The Teaching of Reading in Inclusive Classrooms

A Case Study of Regular Teachers' Instructional Strategies in Teaching Reading Comprehension to Standard Four Learners in Malawi

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Abstract

The main aim of this study was to explore how regular teachers are teaching reading comprehension in inclusive classrooms in Malawi. The focus was on standard four teachers whose learners are on transit to an all English class (standard five). The recent years have seen the deteriorating in comprehension competencies in the English language amongst most learners in regular schools. With the introduction of inclusive education, regular classrooms now have learners with various needs which need to be met by regular teachers through various instructional strategies. Therefore, relevant theories and literature were reviewed to relate on what reading comprehension entails and the effective reading strategies. Through this review, various concepts in relation to reading comprehension were clarified followed by a discussion on recent reading comprehension instructional strategies.

A qualitative case study design was adopted for the study. Data was collected through semi-structured classroom observations and participants' interviews. The participants were purposefully selected in order to get a deeper understanding of the case. Five standard four teachers from five inclusive schools were selected. Analysis procedures followed the Robson's five phases of thematic coding (Robson, 2011). Four themes were derived from the data collected guided by the research questions. Interpretations revolved around these four themes: teachers' understanding of the concept 'reading comprehension,' teaching strategies for teaching reading comprehension, challenges in teaching and learning of reading comprehension and possible ways to overcome challenges in teaching reading comprehension. The findings revealed that the teaching of reading comprehension has been rooted in the old traditions of sounding out words using flash cards and answering more comprehension questions. Different reasons have been discovered to be promoting this trend such as; lack of teacher education and development, large classes, inadequate resources, and lack of commitment. It is clear from the findings that there is need for all the stake holders to collaborate to ensure effective teaching of reading comprehension.

The findings clearly imply that there is need for teachers to have an ongoing professional development. Furthermore, teachers need to be equipped with knowledge and skills on how to handle inclusive classrooms to carter for the needs of all learners.

List of Abbreviations

COPEA   Coordinating Primary Education Advisor

CORI   Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction

CSR   Collaborative Strategic Reading

DEM   District Education Manager

DTED   Department of Teachers Education and Development

EFA   Education for All

EGRA   Early Grade Reading Activity

FPE   Free Primary Education

JCE   Junior Certificate of Education

LD   Learning Disability

MDG   Millennium Development Goals

MGDS   Malawi Growth and Development Strategy

MIE   Malawi Institute of Education

MSCE   Malawi School Certificate of Education

NDS   Norwegian Data Service

NESP   National Education Sector Plan

OBE   Outcome Based Education

ODL   Open and Distance Learning

PSSP   Primary School Support Program

PTA   Parent Teacher Association

RRSG RAND   Reading Study Group

RTI   Response to Intervention

SACMEQ   Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality

SFP   School Fees Program

SNE   Special Needs Education

UNESCO   United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF   United Nations Children's Fund

WALA   Wellness and Agriculture for Life Advancement

ZPD   Zone of Proximal Development

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my late father; Melkias Jossam Chisamba who was a teacher himself, but used his meagre resources to make me what I am today.

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1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to investigate how regular teachers are teaching reading comprehension in inclusive classrooms in Malawi and the focus is on standard four teachers. As an introduction to this study, this chapter will present the background of the study (1.2); rationale of the study (1.3); the statement of the problem (1.4); the purpose of the study (1.5); research questions (1.6); expectations for the study (1.7); significance and scope of the study (1.8); personal experiences pertaining to teaching reading comprehension (1.9); clarification of concepts (1.10); and finally, the structure of the thesis (1.11).

1.1 Background of the Study

Learning to read is very important to enable formal education in which reading to learn takes the central focus (William, 1998). As learning is an ongoing process, it requires one to have the ability to process information. The world of today demands readers who are able to read more and faster than before. There are now more media in which information is being conveyed which require more effective instruction approaches to assist learners to effectively understand the ever-increasing variety of textual formats (Morrow & Gambrell, 2003) . The basis of it all is the ability to read which has been defined as; *"the process of deriving meaning from print"* (Reynolds & Fletcher-Janzen, 2002; Njuki & Nakitende, 2013, p.12). On the same, (Harris, 1981) defines reading as an interpretation of written word symbols through interaction between graphic symbols which represent language and the readers' skills in the language with an aid of cognitive and background knowledge. While the main emphasis in this study is reading comprehension, but it cannot be isolated from the other components of reading which are being portrayed in this definition.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

Inclusive education is a new phenomenon in Malawi which like many other countries ratified the "Salamanca Statement for Action on Special Needs in Education" in 2007 (Reference Tool Kit for Child Friendly Schools, 2010). As a result, the education system in Malawi has embarked on developments which are geared to meet the contents of the Salamanca's five clauses. This has been portrayed in the formulation of a policy on primary education in Malawi which says *"government shall provide an enabling environment for children with special educational needs and for the underprivileged within the conventional school system"*

(Reference Tool Kit for Child Friendly Schools, 2010, p.29). As such, Malawi has started working towards inclusive education in order to realize Education for All (EFA) by the year 2015. In addition, Malawi introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) to ensure that all children are able to attain formal education (Reference Tool Kit for Child Friendly Schools, 2010). These developments have seen the presence of learners with different needs in regular classrooms under regular teachers. In a country where literacy level is very low (74.8%) according to UNICEF, the basic education target is on reducing illiteracy level. Ability to read is regarded as one of the most important basic skills for survival in day to day lives.

However, the policies for achieving EFA have brought in challenges such as; high pupil/teacher ratio, large classes, inadquate teaching and learning materials, inadquate classroom blocks, and many others. These challenges have greatly affected the teaching of reading comprehension. English is the mode of communication from standard five up to tertiary level. However, fewer and fewer learners are able to read English text without difficulties let alone comprehend. According to Cohen & Ball (1999), the quality of a teacher is what determines the student learning in schools. Vacca (2000) is emphasizing that teachers should be in a position of putting into practice the new approaches and skills in order to ensure effective reading comprehension. Therefore, this study is set at enhancing the use of effective instructional strategies for reading comprehension.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Malawi has seen the launching of a literacy campaign that incorporated a number of literacy-based activities to promote reading among pupils through Primary School Support Program: A School Fees Pilot (PSSP: SFP). Through this project, teachers have been trained in literacy strategies and participatory methods to support literacy development (Let's Read Malawi, 2009). This project is aiming at reviving the reading culture which has gone down in the recent years in Malawi. Targeted are primary schools which are deemed to be for basic education. For a long time, literacy has been equated with the knowledge of basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. However, such is not the case anymore. Becoming fully literate means being able to construct meaning from the text, ability in oral and written communication, and have the desire to read and write intrinsically (Morrow et al, 2003). However, the emphasis in this study is about reading comprehension. Simply put as the ability to make sense out of print (Pressley, 2006). According to Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ), only 16.2% of standard six

learners were able to read for meaning in Malawi by the year 2000. The situation seems not to have changed much even though it is now fourteen years down the line. Therefore, it is with this understanding that instructional methods for teaching reading comprehension are very important if the 73.8% (World Data on Education, 2010/11) literacy rate is to be raised.

Education System in Malawi

This study focused on the teaching of reading comprehension in standard four in Malawi. A brief description of Malawi in terms of; location, size and population, history of education, and the current education policies are provided in **Appendix C**.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The main aim of this study is to investigate how standard four regular teachers are teaching reading comprehension in inclusive classrooms. Special focus will be on methods, resources, and assistance which teachers give to learners in an inclusive setting. Other areas of interest are the challenges which are encountered in teaching reading comprehension and suggestions on how these challenges can be overcome.

1.5 Research Questions

Questions have been formulated from the research topic with an aim of gaining an understanding of both theory and practice which underlie the teaching of reading comprehension by standard four regular teachers. The five sub-questions have been developed to focus on relevant areas of interest in trying to answer the main question.

Main Research Question:

How are regular teachers teaching reading comprehension in inclusive classrooms?

Sub-questions:

- How do teachers understand the concept 'reading comprehension'?
- What methods of instruction are teachers using to ensure that all learners are reading with understanding?
- How are teachers engaging learners' participation during reading comprehension lessons?
- What are the challenges both teachers and learners meet during reading comprehension lessons?
- How can the challenges be overcome?

1.6 My Expectations for the Study

The participants in this study are from schools which are practising inclusive education. This study therefore, assumes that these participants have been prepared in knowledge and skills on how to handle inclusive classrooms. The assumption is; their placement in these schools is not coincidental, but was undertaken with great consideration of assisting learners with various needs. As such, the expectation is that participants will display expert knowledge and skills in the teaching of reading comprehension to standard four learners.

1.7 Significance and Scope of the Study

This research is deemed to be relevant to the learner, the teacher, and the policy makers. Why policy makers? Currently Malawi is advocating for inclusive education; therefore, this research will help in assessing what primary schools are experiencing. Such an assessment will help in coming up with viable strategies on how teachers may go about implementing inclusive education. With high illiteracy levels, it is not surprising that the target is reading. As such, this study shall bring to light how reading comprehension is being taught. This may result into interventions to make sure that inclusive education is feasible. Additionally, it may also be the basis for other researches on the same to help policy makers scrutinize the program thoroughly and come up with practical strategies.

The teacher on the other hand, is the one who implements such policies. As such, this study is so relevant in that it may bring to light what needs to be encouraged and/or improved as pertaining to reading instruction by the mother body: the Department of Teacher Education and Development (DTED). Finally, but most important is the learner who is at the receiving end. With achievable policies being implemented by competent, effective, and efficient teachers; all learners of different needs will benefit in the long run.

Due to time limitation, this study is focusing only on the regular teachers teaching in primary schools which are practising inclusive education. It could have been much better to investigate the methods which special teachers and other regular teachers use for comparison sake. However, focusing on these inclusive schools will serve the purpose of this study.

1.8 Personal Motivation of the Study

The decision to undertake this study has been reached based on my experience of more than ten years in the teaching profession. Throughout my teaching career, I have noted with great

concern that most learners have problems when it comes to reading comprehension in English. This is because decoding is emphasized more than all other reading skills. Learners end up reading what they don't understand. This result into problems when learners are in standard five in which the medium of instruction is English. As a remedy, standard five teachers tend to translate each and every sentence from English to Chichewa which makes it more problematic for learners to attain the necessary language skills. Being a teacher trainer has made me realize how important the teachers' role is to enable learners attain all the required skills in a language. Therefore, the success of reading comprehension should start with the teacher and the teaching instructional strategies to ensure effective teaching of reading comprehension.

1.9 Clarification of Concepts and Operationalization of Terms

There are some key concepts of the research topic which require clarification and an explanation on their importance in this study. Below is a brief definition of concepts such as; inclusive education, regular teacher, teaching methods, and reading comprehension.

1.9.1 Inclusive education/ inclusive classroom

There have been different perceptions as to what inclusive education entails. However, the term inclusive education emerged from the 'Salamanca Statement on Inclusive Education' which emphasized on the rights of all children to attend school in their home community schools which would have to be adjusted to meet the needs of all learners. (UNESCO, 1994/5; Johnsen & Skjorten, 2001). In other words, inclusive education is the provision of education to all learners despite their various needs in a regular classroom (Smith, 1998). However, just having special needs learners in a regular class is not exhaustive of the definition of inclusive education. Mittler, (2000) points out that inclusive classroom should include the curriculum, instruction and assessment strategies, and all classroom practices. This means that inclusive classrooms are there to ensure that all learners regardless of their needs are accessing and participating in classroom activities. The term "inclusive education" is very important in this study because the whole focus of the study is on the teaching methods which regular teachers use in teaching reading comprehension in inclusive classrooms.

1.9.2 Regular Teacher

As from the definition of inclusive education above, the regular school is perceived as a school which the pupil would have attended in the absence of a special need (Mittler, 2000).

Therefore, inclusive education is provided in the regular classroom by regular teachers. As such, all teachers are responsible for the education of all children (Johnsen & Skjorten, 2001). Before the introduction of inclusive education, in Malawi, teachers were trained along the lines of being either a special needs teacher or a regular school teacher. The focus of the teacher training programs for the two were totally different because it was expected that special needs learners will go to special schools. However, with the ratification of the 'Salamanca Statement', schools are moving towards inclusive education. As such, learners with special needs are now taught by regular teachers in regular schools.

1.9.3 Teaching Methods

According to Dictionary.com, teaching methods are defined as principles and mode of instruction. There are mediums through which teachers deliver the content material and learners attain the required content. Different methods have been designed for different purposes and for different instructional materials. The task of a teacher is to use the appropriate method of content delivery in order to ensure effective teaching and learning. In other words, the teaching methods should match the needs of learners and activate enthusiasm to learn more.

1.9.4 Reading comprehension

According to Pressley (2006, p.35), "*reading comprehension is about getting the meaning out the text*". On the same Goodman agrees that reading comprehension should be understood as making sense of print (Goodman, 1994; Pressley, 2006). All these definitions are stressing on the importance of understanding the written text. However, the RAND definition is relatively broad because it is looking at reading comprehension as a process which involves extracting and constructing meaning. This process is done through the reader's interaction and involvement with the written text (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002; Duke, Presssley, & Hilden, 2004). Therefore, going by RAND's definition, reading comprehension to be accomplished requires the active participation of a reader, presence of the text, achievability of the activity, and the social context. These aspects have been thoroughly discussed in the next chapter.

1.11 Outline of the Thesis

The five chapters in this thesis are trying to answer the main question: "How are regular teachers teaching reading comprehension in inclusive classrooms?"

The second chapter provides the theoretical framework and literature review which act as the point of reference and justification for this study. The theories are in support of the importance of teachers' assistance and learner involvement in learning. This is being justified by different researches which have been done in reading.

The third chapter gives a detailed description of the methods used in this study: research design, population sample, data collection methods and instruments, data analysis, validity and reliability, and ethical considerations.

The fourth chapter presents and discusses the findings.

The last chapter is giving a summary and conclusions of the findings.

2 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is aimed at exploring theories and concepts which have been the basis for this study. Teaching of standard four reading comprehension is the main focus in this study. Therefore, the theories discussed in this chapter are serving as reference ground for examining comprehension instruction. This literature review and theoretical framework shall revolve its discussion around the sub-questions in an attempt to answer the main research question. This will be done by looking at the concept of reading comprehension and its importance (2.2); the components of reading comprehension (2.3); teaching of reading comprehension (2.4); challenges (2.5); possible ways on how to overcome challenges (2.6). Lastly, it is the summary of the chapter in (2.7).

2.2 The Concept of Reading Comprehension

Different writers and researchers have come up with differing views on what reading comprehension really is. However, this study shall dwell much on the definition by RAND which says that, "*it is the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language*" (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002; Duke, Pressley, & Hilden, 2004, p.502). From the above definition, there seem to be two important key words which are defining reading comprehension; "extracting", and "constructing". RAND is looking at reading comprehension as a process through which learners are able to derive the meaning out of the text. In concurrence, Morrow et al. (2003), state that comprehension is when a reader is able to make meaning from the text. However, extracting has more to it because it entails the ability to dig out meanings from the text which relates more to deductive way of understanding. Despite that, both definitions have a reader in mind who has prior knowledge which is brought into the text. Reading comprehension is not mere word recognition and the ability to understand oral language (Gough, Hoover & Peterson, 1996; Duke, Pressley, & Hilden, 2004). This is more to the surface because learners have problems to read the very words they speak. Ehri & Snowling (2004) are against the opinion that the ability to construct meaning from individual words ensures reading comprehension. RAND has pointed out that "construction" of meaning is done depending on

the prior knowledge and word processing skills (Duke, Pressley, & Hilden, 2004). On this, RAND is emphasizing on the importance of interaction and involvement which learners may have with the words in their immediate environment or social-cultural context.

2.2.1 A Heuristic Thinking of Reading Comprehension

According to RAND Reading Study Group (RRSG), there are three elements which are involved in comprehension. A heuristic has been developed to show how the reader, text, and activity of reading interrelate based on social-cultural context in reading comprehension (RRSG RB-8024-OERI, 2003). According to this model, reading comprehension involves the reader, text, and the activity. All these three elements contribute to the development of reading comprehension and as such they are interrelated. According to RRSG, the reader brings attributes in cognitive abilities, motivation, knowledge, and experiences into reading comprehension 'the text plus the activity' (RRSG RB-8024-OERI, 2003). The comprehension process may develop through maturity, experiences, and/or classroom instruction. Through classroom instruction, the reader is able to use various strategies in becoming self-regulated and active reader.

"Extracting" is one of the key words in RAND's definition of reading comprehension. In reading comprehension, a reader has to "interact" with the text in order to "extract and construct" the meaning. That is, the reader brings in the attributes into the text in order to make sense of it. While the reader may use experiences and knowledge to extract and construct meaning, but classroom instruction will help a reader to interact with the vocabulary, structure, discourse, and genre of the text (RRSG RB-8024-OERI, 2003). Pressley (2006) argues that despite the instructional orientation which teachers may decide to follow, the intent of reading instruction should always focus on enabling readers to derive meaning from the text. Furthermore, according to RAND, the "interaction" will require the reader's "involvement" and this can be done through "activities". The act of reading is done for different purposes. Through those various purposes, different processes of reading comprehension such as decoding, linguistic and semantic processing, and monitoring are involved (RRSG RB-8024-OERI, 2003). As such, the reader, text, and activity are indeed intertwined. However, all this takes place within the social-cultural context in which the classroom is part of it.

Diagram 1: A heuristic of RAND
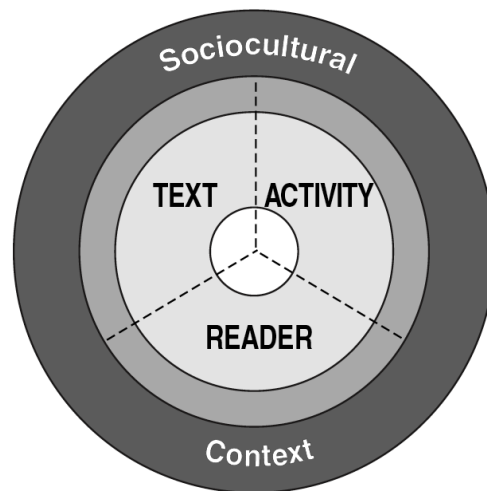
Adapted from RB-8024-OERI, p. xiv, 2003

2.2.2 Importance of Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is important because it is a measure for literacy levels. Learners are expected to construct meaning from the text, build, and apply the concepts and communicate effectively (Morrow et al, 2003). This is to say that, after getting the meaning out of the text, what next? One can say that reading is not only a skill to be mastered, but also a crucial tool for further learning. Corroborating this, Palincsar & Brown (1984) state that mature readers read to obtain knowledge and information which they do not yet have. In agreement, Izizinga (2000) points out that comprehension skills enable learners to learn other subjects with ease. That is to say, the ideas gained from text are used to meet particular needs in particular situations (Frankel, Pearson, & Nair, 2011). In other words, comprehension gives the ability to apply the information attained through reading to different situations.

2.3 Social-Cultural Theory by Lev Vygotsky

With social-cultural theory's understanding, reading is viewed as a social process by taking the context of children in and outside school into consideration (McIntyre, 2011). Based on Vygotsky's understanding, researchers have come up to understand that reading structures social interactions and that social relationships affect reading (Bloome & Green, 1984; Gee, 2000; McIntyre, 2011). Vygotsky's interest in the use of signs and tools in mediating learning and the importance of speech (language) strongly supports the assertion that reading is a social process. In addition to signs and tools in which language dominates, another important

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notion is the zone of proximal development (ZPD) in which "the knowledgeable other" assist the novice in the manipulation of signs and tools.

2.3.1 Language as a Psychological Tool

Vygotsky identifies language as a psychological tool which starts from the social interaction within the community and then develops into thought in an individual (Gale & Steffe, 1995). Apart from transmitting information from adults to children, language becomes an important tool in cognitive development. Vygotsky is talking about 'private speech' in which children talk aloud to themselves and later this is developed into thought (Bruner, 1990). According to McLeod (2013), Vygotsky's explanation of private speech is that it enables children to plan their activities and strategies; hence, the important factor in cognitive development. Vygotsky is equating the amount of private speech to social competence. The more the words children have, the more flexible they are in social interaction. Therefore, social interaction is the prerequisite for children to acquire more words. Reading is then regarded as a social process; that which mediates the social interactions (Bloome & Green, 1984; Gee, 2000; McIntyre, 2011). Reading depends on private and inner speech because language is both inter and intra-personal.

In agreement with Vygotsky's theory, Lyster (2001), states that right away in the first year of life, the child participates in conversations through body language and non-verbal cues which gradually transforms into language. That is, the more the child has spoken and printed words the stronger the influence in reading in future. Some may argue that this can only take place within families in high social status settings. However, Lyster has observed that the social status does not matter so much as far as the initial interactions are positive. Hence, reading will be made simpler if the child has acquired more words during pre-school period. Lyster continues to say that children most at risk when it comes to reading difficulties are those who begin school with less verbal skills. Therefore, it is the task of the teacher to create an atmosphere of social interaction right away in the classroom for learning purposes.

2.3.2 Zone of Proximal Development

According to Vygotsky (1978), *"Zone of proximal development is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers"* (p.86). This is to mean that there are some activities

which learners may do independently, while they may need adult or peer assistance on more complex activities not yet mastered alone. Vygotsky claims that what children are able to do with assistance from others determine more of their mental development than what they can do on their own (McIntyre, 2011). Assisted performance is a natural occurrence in all cultures. As children grow, they learn from adults just like novices who learn from experts (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003; Tharp & Gallimore, 1993; McIntyre, 2011) Based on this understanding Rogoff (2003), has explained that adults support, assist, and guide their children as they develop intellectually and has condensed it to "guided participation". This guidance is performed by more knowledgeable adults or peers. In classroom situation, this can mean teachers and fellow learners.

