

**NATURE AND PREVALENCE OF WRITING DIFFICULTIES
AMONG LEARNERS AT FOURTH GRADE: A CASE OF
SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN LUSAKA DISTRICT OF
ZAMBIA**

BY

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**The Nature and Prevalence of Writing Difficulties among learners at fourth
Grade: A case of selected primary schools in Lusaka district of Zambia**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to determine the nature and prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade, in four selected primary schools in Lusaka district. A descriptive survey research design was used in the study, and the study employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods to analyse data. The study sample consisted of 90 respondents: 80 grade four learners and 10 grade four teachers. The Basic skills Assessment tool (BASAT), Teachers Questionnaires and checklist were the instruments that were used to collect data. Stratified sampling then simple random sampling were the methods that were used to select grade four learners while purposive sampling was used to select teachers. Data from the BASAT and checklist was analysed quantitatively using Statistical package for social Sciences (SPSS) to generate tables, figures and graphs. Qualitative data from teachers' questionnaires was analysed thematically.

The study revealed that, the writing abilities of grade four in the sampled schools were relatively low and below their grade level. The nature of handwriting difficulty was mainly characterized with poor spellings, poor spacing, messiness and combination of upper and lower cases in words, while expressive writing difficulty was characterised by difficulties in formulation of coherent ideas, poor paragraphing and punctuation marks. The prevalence of writing difficulties of learners who participated in the study was generally high and did not reflect writing abilities of their grade level. An average of 50(64.05%) learners had difficulties writing words and sentences from the BASAT while 61(76.25%) were unable to write the tested story correctly. The high prevalence of writing difficulties of grade four learners was more attributed to school and teacher factors, and to a lesser extent to learner factors.

The study has highlighted school- factors that contributed to learners writing difficulties as: inadequate teacher training in teaching writing skills, lack of continuous orientation writing programmes, overcrowded classrooms and insufficient time to teach writing, while teacher factors include: lack of adequate teacher knowledge in teaching phonological awareness and other writing instructional strategies, as well as lack of assessing learners' writing difficulties and inadequate administering of remedial work. Learner factors include; inadequate oral English vocabulary, lack of phonological awareness, poor reading and lack of interest in writing. The study recommended that, The MOESVTEE should introduce new programmes aimed at the teaching of writing skills to learners. The study further recommended that, the teaching of writing skills should be time-tabled on the school time table, to compel teachers to teach writing skills; and that over enrolment of pupils in lower grades should be controlled to allow enough teacher-pupil contact and to maximise learning opportunities for all learners.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0. Overview

This chapter discusses the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research objectives, research questions, and significance of the study. It also discusses the limitation of the study, delimitation of the study and definition of key terms used in the study

1.1 Background of the study

Writing is a very important component of literacy which all learners in the school system need to acquire and utilise if they are to progress successfully in the education system. (Alston and Taylor, 1987). Most contexts of life (school, workplace, and community) call for some level of writing skill. In the school setting, writing is a means of extending and deepening learners' knowledge; it acts as a tool for learning subject matter (Keys, 2000; Shanahan, 2004; Sperling & Freedman, 2001). As learners' progress through the levels of education, they are expected to express what they know in different school subjects through writing. When a learner fails to develop certain basic writing skills, this affects his or her ability to communicate effectively what the school system demands, (Keys, 2000).

Research from around the world has confirmed that literacy is fundamental to success in the formal education system particularly in developing countries more especially in Sub- Sahara Africa. UNESCO (2005:17) report on Global Monitoring Report (GMR) indicates that, "of all the core competencies recognized to contribute to lifelong learning and sustainable development in sub-Saharan Africa, none is quite as central as the ability to read and write. Additionally, the 2006 Education for All (EFA) and Global Monitoring Report (GMR) of 2005, by UNESCO notes that, "literacy is essential to achieving each of the EFA goals;

crucial for economic, social and political participation and development, as well as key to critical thinking, improved health and family planning, HIV/AIDS prevention, children's education, poverty reduction and active citizenship. Good, Gruba & Kaminski (2001 p 679) have noted that, "children in Sub- Sahara Africa who develop literacy skills; in both good reading and writing skills are more likely to succeed at school and become productive members of our society."

A study conducted in the United States of America (U.S.A) by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2002, measured writing skills of 4th, 8th, and 12th graders and translated their scores into three levels of proficiency: Basic, Proficient and Advanced. (Persky, Daane, & Jin, 2003). Findings from NAEP 2002 study were that; only 22%to 26% of learners scored at the Proficient level across the three grades, and very few were found to write at the Advanced level, (Persky, Daane & Jin, 2003). According to National Centre for Education Statistics (2003), 72% of 4th-grade learners, who were tested, did not meet NAEP writing proficiency goals. These results clearly demonstrate that very large numbers of learners in schools at any given educational level need interventions to help them become better writers. A study conducted by Action Commission for teaching (2005) revealed that about two thirds of lower primary grades do not meet readiness benchmarks for upper primary school-level English composition writing. These findings imply that learners with writing difficulties are unlikely to learn effectively at the next education level where they were enrolled. (Grubb, Worthern, Byrd, Webb, & Badway, 1999; Perin &Charron, 2006).

In relation to writing levels in sub-Sahara Africa, very little has been documented on the prevalence levels of writing skill. Most studies on literacy competences in sub-Sahara Africa have to the larger extent concentrated on finding out reading difficulties among learners in schools than writing difficulties. For example, a study conducted by Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ II) in 2006, on the competences in literacy, found that, there were fewer than 10% of grade 6 children who could read

adequately. Another study that was conducted in South Africa by the Progress in literacy Assessment, only revealed the lowest level of reading ability of learners of about 15% compared with reading ability of 95% in Europe. Other studies in Kenya, by (Piper, 2010b), also reported that, only 30% grade 3 learners could read simple grade level passage in English and answer a set of factual and inferential questions. Additionally studies by Gove & Ceviche (2011) in Uganda, revealed that more than 80% and even 95% of children at the end of Grade 2 could not read one word of a simple story. As it can be seen from all these studies that have been conducted in some of the stated Sub-Sahara African countries, the major focus of literacy was to reveal the reading difficulties among school going learners. However writing difficulties faced by learners in schools had not been revealed, though it is also part of literacy.

The principal site for learning how to write is the school and usually during the early grades. However, the success for teaching writing in sub-Sahara Africa in the primary school system remains a source of concern as most literacy programme are tailored towards improving reading skills of learners. For example, in Kenya, a literacy program implemented by the Aga Khan Foundation reported to had increased student reading fluency in both Kiswahili and English by more than 80%, (Crouch, Korda, & Mumo, 2009). Piper & Korda (2010) also reports that a 2 year literacy programme that was conducted by The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to improve learning outcomes in Liberia, revealed to have increased expected outcomes by more than 90% in reading fluency and comprehension. According to Piper & Korda (2010), the USAID had established three key education goals: the first goal was to improve reading skills for 100 million children in primary grades by 2015 in Africa. An analysis of the examples of the literacy programmes that have been conducted in sub- Sahara Africa, continue to indicate that little attention has been paid to improve a commensurable number of learners in writing.

In regards to writing levels in Zambia, very little is also known in terms of statistics on the prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at various grade levels in primary schools. A study conducted by Williams (1993) on literacy levels in Zambia, which focused on pupils in grade 3,4 and 5, only revealed low reading levels in the sampled grades. In the study conducted by the Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) in 1995 in Zambia, also revealed that only 25% of the grade 6 pupils could read at the minimum level of proficiency and only 3% read at a specified desirable level, (MoE, 1995).

The National Assessment Report on literacy by Kelly and Kanyika (1999) also revealed poor reading levels of learners at grade five in Zambia. The SACMEQ report of 2007, reported low literacy levels in Zambia particularly in reading at 33% and in 2010 it reported reading levels dropping to as below as 20%. In 2012, SACMEQ further conducted a similar study on literacy levels and Zambia was ranked 11th in Southern Africa, in terms of low reading levels in school going children. In all these studies and reports on literacy levels in Zambia, little attempt was made to reveal the prevalence of writing difficulties of learners in the sampled grades.

Arising from numerous studies and reports on low literacy levels in Zambia, The Ministry of Education promoted literacy programmes by introducing the Primary Reading Programme (PRP) in 1999. According to Matafwali (2005), the main purpose of this programme was to improve reading skills. However, the study by Mubanga (2010) revealed that the general performance of learners at grade 2 in literacy levels was that, there were fewer learners who were able to write the words correctly than they could read them after exposing them to PRP. The findings by Mubanga (2010) were consistent with the study conducted by NAEP in 2002, in the United States of America on writing examination (Persky, Daane, & Jin, 2003); which measured the writing skills of 4th, 8th, and 12th graders; the NAEP 2002 study indicated that only 22%to 26% of learners scored at the Proficient level across the three grades, and very

few were found to write at the advanced level, (Persky, Daane & Jin, 2003). However, the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocation Training and Early Education (MOESVTEE) working in collaboration with STEP-UP Zambia had come up with a target to create one million new readers between 2013 and 2015 between grades 1 to 4, (STEP-UP Zambia , 2013). The STEP-UP Zambia was a USAID funded literacy programme whose goal was to have 100 million children in primary grades by 2015 in Africa able to read, (Piper & Korda, 2010). However, similar efforts to create a commensurable number of new writers in this programme by STEP-UP Zambia was not stated.

Having analysed all the literacy programmes that have been implemented in sub-Sahara Africa and Zambia inclusive, Keys (2000) observes that, often educators assume that learners who are proficient readers must be proficient writers, too. That is why most literacy programmes focus on remediating reading difficulties rather than writing difficulties. If this was the case, then helping learners learn to read better would naturally lead to the same learners writing well, (Perin & Charron, 2006). Although reading and writing are complementary skills whose development runs a roughly parallel course, they do not necessarily go hand in hand. Aro and Ahonen (2005 p 50) have also indicate that, “difficulties in reading and writing are often comorbid. However, they occur separately in that a child may be proficient in one skill but clearly deficient in another.” This means that many learners are able to handle average reading demands but may have severe difficulties with writing. Moreover, the nature of the relationship between reading and writing skills changes over time. (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000). Therefore, writing and reading are both vital aspects of literacy which require their own dedicated instruction. (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000).

