said to Leopard,	107
'You are faithful and kind. Come, I'll give you the medicine.'	118
Timba gave Leopard beautiful colours. Leopard was pleased.	126
When Hyena saw Leopard, he asked him where he got the	137
beautiful colours from. Leopard said,	142
'Timba gave them to me'. Hyena also went to Timba and asked	154
her for the medicine to become beautiful. Timba said, I'll give you	166
some. But first I want you to sit on my ten eggs for fourteen days	181
until they all hatch'.	185

Number of words correct in one minute: _____

Total number of words correct: _____

Percent of words correct (# / 185) _____

Appendix 5

Pupils' performance summary sheet

School: _____
 School code: _____
 Teacher: _____

Standard: _____
 Date: _____
 Teacher Code: _____

Name of pupil	sex	age	Home language	Mother's education	Mother's occupation	Father's education	Father's occupation	No. of days absent from school	Phonics	Phonemic awareness	Vocabulary	No. of words read per minute	Comprehension
1													
2													
3													
4													
5													
6													
7													
8													
9													
10													
11													
12													
13													
14													
15													
16													

Item Review Sheet

Thank you for taking the time to review these Literacy development test items. Your review is very important for helping us improve the quality of our test. Attached is an information sheet describing the content areas measured on the test. Please review each task and indicate the content area you think the task is measuring.

Content Areas

Item	Phonics	Phonemic awareness	Fluency	Vocabulary	Comprehension
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10					

Thank you for completing the task ratings. We are also interested in your overall impressions of this preliminary set of test items. Please answer the following questions. Attach additional paper if necessary, and feel free to make comments on the test itself.

1) Do you think the content of this test is appropriate for the development of literacy in English? Yes No

Comment:-

2) Are there important knowledge and skills that should be tested that are *missing* from this test?

3) What is your opinion regarding the *difficulty* of this test? Do you think the test is too easy, too difficult, or “about right?”

Comment:

4) Does the test contain any material that could be construed as offensive to any groups of examinees? Does the test contain material that may provide an unfair advantage or disadvantage to any particular groups of examinees? If so, please indicate below.

Content Validity Rating Form

The questions on literacy development you will rate are from an examination that has a specific content structure. This examination classifies each question into one of five content categories: (phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension). These content categories are described on a separate sheet of paper. Your task is to rate each of the five item types in terms of its relevance to each of the five content areas according to the following instructions.

Instructions:

Read each question (item) and make a judgment regarding its relevance to each of the five content areas (phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension). You must indicate your judgement by entering a number from 1 to 5 under each content area. Enter the number “5” if you believe the item is highly relevant to the respective content area. Enter the number “1” if you believe the item is not at all relevant to the respective content area. Use the numbers 2 through 4 to indicate intermediate degrees of content relevance.

Each item must be rated for each content area; thus, five ratings are required for each item. As an example, suppose you considered the item below to be highly relevant to “fluency”, moderately relevant to “vocabulary”, and not at all relevant to the other content areas, your item rating sheet might look something like this:

Example

Phonics	Phonemic/Aware	Fluency	Vocabulary	Comprehension
1	1	5	3	1

It is possible to rate an item as highly relevant to only one content area, highly relevant to more than one content area, or not at all relevant to any content area.

Directions: Please indicate the relevance of each item to each of the content areas listed below using a five-point scale where a rating of “1” indicates “not at all relevant” and a rating of “5” indicates “highly relevant”. Use the numbers 2 through

4 to indicate intermediate degrees of relevance. A description of each of the five content areas is attached.

Rating the relevance of test items

Task	Phonics	Phonemic Awareness	Fluency	Vocabulary	Comprehension
A					
B					
C					
D					
E					
F					
G					
H					
I					
J					

1 2 3 4 5

not at all
relevant

highly relevant

Description of content

Phonics

Phonics is the understanding that there is a relationship between the sounds of spoken language (phonemes) and the letters of the written language (graphemes). Pupils need to acquire knowledge of the alphabet to become good readers.

Phonics instruction

In the classroom the teacher has to provide systematic and explicit phonics instruction. Teachers need to organize reading instructions in a logical order moving from simple to more complex skills.

Instructional approaches that let pupils:

- Give rhyming words e.g. *fan; tan; man*
- Divide words up into syllables e.g. *hel / i / cop / ter; sn / ake*
- Notice that group of words have the same beginning e.g. *star; story; staircase*
- Notice that group of words have the same middle e.g. *bag cat*
- Notice that group of words have the same ending e.g. *bat; sat; mat; pat; that; or pinch; lunch; punch*
- Identify and work with onsets and rimes e.g. *cat c* is the onset *at* is the rime; *splat spl* is the onset *at* is the rime
- Make analogies e.g. *table; stable; able; cable; gable; fable;*

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, identify, and play with individual sounds in spoken words. Instruction in phonemic awareness is important because pupils who have these skills are likely to learn to read and spell words more than children who do not.

Phonemic awareness instruction

In the classroom situation the teacher has to provide activities that will help pupils develop phonemic awareness through hearing, identifying and manipulating the individual sounds, or phonemes, within spoken words. Some of the activities to be practiced are:

- Phoneme isolation e.g. what is the first or last sound in *mitt*? The first sound is /**m**/ the last sound is /**t**/

- Phoneme identification e.g. which sound is the same in *man, mitt, mess*? /**m**/ is the same.
- Phoneme categorization e.g. which word does not belong *fat, fan, tap*? *tap* does not belong
- Phoneme blending or combining e.g. what word results when you blend these separately pronounced individual sounds to make a word /**m**/ /**a**/ /**n**/? The blended sounds make the word *man*

The teacher teaches explicitly. Teaching aids can be a chart or pictures. The teacher can also use games, rhymes, alliterations, assonance, or any other language that focuses on the sounds in. The focus of the lesson may be oral language or this can be combined with looking at letters. After the teacher has modelled the skill, pupils need to practice actively. The activity can be done individually or in groups. Research findings have shown that phonemic awareness instruction is most effective when it focuses on one or two phoneme manipulation (Armbruster et al., 2003). This study will also focus on two types of phonemic awareness.

