



Teachers' Familiarity with the Official Language of Instruction in Selected Urban Government Primary Schools in Solwezi District of Zambia

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ABSTRACT: The study assessed class teachers' familiarity with the official language of instruction in selected urban government primary schools in Solwezi District of Zambia. The objectives of the study were to determine class teachers' familiarity with the official language of instruction; establish the effects of teachers' familiarity with the official language of instruction on literacy achievement among urban Grade 3 learners; and ascertain the language instructional strategies teachers who were non-speakers of the language of instruction used to teach in class. The study was guided by The Mother Tongue Instruction Theory, and employed a mixed methods design. Data were collected through interview, lesson observation and fluency test. The study established that teachers who were non-speakers were unfamiliar with the language of classroom instruction, *kiikaonde*. The fluency test results showed that the teachers' oral fluency, reading fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, linguistic performance and articulation was generally poor. Interview and observation results showed that the teachers' unfamiliarity with the official language of instruction impeded teaching, learning and learners' understanding in those classrooms. For instance, the learners misunderstood the concepts, it was time consuming, teachers could not deliver lessons very well because of language barrier and learners did not get the best from the teachers resulting in under performance among teachers and learners. The study also established that the unfamiliar teachers with the language of instruction used variety coping language strategies in the classrooms such as translation, code-switch, group work, individual work and question and answer. The study recommends teachers should be capacity built in familiar language through training in colleges and CPD in schools. The teachers who were unfamiliar with the official familiar language of classroom instruction should not be allocated to teach lower primary classes before they learn the familiar language of instruction by MOE authorities; and the use of variety coping strategies should be encouraged.

KEY WORDS: Familiar language of instruction, Kiikaonde, Teacher, Solwezi, Unfamiliarity.

1.0. INTRODUCTION

In Zambia, the policy is that teaching at Lower Grades at primary school must be in the learner's familiar language or mother tongue. By learner's familiar language is meant the Mother Tongue (MOE, 2013). The familiar language of instruction policy hopes to foster better initial learning, enhance the status of Zambian Languages and integrate the schools more meaningfully into the life of the local communities (MOE, 2013). Research shows that children whose primary language is not the language of instruction in school are more likely to drop out of school or fail in early grades (Machinyise, 2019). Further, research has shown that children's mother tongue or first language is the optimal language for literacy and learning throughout primary school (Machinyise, 2019; MOE, 2013).

What is known from research is that children learn best when the first language of instruction is their mother tongue (Machinyise, 2019; Benson, 2004; Bühmann and Trudell, 2007). Results of learning assessments show that when home and school languages differ there is a negative impact on test scores (UNESCO, 2016). According to an analysis of SACMEQ III data in 2010, there is a positive correlation between speaking the language of instruction and pupil achievement, especially in reading (Trudell, 2016; MOE, 2013). Using the mother tongue in the classroom has been found to enhance classroom participation, decrease attrition, and increase the likelihood of family and community engagement in the child's learning (MOE, 2013; Trudell, 2016; Mkandawire, 2017; Iversen & Mkandawire, 2020; Maala & Mkandawire, 2022). In order to enhance their learning, learners also need access to inclusive and culturally relevant curriculum and learning materials in a language with which they are familiar (Bühmann and Trudell, 2007; UNESCO, 2016). Researchers now conclude that learning achievement is enhanced when children are taught in their mother tongue for at least the first six years of primary school before the second language, the main language of instruction, is introduced (Ball, 2011; Benson, 2004; UNESCO, 2016). Bilingual and/or multilingual education has been found to increase a



student's self-confidence and self-esteem (UNESCO, 2016). In bilingual models, students continue to use both mother tongue and second language as languages of instruction for a range of academic subjects throughout primary and secondary schooling (Ball, 2011). If the transition from mother tongue to second language is too rapid, the risk is that students will not attain full mastery of either language (Benson, 2004). Mother tongue-based bilingual education – the use of the child's mother tongue alongside a second language – is now the recommended strategy (UNESCO, 2016). It is against such growing evidence and parent demand that the educational system in Zambia insists on the use of learners' familiar language as medium of instruction (Machinyise, 2019). This means children would not be marginalized and would not drop out of school due to language of instruction barrier (Machinyise, 2019).

However, lack of trained teachers as Trudell (2016) points out, is one challenge of implementing the policy. Many scholars contend that local languages have been marginalized in many education systems, often resulting in a shortage of qualified teachers able to understand, speak and teach in a child's mother tongue (Trudell, 2016; Ball, 2011; Benson, 2004). Persistent low literacy rates have been reported at Grade 3 at Lower Primary school in most schools in Zambia for a very long time. Yet the teachers at this level of schooling teach in the Mother Tongue of the learner, and also despite numerous literacy programmes such as AIMES, NBTL, ROC, SITE, THRASS and Let's Read having targeted reading. The problem of low literacy rates among Grade 3 learners is also wide spread in primary schools in Solwezi District. The question that arises is where is the problem accounting for the low literacy levels at lower primary? Could it be anything to do with the teachers' familiarity with the learner's Mother Tongue Language? Due to lack of reliable research on teachers' familiarity with learner's Mother Tongue language, this study was proposed.

According to MOE (2013) language of instruction is the local language or language of play of the learner. The Zambia Education Curriculum Framework (2013) describes the language of instruction as the familiar Zambian language used as official language of instruction in the Pre-School and early Grades (Grade 1 to 4). According to this document, all the teaching and learning areas at the Lower Primary level is in the familiar Zambian Languages. This is because there is evidence that children learn more easily and successfully through languages that they know and understand well (MOE, 2013). According to the policy, English will be offered as a subject, beginning at Grade 2. After the children have acquired sufficient literacy skills in the Zambian Languages, it is assumed that it will be easier for them to transfer these skills quickly and with ease to literacy in English at Grade 2. In Zambia, the seven zone languages; *Chinyanja, Chitonga, Ichibemba, Kiikaonde, Lunda, Luvale* and *Silosi* as well as the widely used community languages in specific school catchment areas will be used as language of instruction or simply familiar language. In this sense, they are familiar language or official language of instruction at that level. In the schools in Solwezi district, the language of instruction which a familiar language to the learners is *Kiikaonde*.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

A few years after independence, Zambia began to record low literacy rates among primary school learners countrywide (Mwansa, 2017; Mumba & Mkandawire, 2020; Chipili, 2016, MOE, 2002). Several factors have been cited contributing to low literacy rates in Zambia and these factors include: the teacher factor, inadequate teaching and learning materials, linguistic factor, poverty and methodological factors (Mkandawire, 2022; Tambulukani & Bus 2011; Muzata, 2015; Lungu & Mkandawire, 2022). The teacher factor covered several dimensions where for example, some teachers were described as ill trained to teach literacy, lacked linguistic competence, laziness and lacked improvisation skills (Mkandawire, 2022; Chileshe et. al, 2018). While the studies cited above addressed several issues and carried out in Lusaka province, the current study investigated teacher competencies and familiarity with the official language of classroom instruction at Grade 3 level in selected government primary schools in Solwezi urban in North-western province of Zambia.

The National Literacy Framework (2013) demands the use of familiar Zambian languages as media of classroom instruction from Grade 1 to 4. The expectations are that teachers countrywide teach all subjects in Zambian languages. However, the teacher deployment policy places teachers anywhere they are required to serve including regions where the official language of instruction is not familiar to teachers. This linguistic barrier by teachers may have negative output on literacy achievement in schools.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess teachers' familiarity with language of instruction and establish their views on literacy achievement in primary schools.



1.3. Objectives of the Study

The study set out to achieve the following three objectives;

- 1.3.1. To assess class teachers' familiarity with the official language of instruction in selected primary schools in Solwezi District of Zambia.
- 1.3.2. To establish the views of teachers on their familiarity with the official language of instruction and learners' literacy achievements.
- 1.3.3. To ascertain the language instructional strategies unfamiliar teachers with the language of instruction used to teach in class.

1.4. Research Questions

The study answered the following research questions which were a mirror of the objectives.

- 1.4.1. How familiar were class teachers with the official language of instruction in the selected primary schools in Solwezi District?
- 1.4.2. What were the views of class teachers on their familiarity with the official language of instruction on literacy achievement among Grade 3 learners?
- 1.4.3. What instructional strategies did unfamiliar teachers with the language of instruction use to teach in class?