Lack of adequate information from various studies and reports on the prevalence of writing difficulties, both in most sub-Sahara African countries and Zambia inclusive, continue to strongly suggest that there is need for information about the nature and prevalence of writing difficulties among learners in schools to be systematically investigated. Persky, Daane, & Jin

(2003) have indicated that, what improves reading does not always improve writing. Research findings continue to suggest that writing skills are more challenging to develop than reading skills (Grubb, Worthen, Byrd, Webb, & Badway, 1999). But in Zambia, It is often assumed that helping learners become proficient readers would also help them become proficient writers, too. This is not always the case, because writing differs from reading in that, while readers form a mental representation of thoughts written by someone else, writers formulate their own thoughts, organize them, and create a written record of them using the conventions of spelling and grammar. (Perin & Charron, 2006). Therefore because literacy abilities include both reading and writing skills, writing proficiency at lower primary school is also a source of concern that should also be systematically investigated in order to highlight the nature and prevalence of writing difficulties and challenges learners face in acquiring writing skills.

1.2. Statement of the problem

Although writing is a very important component of literacy skills that has to be acquired by school going children, it has not received much attention compared to reading. Studies that have been conducted in Zambia, (Williams, 1993; Kelly and Kanyika, 1999; & SACMEQ, 1995; 1997; 2007; 2010 and 2012), have concentrated on finding out the levels of reading difficulties among learners in Zambian schools and statistics of reading difficulties have been provided, but very little investigations have focused on determining the nature and prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at lower grades. It was therefore important to conduct a systematic investigation to determine the nature and prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade in selected primary schools in Lusaka district.

1.3. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the nature and prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade and thereafter make recommendation, based on the findings of the study, to stakeholders in the provision of education, so that, they may formulate informed

policies and come up with best decisions on various intervention programmes, which might be put in place to mitigate writing difficulties of learners in schools.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- (i) To determine the nature of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade.
- (ii) To determine the prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade.
- (iii) To establish factors which contribute to writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade?
- (iv) To identify measures that should be put in place to remediate writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade.

1.5. Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- (i) What is the nature of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade?
- (ii) What is the prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade?
- (iii) What factors contribute to writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade?
- (iv) What measures should be put in place to remediate writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade?

1.6. Significance of the study

It is hoped that findings from the study may help to provide knowledge on the nature and prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade to stakeholders. The stakeholders in this study are policy makers, curriculum developers, Education Standards Officers, School Head teachers, grade four teachers and grade four learners.

To policy makers and curriculum developers in the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education, this study might provide answers to some reasons

why literacy levels, particularly the teaching of writing, also needs to be given adequate attention like reading so that all literacy programmes that are to be undertaken in schools can equally incorporate the teaching of writing skills to learners. It is hoped that findings from the study would also be relevant to Education Standards Officers and School Head teachers, by helping them not only to know the writing difficulties among grade learners but also influence policy and curriculum developers to make informed decisions on various intervention programmes which might be put in place to improve writing skills to learners in schools.

To grade four teachers, it is envisaged that the findings of the study may provide them with insights of what specific difficulties grade learners exhibit during writing activities and how they can overcome such writing problems. It is also hoped that the study would highlight the characteristics and prevalence of writing difficulties of learners so that intervention strategies may be put in place to help them become proficient writers. It is further anticipated that the findings of this study may generate interest for future research.

1.7. Limitation of the study

Firstly, the study was only confined to four (4) primary schools that were selected from Lusaka district and to only 80 grade four learners. Therefore, the sample size of four (4) schools and 80 learners selected was not sufficient enough to provide a wider representation on the nature and prevalence of writing difficulties of all the grade four learners in Lusaka district. Due to limited number of sample size that was tested, findings from the study could not be generalized to other schools and other learners who did not participate in the study. Secondly, there was inadequate literature on the topic from the Zambian context, as most literacy studies conducted in Zambia have to the larger extent concentrated on providing statistics of reading difficulties rather than statistics of writing difficulties.

1.8. Delimitation of the study

The study only focused on four (4) selected primary schools in Lusaka district. It also focused on learners who were in grade four, as well as teachers who taught grade four classes in 2014.

1.9. Definition of Terms

Dysgraphia – It is the inability to write correctly.

Expressive writing – It is narrative type of writing such a stories, songs, poems or letters.

Fourth grade- It means grade four at lower primary school.

Grapheme- It is a letter symbol represented in written language.

Handwriting- It is the graphical formation of letters and symbols.

Learner – A school going child in grade 4 aged between 9-11 years

Literacy- The ability to read and write.

Messiness – untidy way of writing.

Mirror writing- it is a kind of writing of letters and words just as they appear in the mirror.

Nature of writing – characteristic of writing.

Paragraphing - This is a way of expressing an idea in one complete segment.

Phonological awareness - The ability to understand the sound system of a language.

Prevalence- The rate of occurrence of something.

Writing - It is the ability to put meaningful thought on paper.

Reversal writing - It is a kind of writing were letters are written in the opposite direction.

Spelling - The ability to write correctly a word or sentence.

CHAPTER TWO

LITIRETURE REVIEW

2.0. Overview

This chapter presents literature on the nature and prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at lower primary schools, particularly at fourth grade. Literature has been presented according to the following themes derived from the research objectives: nature of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade, factors may contribute to writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade and measures that should be put in place to remediate writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade.

2.1. Nature of writing difficulties experienced by learners at fourth grade

Neale (1990) observes that writing difficulty is the inability to compose written work eligibly and meaningfully. According to kirk, Gallagher and Anastasiow (2006), learners with writing problems are commonly referred to as having a writing disorder known as dysgraphia. Dysgraphia is the inability to perform motor movement or extremely poor writing associated with neurological dysfunction and other overlapping functions found within the learning environment, (ibid, 2006). It manifests as difficulties with spelling, poor handwriting or putting thought on paper, (Kennedy, 2004)

According to Graham, Karen, Harris, and Lynn (2001), at grade four, learners are expected to exhibit accuracy in key markers of writing such as; word spacing, writing speed, sentence structure, grammar, punctuation marks, capitalization and spelling. Common proficiency expressive writing abilities at grade four may include Personal Communications (which involves learners writing friendly letters, formal letters, messages, and invitations that have a clearly stated purpose) and Creative writing (which involves writing of poems, short stories, and song lyrics), (Graham, Karen, Harris, and Lynn, 2001).

A lot of studies in Europe and the United States of America have revealed a lot on the characteristics of writing difficulties of learners with writing problems. In regards to handwriting problems Alston and Taylor (1987) observed that learners with extreme writing problem in written work exhibited irregularities in letter formation. Learners failed to write letters exactly as they appear or to copy the exact shape of a letter, thereby writing a word in a deformed manner although the spelling was correct. Kennedy (2004) has observed that, the improper closure of letters exhibited by learners in writing is known as dissociation. This is commonly associated with learners with dysgraphia, where learners fail to properly close letters when writing. Additionally, research studies by Margret (1975) on writing abilities of second graders, revealed that learners who had difficulties in handwriting also exhibited failure to stay on horizontal line or follow the line when writing. In line with (Margret, 1975), Brote and Hamstra (1991) indicate that learners who fail to stay on the line when writing may also overshoot or under shoot the lines or letters may be poorly aligned on the line of the book.

Research studies also shows that learners with writing difficulties also exhibit difficulties with spacing and size of letters when writing. Kirk (1972) notes that, learners with writing problem exhibit poor spacing between words and letters. They either left too small or too much, or no space at all between the words. In relation to spacing, research studies by Margret (1975) on writing abilities of second graders, also revealed that, written work of second graders was too crowded or clustered together which rendered reading it difficult. Spacing of letters within words were also poor in that, learners wrote letters within a word which were too far apart. For example, a learner wrote, “*before*” as “*b e f o r e*,” (Margret, 1975).

Slow writing speed is also associated to difficulties in writing. According to O’Hare and Brown (1979), learners with dysgraphia may write slowly because they press the writing instruments (pencil or pen) very hard as they write, to the extent that, they may even tear the paper, and rendering the written work to look dark and dirty. Wedell (1973) has observed that,

some learners write slowly because their wrists may be too weak or too stiff to even hold a pencil in a correct position, making writing to be too slow, painful and tedious. Additionally, Kirby and Peters (2007) outlined that, learners who write slowly were more likely to exhibit poor letter combination in words. A study conducted by Haring and Schiefelbusch, (1976) on third graders in writing activities, revealed that, some learners mixed letters in words in that, small letters and capital letters were found to be in one word. For example, some learners wrote; *“tHe giRl is pLaYiNg wiTh a doll.”* This showed that there was no consistence in writing, as letters in a word consisted both capital and small letters, (Haring and Schiefelbusch, 1976).

Studies by Haring and Schiefelbusch (1976) further revealed that, some learners with writing difficulties also exhibited reversals of numbers, letters and words as they struggled to write. Ibid (1976) noted that learners wrote letters and numbers which faced along a vertical or horizontal line in such a way that, letters are turned upside down, or in other cases, there was poor transposition, where the sequence of letters in words were out of order. For example, learners wrote; *“top”* as *“pot”* or *“saw”* as *“was”*. Learners also wrote letters such as *“b”* as *“d”* or *“p”* as *“q”*. Aukerman (1989) also indicates that, learner with dysgraphia exhibited mirror writing. Ibid (1989) defines mirror writing as a writing difficulty where learners write letters as if they are reflected in a mirror. Instead of writing from left to right, learners usually start writing from right to left. For example, the word; *“MARY”* may be written as *“YRAM”*. The letter *“p”* may be written as *“q”*, (Aukerman, 1989).