Fluency

Fluency is the ability to read accurately, quickly and with proper expression and comprehension (The Partnership for Reading).

Fluency instruction

Research has revealed two major instructional approaches as regards fluency. The first one is a teacher providing models of fluent reading to pupils. Through listening to the teacher reading effortlessly and with expression, pupils will learn how a readers' voice can help a written text make sense. Thus reading aloud will increase pupils' knowledge of the world, their vocabulary and their familiarity with written language. The second one is a teacher giving pupils repeated oral practice while guiding and giving them feedback. The repeated practice improves pupils' word recognition, speed and accuracy as well as fluency. Fluency will develop as a result of several opportunities given to pupils to practice reading on their own.

The teacher should demonstrate fluent oral reading, help expand pupils' listening vocabulary and give support to pupils. Pupils should practice to read fluently through repeated oral readings.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is the words that a pupil must know in order to communicate effectively. Vocabulary plays a critical role in learning to read. Pupils who are just learning to read will need to use their oral vocabulary to make sense of the words they see in print. They will not be able to understand what they read without knowing what most of the words mean.

Vocabulary instruction

Research has shown that most vocabulary is learned indirectly. Pupils can learn new words indirectly through their engagement in oral conversations, listening to other people speak or read to them, and from their engagement in silent reading. Some vocabulary however, must be taught directly. Direct instruction helps pupils learn difficult words. Direct instruction can also be used in teaching pupils word learning strategies. There are several word learning strategies that can be used such as cueing systems like sight vocabulary, context cues, and word attack cues. The teacher needs to teach word recognition, meaning of words and give pupils an opportunity to practice using the new words in context.

Techniques for teaching recognition of new words

- using the sound of letters (phonics),
- identifying words within words they already know such as *soil* which has *s* and *oil*; *become* which has *be* and *come*; *because* which has *be* and *cause*; *woollen* which has *wool* and *en*; *weight* which has *w* and *eight*; *village* contains *v*, *ill* and *age*,
- using word root, prefixes and suffixes e.g. *dis / own*;
un/ interest/ ing ; *re/ sell* ; *protect/ ion*; *re/ pay/ ment* ; *difficult/y*
hit/ hits / hitter/ hitting; *sub/ com/ mi /tee*

Techniques for teaching meanings of new words

- showing a real object/picture/drawing/model
- using the new word in sentences that reveal the meaning of the new word,
- defining or explaining the new word,
- demonstrating the new word wherever possible through mining, acting,
- using the context in which the new word is,

using the sentence patterns and the kind of word/s used e.g. nouns, adjectives,
using the sound of the new word e.g. bees buzzing, snake making s-s-s-s- sound,
using the senses, and
expanding knowledge of multiple word meanings.

The teaching of word-identification should not be done as an end in itself, but should be done to help pupils in the process of constructing meaning as they read. For instance, pupils should be taught sound symbols not because that knowledge is important in itself no, but so that the process of constructing meaning goes on as effortlessly as possible. Thus helping children understand what they read is the rationale for and focus of word identification lessons.

However, the teacher cannot teach all new words. Pupils should be encouraged to guess the meanings of new words from the context. Only words, which make it difficult to understand the text, should be taught.

Text comprehension

Comprehension is the ability to understand and gain meaning from what has been read (Armbruster et al. 2001). Every reader who reads a text reads for a purpose and reading itself is active (Moats 1999). Good readers are active as they read. They make use of their experience and knowledge of the world, vocabulary, language structure knowledge of reading strategies in order to understand a text (Moats 1999). Text comprehension can be developed through teaching comprehension strategies. Instruction in comprehension is important because an understanding of what is being read from a text is essential to proficiency in reading and learning from printed materials.

Instruction in text comprehension

The teacher needs to do the following:

- Introduce key ideas and concepts in the text before reading and after reading,
- Help pupils to understand how the text is structured,
- Prompt pupils to use strategies when reading, and

Extend pupils understanding of the text through asking pupils to write, draw, retell, summarise the story in the text.

Scoring of the English reading passage

Materials Needed:

- English Textbooks for Pupils for Standard 4
- Individual Reading Record Sheet (Numbered copy of the passage; 1 copy per pupil; used by the examiner for recording the known and unknown words)
- Pencil or pen (for the examiner)
- Timer
- Clipboard
- Straight edge for helping the child to focus on one line (e.g., this could be a rectangular piece of plain cardboard or heavy paper)
- English Pupil Performance Summary Sheet

Directions for Administering

1. Open the textbook to the selected passage. Hand the opened textbook to the pupil. Provide the pupil with the straight edge and demonstrate how it could be used. Using the straight edge is optional.
2. Place the Individual Reading Record Sheet in front of you but shielded so the pupil cannot see what you record. A clipboard is useful for this purpose.
3. Say these specific directions to the pupil for each passage:

When I say *begin*, start reading aloud at the top of this page. Read across the page (DEMONSTRATE BY POINTING TO THE PLACE WHERE YOU WANT THE PUPIL TO BEGIN). Try to read each word. If you come to a word you don't know, I'll tell it to you. Be sure to do your best reading. Do you understand what I want you to do?