1.5. Significance of the Study

The study may reveal whether teachers who are themselves non-native speakers of the learners' mother tongue language of instruction in classroom have language familiarity issues and how these issues may be impacting teaching and learning in classroom practice at Grade 3. This study may be a lens to appreciate what is obtaining in this regard in the actual classroom practice in the selected schools. The study may therefore generate new knowledge which might inform language policy in education in Zambia. Furthermore, other researchers may find the results of this study useful for reference. Therefore, people who may benefit from the study by expanding their knowledge on the issue of language policy include teachers, policy makers and researchers.

1.6. Delimitation of the Study

The study was conducted in Solwezi urban Government schools and involved teachers teaching at Grade 3 Lower primary who use the learners' Mother Tongue Language, *Kiikaonde*, as a medium of instruction in classroom practice when they themselves are actually non-native speakers of the Language.

1.7. Limitations of the Study

Since the study was restricted to assessing teachers' familiarity with the official language of instruction at Grade 3 in selected urban Government primary schools in Solwezi District, the results of the study could not be generalized to other teachers and schools outside this scope.

2.0. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review on the topic is as detailed in the following subsequent sections.

2.1. Teachers' Familiarity with the Language of Instruction

A study by Muzata (2015) dubbed "Familiar Language Versus Mother Tongue: An Analysis of the Implications of the Current Language of Instruction Policy in Zambia" examined the implications of the shift in the language of instruction in Zambian schools. The study revealed that in 2013, the Ministry of Education introduced a revised curriculum in which the language of instruction in Grades 1 to 4 is a familiar language officially spoken in the area. According to Muzata, many studies support the teaching and learning through a mother tongue but the implications of a familiar language of instruction had not yet been analyzed. Therefore, Muzata in his study blended history, published research findings and surveys of the views of teachers of Grades 1 to 4 teaching in familiar language to analyze the challenges facing the implementation of such a policy. His research established that the challenges facing the implementation of such a policy were no way different from those faced when the policy was first attempted prior to 1977. The study by Muzata is similar to the current in that both target the familiar language. However, while the study by Muzata analyzed the challenges the current study focused on teachers' familiarity with the familiar or official language of instruction at grade 3. The current study benefited from the methodology from Muzata's study. The use of regional languages to teach initial literacy has not yielded positive results to the speakers of the minority languages.



A study by Mwambazi (2011) conducted in Kasama and Mbala districts sought to establish the factors and nature of low reading achievement among grade two pupils in selected schools. The study used Basic Skills Assessment Tool to collect data from grade two teachers. The study established that the grade two pupils in the target schools were unable to read Zambian language and English according to expected level of proficiency in the primary schools. Impeding factors included shortage of teachers particularly those trained in PRP methodologies, large classes, poor family and educational background, poor and inadequate infrastructure, pupils not breaking through in grade one, inadequate time allocated for literacy or reading lessons, and unfamiliar language of instruction. The study by Mwambazi focused on learners who receive literacy instruction using different language to theirs whereas the current study assessed teachers' familiarity with the learners' familiar language of classroom instruction, *Kiikaonde*, in Solwezi District.

Another study similar to the current one is by Torpsten (2018) investigated translanguaging in a Swedish multilingual classroom. The study observed three learners who arrived in a Sweden and joined the school system. The study employed observation method and observed three learners who arrived in Sweden and joined the school system. The study was confined to a grade five class and observations were used to collect data from five classes on a sample of 150 participants. The study found that the language preferred at home is the same as the one used in school, and the second language is the one used at school. During leisure time some other languages are used as well. This study reveals that after a period where classmates were working with translanguaging in the class, the pupils became curious and abandoned his resistance so he could admit that his native language has some place in his life. The study under review targeted grade five learners or upper grade while the current study targeted grade three or lower grades. On the contrary, both studies applied similar methodologies like observation.

A study by Chilora and Harris (2001) investigated the role of teachers' home language in mother tongue policy implementation using evidence from improving educational quality research findings in Malawi. The researchers hypothesized that because the majority of pupils spoke a different language than the language of instruction, their performance on mathematics word problems would be negatively affected by differences in teacher and pupil language or the language status of the pupil. The study employed a longitudinal design and included in the sample standards 2, 3 and 4 pupils in Mangochi and Balaka districts, both of which are multilingual societies with Chiyao as the majority mother tongue language for children. Later, an equal number of boys and girls were selected from standards 2, 3 and 4 as follows: 16 pupils selected from Standard 2, 8 pupils from standard 3 and standard 4 respectively. The data for standards 2, 3 and 4 were collected through interviews with teachers, head teachers and community members (parents and local leaders in two separate groups of men and women). For the mathematics assessment, the syllabus and textbooks were used to construct test items measuring crucial basic skills such as numbers, mathematic operations, and other numeracy concepts, including money and measurements. The word problems were read out loud in Chichewa to the pupil while the pupil could read along using the card displaying the problem in front of them. If necessary, the mathematics problems could be orally translated to Chiyao, if the teacher could speak it.

Malawi has over 15 local languages (Mchazime, 1996; Kathewera, 1999), however, Malawi's national language, Chichewa, is the only local language that is used as a mandatory medium of instruction in standards 1 to 4. According to the dual, the various studies that have been conducted on language in education show that children learn better during the early years of their primary education when the medium of instruction is in the language they speak at home. This is important because learning in unfamiliar language especially during these years of a child's education, entails learning two things, the language itself and the content of the subject being studied, all at the same time. This is not an easy task for most children unless the subject content is put in context or language that is familiar to children so that they are not disadvantaged in their studies at school.

The results of the study revealed that there were significant differences in performance on mathematics between Chichewa and Chiyao speaking children. The results further suggest that there was a difference in performance on mathematics word problems between pupils who had Chichewa and Chiyao-speaking teachers. There were also further variations in pupils' performance on word problems compared to similar problems in numeric form. The study concluded that context makes learning meaningful and can both improve pupil performance when they are accustomed to the word problem's story line, but could hinder performance if they are not familiar to that context. The study under review is similar to the current in many ways: it targeted familiar language of pupils and teachers at lower primary and employed interview and assessment test just like the current. The variation between the



two studies is that the study by Chilora and Harris used longitudinal quantitative mixed methods approach whereas the current adopted a mixed methods approach. Also the study under review was conducted in two areas of Malawi whereas the current was conducted in one area (district) of Zambia.

A study by Benson and Carole (2004) titled, "Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education Implementation: A Basis for Policy on Culture Preservation" determined the perceptions of elementary school teachers' perceptions on the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education in Philippines. A descriptive survey design was employed. The study sample comprised 121 teachers from 11 different elementary schools belonging to District I of Labrador, Pangasinan and Philippines who were teaching under the mother tongue-based multilingual education curriculum. A structured questionnaire was used to gather data. The study highlighted the teachers' struggles and experiences on the implementation of the mother tongue-based multilingual education and more importantly as to their perceptions whether such curriculum of instruction should further be implemented, adding on their recommendations to its continuance to help in the preservation of culture and traditions emanating from language use. The results revealed that majority of the respondents believed that the use of mother tongue would make a better communication between pupils and teachers; mother tongue-based education would develop the writing system of the children; it would be a big help in developing curriculum and instructional materials; the teachers utilize role play in the generalization of lesson using mother tongue; and children who use mother tongue would have easier way for them to learn a second, third and fourth language. Thus, the respondents were of the strong view that mother tongue based-multilingual education should continue its implementation for it would guarantee the preservation of culture. The study under review sought voices to support the use of mother tongue as a language of classroom instruction in Philippines by highlighting good side while the current study sought views of teachers who are unfamiliar with a familiar language of classroom instruction of the learner on classroom practice and learning generally in selected lower primary schools in Solwezi District of Zambia.

A study by Kamangala (2009) dubbed "An investigation into teacher preparedness to teach initial literacy in Zambia indigenous languages under the new breakthrough to literacy programme: the case of Solwezi college of education and selected basic schools in the north-western province of Zambia", mainly focused on how pre-service teachers were prepared in College of Education to handle initial literacy using *Zambian Local Languages New* (through the Breakthrough to Literacy (NBTL) course). The study seemed to have employed a mixed methods design and targeted all pre-service teachers at Solwezi college of Education and teachers in basic schools in Solwezi District. The researcher used questionnaires, interview schedules and a check list for lesson observation. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically while the quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with the aid of the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) and presented in frequency tables. The study established that majority of pre-service trainee teachers indicated that they had acquired useful techniques, whilst most practicing teachers strongly felt that the school based in-service training had equipped them with enough skills. The study concluded that most pre-service trainee teachers had not acquired most aspects of the NBTL methodology through pre-service training. The study also concluded that most practicing teachers were not accorded an opportunity to train in the NBTL methodology through in-service programmes. Although the study by Kamangala focused on literacy and conducted in Solwezi, it involved pre-service trainee teachers as well as trained practicing basic school teachers whereas the current study involved non-native speakers of Kiikaonde language of instruction teachers in selected urban government primary schools in Solwezi while Kamangala looked at NBTL the current study assessed teachers' familiarity with familiar language of instruction. Both the studies are related in that they employed similar methodology although the results by Kamangala do not inform the current study on familiarity in anyway.

