

Challenges Teachers Face When Teaching Literacy in Kikaonde Language, a Mother Tongue, in Selected Primary Schools of Solwezi District, Zambia.

Kamalata Lukama, Nicholus Nyika and Phephani Gumbi

University of KwaZulu-Natal

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ABSTRACT

Background

The primary literacy programme, a Zambian Literacy programme, has been implemented using local languages as a medium of instruction for the past 10 years, yet teachers still face challenges teaching it.

Objectives

The objective of the research was to investigate challenges teachers in Solwezi District, Zambia were facing in teaching literacy in grade one classrooms using the Primary Literacy Programme (PLP).

Method

The study used a case study design, employed the interpretivism paradigm, with a sample of 15 teachers from six schools purposively sampled for interviews and lesson observations.

Results

The results revealed that teachers were facing several challenges teaching literacy in grade one classrooms such as having trouble covering all the content of a literacy lesson in one hour, challenges in teaching literacy because some learners in the urban part of Solwezi had difficulties in understanding Kikaonde language, the medium of instruction and absenteeism by some learners. The study suggests the review of the one-hour literacy lesson's content to address the issue of insufficient time and engage stakeholders over learner absenteeism. Implications of the findings are discussed.

Keywords: Literacy, challenges, literacy methods, Solwezi District, Kikaonde language

INTRODUCTION

Mwanza (2016) states that Zambia adopted a three-tier system of education at Independence namely primary education lasting seven years of formal education, secondary education lasting five years of the same while tertiary education varies in duration with colleges offering certificates and diplomas taking two to three years, respectively and university education for an undergraduate degree taking four years. Sampa and Halaoui (2005) records a temporal change in 2004, when basic education, encompassing grade one to nine, replaced primary education and secondary education, which became known as high school and covering grades 10 to 12 ran for three years. This change was short-lived as the country reverted again to the education system adopted in 1964 in 2011 and is currently using the same (2024).

Gordon (2014) and Kombe and Mwanza (2014) record that Zambia adopted the use of English as the sole language of instruction from grade one to university after independence. The revised language policy in 1977, after extensive consultations still recommended the continued use of English as medium of instruction, while a provision was made for the utilization of the seven official local languages namely Tonga, Ibibemba, cinyanja, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale and Kikaonde (Banda & Mwanza, 2017; Kombe & Mwanza, 2019). The 1996 language policy returned English as the official language of classroom instruction but promoted the use of a suitable language to use for initial literacy learning (Education, 1996). Once adopted, grade one learners were unable to transfer skills from a familiar local language to English and this resulted into another policy shift in 2014. Banda and Mwanza (2017) indicate that the 2014 language of education policy incorporated the use of the seven official Zambian languages as the medium of instruction from grade one to four and English from grade 5 to university. This change in the medium of instruction led to a few changes in the education system including the teaching of literacy (Banda & Mwanza, 2017). The Zambia national literacy framework (ZNLFF) was drafted to give guidance regarding the teaching of literacy as well as align itself with the education language policy (Ministry of Education & Education, 2013; Mwanza, 2012). The Primary Literacy Programme, a literacy programme adopted in 2013, focused on helping learners develop phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (MESVTEC, 2013). Teachers were trained in how to teach the new literacy programme. Despite the introduction of the Primary literacy programme in 2013, literacy levels remained low. Kabir (2023) for example, reports that an early grade reading assessment (EGRA) conducted by USAID and the Ministry of Education in 2021 revealed that only four per cent of grade two learners in Zambia met the Ministry of Education minimum level for reading proficiency. The teaching of literacy in the mother tongue in Zambia has not been without challenges. Some of the challenges include inadequate teacher training of teachers in mother tongue literacy pedagogy, a serious lack of human resources, and other management factors (Mashige et al., 2019). Against this background, there is a paucity of research on challenges facing teachers in implementing mother tongue literacy programmes in Kikaonde, hence the need for this study.

