

Viewpoints On Catch Up Efficacy, Practice, Experience, Evidence and Sustainability In 5 Selected Primary Schools, Chadiza District, Eastern Province, Zambia.

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Abstract

This article examined Catch Up a Programme aimed at providing remedial work by the Ministry of General Education with the help of VVOB and partners to learners strangling in literacy and numeracy. The study used qualitative research methodology, and was basically a case study. The sample consisted of 3 teachers from 5 selected schools (teaching grade 4, 5 and 6), 1 Catch up mentor from each school and 1 head teacher from each school. The study employed purposeful sampling for all participants. Data was collected through questionnaire and observation guides. Thematic data analysis method was employed. The study established teachers' views on how the programme was being practised, experienced and envisaged its sustainability. The findings indicated that Catch Up was not effectively being conducted in schools though teachers and administrators pretended to be conducting it. Even in the fifth week of term one 2022, no school was conducting Catch Up. Meanwhile, all schools administered Catch Up assessment during the period it was required despite some delays. Catch Up challenges found were: pupil absenteeism, negative attitudes for both

teachers and pupils, lack of proper training and orientation, poor lesson preparation, shortage of teaching and learning materials, over enrolment, infrequent monitoring and difficult timetabling of Catch Up. The study recommended that government should analyse and evaluate Catch Up; make Catch Up formally timetabled and improve staffing and classroom accommodation and reintroduce New Break Through Literacy for grade one and Step into English for grade two to create good foundation for literacy.

Key Words: *Catch Up, Efficacy, Evidence, Experience, Practice, and Sustainability*

INTRODUCTION

This paper examined delivery of Catch-Up programme in 5 selected schools in Chadiza district of Eastern Province of Zambia. The paper begins by giving literacy and numeracy background in Zambia and its programme changes. Then, it discussed Catch Up introduction, how it is conducted, its achievement, challenges and sustainability. It concluded by giving recommendations and suggested areas for future research.

1.1 Background of the study

Literacy and numeracy are two essential skills in life and today's global marketplace (Northern Ireland Audit Office, 2013). Meanwhile, it is a well-known fact that, while many learners in the Zambian education system achieve very good standards of literacy and numeracy, a significant number do not. However, the Primary school period for every learner is a time of significant opportunity for learning these two skills. It is during these Primary school years that children take their first steps along their journey of lifelong learning (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) and they carefully consolidate and develop literacy and numeracy skills.

Realising that a significant number of Zambian learners do not achieve very good standards, the Zambian Government through the Ministry of Education introduced programmes that were aimed at achieving good literacy and numeracy standards. For instance, in 1999, the Primary Reading Programme (PRP) was introduced to help improve literacy levels from 1999 to 2013. This policy provided that the medium of instruction in initial literacy was a familiar language which was practically a regional official language according to province (Kombe and Mwanza, 2019). This follows several changes which took place after Zambia's independence in 1964. Among the changes in education was a shift on language in education

policy from using familiar local language as medium of instruction in early grades to English language from grades 1 to university level (Chileshe et al, 2018).

However, in 2013 the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MESVTEE) the Ministry of General Education revised the curriculum and realized the need to first have a National Literacy Framework. In March 2013, with support from USAID/Zambia Read to Succeed project, MESVTEE developed a draft National Literacy Framework for grade 1 to 7 that established the roadmap for literacy teaching in primary schools (MESVTEE, 2013, Chileshe et al, 2018). The Primary Reading Programme was also reviewed and this review led to the introduction of the Primary Literacy Program (PLP) that also emphasized the use of the familiar local language as the medium of instruction, but this time from pre-school to grade four. PLP was developed in order to address the weaknesses under PRP and improve literacy levels among learners in primary schools. The PLP 2013-2018 was started in 2013 by MESVTEE with support from cooperating partners as an intervention initiative to help address the weaknesses noted under the PRP. This interposition programme emphasized the use of a familiar local Zambian language as the medium of instruction from pre-school to grade 4.

The PLP adopted the process of learning to read that is based on the principles of provision of the big five key competence skills, namely; phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension (Chileshe et al, 2018). Meanwhile, these policy changes which took place did not improve literacy and numeracy levels among Zambian learners as reported by many studies (Kombe and Mwanza, 2019). The levels of these two skills in Zambian learners continued to be exceptionally

low for a considerable period of time. In 2014, a national assessment of literacy and numeracy of primary school students in Zambia brought to light some disconcerting figures. Nearly 1 in 7 grade 2 learners was unable to read a single word in their local language and 30 per cent of grade 5 learners were illiterate with poor math skills.

Therefore, in 2016-2017 a new project that was aimed at improving these two basic skills was introduced by the Ministry of Education with VVOB, J-PAL, Pratham and UNICEF. This was called Catch Up and was initiated in two Provinces of Zambia, namely; Southern and Eastern. Catch Up was a remedial teaching programme for literacy and mathematics. The programme VVOB (2017) started with 80 schools from the four districts of the two provinces. The districts were Chipata and Katete in the Eastern Province while in the Southern Province there was Monze and Mazabuka. Catch Up was scaled up to 470 schools in 2018, 1800 in 2020 and finally to all the schools in the two provinces by 2021. Catch Up project was piloted for 5 years from 2017 to 2021. Therefore, beyond 2021 Catch Up was to be scaled up to the rest of the provinces in Zambia and later handed over to the Ministry of Education (VVOB, 2017).