A study by Steiner (2022) titled, "Multilingual Zambia - Language Issues in Primary/Secondary Schools of The Eastern/Southern Provinces" contended that Zambia is a multilingual country that uses 8 different languages for instruction including English and 7 other indigenous languages. The researcher employed a survey design. The survey was conducted between May-June 2022 on 6-7th graders within 9 Zambian schools. Classroom observations made and teachers interviewed. The results were that in Eastern and Southern Provinces, Zambian teachers speak an average of 5 languages while learners speak an average of 2. Both teachers and learners say English remains the most important language followed by first languages. The study concluded that continued research on language-in-education policies and impacts on learner performance must be conducted if "One Zambia, One Nation" is meant to promote all indigenous peoples over the English colonial past. The study by Steiner, though too general and conducted in Eastern and Southern provinces, is similar to the current as it touches on issues of multilingualism and speaks to language of



instruction policy. It also touches on the need for research on language in education policies and impact on learner performance, which the current study has attempted, particularly on impact.

2.2. The Effects of Teachers Unfamiliarity with Language of Instruction on Literacy Achievement

Literature reviewed found that there had been substantive research that has attempted to establish the effects of teachers' familiarity with local language medium of instruction on primary school pupils' academic achievement. A study by Zergani (2016) titled "Effects of using and teaching with mother tongue language in primary school" examined whether using mother tongue in acquiring a second language has a facilitating role, showing also if it helps students feel more relaxed and comfortable when acquiring a foreign or second language. The study revealed that without language and literacy support in the mother tongue, a child's home language begins to degrade. This study is similar to the current study in that both attempted to bring out some of the effects of using official Zambian language on academic achievement. However, while the main objective of the study by Zergani was to examine whether using mother tongue in acquiring a second language has a facilitating role, showing also if it helps students feel more relaxed and comfortable when acquiring a foreign or second language, the current study zeroed in to investigate the teachers' familiarity with the official language of instruction at Grade3 and the effects that may have on learning.

Another study to make reference to the current is that by Machnyise (2019) titled "The Impact of Familiar Local Language Medium of Instruction on Zambian Primary School Pupils' Academic Performance: A Case Study of Mumbwa Primary Schools. The study was undertaken in Mumbwa by Muchinyise Ellioet. The objective of this study was to investigate the impact of using local familiar languages as media of instruction on Zambian primary school pupils' academic performance specifically in Mumbwa district. The study used the questionnaires, interviews, and observations as research methods. The study established that pupils are acquiring knowledge and skills easily this time around when instructions are given in the familiar language. This study is very important to the current as it has benefited from its methodology and findings. The findings provided the basis for discussion of the results of the current study. However, while the study by Machineryise investigated the impact of using local familiar languages as media of instruction on Zambian primary school pupils' academic performance specifically in Mumbwa district the current assessed the class teachers' familiarity with the official language of instruction in selected urban government primary schools in Solwezi district of Zambia.

Another study found was by Kapenda (2020) titled, "Mismatch Between Familiar Language and Language of Instruction among Pupils: Effect on Reading Comprehension in Selected Primary Schools in Lusaka District", The study examined the extent of the mismatch between familiar language and language of instruction among pupils and its effect on reading comprehension in selected primary schools in Lusaka District of Zambia. The study employed a quantitative design. The study sampled 240 Grade 5 pupils from three (3) government primary schools between the ages nine (9) to 13years. Results of the dependent (paired) sample t-tests indicated that there were significant differences in performance between listening comprehension in Chinyanja and Listening comprehension in English results. Equally, an ANOVA test indicated statistically significant differences in pupils' performance in English language than those based on the home language. The results also suggest that some pupils in primary schools are not benefiting from using Chinyanja as a language of instruction as it contradicts with their home language. Therefore, the study recommended, among other things, the need to simplify the class language of instruction to children's home and language of play and to train teachers in specific Zambian languages. The study by Kapenda is similar to the current study as they both looked at familiar language. The findings by Kapenda on the effect of mismatch between familiar language and language of instruction (English) informed the discussion of results in the current study. Kapenda employed quantitative approach while the current employed mixed methods. Further, the study by Kapenda is misleading when it comes to terminology usage – according to MOE (2013) familiar language is the same as language of instruction not necessarily to refer to English as Kapenda puts it.

Other similar studies to the current include that by Ball (2014) and Alimi et al (2020). A study by Ball (2014) titled "Children Learn Better in their Mother Tongue" which established that Children whose primary language is not the language of instruction in school are more likely to drop out of school or fail in early grades. The findings established by the study by Ball helped with cross-checking the findings of the current study. A study by Alimi et al (2020) looked at the impact of mother tongue on primary pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in Osun State. The study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of mother tongue instruction on the achievement of primary five pupils in Osun State. Though similar to the current study as it brought out the



effects which the current study was also focused on, they differ in that Alimi et.al, conducted the study in Osun State, Nigeria, while the current study was undertaken in Solwezi, Zambia.

The researcher did not find any studies in the literature reviewed that had determined the effects of teachers' familiarity with official language of instruction on learners' academic performance at Grade 3 in Solwezi District of Zambia.

2.3. The Instructional Strategies unfamiliar language of Instruction Teachers use to Teach

Literature reviewed reported some studies on instructional strategies. A study by Mumba and Mkandawire (2019) titled "The Text-based Integrated Approach to Language Teaching: Its Meaning and Classroom Application" reveals that the Text-based Integrated Approach is one of the co-methodologies in the teaching of language such as English at senior secondary Schools in Zambia. These two researchers point out that, as a co-methodology, teachers are expected to understand and fully implement it in language teaching. The study aimed at discussing the Text-based Integrated Approach by outlining its major characteristics, merits, demerits and how it could be implemented in a language class. The study holds that the successful teaching and learning of a language hinge on teachers' use of appropriate approaches and methodologies in their teaching. However, the study by Mumba and Mkandawire (2020) does not go further to suggest whether the Text-based Integrated Approach could be applied to the teaching of familiar or official Zambian language, such as *Kiikaonde*, by teachers who teach from Grades 1 to 4 in official familiar language of instruction which they are themselves incompetent and unfamiliar with. Therefore, this study does not benefit the current study that much as it restricts the co-methodology to the teaching of English at Senior Secondary School in Zambia.

A study by Phiri (2012) investigated teachers' perceptions on factors which prevent some grade one learners from breaking through to initial literacy in the primary schools of Solwezi. The study was conducted in the selected primary schools of Solwezi District where teachers teaching grade one were observed and interviewed. The study findings indicated that the language of instruction to a larger extent was a barrier both to learners and teachers. The situation was more pronounced in urban and peri-urban schools because of the factor of multilingualism which made it impracticable to use a regional standard language (*Kiikaonde*) as a medium of instruction in New Breakthrough to Literacy. The *Kiikaonde* orthography was different from the *Kiikaonde* they spoke in urban. Therefore, it was difficult for learners to actually learn literary in a regional language which they hardly understood their environment better. The study by Phiri was related to the current study since both were conducted in Solwezi at targeted Lower Grade. However, the study by Phiri did not provide instructional strategies interventions while the current study explored the views on effects on learning generally and the strategies teachers who are unfamiliar with the language of classroom instruction employed.

Another study similar to the current study was by Mubanga (2012) conducted to establish the effect of using Nyanja as a medium of classroom instruction in a predominantly Soli speaking area of Lwimba in Chongwe District. The district and area fall under the Nyanja language zone. The findings of the study revealed that children learnt literacy skills with great difficulties in *Nyanja*. The study concluded that since the pupils in Lwimba area mostly speak Soli at home and during play, they have problems with *Nyanja* which is the language of initial literacy for a region because the language is not familiar to the area and children. Such children were then disadvantaged by the policy and the education system as teachers had a tough time to teach the learners the language before they could start learning using the new language. The study under review did not seek alternatives to the effects while the current study investigated the effects and recommends measures to address the challenge of teachers unfamiliarity with language of classroom instruction such as CPDs. Further, the study under review focused on *Nyanja* in Lwimba area while the current targeted *Kiikaonde*, in Grade 3 classes in primary schools in Solwezi District. So, the results are different.

