Teaching Children with Reading and Writing Difficulties in Regular Schools

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Abstract

This study investigates teaching children with reading and writing difficulties in regular schools. For this reason, this study is focused on the following research objectives: Firstly, to explore teaching methods used by teachers when teaching reading and writing. Secondly, it is designed to explore if and how teachers in regular schools identify children with reading and writing difficulties. Lastly, it is designed to explore if and how teachers support children with reading and writing difficulties.

In this research study, a qualitative research approach was used in the attempt to answer the research questions. In addition, semi-structured interviews were used as a method of collecting data to investigate teaching children with reading and writing difficulties in regular schools. Further, thematic analysis was used to organise and analyse the data in this study

This study experienced challenges with teachers’ failure to see the differences between reading and writing difficulties and specific learning disabilities such as dyslexia and dysgraphia. The study also experienced challenges with transportation costs. As a result, it only targeted primary school teachers from one educational district out of twenty nine districts in Malawi.

In conclusion, teachers in regular schools are not creative to use adapted teaching methods and introduce interventions for reading and writing. Instead, they use general teaching methods and general teaching support when teaching children with reading and writing difficulties. For this reason, teachers in regular schools may not effectively teach and support children with reading and writing difficulties to succeed in reading and writing.
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List of abbreviations

IEP  Individualised Education Plan
MOEST  Ministry of Education Science and Technology
PTA  Parents/Teachers Association
SEGREM  Strengthening Early Grade Reading in Malawi
UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
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Chapter One: Introduction

This study investigates teaching children with reading and writing difficulties in regular schools. For this reason, this study is focused on the following research objectives:

- Exploring teaching methods used by teachers when teaching reading and writing.
- Exploring if and how teachers in regular schools identify children with reading and writing difficulties.
- Exploring if and how teachers support children with reading and writing difficulties in regular schools.

A qualitative study approach with semi-structured interviews has been used in this study in the attempt to achieve the above research objectives. Additionally, at the end of this dissertation some recommendations are presented for how teachers can support children with reading and writing difficulties.

In this chapter the following are presented: background of the study, personal teaching experience, research objectives and research problem, and an outline of this dissertation.

1.1 Background of the study

Studies show that teaching methods that are responsive to reading and writing skills have the potential to meet the individual needs of children with reading and writing difficulties. Further, it is suggested that use of adapted teaching methods for the needs of the child allows children with reading and writing difficulties to experience academic achievements in reading and writing (Snowling, 2006). In this case, it implies that teachers need to adjust their teaching methods so that children with reading and writing difficulties can successfully learn to read and write. Teachers need to make considerable adjustments in terms of delivery, content and class organization. These are the adjustments which I am also curious to find out if teachers in regular schools are making them.

Teaching children with reading and writing difficulties appears to be a challenge in developing countries. In a Malawian context, an average enrolment per class in regular schools often exceeds eighty learners per class (Moest, 2009). Based on this, it is imperative that class sizes are very large and very difficult to meet the individual needs of all learners. For this reason, I am also curious to find out how teachers are teaching reading and writing in
such classes. Further, I am curious to find out how relevant teaching supports are given to children with reading and writing difficulties in such classes.

There is no evidence or documented information to suggest teachers’ understanding of their roles when teaching reading and writing, particularly in Malawi (UNESCO, 2008), and many children in regular schools are struggling with reading and writing (Peter, 2004). For these reasons, I want to find out the teaching methods and teaching support used by teachers when teaching reading and writing. Further, I want investigate teachers’ understanding of what they are expected or required to do when teaching children with reading and writing difficulties.

It is the role of a teacher to ensure that individual learning needs of children with reading and writing difficulties are met. It is also the duty of teachers in regular schools to ensure that children are not excluded from learning, are not neglected and not forgotten (Stakes, 2000). For this reason, I am also motivated to find out if teachers understand what they are expected or required to do when teaching reading and writing. This study does not intend to give generalized findings, but base its findings and conclusion on collected data during the research study.

1.2 Personal Teaching experience

As a practising teacher, my teaching experience in regular schools was challenged with how to teach children with reading and writing difficulties. It was also challenged with how to support these children. Though I had training on how to teach children in primary schools, the training was not good enough to teach children with reading and writing difficulties. For this reason, it is obvious to suggest that I had limited knowledge on how to teach and support these children. It is also obvious to suggest that learning needs for these children were never met as most of them continued to struggle with reading and writing.

My teaching experience appears to match with arguments in the literature. It is argued that children with special educational needs in regular schools are often neglected, forgotten and excluded from learning by teachers who do not know how to teach and support these children (Stakes, 2000). With the back ground of my teaching experience, I was curious to find out teaching methods used by fellow teachers when teaching reading and writing. Further, I was
curious to find out if and how fellow teachers are supporting children with reading and writing difficulties in regular schools, in Malawi.

1.3 Brief information about primary schools in Malawi

Primary schools in Malawi are under the administration of district education offices and in Malawi, there are thirty one (31) district education offices (Malawi SDNP, 2010). Each educational district is divided into educational zones. Each educational zone has about ten (10) to nineteen (19) primary schools to control. A few educational zones are located in urban areas while the majority of them are located in rural areas where distances from one school to another are usually longer (Moest, 2009). For instance, most primary schools are between three to five kilometers away from each other.

This study was conducted in an educational zone located in a rural area where primary schools are also far from each other. The easiest and cheapest way to move from one school to another in a rural area like this was either to walk on foot or hire a bicycle taxi. For this reason, none of the schools outside the educational zone where I am living was considered for participation in this research study.

There are two languages of instruction used in all public primary schools in Malawi. In the lower classes of the primary schools (grades one up to four), all subjects, except English as a subject, are taught through a national language called Chichewa. In the upper primary classes (grades five up to eight), all subjects, except one subject (Chichewa as a subject) are taught in English.

Malawi has several local languages but there are only two languages of instruction (English and Chichewa) which are used in schools. Some children in the country are coming from areas or families where they speak a language different from the languages used in schools. These children usually find it hard to learn reading and writing through a language which is different from their mother language.
1.4 Research objectives and research problem

The study was designed to achieve the following research objectives. Firstly, it was designed to explore the teaching methods used by teachers in regular schools when teaching reading and writing. The study was also designed to explore if and how teachers identity children with reading and writing difficulties in regular schools. Further, the study was designed to explore if and how these teachers support and assist children with reading and writing difficulties. In trying to achieve the above research objectives, the study had to collect data based on the following research questions.

- How do teachers teach reading and writing in regular schools?
- Do and if so how do teachers identify children with reading and writing difficulties?
- Do and if so how do teachers support children with reading and writing difficulties in regular schools?

1.5 Outline of the dissertation

This dissertation is presented in five chapters and these are:

- Chapter one presents background of the study, personal teaching experiences, research objectives and research problems for this study.
- Chapter two is about theoretical frameworks for this study.
- Chapter three discusses the methodology used for this study, limitations of the study, validity and reliability and Ethical issues.
- Chapter four presents analysis of research findings, and a discussion of research findings
- Chapter five is about conclusion of this research study.
Chapter Two: Theoretical framework

Presented in this chapter are three main areas that are relevant to this study. The first is about teaching methods for reading and writing. This is followed by a presentation of children with reading and writing difficulties. In this area, the discussion includes recognising children with reading and writing difficulties in schools. It also includes causes of reading and writing difficulties. Further, it includes ways of identifying these children in schools. Third area in this chapter is about teaching support and assistance teachers can give to children with reading and writing difficulties. This area also includes teaching interventions for reading and writing difficulties. A discussion for this chapter is as follows.

2.1 Teaching methods and strategies for reading and writing

Reading can be described as a process whereby a reader identify connections from a text and establish meaning. Reading is also as a process whereby a person is able to recognise and understand written words while writing is a process whereby individuals use characters or letters and symbols to express opinions and ideas (Westwood, 2011). Children with reading and writing difficulties struggle with these two processes.

Children, who read effectively, can understand, remember and summarise content of a text. In addition, these children can discuss and analyse the content to show understanding of what they have read. Further, they have the ability to write (Saskatchewan, 2004). On the contrary, children with reading and writing difficulties fail to read effectively; hence fail to demonstrate all this. For this reason, it requires teachers who understand major elements of the teaching methods for reading and writing to teach these children. Major elements include strategies for teaching reading comprehension and reading fluency. This also includes strategies for teaching word meanings such as phonological awareness, phonics, sentence structures and text structures (Saskatchewan, 2004). For instance, through phonological awareness, teachers may teach children word meanings by connecting sounds to letters and letters to sounds and connecting single sounds and letters. At this point, they may integrate these elements in their
teaching methods when teaching reading and writing. Eventually, teachers may assist children with reading and writing difficulties learn to read and write successfully.

In support to the above argument, it is also argued that children with reading and writing difficulties have the prospects to succeed in reading and writing (Saskatchewan, 2004). Further, it is argued that the success to learn relies on the child’s readiness and on teaching methods that meet individual learning needs and strengths of a child (Westwood, 2008). This suggests that reading and writing difficulties at times will not have permanent learning barriers. They can be avoided; hence children have the likelihood to succeed in reading and writing.

Therefore, reading and writing difficulties can be avoided by teaching reading and writing using appropriate teaching methods, appropriate teaching support and teaching interventions. According to literature, it is argued that appropriate teaching methods for reading and writing involve strategies and delivery skills that promote decoding and comprehension skills among children (Westwood, 2008). Examples of these teaching methods and teaching strategies may include the following: phonological awareness, morphological awareness, reading comprehension, teaching spellings and a consideration of the local language spoken by the children.

2.1.1 Phonological awareness

Studies show that prevalence of reading and writing difficulties in some children is due to phonological deficit (Stanovich, 1986). It is also argued that phonological awareness develops through practice which will help to develop awareness (Wood, 2009). Based on this, it can be suggested that engaging children in phonological awareness can help them to succeed in learning to read and write successfully. A discussion of this (Phonological awareness) is as follows.

Phonological awareness can be described as a teaching approach that enables children to understand that words, whether written or spoken, are composed of single letter sounds. In addition, it is a teaching approach which assists children to learn that words can be split into segments called syllables. Further, it is an approach which helps children to understand that each syllable starts with a sound and end with a different sound. For example, children may
understand that the syllable *mo* from the word mother starts with the sound /m/ and end with the sound /o/. Based on this, it can be suggested that children with a strong phonological awareness are much better than their peers with no knowledge of it. For instance, it can be suggested that children with strong phonological awareness can manage to recognize letter sounds in words and split written words into syllables. In addition, they can manage to combine phonemes to produce syllables and words. Further, they can manage to recognize the sound at beginning of a syllable and at the end of it (Reid, 2009).

In support to the above argument, teaching of phonological awareness is a way of meeting the individual learning needs for these children. Children with reading and writing difficulties are typically poor in phonological tasks if compared with their peers (Philippini, 2012). Further these children experience challenges in understanding letter-sound relationships; a key component for reading and writing in as far as an alphabetic language is concerned. To some extent, they are also less fluent, less able and less skilled in phonological competencies than their peers (Wood, 2009). Teaching phonological awareness is therefore an approach to meeting the individual learning needs of children struggling with these kinds of difficulties and promoting these children a step ahead towards learning to read and write.

Just like phonological awareness, phonemic awareness also helps children to understand how sound is used to read words. However, these two methods are different from each other. Phonemic awareness can be described as the capability to identify and understand the individual sounds in words. Phonological awareness involves teaching of different functions of sound in words. For instance, it involves splitting of words into syllables, and then splitting of syllables into sounds (Reid, 2009).