It is from this background that this study investigated on Catch Up efficacy, practice, experience, evidence and sustainability in 5 selected Primary Schools in Chadiza district of Eastern Province, Zambia.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The policy changes which took place from 1999 did not improve literacy and numeracy levels among Zambian learners as reported by many studies (Kombe and Mwanza, 2019). Many findings supported the opinion that said Zambian children were not gaining basic literacy and numeracy skills. For instance, the baseline study of the Zambian Primary Reading Programme conducted in 1999 noted that among Grade 1 to

6 learners that were tested, the majority of children that attempted to read, read at two grades below grade level in English and three grades below grade level in their own Zambian language (MESVTEE 2013). The Grade 5 National Assessment Survey for 2006 and 2008 reflected learning achievements below 40% in both English and Zambian Languages (35.3% and 39.4% respectively). The Grade 5 National Assessment Survey and the EGRA survey both from 2010 showed poor reading and writing abilities among learners. The South African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ III) of 2010 noted that among Grade 6 learners that were tested in reading, only 27.4% were able to read at a basic competency level. In 2014, a national assessment of literacy and numeracy of primary school learners in Zambia indicated that 1 out of 7 grade 2 learners was unable to read a single word in their local language, and 30 per cent of grade 5 learners were illiterate with poor math skills. The biggest question that one would ask is; was Catch Up effective and sustainable to change this situation and bring out positive results in literacy and numeracy? This compelled the researchers to take up this study to investigate Catch Up efficacy, practice, experience, evidence and sustainability in 5 selected Primary Schools of Chadiza district.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the efficacy, practice, experience, evidence and sustainability of Catch Up in 5 selected Primary Schools of Chadiza district in the Eastern Province of Zambia.

1.4 Specific objectives

- 1.To find out available teaching and learning resources for Catch Up in Primary schools.
- 2.To examine progress and sustainability of Catch Up in Primary Schools.

3.To identify Challenges in trying to sustain Catch Up in Primary Schools.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

This study was influenced by two theories, namely; Bottom-up model of reading and a Social Theory of Numeracy (Pardede, 2008).

As indicated by Ngabut, (2015), Bottom-up model is a theory of reading process that views reading as basically a translating, decoding, or encoding process. This theory allows the reader to start with letters or larger units and as he or she attends to them, they begin to anticipate the words they spell. When the words are identified, they are then decoded to inner speech from which the reader derives meaning in the same way as listening. In this process reading is believed to be an automatic outcome of accurate word recognition. The theory emphasises that reading is essentially the translation of graphic symbols into an approximation of oral language (Pardede, 2008; Ngabut, 2015).

The Social Theory of Numeracy states that numeracy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by quantification. This means that numeracy cannot be abstracted from reality; it is neither mathematics nor abstract statistics and probability. The intimate tethering of numeracy to the social world is what distinguishes it. Whereas literacy is mediated by written text, numeracy involves quantification. We conceptualize quantification as socially produced, whereby people do mathematics and statistics in the process of comprehending their world. For instance, size, shape, direction, magnitude, quantity, classification, projection and comparison are some of the examples of how numeracy acts as a form of social construction, which may be said to be processes by which people assign meaning to their world. Hence, we may simply say numeracy is a collection of forms and reasons of social activities specifically

the collection of how and why people act when they are interacting with quantification.

Numeracy is not only social during its construction (in the sense that people do the quantifying), but it is also social thereafter. People interact with it in any manner of ways. How and why people produce quantification and interact with the quantification thereafter are social practices. A potentially powerful implication of conceptualizing numeracy as a set of social practices is that it decentres what people do not do (an inexhaustible list) and instead centres the exploration and explanation of what people do. A person might quantify their thinking, share or hide how they measure or what they chose to count. A person might also present their quantification as opinion or fact, or ignore quantities that run counter to their beliefs (Craig and Guzman, 2018)

1.6 Significance of the study

The significant of the study was to determine whether the key steps and practices in the Catch Up were being followed, materials made available and see how best its implementation would be sustained. The study provided important information and insight to all stakeholders in education in order to provide opportunities for meaningful learning which would determine meaningful life. The study also provided information needed for sound decision making in education planning and policy determination for various stakeholder regarding literacy and numeracy. The study would further help school administrators, teachers, policy makers, NGO and other stakeholders appreciate challenges associated with literacy and numeracy in order to find a way of sustaining Catch Up. The study also supplemented information to already existing body of information. Hence, other scholars who may need to take up other related studies in future would obtain useful information from it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Johnston, (2012) explained that the term 'Numeracy' refers to the skills students need to recognize and understand about the role of mathematics in the world, and the dispositions and capabilities to apply mathematical knowledge and skills in their personal, social and work circumstances that are constructive and meaningful (Md-Ali et.al, 2016).

This was supported by Department of Education and Skills (2011:8) who also described numeracy not as a restriction to only mean arithmetic and said:

Numeracy is not limited to the ability to use numbers, to add, subtract, multiply and divide. Numeracy encompasses the ability to use mathematical understanding and skills to solve problems and meet the demands of day-to-day living in complex social settings. To have this ability, a young person needs to be able to think and communicate quantitatively, to make sense of data, to have a spatial awareness, to understand patterns and sequences, and to recognise situations where mathematical reasoning can be applied to solve problems.

Going forward, the ministry further described Literacy not only meaning reading and writing but that there are much more than just that as explained below by Department of Education and Skills (2011:8):

Traditionally we have thought about literacy as the skills of reading and writing; but today our understanding of literacy encompasses much more than that. Literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media.

It is therefore important to remember in this article that when we refer to the word "literacy" we mean this broader understanding of the skill

stated above, including speaking and listening, as well as communication using not only traditional writing and print, but also digital media.

According to Department of Education and Skills (2011:12), 'One in ten children in Irish schools has serious difficulty with reading or writing; in some disadvantaged schools this is as high as almost one in three students. The literacy skills of students in Irish primary schools, measured by the National Assessments of English Reading, have not improved in over thirty years, despite considerable investments in reducing pupil-teacher ratios, the introduction of learning support (formerly remedial) and resource teachers, the provision of better teaching materials and considerable curricular reform Second-level. This prompted the Department of Education and Skills to publish a draft national plan for improving literacy and numeracy in November 2010 (Department of Education and Skills 2011).