A study by Mkandawire, Zuilkowski, Mwansa & Manchishi (2023) sought to establish the instructional strategies used by teachers in multilingual classes to help non-speakers of the language of instruction learn initial reading skills in Zambia. The study sought to understand multilingual teachers' pedagogical approaches to helping non-speakers of the language of instruction learn initial reading (decoding) skills in diverse classes of Lusaka District of Zambia. Qualitative data was collected through face-to-face interviews, focus groups, and lesson observations with 23 Grade One teachers. Data collected were transcribed and qualitative content analysis was performed through a meaning condensation process. Findings of the study revealed that teachers in multilingual classes used translanguaging, bilingual materials, and remediation and reading interventions strategies to teach literacy among early graders. Further, parents, multilingual teachers, and bilingual learners were also used as resources in



multilingual classes. The study recommended that the government should develop and implement a strong simultaneous bilingual or multilingual literacy programme to reflect community languages and avoid imposing monoglossic language ideologies across schools. Early grade teachers should be allowed to use diverse pedagogical approaches in the teaching of reading in multilingual classes within the mainstream curriculum.

The study by Mkandawire et al (2022) was linked to the current study in the sense that it informed the possible instructional strategies applicable in a class where more than one language was present as the case was for this study in Solwezi. The study also suggests possible methods of teaching that may be observed in diverse classes of Solwezi.

A study by Machinyise and Pali (2023), entitled “The Transitioning of Learners from Zambian Language Literacy to English Literacy in Grade Three in Livingstone District of Zambia: Were teachers prepared to manage it?”. The purpose of the study was to establish whether teachers were adequately prepared to transition learners from Zambian language literacy to English literacy in Grade three in Livingstone District. In line with this, it sought to establish the methods the teachers were using in teaching English literacy in Grade three and establish the challenges faced by teachers in managing the transition from Zambian language literacy to English literacy in Grade three. The study employed a mixed method descriptive design. Data were collected using questionnaires, lesson observations, interviews and document analysis. A random selection and a purposive sampling were used to select respondents for the study. The study found that the teachers were not adequately trained during in-set programmes such as workshops, Continuous Professional Developments and TGMs. Another finding was that the teacher’s attitude to the introduction of English in Grade 3 differed. Some felt that English should be introduced in Grade 1, while others felt that it should be delayed at least up to Grade 4 or 5. The study by the dual was related to the current in that both targeted literacy at Grade 3 and employed similar methodology. However, the study by Machinyise and Pali sought methods teachers were using in teaching English literacy in Grade three in transitioning from Zambian Language while the current study assessed teachers’ familiarity with Language of instruction and the language instructional methods (strategies) they used at Grade 3 in selected urban government primary schools in Solwezi District.

Other studies that had explored the issue of appropriate instructional strategies were Mata (2014), Winfield (2016), Agbevivi (2022), Englis (2022), Mkandawire (2022), and Muzeya (2023). A study by Mata (2014) focused on pedagogical competencies for mother tongue teacher education. This study by Mata was very important to the current study as the researcher gained insights from its methodology and results which have immensely informed the scope of the methodology and the results of the current study. However, although similar to the current study in that both were dealing with competencies, the former was skewed towards pedagogy while the latter encompassed language familiarity, effects and instructional or pedagogical strategies.

The study by Winfield (2016) looked at the Thai – Lao Mother Tongue: teachers’ needs, competencies and conditions for effective instruction. This study looked at Thai– Lao Mother Tongue while the current looked at teachers in Zambia that are teaching in official language of instruction such as Kiikaonde. Despite that variation, the current study’s methodology was immensely informed by the study by Winfield.

Other past studies done on the topic include “Early Grades’ Learning in Mother Tongue: Parents and Teachers’ Perspective” by Agbevivi (2022); and “The Use of Mother Tongue in Teaching Elementary Mathematics” (Englis, 2022), which outlined some of the strategies used by unfamiliar language of instruction teachers to teach Mathematics. A study by Muzeya (2023) which had analyzed classroom language practices in multilingual primary schools of Choma district of Zambia. The study by Muzeya informed the current study by highlighting the possible instructional classroom practices and strategies unfamiliar language of instruction teachers used. Once again, no single study had been found that had explored the Instructional Strategies unfamiliar language of Instruction Teachers use to Teach in schools in Zambia in general and Solwezi district in particular.

2.4. Research Gap

Although a lot of research has been done on Mother Tongue in relation to use as a medium of instruction with regards to teaching and learning at the Lower primary school, most of these studies have focused on effects of using and teaching with mother tongue language in primary school (Zergani, 2016); Early Grades’ learning in mother tongue: parents and teachers’ perspectives (Agbevivi, 2022); children learn better in their Mother Tongue (Ball, 2014); impact of mother tongue on primary



pupils' literacy and numeracy skills (Alimi et al, 2020; Mkandawire, 2017; Mkandawire et al., 2022); the role of teachers' home language in mother tongue policy implementation using evidence from improving educational quality (IEQ) research findings in Malawi (Chilora and Harris, 2001); the importance of mother tongue based schooling (Benson and Carole, 2004); pedagogical competencies for mother tongue teacher education (Mata, 2014); The Thai–Lao Mother Tongue: teachers' needs, competencies and conditions for effective instruction (Winfield, 2016); the use of mother tongue in teaching elementary mathematics (Englis, 2022), to cite but a few. The researcher did not find any study that had assessed teachers' learner mother tongue familiarity at Grade 3, its effects and ways of dealing with them in Primary Schools in Solwezi District, or indeed any other district of Zambia as well as outside Zambia. This was the research gap the study filled.

2.5. Theoretical Framework

Theory building is the most important purpose of research. That is because theories encompass the other purposes of research; description, prediction, and control or improvement. For that reason, this study was underpinned by The Mother Tongue Instruction Theory detailed in section 2.5.1.

2.5.1. Mother Tongue Instruction Theory

Mother Tongue Instruction Theory supposes that children in the initial levels of schooling would be better able to grasp the curriculum if they are taught in the language they are most familiar with - the one they speak at home (leegacy.senate.gov.ph/press-release/2023). However, studies show that 40 % of children do not have access to an education in a language they understand and this is negatively affecting their learning (UNESCO, 2016). Proponents of mother tongue education argue that children should be taught in the language they first learned and spoke at home, while those who oppose this approach argue that English is a 'global language' and should be the main language of instruction throughout the school system and into higher education spaces. Research has shown that a second language is learned best when a first language has been learned well. Most research now concludes that learning achievement is enhanced when children are taught in their mother tongue for at least the first six years of primary school before the second (UNESCO, 2016; Ball, 2011; Chilora & Harris, 2001; Pinnock, 2009). On the basis of the mother tongue instruction theory, most countries in the world have shaped their education policies and curricula towards mother tongue language of instruction. Notable among these countries are Philippines (Benson & Carole, 2004), Malawi (Chilora & Harris, 2001), Zambia (Muzata, 2015, Kelly, 1999), to mention but only a few. The importance of language of instruction for a quality and equitable education is recognized in the Sustainable Development Goals. Thematic indicator 4.5.2 reports on the percentage of students in primary education whose first or home language (mother tongue) is the language of classroom instruction (UIS, 2018). While many countries have a national language policy that supports the use of mother tongue (local languages), such policies are not always implemented in the classroom (Trudell, 2016). There may be a number of reasons for this misalignment. The current study fits into Mother Tongue Instruction Theory very well in that it assessed teachers' familiarity with the official familiar language of classroom instruction to ascertain whether they were familiar to teach in the official language which is not their mother tongue themselves. The study further highlights the difficulties that arise in classroom practice where the teacher is unfamiliar with the mother tongue of the learners, which in this case happens to be the language of classroom instruction and how that is affecting learning. For example, a familiar school teacher may go on to be an incompetent teacher due to language barrier. The teacher in his or her familiar language was competent or good at teaching or interacting with the learners, but as the language of instruction is unfamiliar, he or she was poor at teaching and maintaining good relations with the learners.