Spelling difficulties are often evident from learners who have writing difficulties, (Vogel and Adelman, 1993). According to Trio (2008), spelling errors are generally categorized as errors of omission, substitution or addition. Learners with writing difficulties usually exhibit spelling errors by adding or subtraction letters to or from the word, hence distorting the meaning of the word, (Davis and Elen, 1994). For example, the word; *“book”* may be written as *“bok”* where letter *“o”* is subtracted or *“boork”* where letter *“r”* is added to the word.

Learners with writing difficulties can also show spelling errors by omitting letters in a word, especially the first and the last letters of a word. For example, the word; “**table**” may be written as, “**able**” or as “**tabe,**” (Trio, 2008).

A study conducted in the United States of America (U.S.A) by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2002, which measured writing skills of 4th graders, found that the majority of fourth grader learners had difficulties writing more complex sentences, and written texts that involved paragraphs such as essays, stories or letters. Pollowry, Patton, Payne and Payne (1980) note that, difficulties in expressive writing by learners was as a result of learners’ failure to put ideas in sequential order. Most learners in the (NAEP, 2002) study were reported to have difficulties in writing a story due to lack of planning, poor sentence generation and lack of proof reading. According to Kennedy (2004), learners who have difficulties in processing and putting ideas in order, have poor narrative sequencing and transition. For example, instead of writing, “**this is a man**”, the learner may write, “**man this is,**” (Pollowry, Patton, Payne and Payne 1980).

Punctuation marks and paragraphing are a very important writing skill related to expressive writing. Most learners in (NAEP, 2002) study were reported to have difficulties in the use punctuation marks. The study revealed that learners wrote long sentences that were poorly organized, with repetitive use of conjunction and with less use of punctuation marks, (NAEP, 2002). In addition, kirk, Gallagher and Anastasiow (2006), have observed that, poor punctuation marks entail that learners are most likely to write everything as one long sentence without understanding that the sentence has to start with a capital letter and end with a full stop. They are unlikely to pay attention to punctuation marks.

Still on the nature of writing difficulties, Farris (1993) also notes that, writing in the third or fourth grade classrooms may be quite diversified. Some children may write as confidently and as enthusiastically as they did in the first or second grade. For other children, writing becomes

a dreaded, anxious activity, as they wrestle for perfection with pencil strokes, word spellings and stray marks, resulting in children discarding the work and beginning anew.

The above reviewed literature on the nature of writing difficulties presented an interesting platform to investigate the characteristic of writing proficiency of grade four learners in Zambian schools after they had been exposed to NBTL for four years. In regards to handwriting problems the study needed to establish whether grade four learners with writing problem in written work exhibited irregularities in letter formation, as well as spelling of omission, substitution and addition. It is often argued that once learners have acquired skills learned in one language, that is L1, in initial grades, the knowledge is not only applicable in one language but also in other concurrent languages. Therefore it was vital to investigate if learners were able to transfer knowledge acquired in initial grades, in a familiar language, in NBTL, to write words and concepts more correctly in English, (Dunn 1983). Therefore the issue of language experience approach was an important factor to determine the nature of writing difficulty in this study.

2.2. Factors which may contribute to writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade.

Davis and Elden (1994) have observed that, not all learners have the privilege to prewriting skills at an early age. Lack of proper teaching strategies of writing skills more especially at lower grades (grades 1 to 4 in case of Zambia) may cause serious writing problems. Berninger (2007) identifies poor writing instruction strategies as among the major contributing factors to writing difficulties among school going children, which are to do with how writing instructions are given to learners.

On the other hand, Wolf and Brower (1993) have highlighted poor motor or dexterity of learners as another cause of writing difficulties in learners. This could be attributed to failure by learners to control their fine motor muscles of the fingers. According to Wolf and Brower (1993), when a learner has fingers which are not flexible enough to make required shapes and

position of letters, this can make written work illegible and is likely to distort the meaning of words. Farrant (1980) also writes that, when a learner has poor control of fine motor muscles, such a learner may write too hard. In some instances, such a learner will concentrate on how to hold a pen or pencil which in turn, makes writing tasks even more ineligible and complicated.

According to Blote and Hamstra, (1991) poor vision can affect the learners' visual-motor integration and eye-hand coordination in executing proper writing. Learners with visual-spatial problems may have decreased awareness regarding the spatial arrangement of letters, words or sentence on the page. Visual spatial problems manifest themselves in a learner, when a learner fails to write on a straight line, but will either write going up or down the page, (Blote and Hamstra, 1991). According to Kirk, Gallagher and Anastasiow (2006), learners with visual spatial problems usually write letters or words that seem to be suspended in the air, and not fixed on the horizontal line. Haring and Schiefelbusch, 1976) have also indicated that some learners are unable to write words from memory or dictation due to poor visual memory. Such learners cannot remember how words look like. Additionally learners who are easily distracted or have poor attention span, are more likely to find writing difficult as they forget to remember how letters are formed or how they appear, (Haring and Schiefelbusch, 1976).

Most studies have attributed writing difficulties to poor reading skills among learners. Kavale, Forness and Bender (1987) states that, dysgraphia can occur along side with dyslexia (impaired reading ability). Crystal (1996) indicate that, when learners face reading difficulties, they are very likely to experience writing problems as well, because reading and writing are complementary skills that usually develop simultaneously. According to Shaywitz (1998) and Snowling (2000), it is approximately estimated that 5-18 % of the learners affected by dyslexia in schools often have associated difficulties with writing. Hence learners who are dyslexic are likely to exhibit spelling errors which become evident when they try to write.

Berninger (2007) adds that, reading difficulties seem to have such a potentially devastating consequence in acquisition of writing skills.

In addition to reading difficulties, Paris (2005) reveals that, research on assessment and instruction of learners in literacy skills shows that, alphabet knowledge and phonemic awareness are the enabling skills and significant predictors of later writing achievement. Dixon and Nessel (1983), also argue that in order to learn sound-letter association, one must first be able to discriminate sounds orally and then must learn to associate those sounds with letters that they represent. Successful application of phonics is dependent on the learner's ability to hear and produce the sounds of a language. Lack of adequate experience with English sounds and patterns, makes ESL learners to be unable to recognize a sound, discriminate and use those sounds in speech and consequently in writing. This inability in turn, makes it difficult for young learners to sound out words in print, resulting in writing difficulties, (Paris, 2005).

The above observations by Paris (2005) entail that, learners who fail to identify components of sounds within a word they try to spell can have writing difficulties, because they are more likely to find it difficult to link sounds and syllables to make a correct word. According to Berninger (2007), inadequate phonemic awareness inhibits learners from writing words that are unfamiliar. Additionally, Ronald and Eldem (1994) state that, a problem with development of speech is likely to interfere with a learner's progress in writing. Research studies on literacy development, particularly in acquisition of reading and writing skills, has shown that, speech development may be an early warning sign of dysgraphia, (Ronald and Eldem, 1994).

Woolley-Wade and Geva (2000) have recorded that, biliteracy acquisition often entails the challenge of learning new phonological information and the ability to reliably assign this information to the appropriate graphic representation. Therefore, the challenge of learning to read and write in two orthographies simultaneously or immediately one after the other is a

great challenge on the learner especially in initial grades. Dixon and Nessel (1983) state that, it is generally accepted that writing is more difficulty than listening, speaking or reading. Producing meaning through writing requires more effort than recognising meaning through listening or reading. Mubanga (2010) indicates that, what can be said aloud cannot be expressed as easily or quickly in writing. Usually learners develop writing abilities after oral language abilities are rather well established, (Nessel, 1983). Hence, problems with oral language point to problems with writing skills because learning the skills of written expression can be difficult for ESL learners who must learn to write a language which is orally unfamiliar.

However, MoE (2002) claims that, the Step into English (SITE) course, of Primary Reading Programme in Zambia, will enable learners not only to read fluently but also to write clearly and accurately in English, in Grade two and other further grades. In this programme, it was argued that learners were going to build on the skills developed in the Zambian language through the NBTL in Grade one, to write competently in later grades. However, this assumption was not likely to be so due to a number of factors such as consistency and regularity of Zambian language versus the inconsistency and irregularity of English in phonemic and orthographic features. This study therefore needed to determine if this assumption by the MOE (2002) had helped learners become proficient writers.

Some of the pertinent causal factors of writing difficulties brought out by the reviewed literature has been inadequate phonemic awareness of the part of the learner which may inhibit learners from writing words that are unfamiliar. Literature has also revealed that problems with development of speech is likely to interfere with a learner's progress in writing. Additionally it has indicated that, speech development may be an early warning sign of dysgraphia. Furthermore, literature has indicated that learners who face reading difficulties are very likely to experience writing problems as well, because reading and writing are

complementary skills that usually develop simultaneously. This study therefore needed to determine if these highlighted causal factors are also evident to Zambian grade four learners.

2.3. Interventional strategies of remediating writing difficulties

Concerning teaching methodologies in writing, Commeyras and Inyega (2007) argue that, all teachers, whether of English or African languages, require to possess teaching methodologies for teaching specific writing activities more effectively. So, teachers' knowledge both in content and methodology is of great importance if the teaching of writing is to succeed. Furthermore, Schroeder (2005) points out that, writing instructions depend on the part of the teacher's knowledge and effective use of instructional methods.

There are several means which teachers can use to help learners with writing problems to improve on the acquisition of writing skills. Assessment of writing has been suggested by Schroeder (2005), as the first step a teacher can do to determine the nature, degree and cause of writing difficulties of learners, and thereby come up with appropriate remedies.

