

Nurturing the Foundations: Teaching Strategies Employed by Preschool Teachers in Enhancing Early Literacy Skills

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study was conducted within the constructivist framework to investigate the teaching practices, strategies, and techniques employed by preschool teachers in fostering early literacy skills among preschool-aged children. The study emphasized the importance of early literacy development and the role of teachers in enhancing children's skills. Data was generated through in-depth interviews with preschool teachers, and the data obtained from the participants were content analyzed. The results of the analysis revealed the effectiveness of various instructional practices, such as dialogic reading, storytelling, and interactive learning activities. These strategies were found to effectively prepare children for primary school and enhance their readiness for learning. Additionally, the participating preschool teachers recommended several measures to improve early literacy instruction, including acknowledging and accommodating individual learning paces, improving the home-school connection, providing greater teaching resources, and enhancing professional development opportunities. However, the study also identified financial challenges and limited access to educational materials as barriers to effective teaching. The findings of this study suggest the need for further research to explore preschool teachers' knowledge and understanding of early literacy.

Keywords: Literacy Skills, Early Literacy, Preschool, Instructional Practices, Preschool Teachers

INTRODUCTION

Malawi's government's awareness of the importance of teaching early literacy is clearly illustrated in the National Early Childhood Development syllabus and the National Policy on Early Childhood Development. However, "research evidence on provision of learning experiences, especially early literacy and numeracy in rural preschools shows that such experiences are provided accidentally as most caregivers do not deliberately plan for literacy development activities, and worse still, caregivers do not even know they are providing early literacy experiences" (Kholowa & Ellis, 2010, p. 74)

The development of early literacy skills is critical to children's later success in reading and reading-related activities (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998 as cited in Dennis & Horn, 2011); therefore, understanding how teachers can support early literacy development is equally important. According to Vaisarova & Reynolds (2022), early childhood educators have primary control over the learning process and use explicit instruction to impart specific skills and knowledge. The way teachers implement instructional practices has the power to influence early literacy skill development and potentially impact children's later success in school (Johari & Yunus, 2019; Dennis & Horn, 2011).

Learning to read has become one of the most important skills of childhood, with children who experience difficulties with learning to read being at a greater risk for possible academic failure (Hagtvet, 2000, cited in Dennis & Horn, 2011). Whitehurst (2001) as cited in Dennis and Horn (2011) reports that children who struggle with reading are not only at risk for school failure but are also more likely to struggle with social and emotional issues, delinquency, and drug abuse. Therefore, it is essential to address this issue when children are young, emergent language learners and before they are unsuccessful in learning to read (Podhajski & Nathan, 2005 as cited in Dennis & Horn, 2011).

The acquisition of early literacy skills has become an important topic in research (National Reading Panel, 2000; Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000; Snow et al., 1998 as cited in Dennis & Horn, 2011). Multiple scholars and studies (Eckhoff, 2008; Johari & Yunus, 2019; Johari & Yunus, 2021; Dennis & Horn, 2011) emphasize the need for a solid understanding by early educators of teaching strategies, their effectiveness, and their applicability in the early childhood classroom. As a result, there has been a growing scholarly interest in the strategies that preschool teachers employ in classrooms.

Theoretical framework

The current study combined two influential perspectives: Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory (EST). EST highlights the importance of teachers' critical reflection on their practices and other inter-relationships (Asmawi & SeyedHendi, 2016). Furthermore, this research was informed by a social constructivist theory. This view emphasizes the importance of more knowledgeable other, preschool teachers, in facilitating learning. Additionally, Social Constructivist theory emphasizes that Language and literacy are social events that require skills, knowledge, and understanding, but also involve complex interactions and responses (Asmawi & SeyedHendi, 2016). These foundational theoretical pillars provide a strong basis for exploring and understanding the topic in research.

Purpose of the study

The primary objective of this research is to identify teaching strategies and techniques used by preschool educators in nurturing early literacy skills among preschool-aged children. By doing so, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on effective teaching practices in ECE.