Msango (2010) reported that there was a critical shortage of literacy teaching and learning materials in Malawi which negatively affected literacy teaching and learning. Salvador (2012) also complained of lack of teaching and learning materials and stated that the shortage was one of the most contributing factors to the continued low literacy levels in Mozambique.

Chibamba (2012) and Mwanza (2012) provided information on the reading levels among Zambian children and results showed that, on the overall, reading achievement levels were still low.

MESVTEE (2013) indicated that Early Reading Programme had weaknesses that affected literacy and included the following: a) inadequate pre-service training in literacy instruction, b) A curriculum not sufficiently focused on literacy instruction, c) Inadequate provision of in-service training in literacy teaching methodology, d) Half-hearted attempts

at developing primary language skills and literacy, e) Lack of parental or community participation and support for literacy instruction, f) Inadequate provision of appropriate reading materials, and g) The absence of a reading culture in the country which can be blamed on the use of English in early reading culture (MESVTEE, 2013)

Phiri (2015) conducted a study to establish the nature and prevalence of reading difficulties among grade four pupils in Lusaka District. The study reported that writing abilities of grade four pupils in the sampled schools were low and below their grade level. Phiri found that 50 (64.05%) of the participating pupils had difficulties writing words and sentences from the BASAT test while 61 (76.25%) could not write the tested story, we simply say, could not write any narrative.

Mutale (2016) conducted a study whose aim was to examine the reading skills acquired by grade two learners in Cinyanja under the revised curriculum framework in Lusaka District of Zambia. She reported that reading skills were poor especially among pupils in schools which lacked adequate and appropriate teaching and learning materials compared to schools which were resourceful.

Mkandawire (2017a) elucidated that the introduction of PRP and PLP were meant to help improve literacy levels among early grade learners in Zambia (Chileshe et al, 2018).

Another study also explained that the mathematics performance by Zambian primary school children is very low compared with other Sub-Saharan African countries (Makuwa, 2010). One of the biggest challenges for primary school children when learning mathematics is moving beyond the use of counting in calculations (Nakawa, 2012). Meanwhile, in investigating young children's early mathematical development in pattern and structure Mulligan et

al. (2015) developed a tool to assess children's number competencies called Pattern and Structure Assessment (PASA).

Pershad (2021) also explained that the overall reading levels are low, and the tail of the distribution is long and varied. Math is often worse.

Having identified the literacy and numeracy situation, VVOB, (2017) VVOB did not want to take this situation for granted. Hence, in collaboration with the University of Cape Town, South Africa, J-PAL Africa, UNICEF, and VVOB, (with VVOB strongly focusing on the professional development of teachers and school leadership) in 2017 the MOGE started the TaRL methodology in primary schools in Eastern and Southern Provinces. This was aimed at improving the low reading levels among Zambian learners. The TaRL is locally called "Catch-Up" referring to the programme's goal to help learners "catch-up" to grade level. The project received growing support from both parents and teachers and it was embraced by the Ministry of General Education. The ministry promised to continue this approach (VVOB, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The aim of the study was to investigate Catch Up practice, experience, evidence and sustainability in Primary Schools. Looking at the nature of the study, the researchers felt that it required data in form of people's views, observed experiences, practice, evidence and feelings about Catch Up. Therefore, qualitative research approach was adopted. This approach was mainly a case study and it was selected because it helped to explore Catch Up within its particular context through various data sources, and allowed the researchers to undertake the exploration through variety of lenses in order to reveal multiple facets of the Catch-Up implementation and sustainability. This is in line with Yin (2014) who said that case study research has gained considerable acceptance as a research method and that it should be considered a separate and all-encompassing method with its own research design.

3.2 Research site

The study was carried out in the five selected primary schools (Chadiza, Chilenga, Katantha, Tadyela and Tigwirizane) in Chadiza district of Eastern Province from which respondents were also sampled.

3.3 Population, Sample and Sampling procedure

The population of the study comprised of all teachers, Catch Up mentors and head teachers in the selected schools. Purposive sampling procedure was used to select 5 grade 4 teachers, 5 grade 5 teachers, 5 grade 6 teachers, 5 Catch Up mentors and 5 headteachers. The sample size comprised of 25 respondents. Three questionnaires were used, one for class teachers, another one for Catch Up mentors and the third one for headteachers. The researchers also collected data using observation guide from 3 teachers. Documents such as Catch-Up

timetable, Class timetable, monitoring instruments, assessment tools and assessment results sheets were also used to collect data. In order to get more clarification from participants, follow up phone calls were also used. Observation visit was made to all selected schools. Through these visits, the researchers were able to determine certain aspects of Catch-Up implementation and its sustainability. The primary data was complimented by the secondary data which was derived from government policy documents, ministerial reports and relevant literature on literacy and numeracy.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data collected through questionnaire, observation visits and documents were analysed qualitatively into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the people's views, experiences and evidence of Catch-Up programme. Data was analysed manually through Microsoft word and Microsoft excel by way of coding, grouping, and categorising to create sub-themes which later formed themes. Tables and narratives were used.

3.5 Ethical issues

The researchers were much conscious of the need to follow all ethical rules when carrying out this study. This was done by respecting the privacy of individuals who took part in the study and making sure that their names and identities remain anonymous to the public. All their valuable views, opinions, perceptions or responses were only known by the researchers for use only in this study.

Permission was also sourced from the district education board office and head teachers. Schools were assigned letters from A to E without following any order. Participants were randomly assigned letters and numbers such as: Head teachers (H1) mentors as M1 and teachers as T1.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Below are the findings and discussion of this study whose purpose was to investigate the efficacy, practice, experience, evidence and sustainability of Catch Up.