Studies show that competency in phoneme awareness indicates a long-term success in reading and writing among children. In addition, competency in phoneme awareness predicts the success of literacy skills in children more precisely than other factors such as the amount of vocabulary acquired by the child, social-economic background and intelligence (Gillon, 2004). Further, studies show that children with poor phonemic awareness also experience challenges with reading and writing. Additionally, children with deficits in phonemic awareness may not understand that written words or letters are made of sounds that have been put together (Westwood, 2011). For these reasons, it can be suggested that teaching of phonemic awareness has the potential for the success of children learning to read and write.
Teaching of phonemic awareness involves the teaching of a phoneme. A phoneme can be described as a tiny part of a sound in a word. A collection of these tiny parts form words and each part has a meaning. Therefore, teaching of phonemic awareness can help children to understand that both spoken and written words are composed of tiny parts (individual) of sound. For example, children can understand that the word boy is made from a combination of three letters (phonemes) which are /b/ /o/ and /y/. They can understand that each of these phonemes has a sound that can affect the meaning of the word boy if removed from the combination of the three letters (Wilson, 2007). For example removing /o/ from the middle of the three letter and put /u/, they can produce another word different from the word boy.

2.1.2 Morphological awareness

Morphological awareness is another possible approach for teaching reading and writing. For instance, teaching to improve morphological awareness may assist learners to learn morphemes. Morphemes can be described as smallest and meaningful grammatical elements of a language (Reid, 2009).

Teaching of morphemes may help children in a classroom to realize that every morpheme in a word has a meaning (Filippini, 2012). For instance, the word irresponsible can completely change its meaning by eliminating the morpheme ir-. Further, they may help children to understand that alterations of a morpheme in a word may result in changing meaning of that particular word.

2.1.3 Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension means the art of understanding a written text. For teachers to teach reading comprehension effectively, they need to understand how to use comprehension strategies in their teaching methods. Comprehension strategies are a core strategy when teaching reading and writing (Pressley, 2000).

Examples of comprehension strategies include the following; ability to understand a text, summarise a text, ability to formulate questions and ability to make predictions from a text and the ability clarify some points from a text. It also includes children’s ability to relate what they have read with their personal experiences. (Collins, 2001). Teaching of these
comprehension strategies requires teachers to clearly describe them to students. It also requires teachers to explain to students how and when they can use such strategies. Further, teachers need to demonstrate and practice with students how to use them (Saskatchewan, 2004).

2.1.4 Teaching Spelling

A child who struggles with reading also struggles with writing (Saskatchewan, 2004). For this reason, teachers need to teach children with reading and writing difficulties spellings (Moats, 1998). This can be done by teaching phonological skills. This can also be done by teaching orthographic skills (spelling patterns) (Lennox, 1998). Children depend on phonology and spelling patterns to learn how to write a word (Leong, 1998).

2.1.5 Other teaching techniques for reading and writing

Other possible teaching techniques for reading and writing may include teaching of letter sounds and syllables. For instance, teachers may teach children to identify and understand the connections between spellings and letter sounds in a word. In addition, they may teach syllable segmentation. Further, they may teach children to retell a story and write summaries out of it (Reid, 2007).

2.1.6 Consideration for the principle of individual difference

Constructive and transactional theories demand teachers to consider the individual learning needs of every child during the process of teaching and learning (Reid, 2007). For this reason, teachers need to understand that every child in their classrooms is different from each other: hence, they learn differently. For instance, teachers need to understand that some children learn better through active participation, others learn better through visuals while others learn better through activities (Reid, 2007). Teachers need to teach reading and writing while considering children’s needs, interest, weaknesses and strengths (Snowling, 2006).
2.2 Children with reading and writing difficulties

This section includes recognising children with reading and writing difficulties. It also includes possible causes of reading and writing difficulties, and identification of these children in classes.

2.2.1 Reading and writing difficulties

Reading and writing difficulties, dyslexia and dysgraphia may appear to be similar when we look at how they affect reading and writing in individuals. For instance, children with reading and writing difficulties may fail to succeed in recognising words, decoding words, comprehension and spellings (Saskatchewan, 2004). On the other hand, dyslexia may interfere with reading and language processing skills in children. Notably, dyslexia may interfere with decoding, reading fluency and reading comprehension (Reid, 2009).

Similarly, dysgraphia may interfere with the ability of a person to write. It may also affect fine motor skills of a person. Additionally, challenges for individuals with dysgraphia may include poor spellings, poor handwriting and inconsistency with spacing (Saskatchewan, 2004). Based on this, it may appear that reading and writing difficulties are the same as dyslexia and dysgraphia. The truth is that reading and writing difficulties are not same as dyslexia or dysgraphia. Some children may have reading and writing difficulties but may not have dyslexia, dysgraphia (Snowling, 2006).

Therefore teachers need to understand that reading and writing difficulties are not the same as dyslexia and dysgraphia. Reading and writing difficulties are learning difficulties with no attachment to any disability. These are learning difficulties which can be corrected through suitable teaching methods and suitable teaching support (Saskatchewan, 2004). On the other hand, dyslexia and dysgraphia are both specific learning disabilities (Reid, 2009). For instance, dyslexia is a specific learning disability in reading while dysgraphia is a specific learning disability in writing. Children with dyslexia and dysgraphia experience neurological challenges while children with reading and writing difficulties do not. As disabilities, both dyslexia and dysgraphia will never be cured (Saskatchewan, 2004).
2.2.2 Recognising children with reading and writing difficulties

Children with reading and writing difficulties have poor reading and writing skills. For instance, they fail to realise that words are made of letter sounds and syllables (Reid, 2009). They also fail to read and write at the expected grade level. Usually, they perform below average in spellings and reading. Some children, especially children who have not attained the maturity level to be enrolled in schools may read words in reverse. For instance, they may read the word bad as dad (Integra, 2009).

Some children fail to recognize letters of alphabet and letter sounds. In addition, these children struggle with reading activities such as reading aloud and word pronunciation (Reid, 2003). However, these children can successfully learn to read and write when teachers adequately and suitably teach and support them (Integra, 2009).

During writing, these children experience difficulties with forming words and letters. They also experience challenges with expressive writing; hence, struggle to put their ideas and opinions on paper. In some cases, they experience difficulties with spelling consistency. Additionally, they experience challenges with copying letters and words correctly. Further, they experience challenges with consistency and neatness of writing (Reid, 2003). Above all, these children perform poorly in reading and writing tasks when compared with children of their age group (Wilson, 2007). However, these challenges can also be reduced when teachers teach these children using suitable teaching methods and suitable teaching support. In this case, suitable teaching methods and teaching support are those that are responsive to individual learning needs for these children (Integra, 2009).

2.2.3 Causes of reading and writing difficulties

Some students in schools fail to read and to write. These children are often described as children with reading and writing difficulties. For some children, this challenge may be caused by learning disabilities while for others the challenges are influenced by other factors. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to understand that there are several possible factors that are responsible for children’s failure to read and write. For this reason, different causes of reading and writing difficulties are described in this section.
Possible causes of reading and writing difficulties include ineffective teaching methods, language experiences, and poor language stimulation before school. They also include children’s readiness and maturity, lack of exposure to books and reading materials and lack of motivation and children’s family background. An understanding of these causes by teachers might be the initial step in assisting the children to progress in reading and writing (Westwood, 2008).

**a. Ineffective teaching methods**

Teachers need to teach children clearly how to use letter sounds in order to understand and pronounce correctly words which they are not familiar with (Westwood, 2008). It is also argued that use of ineffective teaching methods by teachers leads to children’s failure to read and write in schools (Wilson, 2007). Based on this, it is imperative to suggest that teachers may contribute to children’s struggle with reading and writing. This may happen when teachers teach reading and writing using inappropriate and unsuitable teaching methods. It can also be suggested that it is pointless to label some children as children with reading and writing difficulties. Instead, the blame needs to be shifted to teachers for using teaching methods that are not relevant for the needs of these children.

**b. Language experiences**

Another factor leading to reading and writing difficulties in schools include language experiences which children experience in their families before entering school. Particularly, its language experiences they encounter during their early childhood development stage (Saskatchewan, 2004). For instance, children in Malawi learn some subjects in English and yet they are coming from homes where they speak a different language. As a result, these children fail to understand the language used by teachers as a medium of communication during lessons and written ideas in books.

**c. Poor language stimulation before school**

In some children, language development fails to be stimulated effectively: hence they end up with vocabulary deficiencies. As a result, these children are enrolled in schools while they have vocabulary deficiency. Additionally, they may be enrolled in schools with too little pre-requisite knowledge suitable for understanding a language (Saskatchewan, 2004).

**d. Children’s readiness and maturity**

Children’s readiness involves the maturity of a child in terms of social development, emotional development and intellectual development of children (Saskatchewan, 2004). Readiness of children in these areas can be influenced by external factors. Therefore, teachers
can hasten children’s readiness to read and write by giving them pre-reading and writing experiences such as playing with sand, water and free writing. This can also be done by motivating and attracting the attention of children when teaching reading and writing. Further, they can hasten it by using teaching methods that matches with concentration span of children with reading and writing difficulties (Wilson, 2007). For this reason, teachers’ failure to influence children’s readiness for learning to read and write may be blamed to be the contributing factor for reading and writing difficulties.

When we say children’s maturity, we mean the maturity level at which children are believed to be ready for learning to read and write. This level is biologically controlled and therefore cannot be harried by external factors (Wilson, 2007). For this reason, teachers need to understand that children who have not attained the maturity level cannot learn the skills needed for reading and writing. This is also why some children in first grades of primary schools fail to read and write. However, providing pre-reading and writing activities to these children can suggest the preparatory stage for these children to learn reading and writing.

e. Lack of exposure to books and reading materials

Children’s exposure to books and other reading materials in their homes is one of the major indicators for the success of an individual to read and write (Myers, 2008). For this reason, it can be suggested that effective exposure to books, and other reading materials during early childhood development of children (Pre-school period), promotes literacy and language awareness for the children. Additionally, it prepares them learning to read and write when they start school.

f. Lack of motivation

Many children in schools fail to read and write successfully. According to studies, frequent failures demoralise and frustrate these children in schools. This also contributes to loss of interest and the motivation to learn reading and writing (Westwood, 2011). In addition, this leads to loss of self-esteem among the children (Wilson, 2007). To avoid this, children need to be reinforced, motivated or given positive feedback in the process of doing a task or when it is done. Children’s achievement in class work which is followed by reinforcement has the likelihood to be repeated (Woollard, 2010). Based on this, teachers’ failure to motivate or give reinforcement to children may suggest a contribution for causes of reading and writing difficulties. In short, giving positive reinforcement to children may contribute to mastery of a skill; in this case, reading and writing skills.
g. Children’s family background

Some children from families with a lower socio-economic status have difficulties with reading and writing (Westwood, 2008). Studies show that opportunities for these children to learn are reduced through a number of factors. The factors include regular absenteeism from school and they do not see any hope to succeed in life. For this reason, it appears that learning to read and write for some children is a challenge which they are not ready to deal with. This is also why the attainment gap in literacy is very wide when we compare children from lower social-economic families and those from higher-economic families (Wilson, 2007).

2.2.4 Identifying children with reading and writing difficulties

Teachers have the mandate to identify children with reading and writing difficulties. It is argued that teachers need to take extra care during the identification process and avoid confusing reading and writing difficulties with learning disabilities such as dyslexia and dysgraphia. For instance, nearly half of the children with reading and writing difficulties experience the challenges that are also experienced by children with learning disabilities (Bishop, 2004). Studies show that children with reading and writing difficulties and those with other learning disabilities appear to experience similar challenges and information from neurobiological and genetic research findings suggests that reading and writing difficulties and learning difficulties are different from each other (Snowling, 2006). Therefore, teachers need to conduct an identification process to decide whether children have reading and writing difficulties or not.