The following questions guided this research:

Research Questions

1. What specific teaching strategies and techniques are employed by preschool teachers to promote early literacy skills among preschool-aged children?
2. How do teaching strategies and techniques employed contribute to promoting early literacy skills in preschool-aged children?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The preschool years constitute a formative stage for the development of essential emergent literacy skills that are crucial for a child's future success in reading and language acquisition (NELP, 2008 as cited in Piasta et al., 2023). These skills include print knowledge, phonological awareness, oral language, and emergent writing. Piasta et al. (2023) emphasize that systematic exposure to print and high-quality instructional activities play a critical role in nurturing these skills. Preschool teachers play an important role in this process, employing different teaching strategies. These strategies include:

Early literacy defined

In today's environment, it is important to introduce and expose children to literacy learning at an early age as it has become an important foundation for their learning and development (Johari & Yunus, 2021). According to Sop and Sezgin (2021), "Early literacy is a term which refers to children's literacy knowledge and skills before they become actual literates." Literacy is not just simply a set of skills necessary to be learned and mastered (Johari & Yunus, 2021). It is much more complex than that. In fact, not only is it a complex and social skill but also "the literate demands of the world keep changing with exponential acceleration" as the boundaries and conventions between written and spoken words have been eradicated by the advancement of technology (Johnston & Costello, 2005 as cited in Johari & Yunus, 2021). The sounds children make, their interest in writing around them, and their interactions with technology are important in terms of literacy development (Sop & Sezgin, 2021).

Teachers' role

Preschool teachers play a vital role in the shaping of children's early literacy development. The way teachers execute and implement teaching practices greatly influences children's development in early literacy skills which will later impact them either positively or negatively depending on how teachers deliver and execute literacy instructional practices (Johari & Yunus, 2021). This means that children who are exposed to best literacy practices are more likely to excel in learning compared to those who are not.

Teachers working with babies and toddlers rely heavily on the role of a conversational partner, as the first three years of life are crucial for language development (Bredekamp, 2017). From the very first moments of life, babies instinctively try to communicate, and adults should respond to the infant's efforts to communicate (Taylor et al., 2011; Bredekamp, 2017). Teachers need to talk as if the child can talk back and respond to almost any form of communication (Bredekamp, 2017). A typical interaction between an adult and a baby might involve the use of a gentle, high-pitched voice, referred to as *"parentese"* or *"motherese."*

According to Bredekamp (2017), the foundation of effective communication is established through babies' attentiveness and responsive behaviour. When the child initiates communication, teachers need to respond enthusiastically and then await a response. They interpret what babies are trying to communicate and expand on the message with words (Jorgensen & Graven, 2021).

According to (Bredekamp, 2017), communication with children must remain meaningful. Instead of posing obvious questions such as *"What are you doing?"* or giving direct commands like *"Put the car on the road"* a teacher might say, *"Your car is going fast."* If the comment sparks the child's interest, the child might respond, *"Fast?"* Then it is the teacher's turn: *"You're making the car go very fast."* This approach elicits responses and encourages children to actively participate in conversations, fostering their language skills.

Using a technique known as *"play-by-play language"* or *"running commentary"* during routines and social interactions with babies and toddlers is highly effective in building language skills for children (Bredekamp, 2017). Here is an example of play-by-play during a typical routine, with the words tied to each action:

"Let us change your diaper now. I need to pick you up. You are such a big boy. Let us lie down on the changing table. You can hold your horsie. We need to take off these wet pants" and on and on.

Commentaries of this nature establish connections between actions and objects through words, helping babies become acquainted with the cadences of speech (Bredekamp, 2017).

To promote language in babies and toddlers, two critical points must be kept in mind (Kucirkova et al., 2017). First, children need sufficient opportunities to play with a variety of toys, interact with tangible objects, and explore their environment through movement. Secondly, in each of these situations, teachers need to supply the accompanying words. For instance, as children play on a ramp, the teacher can introduce vocabulary related to the activity, such as *slide, roll, climb, fast, shiny, push*, and various others. This active integration of language within activities enriches the learning experience, promoting the acquisition and expression of language skills in young learners.

Teachers play a crucial role in children's lives, as they not only provide important instruction but also serve as role models (Bredekamp, 2017). As a result, they must use proper grammatical language. They must acknowledge the grammatical mistakes made by children, such as *"I goed to the store"* or *"three sheeps"* reflect their genuine attempts to learn the rules of language.