On the other hand, Swaroop (2010) indicates that, light physical exercises are very much encouraged to be administered to learners with writing difficulties. He further argues teachers to train learners in early writing activities by training them in finger movements. According to Swaroop (2010), light finger exercises help learners improve their fine motor skills and enable them execute good handwriting. Pollowry, Patton, Payne and Payne (1980) also note that, fine motor activity can include; sorting out beads or seeds as well as tracing around object, template letters, around finger or writing in the said or saw dust.

Molloy (1985) has suggested that, learners can avoid writing too sequenced or too spaced work by using stamp pad or their fingertips placed between each word as they write. In the same line, Hallahan (2009) says that, teachers can also encourage learners to use paper with raised lines to keep learners' written work on the line. He has also encouraged teachers to use

lined paper to help learners write along the line and develop awareness of size and height of letters especially when teaching punctuation skills, uppercase ('P') or lowercase ('b').

Additionally, Pollowry, Patton, Payne and Payne (1989) have suggested that, when teaching learners with writing problems in recalling and forming specific words, the key concept to apply is to teach from simplicity to complexity, and from known to unknown. Classroom teachers are encouraged to teach writing skill by using simple steps moving from familiar letters or word to complicated ones. According to Gearheart, Weishahn and Gearheart (1988), one effective approach to teaching learners with writing problems is the Fernald approach. The Fernald approach is a Visual, Auditory, Kinaesthetic and Tactile (VAKT) approach which requires a child to simultaneously feel, see, say and hear letters or words being written. It is a multi-sensory approach which requires a child to trace letters and write words as many times as necessary until the child is able to write the letters and the words without looking at the letter or word, (Gearheart, Weishahn and Gearheart, 1988).

With regards to remediating spelling errors in learners, Kirk, Gallagher and Anastasiow (2006) have suggested that, teachers can involve learners with spelling difficulties in various class exercises. This can be involving learners in different usage of words and simple repetitive spelling tasks that can increase spelling accuracy. For example, a learner with profound spelling problems, a short list of words can prove productive, (Vogel and Moran, 1982).

Research studies have also highlighted a number of strategies that can be used by teachers to help learners with expressive writing difficulties. According to Vogel and Moran (1982), teachers can encourage learners to use their imagination by incorporating target words in their own sentences or by completing fill-in sentence exercises. Learners may also be given activities for proof reading and editing that can provide focus on developing written language skills. Kennedy (2004) adds that, teachers can also encourage learners to write a variety of exercises that involve sentences and paragraph correction or fill in items that focus on

grammar rules being taught. Additionally punctuation marks must be numbered. For example, full stop as (1), comma as (2), question marks as (3), (Ibid, 2004)). Furthermore, teachers can teach learners some strategies for composition writing such as planning what to write. This can begin by making an outline of a story in a sequence by considering the parts of the story. Besides, teachers can discuss the story with learners in class or explain the content of the story before learners can write it. (Kennedy, 2004).

To help learners become enthusiastic writers in schools and in future, Ott (1994) has argued schools to adopt a whole school writing policy where learners are allowed to engage in creative and expressive writing such as poems, short stories, and personal experiences. Additionally, Lerner (1993) writes that, more writing time is a necessity and should be given to learners with writing difficulties by having one-on-one tutoring. In the same line, Gearheart, Weishahn and Gearheart (1988) have observed that, learners should be allowed practice writing activities at least 10 to 15 minutes in a day, more especially when using the Fernard VAKT approach. This allows teachers to give help to learners in specific writing difficulties appropriate to learners' needs as well as age, (Gearheart, Weishahn and Gearheart, 1988) and (Kirk, Gallagher and Anastasiow, 2006).

As indicated by Schroeder (2005) that, writing instructions depend on the part of the teacher's knowledge and effective use of instructional methods, this issue of teachers' knowledge both in content and methodology was therefore of great importance to investigate in the teaching of writing skills to learners. Literature has arguably noted teacher's knowledge in various instructional strategies in the teaching of writing as fundamental. Additionally, this study needed also to establish if adequate teacher training and knowledge could also influence the learners writing proficiency or it could negatively affect learner's writing ability. On the other hand, the study needed to establish if adopting a whole school writing policy in creative and expressive writing; as well as allocating more writing time to learners to practice writing activities could enhance the ability of writing skills of learners in Zambian schools.

2.4. Chapter summary

Although there was inadequate literature concerning the nature and prevalence of writing difficulties from the Zambian context, literature that was consulted from various studies across the world had covered many areas on the nature and prevalence of writing difficulties of learners at various grade levels in primary schools. On the prevalence of writing difficulties, literature has revealed that, 72% of 4th-grade learners, who were tested, in the NAEP 2002 study did not meet the NAEP writing proficiency goals. It has also indicated that about two thirds of lower primary grades who took part in the ACT (2005) study did not meet readiness benchmarks for upper primary school-level English composition writing.

In regards to nature of handwriting problems, literature has indicated that learners with writing problem in written work, exhibited irregularities in letter formation, as well as spelling of omission, substitution and addition. The reviewed literature has also highlighted inadequate phonemic awareness on the part of the learner as a causal factor that inhibits learners from writing words that are unfamiliar. It has also revealed that problems with development of speech is likely to interfere with a learner's progress in writing. Furthermore, it has stated that learners who face reading difficulties are very likely to experience writing problems as well, because reading and writing are complementary skills that usually develop simultaneously. On the other hand, literature has highlighted that, adopting a whole school writing policy in creative and expressive writing; as well as allocating more time to learners to practice writing activities could enhance the writing abilities of learners in schools.

Therefore, the information that was gathered from world research findings and other scholars was fundamental in helping shape the direction of the study. It also helped the researcher not only to understand the nature and prevalence of writing difficulties of learners at various grades, but also guided this study in coming up with appropriate methodology and presentation of findings in the proceeding chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Overview

This chapter outlines the methods that were used in the study. It explains the research design, study population, sample size and sampling procedures. It further explains research instruments that were used to collect data and data collection procedures, as well as tools that were used to analyse data.

3.1. Research design

The study used a descriptive survey design. This design allowed the researcher to use both qualitative and quantitative methods. The research design was also used because it was suitable in generating in-depth knowledge and describing the state of affairs as it existed. Cohen and Manion (1994) state that, descriptive surveys typically gather data with the intention of describing the nature of the existing conditions, or determining the relationships that exist between specific events. The design also allowed the researcher to generate the required data through the use of questionnaires for teachers as well as administer tests and writing checklists to learners, (Cohen and Manion, 1994). A descriptive survey design was also used in this study because of its usefulness in capturing and describing the characteristics of a larger population using a sample. It allowed the researcher to capture opinions and attitudes of respondents particularly of grade four teachers on the issue of writing abilities of their grade four learners, (Graziano and Raulin, 2007).

Qualitative method was used to give a detailed description of emerging themes which unfolded from the questionnaires and checklists. According to Graziano and Raulin (2007), the major goals of qualitative research methods are to describe and analyse functioning in everyday settings which include naturalistic and participant observations. Qualitative methods are useful when the researcher uses instruments such as questionnaires and checklists. On the

other hand, quantitative method was used in this study because the researcher believed that the truth could only be established using science. Quantitative method is one that applies scientific investigation to establish relationships and regularities between selected factors in the world, (Cohen and Manion, (1980). In this study quantitative methods enabled the researcher to classify features and construct statistical models in an attempt to explain data collected from respondents, more especially from the Basic Skills Assessment Tool (BASAT).

3.2 Target population

According to Patton (1990), a target population is a set of elements that the researcher focuses on, by testing the sample whose results can be generalised. An ideal population for this study were all the grade four learners and grade four teachers from four (4) primary schools in Lusaka district of Lusaka Province. Grade four teachers were used as informers. The categories for both groups were grade four learners and grade four teachers.

3.3. Study sample

Kahn and Best (2006) describe a study sample as a small proportion of the population that is selected for observation and analysis. It was from testing the sample that the researcher made inferences about the characteristics of the population from which it was drawn. The study sample consisted of total of ninety (90) respondents distributed as follows: 80 learners who were in Grade four in 2014 and 10 teachers who were teaching grade four classes in 2014. These were selected from four schools in Lusaka districts. In this study, twenty (20) learners were selected from each of the four schools. The gender distribution was as follows:

Gender of respondents

Table 1 below shows that, there were a total of eighty (80) learners, of which, forty (40) were boys, representing 50% and forty (40) were girls, representing 50%. This represents the ratio of boys and girls who participated in the study of 1:1. There were also 10 teachers who

participated in the study. All the 10 teachers who participated in the study were female. It should be stated that, there were only female teachers who participated in the study, as these were the only ones who were teaching grade four classes at the time the research was conducted.

Table 1: Gender of respondents by school

School	Learners		Teachers	
	Boys	Girls	Male	Female
A	10	10	00	3
B	10	10	00	3
C	10	10	00	2
D	10	10	00	2
Total	40 (50%)	40(50%)	00	10
Grand Total	80 (100%)		10 (100%)	

3.4. Sampling procedure

A sampling procedure is a way of choosing respondents that make up a study sample. According to Sidhu (2001), it is a process of selecting a small number of cases from the population in such a way that the cases are representative of the large group from which they were selected. This study used two sampling procedures, namely, purposive sampling and stratified random sampling.

The four schools were purposively selected as they were believed to the characteristics vital to the study, as the sample size of the four schools was representative enough of the population under study. Therefore, to have an accurate and representative sample of schools, two (2) primary schools were selected from high density areas, while the other two (2) primary Schools were selected from low density areas. Purposive sampling was also used to select all the grade four teachers. This was done in order to have respondents who could provide the richest information and had the characteristics believed to be vital to the study, (Patton, 1990). Additionally, grade four teachers were also purposively selected because of the small numbers of teachers in primary schools who taught grade four classes.