Teachers may conduct the identification process by using case history and observation checklist (McMaster, 2008). Further, they may randomly collect speech and language samples of children to suggest whether the children have reading and writing difficulties or not (Reid, 2009). In addition, they may assess language skills of children by using standardised tests. Teachers may also use standardised tests to assess children’s competence in grammar and word knowledge (McMaster, 2008).
2.3 Teaching support for children with reading and writing difficulties

It is argued that the success of children’s ability to read and write is dependent on appropriate teaching methods and appropriate teaching support (Westwood, 2008). Further, it is argued that teachers need to modify teaching skills, teaching styles, teaching resources and the environment in order to meet the individual learning needs of all learners (Saskatchewan Education, 2003). Based on this, it can be suggested the success of children to learn to read and write is dependent on the ability of teachers to use suitable teaching methods and teaching resources.

This section presents possible examples of suitable and modified teaching approaches and the support which teachers may use when teaching reading and writing.

2.3.1 Adapting (Modifying) teaching strategies or approaches

Teachers in regular schools may use the following teaching approaches when teaching reading and writing. For instance, teachers may give children who struggle with writing plenty of time to copy work from the chalkboard (Integra, 2009). Those who struggle with reading may be supported by writing key words on the chalkboard clearly and splitting of long words into syllables with a pencil line (Reid, 2007). Teachers may also give these children oral activities than written tasks. In addition, teachers need to allow children with reading and writing difficulties to work with text books open. In this way, they are helped to stay focused on the assigned reading and writing activity. Further, teachers need to give these children front seats in the classrooms. In this way, they are close to the teacher; hence they are quickly assisted than seating in the back of the classroom (Reid, 2007).

Teachers may also support children with reading and writing difficulties in the following ways. For example, they may introduce news words in a lesson by writing the words in sentences (Wilson, 2007). This can be followed by a discussion of meanings of the words with the children. Later, they can teach these children pronunciations on the words. Children need to be taught pronunciations considering that if they can’t pronounce particular words, then they can’t use them in their conversation or in writing (Westwood, 2008). In this case, children should be allowed to practice the pronunciation of words after the teacher. Repeating the activity for a minimum of three times may ensure that children with reading and writing
difficulties have been involved in the activity (Wilson, 2007). In addition, choral pronunciation practice may save these children from embarrassment as this may send the message to the whole class that all of them are learning together and in the same way (Tantillo, 2013).

During planning of classwork, teachers also need to make consideration with regard to adjustments of tasks (Saskatchewan, 2004). For instance, they may make the adjustments in the following ways. In the event that children are given written work, the teacher may complement the work with pictures, words with colours or symbols and go over it several times it to enhance their understanding (Integra, 2009). Teachers may also present the task into small parts and motivate them to read by connecting the task with children’s real life-experiences (Westwood, 2011).

Other support for these children may include the following. During reading of text, teachers need to allow these children to read in unison or take turns with a fast learner. During writing of any class work, teachers need to give these children extra time to write (Integra, 2009). This should be done considering that they struggle with written tasks. Teachers also need to allow these children to complete their tasks in phases while supporting them with proofreading and revision work (Saskatchewan, 2004). Further, teachers need to support these children by giving them homework activities that ensures promotion of reading and writing skills (Westwood, 2011). Additionally, these children need to be supported through tutoring. Through tutoring, these children may be provided with personalised and relevant teaching support (Birnbaum, 2010).

It is also important for teachers to consider other factors that may contribute to advancement of reading and writing abilities in children. The factors may include language experiences of the children in their homes and availability of reading materials in their homes. Studies show that children acquire vocabulary from their parents and reading materials found in their homes (Westwood, 2011). Further, it is argued that children who are exposed to more words are likely to comprehend more sentences, more questions, more explanations and more complex texts: (Tantillo, 2013). Therefore, teachers’ understanding of this background knowledge may help them to understand the skills children are able to do and the skills which they need to learn. For instance, teachers may use children’s background knowledge to facilitate successful teaching of reading and writing skills.
2.3.2 Adjusting testing procedures

During tests, teachers need adjust testing procedures for the sake of children who struggles with reading and writing (Reid, 2007). For example, they may give students oral instructions instead of written instructions. Teachers may also test these children orally. Through oral examinations, these children are assured that the difficulties they encounter during reading and writing do not prevent them from giving the information they intend to give (Reid, 2007).

Further, teachers may adjust the test format. For instance, they may give these children true/false questions or multiple choice questions. Teachers can do this as an alternative to questions that require writing sentences. Teachers may also test these children through regular short quizzes than using examinations (Westwood, 2011).

2.3.3 Supporting children through teaching and learning resources

Learners struggle with learning to read and write in lower primary school classes (Saskatchewan, 2004). Using teaching and learning resources can support these children to succeed in learning to read and write (Cowley, 2012). Teaching and learning resources motivate learners to learn: hence encourage learners to improve their reading and writing skills. For instance teaching resources provide learners with a diversity of multisensory components that may attract a lot of senses in children: hence attract their attention during learning to read and write (Cowley, 2012).

Use of teaching resources when teaching reading and writing may also help learners to connect learning with reality and truth in real life situation (Cowley, 2012). In this way, learners may find it easier to learn new skills and concepts such as new vocabulary and spellings. To achieve this, teachers may use resources such as pictures, models and real objects when teaching reading and writing.

2.3.4 Supporting children with classroom displays

Children are naturally attracted by items and objects in their immediate environment (Cowley, 2012). Teachers may use classroom displays to attract the attention of learners: hence support these children how to read and write successfully. Displaying written work/resources in a classroom may suggest bringing the outside environment closer to the children with reading and writing difficulties.
It is also argued that a display of relevant print materials in a classroom provides a platform on which children can learn to improve their ability to read and write (Cowley, 2012). For instance, a display of written work by children can be a motivation for learners in that particular class. In support of this, teachers may display letters of the alphabet, phonemes which the class had worked on. Teachers may also display word banks, for instance, they may display a set of new vocabulary on the walls of the classroom (Cowley, 2012).

2.4 Interventions for reading and writing

According to literature, it is argued that interventions have the potential to increase reading and writing skills in children (Tankersley, 2003). It is also argued that interventions are significant aspects of effective teaching methods for children who struggle with reading and writing (Brooks, 2002). Based on these, it implies that that failing to provide interventions for these children suggests a failure in helping them to succeed in reading and writing. However this may also suggests a demand for teachers to understand and identify suitable teaching methods for reading and writing that perfectly matches with interventions.

This section presents examples of interventions for reading and writing. The examples include paired reading and success for all. They also include reading recovery, reading rescue and reading fluency (Westwood, 2011). A detailed explanation of these interventions is as follows.

2.4.1 Paired reading

This is a teaching method whereby a teacher support the child by reading aloud a text together with that particular child. Later, the teacher gradually leave the child to read aloud the text alone. At this moment the teacher gives the child words of encouragement. They also praise and support the child wherever it is needed (Brooks, 2007).

2.4.2 Success for all

This is an intervention that targets all children in a class. It involves one-to-one assistance. The intervention particularly targets children who may be considered to be socially underprivileged and are at-risk. Teachers provide assistance to these children so that they may
improve their ability to learn reading and writing (Westwood, 2011). Notable tasks in this intervention include reading tasks and phonic instructions from which children are taught letter sounds and comprehension skills.

### 2.4.3 Reading recovery

Under this intervention, children with reading and writing difficulties are intensively given extra lessons basing on their learning ability and level of the difficulties. The intervention is introduced to these children after spending a year in school. During this period, children receive individual support and write tasks such as letter identification, sentence construction and reconstruction, dictation, spellings and guided reading (Westwood, 2011).

### 2.4.4 Reading rescue

The intervention equips teachers with knowledge and skills that are appropriate for individual support for children with reading and writing difficulties in grades one and two. This intervention provides children with comprehension and reading skills (Westwood, 2011).

### 2.4.5 Reading Fluency

Reading fluency can be described as the capability to read a text quickly, correctly and with proper expression (Shaywitz, 2003). It is argued that fluent readers find it easy to read a text. Fluent readers do not need to decode or sound out each word during reading. Instead, automaticity enables them to pay attention to comprehension. For this reason, teachers in regular schools also need teach reading fluency during reading and writing in order to support children with reading and writing difficulties.

It is also argued that fluent readers have good skills for word recognition and a good vocabulary (Shaywitz, 2003). Therefore teaching reading fluency in regular schools may help children with reading and writing difficulties to increase their skills for word recognition: hence develop their proficiency in reading, and develop their ability to find connections between their previous knowledge and a text. Teachers can teach fluent reading through shared reading, repeated reading, guided reading and echo reading. They can also teach through visualisation, self-identifying errors and oral reading (Shaywitz, 2003).
2.5 Summary of Theoretical framework

Presented in this section is a summary of key areas in chapter two. These key areas are teaching strategies for reading and writing, recognising children with reading and writing difficulties, and teaching support for children with reading and writing difficulties. Key areas also include intervention for reading and writing. Later, this section will explain how key areas in chapter two will be used to interpret data in chapter four.

2.5.1 Teaching strategies for reading and writing

One of the key areas evident in chapter two is a bout teaching strategies for reading and writing. Teaching strategies highlighted in this area include phonological awareness, morphological awareness, reading comprehension, and teaching spellings. This area also highlighted the consideration of the local language spoken by the children.

2.5.2 Recognising children with reading and writing difficulties

Also evident in chapter two is a presentation of reading and writing difficulties. In this presentation, highlighted areas include recognising children with reading and writing difficulties. For instance, these children have poor reading and writing skills. Notably, they fail to realise that words are made of letter sounds and syllables (Reid, 2009). They also fail to read and write at the expected grade level. Usually, they perform below average in spellings and reading. Some children, especially children who have not attained the maturity level to be enrolled in schools may read words in reverse.

A presentation on reading and writing difficulties also highlighted the causes of reading and writing difficulties. Causes of reading and writing difficulties in the presentation include ineffective teaching methods, language experiences, children’s readiness and maturity. They also include lack of exposure to books and reading materials and lack of motivation and children´s family background.

Further, a presentation of reading and writing difficulties highlighted ways of identifying children with reading and writing difficulties. For instance, the presentation highlighted the use of case history and observation checklist to identify these children. It also suggested random collection of speech and language samples of children to suggest whether the children
have reading and writing difficulties or not. In addition, it suggested use of standardised tests to assess children’s competence in grammar and word knowledge.

2.5.3 Teaching support for children with reading and writing difficulties

Teaching support is another key area which is evident in chapter two. In this section, highlighted areas include: Adapting (Modifying) teaching strategies or approaches for reading and writing, and the adjustments of testing procedures during tests. The support is also highlighted through the use of teaching and learning resources and classroom displays.

2.5.4 Intervention for reading and writing

The support for children with reading and writing difficulties is also highlighted through interventions for reading and writing. Highlighted interventions include paired reading and success for all, reading recovery and reading rescue (Westwood, 2011).

2.5.5 Theoretical background for data analyses and discussion

It is argued that the literature review in a qualitative study can be used to compare and contrast research findings in a research study (Creswell, 2012). Based on this, this section explains how key areas in chapter two will be used to interpret data in chapter four. Theoretical framework in this chapter (chapter two) will be used to determine answers from organised data in chapter four answering the research questions for this study. For instance, theoretical background in this chapter will be used as documented evidence to show that research findings are valid (Williman, 2011). Theoretical background in this chapter will also be used as a basis for comparing with the research findings and later make descriptions, discussions, evaluations and conclusions answering the research questions for this research study (Creswell, 2012).
Chapter Three: Methodology

The study involves investigating teaching children with reading and writing difficulties in regular schools. For this reason, research objectives for this study are focused on teaching methods for reading and writing, identification process, and teaching support for these children. In the attempt to accomplish these objectives, I chose to use the qualitative research approach. According to studies, qualitative research approach is good at exploring experiences (Dawson, 2002). In this study, the method for collecting data was semi-structured interviews investigating teaching children with reading and writing difficulties.