4.1 Chadiza district

Chadiza is one of the 15 districts in Eastern Province of Zambia where Catch Up is implemented. As reviewed in Chulu et al (2021) Chadiza district was established in 1949 and was second from Chipata district to be created in the province. It is located in the extreme south-east corner of Zambia, bordering Mozambique to its South, Vubwi District to the east, Chipata to the North, and Katete to the west. When talking about education matters, as of first quarter of 2022, the district had a total of 53 public primary schools and 6 community primary schools. The district is divided into 9 zones. Each zone has a Zone Centre School which contains the Zone Education Support Team (ZEST), a Zonal Headteacher and a Zone INSET Coordinator (ZIC). Each Zone has individual schools that contains the School Education Support Team (SEST), a School Headteacher, a School INSET Coordinator (SIC). When we are looking at Catch Up, each school also has a mentor and Catch-Up Class teachers.

4.2 Availability of teaching and learning resource for Catch Up in Primary schools

What is Catch Up?

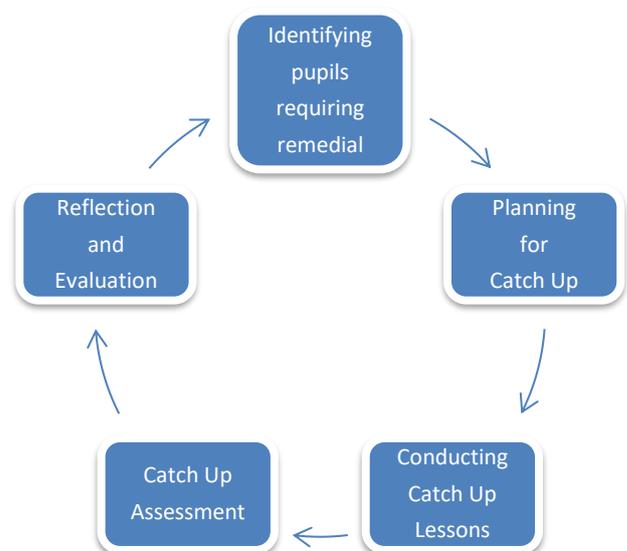
Catch-Up is an educational program being conducted in Eastern and Southern Provinces in Zambia. Following the problem in literacy and numeracy that was faced in Zambia, more than 60% of primary learners had problems achieving good standards in literacy and numeracy at the right grade and level. Zambia tried to look for an initiative that could get these learners back on track. VVOB (2017) Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) however, promised

that it could do the job. Hence, in 2017 the MOGE and VVOB with partners started TaRL which was locally called “Catch-Up” referring to the programme’s goal to help learners “catch-up” to grade level. It is a remedial teaching methodology that focuses on literacy and numeracy and it was borrowed from India where it proved to be very successful in improving basic skills among underachieving primary school learners (VVOB, 2017).

How is it done?

During School observation visit, the researchers wanted to observed Catch-Up lessons. Unfortunately, no school was conducting it. Therefore, the researchers only had chance of discussing with Catch Up teachers. Results from these visitations were that Catch-Up uses only one period of the school day outside formal school timetable, however schools found it difficult to fix time.

Figure 1: Catch Up cycle



Source: Research findings 2022

Learners who needed remedial work in grades three, four and five were grouped according to their literacy and numeracy skill levels rather than their grade level. Teachers appointed to teach Catch Up lead the groups, ensuring that learners who needed the most help had a small group and more attention given.

T2 at School D said: *Once the teacher assesses learners and groups them (put them in Catch Up classes) according to their skill level in literacy and numeracy, then the teacher plan and conduct Catch Up.*

All the teachers talked to said Catch Up heightened learners' performance in literacy and numeracy and improved in their reading, writing and maths skills which were the basis for all other subjects as well. Catch-Up lessons integrated learning with play. The integration was meant to make teaching and learning very active and interesting in order to enhance the learner's experience. As such Catch Up helped to bridge the literacy and numeracy gap between novice and expert readers, making the learning and teaching process easier.

Who are involved in Catch Up?

During observation visits to the schools, it was found that at school level there are a number of players that insure Catch Up is implemented. This study found that the first key player was a Catch-Up teacher. This agreed with what VVOB (2018) said that, teachers were crucial to achieving learning outcomes and learner wellbeing, especially in the context of providing equal opportunities. Teachers were appointed and allocated Catch Up classes after being trained in Catch Up methodology. This also confirmed VVOB (2018) words that, VVOB focuses on initial training, induction and continuous professional development of teachers. These teachers were responsible of assessing, recording assessment results, grouping them, teaching remedial work and

giving out reports of progress for each learner. Classes were created depending on the number of learners in need of remedial work in literacy and numeracy from grade 3, 4 and 5 at each particular school. Another person involved in Catch Up was the mentor. This is a teacher who was appointed and trained to be mentoring Catch Up class teachers. The mentor consolidates all the assessments records in the school, keeps and distributes to wherever they may be needed and assists mentoring teachers. The reports were given to the school head teacher who later sent a copy to the zone centre school who equally sent a consolidated copy of the zone to the District Resource Centre where they were received by the District Resource Centre Coordinator (DRCC) for onward transmission to the province and later Nation.

Teaching and learning materials in Catch Up

Catch Up mainly uses locally available materials. Teachers sometimes come together without learners or with their learners to make these materials. Others are just collections of items from the environment such as bottle tops, tins, plastics, boxes, grasses and many more that are just used as collected or used to create other items. However, T3 at School B said:

At first, all teachers in school could make a day and come together to make these materials. The monitor could tell individual teacher or groups what to make. Currently, it is like we are all busy. Teachers are always occupied with other a lot of activities and no one is talking about making material.

The above response was commended by T3 at School A, who said:

We had a lot of materials to use but I do not know where they are. I have tried to ask my friends (other teachers) but they also do not know. Only a few were found in senior teacher's office.