Problem statement

Zambia's Primary Literacy Programme has run for ten years now. Kombe and Mwanza (2019) identified challenges such as the lack of teaching and learning materials, inadequate training by policy makers, rigidity on the part of those monitoring policy implementation, and translation of literacy content from English to local languages. Kombe and Mwanza (2019) who highlighted the challenges conducted their studies in places outside Solwezi Furthermore, the above stated scholars used case studies whose findings could not be generalized to other places. It was important to ascertain the unique challenges teachers in Solwezi District, Zambia were facing in teaching literacy in Kikaonde language, using the primary literacy programme. The study asked: What challenges are teachers facing in teaching literacy in Kikaonde in grade one classrooms in Solwezi District?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges in implementing mother tongue literacy programmes around the world

Literature exists on the challenges teachers are facing in implementing mother-tongue literacy programmes around the world and in Africa in implementing literacy programmes at all levels. For example, Dewi et al. (2022) conducted a study Indonesia in which they sought to describe challenges faced by teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in implementing school literacy programmes during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. A sample of four EFL junior high school teachers were interviewed using semi-structured interviews in a descriptive qualitative study. The findings of the study revealed that teachers faced challenges in implementing the school literacy programme because of their lack of understanding of the programme, challenges in time management, being technologically illiterate, an inadequate source of online reading, and students lack interest in reading. The study stated above differs from the present study geographically and in the level at which teachers faced challenges in implementing the literacy programme.

Anthony (2023) also conducted a study in Ghana aimed at identifying challenges teachers faced in teaching literacy skills among kindergarteners and how the identified challenges impeded their smooth teaching. The study was an ethnography, and data were gathered through semi-structured interview guides. Twelve participants, purposively sampled, participated in the interviews. Content and thematic analysis procedures were used to analyse the gathered data. Findings from the study revealed that teachers encountered challenges related to inadequate instructional resources, large class sizes, insufficient in-service training and continuous professional development programmes, learning disorders, and an absence of supportive adults in the lives of kindergarteners. The two scholars recommend that headteachers and the local district education directorate organise in-service training for teachers so that they are exposed to literacy, instructional skills, and managing large classes. The study by Anthony informed our present study on the challenges that impeded the effective teaching of literacy. However, it differs from the present study in the geographical location of the study as well as the level of learners.

Professionals have suggested a number of ways to deal with some of the challenges highlighted above such as large class sizes. Khati (2010) urges teachers to develop a collaborative learning environment and give different learning activities to learners according to their different levels while at the same time ensuring that they are involved in the learning process. This entails teachers planning well for the lesson, managing their classes effectively, and monitoring learners' behaviour (Nikam & Ambekar, 2016).

Challenges in teaching literacy in Zambia

There have been several challenges that teachers have been facing in teaching literacy. Kombe and Mwanza (2019) highlight challenges such as lack of teaching and learning materials, inadequate training by policymakers, rigidity on the part of those monitoring policy implementation, translation of literacy content from English to local languages, absenteeism by learners, and inadequate time to teach the stipulated sounds, as discussed in detail below.

The primary literacy programme and the current literacy programme being implemented did not come with the required material for teaching and learning (Kombe & Mwanza, 2014). Meki Kombe and Herman (2017), adding their voice to the same state that the Ministry of Education rolled out the revised literacy policy before they distributed materials to use. This scenario presented difficulties to teachers who were unable to teach literacy instruction effectively. Although the materials have been rolled out in recent years, the book-to-pupil book ratio still remains a challenge, as learners are still required to share these materials, especially in urban areas where the number of learners in a class still remains high. Mwanza (2012), in his study, reports the lack of teaching and learning materials as a factor hindering the effective teaching and learning of literacy.

There was a general concern that teachers had inadequate time to complete the one-hour literacy lesson (Kombe & Mwanza, 2014). An understanding of a grade one literacy lesson as outlined in the teacher's guide is cardinal. The lesson is outlined in stages as follows:

1. Objectives: Teach the letter sound of the day.
2. Learning outcomes include learners identifying and sounding out the phoneme of the day correctly, segmenting and blending sounds with vowels to form syllables and using syllables to form words, reading and relating the syllables and words to their sounds, and answering questions based on the story read.
3. Introduction: The introduction of the lesson should take five minutes. The teacher reads a story to the learners aloud and asks a few questions orally. The oral questions are related to the sound being taught that day. The teacher then introduces the sound (phoneme) of the day. The teacher demonstrates one or more phonemic awareness activities, depending on the level of the learners. Learners are requested to practice the phonemic awareness activities, emphasising the beginning and end sounds, identifying the odd one out, and blending and substituting sounds. The phonemic awareness activity part should take five minutes.