3.1 Data collection

For this study to provide answers to the research questions and achieve its objectives, I had to collect data from respondents in schools (work places for respondents), and data collection started with identifying schools and then individuals to participate in the study. It also involved obtaining consent from the identified schools and the selected individuals before their participation in this research study. Eventually, it involved meeting and interviewing the participants in their work places (schools). By meeting and interviewing participants in their work places (schools) it suggests that this study based its evidence on primary data in finding information leading to answering the research questions for this study. According literature, primary data can be described as data which has been observed, recorded or experienced within the locality of the truth or event (Williaman).

3.1.1 Sampling

During the process of sampling, the person doing the research has to decide whether to study individuals from one or many institutions. Once a decision is a made on what or who to study, it requires another decision on how many participants to include in the study. It also requires a decision on what procedure to use in selecting participants from a group of identified individuals (Creswell, 2012). Researchers may use different sampling techniques; for instance, they may use random sampling or convenience sampling techniques to determine which individuals to participate in the study (Cohen, 2007). The decision to choose a particular sampling technique is mostly dependent on several factors. Some of them may
include the amount of accuracy to be achieved in the study, accessibility of participants and relevancy of the targeted group (Creswell, 2012).

In this study, sampling started with the process of selecting six schools and then the identification of informants through head teachers. I chose to start with the identification of schools and later, selection of teachers because of the following reasons. It was easier to find a school than finding names of language teachers in the district. Secondly, for ethical reasons, it was better to find a school first, and then meet head-teachers of those schools before meeting with the teachers (Creswell, 2012).

All the six selected primary schools were selected from one district out the twenty eight districts in Malawi. From the selected educational district, six schools were selected from one educational zone out of the nineteen educational zones in the district. The selected zone has eighteen schools. The six selected schools were selected from this zone because of the following reasons. Targeting and selecting teachers from schools outside this zone would have required paying for transport costs and it is costly. The educational zone I selected is the zone where I am also living. Therefore, it was for these reasons that all the six schools were selected from one district and from the same zone. In principle, this can be described as selection of convenience (Convenience sampling).

According to literature, convenience sampling is described as a sampling technique whereby selection of informants for the research study is done by considering convenient availability of informants and their nearness to the researcher. In other words, it involves finding informants wherever the researcher can get them and usually where they are conveniently available (Cohen, 2007). It was for this reason why in this study all six primary schools were chosen from one district and asked head teachers to identify a teacher for participation in this study. However, the actual process of selecting the six schools (The schools from which informants for this study were identified) in this zone was done through random sampling.

a. Random Sampling

In this study, random sampling technique was used to select six schools from the same zone. This was done based on the following reasons. It is argued that random sampling technique ensures that every individual in the targeted population has the probability to participate in the study (Kothari, 2004). It is also argued that exclusion or inclusion of a member from the sample is only by chance (Creswell, 2012).
Random sampling was actually done in the following way. In the first place, it was done by compiling a list of schools (names of schools) from the chosen district. Names of the schools which appeared on my list were given identification numbers for identification purposes. Later, the identification numbers were written on small pieces of paper and eventually, these papers were randomly displayed on a table. Thereafter, six pieces of paper were randomly picked from the displayed papers on the table. The six papers which were randomly picked from the table suggested a selection of six schools. In short, selection of the six schools was done in a form of a rotary.

b. Selection of informants (participants) for the study
After the selection of six schools, I visited each of the identified schools. The purpose of these visits was to obtain consent from the head teachers to access their schools (more details of this are under ethical issues below). During the visits, head teachers were asked to identify one teacher from their schools to participate in this study. At this point, head teachers were guided to identify these teachers by basing on the following guidelines. They were guided to consider teachers who were teaching language subjects such as English and a local language in Malawi called Chichewa. They were also guided to consider teachers who were teaching lower classes in primary schools. In a Malawian context, these are grades 1 up to 4. Further, they were guided to identify teachers without considering gender. Consideration for gender was not needed in this study because its effects are outside the objectives of this research study. Eventually, a sample of six (6) primary school teachers was drawn: one from each of the selected six primary schools in the district. Out of the six teachers, one was used for pilot purposes.

3.1.2 Interviews
In this study, data was collected from participants through interview method. The method involved asking of verbal questions and getting a reply from informants in form of verbal responses. With this method, it required the interviewer to ask questions the informants in a face-to-face interaction. According to Cohen (2002), this method of interview is called personal interview method. Interviewers can interview participants by using any of the following three types of interviews. These are structured interviews, unstructured interviews and semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2012). These types of interviews are different from each other.
• Structured interviews refer to close-ended and standardized questions which the interviewer asks the informants by referring to the interview schedule.

• Unstructured or open interview is more a free interview with focus on a topic but no interview guide. The researcher may for example say: please tell me what you think about teaching methods for reading and writing and just gives the informants freedom to talk. Once in a while the interviewer may redirect the informant.

• Semi-structured interviews are the ones with a flexible format and open-ended questions (Kothari, 2004). In semi-structured interviews, questions that are asked are based on the interview guide; with possibilities for support questions as well as possibilities to change the order of questions if needed (Creswell, 2012).

Informants in this study were interviewed by using semi-structured interviews. Use of this method for data collection allows a two-way communication between the respondent and the interviewer. Further, it allows respondents to express themselves freely; hence allow new ideas to emerge from such respondents. Above all, the method allows the interviewer to create a fairly free atmosphere where information can be given or received freely (Creswell, 2012).

Other advantages of using semi-structured interviews include the following. They give informants the freedom to ask the interviewer some questions. They also allow the interviewer to ask supplementary questions or sometimes leave out some questions and this depends on the situation (Creswell, 2012). The choice to use this data collection tool was therefore based on the descriptions and advantages given above.

Use of open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews has the potential to lead the conversation off track from the research objectives. Further, it has the potential of leading to lengthy conversation and difficulties in writing down information given by respondents (McNamara, 2009). For this reason, some measures were used to address this concern. The measures include preparation of the interview guide for this research study. Additionally, the study used a voice recorder to record the interviews. Recording was done as a way of securing the exactness of information given by informants. Recorded interviews were later transcribed for data analysis.

Based on interview guide, this study had a list of specific questions (Sub-questions) to ensure collection of data that may lead to information answering the research questions for this
research study. For this reason, specific question on the interview guide were focused on research questions. For instance, some questions were used to investigate teaching methods used by teachers when teaching children with reading and writing difficulties. Other questions were used to investigate how teachers identify children with reading and writing difficulties in regular schools. Additionally, other questions were meant to investigate how teachers in regular schools support children with reading and writing difficulties. More details on this are presented below.

**Research question one: How do teachers teach reading and writing in regular schools?**

Sub-questions used to investigate how teachers in this research study teach reading and writing were as follows:

1. What teaching methods/skills do you use when teaching reading and writing?
2. How do you use the teaching methods given above to teach reading and writing?
3. How do you use teaching methods/skills for reading and writing to meet the individual needs for children with reading and writing difficulties?
4. Do you use phonetic awareness when teaching children with reading and writing difficulties?
5. If your answer is yes, how do you use it?

**Research question two: Do and if so how do teachers identify children with reading and writing difficulties?**

Sub-questions used to investigate whether teachers identify and if so, how they identify children with reading and writing difficulties were as follows:

1. Do you have some children in your classroom with reading and writing difficulties?
2. What are the ages of the children who are experiencing reading and writing difficulties?
3. What do you do to decide if a child has reading and writing difficulties or not in your classroom?
4. What do you think are the causes of reading and writing difficulties for some of the children in your classroom?
5. Do you have any information about availability of reading materials in the homes from where children with reading and writing difficulties are coming from?
6. If your answer is yes, how did you gather this information?
Research question three: Do and if so how do teachers support children with reading and writing difficulties in regular schools?

Sub-questions used to investigate whether teachers support and if so, how they support children with reading and writing difficulties in regular schools were as follows:

1. What do you do to support all children in your classroom during reading and writing?

2. How are children with reading and writing difficulties practically supported in the lessons e.g. individually, in small groups, or withdraw? What do you do to support all children in your classroom?

3. How do you encourage children with reading and writing difficulties to improve their academic performance?

4. As a language teacher, what strategies or means have you put in place to overcome challenges experienced by some children during reading and writing?

5. What kind of teaching and learning resources do you use when teaching a class in which some children have reading and writing difficulties?

6. What additional support do teachers need in order to assist children with reading writing difficulties in their classroom?

7. How do you support children with reading and writing difficulties during tests?

3.1.3 Pilot interview

Studies show that pilot interviews help interviewer to determine if there are mistakes, weaknesses and challenges within the design of the interviews and make necessary changes before implementing the research activity (Kvale, 2007). Based on this, a pilot interview was also done in this study. The interview involved one of the six teachers who were identified by head teachers from sampled schools. As a trial interview, it allowed me to conduct a self-evaluation of myself as an interviewer. For instance, it allowed me to assess myself how I was talking with informants and whether my language was understandable. It also allowed me to assess how I behaved to create friendly atmosphere. Further, this helped me to refine some questions.

Some of the refined questions include the following. What kind of reading and writing methods do you use when teaching children with reading writing difficulties in your classroom? This question was refined to be; “What teaching methods/teaching skills do you use when teaching reading and writing”? This question had a follow up question and this was;
how do you use the teaching methods given above to teach reading and writing? The weakness with the above question was that, it only allowed participants to identify the teaching methods they use and not explain how they use it. Refinement of questions also affected the following question, “what practical support do children with reading and writing difficulties need from teachers?” It also affected this question, “what additional support do teachers need in order to assist children with reading writing difficulties in their classroom?” These two questions appeared to be a duplication of each other. This is true in the sense that the responses provided by the informant for one question were also fit for the other question. For this reason, the two questions were merged into one question. The new question was, “what do you do to support all children in your classroom during reading and writing?”

3.2 Thematic analysis

In a research study, data must be organised and analysed in order to provide answers for the research question (Silverman, 2005). Based on this, thematic analysis was used to organise and analyse the data in this study. Thematic analysis can be described as a method used for categorising, analysing and showing patterns emerging from data (Cohen, 2007). This can also be described as a method for searching repeated patterns of ideas from a set of data. Use of this method starts from the moment the researcher notices patterns of ideas and issues with potential information from the data. Further, this method ends with presentation of categories of ideas (themes) (Dawson, 2002).

3.2.1 Data reduction

With thematic analysis of data, data reduction in this study was done in the following way. Firstly, it involved familiarising myself with the data. According to literature, familiarising with data involves reading content of the data in order to get a better meaning of the content (Ryan, 2000). For this reason, I read repeatedly content of the data for this study. This was done in search for patterns of ideas and information connected with research questions for this study. This was followed by listing of ideas. In this case, a list of ideas with information connected to the research questions was generated from the data.

Data reduction in this study proceeded with searching of themes from a list of ideas which were generated from the data. According to literature, it is argued that researchers need to
explore data comprehensively in order to suggest general ideas and themes out of it (Silverman, 2005). For this reason, I had to categorise the ideas from a list of ideas which were generated from the data. In this case, categorising of ideas was only done on the information which was connected with the research questions. At this point, similar ideas from the list were combined to produce a broader category of ideas (potential themes).

After the production of potential themes, data reduction proceeded with reviewing and refining of the potential themes. During reviewing of the potential themes, some potential themes were discarded as they had less information to be connected with the research questions. Potential themes which had enough data connected to the research questions were maintained. Later, potential themes were refined in order to produce a clear and sensible pattern of ideas. Refined potential themes which were clear and had sensible meanings were eventually defined and given a description to represent a theme.

At the end of defining and describing (naming) sensible categories, six themes were identified for the research findings. These are:

**Theme one:** Teaching methods for reading and writing. This theme emerged from data with information connected to research question one. Research question one was meant to investigate teaching methods used by teachers when teaching children with reading and writing difficulties.

**Theme two:** Teachers’ knowledge about causes of reading and writing difficulties

**Theme three:** Teachers’ competence in identification of children with reading and writing difficulties. Themes two and three emerged from data with information connected to research question two. Research question two was meant to investigate whether teachers in regular schools identify and if so, how they identify children with reading and writing difficulties.