On the other hand, stratified random sampling procedure was used to select respondents from grade four learners. According to Graziano and Raulin (2007), stratified random sampling procedures are used when it is important to ensure that sub-groups within the population are adequately represented in the sample, by dividing the population into strata and then a random sample is taken from each stratum. Therefore, the researcher used stratified random sampling by dividing learners into four literacy strata in each class, in order to have an equal representation of learners from all ability categories in terms of literacy.

The ability groups where learners were selected from were Red (low literacy ability), Green and Yellow (average), and Orange and Blue (high literacy ability). This was done with the help of class teachers to avoid overlapping of variables. After grouping learners into their literacy groups, simple random sampling was then used to select pupils from the stratified sub-groups. Graziano and Raulin (2007 p 417) define simple random sampling as a , “procedure for selecting participants, in which each participant has an equal chance of being selected, and the selection of any one participant does not affect the probability of selecting any other participant.” Some of the advantages of stratified random sampling were that no significant group from the sample remained unrepresented and replacement of the unit could be done conveniently if the original selected case was inaccessible. Simple random sampling was chosen in order to accord each member of the population an equal chance of being selected. In this study 8 high achievers were selected from each school while both 6 average and low achievers were also selected from each school.

3.5. Data Collection Instruments

Three instruments were used to collect data from respondents and these were: Questionnaire, Basic Skills Assessment Tool (BASAT) and a writing evaluation checklist. Questionnaires were used to collect data from teachers. Questionnaires had both qualitative and quantitative questions which were used to collect the data from grade four teachers on their experiences regarding the nature and prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at grade four (see

appendix 1). The questionnaire as a research tool was used in this study because it took into account things like anonymity, encouraged honest and objectivity from respondents, (Shamoo and Resnik , 2009).

The BASAT was used to collect data from learners by assessing their writing abilities in different writing tasks as outlined in the writing component of the tool. In this study the BASAT was the main instrument of data collection. This instrument is a comprehensive standardized Zambian tool which was specially designed by the Ministry of Education in conjunction with the University of Zambia, (MoE, 2002; and Matafwali, 2005). The instrument was initially meant to assess Grades One and Two school pupils' literacy proficiency, but it can also be used at other grade levels. The BASAT consists of seven aspects, each focusing on one of the literacy abilities which were in the areas of letter name-knowledge, letter-sound knowledge, phonological tasks, reading, writing, reading comprehension and digit span. In this study the English version of the BASAT was used to assess writing abilities of grade four learners, because it was the literacy skill which was under investigation, (see appendix 2). Therefore, the researcher used the writing component of the BASAT to assess learners' ability to write dictated word and sentence items. The following is the key to understand the scoring on the BASAT:

*** KEY:** **Yes** =learners are able to write correctly; **No** = learners are not able to write correctly; **Needs help** = learners are able to write some names or words.

The researcher designed the Writing Evaluation Checklist to collect data from learners on their expressive writing abilities, (See appendix 3). Learners were tested on an expressive writing activity adopted from the Grade four English Activity Book 1 (2004:25), entitled, "Telling a story". The short story was about the activities Chongo does during the day. The story contained eight sentences that were already written on pieces of paper by the researcher, but were written in a jumbled way. Learners were required to re-write the story by re-arranging the sentences to make it meaningful, (See appendix 4).

3.6. Data collection procedures

Questionnaires were distributed to grade four teachers to answer the questions and were later collected for data analysis after five (5) days. Before distributing the questionnaires, the researcher highlighted to teachers on how to answer the questions.

The BASAT writing dictation component was used to assess selected grade four learners writing proficiency. This test was administered to learners in groups of tens. Each learner was provided with a writing sheet of paper and a pencil. Learners were made sit alone on a desk, in rows, facing the researcher. Then they were tested on how to write their full names, the alphabet, and two - letter words, three - letter words, and more than three - letter words. They were also tested on writing simple sentences as provided in BASAT writing test. All the tasks were dictated by the researcher. Each of the words were read twice, one at a time. The researcher also constructed simple sentences in which the dictated words were used in contextual situations to enable learners understand the words clearly. Additionally, the dictated sentences were read two times, slowly and clearly before the learners could write them. The test took about 20 minutes because a maximum time of 30 seconds was allocated for writing each word and about 1 minute for writing each sentence. The dictation test was used to assess word-spelling as well as word-order in sentences.

The researcher used the writing evaluation checklist to critically analyse the nature of writing abilities of learners in an expressive activity that was given to them. The expressive writing activity was conducted by dividing learners in groups of ten. Each learner was given a pre-written jumbled story, a pencil, a rubber and a lined piece of paper on which to write the story. The jumbled story was read three times after which learners were asked to rewrite the story in the meaningful way to show Chongo's activities during the day. Learners were asked to rearrange the sentences in a chronological order. They were also told to write the story in a paragraph. In addition, learners were given 20 minutes to rewrite the story in the correct way. After writing the story, the written work was collected by the researcher for analysis using the

checklist. Each learner's work was analysed by scrutinising learners' ability to write straight on the horizontal line, word spacing, and neatness of written work, as well as letter formation. It was further assessed by analysing sentences order, punctuation and paragraphing.

3.7. Data analysis

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), data analysis is the process of systematically arranging the interview scripts, field notes, and other material that one accumulates to increase one's understanding of them. Therefore, data analysis enables the researcher to present what has been discovered to others in systematic and understandable manner. In this study, a variety of tools were used to analyse data. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer programme was used to analyse data quantitatively by using tables of frequencies, percentages and cross-tabulations from both learner and teacher respondents. Qualitative method was used to describe the tabulation in tables and emerging themes from open-ended items from teachers' questionnaires and learners writing evaluation checklist.

3.8. Ethical considerations.

The following are some ethical principles that guided the research as proposed by Shamoo & Resnik (2009).

Consent: Regarding this ethical issue, the researcher obtained an introductory letter from the Assistant Dean, Post Graduate Studies in the School of Education. Upon getting the letter, the researcher went to the Provincial and District Education offices of the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and early Education (MESVTEE) in Lusaka district to get consent to conduct the study in selected schools in the district. The purpose of the study was explained to both the Provincial and District officials. Informed consent was also obtained from learners' parents or guardians before their children were subjected to research tests by explaining the purpose of the study and asking them if they were willing to allow their children to participate in the study, (see appendix 4).

Confidentiality: Responses from teachers and learners were kept confidential. Further, identities of respondents and selected schools were kept anonymous. For the sake of anonymity and confidentiality, the names of the four schools were withheld, as such, pseudonyms (letters of the alphabet: ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’) were used to represent the four schools. However, the study only used the first names of learners, because it was a requirement when using the BASAT, to assess learners’ ability to write their first names. The first names could not apply to each individual learner without the surname, because first names were not unique. (See appendix 4).

Human participant Protection: Since the study was conducted on human participants, the researcher respected human dignity, privacy, and autonomy as advocated by Shamoo and Resnik (2009). The researcher respected the views of all the participants, by clearly indicating in the consent form that, selected learners were free to take part in study, but if they did not wish to do so, they were also free to stop participating in the data collection at any time, without affecting their relationship with the researcher. (See appendix 4)

Carefulness: The researcher carefully and critically examined his own work by keeping good records of research activities, such as data collection tools and correspondence with teachers, parents/guardians and learners.

Honesty: Every research tool and procedures used in this study were honestly explained to participants. Respondents were also assured that data that was collected was for academic purposes only, and findings from the study were to be published so that other interested people may learn from the study as a requirement by the University of Zambia.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

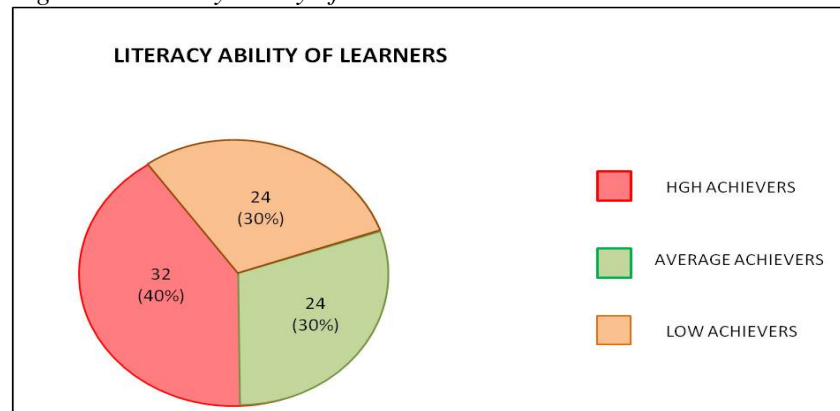
4.0. Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the study. All the research findings were presented according to the four research questions that were asked in chapter one of this study. The first question being; what is the nature of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade? The second question being; what is the prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade? The third question, being; what factors contribute to writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade? The fourth and last question, being; what measures should be put in place to remediate writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade?

Learners' level of literacy achievement

It was found that under the PRP, learners in class were grouped according to how high or low they performed in literacy (reading) based on the class teacher's assessment of learners, on the taught items in a given term. They were grouped according to the following colours: red, yellow; and blue. In PRP, the red colour meant that learners were of low literacy ability, while yellow were of average literacy ability and blue meant that learners were categorised as high literacy ability. Figure 1 below, shows that , there were 32 out of 80 learners categorised as high literacy ability learners (high achievers) representing 40%, 24 out 80 average literacy ability learners (average achievers) representing 30% and 24 out of 80 low literacy ability learners (low achievers), also representing 30%. The ratio of literacy ability of learners was, 5:3:3. In this study, they were many higher achiever learners in literacy (reading) compared to average and low achievers. Both boys and girls were equally represented in these literacy ability categories.

Figure 1: Literacy ability of learners.



Source: 2014 field data

4.1. What is the nature of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade?

To answer this question, findings were presented according to the nature of learners' writing difficulties from the BASAT, checklist and then from teachers' questionnaires.