While acquiring the rule, such as using the letter 's' to represent plurality, they tend to overextend its application (Bredekamp, 2017). Instead of emphasizing grammar errors, a highly effective approach involves listening carefully to what the child says and then providing correct models of speech, guiding them towards the path of language development. For instance, a child might say, *"I gots two foots,"* to which the teacher can respond firmly, saying *"Yes, you have two feet, so you need two socks."* This approach not only promotes correct language usage but also encourages children to naturally absorb these patterns.

Increasing the amount of classroom talk and purposefully extending conversations is a highly effective method for building children's vocabulary (Bredekamp, 2017). Dickinson and Tabors (2001) cited in Bredekamp (2017) suggest that extended discourse occurs when adults interact with children in conversations that not only recognize and respond to their words but also expand upon their ideas to enrich the conversation.

Teachers should minimize the use of conversation closers that involve insincere praise or generic phrases like *"That's nice, Jack"* or *"Good boy."* They should also avoid overemphasizing safety and rules in their responses to students' remarks or sharing of experiences. For instance, if a student like Jack exclaims, *"Hey, I found a caterpillar!"* the teacher should respond with genuine interest and encourage further exploration, rather than immediately redirecting the focus to hand-washing by saying, *"You'll have to wash your hands now."* Instead, they should use conversation stretchers that promote engagement, like (1) Sharing personal experiences to initiate dialogue. For instance, *"As I was heading to school, I heard the piercing sound of an ambulance siren. "It startled me."* (2) Explaining the terms *"A false alarm. False refers to something that is not real or genuine. So, a false alarm means there is not a real emergency or fire."*

When educators incorporate these conversation stretchers into their interactions with children, they cultivate a dynamic learning environment that not only promotes vocabulary growth but also nurtures a deeper understanding of language and its intricacies.

Conversations are characterized by the exchange of turns. According to Bredekamp (2017), effective communication involves active listening from one person while the other person speaks. Listening is crucial to comprehend what is being said. Moreover, the development of listening skills in early childhood serves as a solid foundation for their future reading comprehension abilities. Jalongo (2008) supports this claim, as cited in Bredekamp (2017).

To enhance children's vocabulary, teachers should employ explicit instruction and deliberately introduce new and uncommon words. These words should be multi-syllable and sophisticated, going beyond what is typically found in a child's vocabulary (Collins, 2012; Neuman & Wright, 2013 as cited in Bredekamp, 2017).

Storybook reading activities enhance young children's literacy development (Kucirkova et al., 2017, p. 20). According to Lonigan et al. (2008), as cited in Jones & Christensen (2023), reading aloud to children is an essential activity that plays a significant role in fostering the necessary knowledge and attitudes for future reading success. Furthermore, studies indicate that book reading is most effective when done in groups of four to six children (Kucirkova et al., 2017; Bredekamp (2017). According to Gonzalez et al. (2014), the true power of reading lies not just within the book itself, but also in the conversations that occur between teachers and children before, during, and after reading. Engaging in interactive and shared book reading with children is a powerful approach to enhance their language skills and improve their listening comprehension (Bredekamp, 2017). However, while small-group reading has proven to be effective, it does not imply teachers should eliminate whole-group readings. Whole-group reading may be the best choice if the book is short, involves children actively participating, and has predictable text (Bredekamp, 2017). Children also learn the value and importance of literacy from their surroundings. To promote learning, every classroom must have a diverse selection of literacy-enhancing materials and experiences (Roskos & Neuman, 2011).

METHODS

The study was conducted within the constructivist paradigm using a qualitative research approach. As delineated by Christensen et al., 2015; Mertens, 2015), qualitative research is characterized by the collection of nonnumerical data to address research questions, usually including information like statements made during interviews. This approach was suitable as it aimed to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the preschool teachers' practices within classroom settings. The researcher adopted a purposive sampling technique to carefully select three preschool teachers from *Zomba* district, located in the southern region of Malawi. Purposive sampling involves specifying the characteristics of a target population and then strategically identifying key informants who possess these requisite characteristics (Christensen et al., 2015; Mertens, 2015). These teachers had experience and knowledge in teaching literacy in rural preschools in *Zomba*, Malawi.