**Theme four:** Teachers knowledge about learners’ reading and writing background

**Theme five:** Relevant teaching support

**Theme six:** Interventions for reading and writing. Themes four, five and six emerged from data with information connected to research question three. Research question three was meant to investigate whether teachers in regular schools support and if so, how they children with reading and writing difficulties.
3.3 Validity and reliability

a. Validity

Validity is a way of showing that a particular method of data collection collects the data which it is supposed to collect (Cohen, 2007). In qualitative data, this might be achieved through richness, depth and honesty of the collected data. For this reason, a number of factors were considered in this study as a way of increasing the validity of data. For instance, during data collection, biasness such interviewers opinion and interests were minimised in order to achieve maximum validity.

It is argued that greater validity of interviews can be achieved by reducing biasness during the interviews (Cohen, 2004). Based on this, biasness in this study was avoided by avoiding the following:

- Having pre-conceived ideas about expectations, opinions and attitudes of the participants.
- Judging competency of the participants based on their personal appearance and teaching experiences.

In this study, validity of the interviews was also increased by using open-ended questions during interviews. According to Silverman (1993), use of open-ended questions in interviews allows participants to express their definitions and understanding about the topic or situation being studied thereby increasing validity. Additionally, use of open-ended questions enables the respondents to raise important issues that are never expected in the study. Further, use of open-ended questions during interviews acknowledges that a particular sequence of questions which is fit for a particular informant might not be fit for another informant (Cohen, 2007).

Validity was also ensured by avoiding leading questions during interviews. According to literature leading questions have the potential to put words into the mouth of participants. As a result, these questions (leading questions) have the ability to influence invalid responses from respondents (Cohen, 2001).

Lastly, validity of data during data analysis and data reporting was increased because no data was selected based on the interest of the interviewer. Instead, data was selected because it
contains information which is connected to the research questions. As result, both positive and negative results from the data were highlighted without twisting their messages.

b. Reliability
Different authors have defined reliability differently; however their meanings are centered on similar concepts. These concepts are dependability, credibility, ‘trustworthiness and consistency (Cohen, 2007).

By description, the term reliability can be described as the matching of recorded data with the actual situation in the natural scenery which is being investigated. It can also be described as amount of correctness and extensiveness of recorded data (Cohen, 2007). Based on this, achievement of reliability in this study was done by doing the following. Firstly, the interviewer developed imaginary teaching (hypothetical) cases based on his past teaching experiences with reading and writing. Later, the interviewer predicted and compiled expected answers in response to the imaginary cases. In the end, recorded data was compared with expected answers from imaginary cases to determine correctness of the data.

3.4 Ethical issues
According to literature, collection of data should be done ethically; for instance, respecting sites and the individuals participating in it (Creswell, 2012). Based on this, ethical issues concerning data collection procedures were considered prior to data collection. They were considered with regard to permission to access the research sites and obtaining consent from the individuals participating in the study. This was also done by considering sensitivity of the information. Further, this was done by protecting the anonymity and privacy of the informants. At this point, anonymity and privacy of informants was protected by keeping their identities and the name of schools and district anonymous and confidential (Creswell, 2012).

a) Permission to access schools
It is argued that researchers need to obtain permission to access premises before entering them for collection of data (Creswell, 2012). For this reason, the interviewer in this study met the schools principals to obtain permission from them. In this context, these were principals of the schools which were selected to identify teachers (informants) from their schools for participation in this study. This was done in order to ask for permission to access their schools before meeting the informants.
Obtaining permission to access institutions such as schools and collect data from teachers requires researchers to contact school principals in writing (Cohen, 2002). For this reason, the interviewer wrote a request to the head teachers requesting for permission to access their schools. The request for permission included the objectives of the research study. It also included the amount of time to be spent in their schools and amount of time for a participant to be involved in the interview. Further, it included how the research study intends to use the data (See appendix A).

Permission to access the schools was acknowledged by head teachers by signing their signatures at the bottom of my letters of consent. This was also acknowledged by endorsing the school stamp/seal on my letters of consent.

b) **Obtaining informed consent from informants**

Obtaining informed consent from informants confirms the fulfilment of an ethical practice that requires researchers to obtain before data collection. This also suggests getting assurance of the cooperation with informants during interviews (Cohen, 2002). Therefore, to obtain informed consent from informants; the interviewer in this study requested the participation of informants in writing (see appendix B). In this context, informed consent forms were written and given to the identified informants. They all read the objectives, conditions and terms of the research study and agreed to participate in it by signing their name on the form. Among the conditions and terms of the research study, informants were given the freedom to participate, refuse to participate or withdraw in the study at any time. According to literature, participants in a research study have the right to freedom and self-determination for participation in it (Cohen, 2001).

Other terms and conditions on the informed consent form included respecting requests and wishes of informants during the study. They also included the anonymity of the informants in the research study. Ethical practices require researchers to protect the anonymity and privacy of participants by keeping their identities confidential. It also requires the interviewer to obtain permission from informants to record the interviews and ensuring to destroy the recordings after completing the research study (Creswell, 2012).
3.5 Limitations

This study experienced challenges with teachers’ ability to see the difference between reading and writing difficulties and other learning disabilities such as dyslexia and dysgraphia. In this case, teachers in Malawi are mixing up reading and writing difficulties with dyslexia and dysgraphia. For this reason, there is a possibility of mistaking reading and writing difficulties with dyslexia or dysgraphia and vice versa. Additionally, in Malawi; there are no practitioners such as speech therapists to work with teachers in identifying children with reading and writing difficulties (MoE, 2009). Again, this gives the probability for teachers to mistake reading and writing difficulties with other learning disabilities.

The study also experienced challenges with transportation costs. In this case, the study only selected primary school teachers from one particular educational district in Malawi. Schools outside this particular district were not selected to avoid transportation costs. It is costly to travel to places out this district. Therefore, it was for this reason, that all schools were selected from one particular district.
Chapter Four: Data presentation and discussion

During the process of data analysis, it is suggested that there should be three actions that should flow concurrently. The actions are data reduction, display (presentation) of data and drawing conclusion from the analysis (Miles, 1994). Therefore, this section gives details of data display as follows.

Organisation and presentation of research findings requires a visual presentation of the findings through diagrams and tables (Miles, 1994). According to literature, data need to be displayed considering that the mind of readers may find it hard to deal with large volumes of data. People may like simplified and easily understood information (Cohen, 2002). Therefore, reducing the information and organising the data in topics or categories and summarising it will make it easier accessible for the readers. Further, this may ensure clarity of the information for the readers. In return, this may allow readers to explore the connections between the different data presented (Creswell, 2012).

In research studies, there is no better approach for data analysis and presentation of data. The decision to choose the method depends on how the method fits the purpose of study (Cohen, 2007). For this reason, I chose to organise and present data analysis for this research study based on respondents and in response to specific issues (themes).

Studies show that presentation of relevant data based on a particular issue involves the following. It involves structuring and in instances where some participants give similar responses, their responses are also structured and presented based on a group of respondents to which they belong and in connection with a particular issue (Cohen, 2007). Studies also show that presentation of data based on respondents and in response to specific issues has some advantages. The advantages include an automatic grouping of data and enabling of patterns and themes to be noticed at a glance. The approach also appears to be a better approach when summarizing responses with similar ideas (Creswell, 2012). However, the approach appears to disperse a collection of responses from respondents across several themes and groups of respondent. This also leads to loss of coherence of ideas from data since responses from individual respondent are lost in a collective summary (Cohen, 2007).
Details of data organisation and presentation for this study are as follows. The details illustrate a summary of similar responses responding to a particular issue (theme). For instance, responses which are responding to a similar theme are presented as a summary of information connected to that particular theme. This study has six themes and for this reason, there are also six categories of information displaying a summary of responses for each theme. The following are the themes to be accompanied by a summary of data: teaching methods for reading and writing, Teachers’ knowledge about causes of reading and writing difficulties, Teachers’ competence in identification of children, Teachers knowledge about learners’ reading and writing background, Relevant teaching support and lastly, Interventions for reading and writing. Each presentation of summary in this research study is followed by a discussion of research findings. Discussions on the research findings for this study are also focused on the six themes mention above and information from the data connected with a theme mentioned in the discussion.

4.1 Data presentation on theme one: Teaching methods for reading and writing

Theme one has a summary of data with information connected to research question one of this research study. In this study, research question one seeks to investigate how teachers in regular schools teach reading and writing, and research question one says: How do teachers teach reading and writing in regular schools?

A summary of data from informants with information connected to theme one in this research study is as follows:

**Informant 1:**

“We have got pre-reading activities that we use for them. We also ask them to join jumbled pictures, so that they make one picture. We use flash cards, for instance, we just flash the cards very fast and help some learners to become fast learners. We use the phonic charts with letters of similar spelling features. We teach them how to combine letters and how to use sound letters to pronounce a word”.

"
Informant 2:
“We give a model of reading because first of all as a teacher we model reading. To the beginners we teach them by using the whole word approach like labelling a hoe and a door. The other way of teaching is through classification. When learners classify different objects, they also relate them with different letters. We also use look and say approach whereby we use flash cards. Learners are taught latter sounds and word sounds (Phonological awareness)”. 

Informant 3:
“We introduce these learners to alphabetical awareness and phonological awareness. They have to know the letters of alphabet and the sound of each letter and when we combine those letters and learners actually know the sound of each word. We use demonstration, gestures, even miming to accompany the explanations so that learners should know what the teacher is explaining”. 

Informant 4:
“I use pair work, group work. I demonstrate, that is, between me and one of the learners (teacher-learner demonstration). For those that have reading and writing difficulties, I pair them with somebody who is better so that they can be helping one another. Learners are taught the sound of letters. First of all they have to know the letters of alphabet and the sound of each letter”. 

Informant 5:
“I use look and say, and demonstration methods. For example the word tree, I demonstrate how to write the word tree on the chalkboard”. 

4.1.1 Discussion on teaching methods for reading and writing
Teachers need to use teaching methods and teaching techniques that are suitable for the individual learning needs of children with reading and writing difficulties (Saskatchewan, 2004). On the contrary, information from data above shows that teachers from the visited schools have limited knowledge on adjusting teaching methods for reading and writing to individual needs. For instance, they mostly use methods such as demonstration, look and say, whole word approach and pair work. These methods simply promote memorising and not
understanding of skills (Farrant, 1980). Use of these methods may suggest lack of knowledge and teachers’ incompetence on teaching methods that can address reading and writing difficulties. However, a few teachers are indeed using teaching methods that are responsive to reading and writing. For instance, they use phonological awareness. Unfortunately, these teachers did not explain comprehensively how they use this method to demonstrate their efficiency and knowledge on this approach.

Children with reading and writing difficulties encounter a lot of learning challenges in schools (Integra, 2009) because their mother tongue differs from the language of instruction. Making adaptations (adjustments) within teaching methods can greatly reduce the challenges these children experience during learning (Saskatchewan Education, 2003). To achieve this, teachers need to modify teaching skills, teaching styles, teaching resources and the environment in order to meet the individual learning needs of all learners (Saskatchewan Education, 2003). Teachers in this study failed to make these adjustments. Failure to make the adaptations (adjustments) when teaching reading and writing may suggests a number of implications. For instance, this may suggests that these teachers do not know how to adapt teaching methods when teaching reading and writing. Further, this may suggests teacher’s failure to understand the use of balanced teaching methods.

Balanced teaching methods are teaching instructions which teachers adjust based on the individual needs of children (Graham, 2000). Therefore, by using general teaching methods (less suitable teaching methods), these teachers fail to consider individual learning needs and individual differences among children. They also demonstrate lack of their expertise to provide appropriate support to children who struggles with reading and writing. Further, they show their failure to provide personalized teaching methods which may help children to succeed in reading and writing. Eventually, they show their failure to reduce the achievement gap between these children and their peers (Saskatchewan Education, 2003).