4. **Development: Phonics:** The teacher revises all the vowels, the sounds learned from the previous day, and some of the syllables from the previous lesson. Some of the activities learners are involved in include identifying words or pictures beginning with sounds or syllables, teachers pointing at syllables at random, and learners sounding them out. The teacher then writes the new letter introduced in the phonemic awareness activity in both lower and upper case on the board or chart. The teacher also brings in both long and short vowels revised on that day. Learners are asked to give examples of words that begin with the sound of the day. The teacher can also sound some words and ask learners how many times they hear the sound of the day in the word. The teacher then blends the sound of the day (consonant) with a vowel (/m+a/ = /ma/) and thereafter asks learners to blend the consonant with each of the vowels. The phonics activities should take 20 minutes.
5. **Fluency Activities:** The fluency activities should take eight minutes and involve teachers writing the syllables on the board in random order (pu, pa, pi, pe, pu) and learners practicing decoding them. Learners are thereafter requested to blend the syllables into either words or nonsense words, such as "pepi," meaning near in Kikaonde, a Zambian language, or "pepu," a nonsense word. The teacher's guide encourages the teacher to allow learners to do these activities in pairs or groups.
6. **Vocabulary activities:** These activities should take eight minutes. These activities involve the teacher and learners revising or going through some of the words previously learned. The teacher, using flash cards or written words in random order, dictates these words for learners to read and pronounce.
7. **Writing:** The writing activities take eight minutes. The teacher demonstrates on the chalkboard how to form a letter correctly, and learners practice writing the letter of the day. This activity is aimed at promoting handwriting. Another activity aimed at promoting independent writing involves the teacher requesting learners to write syllables and words dictated by the teacher, drawing and labelling pictures beginning with the sound of the day, filling in the blank spaces in words with the missing sounds or syllables, and in later stages, writing sentences or short paragraphs.
8. **Comprehension:** listening comprehension involves teachers reading a short story to the learners and asking questions during or after reading.
9. The conclusion of the lesson involves learners practicing what they have learned that particular day.

The above-stated is the suggested literacy lesson format (CDC, 2014). Kombe and Mwanza (2019) found in their study that most teachers were unable to teach the stipulated sounds of the day because of limited time. The teachers who participated in their study stated that the literacy hour was not adequate to teach all the steps as outlined and guided by the Ministry of Education. The other challenge related to teaching was that most of the learners were unable to grasp the two sounds in one week. This adversely affected the curriculum coverage as teachers were made to repeat the lessons as remedial work.

Kombe and Mwanza (2014) and Nalwimba (2019) all state that some of the teachers were not trained in the literacy programme, and this affected the implementation. This is mainly because some of these teachers were not in school at the time of the training. Despite being trained by the school in-service coordinator (SIC), some of them were still unable to effectively teach literacy.

Some of the other challenges experienced by teachers were the non-involvement of primary school headteachers in the development of the curriculum ((Nalwimba, 2019). This meant that teachers never owned the literacy programme, and their role was to simply implement a programme they did not take part in. There was also a general over enrolment of grade one learners in urban schools, making it difficult for teachers to give individual attention to learners (Nalwimba, 2019). Furthermore, the bad attitude of parents towards local language learning had an influence on the learners' attitude towards learning (Nalwimba, 2019).

Mwanza (2012) and Gonçalves (2019) add that there may have been a shortage of trained teachers who were proficient in the various Zambian languages, leading to a mismatch between the language of instruction and the languages spoken by the learners. This meant that teachers were using other languages other than the medium of instruction used in the area.

The challenges in the teaching of literacy since the implementation of the literacy programme in 2014 have been highlighted. Most of the scholars who highlighted the challenges conducted their research in places outside Solwezi. Most of them used case studies whose findings could not be generalised to other places. It was important to ascertain the unique challenges teachers in Solwezi were facing in teaching literacy using the primary literacy programme, which is one of the main interests of this study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design, research setting, participants and sample

This study used qualitative approaches and employed a case-study research design (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Teherani et al., 2015). A case study was used because it focusses on individual participants to understand their perceptions of events and also due its rich and clear descriptions of events (Cohen et al., 2018; Setlhatlhanyo et al., 2019). It was conducted in six primary schools situated in both urban and rural parts of Solwezi district, Zambia. Kikaonde is used as a medium of instruction for teaching literacy from grades 1 to 4. Some areas in Solwezi are urban, whose population has access to hydroelectric power and internet facilities in schools. Schools in urban areas receive a lot of financial support because of the huge population of learners and proximity to business houses. Learners in rural schools are not exposed to modern life and amenities such as electricity.