The researcher initiated direct communication with the selected preschool teachers by communicating the overarching goal and objectives of the study. The preschool teachers willingly consented to participate in the individual in-depth interviews. In order to ensure a comprehensive and efficient data collection process, each interview was meticulously scheduled, ensuring that participants were well-informed about the exact date and time. The researcher used a meticulously designed interview guide, as shown in *Annexure 1*, which aligned with the research questions guiding this study. The interview guide consisted of five items. The researcher took into account the ethical considerations before, during, and after conducting the study. The researcher ensured compliance with accepted ethical standards, including voluntary participation without any form of coercion.

Data analysis

This study adopted both thematic and content approaches to data analysis. The researcher followed a systematic, six-phase process of thematic analysis, as outlined in Braun and Clarke (2006) and presented in *Table 1*. The analysis of the study's findings focused exclusively on the fundamental questions that guide the research process. Interviews were conducted in *Chichewa*, reflecting the preschool teachers' preference due to their varying levels of confidence in expressing themselves in English. For analytical purposes, all audio data were transcribed and translated into English. Data analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel 365, focusing on identifying recurring themes. To identify significant views from preschool teachers, content analysis was carried out on the dataset. This approach involves searching for relevant themes by first using initial descriptive statements emanating from the interview transcripts.

Table 1 Phases of thematic analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, and noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Table 2... Phases of Thematic Analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006).

Data presentation

The data analysis combined the content for results and discussion sections. The researcher interpreted the data, connected it to the research questions guiding the research and, importantly, tied the data and analysis into existing scholarly literature. Linking the analysis to the literature is a vital part of any analysis; it's about locating your analysis in relation to what already exists, and showing how your analysis contributes to, develops further, or challenges what we already know about a topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Extracts drawn *across* the data from the discussion with preschool teachers were included as evidence of the researcher's analytic claims, and to

allow the readers to judge the 'fit' between the data and the researcher's understandings and interpretations of data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The preschool teachers shared valuable insights into the various instructional strategies, techniques and practices they use to nurture early literacy skills. The following approaches reflect their unique and effective teaching approaches in early literacy.

Dialogic reading and storytelling

The preschool teachers emphasized the potency of storytelling as a central teaching strategy to promote early literacy. They outlined the method of gathering children in a circle and reading age-appropriate storybooks in Chichewa, promoting discussions about the characters and plot within the stories. According to Dennis and Horn (2011), reading books to children is a particularly powerful platform for introducing and enhancing literacy skills. One teacher emphasized the importance of reading and storytelling, stating,

"At our centre, we use storytelling as a powerful tool to promote early literacy.

We gather the children in a circle and read age-appropriate storybooks in Chichewa, then discuss the characters and plot."

This strategy serves as a doorway to the growth of language skills, and these *Chichewa* tales offer a culturally relevant and engaging path to foster early literacy.

Letter recognition and spelling

Preschool educators also highlighted the importance of letter identification and spelling exercises as important components of their instructional strategies. The teacher stated that they use spelling cards, spelling charts, and letter puzzles to improve learners' *Chichewa* spellings, letter sounds, and vowel identification. Encouraging children to recognize simple letters and words is central to early literacy development. As one teacher explained,

"...we use spelling cards and spelling charts to teach them Chichewa spellings, letter sounds, and vowels."

Interactive learning activities

The preschool teachers also highlighted that incorporating a range of stimulating and interactive activities promotes letter recognition. These activities include letter puzzles, letter searches, and spontaneous class activities, all designed to promote early literacy development. A teacher emphasised the relevance of such strategies by stating,

"Letter recognition is taught through fun activities such as letter puzzles, letter searches, and spontaneous class activities."

By incorporating interactive activities in their teaching, the teachers acknowledge the importance of active and participatory learning experiences.

Creative writing and fine motor skills

The preschool teachers also highlighted the importance of fostering creativity and fine motor skills. To help learners acquire foundational writing skills, activities like letter and number searches, drawing, and colouring are used. These activities guide learners in holding pencils or crayons, writing straight lines, and remaining within trace margins. As one teacher described,

"Additionally, we introduce basic writing skills through activities such as letter and number searches. Plus, drawing and colouring, as it helps with fine motor skills and creativity as they learn to hold a pencil or crayon and write straight lines or within trace margins of a picture."