3.0. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed a mixed methods design. The target population for this study was all the Grade 3 learners, and all the teachers who taught at Grade 3 in the selected Urban Government primary schools in Solwezi District of Zambia who were non-native speakers of the learner's Mother Tongue Language. The sample size comprised 5 primary schools, 15 Grade 3 non-native speakers of learners' mother Tongue Language teachers, 15 learners and 5 lessons in any subject. The teachers to belong to the sample were first identified through purposive sampling based on their being non-native speakers of the learners' Mother Tongue Language. Then 15 out of those who were identified were selected by simple random sampling. Further, 5 primary schools and 15 Grade 3 learners were selected purposively. The Grade 3 classes in which the lessons were observed to assess the teachers' familiarity with the language of classroom instruction were also selected purposively by typical case sampling so that only the



correct classes are involved. The rule of thumb principle (Field; 2001) was applied to arrive at the quantitative sample of 15 teachers. The data on teachers' competencies were obtained through five lesson observations and interview with teachers and learners. Lesson observation Sheet and structured interview guide (Appendix A, Appendix B for teachers and appendix C for learners) were used to gather data in the field. Furthermore, data on teachers' reading fluency were obtained through administration of reading fluency test using a Grade Three *Kiikaonde* Text adopted from Primary Literacy Program, Ministry of Education. The reading fluency test helped to assess the following components of reading fluency: rate; which is the speed of reading, automaticity; which is how quickly and accurately words are recognized, accuracy; which is ability to decode and sound out words without mistakes, and finally prosody; which is expression, appropriate phrasing, and attention to punctuation (USAID Transforming Teacher Education, 2022). Validity of the interview guide and reading fluency assessment test were achieved by testing them on a trial sample. Reliability was ensured by making sure that same questions and or passage which were written down in the structured interview guide and competence index in the competence assessment test were administered to all the participants in the study area. The qualitative data gathered through interviews and observations were analyzed thematically. The quantitative data from fluency test were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics such as frequency tables. Ethical considerations included obtaining verbal informed consent from the gatekeepers, teachers, school authorities before involving them in the study, upholding confidentiality and anonymity of informants by not disclosing their identity or associating them in whatever way with the information they provided.

4.0. RESULTS

4.1. Research Question One: what were the class teachers' views on their familiarity with the official language of classroom instruction in selected primary schools in Solwezi District?

The data that addressed this question were gathered through interviews with teachers and learners as well as classroom observation and reading fluency test. The findings from interview with class teachers revealed several themes reflecting teacher competencies. From the interview majority (10) of the class teachers were of the view that their familiarity with official language of classroom instruction was poor. The following were the voices from the teachers during the interviews:

Teacher 1 said, "I am good at reading fluency but average in vocabulary and comprehension". Teacher 3 said, "I am poor in oral fluency, reading but average at comprehension".

Teacher 5 said, "I am not very familiar with *kiikaonde* but I can understand some phrases that are not too deep".

Teacher 7 said, "I am average at vocabulary, reading fluency and comprehension but poor at oral fluency".

Teacher 8 said, "I am average at oral fluency but poor at reading fluency, vocabulary and comprehension".

Teacher 9 said, "I am average at oral fluency and poor at reading fluency, vocabulary and comprehension".

The 10 teachers that were non-native speakers of *Kiikaonde* indicated that they lacked sufficient knowledge of *Kiikaonde* to teach in class.

In order to gather data on teachers' familiarity language of classroom instruction to address research question 1; learners were asked for their views. Majority of the learners (12) were of the view that the teachers were unfamiliar. During interviews pupils indicated that some teachers had difficulties with *Kiikaonde* language of instruction in class. The voices of pupils during the interviews were as follows:

Learner 1 said, "My teacher does not speak *Kiikaonde* and when teaching she changes to English because she does not know words".

Learner 2 said, "My teacher uses English and Bemba a lot not *Kiikaonde*".

Learner 4 said, "My teacher is not familiar with *Kiikaonde*. Sometimes when she does not know how to ask a question, she asks".

Learner 5 said, "I am not sure if my teacher is a native speaker of the familiar language of instruction but she is unfamiliar with *Kiikaonde*, because she does not know how to ask questions in *kiikaonde* or reading or narrating story in *kiikaonde*".

Learner 6 said "The teacher is not familiar with *Kiikaonde*. She makes mistakes in speaking, reading and writing in classroom".

Learner 9 said, "The teacher is not familiar with the familiar language of instruction, *Kiikaonde*. She makes mistakes in her speaking in *kiikaonde* in class".

Learner 10 said, "I think my teacher is familiar with *kiikaonde*".



The themes arising from the findings on teachers’ familiarity with the language of classroom instruction according to classroom lesson observations in the five selected schools in Solwezi District were as presented in Table 4.1.1.

Table 4.1.1: Observation Results on Teachers’ Familiarity with Language of Instruction

| Classroom Observation | Classroom Language Instruction | Teacher’s familiarity with language | Evidence for familiarity or lack of it | View on language proficiency on learning |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1 | <i>Kiikaonde</i> (Familiar language) | Familiar | Able to speak, read & write | Meaningful learning occurred |
| 2 to 5 | English & Teacher’s Native Language | Unfamiliar | Poor language proficiency e.g. inability to express oneself | No meaningful learning occurred |

The following narratives shade more light to the result summary in Table 4.1.1.

Classroom Observation 1: Teacher 1 was observed in a Grade 3 classroom at School 2. The class comprised 45 pupils. The teacher taught a science lesson. The teacher was poor at oral fluency, comprehension but poor at oral fluency, grammar, vocabulary, articulation, writing fluency and linguistic performance. The teacher was using English as language of instruction mixed with *Ichibemba* and a bit of *Kiikaonde*. It was vivid that the teacher was struggling in *Kiikaonde*.

Classroom Observation 2: Teacher 2 was observed in a Grade 3 classroom at School 2. The class comprised 53 pupils. The teacher taught Mathematics. The teacher was average at oral fluency, grammar, writing fluency, vocabulary and articulation.

Classroom Observation 3: Teacher 3 was observed in a Grade 3 classroom at School 3. The class comprised 71 pupils. The teacher taught literacy in *Kiikaonde*. The teacher was poor at vocabulary, grammar, articulation, writing fluency, oral fluency, linguistic performance and comprehension.

Classroom Observation 4: Teacher 4 was observed in a Grade 3 classroom at School 4. The class comprised 49 pupils. The teacher taught literacy in *Kiikaonde*. She was poor at articulation, comprehension, oral fluency, grammar, vocabulary, linguistic performance and writing fluency.

Classroom Observation 5: Teacher 5 was observed in a Grade 3 classroom at School 5. The class comprised 62 pupils. The teacher taught literacy in *Kiikaonde*. She was good at comprehension, writing fluency; average at vocabulary, oral fluency, grammar, linguistic performance and articulation.

Although 15 teachers were sampled, only 5 agreed to take the fluency test, the rest declined. The findings of the teachers’ reading fluency test are presented in Table 4.1.2.

Table 4.1.2: Teachers’ Reading Fluency Assessment Results

| Teacher | Text | Rate | Automaticity | Accuracy | Prosody |
|---------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|--|---|--|
| 1 | 13 lines 114 words Grade Three Text | 104 words per minute | Quickly and accurately recognized words | Able to decode and sound words with less mistakes | Showed expression, lacked appropriate phrasing and attention to punctuation |
| 2 | 13 lines 114 words Grade Three Text | 106 words per minute | Slow and inaccurate recognition of words | Unable to decode and sound out words | Unable to show expression; appropriate phrasing and attention to punctuation |
| 3 | 13 lines 114 words Grade Three Text | 92 words per minute | Slow and inaccurate recognition of words | Unable to decode and sound out word | Unable to show expression; appropriate phrasing and attention to punctuation |



| | | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| 4 | 13 lines 114 words Grade Three Text | 98 words per minute | Slow and inaccurate recognition of words | Unable to decode and sound out word | Unable to show expression; appropriate phrasing and attention to punctuation |
| 5 | 13 lines 114 words Grade Three Text | 86 words per minute | Slow and inaccurate recognition of words | Unable to decode and sound out word | Unable to show expression; appropriate phrasing and attention to punctuation |

4.2. What were the views of class teachers on their familiarity with the official language of classroom instruction on learning generally?

This second research question sought to investigate class teachers’ views on their familiarity with official language of classroom instruction in selected primary schools in Solwezi District. Data to address this research question were gathered through interview and lesson observation. The themes from findings of both interview and classroom observation were as presented in Table 4.2.1.