Purposive sampling was used to select fifteen teachers, drawn from six schools, to participate in interviews. Purposive sampling was used because it suitable and relevant in responding to the study objective (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Furthermore, six teachers of the fifteen and based on their rich descriptions in the interviews and experience participated in lesson observations, aimed at establishing the challenges teachers are facing in teaching literacy in Kikaonde in grade one classrooms in Solwezi District. Three were urban primary schools, while the other three were rural schools. Most of the rural schools have single streams, while urban schools have multiple streams. Four teachers were drawn from each of the three urban schools because they have multiple streams, while one teacher was drawn from each rural school because they had a single stream.

Research materials and data processing

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from fifteen teachers that established the challenges teachers were facing in teaching literacy. Each interview took about 30 minutes and was conducted within the school the teacher was teaching at. A quiet class was used. Interviews were conducted after lessons so that the school routine was not disrupted. Furthermore, eighteen observations, once every two weeks, were conducted in six schools to get data on challenges teachers were facing when teaching. The selection of these teachers whose literacy lessons were observed was based on their participation in the interviews, their rich descriptions in interviews and length of work experience in the case of schools that had more than one class. Furthermore, information from the lesson observations was categorised according to patterns and themes and interpretations made to highlight their meanings and similarities.

This study used qualitative methods of data analysis. Reflexive thematic analysis was used (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Thematic analysis involves categorising related topics to identify major concepts and themes (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). Verbal information from interviews with teachers was grouped into identified themes and categories. Themes were developed from this information, and their meanings and significance explained. Some direct quotations from the respondents were made.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was sought from the University of KwaZulu-Natal to conduct the study. Ethical approval aim to find out how study participants are going to be protected from harm, their right to privacy and informed consent (Rudolph, 2015). Written permission was sought from the District Education Board Secretary for Solwezi District to conduct the study. Participants were informed on the nature of the study and informed consent was sought. Participation was voluntary.

RESULTS

The study sought to establish challenges which teachers were facing teaching literacy in grade one classrooms. Presented in this section are findings generated qualitatively using semi-structured interviews with the fifteen (15) teachers and lesson observations conducted in the six schools. The following were the findings:

a. Findings from Interviews

i. Too much content to be covered in one hour

Fourteen out of the fifteen (15) teachers translating into 93.3 per cent indicated that they had had challenges covering all the content of a literacy lesson in an hour because there was too much content to cover. The lesson consisted of five major stages: Present, Model, Guide, Practice, and Interact. In the present stage, the teacher introduced the day's sound to the learners and revised the vowels. In the model stage, the teacher demonstrated fluent reading and asked the learners oral questions based on the short story. The teacher taught learners how to blend sounds into syllables and words; they read those sounds in the guide stage. The teacher and learners practiced reading in the practice stage, and learners wrote individual work in the interact stage. All the fourteen teachers indicated that the five steps involved in teaching literacy were loaded with several teacher and learner activities, making it difficult for them to conclude the lesson. For example, Teacher 1 from School A said:

“One of the challenges which I have teaching literacy using the Primary Literacy Programme is that there is just so much involved in one lesson and time is not enough to teach the sound of the day, read the story and learners answer oral questions, blend the sound with vowels to form syllables and syllables into words and sometimes simple sentences. I also must ensure that learners are involved in the learning process by asking them to participate and this takes a bit of some time. The literacy hour is sometimes not enough for me and the learners to do everything planned.”

Teacher 2 from School B also said:

“There is so much to teach in one day. If you check on the specific outcomes of a lesson, I have about four. I have to teach the sound of the day, and after that is done, I have to blend the sound of the day with vowel sounds to form words. Furthermore, I am expected to guide learners on how to blend words into sentences, and this takes a lot of time for learners to understand. There is also the reading of a short story and oral comprehension. Learners are also expected to practice what they have learned and write an exercise at the end of the lesson. This makes the lesson very long and very difficult to complete the literacy lesson in one hour.”