According to Vygotsky, learning takes place through interactions between children and more competent persons such adults or peers "knowledgeable other" (Feuerstein, Rand, & Hoffman, 1979; McIntyre, 2011). Therefore, the mentioning of signs and tools and scaffolding take central position when discussing the roles of the "knowledgeable other". The use of such tools in learning is done interpersonally with the teacher scaffolding learners. (McIntyre, 2011). Vygotsky (1978) is calling these signs and tools which aid in internalizing a concept; "mediating tools." Mediating tools can be in a form of teaching and learning resources which are used during lesson delivery. In reading, such materials can be used to explain meanings of words or illustrate a concept. Teachers may also enhance interactions with the "knowledgeable other" through reading groups and group work. The Vygotskian view of cognitive development is represented by attending to the social aspects of learning. Pressley (2006) states that as children learn to read, an interaction with others is developed through the reading strategies which the teacher scaffolds dialogically and are internalized by learners. Interaction with others both teachers and peers has cognitive as well as affective results (Gage & Berliner, 1998).

Reading comprehension strategies based on social-cultural theory are geared at encompassing all learners despite their various needs. According to Risinski et al. (2010), effective teachers know their learners and provide support when needed. Therefore, with a social-cultural perspective, learners may be at different levels of understanding, but can be assisted by teachers and their peers. As such, teaching of reading comprehension should focus on the different needs of learners who may have different backgrounds and various needs.

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2.4 Components of Reading Comprehension

Going back to the RRSG heuristic, a mention has been made that readers bring their various capabilities and dispositions into the text during reading activity. Therefore, the variability in reading comprehension can be a result of differences in these capabilities and dispositions (RRSG RB-8024-OERI, 2003). In addition, individual differences may also be a result of differences in social-cultural environments; the context in which learners live, and where they learn to read. RAND has also pointed out the challenges that second-language readers face due to their limited vocabulary and linguistic knowledge. Therefore, effective reading comprehension instruction should encompass all the necessary components to maximize learners' attainment of the skills.

2.4.1 Prior Knowledge

Prior knowledge is one of the most important component of reading comprehension, and can be referred to as all the experiences learners may have acquired before the learning experiences (Pressley, 2006). The various settings, in which children belong, enrich them with a wide range of experiences which are vital for teaching and learning. A social-cultural perspective has this line of thinking that the environment or the context in which the child is, plays a great role in the child's learning. A heuristic of RAND is emphasizing on the same. A reader, who in this case is a child, brings into reading the various experiences from the different settings she/he belongs to (RRSG RB-8024-OERI, 2003). This knowledge enables learners to put life into the written words; hence, making reading more relevant to them (Morrow et al., 2003). According to Pressley (2006), prior knowledge based on experiences is important in comprehending information presented in texts. Pressley continues to say that prior knowledge has an important role because it enables people to have a very good understanding of a very large situation with very little information. In concurrence, Roth (2004) states that a reader gets what was brought into the text through prior knowledge. That is to say, prior knowledge enables a reader to predict about the content of the topic. Furthermore, prior knowledge enables a reader to make inferences as they read. The most important thing is that prior knowledge has been proven to have a positive effect on reading by many researchers (Roth, 2004). As such, it is very important for teachers to regard learners as individuals who have a foundation in them on which classroom instruction can build on. One other foundation is a vocabulary of words which learners bring into the classroom.

2.4.1.1 Vocabulary

Vocabulary may mean words which are used in a language. Children's vocabulary is enriched with words which they learn through social interactions. Indeed children learn some words incidentally in context, but they accumulate a body of words through interactions in their immediate world. While some learners come to school with more words in their oral vocabulary, some learners come with very few words (Gunderson, D'Silva, & Chen, 2011). The latter is typical with English learners like in Malawi. However, this everyday vocabulary which children bring to school lack the abstract concepts which are encountered in text books and expository texts used in schools. In such cases, McIntyre (2011), indicates that in their interactions with learners, teachers should provide rich and varied language experiences with deliberate effort to include new and challenging words. Different subject areas have different terms and concepts which learners come across as they learn such subjects. As learners interact with different texts, they may come into contact with words from various subject areas. According to Perfetti et al. (1996), vocabulary knowledge when connected with domain knowledge links the reader to the text in order to make a richer inference based representation of the situation. In such cases, teachers should have more activities which will actively involve learners in word processing strategies. This helps learners to understand the meanings of the words as well as pronounce them correctly. However, the depth and breadth of vocabulary should be decided by the teacher beforehand (Morrow et al., 2003). This should be portrayed in the strategies which the teachers use for teaching reading comprehension.

2.5 Teaching of Reading Comprehension

There are a number of research-based principles of best practices in reading which have been proven to be effective to all learners (Morrow et al., 2003). Effective reading instruction depends upon the teachers' knowledge of the content, their experiences in the field, the ability to make decisions about the instruction, and flexibility to interact with other teachers for collaboration (Swalord, Chapman, Rhodes, & Kullis, 1996; Benner, Bell, & Broemmel, 2011). Therefore, what is required is for teachers to know their learners and use strategies which will be applicable to their individual needs and most important is to follow the balanced approach which may comprise whole-language approach and skills instruction (phonics).

2.5.1 Whole-Language Approach

While there is no agreed definition of what whole-language entails, but this approach emphasizes on natural development of literacy competence (Pressley, 2006). In other words, reading instruction that focuses on meaning and comprehension. Whole-language approach focuses on engaging learners in real literature and daily writing. Proponents of this approach argue that a reader can construct meaning of the text through prior knowledge. The importance of prior knowledge in reading comprehension has already been discussed earlier in this chapter. Whole-language approach emphasizes on teaching reading comprehension as a whole and not in parts. The argument is that children learn oral language in the context of its use and the same should apply to reading comprehension (Goodman, 1993; Pressley, 2006). While there has been no agreement on the instructional techniques and strategies which can be followed in whole-language, but a mention has been made on the use of picture cues, prediction, and self-monitoring. According to Routman, (Pressley, 2006) with whole-language approach, words can be recognized through semantic, syntactic, and graphemic-phonemic. The emphasis is that as learners engage in reading, they learn how to sound-out words and recognize their meanings through context. The argument is that recognition of a word comes after its meaning has been comprehended (Smith, 1979; Pressley, 2006). Research has proved that readers through whole-language approach have good comprehension skills, but some have argued that whole-language does not favor learners from low economic status who are already at risk (Jeynes & Littell, 2000; Pressley, 2006). However, Pressley (2006) concludes by saying that the positive elements in whole-language approach need to be balanced with phonics and comprehension skills.

2.5.2 Phonics

Phonics refers to the relationship between sound and spelling patterns which a reader may use to decode words (Rasinski et al., 2010). Phonics instruction focuses on the sounds produced by both vowels and consonants and blending of these sounds by also paying attention to root words (Pressley, 2006). This is in contrast to some whole-language proponents who discourage the emphasis on skills instruction. However, with good phonics instruction, learners may develop automatic word recognition (Stahl et al., 1998; Pressley, 2006). Pressley continues to say that phonics instruction lead to skilled reading to enable readers recognize words effortlessly and not mere sounding-out words. With phonics instruction, learners are able to use their new knowledge (phonics) to read words and text. However, phonics

instruction is just one part of reading instruction; hence, it needs to be blended with other reading instructions (Yopp & Yopp, 2000; Morrow et al., 2003). In agreement, Pressley (2006) argues that in education environments where little skills instruction is occurring, addition of phonics instruction tend to benefit the learners. Taking social-cultural theory in mind, learners may be at different levels within the zone of proximal development. Some learners may need more assistance in sounding-out words while some learners may not find this difficult. That is why Rasinski et al. (2010, p.93) argue that, "*it is not a question of whether to teach phonics or not, but rather to whom and how*". This indicates that phonics still do have a place in the teaching of reading comprehension. Therefore, the best is to balance the two approaches in order to carter for the various needs of learners in inclusive classrooms.

2.5.3 The Balanced Approach

After discussing the two approaches; whole language and phonics, it seems many researchers are in favor of combining the two in order to bring about effective reading comprehension instruction. Pressley (2006) gives a brief description of the arguments of advocates for whole-language approach and that of skills-instruction approach. However, he is of the view that while whole-language has produced positive results in elementary reading instruction, but such an approach should be combined with more explicit skills instruction when needed. Research has found that explicit phonics instruction which is combined with opportunities to apply learning in reading and connected text, produces positive reading gains (O'Connor, 2011). Balanced approach mainly lays in the hands of a teacher who makes conscious and intentional decisions on strategies offered to different learners according to their needs. Thus, to some learners the teacher may be a whole-language teacher while to others, a skills teacher (Morrow et al., 2004). Most important is the fact that teachers are better positioned to make sound judgment when it comes to strategies to be used in teaching reading coprehension. However, the balanced approach can be reached if teachers have an understanding of both whole-language and skills-instruction approach.

For English learners like in Malawi; comprehension skills cannot go without focusing on phonics. Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective considers the context of a child as very important. While getting the meaning out of the text is important, but the ability to sound out words is also vital to English learners. Second language readers have a great task ahead of them when it comes to learning to read. According to Pressley (2006), learning to decode, to

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recognize words, or sounding out words is most problematic in learning to read. It is just impossible to comprehend when a learner is failing to decode words. Therefore, balancing of the two is the best way to ensure that the various needs of learners are taken care of in inclusive classrooms.

2.5.4 Reading Comprehension Instruction

The whole essence of reading is for a reader to make meaning out of the text. Referring to the RAND definition above, to comprehend means to extract and construct meaning through interactions and involvement with the text. While balanced approach can be followed to effectively teach reading comprehension, but teachers should have in mind that they are dealing with learners of different learning styles and needs. As such, teachers should use a variety of reading comprehension strategies such as reciprocal teaching and collaborative strategic reading.

2.5.4.1 Reciprocal Teaching

Reciprocal Teaching (RT) was designed to improve comprehension for learners who are able to decode, but have problems in comprehending text (Palinscar, 1986; Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Palinscar, Brown, & Martin, 1987; Vuaghn & Klinger, 2003; Vaughn & Klinger, 2004). Reciprocal teaching involves teaching comprehension strategies in the context of a reading group (Pressley, 2006). This is done to assist learners whose needs, skills, performance, and dispositions differ greatly. Through RT, learners are taught to use the four strategies of prediction, summarization, question generation, and clarification. The main idea from the informational text can be solicited through these four strategies. In their landmark article, Palincsar & Brown (1984) have elaborated that self-questioning helps learners to concentrate on main ideas of the text, summarizing enables learners to identify the main content of the text, clarifying assists learners in critical evaluation as they read while predicting engages learners in making inferences. During RT, the whole lesson is directed by the teacher at first by modelling and prompting (Vuaghn & Klinger, 2004). Then one learner is assigned the role of a group leader to supervise the four strategies during reading. Members of the group interact in giving points and asking for clarifications on what they do not understand. The teacher comes in to scaffold whenever need arises. This scaffolding is withdrawn as learners develop proficiency in the use of the strategies (Pressley, 2006). Through these processes, RT enables learners to have active self-direction of comprehension reading. Sometimes learners feel more flexible with a peer rather than an authority figure

(Benner, Bell, & Broemmel, 2011). Benner, Bell, & Broemmel (2011) continue to say that when learners are given an opportunity to work with peers in resolving their comprehension problems; there is an assurance of positive assistance. Pressley et al, (1992), have agreed that when learners read in groups, they bring in their different prior knowledge and background which enrich the interpretation of the text.

2.5.4.2 Collaborative Strategic Reading

Just like in reciprocal teaching, collaborative strategic reading (CSR) focuses on learners with mixed achievement levels to apply comprehension strategies while working in small groups (Vuaghn & Klinger, 2004). Small group discussions provide opportunities for learners with reading disabilities to acquire complex skills (Morrow et al, (2003). The four strategies involved in CSR are; preview, click and clunk, getting the gist, and wrap up. In collaborative reading, the teacher presents the strategies to the whole class by the means of modelling, role playing, and teacher think-alouds (Vuaghn & Klinger, 2004). In preview, learners' prior knowledge is activated through predictions and brainstorming; while 'click and clunk' is meant to clarify any errors which may have arisen as learners were reading. "Getting the gist" aims at identifying and extracting the main ideas in the text. Finally, all this is wrapped up with some comprehension questions. Learners work in small groups after developing proficiency in using the strategies. Each one of them has a role to play which promotes interaction amongst learners. Learners have to collaborate and share their ideas as pertaining to the task assigned to them. The roles are explicitly taught by the teacher so that each learner is clear on what to do (Vuaghn & Klinger, 2004). While CSR was designed for expository reading, it can also be used with narrative text.

After all has been said and done, Pressley (2006) states that there are no specific strategies which have been designed for learners with reading disabilities. According to Pressley, all teaching methods for reading can achieve the desired results. On the other hand, Morrow et al. (2003) argue that oftentimes individual learners respond differently to the same instruction. That is to say, learners can develop comprehension skills at different rates. Therefore, it all depends on the teacher's understanding of the learners and how she/he plans to meet their needs.

2.6 Challenges in Teaching of Reading Comprehension

The discussion above has focused on the need to have a balanced approach in which teachers will be flexible to mix whole-language approach with skills instructions in teaching reading comprehension. However, in situations where there is a national curriculum, teachers tend not to be more flexible. This becomes a great challenge in that teachers are dictated by the predetermined skills of instruction regardless of the diverse needs of the class. According to Morrow et al., emphasis should be on the importance of decreasing teacher's control in order to increase activity on the part of the learner (Block & Johnson, 2003; Morrow et al, 2003). However, when the curriculum is controlled by those least familiar with the specific learners who study the curriculum, it becomes a challenge to teachers during implementation.

Furthermore, some teachers are poorly prepared for reading comprehension. Good comprehension instruction requires teachers to have extensive knowledge about the nature of the language, modern instructions of learning to read, and have a good understanding of children's literature (Pressley, 2006). Pressley has also pointed out that teachers who are ill equipped for reading comprehension, end up assessing comprehension by asking learners questions about the material they have just read instead of teaching them how to comprehend it. In concurrence, Izizinga (2000) argues that the intended purpose of comprehension reading cannot be realized with only having learners discussing questions from the passage they have read. However, such is the case when the teacher is limited in skills and knowledge on how to go about teaching reading comprehension. This means that teachers are expected to have knowledge and skills when it comes to teaching reading comprehension or else they may not know what is expected of them in a particular task.

The other challenge is that of inadequate reading materials. Pressley (2006) is of the opinion that balanced reading instruction is that which exposes learners to a variety of texts. The similar observation has been made by Izizinga, (2000) in which she says that the primary schools deserve better trained teachers, more and better books, including equipment and buildings. This is to say that there is a lot to be done in order to realize the effective results. Therefore, it is only learners who are exposed to reading materials both at school and in the home who have great chances of developing comprehension skills at a faster rate.

Lastly, the background and the support which learners receive at home is also vital. Thus, in absence of this, it may be a challenge for learners just to rely on classroom work when it

comes to reading. Vygotsky has emphasized on the contribution of the society towards the learners education. It has been proven that learners who participate regularly in literacy-connected activities with their families have higher levels of reading achievement (Risisnki et al. 2010). Therefore, if parents can work together with teachers in promoting reading; learners can develop reading comprehension skills at a much higher speed.

2.7 How to Overcome Challenges in the Teaching and Learning of Reading Comprehension

Different writers and researchers have come up with various strategies for teaching reading comprehension. However, it is the teacher who is expected to implement these strategies in class. Morrow et al. (2003) argue that there is need to improve teacher preparation, teacher recruitment, professional development, and the organization of schools. Effective teachers of comprehension should be good comprehenders themselves by understanding the strategies which good comprehenders use (Pressley, 2006). There are some teachers who are not aware at all that they lack in understanding what should be taught and how to teach it (Bos, Mather, Dickson, Podhajski, & Chard, 2001; Cunningham, Perry, Stanovich, & & Stanovich, 2004; Spear-Swerling & Bruker, 2003; Pressley, 2006). This goes back to the teacher education program. Does the program teach information about language that teachers need to know? Teachers should be well equipped when they go into the field to ensure their effectiveness.

The second aspect to be looked into is the need to have adequate classroom instructional materials. Morrow et al. (2003) state that learners whose primary language is not English need additional contextual help of physical objects to internalize English vocabulary. In agreement Gunderson, D'Silva, & Chen (2011) state that the problems learners face when learning to read English is not a result of variations in teaching methods in different countries, rather it is due to the fact that English has low orthographic consistency (Ziegler, 2006; Gunderson, D'Silva, & Chen, 2011). Therefore, in such countries, text books should be designed to be more considerate of the instructional needs of the learners' as well as teachers' needs (Gunderson, D'Silva, & Chen, 2011). Information books, novels, poetry, newspapers, and hands on materials can as well be used in reading comprehension lessons. In some instances, teachers just need drawings, pictures, models, or real objects which may help in defining a word or a sentence. While such materials may not require funds from the government, but it is

only dedicated and effective teachers who can be creative and resourceful enough to have the needs of the learners at heart.

Lastly, it is the classroom environment which also needs to be conducive to learners for effective teaching and learning of reading comprehension. Morrow et al., (2003) has argued that organization of an effective classroom is a product of an efective teacher. The presence of posters, charts, books, word walls, and learning centers transform a classroom from a mere four- walled room into a learning environment. This in turn motivates learners and develops in them the interest to learn which in the long run enhances reading comprehension. To ensure that all learners are engaged Pressley, (2006) argues that teachers should connect with learners personally and discourage competition between learners. Furthermore, Rasinski et al. (2010) argue that instructional environment should promote cooperation and not competition. Learners in cooperative situations view problems as challenges for the group and not reflecting their own inabilities. All in all, it can be said that to come with a good learning environment, it will still be revolving around the preparedness of the teacher.

2.8 Summary

This chapter has reviewed literature relevant to the topic under study. Discussion of a social-cultural theory and its relevance to the teaching of reading comprehension has been done. This discussion has also considered the works of different scholars on the understanding of reading comprehension. The chapter has highlighted some methods and strategies which teachers may use in teaching reading comprehension as stipulated by various researchers and scholars. However, this has been tailored to the social-cultural theory. Finally, the chapter has looked into the challenges which teachers face when teaching reading comprehension and what should be done in order to overcome these challenges. This has been reached at considering what reading comprehension entails and its requirements to be successful. The next chapter discusses the research methods which this study followed.

3 Methodology and Research Design

3.1 Introduction

The intent of this study is to investigate the teaching of reading comprehension by regular teachers in inclusive classrooms in Malawi. A number of classroom observations plus interviews were conducted in order to come up with data for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which will report experiences, meanings, and the reality of the participants. The nature of the study is qualitative in which narrative description has been used to come up with an understanding of the approaches which regular teachers are using in teaching reading comprehension. This chapter therefore will present the research design (3.2) with a brief description and its rationale in this study. Details about the population and sampling have been presented in (3.3); detailed procedures for collecting data and instruments in (3.4); and data analysis (3.5). The validity and reliability of the study in (3.6); ethical considerations (3.7); and a brief summary (3.8) in conclusion of the chapter.

3.2 Research Design (Qualitative Approach)

A qualitative approach has been followed in this study. Denzin & Lincoln defines qualitative research as *"the study of things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them"* (2004, p.3). Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun (2012) argue that many researchers are mostly interested in the quality of a particular event or activity rather than the statistical part of it. It is evident that the teaching and learning process involves more than verbal communication between the teacher and the learners. Therefore qualitative approach has best suited this study as it emphasizes on holistic description. The fact that qualitative method allows the researcher to focus on the process of "how something happens" rather than on just the "outcomes or results" which is more characteristic of quantitative designs (Hoepfl, 1997); makes it suitable for the topic under study. As such, in order to investigate the teaching methods for teaching reading comprehension in an inclusive classroom, there was need to understand "how something happens." In this case, that "something" is the teaching and learning process. Seeing the reality of the classroom situation rather than basing on the theoretical perceptions and ideas outside classroom was vital for this study. According to Denzin & Lincoln (2003), qualitative design requires that the researcher becomes a research instrument. This is to mean that the researcher needs to have the ability and necessary skills to observe behavior. The reason for

this is that no data are trivial or unworthy noting with a qualitative approach. This is what has been done in this study whereby I have been actively involved in investigating the teaching methods. The aim was to have data which will be rich with detail and insights in teaching methods and classroom experiences.

According to Christina Hughes (2006), qualitative research is an interactive process in which the studied persons teach the researcher about their lives. In this particular research therefore, an interest was focused on learning more about the teaching methods in an inclusive setting from the teachers themselves through observations and interviews. While observations focused on how teachers are teaching reading comprehension to carter for the diverse needs of learners; interviews aimed at unveiling the understanding of reading comprehension, the challenges they meet, and how to overcome such challenges from the teachers themselves.

3.3 Sampling and Participants

3.3.1 Area of Study

Being an educational research, school settings were deemed more appropriate for the topic (Gall et al, 2003). Factors such as the nature of the school and accessibility were very much considered. Public schools which are practising inclusive education and accessible in terms of transport were considered as best suited for this research.

3.3.2 Criteria for Selecting Schools

The technique for choosing the participating schools in this study was based on purposive sampling. Purposeful sampling aims at selecting cases which will provide rich information in respect to the purpose of the study (Gall & Gall, 2007). The schools were selected with the assistance of the Coordinating Primary Education Advisor (COPEA) who is an overseer for special and inclusive education in the district. A few selected schools have been designated as resource centers with a specialist who goes around assisting learners with severe needs in the surrounding schools. I opted to study one resource center school and four ordinary schools. Both religious affiliated and government aided schools follow the same curriculum in Malawi. Therefore, my choice comprised two religious affiliated and three government aided schools. These schools are located in the remote parts of the district, but have accessible roads. Teachers in all these schools undergo the same training course although of different modes.