Table 4.2.1: Class Teachers Views on Effect of their Familiarity with language of instruction on learning

| Theme | Number of responses |
|---|---------------------|
| Lack of understanding among learners | 4 |
| More time spent on explaining one concept due to language unfamiliarity | 2 |
| Inability to express oneself | 1 |
| Teacher-learner poor interaction | 1 |
| Code switching | 1 |
| Loss of interest in learning by learners | 5 |
| No meaningful learning | 2 |
| Language barrier hindering learning | 5 |
| Poor performance among learners | 3 |
| Ineffective lesson delivery by teachers | 6 |

The findings obtained from interview with teachers on their views on effects of class teachers’ competencies in the official language on literacy achievement among Grade 3 learners were highlighted by the following verbatim.

Teacher 1 said, “Because of my mispronunciation of Kiikaonde words my learners misunderstand the concepts. It is also time consuming as I spend more time on one concept because of language barrier.”

Teacher 2 said, “I have problem with fluency and vocabulary in Kiikaonde. I can’t deliver my lessons very well because of language barrier and learners don’t get the best from my teaching and are misled”.

Teacher 3 said, “It has a negative impact on learning. For example, students cannot understand as well as me the teacher. Hence, the performance for the class is not good”.

Teacher 4 said, “There is no effective learning because of language barrier hindering the learning process”.

Teacher 5 said, “Since I do not know Kiikaonde well my learners maybe left behind in understanding the concepts. This may affect them even at Grade 7”.

Teacher 6 said, “I don’t understand Kiikaonde and I waste much time asking about words especially in science. I fail to teach effectively because I don’t really know how to speak the language. So children in my class are suffering because there is no meaningful leaning”.

Teacher 7 said “The effect is that I fail to express myself effectively such that learners don’t get much from my teaching. I do not feel comfortable teaching in Kiikaonde which I do not know. In short, I feel challenged or forced to teach”.

Teacher 8 said, “I am unable to deliver to my expectation and effectively due to the language barrier. Language makes me fail to teach and enjoy teaching”.



Teacher 9 said, “I find it difficult in giving examples in Kiikaonde as well as interpreting it fully for me to understand and explain the concepts. My learners do not perform very well because they do not understand fully because I fail to explain very well due to my language inefficiency”.

Teacher 10 said, “I don’t understand most words in Kiikaonde language. Also, I can plan very well following all the steps but to deliver effectively it is a challenge because of the language difficulties”.

The themes derived from data from interview on learners’ views of their teachers’ familiarity with the official language of classroom instruction on learning were as presented in Table 4.2.2.

Table 4.2.2: Learners’ Views of their Teachers’ Familiarity with the Official Language of Classroom Instruction on Learning

| Theme | Number of responses |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Lack of understanding | 13 |
| Teacher makes mistakes in speaking | 3 |
| Teacher fails to express oneself | 4 |
| Teacher fails to read text | 2 |
| Teacher is able to explain | 2 |
| Teacher does not know some words | 2 |
| Teacher misspells words | 2 |

The findings from interview with learners on their views on effects of class teachers’ competencies in the official language on literacy achievement were highlighted in the following verbatim:

Learner 1 said, “We do not understand much in Kiikaonde unless when she is teaching in English”.

Learner 2 said, “Some words we don’t understand them”.

Learner 3 said, “We don’t understand some things”.

Learner 4 said, “Sometimes we do not understand what she says and get wrong the class exercise”.

Learner 5 said, “We fail to understand”.

Learner 6 said, “We don’t understand what she teaches. Sometimes she mixes with other languages we don’t understand and speak”.

Learner 7 said, “The effect is that we fail to understand sometimes when the teacher fails to express herself. Even writing becomes a problem to us”.

Learner 8 said, “We don’t understand sometimes not until someone corrects her to say what she is trying to say correctly”.

Learner 9 said, “We don’t understand sometimes when she is teaching because she doesn’t know how to speak Kiikaonde”.

Learner 10 said, “I don’t understand certain things that the teacher instructs us to do when she uses Kiikaonde”.

Learner 13 said, “Sometimes only she may fail here and there in the spoken or written Kiikaonde and we correct her if we know it”.

Learner 16 said, “We normally not understand if she tries to speak Kiikaonde unless in English”.

The findings from classroom observation on effects of class teachers’ familiarity with the official language on learning among Grade 3 learners were given in the narratives below.

Classroom Observation 1: Teacher 1 was observed in a Grade 3 classroom at School 2. The class comprised 45 pupils. The teacher taught a science lesson. The teacher was poor at oral fluency, comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, articulation, writing fluency and linguistic performance. The teacher was using English as language of instruction mixed with *Ichibemba* and a bit of *Kiikaonde*. It was vivid that the teacher was struggling in *Kiikaonde*. The observed effect was that learners did not understand much in *Kiikaonde* unless when the teacher code switched to teaching in English. Also because of the teacher’s mispronunciation of *Kiikaonde* words most learners misunderstood the concepts and the teacher spent much time on one concept because of language barrier.

Classroom Observation 2: Teacher 2 was observed in a Grade 3 classroom at School 2. The class comprised 53 pupils. The teacher taught Mathematics. The teacher was average at oral fluency, grammar, writing fluency, vocabulary and articulation.



“I have problem with fluency and vocabulary in *Kiikaonde*. I can’t deliver my lessons very well because of language barrier and learners don’t get the best from my teaching and are misled”.

Learner 2 said, “Some words we don’t understand them”.

Classroom Observation 3: Teacher 3 was observed in a Grade 3 classroom at School 3. The class comprised 71 pupils. The teacher taught literacy in *Kiikaonde*. The teacher was poor at vocabulary, grammar, articulation, writing fluency, oral fluency, linguistic performance and comprehension. This had a negative impact on learning. For example, students could not understand as well as the teacher the concepts of the lesson. Hence, the performance for the class was not good as judged from the class exercise that was given. It was vivid from the learners’ faces that they did not understand some things in that lesson.

Classroom Observation 4: Teacher 4 was observed in a Grade 3 classroom at School 4. The class comprised 49 pupils. The teacher taught literacy in *Kiikaonde*. She was average at articulation, comprehension, oral fluency, grammar, vocabulary, linguistic performance and writing fluency. There was no effective learning because of language barrier hindering the learning process. At times during the lesson learners could not understand what the teacher was saying in *Kiikaonde* and got wrong the class exercise.

Classroom Observation 5: Teacher 5 was observed in a Grade 3 classroom at School 5. The class comprised 62 pupils. The teacher taught literacy in *Kiikaonde*. She was poor at comprehension, writing fluency, vocabulary, oral fluency, grammar, linguistic performance and articulation. The teacher did not know *Kiikaonde* well as result learners were being left behind in understanding the concepts. The teacher did not write well or clearly the language on the board, making learners fails to read and understand.

4.3. What language instructional strategies do unfamiliar teachers with the language of instruction use to teach in class?

The findings from both the interview and classroom observation on instructional strategies unfamiliar teachers with the language of instruction use to teach in class were presented in Tables 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 respectively.

Table 4.3.1: Instructional Strategies Unfamiliar Teachers with the Language of Instruction Use according to Teachers

| Instructional Strategy | Number of Responses (Frequency) |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Group work | 5 |
| Discussion | 2 |
| Individual work | 1 |
| Story telling | 2 |
| Question and answer | 1 |
| Pair work | 1 |
| Songs | 1 |

The findings from interview with teachers on instructional strategies unfamiliar teachers with the language of instruction use to teach in class were highlighted in the following verbatim.

Teacher 4 said, “I mix the languages or code-switch. Mostly I teach in English to be honest”.

Teacher 6 said, “Sometimes I use *Ichibemba* and English in my teaching despite this being a Lower Grade where teaching supposed to be done in English. I also make use of group work just to ease the language barrier challenge in class”.

Teacher 7 said,

“With my status of not knowing the language, I ask learners to tell me some of the words. Most learners from town use Ichibemba, so I ask them in that language. Also, I use English in most cases, I can’t lie, because it is easy and most learners understand it. To get over the challenges associated with my language inefficiency, I rely on storytelling by learners, question and answer, individual work and group work discussions”.

Teacher 8 said, “I involve learners through group work and storytelling”.

Teacher 9 said, “I use question and answer, group work and discussion strategies”.

Teacher 10 said, “I use pair work, individual and whole class reading”.



