

# Comparative Effectiveness of Literacy Initiatives in Zimbabwe: ERI versus THRASS

Zirima Desline; \*Dr Ndongwe Evershine

Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Chivi, Zimbabwe

\*Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.10200113>

Received: 05 February 2026; Accepted: 10 February 2026; Published: 25 February 2026

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the comparative effectiveness of two literacy initiatives in Zimbabwe: The Early Reading Initiative (ERI) and the Teaching Handwriting, Reading, and Spelling Skills (THRASS) program. Given the critical importance of early literacy for lifelong learning and development, this study assesses each program's alignment with Zimbabwe's Heritage-Based Curriculum. Employing a desk study methodology, the analysis reviews policy documents, program manuals, and empirical studies to evaluate how effectively each initiative addresses linguistic diversity, cultural inclusivity, and scalability in diverse educational contexts. Findings indicate that while THRASS offers structured phonics instruction beneficial in urban areas, ERI's holistic approach integrating indigenous languages and community involvement emerges as the more effective model across varied socio-economic settings. The paper concludes with recommendations for policymakers, emphasizing the need for adaptable, culturally relevant literacy frameworks to enhance educational outcomes in Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:** Early literacy, Early Reading Initiative (ERI), Teaching Handwriting, Reading, and Spelling Skills (THRASS), Cultural inclusivity, Linguistic diversity

## INTRODUCTION

Early grade literacy is not merely an academic achievement; it serves as a vital foundation for lifelong learning and personal development. International research consistently demonstrates that children who fail to acquire reading skills at an early age face lifelong disadvantage, including reduced educational attainment and limited career opportunities (Hernandez, 2011). In Zimbabwe, improving literacy rates among early-grade learners has become a pressing concern for educators and policymakers alike. National assessment reports indicate that approximately 65% of Grade 2 learners do not meet minimum reading proficiency requirements (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education 2019).

Several factors contribute to these inadequate literacy outcomes. Economic disparities, particularly between urban and rural areas, exacerbate educational inequities. Many rural schools lack access to essential resources, trained educators, and quality teaching materials. Furthermore, the multilingual nature of Zimbabwean society complicates literacy instruction, as learners are expected to transition from their indigenous languages to English, creating confusion and reluctance to engage fully with the learning materials (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007).

To address these challenges, the MoPSE has implemented targeted initiatives, notably the Early Reading Initiative (ERI) and the Teaching Handwriting, Reading, and Spelling Skills (THRASS) program. ERI adopts a holistic, culturally sensitive pedagogical approach emphasizing local languages and community involvement. Conversely, THRASS employs a synthetic phonics method focused primarily on English, which may not fully align with the linguistic realities of many learners (Dede, 2018).

This paper aims to provide a detailed comparative analysis of ERI and THRASS within the context of Zimbabwe's Heritage-Based Curriculum. Through the lenses of cultural relevance, linguistic inclusivity,

scalability, sustainability, and equity, this analysis seeks to evaluate how effectively each initiative addresses the diverse educational needs of Zimbabwean learners.

The findings suggest that while THRASS is beneficial in enhancing phonemic awareness in well-resourced urban settings, ERI's holistic and adaptable approach emerges as a more suitable literacy model for the broader spectrum of Zimbabwe's educational landscape, particularly in resource-limited rural contexts.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on early literacy education has highlighted the complexities involved in successful literacy acquisition, emphasizing its cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions. Early literacy is intricately linked to overall educational outcomes and future career prospects (Hernandez, 2011). Effective early literacy instruction requires a combination of phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies, which fundamentally support learners' abilities to engage meaningfully with texts (National Reading Panel, 2000).

In Zimbabwe, socio-economic disparities significantly impact literacy outcomes. UNICEF (2016) highlights that children from disadvantaged backgrounds consistently underperform in basic literacy assessments. Factors such as lack of resources, untrained teachers, and inadequate school facilities drive these disparities. Moreover, the country's linguistic diversity further complicates the implementation of effective literacy programs (Chimhenga, 2020). Learners often transition from their mother tongues to English, making it challenging to develop reading proficiency.

Numerous studies advocate for mother-tongue instruction as foundational to effective literacy education. Cummins (2000) provides compelling evidence that beginning literacy in a child's first language enhances cognitive development and lays a robust foundation for later achievements in second languages. This aligns with the principles embedded within Zimbabwe's Heritage-Based Curriculum, which promotes culturally responsive pedagogy that incorporates local languages into educational practices.