Often the passage begins with the title. When you demonstrate where to begin, point to the title and then indicate that the child is to continue.

4. If you are uncertain as to whether the pupil understands what is expected, the directions may be repeated in the mother tongue.
5. Say 'begin' and start your timer when the pupil says the first word. If the pupil fails to say the first word of the passage after about 3 seconds, tell them the word and mark it as incorrect, then start your stopwatch. (IF THE CHILD STOPS READING BEFORE THE END OF THE PASSAGE, TELL THE CHILD TO KEEP READING – Show the child where you mean if necessary.)
6. Follow along on your copy. Put a slash (/) through words read incorrectly (see scoring procedures).
7. At the end of 1 minute, place a bracket (1) after the last word. Allow the pupil to finish the passage.

When the child has finished the last sentence on the numbered copy, say,

Thank you.

8. If at the end of one minute a pupil has read less than 4 words correctly and the child is struggling, stop the child, place a straight edge under the first line and say,

Now I want you to look at the rest of this line. Can you read something from this line? Do you see any words you know? Look and say the words you know.

After the child responds, move the straight edge to the next line and repeat this prompt. Continue for each line in the story. If, however, the child is still unable to read any words, stop moving line by line and ask if he/she can read any more words on the page.

On the Individual Reading Record Sheet circle the words that the child is able to read (the child must point to the word and say what it is). If the child knows a word that is repeated in the line, ask if the child sees that word anywhere else. Stop here, there is no need to ask the child to word by word tell you he/she cannot read the passage.

9. Comprehension questions: Before going to next passage, say to the child:

Now I am going to ask you some questions about what you read. You may look back in the story for the answers.

Ask each of the comprehension questions. Write the child's response on the Individual Reading Record Sheet.

Directions for Scoring

This task is scored by counting the number of correctly read words. Below are rules for determining if a word has been read correctly. (These rules are adapted from Tilly, W.D. & Carlson, S. (1992). Administration and scoring. In M.R. Shinn, N. Knutson, and W.D. Tilly (Eds.). Curriculum Based Assessment: Training Modules (3rd ed.) (pp.8-12). Eugene, OR: University of Oregon.)

Rule 1: Correctly read words are pronounced correctly. A word must be read correctly given the context of the sentence.

Example: The word "read" must be pronounced "read" when presented in the context of: "He will read the book."

Not as "He will red the book."

Example: The word "lead" must be pronounced "led" when presented in the context of: "She picked up the lead pipe." Not as "She picked up a leed pipe."

Rule 2: Self-corrected words are counted as correct. Words misread initially but corrected within 3 seconds are counted as correctly read.

Example: “The river was cold.” Read as: The river was could ... (2 seconds) ... cold. (4 correctly read words)

Rule 3: Repeated words are counted as correct. Words said over again correctly are ignored.

Example: “Ama ran swiftly” read as “Ama ran ... Ama ran swiftly.” (3 correctly read words)

Rule 4: Dialect. Variations in pronunciation that are explainable by local language norms are not errors.

Rule 5: Inserted words are ignored. When a pupil adds extra words, they are not counted as correct words nor as reading errors.

Example: “Yaw was happy.” Read as “Yaw was very happy.” (3 words correctly read)

Rule 6: Mispronounced or substituted words are counted as incorrect.

Example: “Yaw wanted a new hat.” Read as “Yaw want a new hat.” (4 correctly read words)

Rule 7: Omitted words are counted as errors.

Example: “Kofi climbed the tall tree.” Read as “Kofi climbed the tree.” (4 correctly read words)

Rule 8: Hesitations: When a pupil hesitates or fails to correctly pronounce a word within 3 seconds, the pupil is told the word and an error is scored.

Example: “Dede saw an elephant.” Read as “Dede saw an ... (3 seconds)” or “Dede saw an ell-ee ... (3 seconds)” At this point the examiner says, “elephant” (3 correctly read words)

Rule 9: Reversals: When a pupil transposes two or more words, those words not read in the correct order are errors.

Example: “Mensa ran quickly.” Read as “Mensa quickly ran.” (1 correctly read word)

Rule 10: Numbers written as numerals are counted as words and must be read correctly within the context of the passage.

Example: “Mensa had 13 balls.” Read as “Mensa had thirteen balls.” (4 correctly read words); not as “Mensa had one three balls.” (3 correctly read words)

Rule 11: Abbreviations are counted as words, and must be read correctly within the

context of the sentence.

Example: “Mr. Poku went to the farm.” Should be read as “Mister Poku went to the farm.” (6 words).

Directions for Recording the pupil’s score

Record the child’s name and identifying information on the Individual Reading Record Sheet (the numbered copy of the reading passage). Count up the total number of words read or attempted within one minute [use the numbers at the end of each line as a guide]. Record these numbers in the box that has been provided on the Individual Reading Record Sheet. Record the number of words read correctly in one minute on the English Pupil Performance Summary Sheet.

Count the number of words read correctly for the whole passage. Then calculate the percentage correct for the entire passage (percentage correct = words read correctly/total number of words in the passage). [Even if the child didn’t finish the passage (i.e., if the passage was too hard and the child read fewer than 4 words correctly in one minute) the total number of words for the whole passage is used as the basis for calculating percent correct.] Record this number in the Individual Reading Record Sheet box and on the English Pupil Performance Summary Sheet.

Also, record the number of comprehension questions that are answered correctly on the English Pupil Performance Summary Sheet.

Storing the Data

Once you have completed testing one child and have recorded all of the scores on the English Pupil Performance Summary Sheet, staple together the paper used for the writing tasks and the Individual Reading Record Sheet for the reading passages. Make sure that the pupil’s name is clearly written on both pages. Organize the papers by class and store the materials in a secure location.