3.3.3 Criteria for Selecting Participants

The participants in this study were not chosen as representatives of all the regular teachers, but because they possess the required information about the regular teachers (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). The emphasis was on those teachers who are teaching reading comprehension in standard four. Experience in teaching and learning was not considered as criteria for selecting the participants. The reason being that standard four is mostly handled by student-teachers who are undergoing Open and Distance Learning (ODL) course. Therefore, it would not be imperative to stress on experience as most of them do not have much experience. However, being on training enables them to have recent information and knowledge in pedagogical skills as pertaining to an inclusive classroom. Additionally, they are also very ready to accept visitors because they see it as an opportunity for improving their skills for moderation.

Therefore, out of the five teachers who participated; two were student-teachers. As such, it was a mixture of those who have a wide experience with those who are fresh from college. Despite this difference, all the participants were T2 grade teachers, which means that they are all holders of Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE). Currently, only those with MSCE are accepted to undergo teacher training course in Malawi and are awarded teaching certificates after successful completion. Amongst the five participants, only one was male. Brief background information about the schools and participating teachers in terms of experience, qualification and age has been given in the next section.

3.3.4 Creating a Picture of the Schools and the Informants

The sites for this research were schools, while the informants were teachers. This section gives a description of these as it is deemed very important in data analysis. For confidentiality sake, names of teachers have been concealed; teacher-one (T1), teacher-two (T2), teacher-three (T3), teacher-four (T4), and teacher-five (T5). Some of what the head teachers said will be included in the analysis; hence, head teachers have also been coded (HT1), (HT2), (HT3), (HT4) and (HT5). The numbering of teachers and head teachers does not correspond with anything. The coding has been mixed up in order to avoid giving unnecessary clues.

3.3.4.1 Site One

The school: This religious affiliated school is situated 1.5km from the main road. This school has five blocks with twelve classrooms. There are twenty-one teachers with thirteen females

and eight males. The school operates double shift with classes starting morning and afternoon. All classes have their lessons in classrooms. It is close to a resource center where there is a specialist in Learning Disabilities (LD). This school was one of the beneficiaries of "Read Malawi" project as such, there are a lot of extra reading materials which learners can use.

The Head teacher: (HT5) has served for twenty five years and he is well experienced in both teaching and administration. On reading comprehension, he pointed out that he took an initiative of creating reading centers in the surrounding villages where volunteers were to oversee that learners were reading after classes. This idea was from "Read Malawi" with an aim of reviving the reading culture amongst the youth. According to HT5 the initiative did not go far because the volunteers were always busy and they also started to demand money from the teachers.

The Teacher: T1 is a student-teacher who has been in college for one year and now she is doing her one year teaching practice. She is twenty-five years old and shares the class with a qualified teacher.T1 said that becoming a teacher has been her dream and she will work hard to see it come true.

3.3.4.2 Site Two

The School: This school is situated 2km from the main road. There are twenty-eight teachers with eighteen females and ten males. The total enrolment is 2389 learners with 1005 girls and 1384 boys. There is no double shift at this school. Standard three to five have their classes outside because the classrooms are inadequate. This school is under Local Education Authority (LEA) and it s close to a resource center where there is a specialist in LD.

The Head Teacher: HT4 has been teaching for twenty-seven years. On reading comprehension, HT4 said that he created a library using the books which were out of syllabus. He has been lending these "out of syllabus" learners books to standard three and four learners so that they practice reading at home. He also pointed out of a non-governmental organization; 'WALA' (Wellness and Agriculture for Life Advancement) which apart from its agricultural projects, it is also supplying books in village centers around the school for learners to be reading after classes.

The teacher: T2 is an ODL student who is in her second year of training and she is thirty-three years old. Before joining ODL, T2 had been teaching for two years as a volunteer

teacher. At that time she only had Junior Certificate of Education (JCE), but she sat for MSCE and passed. This was what enabled her to apply for ODL. T2 has a collegue who is also an ODL student.

3.3.4.3 Site Three

The School: This school is located far from the district headquarters, but 5oo meters away from a busy road and market. It is a religious affiliated school with six classroom blocks and eighteen classes. The total enrolment is 2867 with 1202 girls and 1665 boys. There are thirty-two teachers with twenty females and twelve males. The school is close to a resource center where there is a specialist in mental impairment. This school does not have double shift and most of the classes have their lessons outside.

The Head Teacher: HT3 has twenty years of teaching experience and she has been head teacher for nine years. HT3 complained that her staff has more student-teachers which makes it very difficult to have double shift. On extra reading materials, HT3 said that there are a lot of books which have been donated by different organizations, but nobody is using them.

The Teacher: T3 is a forty-two years old female who has been teaching for seventeen years. She is a qualified teacher who has an ODL colleague. T3 was once a deputy headteacher at her previous school. T3 acknowledged that she has been attending seminars on curriculum change and other workshops organised by 'Read Malawi'. T3 is currently the head of the junior section.

3.3.4.4 Site Four

The School: The school is five kilometers from the main road, but far away from the district headquarters. The total enrolment is 2049 with 925 girls and 1124 boys. There are eighteen teachers with eight females and ten males. There are three classroom blocks with eight classes. Standards three to five have their classes under trees outside.

The Head Teacher: HT4 has been working for twenty-three years and he has been a head teacher for eight years. On extra reading materials, the head teacher pointed out that he is still keeping the books from "Read Malawi" secure in his office because no teacher is willing to make use of them.

The Teacher: T4 is the only male teacher who participated in this study. He is thirty-eight years old and has fourteen years of experience. T4 has been at this school for six years in

which he has been rotating from standard four to standard five. During his career, T4 acknowledged that he has attended different seminars and workshops mainly on curriculum change. Due to in adequate classrooms, T4 teaches his class under a tree.

3.3.4.5 Site Five

The School: This school is an LEA with a resource center where a specialist in LD is located. The school has an enrolment of 2937 with 1423 girls and 1514 boys. This school has thirty-nine teachers, with twenty-two females and seventeen males. There are eight classroom blocks with sixteen classes. This school operates double shifts.

Head Teacher: HT1 has twenty-five years of experience. She has been head teacher for twelve years. On reading comprehension she said that her school has a library, but acknowledged that it is seldom used.

The Resource Teacher: The resource teacher at this school is a specialist in LD. She pointed out that the school has twenty-five learners with various special needs. However, she is expected to help them all despite being a specialist in one area. She has a resource room which is used for teaching learners with severe needs. The learners are accommodated in various classes, but go to the resource room for extra help. The resource teacher said that she is currently planning to orient regular teachers in some basics on how to handle special needs learners.

The Teacher: T5 is a thirty-five year old female teacher with ten years of experience in teaching, but she has been teaching at this particular school for two years. During her career, T5 has been teaching mainly in infant and junior sections. She has attended two workshops in curriculum change. T5 noted that despite having a resource teacher at this school, she has never been oriented on how to handle learners with special needs.

3.4.1 Pilot Study

Before carrying out the main observations and interviews, a pilot study was conducted. This pilot study aimed at examining the instruments of their clarity, quality, and relevance. Cohen, Manion & Morrison, (2007) state that a pilot study enables a researcher to make necessary amendments to the observation system, or procedure. In addition, a pilot study helps a researcher to practice the skills necessary for both observation and interviews. The pilot study for this research was conducted at a demonstration primary school. This school was chosen

because it has best teachers who are put to demonstrate the teaching and learning processes to student-teachers undergoing teacher training course. The other reason is that it was easily accessible due to its closeness to where I live and easy to get permission.

I first conducted an informal interview with the head teacher to find out what kind of information I will be able to source from head teachers. In both classes I used the video recorder and took down notes using the semi-structured observation guide. After class observations, I had interviews with the teachers who had been observed. Discussions with the teachers to assess the instruments followed after the interviews. The first thing to recommend was the video recorder which was almost concealed from the learners as well as teachers themselves. I did the video recording myself on my camcorder by just put it on a strategic place while I took down notes. There was minimal distraction as no learner was seen turning back to look at me or the video camera. I decided to use this strategy during my study. However, on my interview questions, both teachers noted that some questions were just rephrased differently, but requiring the same response. The other thing they pointed out was that, I should not let my knowledge in teaching come in when asking questions. What they recommended was that after I ask the question, I should wait for the respondents to give the answer and not to push them into my thinking. After these discussions, I realized that both guides needed some adjustments and refining.

3.4 Instruments and Data Collection

According to Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun (2012), qualitative researchers use a variety of methods and instruments to collect data as a measure for checking biases and ensuring that there is no misinformation. As such, this study used; observation through paper and pencil plus video recorder as a reminder on what might have been missed, formal interviews, and informal interviews and observations.These methods were chosen because they complement each other. Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun continue to say that when a conclusion is supported by data collected from a number of different instruments, it enhances validity. Therefore, the choice of these methods was based on the assumption that they will work interdepedently so as to produce valid results.

3.4.2 Formal Observations

One of the main techniques for collecting data in qualitative research is through observation. In this study, a semi-structured observation was followed. This technique is a bit systematic in

that the researcher starts with an agenda of what will be observed and how it will be done, but data collection is not more systematic (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). In this study therefore, a guide was designed focusing on the details of the research question. This was vital because it enabled me to have deeper information on the topic under study. Before doing the classroom observations, I first made arrangements with the teachers' concerned on time when the lesson will be observed. It was during this time that I stated the reasons and purpose for my observations and that I was not there as a supervisor to grade them. I also told them that the information will be treated with strict confidentiality and that names; be it of learners, teachers or the school will be anonymous. I also explained to them about the instruments I would use to collect data and that is; paper and pencil and video recorder. With such assurance, only one teacher declined to be observed and was swapped with another teacher who was willing, but the rest accepted. Gall & Gall (2007) have stated that participants or schools are willing to accept observers who are open. However, some participants (student-teachers) felt that they were indebted to be observed, but I indicated to them that they had freedom to participate or not because this would not affect their teaching practice grade in any way.

After assuring them and signing of the consent forms, I visited the classrooms and observed a lesson in order to familiarize myself with both the teacher and the learners before I carried out the formal observations. During all my observations, I preferred to sit at the back of the class so that learners are not distracted by my presence. The main instrument for data collection was paper and pencil; however, I also used a video camera which was just put on strategic place right at the back of the classroom to avoid capturing the faces of the learners. The video was only used to complement what I observed through paper and pencil and it was not used as a tool for collecting data on its own. In addition, the video recorder was used to enable me to replay the files several times as a reminder for analysis (Gall & Gall, 2007). These classroom observations were so vital because they gave me an insight of the methods which teachers are using in teaching reading comprehension before I interviewed them.

Being a teacher trainer, I have an understanding of how classroom work is done, but teaching is an art which requires so many attributes apart from the prescribed teaching strategies. Therefore, I always kept in mind that my position would influence the perceptions of what would be witnessed during an observation and affect what was to be recorded (Silverman, 2006). Such being the case, I separated my reflections and interpretations from

the descriptive data according to the observation protocol by Creswell (2006). During observation, at no point did I get involved in the activities being conducted in the classrooms. As such, the observations were done overtly. However, it must be pointed out that my presence in the classroom may have influenced the behaviors of both teachers and learners being observed (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

3.4.3 Formal Interviews

In addition to the observations, this study also used interviews as a technique for collecting data. Silverman, (2006, p.38) says that "*one of the strengths of qualitative research is its ability to access directly what happens in the world*". In this study, interviews enabled me to examine the perspectives, views, and understanding of regular teachers as regards to the teaching and learning of reading comprehension in standard four. Even though, sometimes interviews cannot directly portray about what the teachers' experiences are, but just a representation of those experiences (Kitzinger & Rapley, 2004; Silverman, 2006). In this study, interviews were regarded as a best method to solicit perceptions of teachers with regards to reading comprehension. Considerations on how to come up with an effective interview guide was done following the guidelines by Fontana and Frey in Silverman, (2006, p.121). I used semi-structured interview guide which was flexible, but still emphasizing on the research question. Interviews enabled me to cover those areas which could not be covered through observations. As such, these interviews were considered as secondary data. The interviews were conducted with the same teachers I had their lessons observed. Despite being the same teachers, I still needed to build a rapport with them because they thought I would be giving feedback of my lesson observations. I could sense this in how they behaved. So I started talking about other issues not relating to teaching to make them feel comfortable.

Before starting the formal interviews, I asked the participants if I could use the voice recorder which all of them accepted. This voice recorder was used to capture what would be omitted by the paper and pencil. The participants were told that this would be treated the same way as the video recordings and that is; with total confidentiality and anonymity. I then engaged the participants in the interviews so that I should learn more of their experiences as pertaining to the teaching of reading comprehension. Probing would come in during the interviews in order for the respondents to make thorough clarifications on some responses. Only one interview was done in the staffroom, but the rest were conducted outside because there are no staffrooms in most primary schools in Malawi. In addition, the teachers did not feel

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comfortable to use the headteacher's office. All the interviews were conducted in 'Chichewa' even though the guide was in English because all the participants felt that they would be comfortable in it.

3.4.4 Informal Interviews and Observations

This was done in order to enrich the information which was collected through formal observations and interviews. Informal interviews were conducted with the head teachers and a resource teacher of one of the participating schools. These informal conversations were geared at validating the interviews I had with the teachers. The main focus was on the perceptions and what the administration is doing in order to ensure the success of reading comprehension. For instance, if the school has a library and how it functions, reading interventions from other stake holders such as "Read Malawi" and issues concerning class allocation. The resource person also gave important information concerning learners with special needs and how she helps them.

Additionally, there was an informal observation going on throughout the study. The reason for this was that there are several factors that influence teaching and learning in which some may be external factors. For instance, observations were made on the infrastructure, classroom furniture, and general teaching and learning materials.

3.5 Organization and Analysis of Data

Dey (2005) argues that the relative value of anything is measured by quality, based on the general characteristics or internal understanding of what one is assessing. This study was based on thematic analysis. According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison, (2007) thematic analysis is interested in the common ideas which are found in the data. However, to come up with comprehensive data, the observation notes were written in detail after cross-checking with the video recordings to make sure that everything of importance has been included. This was done soon after the observations had taken place to avoid forgetting some details which transpired. The observation notes were divided into units according to the aspect which was being addressed. Each aspect had notes from all the five participants. The aspects which were formulated to answer the research question. Categorizing the notes according to the aspect it was addressing helped in coming up with a pattern in which data started to unfold.

Furthermore, the short notes from interviews which had the actual words from the respondents were transcribed into well detailed notes. The linguistic details as per conversational analysis were not included based on the fact that the data were collected through note-taking in which the details of the behavior may have been lost (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990). In addition, it is possible to discover the meaning from interviewees' responses without digging into linguistic detail (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Ariong, 2013). Just like with the observation notes, the interview transcriptions were categorized into units as per the questions which were being addressed. Interviews mainly addressed the sub-questions whose information could not be obtained through observations. However, all the sub-questions were geared at answering the main research question. Finally, both observation and interview data were analyzed following the Robnson's five phases of thematic coding analysis as follows: (Robson, 2011).

Familiarizing oneself with data: I read through my notes repeatedly to be familiar with meanings and patterns of my data. Braun & Clarke (2006) says that it is during this phase that one can start marking ideas for coding. Everything that was transcribed was read and reread in order to be familiar with the data. The video and voice recordings were replayed time and again while cross-checking with the observation and interview notes to check that nothing was left out.

Generating initial codes: In this phase, I started to identify important features of the data which would be relevant to answering the research question (Robson, 2011). Based on the first phase, the entire data was coded manually following the patterns which were unfolding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I started working with data collected through observations. Different colors were used to identify the patterns. Having familiarized myself with the data, I was able to pick out categories and data started to fall into themes.

Identifying themes: After coding was done, the different codes were sorted out into potential themes. The emerging themes were closely checked if they were answering the research question which is "How do regular teachers teach reading comprehension in an inclusive classroom?" Therefore, it was necessary to look closely in which comparison and categorization of themes was done until saturation was reached. Silverman (2006) argues that "*looking at an object from more than one standpoint, it is possible to produce a more, true and certain representation of the object*" (p.291). As such, the codes from the interviews and

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those from observation were both scrutinized to find out if they correspond and draw the same or similar conclusions.

Constructing thematic networks: this phase concerned the cross-checking if themes were really portraying what was in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Emerging themes were tuned to answer the research question. This was done by thoroughly searching for similarities and differences with other themes. Finally some were combined and others were discarded.

Integration and interpretation: this phase involves the write-up of thematic analysis and it will come in the next chapter.

Thematic coding has been chosen because of its flexibility. The result of such analysis gives no problems when communicating to the interested parties (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gall & Gall, 2007). However, the fact that it is flexible; brings about the problem of having a broad data which may be difficult to decide on which aspects to focus on. With regards to this, this study used a small sample to avoid skipping and selecting data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.5.1 Organizing the Classroom Observations

Taking down notes during the reading comprehension lessons was very important because it included descriptive information as well as reflections and interpretations (Gall & Gall, 2007). The guide was developed in such a way that the notes should be well detailed, concrete and without being vague or overgeneralizing (Silverman, 2006). Additionally, my reflections and the interpretations were written separately from the descriptive data during observation. After a comprehensive writing of the field notes, data were segmented according to an observation protocol by Creswell (2007). The observation protocol had a header for the date, activity, and duration. The observation protocol consisted of the three columns. First, the descriptive column which had a chronological flow of the activities which took place in class and all the important aspects of what was observed. Second, the reflective column which included the processes and theoretical reflections of the classroom activities. Finally, the third column comprised the reflections on teaching methods which were drawn from the activities (Creswell, 2007).

Tables below show extracts of both field notes and observation protocol as from (Ariong, 2013) adapted from Creswel, (2007)

Table 2. Extract of observation field notes

Date: 04-11-2013	Activity: Reading Comprehension	Time: 35minutes

The class has 85 learners with 46girls and 39boys. They are seated under a tree. Some learners have brought mats to sit on because it is so dusty. The main road is nearby. The teaching and learning materials are on the teachers' desk in front. There is a small portable board in front.

The teacher starts the class by revising words from the previous lesson. She uses flash cards with words; *throughout, well done, plot, insecticides, seedlings, transplant and mustard*. Different learners are chosen to read the words; some learners fail and are assisted by the teacher. Several learners are given the opportunity to read the words and finally the learners read the words in unison.

The teacher introduces the new lesson '*dangerous insects in the home.*' She then asks learners to mention insects that are found in the home. Very few learners are able to mention the insects in English but manage to mention them in 'Chichewa.' The teacher comes in to tell them the English names for the insects mentioned. Using the name cards, the teachers introduces the new words*; spray, bed bags, left-over, cockroaches, spread and not covered*. She drills the words because some learners have problems in pronouncing them especially 'cockroaches, spray, and spread' the 'r' sound is a big problem. Learners pronounce it 'l.' The teacher then starts drilling 'r' sound. She then, displays the chart on which a story is written.

One day, Madalo went to school. She felt very hungry. When she went home, she found some left-over food. It was not covered. She did not know that cockroaches and flies had contaminated the food. She ate all the food. After some time, she felt pain in her stomach and started vomiting and had open bowels.

The teacher reads the story slowly while learners are listening. Then she read it together with learners. She then writes simple questions on the chalkboard and reads them. Learners are told to go into their groups and the teachers distribute the papers on which the story is written in order to supplement the books which are very few (one per group of ten learners). Learners are told to read the story and answer the questions which are on the chalkboard. After checking the answers from all the groups, the teachers revises the answers with the class.

Table 3. Observation protocol interpreted from the table above

Date: 04.11.2013	Activity: English Reading Comprehension	Duration: 35minutes
Descriptive notes	**Theoretical reflections**	**Teaching methods reflections**
The class has 85 learners with 46 girls and 39 boys. The class is being conducted under a tree and learners are sitting on mats they have brought from home. It is near the main road and market. Both teachers actively help each other during the lesson.	The ground is so dusty which is not healthy for both learners and teachers. The market and main road are so noisy and learners are distracted. It is very hard for learners to be in groups because it means moving up and down and producing a lot of dust.	Team work is very important especially when class management is at stake. It is very good that teachers are helping each other to make sure that learning is taking place despite being outside.
Teacher introduces new lesson by revising previous lesson. The new lesson is introduced by connecting with prior knowledge. Teacher drills the new words. Learners read in their groups and then answer comprehension questions	Starting teaching from known to unknown enables learners to use their prior knowledge. The teacher is able to recognize and assist learners with problems, individually and in their groups.	The teacher is activating and at the same time utilizing the learners' prior knowledge. Scaffolding is taking place as the teachers assists those learners with problems and during group work.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

The investigator's interpretation of data is said to be persuasive and plausible, reasonable, and convincing if it passes reliability and validity test (Silverman, 2006). Silverman continues to say that persuasiveness is strengthened when the accounts from informants; both negative or positive and alternative interpretations are considered. On reliability, (Kirk and Miller, 1986) points out that the degree to which the findings of a study are independent of accidental circumstances of their production while validity is the extent of the accuracy of the results.

According to Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2007), in qualitative research, data is said to be valid when issues such as honesty, depth, richness, and scope have been achieved. In addition, validity should also address the participants approached, and the objectivity of the researcher (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). There are different kinds of validity, but this study dwelled much on ecological, internal, and content validity. Ecological validity is more interested in the natural occurrence of events. It is based on the premise that the researcher

does not try to manipulate variables or settings (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). On the other hand, content validity emphasizes on fair representation of the issue under investigation. Finally, internal validity is concerned with accuracy; when the phenomena under study is accurately described by the findings.

3.6.1 Securing Validity and Reliability

Lesson observation was the primary source for data collection in this study. Therefore, there was need to abide by the demands of ecological validity. The participating teachers were informed in advance of my visit. I first visited their classes during the time they signed the letter of consent. I did this to make both the teachers and the learners comfortable with my next visit. I introduced myself that I will be there just for research purposes and not supervision. I also told them that they should teach what was planned for that day, whether it was an introduction to a new topic or continuation. I also assured them that I would not grade their lessons and that I was not interested in the teachers' records such as lesson plans and schemes of work. They should feel free to give me their records or not. During my first visit, I noted that three teachers had their classes under trees. I told them that I would rather observe them teaching right there instead of swapping with another class for my sake. During observations, I sat at the back of the class so that learners' attention was directed to the teacher. The video camera which was used to supplement my data, was put on the desk and I just focused on what was going on while taking down notes.