The literature emphasizes that balanced approaches to literacy instruction are essential. Scholars such as Goodman (1986) argue that reading encompasses not only decoding but also understanding and making sense of texts within their cultural contexts. Such frameworks underscore the importance of engaging learners with meaningful content that reflects their lived experiences.

While synthetic phonics programs, such as THRASS, focus on systematic instruction, they face criticism for potentially neglecting comprehension strategies, especially in multilingual classrooms. Research shows that students receiving phonics instruction alone may struggle with reading fluency and comprehension, particularly during language transitions (UNESCO, 2016). Thus, examining ERI and THRASS within the context of existing literature offers insights into how each program aligns with contemporary understandings of effective literacy education.

### Theoretical Framework

The underlying theories guiding literacy instruction significantly shape the effectiveness of programs such as ERI and THRASS. Two primary theoretical traditions are most relevant: balanced literacy approaches and systematic synthetic phonics.

### Balanced Literacy Approaches

Balanced literacy is rooted in socio-constructivist theories of learning, emphasizing literacy as a social process involving interaction with peers and texts (Vygotsky, 1978). This perspective asserts that reading encompasses not only technical decoding but also constructing meaning through context, vocabulary, and cultural relevance. In Zimbabwe, the balanced literacy approach is embodied by ERI's pedagogical framework, which prioritizes oral language development, comprehension, and culturally relevant materials. This integration fosters a sense of belonging and community among learners, thereby enhancing their engagement and motivation in reading.

## **Synthetic Phonics Approaches**

Synthetic phonics theory posits that reading success relies heavily on mastering sound-letter relationships through systematic, explicit instruction (Johnston & Watson, 2005). THRASS exemplifies this approach, focusing on providing structured pathways for teaching decoding and spelling skills in English. While effective for improving decoding skills, critics point out limitations in fostering comprehension, especially in multilingual settings where learners must navigate multiple linguistic systems (UNESCO, 2016).

## **Multilingual Literacy Theory**

Cummins' multilingual literacy theory offers valuable insights into early literacy development, proposing that foundational skills acquired in one language can facilitate literacy learning in additional languages. Employing indigenous languages in early literacy instruction, ERI aligns with this theory, enabling learners to build robust reading foundations that support later transitions to English. Research indicates that when learners are taught reading in familiar languages, they are more likely to grasp essential reading concepts and engage meaningfully with texts (Cummins, 2000). Consequently, ERI's approach not only promotes cultural relevancy but also enhances cognitive engagement, facilitating a more effective learning environment.

## **Policy Context**

The policy landscape in Zimbabwe, framed by the Heritage-Based Curriculum and NDS1, creates the educational context in which ERI and THRASS operate.

## **Heritage-Based Curriculum**

The Heritage-Based Curriculum, implemented for 2024–2030, emphasizes a culturally responsive pedagogy that values indigenous languages and the importance of community participation in education (MoPSE, 2023). This curriculum resonates with the notion that learning should reflect learners' cultural identities, foster community engagement and promoting achievement. Key provisions advocate for mother-tongue instruction in early literacy development, emphasizing the need for foundational literacy skills to be developed in familiar languages. By aligning with these curricular goals, ERI effectively engages language diversity and community context into its literacy instruction.

## **National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1)**

The National Development Strategy 1 elevates human capital development as a cornerstone for sustainable national progress, highlighting education as a critical component for achieving various socio-economic outcomes (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020). The strategic vision outlines goals prioritizing equitable access to quality education and the improvement of literacy rates, particularly for marginalized populations. NDS1 explicitly calls for educational reforms that are inclusive and sustainable across both rural and urban communities. This perspective reinforces the need for literacy initiatives that can adapt to diverse contexts and provide tangible improvements in literacy outcomes. Consequently, ERI's focus on community involvement and cultural inclusivity aligns strongly with the aspirations articulated in NDS1, while THRASS's resource demands may hinder its potential for widespread implementation.

## **Program Overviews**

Understanding the operational structures and methodologies of ERI and THRASS is crucial for evaluating their contributions to early literacy in Zimbabwe.