Teacher 11 said “*I use pair work, group work, songs to teach sounds so that they remember*”

Table 4.3.2: Instructional Strategies Unfamiliar Teachers with the Language of Instruction Use according to Learners

| Instructional Strategy | Number of Responses (Frequency) |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Group work | 12 |
| Individual work | 10 |
| Translation | 2 |
| Question and answer | 5 |
| Role play | 1 |
| Home work | 1 |

The findings from interview with learners on instructional strategies unfamiliar teachers with the language of instruction use to teach in class were highlighted in the following verbatim.

Learner 1 said, “*Groups, individual work and question and answer*”.

Learner 3 said, “*The teacher gives us group and individual tasks*”.

Learner 5 said, “*We are put in groups, given individual work and homework*”.

Learner 7 said, “*The teacher uses individual work and question and answer to teach us*”.

Learner 8 said, “*We are given independent tasks, group work and homework*”.

Learner 9 said, “*The teacher uses question and answer, individual work and translation*”.

Learner 10 said, “*We do group work and individual tasks*”.

Learner 15 said, “*Group work, role-play and individual work*”.

Table 4.3.3: Instructional Strategies Unfamiliar Teachers with the Language of Instruction Used in the Observed Classrooms

| Instructional Strategy Observed | Number of Observation (Frequency) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Group work | 2 |
| Translation | 4 |
| Question and answer | 4 |
| Oral drills | 4 |

The findings from classroom observation on instructional strategies unfamiliar teachers with the language of instruction used to teach in class were summarized in Table 4.3.3 above and detailed in the following narratives.

In Classroom Observation 1, The Lesson was observed in Grade 3 classroom. The lesson was 30 minutes. The Teacher used group work. In Classroom Observation 2, instead of teaching using *Kiikaonde*, the teacher heavily used English in both oral and written work. In Classroom Observation 3, The Lesson was observed in Grade 3 classroom. The lesson was 60 minutes. The Teacher used translation, oral drills and question and answer strategies. In Classroom Observation 4, The Lesson was observed in Grade 3 classroom. There were 49 pupils in attendance (that is, 28 boys and 21 girls). The lesson was 60 minutes. The Teacher used translation, oral drills and question and answer strategies. In Classroom Observation 5, the Lesson was observed in Grade 3 classroom. The lesson was 30 minutes. The Teacher used translation, oral drills and question and answer strategies.

5.0. DISCUSSION

The results of data analysis from interviews with teachers and learners revealed that majority of the teachers were not familiar with the official language of classroom instruction, *Kiikaonde*.

The results of classroom observations (Table 4.1.1) showed that out of the five teachers observed; only one was familiar with the familiar language of classroom instruction.

The results of the reading fluency test (Table 4.1.2) further revealed that while most of the teachers scored a relatively high reading rate (ranging from 92 to 108 words per minute, or 74 % to 95 %) except for one who scored reading fluency score of 86



words per minute (75%) they were short of automaticity, accuracy and prosody. The results indicate that the reading by majority of the teachers was slow and inaccurate recognition of words, unable to decode and sound out words, unable to show expression; appropriate phrasing and attention to punctuation. The results (Table 4.1.2) generally indicated teacher unfamiliarity with the language of classroom instruction evidenced by poor language proficiency such as inability to express oneself with the implication or View on language proficiency on learning that no meaningful learning occurred. According to USAID Transforming Teacher Education (2022) when a learner or teacher can read text between 95 % and 100 % accuracy, the text is considered to be at their independent level. Texts that are read between 90 % and 94 % accuracy are at learners or teachers' instructional level, and texts read below are at learners' frustration level.

Therefore, it could be implied that the teacher whose reading rate was 75 % or 86 words per minute was at frustration level. All fluency components are included in this strategy, but the focus is on accuracy and rate. The findings suggest that majority of the teachers were unfamiliar with *Kiikaonde* the language of classroom instruction; but this does not suggest that the teachers were incompetent in *Kiikaonde*.

The findings obtained from interview with the learners on class teachers' familiarity show that all the teachers were unfamiliar with the language of classroom instruction. The findings further indicate that almost all the teachers did not know most of the words in *Kiikaonde*, thus struggled to use it. This suggests that there is a serious language barrier between the teachers and the learners' familiar language. Most of them used English as language of instruction mixed with *Ichibemba* and a bit of *Kiikaonde*. This finding is supported by Zergani (2016) who revealed that without language and literacy support in the mother tongue, a child's home language begins to degrade. The results suggest that almost all the teachers were struggling in *Kiikaonde*. This implies that the teachers would be less willing to use the familiar language and as Zergani puts it, the familiar language, which is a child's home language, begins to degrade. The argument by Mwelwa and Mwanza (2020) citing Wakumelo (2013) that English has always been the language of government business, judiciary, media and employment and a compulsory subject from grades five to the final year of secondary education while Zambian languages are used as medium of instruction from grade 1- 4 and as a subject from grade 5-12 and have largely performed the role of preserving Zambian culture and heritage as noted by (Wakumelo 2013; Kafusha et al., 2019) could be on a slippery slope, if teachers fail to use the familiar language of classroom instruction, it would imply that Zambian languages would be deprived of the role of preserving Zambian culture and heritage .

The findings that teachers are unfamiliar with the mother tongue language of classroom instruction have implications on the Zambian education system, which is that, the use of familiar language or to be precise, the familiar language policy is proving to be a barrier to effective communication and lesson delivery among non-native teachers and learners at Lower primary school in Solwezi District. The findings do not support the mother tongue language of instruction theory but bilingual models such as the simultaneous use of mother tongue and a second language such as English. This could ease the language barrier that arises from the use of monolingual as other scholars have argued.

The results of interview data analysis of teachers' views on their familiarity with the official language of classroom instruction on learning (Table 4.2.1) generally indicated ineffective lesson delivery by teachers, lack of understanding among learners, loss of interest in learning among learners, language barrier hindering learning and poor performance among learners were the most frequent responses by the teachers.

Therefore, this could imply that there is generally no meaningful learning going on in those classrooms where non-native familiar language teachers are teaching at Lower Grades. This could further suggest that the mono lingual policy directing teachers to teach in a learner's familiar language of classroom instruction at lower grades needs rethinking.

These findings do not support the Mother Tongue Instruction Theory that children in the initial levels of schooling would be better able to grasp the curriculum if they are taught in the language they are most familiar with - the one they speak at home (leegacy.senate.gov.ph/press-release/2023), since studies show that 40 % of children do not have access to an education in a language they understand and also the teachers who may be unfamiliar with the language, and this is negatively affecting their learning (UNESCO, 2016). The results further do not resonate with those by Benson and Carole (2004) who reported that majority of the respondents in their study believed that the use of mother tongue would make a better communication between pupils and teachers; mother tongue-based education would develop the writing system of the children; it would be a big help in developing curriculum and instructional materials. However, the findings are supported by Chella, Tambulukani, and Mkandawire (2023)



who in their study recommended that the government should develop and implement a strong simultaneous bilingual or multilingual literacy programme to reflect community languages and avoid imposing monoglossic language ideologies across schools given the multilingual characteristics of most societies.

The findings of the current study are further supported by Muzata (2015), who looked at familiar language versus mother tongue implications of the shift in the language of instruction in Zambian schools and reported that many studies support the teaching and learning through a mother tongue but the implications of a familiar language of instruction had not yet been analyzed. His research established that the challenges facing the implementation of such a policy were no way different from those faced when the policy was first attempted prior to 1977, but fails to state them. The findings which reveal that most of the learners did not understand what the teacher is teaching are further supported by Ball (2014) who in his study reported that Children whose primary language is not the language of instruction in school are more likely to drop out of school or fail in early grades because they could not understand.

The findings of the data analysis derived from interview on learners' views of their teachers' familiarity with the official language of classroom instruction on learning indicated lack of understanding, teacher failure to express oneself (speaking, reading and writing) as the most frequent responses. Both the teachers' and learners' views on effects of teachers' familiarity with language of classroom instruction are consistent.

The findings from classroom observation on effects of class teachers' familiarity with the official language on learning among Grade 3 revealed that all the teachers who were observed were poor at oral fluency, comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, articulation, writing fluency and linguistic performance. The teachers used English as language of instruction mixed with *Ichibemba* and a bit of *Kiikaonde*. It was vivid that the teachers were struggling in *Kiikaonde*. The observed effect was that learners did not understand much in *Kiikaonde* unless when the teacher code switched to teaching in English. Also because of the teachers mispronunciation of *Kiikaonde* words most learners misunderstood the concepts and the teacher spent much time on one concept because of language barrier. Similarly, these observations are consistent with both the teachers' and learners' views on this issue. The findings of the current study contradict those by Machnyise (2019) who in his study titled "The Impact of Familiar Local Language Medium of Instruction on Zambian Primary School Pupils' Academic Performance: A Case Study of Mumbwa Primary Schools" undertaken in Mumbwa which investigated the impact of using local familiar languages as media of instruction on Zambian primary school pupils' academic performance specifically in Mumbwa district established that pupils are acquiring knowledge and skills easily this time around when instructions are given in the familiar language.