On the other hand, the content validity was secured through pilot study. This pilot study enabled me to redesign the data instruments. Interview questions and observation items were revised in order to allow the collection of the desired information. According to Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun (2012) field notes may reflect the biases and viewpoints of the observer to some extent, but the use of multiple tools and methods for data collection may minimize such biasness. Furthermore, I conducted the observations first before doing the interviews because the same participants were involved in both. The natural setting for observations could have been so much weakened if participants were interviewed first. Finally, in order to secure internal validity, low-inference descriptors have been used. Extracts of both observations and interviews have been used in this chapter as well as in the analysis chapter.

Furthermore, the following strategies were also followed in order to ensure trustworthiness:

The use of Local Language: English is an official language in Malawi, but many people prefer to use the local language for communication. Therefore, I decided to use this language for the interviews so that the participants are able to contribute freely.

Multiple tools for data collection: this study used various tools for collecting data for the sore reason of ensuring the validity and reliability. Multiple tools tend to complement each other which minimizes biasness.

Use of Informal Methods: Apart from the formal methods which were used in this study, informal methods supplied important information which was not gathered formally. People tend to say more when it comes into informal settings. Therefore, this gave some credibility to the data which had been collected using formal means.

Audit trial: the video recordings were watched over and over again in order to check if there were any misinterpretations in the transcribed data. The same was done with the audio tapes.

Use of Pseudo names: This study has kept hidden the identity of the schools and those of the participants by using pseudo names for confidentiality sake. The participants who were all teachers felt that exposing their identities may jeopardize the relationship with their authorities. One participant clearly indicated that she is not a spokesperson for the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST) and that she was free to be interviewed because her identity would be concealed as per the content in the letter of consent. Therefore, the use of pseudo names enabled the participants to contribute freely during interviews.

3.6.2 Threats against Validity and Reliability in this Study

Despite all the measures which were done in order to check that the data collected were valid and reliable, there may still be some areas which may threaten the validity and reliability. For instance, the schools I visited have student-teachers who are normally supervised by lecturers from our Teachers' Training College. The fact that my letter of identification had all my details as a teacher trainer may have impacted the way the participants conducted their lessons. Additionally, despite everything I did to familiarize myself with the teachers, but my presence in the classroom may have influenced the behaviors of both the teachers and the learners being observed (Gall & Gall, 2007). Again, while I asked the teachers who had their classes under trees not to swap for the sake of observations, but still two teachers swapped at

the direction of their head teachers to use the classroom for instruction. This also was not natural to both the teachers and the learners concerned. In addition, the fact that I interviewed the same persons I observed, may have stressed them out and this may have affected their responses. Again, the setting itself was a problem to some participants because even though we abandoned to use the head teacher's office and went to sit outside, other teachers were moving around close to where we sat and this may have affected the interviewees. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2007) has emphasized on the importance of a conducive setting so that the respondents feel free to participate. On the same, some participants (student-teachers) felt that they were obliged to participate in the study and may have reacted in a way to please me (Denzin, 1970; Silverman, 2006).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

When dealing with people as in this research, there was need to consider ethical issues. It is not a surprise that such kind of a research poses moral and ethical dilemmas. As such, it was very vital to address such issues before conducting a research. This study followed the ethical principles so that it brings no harm, stress or anxiety to the participants (Robnson, 2011).

3.7.1 Access and Acceptance

The research topic involved studying people's (teachers and learners) behavior through observations and interviews; hence, the researcher's responsibilities to those studied had to be faced (Silverman, 2006). As such, to abide by the research ethics, permissions from relevant authorities were sought. Whilst in Norway, permission was obtained from Norwegian Data Service (NDS) after giving them a well detailed plan on how the privacy of the participants shall be protected. The letters from the Department of Special Needs Education (SNE), University of Oslo and another one from The Principal of Machinga Teachers Training College (my work place) introduced me to the District Educational Manager (DEM) for Machinga district. Attached to it was a letter requesting to conduct a study in five schools with standard four teachers within the district.

3.7.2 Informed Consent

Data for this study was collected through observation of lessons and interviewing teachers in different schools. As such, consent from the District Education Manager, Head teachers and the teachers involved were very important. This was obtained before the commencement of the research. Classroom teachers whose classes were observed had to agree and sign the

consent form. The learners were told by their teachers that their class will be participating in a research (Robson, 2011). The consent form had some details of the project. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2007) argues that informed consent enables participants to make informed choice as to whether to take part in the investigation being carried out after understanding the intent of the study. In line with this, the participants were given full information of what the data was all about. The participants were also told that they may withdraw at any point if they wished so. The participants kept one of the signed copies for references. During this study, some teachers declined to participate.

3.7.3 Confidentiality

The dignity of the participants was preserved throughout this research, taking into consideration that ethics may mean being sensitive to the rights of others (Robson, 2011). As such, confidentiality and privacy was prioritized. The video records were transcribed verbatim so that no names were on record. The information was stored in folders with confidential passwords. The data collected was treated with uttermost confidentiality to protect the privacy of the participants. No names or any kind of connectivity with the subjects has been put in the final report. The key to the code names was kept confidential and deleted together with the data collected after finalising the project.

3.8 Summary

In chapter three, I have explained in detail the research methodology which has been used in this study. The rationale for choosing qualitative research design in this study has been explained. The chapter has also explained how the participants were chosen, and brief details of their involvement. The various methods and instruments have been described in detail. The chapter has also explained how data has been organized and analyzed. An explanation about validity and reliability has also been tackled by citing different ways in which an attempt was made to ensure trustworthiness of the data. Finally, ethical considerations at various levels have been looked into. The next chapter will present data analysis and discussion.

4 Data Presentation and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

Data collected from the informants will be presented and discussed in this chapter. The chapter unfolds a detailed presentation and interpretation of data together with a comprehensive discussion based on the themes that emerged during the analysis of the data. Theme: 1 (4.2) is about teachers' conception of the term "reading comprehension" and its importance to standard four learners. Theme: 2 (4.3) explores the different teaching strategies which teachers employ when teaching reading comprehension. Theme: 3 (4.4) identifies the challenges that are impeding progress when it comes to teaching and learning of reading comprehension. Theme: 4 (4.5) explores possible ways which can help to overcome challenges in teaching of reading comprehension. The overarching research question being addressed is: How are regular teachers teaching reading comprehension in inclusive classrooms in Malawi?

Themes from Data Collected

Below are the four themes which represents the results of this study. These themes have been organized to portray what was observed (primary source of information) and the responses from the informants (secondary source of information). The first and fourth themes were based on interviews only while themes two and three were based mainly on observations and partly interviews. All the procedures to reach up to this stage have been discussed in the methodology section[1]. As the interviews were conducted in "Chichewa", the quotations have been translated and structured so that they are grammatically compatible. However, this was done with great care to avoid distorting the quotes. For easy follow-up, each excerpt has an identity to distinguish it from the rest. The excerpts from interviews have been marked with Roman numerals while excerpts from observations have been marked with alphabetical letters. Therefore, the excerpts have been assigned the participant code plus the excerpts code such as; (T2-III) for a third interview excerpt of Teacher 2 and (T2-C) for a third observation excerpt of Teacher 2.

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[1] See Chapter 3, section 3.5

4.2 Theme 1: Teachers' Understanding of the Concept "Reading Comprehension"

In this theme, the responses from teachers were analyzed to examine the teachers' conception of reading comprehension. Interview questions were based on the sub-question: How do teachers understand the concept 'reading comprehension'? Two questions were very much geared to bring responses towards this theme:

- How do you understand the term "reading comprehension"?
- How important is English reading comprehension to standard four learners?

T4 gave simple and straight forward answer to the first question:

T4-I*: Reading comprehension is when you read with understanding. For instance, when a child is able to explain what has been read to another person such as a teacher or a fellow learner. It is getting the meaning out of the written text maybe for exams' sake or everyday life.*

There are three important words which can be derived from excerpt **T4-I**. The first sentence in the excerpt includes key word "*understanding*" which implies that comprehension entails understanding of the written text. The second sentence focuses on the "*ability to explain*" which may mean retelling the passage in one's own words which is also one way of showing understanding. The third sentence of the excerpt implies that, being able to use the information which has been derived from the text is also an important aspect of reading comprehension. In addition, **T3** had the same understanding although put in different wording. She emphasized the importance of deriving meanings out of the written text.

T3-I*: Reading comprehension is revealing what has been hidden in the text. My understanding is that reading should not be mere vocalization of words, but good reading is that which puts the meanings to the words, sentences, and texts being read.*

T3's understanding seems to be centered on the ability to interpret the text. She seems to take note of all kinds of reading that take place. Her emphasis is getting the meaning out of the written text. She seems to understand that some readers may just vocalize the words 'sounding-out-words', but she denies this as a matter of reading comprehension.

Similarly, what **T1** said as she was answering the first question:

T1-I*: ...the first term as this one, I have some learners who are able to read the whole text, but cannot answer even a single question from the text, they just memorize without understanding. It is funny, some just look at the picture and are able to read the whole passage; that is not reading comprehension.*

To illustrate her definition of what reading comprehension is, **T1** gave an example of her own learners. She differentiates reading comprehension from memorization. She seems to say that sometimes learners may retell the story (passage) verbatim without understanding it. Teachers may be deceived by such learners thinking that they understand what they are reading while it is mere memorization.

Going back to **T4**, he has been teaching in the junior section for quite a long period. His conception of reading comprehension seems to be derived from the experiences he has had with teaching English reading comprehension. His response indicates all the dimensions which a competent teacher in English needs to display: Understanding of the text, the ability to retell text content in their own words, and the ability to apply what has been read. All these three aspects are very important in reading comprehension. This is not far from what RAND's definition is emphasizing that reading comprehension should involve "extracting" and "constructing" through interaction and involvement with the text (RRSG RB-8024-OERI, 2003). **T4** has pointed out the aspect of "ability to retell" which can only be done if one is able to get what is in the text. In other words, retelling can be done if a reader immerses him/herself into the text. The same goes with "application of what has been read" which cannot be done without "constructing" meaning from the text. Therefore, it can be said that what **T4** conceived as reading comprehension is not far from the definition given by RAND. In support of "application of what has been read", Poplin argues that the goal of a school is to enable learners acquire new meanings to respond to new experiences rather than just learning the meaning which other people have created (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Pressley, 2006). In other words **T4** is emphasizing what Izizinga (2000, p.67) has quoted from Francis Bacon that "*Reading make the man perfect*". This is to mean that reading comprehension enables one to get information from written forms which is vital in all aspects of life.

On the other hand **T3** and **T1** have unveiled some of the problems which are encountered when it comes to English reading comprehension. **T1** is pointing out at reading which is characterized by memorization. Pressley (2006) argues that this is a common problem with poor readers who attempt to read words just by looking at pictures for cues or guessing based

on the meaning of the text. There are some learners who just memorize the texts verbatim and are able to retell the contents of the passage without really understanding it. According to the heuristic of RRSG, a reader in this case a learner, brings different attributes and abilities into reading comprehension and lack of these may result into poor reading skills. RAND argues that a reader uses experiences and prior knowledge in order to decipher what is in the text. The rich the experiences and prior knowledge, the easy reading comprehension becomes (RRSG RB-8024-OERI, 2003). However, in adequacy of experiences and prior knowledge may force a reader to resort into memorization. Morrow et al. (2003) says that many teachers think that learners can comprehend simply by reading a lot of text. According to **T1-I,** it seems such learners tend to deceive teachers, but on the other hand teachers may be encouraging such a trend in learners due to the strategies they use in teaching reading comprehension. With consideration to interview excerpt **T1-I**, this can be a result of too much "reading aloud" in which sometimes learners just sound out words without even looking at the text. In agreement, **T3** also observed this mere vocalization in learners **(see excerpt T3-1)**. Morrow et al. (2003, p.113) has this to say on vocalization: "*When young leaders are sounding out words, they have to devote a lot of mental effort to the activity. There is little mental capacity left over for comprehending either the individual word that is being sounded out or other words in the text.*" The demerits of sounding out words have also been cited in the literature review[2]. While vocalization cannot be scrapped off from reading lessons, but one solution for those with reading problems would be decoding first and then comprehending (Pressley, 2006). However, Pressley argues that decoding should not be taught directly to avoid ending up in sounding out words (Weaver, 1998; Pressley, 2006). But it all goes back to the teacher's understanding of learners needs.

Social-cultural theory is emphasizing on the importance of the background or context of a learner, likewise the heurastic of RAND. Therefore, skills instruction as in sounding-out words may be very important to some learners and not to others as per their background knowledge. However, reference can be made to **(T3-I)** that the ability to vocalize words does not mean the ability to discern their meanings. Vocalization helps in word recognition which enhances fluency and lastly comprehension. As agreed by Pressley (2006) that learners may pronounce words, but fail to understand them. **T3** therefore, is showing an understanding of

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[2] See Chapter 3, section 2.5.2

the relationship of these skills and how emphasis on one only may fail to achieve the desired goal of reading comprehension.

On the second question; how important is reading comprehension in English to standard four learners? **T5** had this to say:

T5-I*: When teaching my standard four learners, I always think about how they will do it in other classes. English is the medium of communication from standard five up to tertiary level in Malawi; as such, learners have to read it with understanding.*

From this statement it is clear that **T5** is regarding the importance of language as a medium for communication. Communication is effective when people are able to understand one another. **T5** is looking at comprehension as of great need to learners because it enables them to have an understanding of English language. The excerpt above implies that if learners lack the ability to understand English, then there will be zero communication when they go into upper classes. According to Apolo Nsibambi (2000), communication is important in order to understand issues beyond one's vicinity and for coping with various changes. That is, reading comprehension will enable learners to communicate far beyond the classroom. In support of this notion **T2** had this to say;

T2-I: *I tell my learners that there is no way that they can understand other subjects if they are failing to comprehend English. Reading comprehension should come first. I have noted that learners who are able to comprehend what they read have no problems when it comes to understanding other subjects which are taught in English.*

While **T5** is emphasizing on comprehension for the sake of communication, **T2** is stressing on the importance of comprehension for the sake of understanding other subjects. The two are saying the same thing although in different words. Comprehension will enable learners to understand what other people say (in this context a teacher) which in the long run will enable them to understand subjects taught in English. Both teachers are stressing the fact that ability to understand English will ensure learners' success in their education. While concurring with **T5** and **T2, T3** suggested that it could be proper if teaching of English was also emphasized in the infant classes. Her concern was that it seems the whole load is heaped on the standard four teachers to prepare learners for an all English class (standard five). In other words, she argues that all teachers should look at reading comprehension with the same lenses. That is,

preparation of learners should start right away in the infant classes. However, all these teachers are agreeing on the importance of having learners who can comprehend English whilst in standard four. In agreement to this Izizinga (2000) simply puts it that reading is fundamental for formal education. While Frankel, Pearson, & Nair (2011) state that the ideas gained from text are used to meet particular needs in particular situations. Hence, teachers who teach reading comprehension have the key to facilitate learning and achievement in other subjects as well. Failure to comprehend English results into failure to understand other subjects. In a country where English is regarded as an official language, one cannot imagine any skilled work that will not require the ability to read; hence, to comprehend. As such, this gives reading comprehension a central focus in the education system of Malawi. Therefore, the sentiments of all these teachers are positive as regards to the importance of reading comprehension.

4.3 Theme 2: Teaching Strategies which Regular Teachers Use in Teaching Reading Comprehension

This theme is looking into the strategies which teachers use to meet various needs of learners in inclusive classrooms. By strategies, I have included; teaching methods, teaching and learning materials, and scaffolding. The theme is focusing on the second and third sub-questions.

- What methods of instruction are teachers using to ensure that all learners are reading with understanding?
- How are teachers engaging learners' participation during reading comprehension lessons?

The information in response to this theme was obtained mostly through observations and partly interviews.

4.3.1Teaching Methods

In this study, all the five participants used a variety of methods in their teaching. The common methods which were observed comprised; question and answer, group work, and read-aloud. However, all the teachers had their own approaches. For instance this is what **T3** did:

T3-A*: The teacher introduces the new lesson "Dangerous Insects in the Home." She then asks learners to think of any insects that are found in the home and then share what they think*

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with someone siting to their left. After a while, the teacher asks learners to share with the rest of the class what they have come up with. Very few learners are able to mention the insects in English, but manage to mention in "Chichewa." The teacher comes in to tell them the English names for the insects mentioned. Using the name cards, the teacher introduces the new words; spray, bed bags, left-over, cockroaches, spread, and not covered. Learners say the words after the teacher. The teacher starts drilling the words because some learners have problems in pronouncing them especially 'cockroaches, spray, and spread' the 'r' sound is a big problem. Learners pronounce it 'l.'

From the above extract, the teacher used different methods. First, there is think-pair-share. **T3's** strategy was to start from known to unknown by activating learners' prior knowledge. Learners are being asked to share the knowledge they have about insects. **T3** wants to utilize the knowledge which learners already have by building on it. While activating prior knowledge, **T3** is also helping learners to collaborate through pair work. This is one way of developing social interactions amongst learners which is also essential in reading comprehension.

According to RRSG, prior knowledge is what will enable learners to predict what is in the text (RRSG RB-8024-OERI, 2003). In support of this, Morrow et al. (2003) says that effective teachers use learners' understanding, beliefs, and values to connect with new ideas and competencies. Furthermore, the topic of the lesson in the excerpt above is from the social-cultural context of learners which RRSG supports. In agreement, McIntyre (2011) states that from a social-cultural perspective, reading instruction takes the child's contextual world into account. As is the case with **T3**, she wants to find out how much learners know about insects before she introduces a new lesson. However, the problem is that learners were responding in 'Chichewa' when asked. This was a backfire of literal- translation type of teaching which dominated **T3**'s lesson. In some cases, it was very difficult to differentiate whether it was an English or Chichewa lesson. All the same, what was evident was that the teacher made corrections whenever learners had problems.

Secondly, **T3** also used reading-aloud during introduction. Through reading-aloud, the teacher was able to note the difficulties learners had in pronouncing 'r'. This made the teacher to drill the words with 'r' sound. This shows that **T3** was flexible and could easily notice the learners' needs. The teacher could have rushed through the introduction because the intent of the lesson was comprehension, but she started explicit phonics instruction. Maybe decoding

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was not planned, but the teacher did it because there was an evident need among the learners in the class.

In argument, Weaver's worry is that phonics instruction will make learners sound out words too much disregarding meaning (Pressley, 2006). Izizinga (2000) also worries that to most teachers, reading is all about reading aloud. However, correct pronunciation is very essential if learners are going to give meaning to the correct word. Pressley (2006, p.300) agrees by saying that, "*when children cannot decode at all, there is no chance of comprehension*". One of the aspects of RRSG heuristic is 'the text' which may be in different forms. RAND states that extraction of meaning should go together with the reader's ability to construct different representations of the text that are important for comprehension (RRSG RB-8024-OERI, 2003). Therefore, it is important that learners are able to decode words in order to recognize the surface code and the text base. With **T3**, it was evident that by drilling, the teacher had diverted from the planned activities, but it was to the advantage of the learners. This is what "balanced approach[3]" focuses on; in which decoding and comprehension strategies are combined so as to meet the various needs of learners (Frankel, Pearson, & Nair, 2011).

While observing **T4**, this is what transpired:

T4-A*: The teacher reads the story aloud twice from a chart pasted on the chalkboard while the learners are following. He then tells them to go into their groups in which the group leaders read aloud while others are following. Each group has four books against twelve learners. The group leader has one book and other learners have to share the three books. Most of the learners are not looking at the books, they are just imitating what the group leader is saying. Some learners are not participating at all. The teacher then asks learners questions from the text. Very few learners are able to answer the questions.*

T4 used reading aloud and reading groups according to this excerpt. When **T4** himself was reading the story aloud, not all learners were looking where he was pointing, but everyone was repeating what he was saying. The same scenario happened when learners read in their groups. However, reading in groups sometimes is advantageous to those with reading problems when planned properly. But, it seems this group work did not achieve the intended goal. While group work could enhance collaborative learning, this seems to require that teachers or more competent peers scaffold the development of interpersonal skills first

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[3] Section 2.5.3

(Morrow et al., 2003). That is, learning from 'knowledgeable other' is effective when learners are able to interact. Morrow et al. (2003, p.244) points out that; *"a particular grouping strategy must be made in full appreciation of the potential social, instructional, psychological, and moral outcomes of such a choice on children, not just for the ease or convenience of the teacher."* The groups in **T4**'s class were large and they had few books. Such groups are very difficult to manage and very difficult for learners to get close to each other (learner/learner interaction). The teacher was unable to meet individual needs and there was low participation on the part of the learners. All along, the teacher was expecting learners to comprehend what was in the text through responding to comprehension questions at the end. This is what Durkin (Durkin, 1978/79; Pressley, 2006) observed in her study that instead of teaching learners how to comprehend, teachers resort to assessing comprehension by asking learners questions about the text which they had just read. Furthermore, there were some learners who were just imitating what the group leader was saying. This can be similar to what **T1** said in **(excerpt T1-1)** that other learners can read the whole text by just looking at the picture. According to Pressley (2006), using textual and picture cues and clues to guess about a word's meaning is a characteristic of poor readers. However, in the instance of **T4**, learners are not deducing the meanings using the pictures, but they are just imitating what the leader is saying. They may attempt to read the words by just looking at pictures which may result in many errors in reading. The same may apply to those learners who just imitate without looking at the book. It was not surprising to see them failing to read on their own when appointed by the teacher. Izizinga (2000) points out that such kind of reading benefits only the few who practice reading aloud and in this case those who were taking the leading roles. As such, it was not astonishing that very few learners managed to respond to the comprehension questions in this class. Usually, there is a tendency of confusing reading comprehension from reading aloud (Izizinga, 2000).