## **Early Reading Initiative (ERI)**

Launched in 2014, the Early Reading Initiative (ERI) seeks to significantly enhance early literacy in Zimbabwe through a multifaceted and community-centred approach. Recognizing the critical importance of mastering reading skills at an early age, ERI focuses on several key objectives:

1. **Improving the Quality of Literacy Instruction:** ERI seeks to elevate the standards of literacy instruction by equipping educators with effective pedagogical strategies. Teachers are trained to implement evidence-based practices tailored to meet the diverse needs of learners. This improvement encompasses methodologies for teaching reading and assessing literacy skills, ensuring that educators are well-prepared to support student learning in dynamic classroom environments.
2. **Promoting the Use of Local Teaching Materials:** Central to ERI's philosophy is incorporating local teaching materials that reflect the cultural and linguistic context of learners. By utilizing resources that resonate with students' backgrounds, the initiative fosters a more relatable and engaging learning experience. Local stories, cultural traditions, and familiar contexts enhance both understanding and retention.
3. **Fostering Collaborative Literacy Development:** ERI emphasizes collaboration in literacy education, viewing it as a shared responsibility among teachers, students, and their communities. The initiative encourages strong partnerships with parents and local leaders, creating a supportive environment for literacy development. By promoting home-school connections, ERI aims to empower families to participate actively in their children's learning processes, thus reinforcing the significance of reading outside the classroom.
4. **Professional Development Workshops:** A key aspect of ERI is its robust professional development program for teachers. Workshops are designed to equip educators with practical and innovative strategies for teaching reading. These sessions focus on enhancing teachers' understanding of literacy development and effective instructional techniques. As educators engage in continuous professional learning, they become better prepared to address the needs of struggling readers and adapt their teaching methods to suit varying learning styles.
5. **Continuous Assessment Practices:** Continuous assessment is integral to the ERI framework, enabling teachers to identify struggling readers early. By implementing ongoing evaluations and monitoring student progress, educators can tailor interventions to support individual learners in real-time. This proactive approach boosts student confidence and fosters a culture of responsiveness within the classroom, allowing for personalized learning pathways.
6. **Culturally Relevant Materials and Local Languages:** Infusing culturally relevant materials and integrating local languages into instruction is a hallmark of ERI. This strategy enhances student engagement and recognizes the importance of learners' linguistic identities. By teaching reading in familiar languages, ERI aligns with contemporary literacy theories advocating for mother-tongue instruction to strengthen foundational literacy skills. This approach acknowledges the multilingual landscape of Zimbabwe, ensuring that literacy development is both inclusive and effective.

The Early Reading Initiative stands as a transformative force in Zimbabwe's education system, aiming to create sustainable improvements in early literacy outcomes. By prioritizing teacher development, cultural relevance, and community involvement, ERI addresses critical barriers to literacy holistically. This initiative not only empowers educators but also fosters a generation of confident, capable readers equipped with the skills necessary for lifelong learning.

### **Teaching Handwriting, Reading, and Spelling Skills (THRASS)**

Teaching Handwriting, Reading, and Spelling Skills (THRASS) emerged in 2008 as a structured literacy program specifically focused on synthetic phonics instruction. The program aims to equip educators with clear and systematic guidelines for teaching English phonics, which is designed to foster proficiency in reading and spelling through explicit instruction. By introducing phonemic awareness, the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate phonemes in spoken words THRASS seeks to create a solid foundation for literacy development (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

## Key Objectives and Methodology

THRASS is underpinned by several key objectives:

1. **Phonemic Awareness:** Developing students' abilities to understand the connection between sounds and letters is crucial for decoding words.
2. **Systematic Instruction:** Providing a structured approach that breaks down phonics into manageable components facilitates effective learning.
3. **Engagement:** Utilizing engaging materials and activities fosters a love for reading.

The program incorporates various resources, including visual aids, interactive worksheets, and phonics games tailored to enhance the learning experience (Johnston & Watson, 2005). These resources are designed to make learning phonics enjoyable and accessible, catering to diverse learning styles.

## Success in Urban Contexts

THRASS has demonstrated notable success in urban schools, where resources, training, and supportive infrastructures are more readily available. In these environments, educators trained in THRASS methodologies report significant improvements in students' reading fluency, spelling, and overall literacy skills (Wang, 2021). The structured nature of the program facilitates the development of a strong reading culture in urban contexts, allowing students to gain confidence in their literacy abilities. Teachers who undergo specialized training in THRASS exhibit heightened confidence and effectiveness, positively impacting student outcomes (Fullan, 2007).