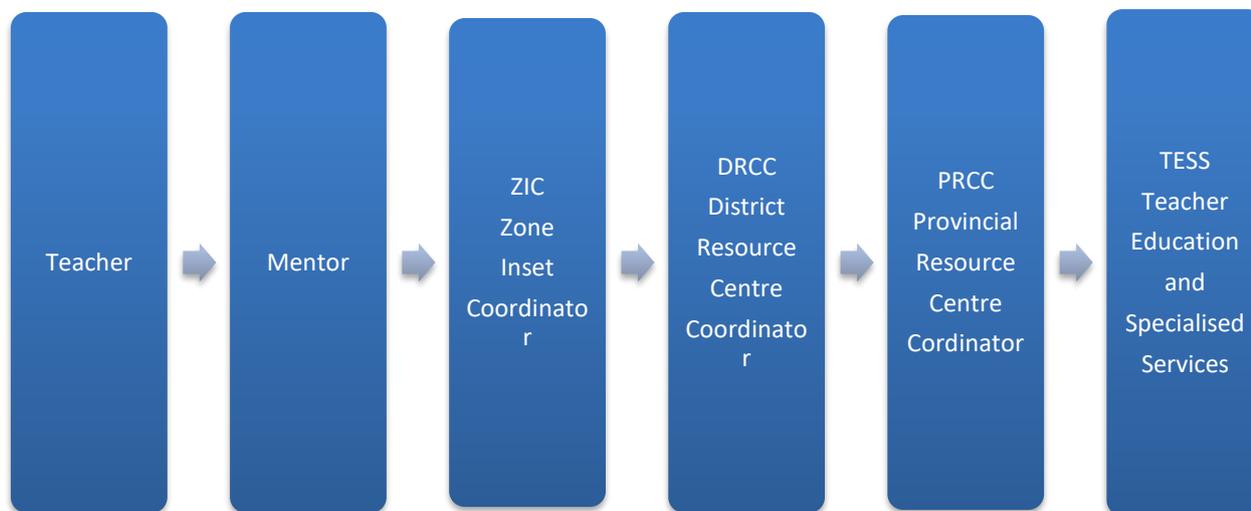
This situation is exactly the same like what was found in Malawi by Msango (2010) and in Mozambique by Salvador (2012) that, there was shortage of teaching and learning materials, a situation that negatively affected literacy. This was in line with what was reviewed in Mutale

(2016) in research done in Lusaka where she reported that reading skills were poor especially among pupils in schools which lacked adequate and appropriate teaching and learning materials compared to schools which were resourceful.

4.3 Progress and sustainability of Catch Up in Primary Schools

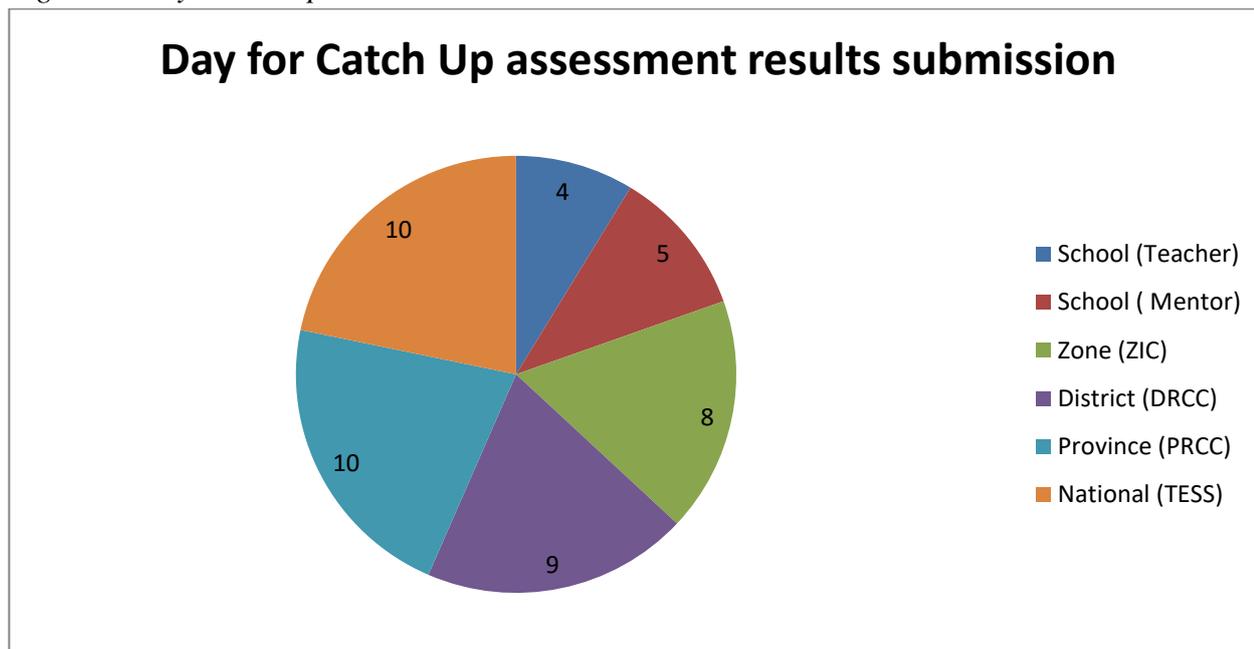
Assessment and monitoring of Catch Up

Figure 2: Catch Up assessment results submission process



Source: Research findings 2022

Figure 3: Day Catch Up assessment results take at each level



Source: Research findings 2022

Catch Up teachers assess the learners three times a year. That is; at the beginning of the year which is called baseline assessment, at the middle which is called midline assessment and at the end of a year that is called end line assessment. Teachers submitted assessment results to mentor to who in turn gives the head teacher and are later sent to the DRCC. Assessment tools come from the Provincial office for Catch Up through the DRCC to the school. This study found that all schools were conducting Catch Up assessments and results were sent to DRCC though late. M3 said:

Teachers always need to be pushed for them to assess the pupils. Sometimes you may be talking as if they are not listening. On due date or even after, that is now some say give us some time we will submit. This has always costed us; due to panic we submit unverified work to the DRCC.