4.1.1. Presentation of nature of writing difficulties from the BASAT.

In this section, the researcher presents some of the actual characteristics of writing difficulties of some grade four learners, referred to as samples. Three samples of learners' writing difficulties are presented to show some characteristics of writing difficulties among grade four learners.

Failure to write the alphabet in chronological order

Sample 1 shows that the learner failed to write the letters of the alphabet in chronological order correctly. The letters of the alphabet were written in a jumbled way. This clearly shows that the learner had not mastered the logical order of the alphabet. The sample also shows that the learner did not write any dictated words and sentences correctly. The rest of learner's nature of writing difficulties are shown in sample 1:

Sample 1: failure to write letters of the alphabet

Basic Skills Assessment Tool (BASAT)
E. Writing
 1. Name: George PHIB
 2. Letters

Z	e	A	r	c
a	w	i	s	n
T	m	o	B	T
t	b	d	b	o
N	o	u	e	L
A	e	m	d	T

3. a. row b. Toot
 c. ewo d. isa ✓
 4. a. gas b. lane
 c. LINE d. exp ✓
 5. a. LIEM b. eint
 c. htne d. Tesu
 6. a. hein the GER
 b. Tenu IS Roll

11

Source: 2014 field data

Writing completely different words

Sample 2 shows how the learner wrote completely different words from those that were dictated to learners. In relation to writing dictated words, the learner exhibited extreme writing difficulties such that, all the words that were dictated were written differently and not making sense at all. Further analysis of the learner's writing difficulty shows that the learner needs help in writing her gender (girl) correctly. The sample also reveals that, the learner wrote letters of the alphabet from A to I correctly, but had difficulties with letters from J to Z as she could not even finish the activity. The rest of learner's characteristic of writing difficulties are shown in sample 2:

girl

Basic Skills Assessment Tool (BASAT)

E. Writing

1. Name: THANG SAKALA

2. Letters

A	B	C	D	E
F	H	G	I	9
R	W	T	N	O
Z	L	J	X	S

3. a. fat rig b. grivasi
 c. row d. azd ✓

4. a. biy b. Baiyem
 c. Btair d. uno? ✓

5. a. Hzag b. Clbail
 c. Hzag d. Transmission

6. a. wrasy the biy
 b. por over thers hear the boad

11

Source: 2014 field data

Orthographical writing difficulties

Sample 3 shows orthographically written words by the learner. Words which were orthographically written by the learner include, 'me' as 'meni', 'in' as 'ni'; 'milk' as 'melik'; 'teacher' as 'ticha' and 'as' as 'asi'. Further, the learner wrote sentence (6b) incorrectly. The rest of learner's nature of writing difficulties are shown in sample 3:

Basic Skills Assessment Tool (BASAT)

E. Writing

1. Name: DAVID Tembo

2. Letters

A	B	C	D	E
F	G	H	I	J
K	L	M	N	O
P	Q	R	S	T
U	V	W	X	Y
Z				✓

3. a. mezi b. ni

4. a. too b. asi ✓

4. a. day b. Besti day

5. a. melik b. camp

5. a. WUDee b. thick ✓

6. a. look at the dog

6. b. Et si usi ne ball

Use additional paper if needed!
The BASAT

24

Source: 2014 field data

Summary on the Nature of writing difficulties of words and sentences from the BASAT

Table 2 shows the summary of learners' characteristic of writing difficulties of words and sentences from the BASAT. All the words and sentences from the writing part of the BASAT were dictated to learners. The expected correct writing words and sentences are presented in the left column while the wrong spelt words by learners are presented in the right column.

Table 2: Summary on the Nature of writing difficulties of words and sentences from the BASAT

Dictated or expected word spelling	Incorrectly written word-spellings
Me	Mnst, mei, mi, ma, my, mier, mir
In	Ni, ai, mete, en, him, ini, ene,
As	Ais, his, anz, has, us, eis, aze, ise, ice,
To	Tu, two, too, tows, toe, 2, tuu,
Dog	Bog, door, bag, goGs, doggie, dogy,
Bat	Daty,bad, bet, but, bird, bit, bet, buty, burt, pat,
Pen	Pain, paen, pea, pallen, pan, piean
Cup	Cat, kapu, cow, capu, cap, kupu,
Milk	Muik, mailk, mink, miak, melik, miki, milek
Small	Samlle, simal, semll, simo, smile
Window	Wiondowe, wideg, widoll, wido, wedo, wendo
Teacher	Teha; terch; teich; tehaucce; ticha; ticat; tichi;
Look at the dog	Uoy at the dag; two te eht deg; luku ati tha dogi
It is playing with the ball	It pains yoe balley; it y a plyeing in bola; et is peyig in the bola;

Source: 2014 field data

4.1.2. Presentation of findings on the nature of learners writing difficulties from the writing evaluation checklist

Learners were given an expressive writing activity adopted from Grade 4 English Activity Book 1 (2004 p 25), entitled, “*Telling a story*”. The story contained eight sentences that were prewritten on pieces of paper by the researcher but were written in the jumbled way. Learners were required to rewrite the story by rearranging the sentences in a meaningful way. Therefore, they were required to write the story correctly as follows:

Chongo wakes up at 06.00hrs. First, he takes a bath very quickly. After a bath, he eats breakfast. He goes to school at 07.00hours. At school, he plays with his friends. After school, he goes back home. At home, he helps his mother in the garden. He goes to sleep at 20.00hours.

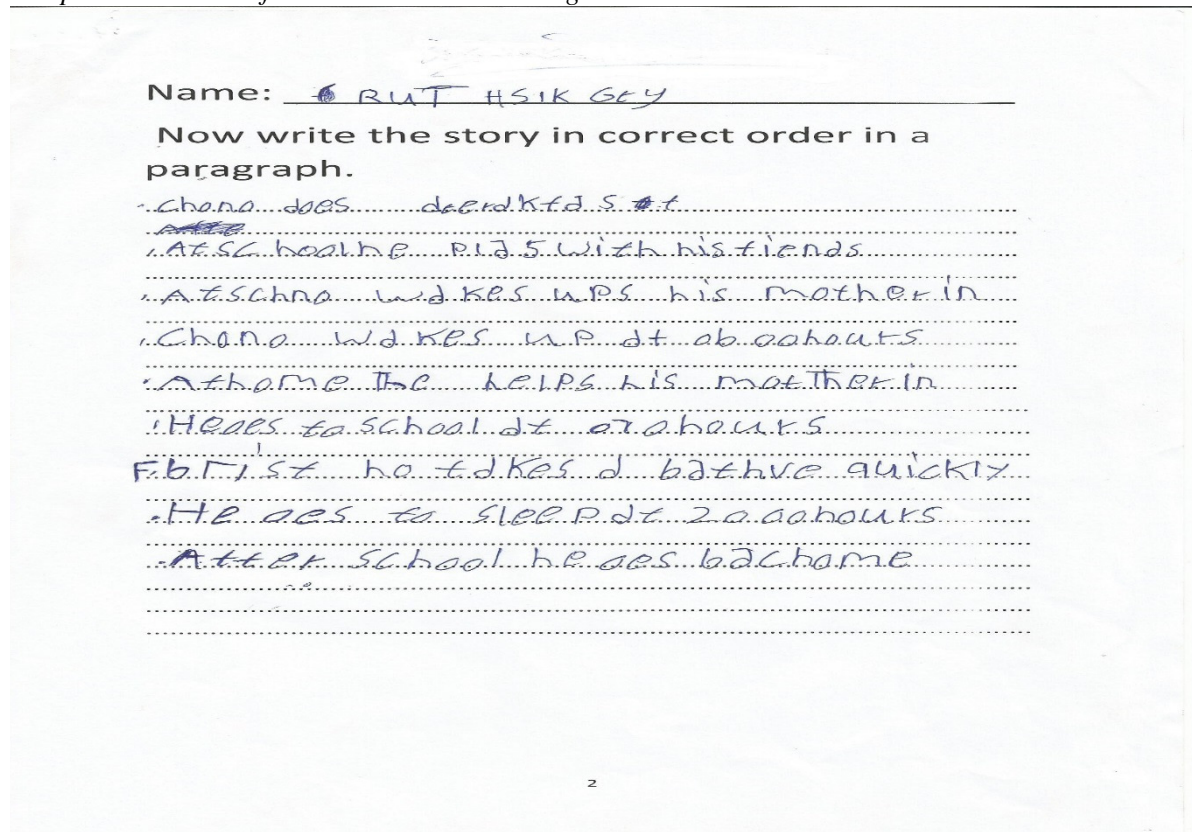
From the story, two aspects of writing ability were assessed using the writing evaluation checklist. These were handwriting and expressive writing.

Characteristic of learners’ expressive writing difficulty

In this section, the researcher presents some of the actual characteristics of expressive writing difficulties of some grade four learners, referred to as samples. Three samples of learners

such as omission of letters in words. For example, the word ‘goes’ was written as ‘oes’, ‘chongo’, was written as, ‘chono’, ‘first’ was written as ‘fbrist’. The whole written work of the learner was not legible at all. The rest of the learner’s nature of handwriting difficulty is indicated in sample 5.

Sample 5: omission of letters and mirror writing



Source: 2014 field data

Poor spacing of words

Sample 6 also shows the nature of the learner’s writing difficulties. The nature of writing difficulty was characterised by poor spacing of words. The learner exhibited poor spacing of words in sentences, in that words are too much squeezed with no space left between the words. This made the written work not legible at all. Further analysis of the learner’s written work show that, the learner failed to write on the horizontal line. All the written words seem to be suspended in air.

girl

Name: MRCY C

Now write the story in correct order in a paragraph.