During interviews, **T4** had this to say before I even started to interview him;

T4-II*: You know this is first term, they are just coming from long holiday and may have forgotten school work. I usually use group work when it comes to reading and it works fine.*

When asked why he uses group method, **T4** said that;

T4-III: *You saw how big the class is. Grouping helps me to supervise learners work easily unlike dealing with individuals. The other reason is that I am able to effectively use the few text books I have when learners are in groups.*

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When asked about the strategies for grouping **T4** said; **T4-IV**: *I don't have any strategy, but I choose group leaders based on their competence in reading and those who have reading problems are just assigned to these group leaders.*

T4's excerpts seem to be justifying why group work flopped in his lesson. He seems to have noted that the lesson did not go as expected. When asked if he rotates the leading roles, **T4** said that he needs leaders who are competent in reading so that they can lead their friends. With this conception it may mean that the 'group leaders' are benefiting more than their friends. Additionally, the teachers' work is eased with the use of these 'group leaders'. Learners were engaged in sounding-out the words rather than in comprehension of these words. In argument Pressley (2006) says that if more attention is on decoding, there is little which is done for comprehension. In the end, learners are able to pronounce words which they cannot understand. Learners can even read sentences without understanding a single word. Therefore, relying on one teaching method can be disadvantageous to learners who have various needs and have different learning styles.

Furthermore, it can be assumed that the grouping strategy which **T4** used was based on ability even though it was only the ability of the group leader which was considered. This has been reached after assessing excerpt **T4-IV** in which **T4** said that he chooses group leaders basing on their competence in reading. It is indicated that teachers rely so much on mixed ability grouping because they think that by doing so, they will meet the learner's needs (Kletzien, 1996; Morrow et al., 2003). However, sometimes it can be disadvantageous to those with low ability in regards to their slow pace and the embarrassment it brings in such groups (Elbaum, Moody & Schumm, 1999; Morrow et al, 2003). In the case of **T4**'s class, the "group leaders" were leading in reading aloud. It can be assumed that these group leaders take leading roles during each and every comprehension lesson; therefore, they benefit more than other members of the group. After all, they always have a text book to themselves. This is in contrast to what RRSG is suggesting about the "activity" which involves purposes for operating to process the text (RRSG RB-8024-OERI, 2003). According to RAND, this purpose can be imposed externally with an assignment at the end of the activity or through intrinsic motivation to read. While **T4** managed to have comprehension questions as a purpose for the "activity", but only group leaders responded to the questions correctly. Therefore, it can be concluded that other learners did not see the purpose of the activity

because it is the group leader who does everything. This trend of having group leaders who have the ability to read was evident in all the classes which were observed.

T1's class had a different scenario. Below is what took place in **T1**'s class:

T1-A: *The teacher starts the lesson by introducing new words using flash cards. Teacher asks learners to recognize the words on flash cards. Learners read the words aloud and are corrected when wrong. Before reading the passage, the teacher writes two questions on the chalkboard which would be answered through the passage. She reads the questions aloud and learners follow. The teacher then reads the story very slowly twice from the chart while learners are listening. Then she asks learners to answer the questions orally basing on the story which is displayed on the chalkboard. The teacher comes up with other follow-up questions which learners answer. Finally, she asks learners to write the answers to the questions individually.*

The teaching methods evident in this lesson are reading-aloud and question and answer. The teaching of individual words by **T1** provided learners with words which were to be encountered in the text. **T1** is able to recognize those learners who have problems in pronunciation through sounding-out. A number of learners were involved in word recognition exercise. However, mere sounding-out of words as was the case in this lesson was not effective. Frankel, Pearson, & Nair (2011) argue that "thin instruction" in which a teacher gives definitions of words to learners will result in shallow word learning. If "thin instruction" was the case in **T1**'s class, then it could have been much better, but it was mere word recognition which is more to the surface. What the learners managed to do was to sound out the words, but no effort was made to explain the meanings of the words.

Listening skill was also being developed in this lesson. As the teacher read out to learners, it enabled them to listen for pronunciation of words. **T1** read the story slowly twice while moving, using gestures, and varying the voice. This attracted the attention of learners. Morrow et al. (2003) state that when children are read to, it helps them to be exposed to the language structure of text. However, Izizinga has some reservations with teachers who read out to learners in this statement; "*during reading lessons teachers take it upon themselves to read to and for the class, even when the pupils have the same text in their hands*"(2000, p.68). Izizinga is not pleased with teachers who bypass learners' involvement in their own learning to read. She is of the opinion that the learner's involvement is the key to learning how to read. In confirmation of Izizinga's worry, **T1** had problems in pronouncing certain words correctly.

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For instance, she said 'ana olenge' instead of 'an orange'. The whole class followed the way the teacher pronounced the words which was very wrong. Therefore, this sounding-out of words left out the main purpose which is vocabulary of the individual words and comprehension of the text (Morrow et al., 2003).

Likewise, writing the questions before hand enables reading with understanding. Most importantly, this is in line with RRSG understanding that prior to reading, a reader needs to have a purpose (RB-8024-OERI, 2003). In case of **T1**'s class, the motivation to read is externally imposed through the comprehension questions. However, this is not a guarantee that reading comprehension will take place because sometimes learners may just scan for the correct answers and not really understand the text. In her research, Rose Izizinga (2000) also noted that teachers made learners discuss comprehension questions before the written exercise. The arguments of teachers were that the number of mistakes is reduced and it helps the poor readers to understand the text. According to Izizinga, this is not an appropriate method of teaching comprehension because answering questions may not determine that understanding has taken place. For sure, focusing on answering questions may just foster rote memorization sometimes. Learners may just quickly scan through the text to find the responses to the questions. In **T1's** class, it was observed that most of the questions were of low level which just required a name or place. For instance; "*what was the name of the visitor in this story*?" In which learners answered, "*Mr. Kalani*". However, judging from the way these learners responded to some of the questions, one may think that they understood what was in the passage. Credit should go to the teacher who offered so much assistance for the learners to come up with correct answers. The teacher rephrased the questions, gave illustrations or demonstrated to enable learners understand what she was asking. Therefore, despite having detriments, comprehension questions enable learners to read with a purpose.

Observations in **T2** and **T5** classes did not differ so much with these other observations. However, **T2** introduced her lesson through a song she had composed using the words which had been taught in the previous lesson. She did as **T1**, reading the story to the learners twice and then sending them into their groups. However, despite putting learners into their groups, learners ended up doing individual work. This was done after **T2** realized that the story was not in the learners' book. She told them to refer to the chart on the chalkboard and then started asking oral questions from the passage. Most of the learners failed and only one learner dominated the whole lesson. According to Morrow et al. (2003) instructional format should

be varied; that is, whole class instruction, small groups, and seat work in order to ensure effective address of learners' needs. Some learners are sidelined when teachers are over-using one instructional format. **T5,** on the other hand, had learners in groups, but she did not check if they were indeed doing the correct thing. When using group work there is need to have a clear strategy for supervising (Morrow et al., 2003). In **T5**'s class, learners were doing contrary to what the teacher expected, but she did not notice. What most groups presented to the class orally was not what they wrote during their discussions (**Appendix I**).

Teachers play an important role when it comes to teaching and learning. In teaching of reading comprehension, teachers should be in a position of identifying and implementing best practices which may foster reading development (Morrow et al., 2003). Therefore, it is the teacher who makes informed decisions about which instructional approaches deemed best for a particular learner. As per these observations, all teachers used group work and question and answer extensively despite citing a variety of methods during interviews. The emphasis was more on sounding out which was done through reading aloud. Even giving meanings of the individual words "vocabulary" was scarcely done. However, all teachers seem to understand the importance of reading comprehension, but it seems they lack both theory and practice of the effective instructional strategies.

4.3.2 Teaching and Learning Materials

During classroom observations, it was observed that all the classes had inadequate text books. The maximum number of books per group was four against twelve learners in some instances. Therefore, during interviews, questions were asked as to how teachers manage these few books and what they do to supplement reading materials to learners. Below is what transpired during both observations and interviews. **T2** had this to say during interviews:

T2-II: *I have only ten learners' books for a class of 62. I don't allow them to take the books home because they are very few. The charts that are in the class are for standard one. I have my class under a tree and my charts are kept in the cardboard box.*

According to the above interview excerpt; it is evident that learners are not very much exposed to the books. It is very surprising that learners are expected to develop reading skills when they are sharing one book among ten learners. It is possible that some learners will not get hold of a book for the whole school year. Worse still, **T2** said that most of these learners come from homes whereby books are non-existent. The only opportunity to hold a book is in

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class where there are just a few copies. By not allowing learners to take books home, **T2** said that it is a way of controlling the meagre text books that she has. And again, it would be very difficult to let learners take the ten books to their homes. **T2** feared that it will be a problem if the learner having the book is absent or if learners lose or mishandle books at home. Her emphasis was that the books are just too few to use both in class and at home.

With reference to the above case, reading comprehension cannot be well developed when learners have no access to books and cannot read in their own time. Learning is enhanced when there are teaching and learning materials. In all the classrooms observed, text books were in adequate. Lyster (2001) states that children who have access to printed material are greatly influenced in their reading. The exposure to print-rich environment enables learners to become aware of sound symbol association (Morrow et al., 2003). The last part of RAND's definition for reading comprehension says, "*…through interaction and involvement with written language*" (RB-8024-OERI, 2003). That is, for reading comprehension to take place, there is need for a reader to interact and get involved with the text through the activity of reading. That means a reader has to get hold of the text if reading comprehension is to be realized. What is reading comprehension all about then if there is nothing to read? Taking the scenario of **T2** class, some learners may think that reading is just a classroom activity. Effective reading is that which is on- going (Pressley, 2006). Reading which should be carried out even during outside classroom hours. Varying instructional methods most often go with adequate teaching and learning materials. When teaching and learning materials are inadequate teachers resort to over-use of one method and in this case; "group work". Izizinga (2000) during her research found that unavailability of the reading materials was partly the cause why teachers resorted to reading out to learners always. In the instance whereby text books are inadequate, charts become very handy. The fact that **T2** had charts, signals a positive development. Passages, sentences or words from textbooks can be written on charts and displayed on boards or on walls. This may give a chance to learners to read in their own time. But then, the charts were not displayed as **T1** did **(Appendix H)** because **T2** doesn't have a classroom of her own. Therefore, a positive development as it may appear, but learners may be benefiting so little from these charts.

Furthermore, during interviews I found out that some schools have libraries with a good stock of extra reading materials. **T4** said.

T4-V: *Our school has a lot of extra reading materials which were donated by 'Read Malawi', but they are kept under lock and key.*

Later I asked the head teacher about the functionality of the library and he said:

HT-I: *No one is interested to run the library because they feel it belongs to only those who attended a workshop by 'Read Malawi'.*

T5 has a similar situation. At her school there is a good library with a lot of extra reading materials, but it is dysfunctional. Both **T4** and **T5** said that learners are being deprived of their chance to have access to extra reading materials. Both teachers pointed out that learners should have access to the reading materials if there is a determination to have them develop reading skills. *"A library is not a shrine for the worship of books, but should be, the delivery or maternity room of ideas"* (Bakka, 2000, p.84). It all goes back to the zeal, willingness and dedication of teachers. If the school has a library which is not the usual case in Malawian primary schools, then it should be looked at as a great privilege. Learners may have that eagerness to read, but dysfunctional libraries are depriving them of this great chance. However, when asked if they would be willing to assist in running the library; **T4** was hesitant in his response and pointed out that there are teachers who were trained for this. However, after probing further as to why he has such an opinion; he reluctantly said that he will start with his class only. **T5** on the other hand, said that she was willing to assist and that she will suggest this to the head teacher. However, the two teachers agreed that reading comprehension can be enhanced if learners have access to various reading materials. According to McIntyre (2011) Vygotsky refers to a book as a technical tool, a tool that enhances reading. If learners can be exposed to such reading materials, their reading can be enhanced. *"If they don't read much, how they ever gonna get good"* (Allington, 1977; Risinski et al., 2010, p.243). This is to say that reading should be done even outside school program for learners to develop all the necessary reading skills. However, this cannot be achieved if teachers are unwilling to assist.

To supplement the few learners' books, teachers in all the schools had charts, flash cards and a lot of real objects. This is a positive development and shows commitment towards teaching and learning on the part of teachers. Malawi Institute of Education (2008) has stated that not all the teaching and learning materials can readily be available. Some of the teaching and learning materials can be made using the locally available resources. **T2** pointed out that she assigns some learners in class who have artistic skills in making most of the teaching and

learning materials she uses. However, **T2, T3 & T4** do not have classrooms. Their classes are conducted under trees. As such, the charts and other materials are kept in cardboard boxes. They are displayed during the lessons only. Morrow et al. (2003) argues that an interactive 'Word Wall' serves as a learners' reference for the words which are frequently used in the class. Therefore, keeping charts in cardboard boxes means that learners will be unable to read or get hold of them during their own free time. While the other two teachers have classrooms, but some have neither windows nor lockable doors. During interviews it was noted that these classes are not safe for keeping the teaching and learning materials. **T1 & T5** said that the charts on walls do not stay long; either they are blown away by the wind or destroyed by children who play around the school. Despite all these setbacks, teachers agreed that the use of real objects, improvised materials and charts help them in promoting reading comprehension. **T3** was precise in her words when she said:

T3-II*: Explaining the meanings of words is simplified when there are real objects and improvised materials.*

T2 on the other hand said; **T2-II**: *I don't exhaust myself in explaining some of the words or actions. I just draw on the chart and learners are able to understand what is taking place. But since I cannot keep them in class, I take the charts home.*

Despite the fact that all teachers agreed on the importance of using teaching and learning materials in teaching reading comprehension, learners had very little interaction with these materials. Social-cultural perspective suggests that children learn through social interactions amongst people and even with tools and artifacts of the society (McIntyre, 2011). However, it was only **T1** who allowed few learners to interact with the materials and objects during the lesson. Most of the teachers handled the materials themselves. If these materials are there to enhance learning, then learners should be allowed to interact with them. The heuristic of RRSG has a "reader" as the one doing the comprehending. Therefore, it is this "reader" who has to interact and get involved with the written text in order to extract and construct meaning (RB-8024-OERI, 2003). If the "reader" in this case the "learner" is taken out from the circle then the whole essence of reading comprehension will be dysfunctional. The fact that learners do not have ample time to interact with these materials, it reduces its potential of maximizing learning. Learners should be able to use the materials during the lessons and during their free time in order to internalize word meanings or concepts.

4.3.3 Scaffolding

During lesson observations, it was noted that teachers were assisting learners in pronouncing words and reading sentences correctly. Reading aloud dominated in all the classes with learners following teachers or group leaders. Despite having its disadvantages, but it helped in clarifying the correct pronunciation of words. For instance, this is what was observed in **T5**'s class:

> **T5-A**: *The teacher writes two sentences on the chalkboard:*
>
> *My mother is baking some_____. (blade/bread)*
>
> *Our school_____ has five classes. (block/broke)*

She then calls a learner in front to read aloud the first sentence. The learner pronounces 'mother' as 'maza'. The teacher tells the learner the correct pronunciation and shows the learner where the tongue should be to pronounce '-ther'. The learner imitates the teacher and manages to pronounce 'mother'. The learner pronounces the word silently and repeatedly as he goes back to his place.

T5 gave this work to the learners as a conclusion of her lesson. The learners had read a passage which contained rhyming words with 'r' and 'l' sounds. The exercise above was geared to check if learners had understood the different meanings of the rhyming words. However, she also wanted to find out if learners are able to sound out the words in the sentences. Now, here is a learner who has problems in pronouncing '–ther'. A good teacher deals with a problem at hand. **T5** did not ignore the learner even though her interest was on the completion of the sentence using the appropriate word in the brackets. Her aim was to find out if learners understand the meanings of the words. However, decoding is one of the processes which learners need in order to derive meaning from the text. As such, learners who are poor at decoding end up having problems when it comes to comprehension (Curtis, 1980; Smiley et al, 1977; Dockrell & McShane, 1993).

The above scenario unveils the importance of the place of a teacher in reading. The more teachers spent time helping and assisting learners in reading, the better the reading in the classroom (Pressley, 2006). Sometimes learners may understand the meanings of the words, but correct pronunciation is very important in reading comprehension. Wrong pronunciation may confuse learners if the same word is pronounced correctly by someone. Vygotsky emphasizes that a child may develop from interpersonal to personal plane through tools such as self-talk (McIntyre, 2011). The above excerpt displays how this is possible. The learner

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was seen talking to himself as he was internalizing what he had just learned. This indicates that vocalizing of words is essential for correct pronunciation. Scaffolding should be part and parcel of each and every method which the teacher is using in class whether individual, as a group or a class as a whole. **T5** displayed this important role when she assisted this learner. Furthermore, by assisting one learner, many more learners were assisted who may have had the similar problem. Going back to RRSG heuristic, the reading activity is done within the social-cultural context which has the presence of the 'knowledgeable other'. The teachers' assistance; therefore, is very vital if the learner is to reach her or his potential in ZPD. The context does not offer tools and prior knowledge only, but it also gives assistance to the novice on areas where there is need.

Similar situation was observed with **T1:**

T1-B*: After giving group work, the teacher goes round the groups assisting them in answering the comprehension questions. Whenever she finds a common problem, she goes in front and clarifies the instruction or tells them her expectations. Some learners are seen assisting fellow learners.*

In this situation a teacher and 'knowledgeable other' are seen taking an important role in assisting in the learning process. According to (Pressley, 2006) interaction with others is very important in learning to read. The strategies which adults scaffold in dialogue will strongly be internalized by the child. It may be assumed that in **T1**'s class some questions were high level and that learners needed the teachers' assistance. By going round the groups, the teacher is able to recognize those learners who need special attention. According to RAND, social-cultural theory argues that learning and literacy are acquired through social interactions; hence, the involvement of the knowledgeable peers and adults is very important (RRSG RB-8024-OERI, 2003). It is during this interaction that a teacher can also take note of the different skills which learners have. However, it all depends on the zeal of the teacher or the peers and openness of the recipient (Morrow et al., 2003). In **T1**'s class, more learners took an active role when they realized that their teacher was going round visiting the groups. Thus, it helped the teacher in class management as well. There was also teacher/learner interaction as the teacher tried to learn what the learners were doing in their respective groups. Even though

some learners like to work without an authority figure[4], but once in a while they may want to ask when they are stack. Therefore, what **T1** did was of benefit to most of the learners.

However, this is contrary to **T2** who opted for a class discussion, but did not involve non volunteers in most of the activities. Learners who failed to give correct answers were not assisted, the teacher just chose another learner to give the correct answer and one learner dominated the whole lesson.

This is what transpired in **T2's** class:

T2-A*: The teacher writes a question on the chalkboard after reading a passage: "What do onions treat?" She gives a pointer to a learner to read the question. The learner goes in front and just looks at the teacher. The teacher tells the learner to go and sit down and calls another learner to read the question.*

T2 only concentrated on those who were able to give correct answers. Those who needed her assistance were neglected and thus, leaving them in stage one of the ZPD. According to McIntyre (2011) reading development in 'zone of proximal development' may occur in three stages with the teacher doing the work of reading in the first stage. While the learner participates as a novice, but gradually takes the responsibility. He continues to say that if a child does not remain engaged in a task, it's when the teacher intervenes from stage one. However, in the case of the learner above; the learner's participation was not encouraged by the teacher. It is scaffolding which helps to keep learners at task and it reduces their frustrations. In the scenario above, all what the learner needed was some assistance from the teacher. And by assisting one learner, many more learners could have been assisted. As per sociocultural perspective, reading instruction takes the child's contextual world into account (McIntyre, 2011). Teachers should understand the background of learners and assist them accordingly. The learner in the above excerpt was not assisted and was embarrassed as she went to sit down.

During interviews **T2** said that;

T2-III: *I have six learners who are able to read with understanding in my class. Today, only one was present and that was why group reading was very difficult. I rely on those learners as you can see the class is too large.*

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[4] See Chapter 3, section 2.5.4.1

As from **T2's** interview excerpt, it can be deduced that the learners who benefit so much in her reading comprehension lessons are the six learners she pointed out. Izizinga (2000) agrees by saying that the so called reading lessons benefits only the few that practice reading aloud. But how are other learners going to learn reading when they are not given a chance at all? **T2** used the same learner in reading the words on flash cards, reading the passage, and reading and answering the questions. This was an oversight considering that they were sixty-two learners present in that class. Teaching reading comprehension requires commitment, time, and knowledge. It needs a teacher who is well conversant with the learners' strengths and needs and is able to plan instruction based on those needs (Morrow et al., 2003). Based on what Morrow et al, has pointed out, it can be said that all the learners in **T2**'s class have the potential to learn, but they just need her assistance and encouragement to realize this. Good primary school teachers understand that their lessons are only a start in the knowledge construction process; hence, require a lot of scaffolding before the learners are able to own the skills (Pressley, 2006). In corroboration, McIntyre (2011) states that in learning to read, the use of tools takes place on the interpersonal plane with a teacher scaffolding individual learners in their zone of proximal development. Therefore, reading comprehension requires that teachers, peers and even parents assist learners in developing the comprehension skills.

4.4 Theme 3: Challenges in Teaching and Learning of Reading Comprehension in Malawi.

Throughout this study it has been noted that there are several challenges which teachers meet when teaching reading comprehension in Malawi. Participants unveiled the challenges they face during interviews, but most of the challenges were noted during lesson observations. The common challenges were; classroom environment, lack of teaching and learning resources, competence of teachers in English language, and mother-tongue interference. Below is a presentation of the findings and discussion of these challenges.