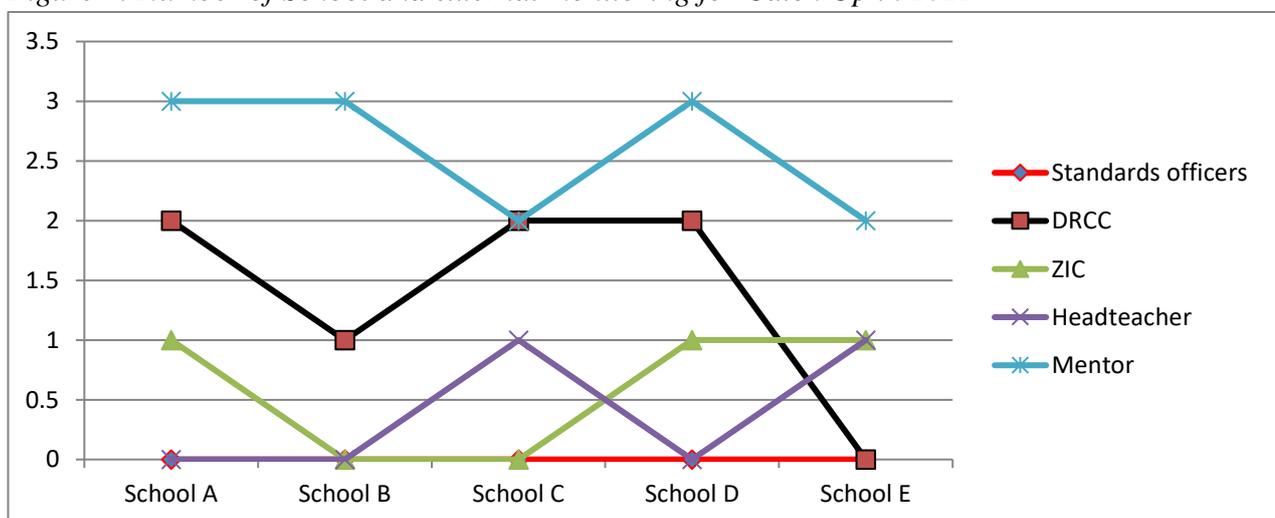
The above complaint was re-echoed by M1, M4 and M5.

Monitoring is a key part of Catch Up. At school level, catch monitoring is done by the mentor and the head teacher. These two are key factors to the success of Catch-Up programme. The main role of School monitoring is to support the teachers in the classroom by providing advice, working with groups of learners, demonstrating activities and answering queries from the teachers. Nonetheless, they also have a crucial role in recording what they see and reporting this to the zone and district who then review implementation and take any necessary supporting actions. Additionally, the deputy headteachers and senior teachers are also expected to monitor teachers in the school.

In addition to School Catch monitoring, the zonal head teacher and ZIC are also expected to monitor teachers though this may happen infrequently depending on the availability of resources for travel. District-level staff such as the District Resource Centre Coordinator (DRCC) and the Standards officers also are expected to spend a large part of their time monitoring teachers, though this also depends on availability of funds and transport. This was confirmed by M2 who said: *we have not seen standards officers coming to monitor us on Catch Up. It is only the DRCC who normally come with another officer from Katete. When she (VVOB officer based in Katete) comes in the district she hires a taxi and samples schools to monitor.*

The study confirmed this as seen in figure 4 that truly external monitors often lack transport for monitoring, this makes school-level monitoring more critical if Catch Up is to be conducted.

Figure 4: Number of School and external monitoring for Catch Up in 2021

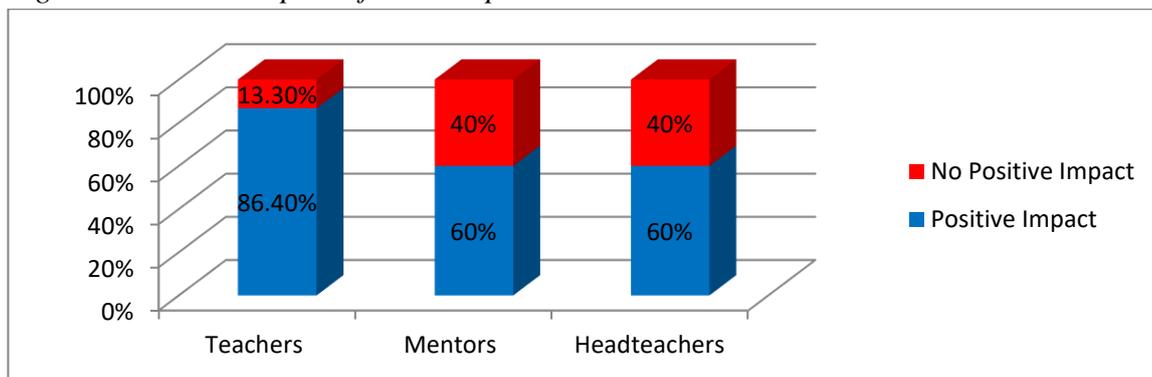


Source: Research findings 2022

What has been achieved in Catch Up?