None of the teachers in this study disclosed how they are teaching writing. All of them disclosed teaching methods that targeting reading difficulties. According to studies, teachers may teach children with writing difficulties by using any of the following teaching approaches. They may teach handwriting skills, punctuation and phonics for spellings (Reid, 2007). Use of these approaches with some modifications can help children to improve their
skills in written tasks; hence learn to write successfully (Wilson, 2007). For these teachers, it is obvious that they may find it tough to help these children succeed in writing difficulties.

Examples of suitable teaching strategies for children with reading and writing difficulties include teaching of phonological awareness (Westwood, 2008). Some teachers in this research study use phonological awareness in some cases when teaching reading and writing. For this reason, these teachers need to be commended for teaching key elements which promote the ability to read and write. I would also suggest for these teachers to adopt teaching strategies that are responsive to cultural diversity and applicable to children coming from disadvantaged families. In this case, they need use strategies that allow children to connect cultural experiences with learning tasks (Gay, 2000).

In this study, all teachers acknowledged that they displayed on the walls of their classrooms written work from children. According to literature, display of written work makes classrooms to be print rich environments. A print rich environment is a place where written tasks are highly displayed and the place is filled with reading and writing resources (Saskatchewan Education, 2003). In this environment, children are allowed to display their written tasks on certain parts of classroom walls. With this approach, it suggests that these teachers combined their teaching methods with the art of acknowledging children’s literacy skills. This also suggests teachers’ compliance with the principle of making classrooms, a literate classroom environment (Saskatchewan Education, 2003). Further, this suggests a motivation for children to work on written tasks during their free time. In addition, this can also be described as an effort to establish a free learning environment where children can decide a topic to write or improve their literacy skills.

4.2 Data presentation on theme two: Teachers’ knowledge about causes of reading and writing difficulties

This theme has a summary of data with information connected to research question two. In this study, research question two seeks to investigate whether teachers in regular schools identify children with reading and writing difficulties and if yes, how they identify these children.
The following is a summary of data from informants with information connected to theme two. The data has information connected with teachers’ understanding of the causes of reading and writing difficulties: hence connected with research question two.

**Informant 1:**
“Problems with intellectual disabilities and those with visual impairments have problems with reading and writing. These learners do not have enough reading and learning resources in this class. If learners are not given too much supplementary reading materials they will not be a position to read”.

**Informant 2:**
“It is caused by Intellectual disabilities. They have got very limited memory in terms of attention span. Some of the causes could also include health conditions such as cerebral palsy (CP). Their brain has got a deficit in focusing the shape of a letter and transferring that shape on to a piece of paper”.

**Informant 3:**
“Some of the causes might be that some of them had serious illness sometime back and this affected their brain. Others due to absenteeism especially here we have market days. They spend much of their time at home playing than doing school work”.

**Informant 4:**
“It is caused by absenteeism of learners and inadequate use of teaching and learning resources by teachers. Others fail to read and write because of poor family background. Others due to poor eye sight, but these are not many”.

**Informant 5:**
“A cause for reading and writing difficulties for some children in my classroom is laziness. Some are not given enough work to practise reading and writing. Most of these learners do not have interest to read. They do not have a reading culture”.
4.2.1 Discussion on teachers’ knowledge about causes of reading and writing difficulties

Information from the data above demonstrates that these teachers have less knowledge and understanding about causes of reading and writing difficulties in children. According to responses given above, it shows that they are mixing up causes of reading and writing difficulties with signs of dyslexia and dysgraphia. For instance, some of them said causes of reading and writing difficulties include intellectual disabilities, poor eye sight, and a deficit in focusing the shape of a letter, short attention span and health conditions. All these factors are associated with learning disabilities such as dyslexia and dysgraphia. In this case, this shows that they are confusing reading and writing difficulties with dyslexia and other learning disabilities.

According to literature, causes of reading and writing difficulties include failure of the learner to understand and use the language as a medium of communication, and lack of exposure to pre-reading activities. They also include inappropriate teaching methods used by teachers when teaching reading and writing. Further, they include children’s social-cultural background, readiness and maturity of a child with regard to abstract thinking, motor, visual and auditory skills (Westwood, 2011).

Other possible causes of reading and writing difficulties include absenteeism, and lack of exposure to reading and writing experiences in their homes prior to joining schools (Westwood, 2011). The causes also include lack of parental involvement in reading and writing experiences and loss of interest by some learners to learn (Saskatchewan, 2004). Further, the causes include failure by teachers to adapt (adjust) teaching methods and skills in order to meet learning needs of children (Ziolkowska, 2007).

Teachers in this research study did not mention any of the possible causes of reading and writing difficulties given above. Instead, they mixed up reading and writing difficulties with dyslexia and dysgraphia. Their responses demonstrated that these teachers have less knowledge and ability to explain causes of reading and writing difficulties.

By having less knowledge to explain about reading and writing difficulties, it suggests that these teachers have inadequate knowledge and information to understand the learning
challenges for children with reading and writing difficulties. It also suggests a step backwards from meeting learning needs for these children. For instance, it is argued that teachers with adequate knowledge about causes of reading and writing difficulties understand better the learning needs of concerned children (Westwood, 2008). Further, teachers with adequate knowledge about causes of reading and writing difficulties may be able to use suitable teaching strategies in helping the children to develop better reading and writing skills (Westwood, 2008).

In short, it can be suggested that teachers from the visited schools have less knowledge about causes of reading and writing difficulties and a description of children with reading and writing difficulties; hence they may not identify these children correctly.

4.3 Presentation on theme three: Teachers’ competence in identification of children

Data in theme number three has also information connected with research question two. As previously explained, research question two seeks to investigate whether teachers in regular schools identify children with reading and writing difficulties and if yes, how they identify these children.

Below is a summary of data from informants under theme three. This data is connected with teachers’ understanding of the process of identifying children with reading and writing difficulties; hence connected with research question two.

Informant 1:
“We give them tests. When you give them excise to write, or sometimes when they are failing to write the correct spellings or instead of writing the letter P they may write 9. Sometimes we use checklist and a rubric. They are very slow when reading and too much stammering. When one is chosen to read where there is a picture, the child will tell more about the picture instead of reading the word”.
Informant 2:
“So we give them work and we see the way they are writing and the way they are behaving in the work that we have given them. We assess them using a rubric (rating scale). We also identify them by looking at how they hold the books it tells a story/it simply outlines that the learner is able to read or not. Test results help us to know this”.

Informant 3:
“We observe them. We give learners some simple words to copy, letters of alphabet to words and when copying they even fail to copy those letters. A rubric (rating scale) helps us to know this. We also test them with letters of alphabet, simple words with simple consonants to read and they even fail”.

Informant 4:
“When they fail to write correctly and even fail to read properly. Most students fail tests. Sometime a checklist assists us to tell whether a child has this problem. Some of these students have stammering problems”.

Informant 5:
“By giving him/her work to read or write and when he or she is facing problem it’s when we decide that this learner is having reading or writing difficulties. We also use checklist and a rubric. Sometimes we use test results to decide whether a child has reading and writing difficulties”.

4.3.1 Discussion on teachers’ competence in identification of children

According to literature, it is argued that conducting the identification process relies on how learning difficulties and challenges are eventually defined. It is also argued that the appropriateness of the identification process relies on its capacity to detect children with potential difficulties and challenges (Ritchey, 2014). Therefore, it is imperative to suggest that teachers with a wider understanding of reading and writing difficulties may identify children with reading and writing difficulties correctly. On the contrary, it appears that teachers in this study have less knowledge and understanding of reading and writing difficulties. For instance, information from data above shows that teachers from the visited
schools understand reading and writing difficulties differently. For instance, some says these children fail to write correctly, some says they have stammering problems, and another teacher said they read in reverse (read 9 as p). Some of these are signs of other learning disabilities (Dyslexia and dysgraphia). These learning disabilities are different from reading and writing difficulties. With such variations, it suggests that these teachers mix up reading and writing difficulties with other learning disabilities. Based on this, it is also obvious to suggest that these teachers may wrongly identify children with reading and writing difficulties. For instance, children with dyslexia may be wrongly identified as children with reading and difficulties or vice versa.

However, teachers in this study have a positive aspect in terms of how to use the identification process for children with learning difficulties. In this case, they have the knowledge on how to conduct an identification process for these children. For instance, they have mentioned use of tests, rating scales and observation checklists as tools they use to identify these children. By having this knowledge, it suggests that these teachers understand what they are supposed to do in a class where some children struggle with reading and writing. It also suggests that these teachers acknowledge that some children in their classrooms may have reading and writing difficulties.

As explained above, teachers in this study use rating scales, tests results and observe learners’ reading and writing skills to track those with reading and writing difficulties. By using the above identification tools, it suggests the degree of their competence and understanding of the identification process. It also suggests that they have a well-defined and organised identification procedure. Further, it suggests these teachers understand their mandate which supports that no child should be left behind (Graham, 2007).

It is argued that use of multiple identification tools helps teachers to confirm results obtained from a previous identification process (Berninger, 2008). For instance, teachers may use tests results and later use rating scales to suggest the literacy level of the children and determine whether the children are at risk or not. Under this situation, children scoring below the expected level may be considered to be at risk of reading and writing difficulties (McMaster, 2008). In this case, test results may be used to define the attainment level of a child in a class. On the other hand, rating scales may be used as an additional gauge to suggest the
performance of children. In addition, rating scales may be used to confirm the attainment level of children that were previously defined by tests (McMaster, 2008). Therefore, use of rating scales, tests results and observation by teachers in this research study may suggest teachers’ use of multiple identification tools to identify children with reading and writing difficulties.

The use of multiple identification tools by teachers in this study also suggests a step towards providing suitable support to these children. For instance, it is argued that conducting the identification process for these children may lead to appropriate measures that may help to avoid long-term effects (McMaster, 2008). For instance, failure to read and write may lead to reduced opportunities for tertiary education and employment. (Graham, 2007). Therefore, identification of these children may suggest a step towards improvement of their reading and writing skills; hence avoid long term effects.

4.4 Presentation on theme four: Teachers’ knowledge about learners’ reading and writing background

This theme is developed from data with information connected to research question three of this research study. Research question three of this research study seeks to investigate whether teachers in regular schools support children with reading and writing difficulties and if so, how they support these children.

Below is a summary of data from informants and has information which is connected with theme four. This data has information targeting teachers’ understanding of their role in collecting children’s background information: hence, provide information connected with research question three of this research study.

Informant 1:

“Most of the children and their parents here do not keep books in their homes. It is something which they do not take seriously. We know this because we ask the parents during PTA meetings or during casual meetings and sometimes we ask the children about this.”
Informant 2:
“ Majority of these learners are coming from houses where there are no other books to read apart from the textbooks they receive from school. We ask there guardians or parents and sometimes we ask the children”.

Informant 3:
“Most of them are coming from homes where there is no reading culture. Most of them do not have books in their homes to read during free time. We know this through learners and from their parents”.

Informant 4:
“Unfortunately, most of them are coming from homes where there are no books. It seems people do not have interest to keep books for reading in their homes. We gather this through their parents and sometimes from the children”.

Informant 5:
“Some of these children are coming from homes where they have different books and newspapers to read. Others are coming from the homes where reading materials are not available, particularly those from village areas. We collect this information form children themselves and sometimes we find out from their parents”.

4.4.1 Discussion on teachers’ knowledge about learners’ reading and writing background

It is argued that responsible teachers understand their learners beyond academic experiences (Moll, 1993). From the data above, it shows that teachers from the visited schools have adequate knowledge on children’s background concerning reading and writing. For instance, all teachers acknowledged that these children are coming from families where there are no reading materials. Further, they acknowledged that some parents do not see the importance of keeping reading materials in their homes. Teachers gathered this information, that is, reading and writing background information of their children through the same children and their parents/guardians (carers). For this reason, It can be suggested that these teachers have a sense of responsibility towards children with reading and writing difficulties. In addition, these
teachers understand the influence of children’s literacy background towards learning to read and write.