4.4.1 Classroom Environment

This section shall consider the condition of the classroom and pupil/teacher ratio. Lesson observations were made in focus of this:

T3-B: The class has 85 learners with 46girls and 39boys. Present today are 34girls and 27boys (61 in total). Learners are seated under a tree. Some learners have brought mats from home to sit on because it is so dusty. The main road and busy market are nearby. The

teaching and learning materials for this lesson are on the teachers' desk in front. There is a small portable board in front. The few teaching and learning materials are in a card board box under the teacher's desk.

Classroom environment affects the roles of both teachers and learners in the teaching and learning process. With the above scenario, the place where the class is located is not conducive for learning. There is a lot of noise because of the busy road and the market. Learners are likely to be distracted. Being outside can also have a psychological effect on learners. It can be very difficult for some learners to regard it as a classroom; hence, act as if they are on a playground. Furthermore, outside classes require teachers to have very good voice in order to be heard by all learners and raising the voice all the time is exhausting. Adding to that, the teaching and learning materials cannot be accessed by learners in their own free time because they are not displayed. Learners are able to see these during the lessons only. Additionally, the portable board is too small which makes the teacher to continuously rub off things to the disadvantage of learners. Leaving writings on the chalkboard help learners to refer to the previous work and make connections which new work on the same board.

During interviews I asked **T3** how she perceives about this classroom and this is what she had to say: **T3-III:** *The class is too big and I am unable to give individual help. Most of the times, the class is disturbed because it is outside. You see, these are children and can be distracted by very simple things.*

When asked what she does in such situations. **T3** said that it is very difficult, but sometimes she just let the learners turn to whatever is happening around until it is gone. She pointed out that time is consumed, but she kept on saying that an outside classroom is a big challenge. She also pointed out that it was not healthy for both learners and teachers because the ground is so dusty. It was indeed a problem because learners literary sat on the dust. The clothes were so dirty and some kept playing with the dust. Each time learners moved, there was a lot of dust which could cause sneezing and coughing. Effectiveness of teachers is also assessed by the way they manage their classes. An outside class poses a big challenge when it comes to class management. In the long run, teaching and learning is affected. **T3** also added that during winter, it is even worse because it is so windy and cold outside. She pointed out that many learners don't have winter clothes and it is worrisome to see them shivering in the cold.

T4 had a different situation: **T4-B:** *His class has 102 learners who are fully packed in a small classroom with open windows (glasses are completely broken) and without a lockable door. Learners sit on the floor and during group work, demarcations between groups are invisible. The teacher is unable to move around to assist learners with needs.*

It is good to have a classroom, but problems arise when there are more learners as compared to the space in the classroom. Infact, **T4** does not have a classroom, he teaches his class under a tree, but the headteacher made him swap with another class for the sake of the observations. However, the classroom was small and learners were pushing each other time and again to squeeze because there was not enough space for them to sit. For sure, comfort should be prioritized if learners are to participate in the activities of the class. While the open windows and open door allowed air ventilation in the summer; however, it poses a big problem during winter. Sitting on a concrete floor with open windows and an agape door can be very uncomfortable to learners during winter. In inclusive classrooms, there are learners with various needs and disabilities who need to be taken care of. As such, all teachers need to establish classroom environments which will not only accept learners of various needs, but will also be supportive of children (Frankel, Pearson, & Nair, 2011). Health issues of the learners should also be considered when allocating classrooms. Sometimes schools have had outbreaks of scabies and chicken pox due to overcrowding of learners. Additionally, classrooms without windows or lockable doors are not safe for keeping teaching and learning materials which deprive learners from utilizing these materials during their own free time. While it is not good to have permanent groups, but it is very difficult to put learners who are tightly sitting on the floor in groups. Mobility in such a class is very difficult. This impedes scaffolding and use of some teaching methods. However, what was surprising was that all the classes observed had two teachers. When asked if they could just split the class into two so that each teacher had his/her own class, the teachers were very reluctant. **T3** said,

T3-IV: *that means there are going to be classes all over the playground*. In agreement **T5** said, **T5-III**: *that means we will be supposed to divide the already few text books*. When asked of how she manages the eighty-five learners, **T5** said, **T5-IV**: *in fact, our class is the smallest because we are student-teachers. Ours is standard four 'A' and there is 'B' and 'C'. Those other classes have more than 120 learners each.*

While the teachers gave different reasons for not opting to split the classes, but it can also be said that teachers preferred to share classes because it eased their work. Instead of taking the

whole class, sharing meant teaching half the subjects. This showed lack of commitment, but again the reasons they put forward were very convincing.

The experience in **T4**'s class brings in another issue of large groups which has already been tackled in the previous section[5]. All the teachers involved had large groups which affected teaching and learning in different ways. Benner, Bell, & Broemmel (2011) say that assistance to learners with reading disabilities can be maximized if the group size is small in order to provide targeted instruction. Using large groups when there is a need can be advantageous, but over-using this instructional format can affect the development of reading comprehension in many learners.

4.4.2 Lack of Teaching and Learning Resources

Much has already been said on teaching and learning resources[6]. All the classes observed had inadequate text books. It seems the over-use of group work was a result of inadequate resources. Teachers wanted to maximize the use of the few books they had by letting learners read in groups. Going by the RRSG heuristic, teaching and learning materials are part of the context at the same time the "text" is found in the inner circle of the heuristic. That means no reading comprehension can take place if there is no text to read. As readers, learners need to be exposed to rich text environment in order for them to develop reading skills. RAND states that there may be disparities in reading comprehension instruction depending on the availability of resources.

4.4.3 Competence of Teachers in English Language

Teachers' competence is very crucial when it comes to teaching. However, this seems to have been a problem with the teachers who were observed. For instance, this is what was observed in **T1**'s class;

T1-C*: Today's topic: "Listen a Story" Before reading the story, the teacher writes two questions on the chalkboard; "Where did Mr. Kananga came from? What does onions treats?"*

The teacher was unaware of the grammatical errors in what she wrote on the chalkboard. She was very uneasy when she was reading aloud the two questions to the learners. While she

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[5] See Section 4.3.1
[6] Section 4.3.2

managed to correct the second question, but the topic and the first question were not corrected. During interviews when **T1** was asked how comfortable she is when teaching reading comprehension, she said that;

T1-III: *I am not comfortable at all, I still have so much to learn*. When asked what she thinks could be done for her to improve, **T1** said; **T1-IV**: *maybe I should be reading a lot to improve my competence in the language.*

While **T1** displayed the grammatical problem through writing, most of the teachers had problems in speaking and this could be a reason why they switched off to Chichewa very often. Pressley, (2006) points out that teachers need to have knowledge about the language development in children and be competent in explanations of grammatical development. Some teachers had spelling problems which was also very crucial because learners copied down wrong spellings. Pressley (2006) is suggesting that individuals for teacher training should be selected just as how sports teams select athletes. Currently, the requirement for one to undergo teacher training course in Malawi is a credit in English and a pass in Mathematics with any other science subject on MSCE. As a result, many people find it easy to go for teaching. However, many students obtain MSCE after seating for the exams more than once. This results into problems when it comes to teaching reading comprehension. Pressley, (2006) continues to say that student-teachers should demonstrate potential talent before they are qualified to be teachers. Therefore, the need for reducing pupil/teacher ratio should be equated with quality education.

4.4.4 Mother-Tongue Interference

Teaching of reading comprehension is greatly affected by the mother-tongue interference by both teachers and learners. This was portrayed in this observation in **T4**'s class in which the teacher translated each and every word to enable learners understand the meaning: **T4-C**
Teacher: 'Ndi liwu lanji limayimira 'mother'? (Which other word can be used instead of mother?)
Learner 1: amai (mother)
Learner 2: mkazi (woman)
Teacher: ine ndikuyankhula English, inu mukuyankha Chichewa' (I am speaking in English and you are answering in Chichewa)
Teacher: the answer is 'woman'

According to **T4,** learners are able to understand English through translation. The whole lesson was dominated by 'Chichewa'. She asked the question in Chichewa, but expected learners to respond in English. That is, learners had to think in Chichewa and then translate into English. This kind of teaching lowers the rate of comprehension in learners. The ability to translate does not mean understanding the passage. Words may mean different things as per the context of the passage. According to Pressley (2006), context has little to do when it comes to reading a word, but it facilitates understanding of the meaning of the word once read. Therefore, literal translation as was the case with **T4** may hinder the intended purpose of reading comprehension lesson. Teaching of reading comprehension requires that a teacher should have extensive knowledge about the nature of the language and the modern conceptions of reading (Pressley, 2006). Alderson argues that "*poor reading in a foreign language is due to poor reading ability in the first language* (Gunderson, D'Silva & Chen, 2011, p.16)". However, it can be counter argued that English is the most difficult language to learn to read and that many learners who learn English as an additional language have trouble learning it (Ziegler et al., 2003; Gunderson, D'Silva & Chen, 2011). However, if the teacher is not competent in the language itself, it may be difficult to deliver the lessons effectively.

The similar situation was observed with **T1** whereby she was heard saying;
T1-D: *Who can 'lid' (read) this sentence?*
    This is 'ana olenge' (an orange)
During interviews**, T1** acknowledged that she has a problem with 'r' because it is absent in her mother tongue language. The same problem was observed amongst learners who had problems in differentiating; lace/race, light/right, lice/rice, low/row, led/red. The 'r' sound could not be heard and the teacher had difficulties to help learners because she had the same problem. Wrong pronunciation may change the meaning of the word; hence, failure to comprehend the sentence/passage. In addition to this, **T1** said that a word such as 'maize' is pronounced 'maise' because the local language of the area does not have the 'z' sound. While this may not be a major problem, but persistent change of word pronunciation may affect the understanding of the passage.

4.5 Theme 4: Possible Ways on How to Overcome Challenges in Teaching and Learning of Reading Comprehension in Malawi

Responses to this theme were collected through interviews. Both teachers and head teachers had noted that the teaching of reading comprehension was related to a lot of challenges which need immediate solutions. Interview questions were formulated to solicit answers in focus of how teachers, learners, parents, school administration and the education department can help in ensuring that learners are able to comprehend English.

4.5.1 The teacher

Benner, Bell, & Broemmel (2011) have pointed out that effective education is a result of development of teachers in content-knowledge, pedagogical skills, and high standards for themselves and their learners. Despite the introduction of learner-centered approaches, teachers still play an important role in the teaching and learning process. As such, all informants agreed that if reading comprehension teaching has to improve then the teacher should be the central focus. Below is what transpired during the interviews:

T1-V: *as a teacher, I need to vary my teaching methods in order to meet the needs of the learners. Sometimes I use the same methods because of lack of thorough preparation. Being a student, I don't have much time to prepare teaching and learning materials which enhance learning. Sometimes I am forced to buy the materials myself like chart papers. Yes, they say that we should be innovative and creative, but some of the materials need to be supplied to us. Some materials I can improvise, but not all.*

T3-VI: *if reading comprehension is to improve then it should start with standard one teachers. Learners come to standard four with very little vocabulary. Some learners completely fail to read English. If the infant section will work together with the junior section in English language development; reading comprehension will improve.*

T5-V: *the great challenge is the attitude. Having a positive attitude towards the language will make a great difference in how reading comprehension will be taught. We complain that English is too involving. It has a lot of periods per week, almost twice a day. In the end, some of the periods are not taught which affects reading comprehension so much.*

T4-VI*: to say the fact, we need in-service or refresher courses. Look, I have been teaching for quite a long time, but I haven't gone to any course during my service. The knowledge I have may be outdated considering that the curriculum has been changing. Furthermore, practicing teachers should be involved in curriculum design. Most of the times, they use people who have been teachers, but are now in offices and not us in the field.*

As from the above excerpts, teachers themselves are able to see their weaknesses and how these can be improved. The plea by **T3** is for teachers to use effective methods and resources. Once a teacher is well equipped, teaching is done with confidence. However, Morrow et al. (2003, p.243) argues that "*to establish best professional practices in literacy instruction, it must be the practices, not the professional that are held responsible for teaching students to read…*" This can be debatable considering that effective reading instruction still depends on the content knowledge held by teachers (Benner, Bell, & Broemmel, 2011). **T4's** argument is that, it is lack of in-service courses that impedes development on the part of teachers. While the failure of reading comprehension cannot be wholly blamed on teachers, they are without doubt the ones who play a great role. According to RRSG heuristic, the inner circle has three aspects; a reader, activity, and text (RRSG RB-8024-OERI, 2003). However, all these aspects are within the social-cultural context in which a teacher has an important role to play. It is the teacher who has to employ effective instructional strategies to ensure that the reader is able to do the activity of reading. It is the teacher who is supposed to offer assistance whenever need arises. Therefore, it is important that teachers are made aware of what they are supposed to do when it comes to teaching of reading comprehension. Izizinga (2000) observed that when teachers are unaware of the importance of reading comprehension, it affects learners negatively. Best practices can be delivered by a professional and the choice of which instructional strategy to use still lays in the hands of teachers. Most often learners do not have the autonomy of transferring mental comprehension processes to novel texts autonomously, but when prompted by the teacher (Morrow et al., 2003).

It all requires a teacher to understand the learners' needs and help them accordingly. As such, teachers cannot be ruled out if positive results are to be realized in reading comprehension. This is what **T3** is emphasizing that teachers have the responsibility to vary teaching methods and meet individual needs; therefore, teachers should not be left aside. Learners who have problems in reading do not need specifically different instruction (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; Frankel, Pearson, & Nair, 2011). This is to say that the same methods used in a regular class can be effective for those with reading problems. The important thing is for the teacher

to know the learners' needs. Benner, Bell, & Broemmel (2011) have also included the six qualities of excellent classroom reading teachers, adapted from (IRA, 2000) in which two of them say; "*they (teachers) know a variety of ways to teach reading, when to use each method, and how to combine the methods into an effective instructional program and they offer a variety of materials and texts for children to read (p.70)*". Possessing such qualities does not mean that teachers will be the fountain of knowledge or assuming the role of experts, rather they will be in a better position to offer the necessary assistance to learners. *Best practices can be described, but not prescribed* (Morrow et al., 2003, p.13). Therefore, what (**T3 and T5**) are saying is that teachers' attitude, knowledge, and ability to use different methods and resources will still remain paramount if teaching of reading comprehension is to improve. Having well researched and effective instruction for teaching reading comprehension cannot be productive if there is no improvement in the teaching profession. After all research has been done and policies made; it is the teacher who is expected to implement the policies through instruction in the classroom. With this regard, there is need to have a teaching personnel which will be in a position to interpret such policies and employ the workable teaching instructions effectively.

4.5.2 The Learner

The learner involvement in reading comprehension is the key to learning how to read and comprehend (Izizinga, 2000). All the informants agreed that learners need to be actively involved in the lesson. They also accepted that reading aloud dominates their lessons and mostly this is done by the teacher while learners are listening. Izizinga argues that such kind of a lesson only benefits the few learners who are appointed to lead the groups in reading aloud. The end result is that most learners develop negative attitude towards reading comprehension. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers help learners to have a positive attitude towards reading comprehension through the use of different methods and a variety of teaching and learning resources.

During interviews **T3** explained that she has reading clubs for 'Chichewa' and she is now working on English reading clubs. The reason is to have small groups of learners who will be interested in reading after classes. By doing this, **T3** said she wants to start with learners who are interested in reading and then extend it to non-volunteers. According to RRSG heuristic, in order for the activity of reading to be done there is need for active involvement of a 'reader' who in this case is the learner (RRSG RB-8024-OERI, 2003). As a 'reader', the

learner has to be actively involved in the reading process or else no reading comprehension will take place. The capacities and abilities which a reader brings into reading are vital for reading comprehension to be done. It is the reader who is to interact and get involved with the written text. Therefore, as per the definition of reading comprehension by RAND, no reading comprehension can take place if the reader is left aside.

4.5.3 Parents/Guardian

All the informants agreed that parents play an important role when it comes to learning to read. Lyster (2001) states that children most at risk when it comes to reading difficulties are those who begin school with less verbal skills. This goes back to the importance of having parents and guardians involvement in assisting their children learn to read. Parents just like teachers fall within the social-cultural context of the RRSG heuristic. In support of this, **T2** said that learners who do better in reading comprehension were noted to be those whose parents are literate. She suggested that maybe these parents assist their wards after classes, or else there are reading materials in such homes. She gave an example of her own son whom she said is encouraged to read a page or two before going to bed. According to **T2**, parents have to take a role to ensure that children are practicing reading in their homes. In support of this, Pressley states that much that is required for literacy development occurs before the child starts school. He has given examples of game and play activities, interactions during meals, media, and outings (Baker, 1994; Pressley, 2006). Therefore, those children who have rich linguistic interactions with their parents will be advantaged opposed to those without.

Additionally, if learners are to achieve reading comprehension skills then it does not require them to use only the recommended books for reading. Other books may be used in order to support individual readers in their development of self-extending reading strategies (Morrow et al., 2003). **HT4**, portrayed a good example by lending standard three and four learners 'out-of-sylabus' books as extra reading materials. To acquire comprehension skills does not confine learners to read recommended learners' books only. Reading should be done even outside the classroom. It has been found out that learners who participate in literacy-related activities with their parents develop highly in reading skills as compared to those whose parents are not actively involved (Pstlethwaite & Ross, 1992; Risinski et al., 2010). In case of illiterate parents, teachers can advise them to use siblings or peers so that learners practice reading in their homes. Therefore, there is need for teachers to support and encourage parents to get involved so that their children are able to read with comprehension.

When responding to the parent's involvement, **T3** had this to say;

T3-VI: *I stopped giving my learners books to take home because they were being misused. Some parents cannot be trusted.*

Even though negatively put, **T3** was of the view of having responsible parents who can play a role in their children's learning. Giving learners books to take home is one sign that **T3** wanted parents to help their child in reading comprehension. What lacks is corroboration between the teacher and the parents so that they have the same goals. While **T2** thinks it is the literacy level of the parents or guardians that matter, but sometimes this does not matter provided the parents show the zeal to be part of their children's school work. Amongst the five teachers in this study, only **T4** said that learners were allowed to take books home; however, not everyone in the class has a book. Therefore, only a few have a chance to read at home with the assistance of their parents. One head teacher had this to say concerning the involvement of parents/guardians in their wards' reading:

HT4-I: *Most of the parents in this area are illiterate, but they are working with WALA. Children go to reading centers after classes which are manned by volunteers from the villages whose skills are very limited, but they are willing to assist.*

In other words, what this head teacher is saying is that parents' willingness is what matters despite being illiterate. While some parents cannot be trusted, but there are some who may assist if they are made aware of their role in forums like PTA. The excerpt above indicates that if teachers and parents can work together, it is probable that reading comprehension maybe improved.

4.5.4 School Administration

The school administration has an important role to play if reading comprehension is to be enhanced. For instance, what **T1** has said in **T1-V** reveals that the school administration should come to assist in learning materials. Considering the excerpt **T1-V** on teaching methods, it is also the school administration which conducts internal supervisions which may help in assessing the methods which teachers are using in teaching reading comprehension. Frequent supervision may also help to overcome what **T5-V** has said about skipping other periods which are meant for reading comprehension. Language learning needs more practice and as such all the periods need to be utilized. In addition to these developments, the

informants suggested some of the things which the school administration should do to improve the teaching and learning of reading comprehension. **T5** had this to say;

T5-VI*: I would love to see our library working. We have a lot of extra reading materials, but we cannot access them because nobody has been assigned to manage the library.*

On the same **T4**-**III** complained about his school that it has a lot of extra books, but they cannot be accessed. In response, **HT2** said that nobody is willing to manage the library and that is why it is closed. But it is the duty of the administration to assign teachers to manage the library. Keeping extra reading materials while learners are sharing one book amongst four is not productive. However, **T4**'s experience is in contrast with another **HT4,** who has taken an initiative of managing a library with 'out-of syllabus' books. In this case, the administration is being exemplary. The other members of staff can easily emulate what the administration is doing.

T4-VI has pointed out about in-service courses. In other words, **T4** is saying that school administration should take an initiative of coming up with in-service courses for the teachers. This can be done at school level in order to share ideas on knew developments so that no teacher is left behind. It can be during these forums that experienced teachers may share knowledge with those fresh from the college. Each party may benefit which in the long run may benefit the learner.

4.5.5 Education Department

According to **T4-VI**, some of the problems were attributed to the education department. An example was given on curriculum design that practicing teachers are not involved directly. The argument was that those who are involved, lack the knowledge and experiences of what is really going on in the field. For instance, **T1** complained about the syllabus being irrelevant in assuming that learners started with kindergarten while in rural areas these kindergartens are non-existent. She said that the books are only emphasizing on 'whole language' approach which would be relevant if decoding (phonics) had already taken place in kindergarten according to her. This is in contrast to what Pressley has stated that 'whole language' is in support of kindergarten approach and not grades after kindergarten (Stahl et al, 1994; Pressley, 2006). To solve this problem, **T1** said she uses out-of-syllabus books which deal with phonics to enable learners read. On the same, **T5** pointed out that the learners' books have long stories which she felt is not appropriate for standard four. She noted that the

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comprehension passages are very long and makes it very difficult for learners to understand. While **T3** made it clear by saying;

T3-VI: *The Ministry of Education should be consulting us when changing the curriculum/syllabus. For instance, if they are working on standard four, the ministry should involve standard four teachers and not only those from urban schools, but also us in the rural schools.*

In view of this, all the informants were in agreement about the involvement of teachers in curriculum design. They said that their involvement will enable them bring to light what is really on the ground. The response of learners to different curriculums and the needs to orient teachers before the curriculum is implemented. In a nut shell, the plea of the teachers is for closer corroboration between all the sectors which are involved so that effective teaching and learning of reading comprehension is ensured.