Adapted from:

Improved Educational Quality/Malawi Project

Appendix 8

Telegrams: PRESSMIN, Lilongwe
Telephone: 01771 550/01774 869
Fax: 01782 431
E-mail: nrcm@sdp.org.mw



Our Reference No **TC/14/1**
National Research Council of Malawi
PO Box 30745
Lilongwe 3
Malawi

Communications should be addressed to:
The Director for National Research Council of Malawi

23rd January 2008

C. E. Kamlongera,
Malawi Institute of Education,
P.O Box 50,
Domasi.

Dear Sir/Madam,

SUBMISSION OF ABSTRACT FOR PRESENTATION CONSIDERATION AT THE 2008 ANNUAL RESEARCH CONFERENCE

The National Research Council of Malawi (NRCM) has organised the 2008 Annual Research Conference, which will take place at Capital Hotel in Lilongwe from 11th to 14th March 2008 starting from 8.00a.m. The main objective of the conference is to provide a forum for disseminating and sharing research results and experiences originating from various research projects funded under the NRCM Research Grant Scheme and those funded from other sources other than NRCM.

Your project titled **"Improving literacy development in English through the use of balanced approaches"** was funded under the NRCM Research Grant Scheme in the 2006/2007 financial year. You are therefore requested to send an abstract of the project to be considered for presentation at the conference before the 28th January 2008. The abstract must be single-spaced in Times New Roman, font size 11, using Microsoft word and should not be more than 300 words with no illustrations or references.

For further enquiries, please contact the undersigned on the following numbers: **01 771 550/09 492 813** or Mrs. G. Mwafulirwa on **08 945 437**.


M.D Tembo

For: **Director of Research, National Research Council of Malawi**



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Wednesday, March 28, 2007

The Division Manager
P/Bag 48
ZOMBA

Dear Sir,

Request for Assistance In Identifying Schools to Participate in the Balanced Literacy Approach Project

The Malawi Institute of Education has received a grant from the National Research Council of Malawi to be used in exploring ways of improving the teaching of English in primary schools.

I therefore, write this letter to ask for your assistance in identifying four primary schools in Zomba rural that may participate in the project. The selected schools will be involved in instructional trials of methodologies in the teaching of English in standard four.

Mrs C.E. Kamlongera is the Principal investigator in this project. She is being supported by Mr. H.G. Chilora. Both are senior members here at MIE. Please feel free to liase with them should you wish to do so at any time.

We look forward to your assistance and cooperation in this very important assignment.

Yours truly,

C. Gunsaru
DIRECTOR

Elisa and Kitty



Part 1

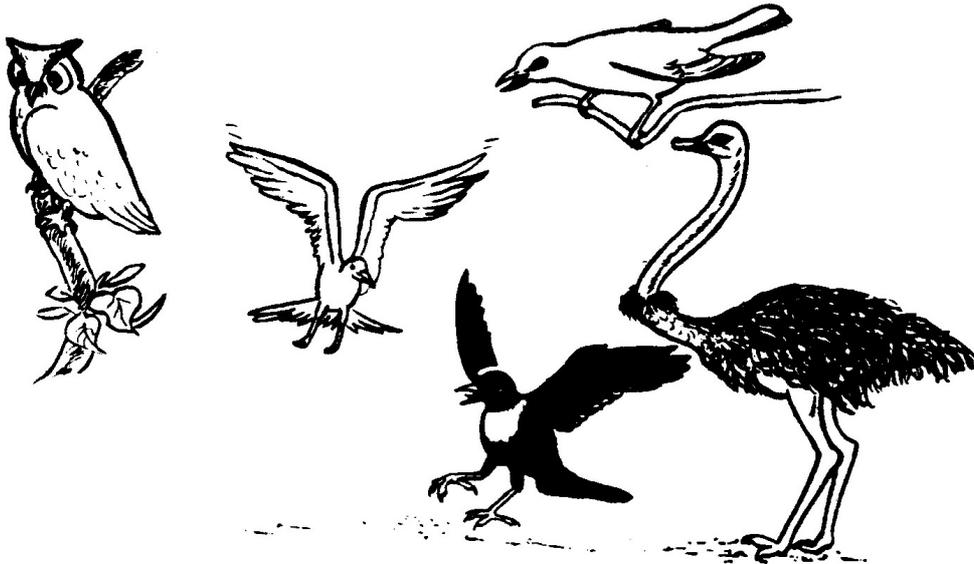
Elisa is a very quiet and polite girl. She is ten years old. She is in Standard 4. At school, she keeps quiet. She does not like playing in class. Most of the pupils in Standard 4 are noisy when their teacher is not in class. But Elisa likes reading her story books. Her mother, Mrs. Chirwa, bought her the story books. In Standard 3, Elisa came first.

At home Elisa likes playing with dolls made of cloth. She doesn't like plastic dolls because they easily break. Her mother taught her how to make cloth dolls. She likes dressing her dolls well. She also likes knitting. She is now learning how to knit boots and caps for her dolls.

One day, on her way home, Elisa found a small kitten. She stopped to look at it. It came towards her. She bent down and brushed its smooth and soft hair from head to tail. The kitten seemed to like this. It moved its tail from side to side and looked at Elisa.

'Miaow - miaow,' it cried, looking at her. Elisa thought it was saying, 'Take me, take me'. She stood up and started going home. As she walked, the kitten followed her. She tried to chase it away but it kept on following her. After some distance, she picked it up and said, 'I'll take you home and look after you.'

Birds



All birds have wings. They use the wings to fly. Some birds fly very fast but others fly very slowly. Some birds do not fly at all.