## Challenges in Rural Contexts

Despite its successes, challenges arise when THRASS is implemented in rural areas. Many schools lack essential materials and training opportunities, creating barriers to effective implementation. In resource-constrained environments, educators may struggle to deliver the THRASS methodology consistently. For instance, rural schools often deal with inadequate infrastructure and limited access to teaching materials, which can hinder both instruction and learning outcomes (Dede, 2018). Consequently, teachers may feel underprepared, leading to inconsistent application of the program and, ultimately, suboptimal student performance.

## Issues of Multicultural Relevance

A significant concern regarding THRASS is its primary focus on the English language. This emphasis may limit its effectiveness in multicultural classrooms, particularly in regions where children transition from their indigenous languages. In Zimbabwe, where numerous languages are spoken, the lack of inclusivity in the THRASS methodology raises important questions about its cultural relevance and ability to engage all learners (Chimhenga, 2020). Research suggests that literacy instruction incorporating local languages and culturally responsive materials is more effective as it resonates with students' experiences and backgrounds (Cummins, 2000).

This focus on English phonics may inadvertently disadvantage learners who are not yet proficient in English, potentially widening the educational divide in diverse classrooms. Effective literacy programs should aim to build on the rich linguistic diversity present in Zimbabwean communities, incorporating indigenous languages into instruction to create a more inclusive learning environment (Ngara, 2018). While THRASS offers a structured framework for improving literacy skills through phonics instruction, its success is contingent on adequate resources, specialized training, and contextual relevance. The challenges faced in rural contexts underline the need for a more adaptive approach that acknowledges and celebrates the linguistic diversity inherent in Zimbabwean society. To enhance the efficacy of THRASS in promoting literacy, strategies that integrate and honour local languages and cultural contexts should be prioritized.

## Empirical Evidence

Analysis of empirical data provides a substantial basis for evaluating the effectiveness of literacy interventions within Zimbabwe's educational landscape. The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) has become a critical tool for measuring literacy achievements, offering insight into learners' reading capabilities through various assessments.

## Assessment Results

EGRA studies highlight alarming statistics: approximately 62% of Grade 2 learners can read a familiar word, but only about 35% can comprehend connected text (UNICEF & MoPSE, 2018). Regional disparities manifest significantly in these results, with urban learners outperforming their rural counterparts due to better access to resources, trained educators, and learning environments conducive to literacy development.

## Classroom Dynamics and Pupil-Teacher Ratios

Classroom conditions pose additional challenges for effective literacy implementation, notably in rural areas, where pupil-teacher ratios range approximately from 1:47 (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020). Research has indicated that continuous assessment practices, especially those aligned with ERI, lead to measurable improvements in early reading outcomes (Dede, 2018). In a context where educators are facing large class sizes and limited resources, the need for adaptable instructional strategies becomes paramount.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a desk study design, relying on secondary data analysis to explore the comparative effectiveness of the Early Reading Initiative (ERI) and the Teaching Handwriting, Reading, and Spelling Skills (THRASS). This methodology is relevant for navigating existing educational programs that are extensively documented, allowing for a comprehensive synthesis of information without necessitating new data collection (Blaikie, 2010).

## Data Sources

Data for this study was sourced from several key categories; each selected for its relevance to understanding the effectiveness of ERI and THRASS:

- **Policy Documents:** Core texts such as the Heritage-Based Curriculum and the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) were analysed to gain insight into the educational goals and frameworks guiding literacy initiatives. These documents were selected based on their foundational status in shaping national education policies.
- **Program Manuals:** Instructional materials from both ERI and THRASS were reviewed to elucidate the pedagogical principles underlying each program. This included aligning with curricular objectives and examining teaching methodologies detailed within the manuals.
- **Assessment Reports:** National evaluations, particularly the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), provided comparative data on literacy outcomes across various demographics. Reports were chosen based on recency and relevance, ensuring alignment with current educational contexts.
- **Scholarly Literature:** Existing academic research on literacy acquisition, multilingual education, and the effectiveness of synthetic phonics was reviewed. Selection criteria focused on peer-reviewed articles and studies conducted in similar socio-educational contexts to enhance theoretical grounding.
- **Statistical Reports:** Quantitative data regarding pupil-teacher ratios, literacy monitoring, and classroom conditions were obtained primarily from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE).