It is argued that the success of children’s ability to read and write is dependent on exposure to books (Snow, 1991). Therefore, understanding the background of children in this study may suggest getting an overview image of the children with reading and writing difficulties in regular schools. Based on this, it can be suggested that teachers in this study are likely to understand whether children in their classrooms were exposed to books before they were enrolled in schools (Sammons, 2000).

It is also argued that the success to learn reading and writing is also dependent on the amount of support parents give to their children (Snow, 1991). Based on this, teachers in this study are also likely to have this background knowledge about their learners. That is, these teachers may know or understand whether the children in their classrooms are given any support for reading and writing in their homes.

Promotion of children’s ability to read and write is not a program for schools only. It also requires homes and community environments that are supportive (Gibbons, 2006). Therefore, teachers who understand the reading and writing background of these children need to understand and make use of this. For instance, teachers in this study need to encourage parents to support their children in reading and writing in their homes (Duncan, 2000). Though it may appear difficult for parents with low literacy level to assist their children, their involvement alone may influence their children to work harder. In this case, teachers may encourage parental involvement through one-on-one meetings with them or through parents and teachers association meetings (PTA). By doing this, it may suggest empowering and inclusion of parents and carers in the fight against reading and writing difficulties. Teachers in this study also need to encourage their children (learners) to visit their nearest libraries and resource centres (particularly in Teachers Development Centres {TDC}) for supplementary reading and writing activities (Wade, 2000). These places are supportive to literacy skills: hence they can contribute to the success of these children learning to read and write (Gibbons, 2006).
4.5 Presentation on theme five: Relevant teaching support

Theme five has also data with information connected with research question three. As explained above, research question three seeks to investigate whether teachers in regular schools support children with reading and writing difficulties and if so, how they support these children.

The following is a summary of data from informants connected with theme five. This summary is presenting examples of teaching support teachers give children with reading and writing difficulties: hence, connected with research question three of this research study.

Informant 1:
“On reading, sometimes it involves difficulties in pronouncing words, so we start to demonstrate correctly so that the learner can get what you are saying. We make changes within the teaching methods in order to assist these children. We give them a lot of supplementary reading material. We make our classroom full of print rich they will be encouraged to read whatever is missing on the table against what is written on the wall. They need support from resource rooms. During tests, we assist them with reading the question so that they get the question. Sometimes it’s good to give them enough time because those with writing problems are slow in writing (During tests). We ask them orally if they cannot read a question (During tests)”.

Informant 2:
“We give tasks according to challenges in the learner. During the tests, we adapt the questions. Our class is full of teaching resources. Some are displayed on the walls. During teaching, we modify some learning activities, the resources and the methods. Those with severe writing challenges are assessed orally instead of written work (During tests)”.

Informant 3:
“We use pictures guided by some words, (accompanied by some words). We teach lessons by using resources and methods that are relevant for the needs of these children. Sometimes we also give them extra time (During tests). For those who cannot read, we read the questions
for them (During tests). We assist them by sounding each letter knowing that we have been teaching the phonological awareness (During tests). We display written work to reinforce what we teach during the class. There is need for a specialist (Special teacher) to handle these learners”.

**Informant 4:**
“I give reinforcements, rewards, individual help, remedial lessons, extra lessons and home work. I give adapted tasks to children with reading and writing difficulties. We do use some of the visual aids so that each and every learner can see what had been written so that they can manage to read. We also use real objects (Teaching resources). Before learners write the exams, I read the questions for them and during the tests. We need support from specialist and resource centres. Learners are only assisted by regular teachers”.

**Informant 5:**
“Most of the time we give learners supplementary reading materials. Most of the times, I use real objects, sentence boards, word cards, flash cards (Teaching resources). Some teaching resources are hanged on the walls; you can go and see them. We give them activities with some alterations so that they can manage to write and complete the activity. The children need assistance from resource rooms. Unfortunately, we don’t this at our school. We give them enough/extra time to write the tests”.

**4.5.1 Discussion on relevant teaching support**

It is argued that giving relevant teaching support to children may help to eliminate barriers that may prevent children from learning to read and write (Reid, 2007). In this study, all teachers are able to provide teaching support to children with reading and writing difficulties in their schools. For instance, responses from teachers in this study show that teaching support for children with reading and writing difficulties is demonstrated in three ways.

Firstly, teaching support in this study is demonstrated through adjustments of testing procedures for children with reading and writing difficulties. It is argued that teachers need to adjust testing procedures so that children with reading and writing difficulties can be graded fairly (Westwood, 2011). According to literature, teachers need to adjust tests by doing the following. They may give these children true/false questions or multiple choice questions.
This may be done as an alternative to questions that may require writing sentences. Teachers may also test these children through regular short quizzes than using examinations. Further, they may give extra time to these children during tests. Teachers may also ask these children oral questions instead of written examinations (Westwood, 2011). Teachers in this study are able to provide children with reading and writing difficulties with the above adjustments. Notably, they give extra time to these children during tests. They also ask these children oral questions during tests. Based on this, it is imperative to suggest that teachers in this study are able to support children with reading and writing difficulties effectively through adjustments of testing procedures. Further, it suggests that teachers in this research study have adequate knowledge and understanding of their roles during tests.

Teaching support for these children is also demonstrated through the use of modified (adapted) teaching approaches by teachers. It is argued that teachers need to support children with reading and writing difficulties by modifying (adapting) teaching strategies (Integra, 2009). For instance, teachers in this study use demonstration method to teach children pronunciation of words, how to read words and how to write words. They also support the children with supplementary reading materials. In addition, they give these children extra lessons, and also give them words guided by pictures. Further, they give these children tasks according their abilities. However, these teachers did not adequately explain how they provide this support to these children. For this reason, it is tempting to suggest that these teachers do not actually use these adapted teaching approaches when teaching reading and writing. They only explained these methods to me because I asked them to do so. Further, it is tempting to suggest that these teachers mostly support these children based on general principles of teaching (Farrant, 1980): hence the support are not comprehensive enough for children with reading and writing difficulties to learn reading and writing successfully.

Possible examples of suitable teaching support which teachers may give these children may include the following. Teachers may teach reading while putting emphasis on teaching sounds of vowels and consonants. Teachers may also teach reading activities that may require these children to focus on listening skills. For example, they may ask these children to summarise and retell a story from a text (Reid, 2007). At this point, teachers may be required to praise these children for any effort they may put on the task or they may give them any positive feedback. Teachers’ failure to provide suitable teaching support as explained above, may
suggests lack of knowledge on how to modify teaching methods and approaches in support for these children (Wilson, 2007).

Use of the above teaching strategies and support may help teachers to meet the learning needs of children with reading and writing difficulties when teaching reading and writing (Saskatchewan, 2004). Eventually, this may help these children to learn reading and writing successfully.

Thirdly, teaching support in this study is demonstrated through the use and display of teaching resources. In this case, these are teaching and learning resources teachers use when teaching reading and writing. In this research study, teachers use resources such as real objects, sentence boards, word cards and flash cards. They also use resources such as visual aids and pictures guided by some words. However, these teachers did not explain how they use these resources to support children with reading and writing difficulties. For this reason, it can be suggested that these teachers do not have adequate knowledge to demonstrate how they can use these resource to teach reading and writing. Further, it can be suggested that these teachers do not use these resources suitably for the benefit of these children.

It is argued that children are naturally attracted by items and objects in their immediate environment. It is also argued that a display of relevant print materials in a classroom provides a platform on which children can learn to improve their ability to read and write (Cowley, 2012). Therefore, teachers’ failure to use teaching and learning resources when teaching reading and writing may suggests teachers’ failure to attract attention of learners: hence, a failure to support these children learning to read and write successfully (Integra, 2007).

It is also argued that specialist teachers in resource rooms work to achieve specific learning objectives (Birnbaum, 2010). Their objectives may be determined by remedial lessons set by class teachers or set by the individualised education plan (IEP). Further, it argued that the attendance of learners in these rooms is not compulsory. Learners may attend lessons in these rooms depending on their individual learning needs (Birnbaum, 2010). Contrary to this, some schools in this research study do not have specialist teachers for reading and writing. Further some schools do not have resource rooms. Only two out the five schools in this study have both specialist teachers and resource rooms. With absence of specialist teachers and the
resource centres in some schools, it suggests a number of challenges for children with reading and writing difficulties. Firstly, it suggests absence of individualised teaching support from teachers targeting these children. Secondly, it suggests teachers’ failure to reduce the learning gap between these children and their peers.

4.6 Presentation on theme six: Interventions for reading and writing

Data under theme six also contains information connected with research question three. As explained above, research question three seeks to investigate whether teachers in regular schools support children with reading and writing difficulties and if so, how they support these children.

The following is a summary of data from informants. It is connected with theme six. This summary has information connected with interventions for reading and writing: hence, it is connected with research question three of this research study.

Informant 1:
“I don’t have any special idea in order to assist these children apart from using the usual teaching and learning methods I was taught from college. Our district has adopted school intervention on early grade reading in Malawi. In this intervention, learners from grade 1 up to 3 are assisted on how to read by using better reading and writing strategies”.

Informant 2:
“There is nothing I am doing other than that what I have said”.

Informant 3:
“There is nothing special I have done. However, we are glad that there is this intervention which is carried out by an NGO and it is called strengthening early grade reading in Malawi (SEGREM). In this intervention, the target grades are grades 1 up to 3”.
Informant 4:
“I only teach based on what I know and nothing else. If at all, there is SEGREM which has targeted grades 1 up to 3 at the moment and this is just a general intervention for all language lessons”.

Informant 5:
“I am only depending on the traditional teaching methods and I don’t have some specific programmes to assist the children. Thanks to the Ministry of education, that it is introducing another way of teaching reading and writing in a program known as SEGREM. It’s a program for classes from standard 1 up to standard 3”.

4.6.1 Discussion on Interventions for reading and writing

Intervention for reading and writing increases the rate of success in learning to read and write (Westwood, 2011). Further, interventions promote and consolidate literacy skills in children with reading and writing difficulties (Brooks, 2007). On the contrary, teachers in this research study do not have any intervention for reading and writing in their schools. For instance, information from the data above show that teachers from the visited schools do not have any intervention for reading and writing to target children with reading and writing difficulties. These teachers do not have any intervention initiated by themselves as teachers. Based on this, it can be suggested that these teachers lack the knowledge of interventions for reading and writing. It can also be suggested that these teachers are incompetent. For those with some knowledge of the interventions but fail to utilise their knowledge for the success of children with reading and writing difficulties, this may suggests teachers’ negligence of duty.

On a positive note, the visited schools have an intervention for reading and writing which has been initiated by a non-governmental organisation. This information, emerged when teachers were asked to explain any intervention they introduced in their schools. This intervention is called and I quote, Strengthening Early Grade Reading in Malawi (SEGREM). http://www.manaonline.gov.mw/. The intervention aims to improve reading and writing skills for children in grades one up to three in primary schools.

This intervention is only done in three educational districts in Malawi. It involves distribution of teaching resources which are meant to increase the ability to read and write among children
in early grades. Further, it involves teaching of phonological awareness. Based on this, it can be suggested that teachers from the visited schools have secured an opportunity to promote and consolidate the ability to read and write in children with reading and writing difficulties in their schools (Brooks, 2007).
5 Chapter Five: Conclusion:

This chapter presents the following. Firstly, it presents a summary of research findings for this research study. Secondly, it presents conclusive remarks on research findings. Later, it presents a section of recommendations to be taken by head teachers (school principals), educational managers and the ministry of education in Malawi. Personal reflection will be the last section to be presented in this chapter.