4.5.6 Overview of Section 4.4 & 4.5

The many challenges which have been noted in these sections have greatly affected the recommendations of the literature review chapter. Firstly, the literature review has based its arguments on the research findings done either in the United Kingdom or the United States. While the instructional strategies advocated can be adopted by any education system, but the education systems in these countries are way beyond that of Malawi. For instance, education in Malawi is bound by a national curriculum which does not give freedom to teachers to determine content and even the time to deliver such content (Mittler, 2000). While having a national curriculum has its advantages, but teachers have problems to meet the needs of various learners in inclusive classrooms. Therefore, other instructional strategies which focus on individualized lessons are deemed to be less important. The national curriculum with its emphasis on national examinations tend to divert the teachers' focus from real teaching to hasty completion of the syllabus in order to prepare learners for national examinations. As such, the kind of teaching becomes exam oriented and leaves the most important part which is learning.

Large classes is another characteristic of Malawian schools. From this study, it has been observed that the average pupil/teacher ratio is about 1:90. However, the official records by UNESCO have an average of 1:68 in rural schools and 1:48 in urban schools (World Data on Education, 2010/11). Regardless of these differences, the fact is that pupil/teacher ratio in

Malawi is very high as compared to the two countries above. With that in mind, it is not surprising to find that teachers in this study are struggling to use methods which are applicable to a small number of learners in a large class. Most of the effective instructional strategies as per literature review involve teacher/learner interaction (scaffolding) which is very rare in a large class.

Furthermore, lack of resources made it very difficult for teachers in this study to deliver their lessons effectively. The literature review has repeatedly pointed out that learners need to be exposed to print-rich environment for them to develop reading comprehension skills. This is the case in UK, USA, and other developed countries, but not in public schools in Malawi. This study has revealed that at least four learners share one book. In such a situation, even the best teacher can be challenged. In such situations, teachers have to be very creative in order to maximize the use of the meagre resources at their disposal (**Appendix H).** Therefore, classroom scenarios are totally different for a learner in Malawi and that in developed countries. While a learner from developed countries is exposed to reading materials in the home and at school, most learners in Malawi seldom interact with a book at school only.

Teacher education and development is another sector which is of great importance if effective teaching has to be achieved. Teacher education in Malawi is more focused at producing more teachers to reduce the pupil/teacher ratio in the expense of quality education. Most important topics are shallowly covered due to insufficient time and lack of current and recent information materials in Teachers' Training Colleges. This may not be the situation in developed countries whereby pupil/teacher ratio is already under control. Teacher education is aimed at producing quality teachers who can ably handle the ever-changing teaching instructional strategies.

Lastly, the literature review based on UK and USA which are English speaking countries unlike Malawi in which English is a second language. Even though it has been argued that it doesn't matter which group of learners one is teaching; English learners or native speakers, the strategies are the same (Frankel, Pearson, & Nair, 2011). However, this study has revealed that the context in Malawi is totally different; therefore, there is need to come up with applicable strategies suitable for the Malawian context.

To sum it up, education in public primary schools in Malawi fall short of what is happening in the developing countries. Therefore, to base what transpired during this study on the literature

review is unrealistic because teachers are faced with so many challenges. What teachers do is trial and error because they lack the knowledge of how to do it. The overwhelming challenges also hamper their effective use of the limited skills and knowledge they may have. As such, there is a lot to be done if the recommendations in the literature review are to be achieved.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented and discussed the data which was collected through interviews and observations. Extracts from respondents and field notes have been analyzed and discussed in detail with reference to the literature review and theoretical frame work. Data presentation and discussion was based on the four themes which were derived from the data collected. Below is a brief summary of what has been discussed:

Theme 1: Teachers' conception of the term "reading comprehension".
Through this theme teachers explained their own understanding of reading comprehension during interviews. All participating teachers expressed that reading comprehension is not mere sounding out of words. They emphasized on ability to make sense of the text, ability to retell the content, and apply the knowledge from the text. However, during class observations it was noted that the main emphasis of the teachers was on answering comprehension questions. Teachers also noted that learners' success in other subjects depend on the ability to comprehend English language.

Theme 2: Teaching Strategies which Teachers use in Teaching Reading Comprehension: Class observations revealed that the teaching strategies which dominated were decoding, question and answer, group work, and mostly reading-aloud. The fact that all classrooms had very few books meant that some learners were just imitating what was being read. Individual help was seldom given due to large classes. As such, very few learners received assistance from the teachers. Teachers opted to help groups rather than individuals.

Theme 3: Challenges in Teaching and Learning of Reading Comprehension
It has been noted that there are several challenges which teachers are facing in teaching reading comprehension. All the classrooms which were observed had high pupil/teacher ratio. which made it difficult for teachers to give individual help. Inadequate teaching and learning materials was another great challenge to both teachers and learners. Four learners were sharing one book which is unpractical. The competence of teachers was another challenge which was observed in this study. Most teachers had problems with the language itself in

grammar, spellings, and pronunciation. While difficulties in pronunciation of other words can be attributed to the mother tongue influence, but persistent grammar and spelling problems can be a result of incompetence in the language. Lack of conducive environment for teaching and learning was another challenge. Three out of the five classes which were observed have their classes under trees.

Theme 4: Possible Ways to Overcome the Challenges
During interviews teachers came up with several suggestions which they thought would help solve the challenges which they are now facing. Their main emphasis was on teacher education and development. Teachers pointed out that there is need for refresher courses to update them on recent teaching instruction strategies. Others suggested that reading comprehension should be emphasized right away from standard one. They pointed out that standard four teachers are on pressure to prepare learners who come into the junior section without enough vocabulary. Teachers also asked to be supplied with all the necessary materials required for teaching in order for them to be effective.

5 Summary and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is giving a summary of findings for the topic under study. This has been done by looking at each theme; teachers' understanding of reading comprehension, (5.2); teaching strategies which teachers employ when teaching reading comprehension, (5.3); challenges in the teaching and learning of reading comprehension in Malawi, (5.4); possible ways on how to overcome challenges in teaching reading comprehension in Malawi, (5.5). This shall be followed by conclusion, (5.6); Implication for future research, (5.7); limitations of the study, 5.8; recommendations, (5.9); personal opinion, (5.10); finally, a concluding comment, (5.11).

5.2 Teachers' Understanding of Reading Comprehension

As from the findings of the study, it can be said that teachers have ideas of what reading comprehension is all about even though they lack the deep understanding of what it really entails. Despite explaining reading comprehension in different words, all the teachers expressed that reading comprehension is about understanding the text. They may not be in a position of explaining as RAND has put it that reading comprehension involves extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with text (Vaughn, & Klingner, 2004). These teachers mainly emphasized on the ability to explain and apply what has been read. However, their theoretical understanding didnot go with the practicality in the classroom. All the lessons focused on answering questions from the text. While comprehension questions tend to measure if learners have understood the passage, but the method may retard the development of comprehension skills if over-used. In instances whereby these questions are asked in advance, learners' reading tend to divert to skimming and scanning for answers. Learners may answer the questions correctly, but that may not be a measure that they are able to comprehend. Therefore, the shallow understanding of what reading comprehension entails which teachers have was portrayed in the way they teach reading comprehension.

5.3 Teaching Strategies Which Regular Teachers Use in Teaching Reading Comprehension

The findings on teaching strategies indicated that the most used methods were reading-aloud, word drilling (decoding), reading in groups, and question and answer. This was in contrast to

the many strategies which the teachers mentioned during interviews. Theoretically, these teachers know a lot of methods which are rarely used during classroom instruction. In reading-aloud, it was mostly learners reading after the teacher or after the group leaders. With the few books which characterized all the classrooms; most learners just mimicked what was being said. At the end of the day, it was the group leader who benefited more than the rest of the members. Izizinga (2000), points out that in such reading lessons, only a few learners benefit.

On the other hand, teachers managed to help learners in decoding. Most learners had problems in word pronunciation and teachers made efforts to drill such words. English language learners have problems when it comes to pronunciation of words due to the influence of their first language. Such was the case in these classrooms whereby most learners had problems in pronouncing 'r' sound. Pressley (2006), agrees by saying that decoding, word recognition, and sounding out words is most problematic in learning to read. However, the setback was that teachers themselves had a lot of trouble in differentiating 'l' from 'r' sound during reading aloud. The problem is that the slight difference as it may seem, but it greatly changes the meaning of the word. Therefore, it was good that the teachers accepted that there is this problem both in learners and in themselves.

Reading groups was also another prominent feature in these findings. Teachers used groups for reading aloud with the help of "group leaders" who were deemed as "good readers". This strategy is aimed at meeting individual learners' needs (Morrow et al., 2003). The emphasis of social-cultural theory is that a novice can learn from an expert through scaffolding. Interaction between peers is very important when it comes to learning. There are indeed some learners who may interact in a small setting rather than with the whole class. Group reading may also bring in prior knowledge from different learners into the text. However, there were a lot of flaws in how this method was used. The group strategy itself only focused on the ability of the leader and not on the members of the group. The groups were too large with some having up to twelve members. This reflected on what teachers said that they have these reading groups in order to carter for the shortage of text books versus large classes. The end result was that this strategy benefited mainly the group leaders who are already far much better in reading than their fellow learners.

Lastly, it can be said that lesson observations assisted in bringing out what really transpires in the classrooms. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2007) says that observations enable one to see

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things that might otherwise be missed out and again it enables one to learn things which participants may not feel free to share in an interview setting. This is really what took place in this study in which observations preceded interviews. During interviews, teachers cited a variety of teaching methods which they use in teaching reading comprehension while in reality very few methods are put into practice. If this study could have used interviews only, the results could have been different. Observations which were done before the teachers were interviewed; revealed otherwise. Conducting interviews after observations was planned deliberately to avoid alerting the teachers on the aspects which would be of interest during observations. As such, the findings in the teaching methods were based more on observations in contrast to what teachers said during interviews.

5.4 Challenges in Teaching and Learning of Reading Comprehension in Malawi

The findings on this theme indicated that the challenges which teachers are facing in teaching of reading comprehension are inadequate resources, large classes, first language interference, and teachers' competence. In all the classes, the number of learners surpassed the number of text books greatly. On average, the ratio was; one book per four learners which is a not practical. Learners tend to improve their vocabulary when they are able to interact with written and spoken languages (Salus & Flood, 2003, Morrow et al., 2003). However, in the case of the findings from this study; learners do not have that chance of interacting with written language due to inadequate of text books. Teachers have no choice, but maximize the use of the few books they have by putting learners into groups.

Apart from the text books, the findings also revealed that most teachers did not have teaching and learning materials which could aid them in explaining or illustrating meanings of words. Morrow et al. (2003), makes it clear that learners whose primary language is not English, need additional help of physical objects to internalize English vocabulary. These objects do not always require to be purchased, some can be made from locally available resources. What was evident was that student-teachers managed to have these materials as compared to the practicing teachers. The simple explanation could be that teachers are dedicated and committed during teaching practice and tend to lax when they are certified to teach. It can also be a result of lack of knowledge and innovative skills. Teachers need to stay current by taking courses and going to conferences or workshops (Morrow et al., 2003). However, this is not

the case with teachers in Malawi. The only time they are oriented is when a new curriculum has been developed. It takes teachers who understand what reading comprehension is all about and have the zeal to put into practice the effective reading comprehension instructions in order to adapt the learning environment, materials, and methods to particular situations and learners (Pearson, 1996; Morrow et al., 2003). As from this understanding some challenges from the findings stem from the lack of dedication and commitment on the part of teachers. For instance, large classes could just be divided into two because all the classes observed had two teachers. While some teachers said that they cannot divide due to lack of classroom blocks, but most of them it was because it eased their work. One could argue that with one hundred and eighty learners, the class is already having classes under a tree, so what would be the difference if the same class is divided between the two teachers to ensure that at least it is manageable? But again, it will mean dividing the few resources which may not suffice the number of classes.

5.5 Possible Ways on How to Overcome Challenges in Teaching Reading Comprehension in Malawi

The findings have revealed that if teaching of reading comprehension is to improve then all those involved should work hand in hand. A mention was made about the teachers, learners, parents, administration, and the education department. It was evident from the teachers' views that effective teaching goes with effective teacher education. That is; those teachers coming from college should have all the theories and instructional strategies that go with teaching a language. However, this should be put into practice because it is of no use to have knowledge and not use it. If teachers are effective, it cannot be a problem to motivate learners. Human beings are born with an intrinsic motivation to learn and improve performance (Pressley, 2006). As such, the task of a teacher is to motivate learners so that they exert more effort because success is attributed to trying hard (Pressley, 2006). With teachers doing their part effectively, they can work hand in hand with parents to ensure that reading comprehension is being enhanced. It has also been noted that frequent supervision on the part of the school administration may help in improving efficiency and effectiveness of teachers. Through proper channels of communication; teachers, schools administration, and the education department can work together to ensure that there are in-service courses, adequate teaching and learning materials, and that there is evaluation of the relevancy of the curriculum.

5.6 Conclusion

With regard to the findings, it can be said that reading comprehension entails more than just the ability to answer questions from the text. Reading comprehension has to involve; extracting and constructing of information through interaction and involvement (RAND, 2002; Vaughn, & Klingner, 2004). Teachers in the study seemed to understand that memorization and vocalization is more to the surface. Their theoretical understanding is not far from what RAND has described. That is, the ability to get what is contained in the text, ability to construct new ideas from the text, make connections with the writer, and be part of the whole process. This is what RAND is emphasizing. If reading is to answer questions; then it can be reduced to skimming and scanning by other learners. It is true that skimming and scanning is a product of good reading (Pressley, 2006), but where the only thing left is to search for answers and clues, then something very important is missing. Therefore, in addition to what these teachers already know as pertaining to reading comprehension, there should be a focus on the four concepts which RAND is emphasizing.

As from the above discussion, knowing the definition of reading comprehension may mean nothing if the same old practices prevail in class. The teaching strategies which teachers in the study used were not geared at enhancing reading comprehension in learners because they mainly focused on word recognition. This is in contrast to what Pressley (2006) is saying that, reading comprehension requires much than just the ability to decode words. Teachers in the study emphasized on reading aloud which does not really bring out the comprehension skills. This may be a result of unpreparedness, or because of the challenges they face, or may be the teachers are just ill-equipped to teach reading comprehension. While some of the challenges may not be overcome by teachers alone, but if teachers are well conversant with what they are supposed to do and do it with commitment and dedication, there can be some improvement in reading comprehension.

5.7 Implication for Future Research

The major conclusion of this research is that teachers are challenged to effectively teach reading comprehension. As such, there is need to enquire on how teachers are being trained in Malawi and the relevancy of the teacher education curriculum. The teacher education curriculum should be looked side by side with the primary school curriculum and English teaching syllabus in particular. Another area of interest should be that of education policies.

The many challenges which teachers are facing in the teaching of reading comprehension may stem from the education policies. Follow-up of such policies is very crucial to come up with necessary procedures on how to overcome the challenges. Having said that, most important, English is a second language to learners in Malawi's schools; hence, it needs thorough research on how teaching should be done with regards to the Malawian context.

5.8 Limitations of the Study

This study was aimed at learning how regular teachers are teaching reading comprehension in an inclusive classroom. The focus was on standard four classes which is a bridge from Chichewa to all English classes. A number of limitations were encountered during the whole process. The interest was on regular teachers, who have been practicing for a number of years. Unfortunately, standard four is given to ODL student-teachers who are undergoing a crush program. They are given classes to teach just after spending two weeks in college. Having two student-teachers in my study may have affected the results.

In addition, the class observations were done only once. This may not be enough to make conclusions because teaching and learning is affected by different factors. Maybe persistent observations could have yielded different results.

My position as a teacher trainer and supervisor also had an impact in this study. Even though the participants couldn't recognize me personally, but the letter of introduction from the District Education Officer had everything concerning my position. That could be the reason why some practicing teachers declined to participate. This could also mean that the student-teachers felt obliged to accept in order to please me. Either way, this may have impacted my study.

Again, it is very rare to have researchers in primary schools in Malawi and this may have brought tensions amongst teachers. As such, those observed may not have acted naturally. Even during interviews, they may have hidden information because they may not be sure if they were doing the right thing or may have given out information to please me.

Lastly, there is inadequacy of literature as pertaining to reading comprehension in Malawi. There are very few books and articles which have focused on reading, but again it is very difficult to access them. This made it difficult for me to review what has already been done in this area.

5.9 Recommendations

Several recommendations emerged as teachers suggested different ways on how to overcome challenges in teaching of reading comprehension. It was found that all stakeholders have a role to play in order to ensure that there is effective teaching and learning of reading comprehension. This section shall echo the suggestions made by teachers.

First, it is The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) through the Education department which has a great role to play. Going through the policies on primary education, one tends to wonder why there are so many challenges in the primary sector when the policies have tackled each and every area of need. Just to mention a few:

- *The MoES & C shall ensure that each school has an adequate supply of instructional and teaching/learning materials. The pupil/text book ratio shall improve from an average of 24 pupils per text book to 2 pupils per textbook by 2002.*
- *Efforts shall be made to reduce the current pupil/qualified teacher ratio to 60:1 across all primary standards by 2012*

(Reference Tool Kit for Child Friendly Schools, 2010, p.30)

In addition to the above, there are other policies which just require the MoEST to do follow-ups. Teachers who are implementers when it comes to quality education should not be left aside. The MoEST should then make follow ups to assess the applicability of the policies. If everyone, from top to bottom will be result oriented, then quality education will be ensured.

Likewise, the Development of Teacher Education Department (DTED) has to come up with comprehensive modules and hand books in English language and reading comprehension in particular. Currently, the modules and hand books are sketchy forgetting that these maybe the only materials which teachers may use as references during their practice. These modules should also be revised periodically to add in recent information. Teachers should be made aware of such information during workshops and/or seminars so that they stay up to date with current information.

Furthermore, frequent supervision by Primary Education Advisors (PEA) should be enhanced in order to ensure that teaching and learning is taking place. Therefore, the District Education Managers' office should work hand in hand with the school administration in order to maintain the high standards of teaching. This can be done by implementing shifts in schools

whereby pupil/teacher ratio is very high or there are inadequate classroom blocks. The school administration should also work at bringing parents and guardians at the core of their wards' education. This should be done through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) so that together they assist the child to develop reading skills at home. Lastly, teachers should be dedicated in their work by practising collaborative teaching and organize internal seminars to update one another on current approaches.

5.10 Personal Opinion

There are a lot of things I have learned from this study. For instance, interviews were done in the local language because teachers felt comfortable in it than in English. This was a great message to me. I observed them teaching reading comprehension, but they would rather be interviewed in Chichewa. While from standard five up to tertiary level English is the medium for communication. I feel something needs to be done. Maybe if the language is introduced earlier. If the policy on pre-school materializes, then it could be better to introduce English early. Some may argue saying, why not using the first language of the child for classroom instruction? While this has its advantages, but it can be problematic due to the various dialects which are in Malawi. Most learners learn the commonly used "Chichewa" at school. In 1996, the government made an announcement on the use of mother-tongue languages in standard one up to four (Chilora, 2000). However, the fact that teachers are posted to teach where there is need, meant that they would be posted in an area with a totally different dialect from theirs. The other problem was that the learner's books were still in Chichewa, teachers' guides in English while the medium of instruction was supposed to be in the local language of that particular area. The end result was total confusion because it meant some subjects were in multilingual (Chilora, 2000). Therefore, with the current scenario, it can be better if English is introduced earlier to learners if we want learners to be good in the language.

Lastly, given a chance to go back to do this research once more, there are a number of things I would do differently. For instance, I would rather observe an infant class and see how English is introduced to a child and compare with the teaching of the same in junior classes. This is because standard four teachers were putting much of the blame on infant teachers. I would also have more observations and not just once in order to have rich data. Interviews and observations would not be conducted on the same day as was the case in this study. Teachers were over-stretched because having an observer in class gives stress to some people. Lastly,

going into another district and be introduced as a mere student doing research would also assist in avoiding frightening the participants off with my position.

5.11 Concluding Comment

Teaching of reading comprehension poses a big challenge when faced with so many obstacles. Being equipped with the effective instructional strategies alone is not enough when there are no text books to read, classes are so big, and no classrooms to learn. While efforts can be made to improve teacher education, but these other challenges will still negatively affect the teaching of reading comprehension. However, today's society requires people who are able to read with understanding or else it will be so difficult to go with the pace of the ever developing world. Therefore, it is not only a need, but a requirement that the teaching of reading comprehension should be at the core of the priorities if illiteracy rate is to be reduced in Malawi.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Observation Guide

1. Comments on the

    - classroom arrangement

    - class enrolment

    - presence of teaching/learning materials

2. How does the teacher introduce the lesson?

3. How does the teacher make use of learners' prior knowledge?

4. Is the teacher portraying knowledge of the subject matter?

5. What are the teaching methods which the teacher is using in teaching reading comprehension?

6. How does the teacher assist learners with reading difficulties/disabilities during the lesson?

7. How are learners collaborating during the lesson?

8. What challenges are both teachers and learners facing during reading comprehension?

9. How are the challenges overcome?

10. Are the materials for reading adequate?

11. What other initiatives did the teacher do to supplement the reading materials?

12. How does the teacher conclude the lesson?

13. Comments on the use of resources

Appendix B: Interview Guide

1. How do you understand the term "reading comprehension"?
2. Why is it important to teach reading comprehension to standard four learners?
3. What strategies of instruction do you use when teaching reading comprehension?
   - Do you have any particular reasons why you use such methods?
4. How do you prepare yourself before teaching reading comprehension?
5. What can you say about reading comprehension competence of your class now?
   - Why is it like that?
6. What is your prediction on reading comprehension in your class by the end of this school session?
7. What are the challenges that you meet in teaching reading comprehension?
   - you as a teacher
   - about learners
   - teaching and learning process
8. What do you think should be done in order to overcome those challenges?

Appendix C: Education System in Malawi

Location, Size and Population

Malawi is located to the southern part of Africa and it lies in the Great Rift Valley. Malawi is land locked and shares its boarders with Tanzania to the north, Zambia to the west, and Mozambique to the south and east. Lake Malawi covers most of the eastern part. The total area is estimated to be 45,745 square miles (111,480 square kilometers).