These reports were included to provide empirical support for the analysis and to identify systemic issues affecting program efficacy.

## Data Analysis

A thematic and comparative analysis approach was utilized to categorize data across key dimensions relevant to literacy interventions. The steps involved included:

1. **Document Selection:** An initial search was conducted using academic databases and government archives. Keywords included "Zimbabwe literacy program efficacy," "ERI outcomes," "THRASS impact," and "multilingual education." Materials were filtered for relevance, credibility, and date of publication.
2. **Thematic Categorization:** Thematic categories were developed to focus on critical aspects of literacy interventions. These included:
  - **Pedagogical Approaches:** Analysing instructional strategies employed by both ERI and THRASS.
  - **Language Usage:** Evaluating the integration of local languages and the impact of English-centred instruction.
  - **Teacher Capacity:** Assessing training needs and pedagogical preparedness.
  - **Classroom Conditions:** Identifying physical and resource-related barriers to effective teaching.
  - **Assessment Practices:** Reviewing how each program measures literacy outcomes.
3. **Comparative Matrix Construction:** A comparative matrix was constructed to juxtapose the strengths and weaknesses of ERI and THRASS, providing a clear visual representation of their respective impacts on literacy development. This matrix allowed for critical insights into where each program excels or falls short based on established criteria.

## Consideration of Limitations and Contextual Dependencies

To enhance analytical balance, both programs were critically examined for limitations and contextual dependencies:

- **ERI's Limitations:** While ERI integrates culturally relevant materials, its implementation can suffer from variability in resource allocation and teacher preparedness, especially in rural environments where access to training and resources remains limited. Additionally, the effectiveness of community engagement strategies may vary by locale.
- **THRASS' Contextual Dependencies:** THRASS's structured phonics approach demonstrates effectiveness in urban areas with adequate resources but may not translate well to multilingual rural settings where English is not the primary language. The cost and availability of materials often pose barriers in these contexts, potentially widening literacy gaps.

By explicitly outlining these document selection procedures and analytical steps, along with a critical examination of both programs' limitations and contexts, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the comparative effectiveness of ERI and THRASS in the Zimbabwean educational landscape.

## Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis of the Early Reading Initiative (ERI) and the Teaching Handwriting, Reading, and Spelling Skills (THRASS) program reveals a nuanced understanding of their respective strengths and limitations across several key dimensions pertinent to literacy development. This analysis is essential for identifying how

each program aligns with the unique needs of Zimbabwean learners and the broader educational goals outlined in the Heritage-Based Curriculum and National Development Strategy 1.

ERI is characterized by its holistic and culturally responsive approach, which integrates mother-tongue instruction, community involvement, and continuous assessment practices. Such elements support a dynamic learning environment that addresses the diverse linguistic and cultural contexts of Zimbabwe's learners. Conversely, THRASS is primarily structured around a systematic phonics framework, focusing heavily on phonemic awareness and decoding skills in English. While this method shows promise, it may lack the flexibility needed to engage learners from different backgrounds effectively, particularly in multilingual classrooms.

This comparative analysis not only highlights the operational mechanics of each initiative but also underscores critical factors such as teacher training, resource utilization, and community engagement that influence their overall effectiveness. The following table summarizes these insights, allowing for a clear visual representation of how ERI and THRASS perform across these dimensions, ultimately aiding in determining best practices and potential areas for improvement in literacy education in Zimbabwe

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of ERI and THRASS

Dimension	Early Reading Initiative (ERI)	Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills (THRASS)
<b>Literacy Orientation</b>	Balanced approach integrating phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and oral language.	Synthetic phonics emphasizing grapheme–phoneme correspondence and systematic decoding strategies.
<b>Pedagogical Structure</b>	Flexible, allowing for developmental progression from picture to text reading based on learner readiness.	Highly structured, requiring adherence to specific phonics routines and teaching sequences.
<b>Language Policy</b>	Encourages and promotes the use of indigenous languages in early literacy instruction.	Primarily focused on English, limiting multilingual instructional strategies.
<b>Cultural Relevance</b>	Strong alignment with local stories and cultural values, enhancing learner engagement.	Limited contextualization to local culture, relying heavily on pre-designed materials and English narratives.
<b>Teacher Preparation</b>	Broad pedagogical professional development; adaptable by all teachers without requiring specialized certification.	Specialized training and certification required, creating barriers for broad implementation across contexts.
<b>Resource Model</b>	Low-cost, improvised materials developed from local resources, promoting sustainability.	Resource-intensive, requiring schools to purchase official teaching materials and manuals.
<b>Classroom Feasibility</b>	Adaptable to large classes and varied ability levels, fostering inclusion.	Best suited to smaller, well-resourced classes where teachers can implement structured routines consistently.
<b>Assessment Practices</b>	Continuous formative assessment embedded in daily activities, responsive to learner needs.	Skill mastery checks primarily focused on phonics accuracy and scripted routines.