The activities mentioned by the teachers not only promote the development of important fine motor skills and artistic expression but also create opportunities for social interaction. Drawing on the research by Johari & Yunus (2019), it is evident that writing is not an isolated skill but an interactive social skill that involves conveying messages to others. Therefore, it is essential that writing activities should involve interaction and communication with others as well as expressing ideas creatively through telling stories and drawing pictures.

Songs

The preschool teachers recognized the importance of incorporating songs into their teaching methods to promote early literacy skills development. Songs with repetitive lyrics have been shown to help children learn new words and sounds while making learning enjoyable. A teacher explained the effectiveness of such approaches, citing the use of the engaging song "Pamchenga".

'Show and tell' sessions

The preschool teachers also mentioned that they use 'show and tell' sessions. This activity enables children to share objects from home, describe them, and share short stories empowering them to express themselves with confidence. As one of the teachers said:

"We also use 'show and tell' sessions, where children bring an object from home, explain it, and share a short story about it. This develops vocabulary and expressive language skills because children are able to explain things and even respond to questions."

Engaging in this practice promotes the growth of expressive language skills and encourages active involvement.

The impact of teaching strategies on early literacy

Classroom instructional practices employed by teachers may affect children either positively or negatively (Johari & Yunus, Preschool Teachers' Practices in English Early Literacy Instruction: A Case Study, 2019). The preschool teachers reported that their teaching strategies have a significant impact on learners' early literacy development. They claimed that these strategies yield notable improvements in various aspects of early literacy, particularly vocabulary and comprehension. Moreover, they believed that these approaches foster children's confidence and language proficiency. For instance, one teacher mentioned,

"I see tremendous improvement in our students' vocabulary and comprehension. They can now recognize and pronounce more words, and their listening has improved. When we ask them questions about the stories we read, they are more confident in responding and discussing the content."

In addition, preschool teachers believe in the increased interest and willingness of children to attempt writing, even when their attempts may lack precision. Furthermore, the preschool teachers observed that their methods also improved learners' fine motor skills, making it easier for them to hold and control a pencil. One of the teachers said,

"Through these methods, I have seen an increase in motor skills, especially fine motor skills. Children can now hold and control a pencil with great ease."

This study revealed that the teaching strategies employed by preschool teachers have a significant impact on preparing children for their transition to standard one in primary school. Teachers highlighted that their efforts did not go unnoticed by the primary school teachers who received these young learners. Primary school teachers reported that children who are exposed to these instructional practices in the Community-Based Childcare Centers (CBCCs) are notably better prepared for their education in contrast to their peers who did not attend

CBCCs. One teacher expressed confidence that the *“children who attend the CBCCs are better prepared for learning compared to those who do not.”*

This is similar to the findings from a study by Sop and Sezgin, 2021, where preschool and primary school preservice teachers expressed that early literacy skills are crucial in promoting the child's readiness for school, enhancing the ability of the child to learn to read and write and facilitating adaptation to primary school.

These findings suggest that the applied teaching strategies play an important role in promoting the children's early literacy skills and adequately preparing them for primary school education.

Infrequently used teaching strategies and techniques for early literacy

Parental storytelling

Parental involvement is a key component in increasing early literacy skills for preschoolers (Dennis & Horn, 2011, p. 38). Preschool teachers expressed a desire for greater parental involvement in early literacy activities. They emphasized that when parents and caregivers actively participate, children benefit by gaining a deeper understanding of language. This involvement not only promotes early literacy skills but also strengthens the connection and relationship between the home and the school. One teacher explained,

“One strategy we do not use often but can be useful is to get parents more involved in activities such as storytelling.”

However, the preschool teachers also reported challenges in achieving this level of parental involvement. They expressed concerns about parents' demanding schedules and limited resources for storybooks, which hinder their participation. Despite this, teachers indicated that storytelling is particularly relevant due to its effectiveness in engaging different learning styles, catering to both auditory and visual learners, thereby providing a well-rounded foundation in reading and writing.