A number of reports reviewed (VVOB, 2017; VVOB, 2018; VVOB, 2019 and Pershad, 2021) reviewed many positives in Catch Up implementation. This study also found that all schools in the district were implementing it. However, its efficacy was one of the issues this study tried to establish. Meanwhile, when participants were asked to tell positive impact of Catch Up the results were that:

Figure 5: Positive impact of Catch Up



Source: Research findings 2022

Two (13.3%) of teachers stated that Catch Up had no positive impact while 13 (86.4%) indicated that Catch Up had positive impact on learners. Two (40%) of mentors showed that there was no positive impact of Catch Up while three (60%) of them stated that it had positive impact. Similarly, two (40%) of Headteacher indicated not having positive impact of Catch Up while three (60%) of them said that it had positive impact. This means that more than 50% of the participants showed that Catch Up was having positive impact while less than 41% did not accept. This was further amplified by T3 at school E who said:

Last year (2021) I had 38 learners in my class (Catch Up class) who were unable to read any single word despite being in grade three, four and even five. By the end of the year 9 were able to read a simple paragraph while 11 were able to read words (T3 at School E).

T1 at School C said: *Talking about achievement, I may say yes, we have achieved though not much. Those who attend regularly are doing fine.*

When teachers teaching Grade six (6) were asked to tell how many pupils in their classes could read grade work in local language, they gave the results of all the pupils in grade 6 in all selected schools as shown below:

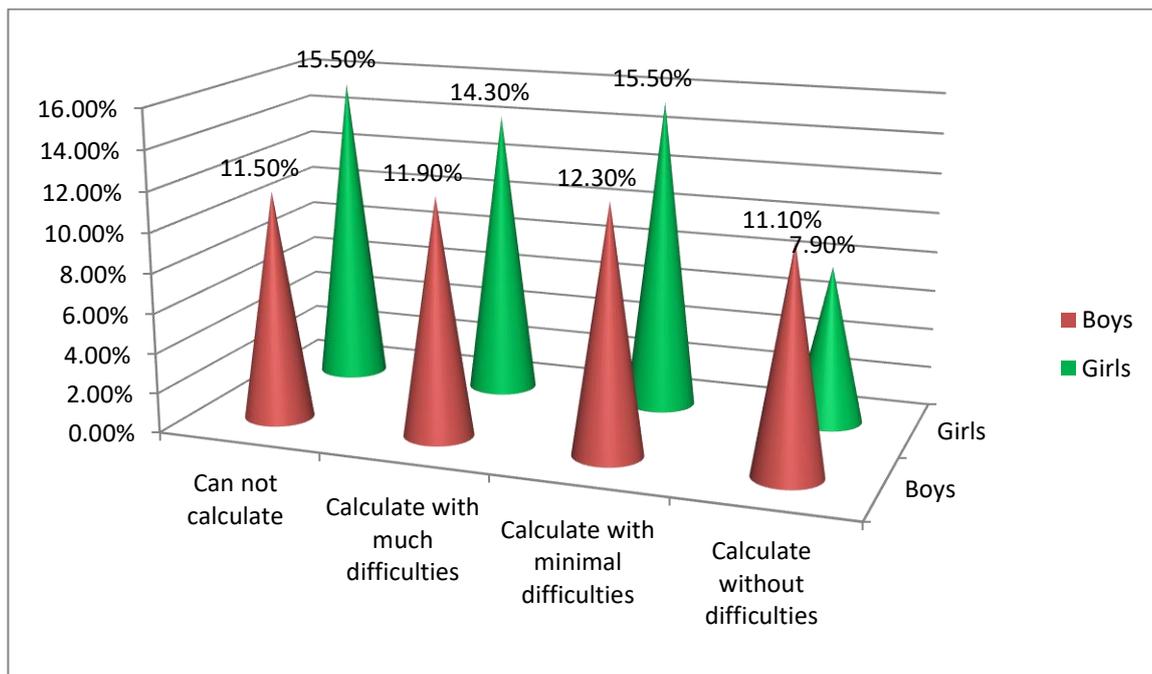
Table 1: Grade 6 local language reading levels

School	Can't read		Read some grade words with much problems		Can read all grade words with minimal problems		Can nicely read with good comprehension	
	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G
A	0	0	6	8	5	10	9	6
B	0	3	1	6	2	6	4	6
C	3	0	6	4	11	15	9	8
D	0	0	4	12	4	8	8	9
E	18	15	17	10	8	9	8	8
Total	21	18	34	40	34	48	38	37
%	7.8	6.7	12.6	14.8	12.6	17.8	14.1	13.7

Source: Research findings 2022

Table 1 above shows that 41.9% had problems with reading while 58.1% were progressing well. Hence, more effort was needed to push the 41.9% to good reading levels. This was as reviewed in Department of Education and Skills (2011:12) ‘One in ten children In Irish schools has serious difficulty with reading or writing; in some disadvantaged schools this is as high as almost one in three students. What was worrying to the researchers was that despite learners attending Catch Up lessons for three years with good reports from participants and good annual reports from VVOB, we still had grade 6 pupils who could not read properly and do maths. Furthermore, those who could read, even in lower grades, were not reading at their grade level too. This study confirmed what was reviewed in (MESVTEE, 2013) that among Grade 1 to 6 learners that were tested, the majority of children that attempted to read, read at two grades below grade level in English and three grades below grade level in their own Zambian language. When teachers teaching Grade six (6) were asked to tell how many pupils in their class could calculate grade work (Long division), their responses showed the results of all the pupils in grade 6 in all selected schools indicated below:

Figure 6: Grade 6 pupils who could calculate long division



Source: Research findings 2022

Figure 5 above shows that 55.9% had problems with long division while 44.1% were progressing well. Hence, more effort was needed to push the 55.9% to good numeracy levels. This settled well with what was reviewed in Makuwa (2010) that, the mathematics performance by Zambian primary school children is very low compared with other Sub-Saharan African countries.

Despite attending Catch Up lessons for three years, we still had pupils who could not do grade 6 work on long division. These were children who passed through all the three years of Catch Up. Where could the problem be?