The above responses indicate that teachers were having challenges completing the literacy lessons in one hour because there was so much to cover.

ii. Some urban based learners have challenges understanding the medium of instruction

Four teachers based in schools within the urban areas stated that some of the learners in grade one classrooms had challenges understanding Kikaonde, the medium of instruction, and this presented a challenge teaching such learners. Some of the learners were not indigenous people and came from homes where Kikaonde, the medium of instruction, was not used as a first or second language. As a result, it took a long time for such learners to learn the language and how to read and write it. For example, Teacher 3 from School C said.

“Some of my learners have challenges understanding Kikaonde, and it takes a long time for them to learn the language. I have learners from different backgrounds, and they usually do not speak Kikaonde at home. This is affecting my teaching because I now must find other ways, including using another language, to help them understand.”

Teacher 4 from School D also said:

“One other challenge that I have been facing in teaching literacy using the current national literacy framework is that some of the learners are unable to understand the medium of instruction, which is Kikaonde. As you are aware, some of the learners in my class are coming from homes where they speak either English or other local languages, and when they are enrolled in grade one, it has been difficult to teach such learners. It simply means that you must start teaching them the language as well as literacy. This means that their pace of learning is different from that of those who already understand the medium of instruction.”

iii. Absenteeism by learners

Eight out of the fifteen (15) teachers translating into 53 per cent mentioned absenteeism as one of the challenges they were facing teaching literacy to the learners. They mentioned that literacy lessons were sequenced in such a way that if a learner was absent for two days, it was very difficult to catch up unless a remedial lesson was taught. The sequence of the literacy syllabus, which outlines a sound to be taught in a day and revised the following day, prevented such learners from catching up. For example, Teacher 5 from School E said:

“I also have the challenge of some learners missing lessons, and this affects their progress as far as literacy is concerned. For example, I have seventy-eight learners present, and fifty-seven are present, meaning that twenty-one are absent. This happens almost daily. It is very difficult to reteach this lesson because I am expected to cover more work every day according to the syllabus and the framework. The current syllabus is made in such a way that two sounds are covered every week, and when pupils are absent, they remain behind for a long time. Some of the parents have been engaged, but it is still a challenge for all learners to be present in school.”

Teacher 6 from School F also said:

“I have a challenge of absenteeism among my learners. I have twenty-four learners absent today. Some learners can be present today, but they will be absent tomorrow. This has been the trend as far as absenteeism is concerned. It is difficult to record any meaningful progress when learners are absent. The absenteeism of learners is a big challenge because the lessons are linked, and when one misses one lesson, it is difficult to catch up.”

In summary, the interviews conducted with teachers revealed that absenteeism by learners, too much content to cover in one day and difficulties by some learners to understand Kikaonde, the medium of instruction were the challenges encountered by teachers when teaching literacy in Solwezi.

b. Findings from lesson observations

This sub-section presents findings from eighteen lesson observations conducted in the six schools. Three literacy lessons, once every fortnight, were observed in each school among grade one teachers. Each lesson observation took one hour. Lesson observations generated demographic information about the teacher and learners such as age range, attendance, lesson topics, outcomes, time covered to conclude the lesson, information on the use of literacy methods and the teaching and learning process. The following were the findings:

i. Failure to complete all planned for activities on time

Fourteen out of the 18 lesson observations exceeded the one hour duration allocated for literacy. Generally, the lessons followed the following pattern: The teacher introduced the lesson with either a song or revised the some of the words taught the previous day. Thereafter, read a short story to model reading. The teacher guided learners on how to make syllables, words and sentences. This was followed by a practice session, where learners read syllables, words and simple sentences learnt that day. Finally, learners wrote their

exercise either as individuals or did a group task. Fourteen teachers spent more than an hour to conclude the literacy lesson. The longest lesson lasted 74 minutes while the shortest lesson lasted 66 minutes.

ii. Absenteeism by learners

Absenteeism by learners was one of the challenges observed in all the six schools. In school A, 21 learners were absent out of a total of 78 while in School B, 24 learners out of 46 were absent. In School C, 11 learners out of a total of 34 were absent. The case was not different in the other remaining three schools indicating that absenteeism was a challenge.