Digital resources

Due to the rapid advancement in technology, the meaning and conventions of literacy may have changed over time (Johari & Yunus, 2021). Literacy is not only confined to writing, reading, speaking, and listening but has evolved into technology-related skills such as computer and digital skills (Johari & Yunus, 2021). In fact, technology can be utilized in classroom instruction to assist in literacy teaching and learning. It is critical for preschool teachers to prepare children to meet such demands when they become older (Johari & Yunus, 2021). The preschool teachers acknowledged the importance of modern tools such as smartphones, educational apps and e-books. These resources have the potential to improve early literacy significantly. However, due to the lack of technology in their centres, they primarily rely on traditional methods. One teacher shared,

“We have not fully utilized the digital resources due to the lack of technology in our centre.”

Despite these challenges, the participants expressed a genuine desire to use digital literacy resources, recognizing their potential to make learning more exciting. One teacher said,

“Having a chance to use various digital literacy resources would be exciting, but it is currently beyond our capabilities compared to some preschools in cities.”

The way forward

The preschool teachers shared their recommendations and additional insights. These recommendations reflect their daily challenges and highlight opportunities for improving early literacy education.

Preschool teachers emphasized the importance of acknowledging and accommodating the individual learning pace of learners. They suggested that customizing the educational experience to match the varying pace at which children develop skills is important. One teacher said,

"It is essential to consider the children's individual speed of learning. Some develop skills faster than others, and it is important to tailor the course to their needs."

The home-school connection is critical, particularly at the preschool level (Dennis & Horn, 2011). Nonetheless, preschool teachers acknowledged the challenge of parental involvement in their children's education, particularly within communities where formal education is limited. However, they are diligently exploring strategies to bridge this gap and improve parental involvement. As one teacher noted,

"One thing we are always working on is getting parents involved in children's activities. However, many parents in our community lack formal education, so we are exploring ways to engage them in their children's learning to ensure that they are fully supported."

Preschool teachers expressed their concerns regarding the challenges they face due to limited teaching resources. They recommend greater support in the form of materials and training to improve their teaching strategies. One teacher explained,

"We face challenges with limited teaching resources, and it would be helpful to have more support in the form of materials and training to improve our teaching strategies."

According to Sop and Sezgin (2021), teachers' levels of knowledge in early literacy are reflected in their classroom practices. Research highlights the importance of strengthening educators' knowledge and awareness levels through professional development in enhancing particularly early literacy (Sop & Sezgin, 2021). In the current study, preschool teachers expressed a major concern regarding professional development. They recognized the importance of staying updated with the latest teaching methods and techniques in literacy. The teachers advocated for continuous learning and improvement to maintain impactful teaching skills. In emphasizing the need for ongoing growth and development, one teacher said;

"We should also consider more professional development opportunities for teachers in our centres. It is important to keep up with the latest teaching methods and techniques in literacy to keep our teaching methods successful."

Preschool teachers raised concerns about financial challenges, particularly in the affordability of educational materials for learners. They highlighted that a lack of support for access to teaching resources significantly affects their ability to teach. One teacher explained,

"We have not been able to use some of the methods effectively because you understand that not all parents can afford picture books for their children, and as a CBCC, we do not get any support. We do not even get paid but just volunteer for this job."

In a similar vein, the study conducted by Sop and Sezgin (2021) explored the perspectives of preschool teachers on the role of families in fostering early literacy skills. Specifically, the teachers highlighted their expectations for families, which included purchasing and reading books to their children.

The result and discussion revealed that preschool teachers' explanations and rationale for their views were varied, and this could affect their practices and efforts in promoting early literacy. As such, subsequent studies may consider exploring preschool teachers' knowledge and understanding of early literacy.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, early literacy development is critical. A solid foundation in early literacy skills has been shown to help decrease struggles children could face in learning to read. The role of early childhood educators in nurturing the foundations of early literacy skills stands as a cornerstone in young children's education. By employing effective language pedagogical strategies, these educators not only prepare children for the immediate challenges in their learning or development but also lay the foundation for lifelong learning. Therefore, keeping up with the latest research and best practices is crucial, and this can be effectively achieved through various means, including training programs and workshops, ensuring that educators remain equipped to meet the dynamic needs of their students. The teaching strategies employed by the preschool teachers in this study reflect the everyday practices

in the early childhood classroom in Malawi. These strategies are not only responsive to the varied learning styles and preferences of the young learners but also reflect the cultural and linguistic context that shapes ECE within CBCCs in Malawi.

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