Sustaining Catch Up programme in primary schools

This study established that, at inception Catch Up started very well. All the schools implemented the programme and followed the standard. The programme on Catch Up classes was conducted every day. The learners that had formal classes in the morning were coming back in the afternoon for Catch Up. Those who had classes midday could come an hour early or so and attended Catch Up lessons before entering formal classes. However, after a period, teachers started complaining of overload and lack of time as reported by T3 at School C:

Those teachers who were teaching their classes in the morning were teaching Catch Up after getting tired with normal classes, while the afternoon classes were attended to by teachers who were already tired with Catch Up.

T1 at School D:

We have no enough time to prepare adequately because we teach our normal classes in the morning and instead of preparing lessons for the following day, we teach Catch Up. Our Catch-Up groups are very big and it is not possible to do it in an hour. Sometimes, the whole afternoon is utilised just for Catch Up.

T3 at school A said: *Catch Up is good but it should have specific teachers to teach it only because same teachers get tired to teach Catch Up after teaching normal classes.*

The above complaints and others forced some schools to reduce days of Catch Up to 3 days in a week instead of 5. However, this study established that even the 3 days were not even observed. Schools could go for some time without conducting Catch Up. Some schools could start teaching Catch Up when they heard that external monitors were in the district doing monitoring. Even then, some schools were found without evidence of conducting Catch Up. This agreed with what was found by

Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) (2017) that, ‘there was anecdotal data that numeracy lessons were not being taught as well as literacy lessons, but this is not the general pattern in the data’. This study confirmed this at the time of observation visit. In all the schools visited none had started teaching Catch Up despite being in week four of the first term. During follow up phone calls in the fifth week of term one 2022, still no school was conducting Catch Up. What was more interesting was that teachers were very good at assessing Catch Up. Whenever it was assessment time, all teachers assessed and submitted to the monitor and so on. M5 said: *Teachers conducted this year’s baseline assessment and I have finished compiling, the DRCC wants them.*

H4 said: *if we want Catch Up to be well conducted, teachers should be given allowance like what happens for those that teach doubles class for normal grades.*

This was in line with what T2 at School D said: *Government should have permanent teachers for Catch Up.* This was giving a threat to Catch Up sustainability despite some teachers recommending it to continue being conducted in schools. Analysing the situation on the ground, the study established that Catch Up lessons were not being conducted but schools pretended. They did not give correct reports. It is important therefore, for VVOB to sincerely analyse the situation rather than just relying on the incorrect reports from those who do not want to be seen that they were not doing what was expected.

4.3 Challenges in trying to sustain Catch Up in Primary Schools.

Challenges face by teachers in Catch Up?

The study found a range of challenges in relation to the implementation of Catch Up. Below are some of the challenges:

Pupil related challenges; this included absenteeism, pupil transfers from one school to another, negative attitudes towards reading and learning in a local language and feeling shy to be identified and put in a Catch-Up group of low achievers (Chileshe et al, 2018)

Teachers related challenges; these included lack of training and orientation in Catch Up as reported by T2 at School B: *Although I am mentoring, I was not trained. The one who was trained she is teaching grade seven and says she has a lot of work for her to again do Catch Up work.*

M3 also had this to say: *some teachers are saying let those who got allowances for training teach Catch Up. Most of them give some excuses when they are told by the head teacher to take up a Catch-Up class.*

A negative attitude toward Catch Up; it was confirmed by this study when headteachers were asked to indicate a fraction of teachers who were positive or negative against Catch Up programme. Three headteachers indicated that more than half of their teachers at school had negative attitude while two indicated that more than half were positive. Another challenge was lack of teachers' oral proficiency in Zambian language. Some teachers also failed to follow the prescribed daily lesson routines for Catch Up. Poor lesson preparation is also another challenge as some teachers are just lazy. They cannot put much effort in their work.

School related challenges; this included lack of adequate teaching and learning materials, over enrolment with high pupil teacher ratio, lack of supervision of Catch-Up teachers by relevant authorities, failing to find appropriate time and shortage of teachers (Chileshe et al 2018).

Way forward on Catch Up

This study established a number of positive remarks for Catch Up to continue being conducted in schools. However, there are a

number of things that teachers and administrators feel should be done if Catch Up was to be successfully sustained. For instance, H3 said: *Catch Up should not be stopped but can be conducted in a different way not as it is now because it robs preparation time.*

H4 said: *let it be continued but can be introduced as a subject within the timetable.*

T1 at School C said: *it helps slow learners to read and write, so let it continue but be put on normal timetable.*

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Literacy and numeracy are really key skills for learners to do well academically and socially. Effort has been made for a long time in Zambian primary school to improve these skills. Unfortunately, all programmes have been discarded on the bases that they were not achieving the goals. However, the researchers of this study strongly believed that most programmes were good. The only problems noted were that proper analysis was not done and that incorrect measures were being taken. The problem was not with the programmes but the implementers at the ground and planners in the ministry who only looked at individual opportunities that comes with the new programmes they accept to be implemented. Following the findings of the study, the researchers made the following recommendations to ensure efficacy and sustainable implementation of Catch Up in primary schools.

1. The government through the Ministry of Education should revise Catch Up methodology.
2. The government through the Ministry of Education should provide good timing for Catch Up.

3. Schools should create adequate resources for Catch Up.
4. The District Education Office and Schools should provide frequent monitoring for Catch Up.
5. The government through the Ministry of Education should provide adequate transport and funds to Standard Department Officers who are charged with responsibility of monitoring.
6. In order to improve literacy, New Breakthrough to Literacy for grade one and Step into English for grade two should be reintroduced.
7. VVOB should ask independent monitors to evaluate the programme on true grounds.

Recommendations for future research

1. The performance and inadequacies of the monitoring department in the Ministry of Education.
2. Housing allowance and accommodation for teachers living in the rural and remote areas.

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