<b>Community Involvement</b>	Strong emphasis on parental engagement and community literacy activities to support learner development.	Predominantly classroom-based, with limited community engagement or family involvement in literacy activities.
<b>Scalability</b>	High potential for adaptable implementation across diverse rural and urban contexts.	Limited scalability due to cost and training demands, particularly in rural settings.

Through this table, we gain a clearer understanding of the comparative dimensions that shape the effectiveness and applicability of each literacy program within the context of Zimbabwe’s educational landscape. It serves as a foundational tool for stakeholders to evaluate which program may better serve the comprehensive literacy needs of learners across various environments.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The comparative analysis illustrates that effective literacy interventions must consider the contextual factors influencing educational outcomes. Central to this discussion is the disconnect between students’ decoding abilities and their reading comprehension. While many learners can recognize words, their capacity to read sentences meaningfully remains underdeveloped. This mismatch highlights a critical gap in literacy instruction, where fluency in word recognition does not directly translate into comprehension skills (Hernandez, 2011).

### Disconnection between Decoding and Comprehension

Research consistently indicates that successful reading involves more than the mechanical ability to read words; it necessitates a deeper understanding of meaning and context (Goodman, 1986). The findings of the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) emphasize this point, revealing that while a significant percentage of learners can decode texts, a much smaller proportion demonstrates sufficient comprehension skills (UNICEF & MoPSE, 2018). This underscores the importance of integrating reading comprehension strategies into foundational literacy programs, an area where the Early Reading Initiative (ERI) excels. ERI’s model, which emphasizes a blend of phonics instruction, comprehension strategies, and cultural engagement, aligns with research advocating for multi-faceted literacy approaches (National Reading Panel, 2000).

### The Role of Language in Literacy Success

Language plays a pivotal role in shaping literacy success, particularly in multilingual contexts like Zimbabwe. The dual-language transitions from indigenous languages to English create unique challenges for learners, who may struggle to fully grasp texts in English without solid foundational skills in their mother tongues (Cummins, 2000). ERI’s focus on mother-tongue instruction not only facilitates natural transitions to English literacy but also mitigates comprehension difficulties frequently encountered during these shifts. This perspective echoes the findings of Makoni and Pennycook (2007), who argue that effective literacy instruction must incorporate learners’ linguistic backgrounds to create meaningful connections between languages.

Research indicates that teaching reading in a child’s first language can significantly enhance cognitive development and support later learning in a second language (UNESCO, 2016). ERI’s strategic integration of local languages in early literacy instruction is informed by this body of evidence, providing a culturally relevant framework that resonates with learners’ identities and experiences.

### Teacher Development and Resource Utilization

Moreover, developing teachers’ capabilities and leveraging available resources are crucial factors influencing the success of literacy interventions. Evidence suggests that professional development programs that are well-structured and ongoing contribute to improved teaching practices (Dede, 2018). This is particularly relevant in the context of ERI, where teacher training emphasizes not only phonics instruction but also methods for incorporating local narratives and contexts into literacy teaching.

As noted by Harris and Hodges (1995), well-prepared educators who understand the intricacies of literacy development can foster a more engaging and responsive classroom environment. The focus on community involvement and teacher capacity building in ERI aligns with the recommendations from previous research indicating that collaborative learning environments can enhance instructional effectiveness and learner outcomes (Blaikie, 2010).

### **Balancing Structure and Flexibility**

The juxtaposition of ERI's culturally responsive methodologies with the more rigid structure of programs like THRASS further highlights the importance of adaptability in literacy programs. While THRASS provides a clear framework for phonics instruction, the lack of flexibility may hinder its application in diverse educational contexts (Wang, 2021). Teachers in resource-limited environments often require adaptive strategies to meet the varied needs of their students, a need that ERI addresses through its community-oriented and inclusive practices.