All birds have feathers. The feathers are of different colours. Some feathers are beautiful but others are ugly. Feathers keep birds warm.

All birds have beaks. Birds use their beaks for eating. Some birds eat meat. Others catch insects with their beaks.

All birds lay eggs. They lay them in nests. Some nests are found in trees while others are found on the ground. Some birds dig holes in the sand and lay their eggs there.

Little boys like picking eggs from nests. This is very bad. Birds are useful to us. They eat insects which eat our crops. Big birds like owls eat mice which eat maize from our 'nkhokwes'. Next time you see a bird near your house, give it some food and water.

Invitation to the wedding



Mr Mapupo lives at Simungwa village. He has two daughters. Their names are Amanda and Teleza. Amanda is older. She is a teacher. Teleza is in Form Two at Kulini Secondary School.

Last school holiday, Amanda got married. A month before the wedding, Mr Mapupo asked Teleza to invite her best friend to come to the wedding. Teleza decided to invite Jane. This is the letter she wrote to her.

4.2.2 Classroom observation results

a Classroom observation (Experimental schools 1)

In the first classroom observation results, the teacher was teaching Unit 16 the title of which was *Elisa and Kitty* (Appendix 10 a) from the book (Chilora et al. 1994) *Activities with English: A course for primary schools*.

Class: Standard 4

Subject: English

Date: 27-08-2008

Time: 8:40-9:15

Topic: Unit 16 Lesson 138

Specific objectives of the lesson

By the end of the lesson pupils should be able to

- read a passage
- orally answer questions on the passage
- make words using a grid.

Teaching and learning materials

dolls, chart

Introduction

The lesson started by the teacher asking some questions and pupils answering the questions as follows:

Teacher: Do you keep animals?

Pupil: Yes I do?

Teacher: What kind of animals?

Pupil: goats

Pupil: dogs

Pupil: cats

Pupil: donkeys

Pupil: cows

Pupil: chickens (Some pupils disagree and say that chickens are not animals but birds).

Teacher: Very good effort. Indeed some people include chickens under domestic animals but others do not. They categorise chickens under domestic birds that include

ducks and pigeons. For our purpose here we agree that we keep a number of animals such as cows, goats, dogs, cats and donkeys. Why do you think we keep these animals?

Pupil: for food. (Some pupils giggle and alert the teacher that not all animals are edible).

Pupil: for various reasons depending on the animal. Dogs and cats are kept as companions of some people or guards.

Pupil: Donkeys are used for transport.

Teacher: Very good! Well done all of you. Indeed we keep animals for various reasons. We keep animals such as cows and goats for food as Moyenda has said. Dogs are kept to guard our homes. Some people keep dogs to keep them company. Here in our community we keep cats to chase or eat rats that infest our homes. Donkeys are kept mostly as beasts of burden. Now I would like you to open your text books on to page 90. Look at the title and illustration on that page.

Teacher: Who or what do you see in the illustration?

Pupil: I see a girl.

Pupil: I see a cat

Pupil: a chair.

Teacher: A good try. But that is not a chair. Is there anyone to say what it is called class?

Pupil: It is called a bench.

Teacher: Very good. What is it called class?

Pupils say in unison: a bench.

The teacher asked learners to say the word *bench* two times more after explaining to the class that the thing the girl is sitting on is called a bench not a chair.

Teacher: What is the girl holding in her hands?

Pupil: a cat

Teacher: Excellent! How many of you have cats at home?

Pupils: A number of pupils with cats at their homes raise their hands.

Teacher: What do you do with the cat?

Pupil: I feed it.

Pupil: I play with it.

Pupil: I curdle it.

Teacher: Very good all of you.

(The teacher proceeds to discussing the title and illustration of the story. He uses the illustration to get pupils to predict what the content of the story is about.)

Teacher: So we do different things with the animals that we keep at home. Is there anyone who would like to read the title of the story?

Pupil: Elisa and Ki-i-i-i (Fails to read the word Kitty).

Teacher: Any one to help her read the title? (Some pupils offer to read the title of the passage).

Pupil: Elisa and Kitty.

Teacher: Excellent! Class what is the title of the story?

Pupils say in a chorus: Elisa and Kitty.

Teacher: I would like all of you to think about what the story is about? (Pause for some seconds). Anyone who would like to guess what the story is about?

Pupils: Pupils make some guesses. Some say that the story is about a girl. Others say it is about a cat. Few pupils say that the story is about a girl and a cat.

Teacher: We shall see later if your guess about the title of the story is correct. The teacher moves on to the development part of the lesson plan.

Development

Step 1

Teacher: Now children I want you to put your finger on the word *noisy* in the passage and read the sentence which contains the word.

Pupil: (Reads the sentence slowly and is not audible).

Teacher: A very good effort. Is there another person who wants to read the sentence with the word *noisy*? (A number of pupils raise their hands).

Pupil: (Reads the sentence) "Most of the pupils are noisy when their teacher is not in class."

The teacher and learners do the same with other words *plastic dolls*, *from side to side*, *chase it away*.

Teacher: The teacher asks learners to guess the meanings of words as they are used in the sentences.

Pupils: A number of pupils are not able to guess the meanings of words.

The teacher and learners discuss the meanings of the words as used in the sentences.

Step 2

Teacher: The teacher writes the following questions on the chalkboard:

What animal produces the sound *miaow*?

Where was the kitten found?

Why does Elisa like plastic dolls?

Teacher: The teacher asks a learner to read aloud the questions on the chalkboard. Then he asks the learners to read silently and think about the questions on the chalkboard.