5.1 A summary of the research findings

Data from this research study show that teachers in the visited schools have limited knowledge about teaching methods and teaching support when teaching children with reading and writing difficulties. For instance, most of them use teaching methods such as demonstration, look and say, and pair work. These methods simply promote memorising and not understanding of skills. Use of these methods may suggest lack of knowledge and teachers’ incompetence on teaching methods that can address reading and writing difficulties.

Information from the data in this study demonstrates that teachers from the visited schools have also limited knowledge and understanding of the causes of reading and writing difficulties. For instance, they mix up causes of reading and writing difficulties with causes of other learning disabilities such as dyslexia and dysgraphia. These findings suggest a step backwards from meeting learning needs for these children. In addition, the findings demonstrate teachers’ incompetence in defining relevant and possible causes of reading and writing difficulties. Further, it suggests teachers’ possibility of using wrong teaching methods and resources for wrongly identified children with reading and writing difficulties.

Teachers in the visited schools do not understand the differences between reading and writing difficulties and learning difficulties. They mix up causes and descriptions of these two challenges (as explained above). For this reason, these teachers may wrongly identify children with reading and writing difficulties. For instance, they may believe that a child has reading and writing difficulties when in reality a child has dyslexia or dysgraphia or vice versa.

On the other hand, information from data in this study shows that teachers in these schools have adequate knowledge on identification process. In this case they have the knowledge and
understand very well how to conduct the identification process for children who struggles with reading and writing. For instance, they use tests, rating scales and observation checklists to identify these children.

Data has also shown that teachers in the visited schools have adequate knowledge about children’s background information concerning reading and writing. For instance, all of them acknowledged that these children are coming from families where there are no reading materials. The teachers collected this information through the learners, parents/carers and through Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) meetings.

It is argued that responsible teachers understand their learners beyond academic experiences (Moll, 1993). For this reason, these teachers fulfilled their obligation to collect reading and writing background information of the children they are teaching. It also suggests teachers’ understanding of the importance of collecting reading and writing background information before assisting these children.

In this study, teaching support for children with reading and writing difficulties is demonstrated through adjustments of testing procedures. Information from the data has shown that teachers in the visited schools have comprehensive knowledge about adjusting testing and academic evaluation procedures for children with reading and writing difficulties. For instance, it shows that teachers in the visited schools give extra time and ask orally children with reading and writing difficulties during tests.

Teaching support in this study is also demonstrated through the use of modified (adapted) teaching approaches by teachers. However, research findings of this study, shows that the teaching support through modified teaching approaches is not adequately provided for these children. For instance most of the teaching supports in this case are based on general principles of teaching (Farrant, 1980).

In this study teaching support is also demonstrated through the use of teaching resources. In this case, research findings show that teachers in the visited schools use teaching and learning resources when teaching reading and writing. They use resources such as real objects, sentence boards, word cards and flash cards. However, the teachers did not explain how they use these resources to demonstrate their knowledge in supporting children with reading and writing difficulties. Further, the resources mentioned above are only relevant for a general
teaching process and not responsive to individual learning needs for children with reading and writing difficulties.

Lastly, information from data has shown that teachers in the visited schools do not have any intervention for reading and writing initiated by themselves in their schools. On a positive note, these schools have an intervention for reading and writing which has been initiated by a non-governmental organisation and not by teachers. This intervention is meant to increase the ability to read and write in children attending grade 1 upt to grade 4 in primary schools. The intervention is called and I quote, *Strengthening Early Grade Reading in Malawi (SEGREM)*.

### 5.2 Conclusive remarks on research findings

This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

- How do teachers teach reading and writing in regular schools?
- Do and if so how do teachers identify children with reading and writing difficulties?
- Do and if so how do teachers support children with reading and writing difficulties in regular schools?

The above research questions were set up in the attempt to achieve the research objectives for this research study. For instance, this study was designed to explore the teaching methods used by teachers in regular schools when teaching children with reading and writing difficulties. It was also designed to explore whether teachers in regular schools identify children with reading and writing difficulties and if so, how they identify these children. Further, it was designed to explore whether teachers support and assist children with reading and writing difficulties and if so, how they support these children.

Based on the research objectives given above and in response to the research questions and in connection with the research findings for this study, I am therefore making the following conclusions.

Firstly, teachers in the visited schools have limited knowledge about teaching methods when teaching children with reading and writing difficulties. Further, these teachers are not creative to use adapted teaching methods and introduce interventions for reading and writing. For this
reason, teachers in the visited schools may not effectively teach and support children with reading and writing difficulties to succeed in reading and writing.

Secondly, teachers in the visited schools do not understand the differences between reading and writing difficulties, and dyslexia. They mix up causes and descriptions of these learning difficulties. For this reason, these teachers may wrongly identify children with reading and writing difficulties. For instance, they may believe that a child has reading and writing difficulties when in reality a child has dyslexia. However, these teachers have adequate knowledge concerning the identification process. They have the knowledge and understand very well how to conduct the identification process for children who struggles with reading and writing.

Thirdly, teachers in the visited school are able to support children with reading and writing difficulties when teaching reading and writing. The teaching support from these teachers is demonstrated through adjustments of testing procedures, through the use of modified (adapted) teaching approaches by teachers, and through the use of teaching resources during teaching.

Lastly, teachers in the visited schools do not have any intervention for reading and writing to support the success of children of children with reading and writing difficulties. They do not have an intervention initiated by themselves as teacher. On a positive note, they are able to support these children through an intervention initiated by non-governmental organisation.

5.3 Recommendations

This section gives recommendations so that suitable (appropriate) educational decisions are made for the education of children with reading and writing difficulties in regular schools. In this case, appropriate decisions may be made by the ministry of education, district educational managers, school principals and other educational officials. For instance, their decisions may help to overcome teachers’ failure in using teaching methods and support which are responsive for the success of these children to read and write. Further, their decision may guarantee the availability of well-trained teachers for reading and writing in schools. A detailed presentation of these recommendations is as follows.
Information from the data in this study has shown that teachers in the visited schools have less knowledge about teaching methods and teaching support for children with reading and writing difficulties. For this reason, these teachers require continuous professional development (CPD). In short, they need in-service training courses. These courses need to be organised by school principals, district educational offices or by the ministry of education. The courses need to be organised in order to improve the teaching methods and skills of these teachers on how to teach children with reading and writing difficulties. To achieve this, there is a need to recruit part-time language specialists to train class teachers. Language specialists will be needed during in-service training course to train teachers how to teach reading and writing.

This study also recommends the recruitment of full-time language specialists by the ministry of education. These language specialists need to be allocated in each district education office in the country for the following services. Firstly, they need to be mandated to train all language teachers in the districts. In this case, they need to teach teachers teaching methods that are responsive for the success of reading and writing in children. In addition, they need to train teachers the interventions for reading and writing while targeting children who struggle with reading and writing. Further, language specialists need to be mandated for monitoring and supervision of how language teachers teach reading and writing. Lastly, they need to be responsible for providing teachers with suitable advice concerning teaching methods for reading and writing.

In addition to the above, the ministry of education in conjunction with teacher training colleges need to introduce refresher courses for serving teachers. The courses need to include comprehensive content on reading and writing difficulties. For instance, comprehensive content in this area may include description of reading and writing difficulties, causes and teaching strategies for this learning difficulty.

Teaching and learning condition should be conducive and suitable for children with reading and writing difficulties (Farrant, 1980). For this to be achieved teachers in these schools need to modify (make adaptations) teaching methods, teaching support and teaching resources when teaching reading and writing. The modifications need to be made by basing on the learning needs of children with reading and writing difficulties.
Information from the data in this study has shown that some of struggling readers are coming from the homes where there are no reading materials. It has also shown that some parents do not spend some of their time to teach their children how to read or write. For this reason, teachers need to sensitize parents or carers their roles at home so that these children may learn to read and write successfully. Teachers need to advise parents how to read for their children and what to do to motivate their children.

5.4 Personal reflection

Completion of this research study suggests a significant revelation of how teachers are teaching and supporting children with reading and writing difficulties. For instance, teachers are only using general teaching methods and general support when teaching reading and writing. They are also failing to see the differences between reading and writing difficulties with dyslexia. This revelation takes me back some years ago when I was also teaching reading and writing in primary schools. The revelation truly reflects the way I was teaching children with reading and writing difficulties. As a primary school teacher by then, it was a challenge for me to decide how I could teach and support these children. At that time, I only used general teaching methods and general support when teaching reading writing.

Though I had training on how to teach and support children in primary schools, the training was not specifically designed to teach children with reading and writing difficulties. The training which I had was training for general teaching in primary schools. Possibly, this is also why I had limited knowledge on how to teach and support these children. Possibly, it can also be suggested that teachers who participated in this study had a similar experience during their training. Further, it can be suggested that this is also why these teachers are mostly using general teaching methods and general teaching support. If the situation is like this in most schools, it is obvious that children with reading and writing difficulties are often neglected and forgotten; hence, they are excluded from learning to read and write.

Completion of this research study also suggests a significant achievement in a number of ways. For instance, it suggests a journey towards the achievement of a higher academic qualification and careerism in the field of special and inclusive education on my part. For
teachers, curriculum specialists and other educational officials, the study suggests the beginning point to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness teaching methods used by teachers in schools. At national level, the research suggests a forum from which decision and policy makers will base their actions, innovations and changes towards future programmes and practices for children in regular. In the context of the Malawi government, the research suggests the beginning point of uncovering the realities that children with reading and writing difficulties are experiencing. It also suggests providing the ground for diagnosing the forces behind the degree of competence and commitment of teachers in regular schools. Further, it suggests provision of the forum from which the government of Malawi will base its predictions of the upcoming educational programmes for children in regular schools.
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Appendices

Appendix A:

LETTER OF CONSENT

NAME OF SCHOOL

ATTENTION THE HEADTEACHER

I am Foster Benson Magombo, a student under the Erasmus Mundus Scholarship and I am pursuing a Masters’ degree course in Special and Inclusive Education at the University of Oslo. As part of fulfilment of the Erasmus Mundus Masters in Special and Inclusive Education, I am going to carry out a research study under the topic, “Teaching children with reading and writing difficulties in regular schools.” For this reason, I would like one of your teachers at your school to provide me with information based on the above topic, that is, if you agree to do so.

This research will require about 35 to 45 minutes of the teachers’ time. During this time a teacher will be interviewed about teaching children with reading and writing difficulties. The interview will be conducted at your workplace (school). By allowing your teacher to participate in this research study, be assured and understand the following:

- There will confidentiality of the information the teacher will give
- School information will not be disclosed to anybody during the course of study
- It is voluntary to participate in this study
- The school can choose to take part or in all parts of the study
- The school/participants can withdraw at any time without being disadvantaged in any way

Having read the above information and heard the research study explained to me, I have agreed to allow one of the teachers at this school to participate in the said research study.

Signature

Date: 14/07/2015
Appendix B:

LETTER OF CONSENT

Dear: ........................................................................................................

I am Foster Benson Magombo, a student under the Erasmus Mundus Scholarship and I am pursuing a Masters’ degree course in Special and Inclusive Education at the University of Oslo. As part of fulfilment of the Erasmus Mundus Masters in Special and Inclusive Education, I am going to carry out a research study under the topic, “Teaching children with reading and writing difficulties in regular schools.” For this reason, I would like you to provide me with information based on the above topic, that is, if you agree to do so.

This research will require about 35 to 45 minutes of your time. During this time you will be interviewed about teaching children with reading and writing difficulties. The interview will be conducted at your school. By participating in this research study, be assured and understand the following;

- There will confidentiality of the information the teacher will give
- School information will not be disclosed to anybody during the course of study
- It is voluntary to participate in this study
- The school can choose to take part or in all parts of the study
- The school/participants can withdraw at any time without being disadvantaged in any way

Having read the above information and heard the research study explained to me, I have agreed to allow one of the teachers at this school to participate in the said research study.

Signature........................................................................................................

Date ........................................................................................................