In summary, the findings of this analysis indicate that literacy interventions must be multifaceted and contextually relevant to effectively address the challenges faced by learners in Zimbabwe. By emphasizing mother-tongue instruction, fostering teacher development, and promoting community involvement, ERI presents a holistic approach that aligns with existing research and offers a promising pathway for improving literacy outcomes.

## **CONCLUSION**

This comprehensive analysis emphasizes the need for effective literacy interventions that consider contextual factors impacting educational outcomes. In Zimbabwe, ERI emerges as a culturally resonant and pedagogically sound framework aligning with national educational policies, while THRASS offers advantages for targeted phonics instruction.

An integrated approach that incorporates ERI's holistic frameworks with THRASS's structured methodologies presents a promising pathway toward achieving literacy equity in Zimbabwe. By prioritizing culturally relevant, community-informed practices, stakeholders can enhance early literacy outcomes, contributing to a more literate and empowered society.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Further research could explore the long-term effects of implementing ERI in diverse educational settings, particularly in rural areas where educational resources are limited. Longitudinal studies examining the impact of culturally relevant literacy instruction on learner outcomes may provide valuable insights for policymakers and educators seeking to enhance literacy education in Zimbabwe and similar contexts.

By continuing to build on the foundations established by programs like ERI, there is potential for creating sustainable literacy frameworks that are adaptable, inclusive, and effective in fostering the next generation of readers and learners.

### **Recommendations for MoPSE**

This study indicates that MoPSE should reaffirm its commitment to ERI as a foundational framework for literacy development. Enhancing ERI's existing strategies could offer additional layers of phonics instruction derived from THRASS, ensuring that the curriculum remains relevant and effective.

### **Teacher Training**

Investment in ongoing, community-centric training workshops for educators is crucial for cultivating skilled literacy instruction. Scalable professional development initiatives should encourage collaboration among teachers, allowing for the sharing of best practices and resources. Additionally, adaptive training that accommodates the diverse educational landscapes of urban and rural settings should be prioritized.

## Community Engagement

Enhancing community involvement in literacy education can significantly improve learners' outcomes. Schools should actively engage parents and community leaders to create supportive literacy environments outside the classroom. This could include initiatives such as community reading programs, literacy festivals, or family literacy nights that encourage reading at home and foster a culture of shared responsibility for children's educational journeys.

## REFERENCES

1. Blaikie, N. (2010). *Designing social research* (2nd ed.). Polity Press.
2. Chimhenga, S. (2020). The role of indigenous languages in education: A Zimbabwean perspective. *Zimbabwe Journal of Language Studies*, 7(1), 56-68.
3. Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Multilingual Matters.
4. Dede, C. (2018). *Theoretical perspectives influencing the use of information technology in teaching and learning*. Springer Nature.
5. Government of Zimbabwe. (2020). *National Development Strategy 1 (2021–2025)*. Government Printing Office.
6. Goodman, K. (1986). *What's whole in whole language?* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
7. Harris, J. R., & Hodges, R. E. (1995). *Literacy criteria and standards: A synthesis of research and practice*. Greenwood Publishing Group.
8. Hernandez, D. J. (2011). *Double jeopardy: How third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation*. The Annie E. Casey Foundation.
9. Johnston, S., & Watson, J. (2005). *Teaching synthetic phonics*. Routledge.
10. Makoni, S., & Pennycook, A. (2007). Disinventing language: Multilingualism and the politics of the English language in Zimbabwe. *Language Policy*, 6(2), 133-158. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-007-9036-7>
11. Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. (2019). *National assessment report*.
12. Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. (2023). *Heritage-based curriculum framework*.
13. National Reading Panel. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read*. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.
14. Ngara, R. (2018). Embracing multilingual education in Zimbabwe: Implications for policy and practice. *Research in Education*, 89(1), 34-48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034523717752121>
15. UNESCO. (2016). *Education for all 2000–2015: Achievements and challenges*. UNESCO Publishing.
16. UNICEF, & Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. (2018). *Early Grade Reading Assessment report*.
17. Wang, F. (2021). Exploring the role of digital technologies in education: A systematic review. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 69(1), 1-35. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-021-09957-8>