Step 3

Teacher: The teacher reads the passage aloud to the class. He demonstrates the strategies that pupils could use in order to understand the text such as: “This sentence is confusing to me. Let me re read it and check if I understand it”. The teacher explains the strategy to the class and the reason why pupils have to learn to use it.

Pupils: Few pupils take turns reading and thinking aloud with a sentence one learner at a time.

Teacher and Pupils: The teacher and the learners discuss the questions written on the board.

Pupils: Pupils answer the questions orally.

Step 4

The teacher asks the pupils to read the sentence that contained the word *found* from the passage. He then shows learners a card with the word *found*. He asks the learners to name the letters in the word *found*. When pupils respond the teacher underlines the letters *ound*.

Teacher: Now class I would like us to come up with other words that end with the letters *ound*. For example what word would we have if we removed *f* and put the letter *r* ?

Pupils: Pupils in unison say *round*.

Teacher: Very good class.

Teacher: The teacher hangs a grid as shown below and asks the learners to come up with other words that end with the same letters *-ound*.

r	ound
p	
s	
b	
gr	

Teacher: He writes the words *round, pound, sound, bound, ground*, on the chalkboard as the learners mentioned them.

(The lesson continued with a discussion of the multiple meanings of the various words round, sound, bound, ground and pound. For instance the word pound has a number of meanings, *pound* as weight, (one pound of meat), pound as British money, (He gave me one pound to buy some sweets), pound as in grind, beat, hit or hammer, (Can you please pound some maize for us to have maize flour?).

Conclusion

Teacher: Can we use the words in meaningful sentences.

Pupils: A number of pupils make sentences using the words orally.

Afterwards the teacher asks the learners to write sentences using the words and read the sentences aloud to the class.

b Classroom observation results (Experimental schools 2)

The teacher was teaching Unit 18 whose title was *Birds* (Appendix 10 b).

Class: Standard 4

Subject: English

Date: 13-10-2008

Time: 7:30-8:05

Topic: Unit 18 Lesson 154

Specific objectives

By the end of the lesson pupils should be able to

- read the story on birds
- answer questions at the end of the story
- list words which begin with the /s/ sound from the passage
- identify their own five words which begin with the same sound /s/ (letter).

- Read the identified words to the class.

Teaching and learning materials

nest, insects, feathers, an egg, word card, picture showing a bird

Presentation

Introduction

Teacher: The teacher shows learners a picture with a bird on it and asks some questions.

Teacher: What do you see in this picture?

Pupil: Pupils answer in unison – *a bird*

Teacher: The teacher asks more questions: How many legs, wings, and eyes does a bird have?

Pupil: Pupils respond correctly.

Teacher: What covers the body of a bird?

Pupil: One pupil says long hair. Other pupils offer to correct her and say feathers.

Teacher: Teacher shows the class some real birds' feathers and asks learners, "What is this class?"

Pupils: Some pupils say *feethers* (sic) while others say *feathers*.

Teacher: The teacher pronounces the word and says *feathers*.

Teacher: The teacher repeats pronouncing the word and asks pupils to say the word after him. He asks a volunteer to spell the word. He asks a learner to write the spelt word on the chalkboard for all learners to see how the word is spelt. He asks the learners to read the word from the chalkboard.

Teacher: The teacher shows learners real bird's nest, an insect, an egg and asks learners what they think these things are. In teaching the vocabulary (concept) for these the teacher follows the same steps he did with feathers that is, pronouncing the words and asking pupils to say after him, asking pupils to spell the word, to write the words on the chalkboard and to read the words from the chalk board.

Teacher: Where do birds live?

Pupils: Pupils offer a number of answers. Some say in trees, others say in the forest, yet others say near our houses.

Development

Teacher: He flashes word cards with the following words written on and asks the pupils to read the words: nest, insects, feathers, an egg and beaks.

The teacher and pupils discuss the words.

Teacher: He asks pupils to open their text books on to page 105 *Activities with English: A course for primary schools*.

Teacher and learners discuss the illustration at page 105 guided by the following questions:

How many birds are there in the picture?

How many legs, eyes, and wings do all birds have?

What do birds use to catch insects?

What covers the body of the birds?

What do you think you are going to read about in the story?

What is the title of the story?

Teacher: The teacher once more flashes word cards with the words *nest, feathers, beaks, eggs, wings* and asks learners to find each of the words in the passage.

Teacher: He writes the following questions on the chalkboard:

Are birds' feathers of the same colour?

What do birds use their beaks for?

Where do birds make their nests?

Pupils: Some four pupils read the questions aloud to the class.

Teacher: Reads the first paragraph of the story aloud while pupils listen. He demonstrates the strategy of summarising a text such as re telling what one read by including important information only, using key words from the text leaving out details that are less important. The teacher explains why pupils have to learn the strategy. He asks pupils to practice the strategy using very short paragraphs.

Pupils: Pupils read a passage and summarise it orally.

Teacher: He then asks the pupils to read the passage silently.

Pupils: Pupils read the passage silently.

Teacher and learners discuss the answers to the questions on the chalkboard orally.

Teacher: The teacher asks learners to go through the passage and identify all words which start with the sound /s/ at the beginning (which start with the letter s).

Pupils: Pupils scan for words: sand, some, see, and slowly.

Teacher: The teacher asks learners to identify their own words which start with the /s/ sound (which start with the letter *s*).

Pupils: Pupils come up with the following words: *sun, sin, same, sick, sit, sat, soap, story, see, and school*. Pupils read the words to the class and write them on the chalkboard. Pupils use the words they identified in their own sentences.

Conclusion

Pupils: Pupils match the following words with the objects: *egg, nest, feathers, and insects*.

Teacher: The teacher asks learners to say one sentence each one of them about what they had read in the story.

Pupils: Pupils give one sentence each about the story.