At bath he eats breakfast
And in the paxs with his friends
C wakes up at 06 00 hours.
At home he helps his mother in the
H garden
He goes to school at 07 00 hours
He looks at bath very much
He goes to school at 07 00 hours
At school he goes back home

2

Source: 2014 field data

From the three samples that have been highlighted on characteristics of expressive writing, it can be stated that most learners did not know how to write the story correctly. They had difficulties in writing a meaningful story as expected. The learners' written work was below their grade level, as a lot of bench marks needed in writing a story correctly were not paid attention to, such as; spacing, neatness, paragraphing and use of punctuation marks.

4.1.3. Presentation of findings on the nature of learners writing difficulties from teachers' questionnaire

This section presents findings on teachers' responses on their grade four learners' nature of writing difficulties. The following key provides an understanding of teachers' responses in the preceding tables:

- ❖ **KEY:** **Yes** = learners have writing difficulties: **No** = learners do not have writing difficulties; **Sometimes** = learners usually have writing difficulties

Characteristic of handwriting difficulties of among grade four learners

Table 3 indicates responses of teachers when they were asked to state the characteristic of handwriting difficulties common among their grade four learners. For example, results show that out of 10 teachers, 4 indicated that learners exhibited poor formation of letters when writing, while 5 teachers stated that, learners did not exhibit poor formation of letters when writing, and 1 teacher said learners needed help in formation of letters when writing. The table also shows that there were a total of 23 (38.3%) out 60 responses for **YES**; 18 (30%) out of 60 responses for **NO**; and 19(31.7%) out of 60 responses for **SOMTIMES**. This implies that a small number (38.3%) of grade four learners had difficulties in key markers of handwriting accuracy such as, spacing, combination of upper and lower cases as well as letter formation. The rest of teachers responses are indicated in table 3.

Table 3: Teachers responses on the characteristic of handwriting difficulties among grade 4 learners

S/N	Nature of handwriting difficulties	Yes	No	Needs help	Total
		F	f	f	
1	Poor letter formation	4	5	1	10
2	Poor spacing	5	1	4	10
3	Combination of upper & lower case	7	-	3	10
4	Difficulty staying on horizontal line	3	5	2	10
5	Mirror writing	2	6	2	10
6	Reversal writing	2	1	7	10
TOTAL RESPONSES		23(38.3%)	18(30%)	19(31.7%)	60(100%)

Source: 2014 field data

Common spelling errors among grade four learners

Table 4 shows teachers' responses when they were asked to highlight the spelling errors which were common among grade four learners during writing activities. For example; out of 10 teachers, 9 indicated that omission of letters in a word was common among learners, and none of the teachers indicated that omission of letters in the word was not common, while 1 teacher indicated that, omission of letters in a word was usually common among learners.

The table also shows that there were a total of 40 (66.7%) out of 60 responses for **YES**. This implies that almost two-thirds 40 (66.7%) of the teachers responses confirmed that, learners exhibited different types of spelling errors during writing as indicated in the table below. The rest of the teachers responses are indicated in table 4 below.

Table 4: Teachers' responses on common spelling errors among grade 4 learners

S/N	Common spelling errors	RESPONSES			TOTAL
		YES	NO	SOMETIMES	
1	Omission of letters in a word	9	-	1	10
2	Addition of letters in a word	5	2	3	10
3	Substitution of letters in a word	6	1	3	10
4	Reversing of letters in a word	6	2	2	10
5	Writing completely a different word	7	-	3	10
6	Phonic errors	7	-	3	10
TOTAL RESPONSES		40 (66.7%)	5 (8.3%)	15(25%)	60(100%)

Source: 2014 field data

Types of expressive writing learners find difficulties to write correctly

The following were the responses of teachers when they were asked to state the type of expressive writing which learners find difficulties to write correctly. For example, 2 out of 10 teachers indicated that learners were able to write friendly letters, while 6 out of 10 teachers stated that learners find difficulties writing correctly friendly letters and 2 stated that learners needed help in writing friendly letters. The table further shows that, there were a total of 31(62%) out of 50 responses for '**NO**' (not able to write) .This indicates that over half of grade four learners were not able to write competently the types of expressive writing that are listed in table 5.

Table 5: Teachers responses on types of expressive writing learners find difficulties to write (N= 10)

S/N	TYPE OF EXPRESSIVE WRITING	RESPONSES			TOTAL
		YES	NO	SOMETIMES	
1	Friendly letters	2	6	2	10
2	Formal letters	-	8	2	10
3	Short stories	5	2	3	10
4	Poems	-	7	3	10
5	Invitation notes	2	6	2	10
TOTAL RESPONSES		9 (18%)	31(62%)	12(24%)	50(100%)

Source: 2014 field data

Common areas of writing difficulty in expressive writing

Table 6 shows teachers' responses when they were asked to state the common areas of writing difficulty in expressive writing among grade four learners. For example, out of 10 teachers, 7 of them stated that learners had difficulties in the use of punctuation marks, while 1 teacher stated that, learners had no difficulties in the use of punctuation marks, and 2 of them stated that, learners usually find difficulties in the use of punctuation marks. The table also shows that there were a total of 48 (80%) out 60 responses for **YES**. This implies that most grade four learners had difficulties in writing accuracy in key markers of writing such as, sentence structure, grammar, punctuation marks, capitalization, paragraphing and spelling. The rest of teachers responses are indicated in the table 6 below.

Table6: Responses of teachers on common areas of writing difficulty of learners in expressive writing (N=10)

S/N	Common area of difficulty in Expressive writing	RESPONSES			TOTAL
		YES	NO	SOMETIMES	
1	Poor punctuation marks	7	1	2	10
2	Difficulties in the use of tenses	7	-	3	10
3	Poor spellings	9	-	1	10
4	Poor grammar	8	1	1	10
5	Difficulties in paragraphing	8	-	2	10
6	Difficulties in formulation of meaningful ideas	9	-	1	10
TOTAL RESPONSES		48(80%)	2(3.3%)	10(16.7%)	60(100%)

Source: 2014 field data

4.2. What is the prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade?

To answer this research question, findings were also presented systematically according to data from the BASAT, checklist and then from teachers' questionnaires.

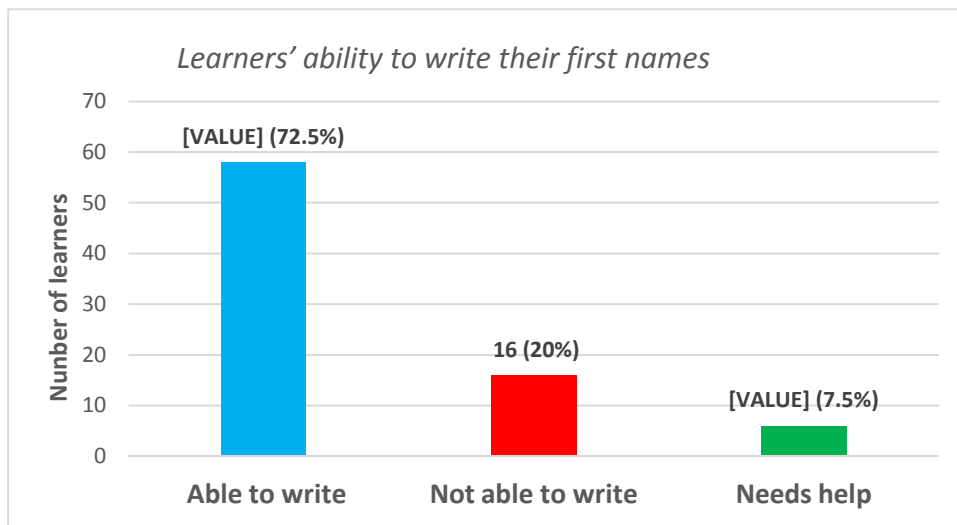
4.2.1. Presentation of findings on the prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade from the BASAT

Learners' ability to write their full names

Graph 1 below shows that 58 out of 80 learners were able to write their first names correctly, representing 72.5%, while 6 out of 80 learners were not able to write their first names correctly, representing 7.5% and 16 out of 80 learners, representing 20%, needed help in

writing their first names. Therefore, a total of 22 out of 80 learners, representing 27.5%, learners had difficulties in writing their first names.

Graph 1: Learners' ability to write their first names

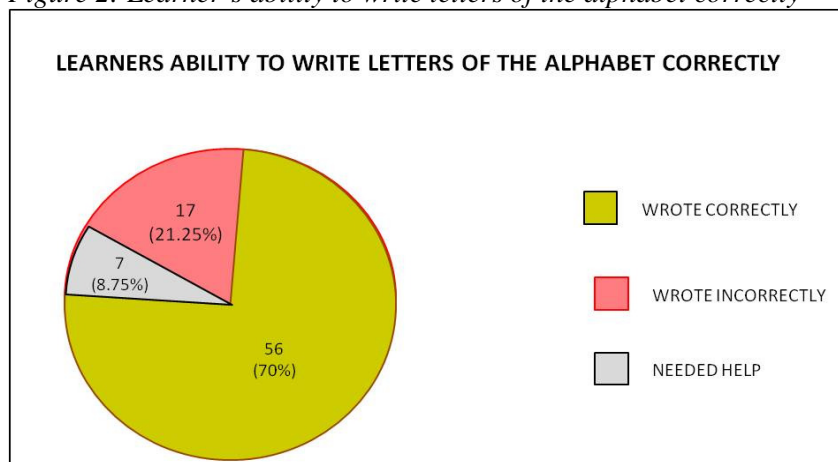


Source: 2014 field data

Learners' ability to write letters of the alphabet

Figure 2 indicates learners' ability to write the letters of the alphabet from A to Z from memory. The figure shows that out of 80 learners, 56 of them wrote the letters of the alphabet correctly, representing 70%, while 17 out of 80 learners wrote the letters of the alphabet incorrectly, representing 21.25% and 7 out of 80 learners needed help in writing the letters of the alphabet, representing 8.75%. Therefore, a total of 24 out of 80 learners, representing 30% had difficulties in writing letters of the alphabet correctly.