According to Malawi Population Data Sheet, 2012, the population of Malawi is estimated at 16,777,547. The number of pupils enrolled in primary school was 3,600,771 against 46,331 teachers in 2008 according to World Data in Education (2010/11). With the population growth rate of 3.35%, the number of pupils may have increased drastically, now being 2014. The literacy rate amongst the youth is 74.8% while total adult literacy rate is estimated at 61.3% according to UNICEF. Pupil/teacher ratio estimated average is 1:48 in the urban areas and 1:68 in the rural schools. UNICEF estimates of 2012 also show that only 26% of the boys and 16% of the girls are able to complete primary school.

Malawi has nine main ethnic groups which have different dialects. Once Chichewa was a national language, but with the introduction of multi-party democracy in 1994, the other languages started to have national significance through radios and television programs. However, Chichewa is still the language which is taught in all public schools. From standard one up to standard four, learners are taught in Chichewa except for English, while from standard five up to tertiary level, Chichewa is taught as a subject. English is the official language in Malawi; hence, from standard five up to tertiary level all subjects are in English except for other language subjects.

Education in Malawi

Formal education was introduced by the early missionaries before Malawi became a British protectorate in 1891. Mission schools emphasized on the 3Rs; Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. This kind of education was so basic because it aimed mainly on enabling people to read the scriptures. Since independence in 1964, there have been constitutional changes and reviews taking place affecting the educational system. However, it was the second education plan, which covered the period between 1985 and 1995 which focused on the primary sector with an aim of reducing illiteracy levels (Kadzamira and Rose, 2001). With the introduction

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of multi-party democracy in 1994, the constitution was reviewed again and many new developments appeared in the primary sector. FPE was introduced which saw the rise of enrolment of pupils from 1.9 million to 3.9 million (Chilora, 2000)

The introduction of FPE faced a lot of challenges. For instance; the number of schools and school blocks were very few and schools were far apart, teaching and learning materials were inadequate, and there was acute shortage of teachers (Chilora, 2000). In order to increase the number of teachers, untrained teachers were deployed in most primary schools in 1994. However, they were later trained through the Malawi Integrated In-Service Teacher Education Project (MIITEP). Since the introduction of FPE there has been a problem of high pupil/teacher ratio (Kadzamira & Rose, 2001). Different teacher training modes have been devised in order to train more teachers at a short period of time. At present, there is Open and Distant Learning (ODL) and Initial Primary Teacher Education (IPTE) training modes which are being done side by side for the sole reason of reducing pupil/teacher ratio.

The National Education Sector Plan (NESP) for 2008-2017, has been set to address some of the thematic areas in the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) in order to achieve Education for All and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Reference Tool Kit for Child-Friendly Schools, 2010). In addition to this, is the ratification of the "Salamanca Statement" by the Malawi government in 2007 (Pretoria University Law Press, 2013). In order to meet the requirements of these frameworks, the education sector has been faced with a lot of challenges. The number of schools and school blocks are still inadequate. More learners are learning either in temporary shades or under trees. The teaching and learning materials especially text books do not correspond with the number of learners. Furthermore, with the introduction of inclusive education, special needs learners have to adapt to their new environment because both the school environment and the teachers have not been prepared enough.

While introduction of FPE is clearly positive, it is yet to be compulsory. This gives freedom of choice to both parents and children on whether to opt for school or not. With this in place, it will be an up-hill task for Malawi if 'Education for All' is to be achieved. Despite this loop hole, the education sector is focusing more on basic education in order to reduce illiteracy rate. Several stakeholders have joined in to revive the reading culture while emphasizing on reading comprehension. There has been "Read Malawi" and now it is Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA) which through Response to Intervention International (RTI) is assisting the

Malawi government to improve and sustain reading performance in learners in standard 1 to 3. EGRA involves school-based activities, community and parent activities, and policy development to improve long-term literacy rates (Malawi National Early Grade Reading Assessment Survey, 2013).

As from the discussion above, it can be noted that as of recent, reading comprehension has been a center of interest. That is why this study is focusing on standard four teachers who are teaching reading comprehension. The different challenges which have been cited in this section have contributed greatly to the decline of competence in English language which is regarded as an official language. With an introduction of inclusive education, teaching instructional strategies which regular teachers are using are very essential to enable that all learners are reading with understanding. There may be other writers and researchers who have done a similar work, but it is very difficult to access literature of such kind in Malawi. Therefore, this study is based on the literature and research work done in other countries especially the USA and the UK. Being a former British colony, the education system in Malawi has adopted some of its practices from the UK. In addition, it would be good to base on English speakers and then develop what would be appropriate for English learners in Malawi. However, it may also be argued that these reading comprehension instructional strategies may as well be appropriate for any language. Therefore, if that is the case, then there are not bound to English speakers only.

Appendix D: Letter of Permission from NSD

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES

NSD

Harald Hårfagres gate 29
N-5007 Bergen
Norway
Tel: +47-55 58 21 17
Fax: +47-55 58 96 50
nsd@nsd.uib.no
www.nsd.uib.no
Org.nr. 985 321 884

Jorunn Buli-Holmberg
Institutt for spesialpedagogikk
Universitetet i Oslo
Postboks 1140 Blindern
0318 OSLO

Vår dato: 27.06.2013   Vår ref:34762 / 3 / AMS   Deres dato: Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 17.06.2013. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

34762	*Teaching Methods for Reading and Writing used by Regular Teachers in an Inclusive Classroom (Malawian Setting)*
Behandlingsansvarlig	Universitetet i Oslo, ved institusjonens øverste leder
Daglig ansvarlig	Jorunn Buli-Holmberg
Student	Chrissie Maggie Chisamba

Etter gjennomgang av opplysninger gitt i meldeskjemaet og øvrig dokumentasjon, finner vi at prosjektet ikke medfører meldeplikt eller konsesjonsplikt etter personopplysningslovens §§ 31 og 33.

Dersom prosjektopplegget endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for vår vurdering, skal prosjektet meldes på nytt. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html.

Vedlagt følger vår begrunnelse for hvorfor prosjektet ikke er meldepliktig.

Vennlig hilsen

Vigdis Namtvedt Kvalheim   Anne-Mette Somby

Kontaktperson: Anne-Mette Somby tlf: 55 58 24 10
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering
Kopi: Chrissie Maggie Chisamba, Rolf E Stenersens, Alle 25, 0858 OSLO

Avdelingskontorer / District Offices
OSLO: NSD. Universitetet i Oslo, Postboks 1055 Blindern, 0316 Oslo. Tel: +47-22 85 52 11. nsd@uio.no
TRONDHEIM: NSD. Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 7491 Trondheim. Tel: +47-73 59 19 07. kyrre.svarva@svt.ntnu.no
TROMSØ: NSD. SVF, Universitetet i Tromsø, 9037 Tromsø. Tel: +47-77 64 43 36. nsdmaa@sv.uit.no

Appendix E: Letter of Permission from Department of SNE

UiO : **Faculty of Educational Sciences**
University of Oslo

CHISAMBA, Chrissie Maggie
Machinga Teachers' Training College
Box 140
LIWONDE, EASTERN REGION
Malawi

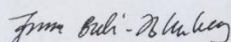Date: 11 November 2013
Your ref.:
Our ref.:   int./2013 JBH/db

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This is to certify that **CHISAMBA, Chrissie Maggie,** date of birth 21.11.1971, is a full-time student pursuing a course of study at the Department of Special Needs Education at the University of Oslo, Norway, leading to the degree of Master of Philosophy in Special Needs Education (M. Phil. SNE).

This is a continuous two-year programme run on the "sandwich" principle, which involves periods of study and field work/research in both Norway and the home country. The student has successfully completed both the first and second semester of the initial study period in Norway and is now working on the collection of data and the writing of a thesis during the autumn semester 2013. This involves a period of field work in Malawi. The student will return to Norway at the beginning of January 2014 and the period of study will be completed at the end of May 2014 in Norway.

The main responsibility for supervising the research, developmental work and thesis remains with the Department of Special Needs Education, University of Oslo, Norway. However, we would kindly request that the relevant authorities give the student the access required to the schools and educational establishments necessary in order to undertake field work and research. We would also be most grateful for any assistance that is afforded to the student which enables her to carry out this work, particularly the use of facilities such as access to telephone, fax, e-mail, computer services and libraries at the various educational establishments.

Yours sincerely

Associate Professor Jorun Buli-Holmberg

Academic Head of International Master's Programme

Department of Special Needs Education

Officer in charge:
Denese Brittain (+ 47) 22 85 80 75, _d.a.brittain@isp.uio.no_

The Department of Special Needs Education (DSNE)
Postal addr.: PO Box 1140 Blindern, 0318 Oslo
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Telefax: (+47) 22 85 80 21
postmottak@uv.uio.no
www.uv.uio.no/isp/
Org. no.: 971 035 854

Appendix F: Letter of Permission from Machinga DEM

REF.No.1/1/1

Machinga District Education Office,

P.O. Box 24,

Machinga

25th. October, 2013.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: CHRISSIE MAGGIE CHISAMBA

The above named person is a member of staff at Machinga Teacher Training College and currently pursuing a Master in Special Needs Education at University of Oslo. She has been given an opportunity to carry out a research in Machinga District in the following schools: Michongwe, Bisa, Machinga, Liwonde and Likwenu.

The aim of her study is to find out the teaching methods which regular classroom teachers use to meet the diverse needs of the learners in an inclusive school setting. It is our hope the results of this study will assist to improve the quality of education in our country.

Your assistance in this exercise will be greatly appreciated.

E.N.M.Chumachao

DISTRICT EDUCATION MANAGER

Appendix G: Consent Form

I am Chrissie Maggie Chisamba, a student at University of Oslo-Norway, undergoing MPhil in Special Needs Education. I am currently in Malawi to do a research as part of my studies. I am interested in learning more about the teaching methods which regular teachers use in teaching reading comprehension in inclusive classrooms.

The data that will be collected will only be used for the purpose of this study. Be assured that there is going to be total confidentiality and that your name and that of your school will be concealed during the whole process. Video and audio recorders will be used in observations and interviews respectively. However, this will be deleted as soon as the project has been completed. I will assign codes to your responses and observations, and I will be the only one who will have a key.

The information from this study will help us to understand how regular teachers teach reading comprehension in inclusive classrooms. The findings will help in promoting positive practices and improving on the shortfalls.

Therefore, I invite you to participate in this study because you possess the data that I am looking for. However, you may choose not to participate or even withdraw voluntarily at any time without giving reasons.

Participant:
I choose voluntarily to participate in this research project.

_____

Print name of participant

_____   _____

Signature of participant   date

_____

Print name of investigator

_____   _____

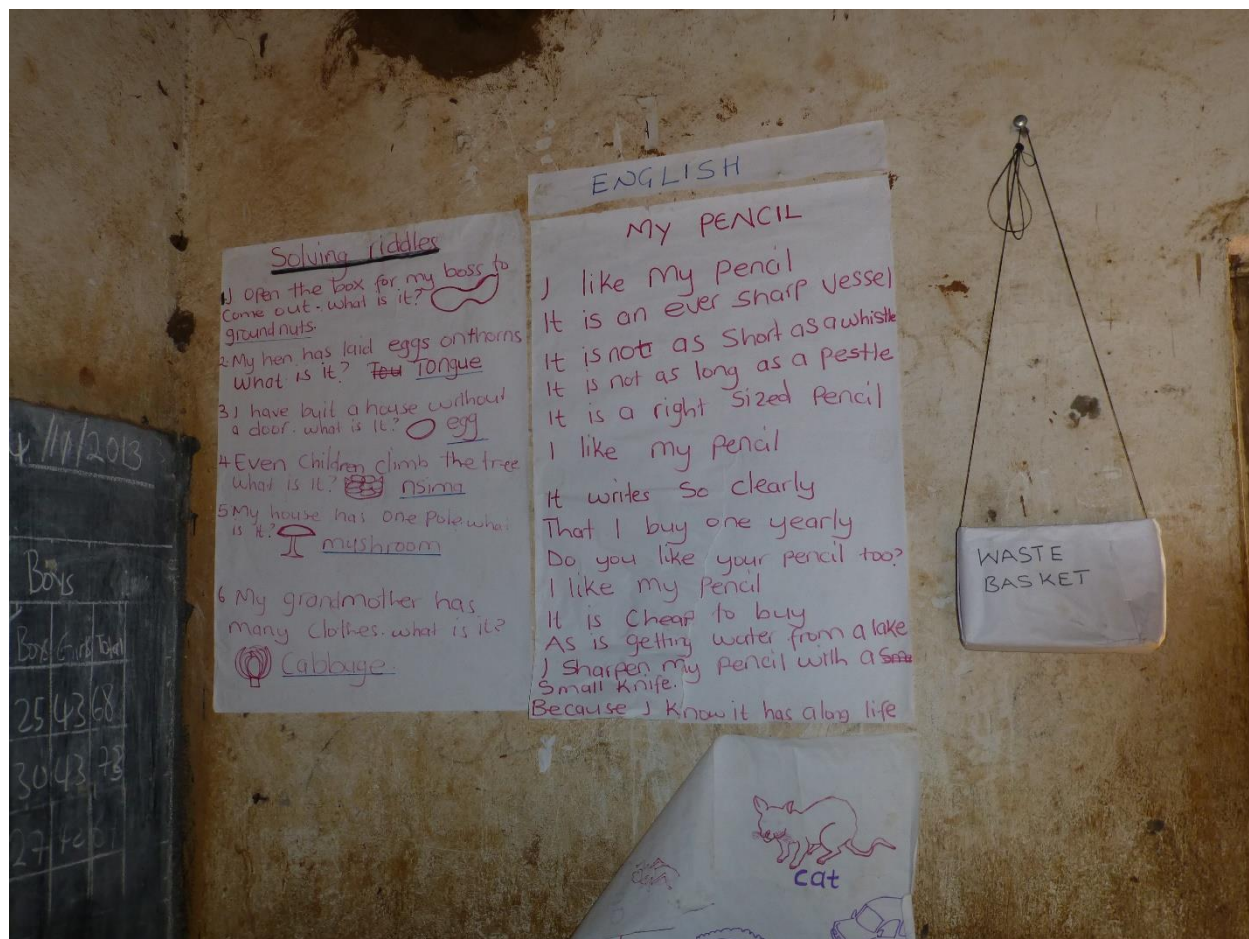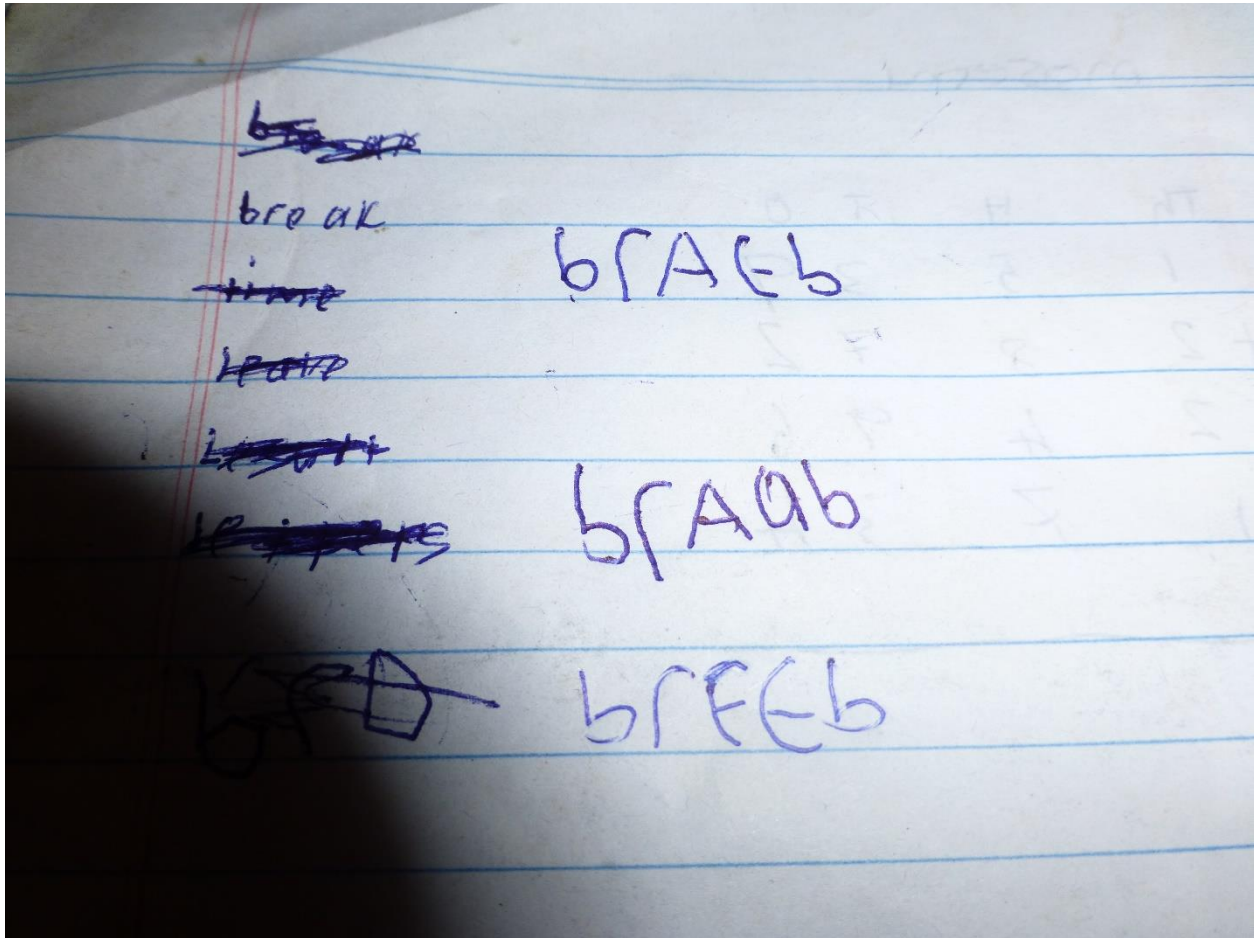Signature of investigator   date
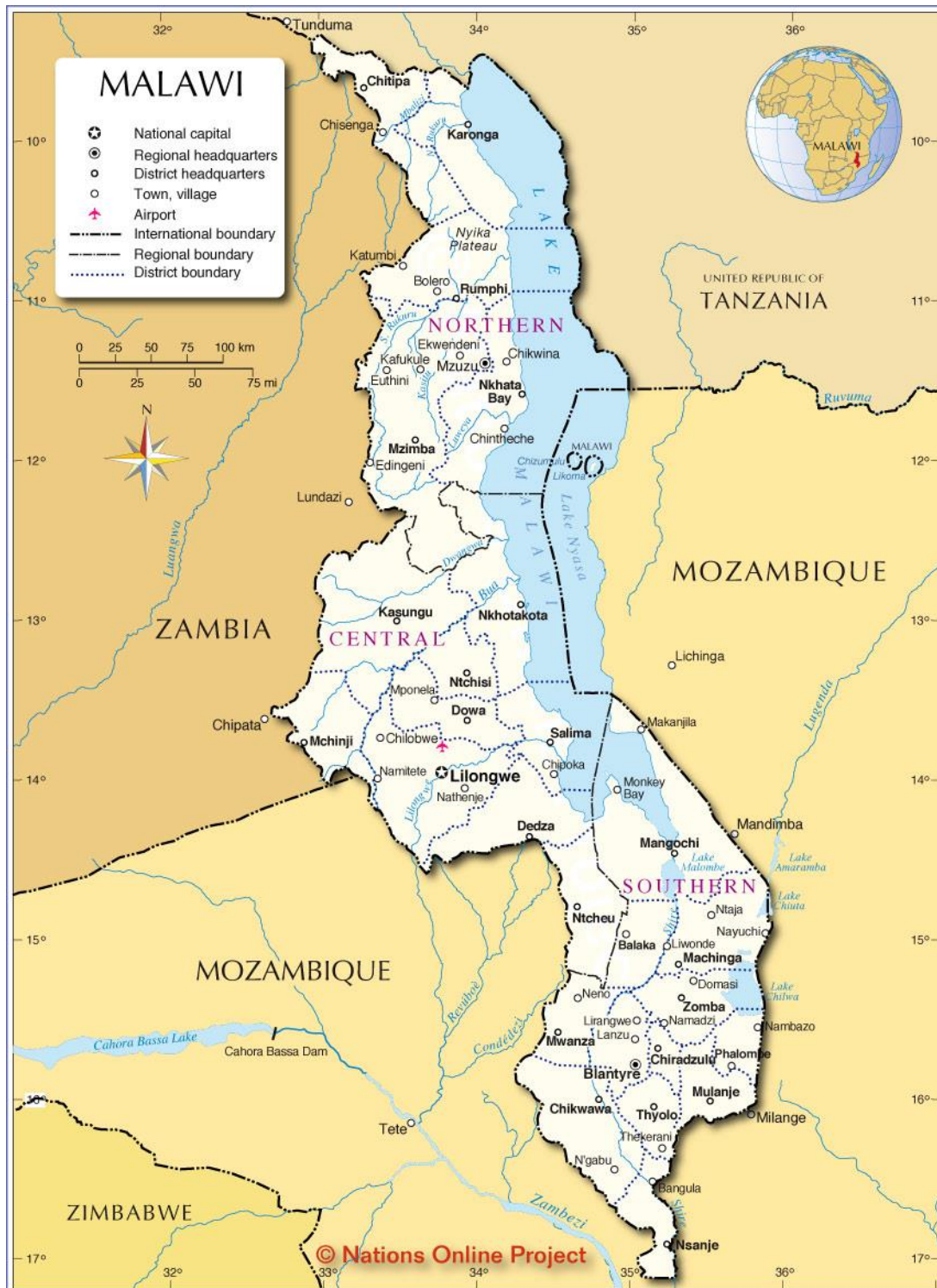
Appendix H: Teaching and learning materials

Appendix I: Group work

Appendix J: Map of Malawi

Source: www.google.no/search?q=map+of+Malawi