Teacher: The teacher here was trying to teach learners the ability of picking an idea from the story. This would lead to learners' ability to identify the main idea of the story and summarise.

c Classroom observation results (Control schools 1)

Just as fidelity of implementation needs to be tracked in the experimental group, instruction in the control group too needs to be observed and described. Below are descriptions of instruction in two of the control schools. In this lesson the teacher was teaching Unit 18 whose title was *Birds* (Appendix 10 b).

Class: Standard 4

Subject: English

Topic: Reading (lesson 154)

Specific objectives:

By the end of the lesson pupils should be able to

- read a passage,
- answer comprehension questions correctly.

Teaching and learning materials

books, cards

Presentation

Introduction

Teacher: We will start our lesson today with spellings. Can you all stand up? When

you get the spelling correct then you can sit down. Are you ready class?

Pupils: Pupils respond in unison and say *Yes*.

Teacher: The teacher asks learners to spell the words *meat, eat, need, heart, and gave*. Some pupils get the spellings correct. Others do not get them right. Eventually the teacher asks them to sit down and get the spellings right next time.

Development

Step 1

Teacher: The teacher writes the following questions on the chalk board

What do all birds have?

Are there any birds which do not lay eggs?

How do birds help us?

Step 2

Teacher: The teacher reads the questions to the pupils.

Pupil: Pupils in unison read the questions after the teacher.

Step 3

Teacher: The teacher reads the passage aloud to the class.

Pupil: Pupils read the passage in unison after the teacher.

Teacher: The teacher corrects reading errors that the pupils make as they read aloud.

Step 4

Teacher: Now class can you read the passage silently.

Pupils: Pupils read the passage silently.

Conclusion

Teacher: Now I would like you to answer comprehension questions from the chalkboard.

Pupils: Pupils answer comprehension questions orally. A number of learners are not able to answer the questions orally.

Teacher: The teacher is at pains to explain the answers to the learners.

d Classroom observation results (Control schools 2)

The instruction given focused on Unit 6 whose title was *Invitation to the wedding* (Appendix 10 c).

Class: Standard 4

Subject: English

Unit 6: Lesson 46

Specific objectives

By the end of the lesson pupils should be able to

- read the story
- answer questions on the story to show their understanding.

Teaching and learning materials

- pupils' books

Presentation

Introduction

Teacher: Class can you sing a local wedding song.

Pupils: Pupils sing a local wedding song *Wamkulu ndani mbanja?* (Who is the boss in a family?)

Teacher: Very good. You sang the song very well.

Development

Step 1

Teacher: Class can you open your books at page 30. I would like you to look at the illustration on the *Invitation to the wedding*. What do you see there?

Pupils: A man and a woman standing next to each other.

Teacher: Very good. Can you repeat, what do you see class?

Pupils: (Pupils repeat) A man and a woman standing next to each other.

Teacher: Excellent class. In the picture there is (sic) a woman and a man standing next to each other. It is their wedding day.

Step 2

Teacher: Class I want you to look for the following words: *invite*, *decided*, *bridesmaid*, *wedding*, and *shelter*.

Pupils: Pupils scan for the words: *invite*, *decided*, *bridesmaid*, *wedding*, and *shelter*.

Teacher: The teacher pre-teaches the words, *invite*, *decided*, *bridesmaid*, *wedding*, and *shelter*.

Step 3

Teacher: The teacher writes the following questions on the chalk board:

- a) Which class is Tereza in?

b) Where does Jane live?

c) Why does Tereza want Jane to come and visit her?

Teacher: The teacher reads the questions on the chalkboard.

Pupils: Pupils repeat after the teacher.

Teacher: Class can you read *An invitation to the wedding* silently?

Pupils: Pupils read the story silently.

Step 4

Teacher and pupils discuss the answers to the questions on the chalkboard orally.

Conclusion

Teacher: The teacher reads the passage aloud to the class once more and asks learners to repeat after her.

Pupils: Pupils read after the teacher in unison.

Balanced approach to literacy study*Difference between vocabulary pre and post mean*

Name of school	Mean	N	Std. Dev.
Chiphoola	1.94	89	1.979
Domasi CCAP	1.13	39	2.525
Matawale	1.67	55	2.472
Naisi	1.17	107	2.099
Namiwawa	-.08	60	2.566
Mtondo	1.02	45	2.840
Total	.47	628	2.680

Difference between comprehension pre and post mean

Name of school	Mean	N	Std. Dev.
Chiphoola	2.07	89	1.737
Domasi CCAP	2.64	39	2.134
Matawale	1.76	54	2.154
Naisi	3.18	107	2.429
Namiwawa	.93	60	1.483
Mtondo	1.58	45	1.738
Total	1.55	628	2.102

Difference between Phonics pre and post mean

Name of school	Mean	N	Std. Dev.
Chiphoola	2.55	20	1.986
Domasi CCAP	.75	20	2.425
Matawale	3.05	20	2.625
Naisi	3.20	20	2.093
Namiwawa	1.20	20	1.704
Mtondo	2.30	20	3.213
Total	1.33	237	2.563

Difference between fluency pre and post mean

Name of school	Mean	N	Std. Dev.
Chiphoola	24.95	20	15.689
Domasi CCAP	16.20	20	16.650
Matawale	32.37	19	19.082
Naisi	22.75	20	14.071
Namiwawa	9.90	20	12.380
Mtondo	31.10	20	24.257
Total	16.69	236	18.019

Difference between phonemic awareness pre and post mean

Name of school	Mean	N	Std. Dev.
Chiphoola	1.70	89	2.529
Domasi CCAP	2.90	39	2.198
Matawale	3.15	55	2.438
Naisi	2.64	107	2.683
Namiwawa	.35	60	2.803
Mtondo	3.58	45	2.083
Total	1.61	628	2.761

Problems that teachers experienced as they implemented the balanced literacy approach

The various challenges that teachers met are presented. Teacher 1 said:

In order to teach effectively I needed to make teaching and learning materials available. However, it was difficult to keep (sic) the teaching and learning materials (sic) because of lack of lockable doors. As a result we were losing things such as word banks, word cards, and classroom newsletters time and again. I was forced to make the same teaching and learning materials over and over again.