DISCUSSION

The discussion in this sub-section is presented in line with the objective of the study. There were several challenges that teachers were facing when teaching literacy in Kikaonde in grade one classrooms. One of the challenges revealed in the study was the inadequate time to cover literacy teaching content in one hour. This is exemplified by what Teacher 1 from School A said that one of the challenges she was facing teaching literacy was that there were so many activities to cover in the one-hour literacy lessons. She explained that by the time she concluded all the five steps of the literacy lesson, she had gone beyond one hour.

The inadequacy of time to cover all the content of a literacy lesson was also highlighted by 13 teachers who participated in the interview. All of them mentioned that the literacy lesson had five major steps involved and required a lot of time to teach learners how to read the sound of the day, blend sounds into syllables, blend syllables into words, and conduct other learning activities such as reading, speaking, writing, and oral comprehension. The lesson observations conducted also revealed the same challenge. This finding is consistent with Kombe and Mwanza (2019) and Gu (2016), who state that there was a general concern that teachers had inadequate time to complete all the teaching tasks in the literacy hour using the primary literacy programme. The lesson observations also revealed that all the teachers did not manage to conclude on time as their lessons lasted more than one hour. Furthermore, some of them did not implement some of the activities they had planned to undertake. One implication of this finding is that most of the teachers do not complete the teaching of the content planned for a particular lesson due to the time factor. This also means that first-grade learners were not acquiring the required competences and skills because of the inadequacy of time, which ultimately delayed their literacy development.

The study also revealed that some pupils in urban areas had challenges understanding Kikaonde, the medium of instruction used in the area, and it usually took a long time for such learners to both learn the language as well as learn to read and write it. This is exemplified by what Teacher 3 from School C who said that one of the challenges she had been facing was that some of the learners were unable to understand the medium of instruction used in the area. The same sentiments were expressed other teachers from urban schools who participated in the interviews. This finding has several learning implications. One of them is that if learners are unable to understand the medium of instruction, they most likely remain behind and not acquire the necessary skills, knowledge, and competences. Learning a language by learners is influenced by a number of factors, such as parental assistance rendered to that child, their attitude towards a particular language, the learners' interaction with peers, and the language itself, among other factors. Nalwimba (2019) found that the negative attitude of parents towards local language learning had an influence on the learners' attitude towards learning that language. It is therefore important for the education system in Zambia to find a solution for such a scenario.

The findings of the study also revealed that absenteeism by learners was one of the challenges teachers were facing in teaching literacy. This is exemplified by what Teacher 5 from School E stated that some of the learners were fond of missing lessons daily. The same challenge was mentioned by other teachers who participated in the interview. The rate of absenteeism was high in all the school. The study revealed that up to 21 learners out of the seventy-eight total class enrolments, translating to 27 percent, were absent. The high levels of absenteeism were alarming and have a negative impact on the literacy development of first-grade

learners in these schools. Firstly, the learners who are absent from school missed out on the literacy content taught that day. This is because the primary literacy programme, the current literacy programme, being implemented is structured in such a way that one sound is taught in a day and revised the second day. Therefore, when a learner does not attend literacy lessons for just a day, they remain behind, ultimately leading to poor performance in the standardised literacy assessments (SLA) for work covered during that period. Furthermore, such learners lag in improving vocabulary, word formations, and sentence construction related to the learning outcomes for the sound taught when they were absent.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitation of this study is that the findings of this study could not be generalized to other places because it was only conducted in Solwezi, one district out of many in Zambia. Cohen et al. (2018) states that one weakness of case studies is that findings cannot be generalized. Secondly, the sample was small and therefore, the findings could not be generalized to other places.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that, teachers were facing several challenges such as having trouble covering all the content of a literacy lesson in an hour because there was so much content to cover. Furthermore, some of their learners in the urban part of Solwezi had difficulties understanding Kikaonde as a medium of instruction used in the area and high levels of absenteeism by learners in all the school covered in the study. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education should immediately review the one-hour literacy lesson's content to address the issue of insufficient time because it affects the pace of the syllabus coverage. The Ministry of education should immediately review the language of instruction policy and accommodate one that minimises language barriers in multilingual contexts. It is also important for school administrators to engage all stakeholders such as parents and government to find a lasting solution to the challenge of absenteeism.

DECLARATIONS

The authors declare that they have no competing interests directly or indirectly related to the work submitted for publication. All research and preparation of this work have been conducted without any financial or non-financial interests that could be perceived as influencing the submitted work.

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