The findings on teachers' familiarity with the language of classroom instruction (mother tongue) could imply that the education system in Zambia may not be reaping maximum benefits from the familiar language policy at Lower Grade in primary schools when non-native teachers are the ones to implement it in the selected schools in Solwezi District. This contradicts the mother tongue language of instruction theory which contends that children learn better in their mother tongue in early grades in primary schools, supported by several studies, (Machnyise (2019; UNSECO, 2016; Chilora & Harris, 2001). The theory ignores the fact that in some societies which are bilingual or multilingual a monolingual policy becomes problematic for both teachers and learners who may come from different language backgrounds.

The findings from teacher interview on instructional strategies unfamiliar teachers with the language of instruction used to teach in class revealed that despite teachers mentioning so many strategies such as discussion, individual work, storytelling, question and answer, pair work, songs; Group work dominated (Table 4.3.1). Learners interview results revealed that group work was the most frequently used strategy (with 12 responses) followed by individual work (with 10 responses), question and answer (with 5 responses) and translation (with 2 responses) (Table 4.3.2).

Findings of classroom lesson observations on instructional strategies unfamiliar teachers with the language of instruction used showed that question and answer, translation and oral drills dominated. Group work was only observed in two observations (Table 4.3.3). The use of the strategies reported by the current study is supported by Benson and Carole (2004) who reported that majority of the respondents in their study believed that the use of mother tongue would make a better communication between pupils and teachers; it would be a big help in developing curriculum and instructional materials; the teachers utilize role play in



the generalization of lesson using mother tongue; and children who use mother tongue would have easier way for them to learn a second, third and fourth language.

Similar strategies were found by Mkandawire, Zuilkowski, Mwansa & Manchishi (2023) in their study which sought to understand multilingual teachers' pedagogical approaches to helping non-speakers of the language of instruction learn initial reading (decoding) skills in diverse classes of Lusaka District of Zambia which revealed that teachers in multilingual classes used translanguaging, bilingual materials, and remediation and reading intervention strategies to teach literacy among early graders. A study by Samalesu, Sakambuta and Mwiinga (2023) which investigated strategies of teaching English as a Second Language in multilingual classrooms at the Lower Grades in the primary schools in Meheba Refugee Settlement in Kalumbila District of Zambia found translation, code switching, look and say, group work, class discussions, question and answer, body language and phonemic awareness strategies being employed by teachers in the teaching of English as a Second Language in multilingual classrooms.

Thus, the findings of the current study on teaching strategies are supported by Samelesu and others. The use of translation is supported by Randaccio who pointed out that the method adopted by Fick used translation to and from the foreign language of individual sentences which were usually specifically constructed to exemplify certain grammatical features. This meant that the examples could be graded for difficulty and that the grammar could be taught systematically. A study by Mwanza and Manchishi (2022) which searched for classroom practices which would facilitate communicative competence in the teaching and learning of English grammar in Zambian public secondary schools revealed that close exercise, transformation exercise, punctuation exercise, substitution exercise, spelling exercise, choosing a correct sentence, single word prompt (mechanical practices) and composition exercise, situational exercise, reading exercise, and constructing own sentences (meaningful practices) were used in the teaching and learning of English grammar by the participants. These findings are different from those established in the current study. A study by Mwanza (2020) titled "An Analysis of Teachers' Classroom Application of the Eclectic Method to English Language Teaching in Multilingual Zambia" reported that although teachers used eclectic method, this was shallow and only two methods dominated including question and answer. A study by Kumwenda (2010) on the "Initial reading performance in Chichewa in multi-ethnic classes of Chipata Urban" reports that pupils to whom Chichewa was their first language performed better than those whose Chichewa was not their first language. Although the study seems to contain some aspect of familiar language of classroom instruction which resonates well with the current study, it does not reveal the specific aspects of Chichewa learners found difficult which the current study has established in *Kikaonde*.

A study by Mwelwa and Mwanza (2020) revealed a number of strategies teachers were employing in teaching English grammar lessons aimed at developing communicative competence in learners which included; group discussions, sentence construction and oral presentations, teacher simulations, brain storming and context based storytelling. However, in 7 out of the 8 lessons observed, teachers were not contextualizing these strategies so as to bring real life application of the grammar learners were learning. The results are also not supported by Mwanza and Manchishi (2022) who in search for classroom practices/exercises which would facilitate communicative competence in the teaching and learning of English grammar in Zambian public secondary schools through interview data revealed that both mechanical practices (Cloze exercise, transformation exercise, punctuation exercise, substitution exercise, spelling exercise, choosing a correct sentence, single word prompt) and meaningful practices (composition exercise, situational exercise, reading exercise and constructing own sentences) were used in the teaching and learning of English Grammar by the participants.

The results further suggest over dependence on English, for instance, instead of teaching using *Kiikaonde*, the teachers heavily used English in both oral and written work. The use of question and answer method is supported by Lambani and Nephawe (2022) who pointed out that although the ideal situation for acquiring any language is to live among native speakers, most learners are not exposed to native English speakers. As the teaching methods employed are governed by this principle, the question and answer method provides immediate feedback to teachers and enhances learners' proficiency in English prepositions. The study by Lambani and Nephawe established that the question and answer method improved learners' proficiency.

The findings generally indicate that many different strategies are used, which is supported by Mkandawire, Zuilkowski, Mwansa & Manchishi (2023) who recommended that Early grade teachers should be allowed to use diverse pedagogical approaches in the teaching of reading in multilingual classes within the mainstream curriculum. On the contrary, the over reliance on group work,



individual work, translation and storytelling by native teachers has implication on the education system, which is that, teachers who are not familiar (non-native speakers) despite being aware of other effective instructional strategies would be less willing to use them due to language barrier or limitation. Therefore, unfamiliarity with the language of classroom instruction could be preventing the unfamiliar teachers with the language from using instructional strategies which optimize learning and learner achievement at lower primary school education system.

6.0. CONCLUSION

The study established from both the interview, classroom observation and fluency reading test (assessment) results that the non-native teachers were not familiar with the language of classroom instruction, *Kiikaonde*, in the schools in Solwezi District. This implies that the teachers who are unfamiliar with the mother tongue language of classroom instruction are struggling to teach and, therefore, the learners are not getting the best from these teachers, which was affecting the achievement of education outcomes. This implies that the implementation of the familiar language policy has challenges in the Zambian education system.

The study further suggests that the teachers' unfamiliarity with the official familiar language of instruction is impeding teaching and learning in those classrooms. The implication of this is that no meaningful learning is taking place in the classrooms in the schools affected by this difficult. Learners do not understand, language barrier is hindering teachers from effective communication resulting in ineffective lesson delivery, which in turn is resulting in poor performance by learners generally. These findings again imply that the familiar or mother tongue language policy is presenting challenges to teachers in the Zambian education system and the ministry of education should find ways of addressing them if the policy is to be useful to education.

The study also revealed that the teachers and learners are aware of this unfamiliarity and its effect on learning. For that reason, teachers are resorting to using many different instructional strategies which do not expose them much to using the learners' familiar language such as group work, individual work, storytelling and question and answer. These results could mean that the teachers due to language proficiency barrier are limited to using certain methods only narrowing their choice of strategies.

On the basis of the results and conclusions the following recommendations are made:

1. This study recommends teachers who are not familiar with the mother tongue of the learner language of classroom instruction should be allowed time by policy makers to learn the language to be able to teach Lower Grades (Grades 1 to 3) in the primary schools, if learning is to occur. This could be done through CPDs and local community socialization for a considerable period of time.
2. The study further recommends that teachers who are unfamiliar with the official language of classroom instruction (mother tongue) should not be allocated to teach Lower Grades in the primary schools before learning the familiar language of instruction by supervisors.
3. The use of variety coping strategies should be encouraged and enhanced among the teachers by the head teacher through school based CPDs and peer monitoring.

For further research:

4. It could be a good idea to scale-up the study to get more insights about this subject and also to see if the results could be validated.

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