It was a big challenge to use the balanced approach in teaching reading with large classes. For instance in a class of 135 learners it was challenging to observe the performance of the class and of each individual in a thirty-five minute period even if pupils were taught while in groups. Due to being over-crowded a number of pupils made a lot of noise in class. It was difficult to control such a class and teach effectively. I felt that I could teach more effectively using the approach with a smaller number of pupils (Teacher 2).

Absenteeism of pupils on market days made teaching difficult. There was no continuity in learning for a number of learners. I had to repeat some lessons time and again for absent learners. For example if I taught deletion of the first initial sound on market days when some pupils were absent I had to repeat the lesson for those learners that were absent in order for them to catch up (Teacher 3).

Absenteeism of some teachers affected the implementation of the balanced approach. When a teacher was absent another teacher, including those of us involved in the intervention, were allocated to a class whose teacher was absent for that day. On such a day the implementation of the balanced approach was affected. I had to attend to two classes instead of one (Teacher 4).

Shortage of the prescribed text book affected the implementation of the balanced literacy approach. I was expected to implement the balanced approach using the text book *Activities with English: A course for primary schools* but the book was in short supply. Even when learners were put into groups the books were still in short supply. At times one book was shared among eleven learners in a group. It was not possible to allow learners to read at home because of shortage of books. My pupils were not able to practice reading at home (Teacher 5).

Lack of cooperation between me as a teacher and parents affected my implementation of the balanced literacy approach. Some pupils mis-interpreted democracy. They thought that they were free to do whatever they wanted in class. A number of pupils came to class late. Parents did not help in disciplining their children. Lack of discipline from pupils negatively affected my teaching (Teacher 6).

Appendix 13 b

Teachers' suggestions on ways of resolving some problems. (experimental group)

Teachers suggested a number of things that could be done in order to resolve problems mentioned in Appendix 13 a:

As a teacher I need to be resourceful so that I am able to have teaching and learning materials and use these appropriately. Parents and pupils can be asked to help in providing these materials. For instance sacks can be provided and used as charts to write words on or sentences. The community can be asked to help a school in providing lockable rooms in which to store the teaching and learning materials (Teacher 1).

As a solution to large classes I suggest the government should train more teachers in order to reduce the teacher-pupil ratio. Although I taught pupils in groups the groups were still too large. It was problematic to provide individual attention to all pupils during lessons. In other words daily assessment of individual learner's performance and progress in the classroom was problematic. Only few learners could be assessed at a time (Teacher 2).

In order to resolve the problem of pupils' absenteeism there is need to civic educate parents and pupils for them to understand the importance of education and attending classes on regular bases. Parents should not allow their wards to be absent from school without valid reasons. Parents need to stop sending their wards to the market on market days (Teacher 3).

It is difficult to avoid absenteeism of teachers since most times there are valid reasons why a teacher might be absent. A teacher might be absent because of an illness, or attending a funeral and so forth. However, teachers report to the head teacher about their being absent from school. Head teachers need to spare the teacher involved in an intervention and allocate other teachers to classes whose teacher is absent (Teacher 4).

The Ministry of Education needs to provide not only enough text books but also other teaching and learning materials if effective teaching and learning is to take place. The teaching and learning environment is so poor that it is difficult for us teachers to teach effectively (Teacher 5).

There is need to civic educate parents and pupils on human rights and responsibilities and democracy so that people understand exactly what they are expected to do and how to behave and the limitations that are there (Teacher 6).

Problems that teachers experienced in implementing the instructional approach besides lack of books and desks. (control group)

Yes, there were a number of problems. As you know our classes are big. For example there are more than one hundred pupils in my class. As a teacher I have problems to attend to every child although I do my best (Teacher 7.)

In my class I do not have enough text books. Although I have grouped the learners more than eight pupils share a book. It is difficult to teach effectively with an acute shortage of text books. I cannot give home work to pupils since the school does not have enough books (Teacher 8).

In my class learners came to class late. Some learners were actually absent from class for a number of days. Absenteeism and perpetual coming in late to school for some learners was a problem that bothered me as a teacher. My teaching was made to be meaningless when pupils were absent. Pupils who are often absent cannot pass end of term tests so it is like I am not teaching at all (Teacher 9).

My major challenge was that I lost five girls when they dropped out of school within one month. That was two months ago and they have not come back yet (Teacher 10).

Teachers' suggestions on how to resolve the problems (control group).

Teacher 7 suggested,

The Ministry of Education should train more teachers so that the teacher/pupil ratio is reduced. When this is done our teaching might be more effective than is the current situation.

Schools should have enough text books and other teaching and learning materials for effective teaching and learning to take place (Teacher 8).

Teacher 9 lamented:

Parents need to tell their children not to come to school late. Parents need to value education. They need to know the consequences of their ward being often absent from school. They should not blame us teachers when their wards fail.

The Ministry should sensitise not only the community around this place, but also all communities in the country on the goodness of keeping the girl child in school. In addition special effort should be made to attract girls that dropped out to come back to school. I feel our country cannot reach equity if girls who dropped out do not come back to school (Teacher 10).