Figure 2: Learner's ability to write letters of the alphabet correctly

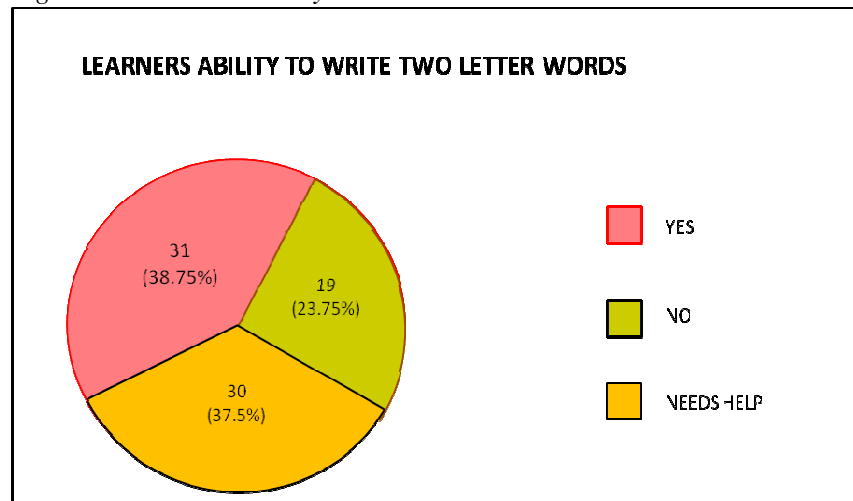


Source: 2014 field data

Learners' ability to write two-letter words

Figure 3 indicates learners' ability to write two letter words from the BASAT. The two letter words that were dictated to learners were; '*me*', '*in*', '*to*' and '*as*'. The figure shows that 31 (38.75%) out of 80 learners were able to write the two-letter words correctly, while 30 (37.5%) out of 80 learners wrote the words incorrectly and 19 (23.75%) out 80 learners needed help in writing the dictated two-letter words.

Figure 3: Learner's ability to write two-letter words



Source: 2014 field data

Prevalence of writing difficulties of two letter words by literacy achievement level

Table 7 shows the prevalence of writing difficulties of two letter words by learners according to their level of literacy ability in reading. As indicated earlier in this chapter, low achievers were those learners that were categorized as Red, while average achievers as Yellow, whereas high achievers were categorized as Blue, according to their literacy ability in RPR, based on grade teacher's assessment. Results show that the mean score of 8 (25%) out 32 higher achievers, standard deviation of 2.63; 11 (45.83%) out 24 average achievers, standard deviation of 3.11; and 14 (58.33%) out of 24 low achievers, standard deviation 3.08; wrote the two-letter words incorrectly. The table further indicates that, 12 (37.5%) out 32 higher achievers, 15 (41.67%) out of 24 average achievers and 19 (79.17%) out 24 low achievers wrote the word '*as*' incorrectly. The rest of the learners' performance are indicated in table 7.

Table 7: Prevalence of writing difficulties of two- letter words by literacy achievement (N=80)

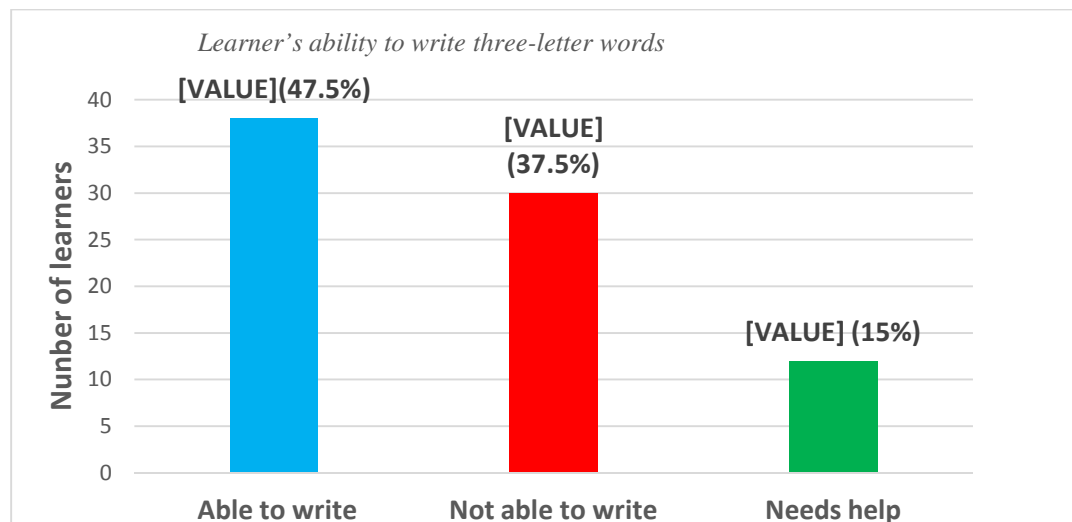
Words	Learners level of literacy achievement					
	Higher achievers (N=32)		Average achievers (N=24)		Low achievers (N=24)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Me	8	25%	10	41.67%	14	58.33%
In	6	18.75%	8	33.33%	12	50%
To	7	21.875%	9	37.5%	11	45.83%
As	12	37.5%	15	62.5%	19	79.17%
Mean/SD	8 (2.63)	26%	11 (3.11)	43.75%	14 (3.08)	58.33%

Source: 2014 field data

Learners' ability to write three-letter words

Graph 2 indicates learners' ability to write three- letter words from the BASAT. The three-letter words that were dictated to learners were: '*dog*', '*bat*', '*pen*', and '*cup*'. The graph shows that 38 (47.5%) out of 80 learners were able to write the three-letter words correctly, while 30 (37.5%) out of 80 learners wrote the three- letter words incorrectly, and 12 (15%) out of 80 learners wrote some, but needed help.

Graph 2: Learner's ability to write three-letter words



Source: 2014 field data

Prevalence of writing difficulty of three- letter words by literacy achievement

Table 8 below shows the prevalence of writing difficulties of three - letter words by learners.

Results show that the mean score of 6 (18.75%) out 32 higher achievers, standard deviation of

3.3; 10 (41.67%) out 24 average achievers, standard deviation of 4.03; and 15 (62.5%) out of 24 low achievers, standard deviation of 5.12; wrote the three-letter words incorrectly. It also shows that, 4 (12.5%) out 32 high achievers, 8(33.3%) out of 24 average achievers and 10 (41.67%) out 24 low achievers wrote the word ‘*dog*’ incorrectly. The rest of the performance trends among the three literacy achievement categories are indicated in the Table 8.

Table 8: Prevalence of writing difficulty of three- letter words by literacy achievement (N=80)

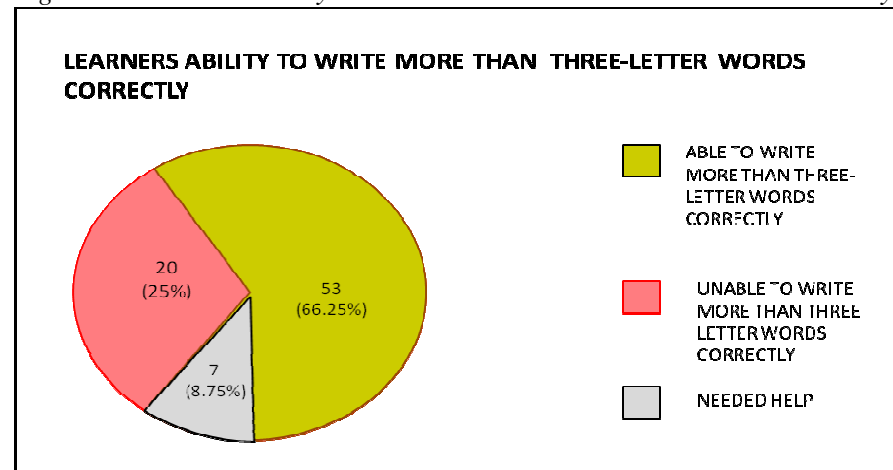
Words	Learners’ level of literacy achievement					
	Higher achievers (N=32)		Average achievers (N=24)		Low achievers (N=24)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Dog	4	12.5%	8	33.33%	10	41.67%
Bat	8	25%	12	50%	18	75%
Pen	10	31.25%	15	62.5%	21	87.5%
Cup	3	9.375%	6	25%	12	50%
Mean/ SD	6 (3.3)	19.53%	10 (4.03)	42.71%	15 (5.12)	63.54%

Source: 2014 field data

Learner’s ability to write more than three -letter words

Figure 4 below indicates learners’ ability to write more than three- letter words from the BASAT. The words with more than three letters which dictated to learners were: ‘*milk*’, ‘*small*’, ‘*window*’, and ‘*teacher*’. The figure shows that, 20 (25%) out of 80 learners correctly wrote the words with more than three letters, while 53 (66.25%) out of 80 learners incorrectly wrote the words with more than three letters and 7 (8.75%) out of 80 learners wrote some words, but needed help in writing the three letter words correctly.

Figure 4: Learners’ ability to write more than three -letter words correctly



Source: 2014 field data

Prevalence of writing difficulty of more than three-letter words by literacy achievement

Table 9 shows the prevalence of learners' writing difficulties of more than three letter words, according to their level of literacy ability in reading. Results show that an average of 8 (23.44%) out of 32 higher achievers, standard deviation of 1.29; 13 (55.21%) out of 24 average achievers, standard deviation of 2.5; and 18 (75%) out of 24 low achievers, standard deviation of 2.94; wrote more than three letter words, incorrectly. The table also indicates that, 9 (28.125%) out of 32 higher achievers, 16 (66.67%) out of 24 average achievers and 21 (87.5%) out of 24 low achievers wrote the word **'teacher'** incorrectly. The rest of the performance trends among the three achievement categories are indicated in the Table 9.

Table 9: Prevalence of writing difficulty of more than three-letter words by literacy achievement (N=80)

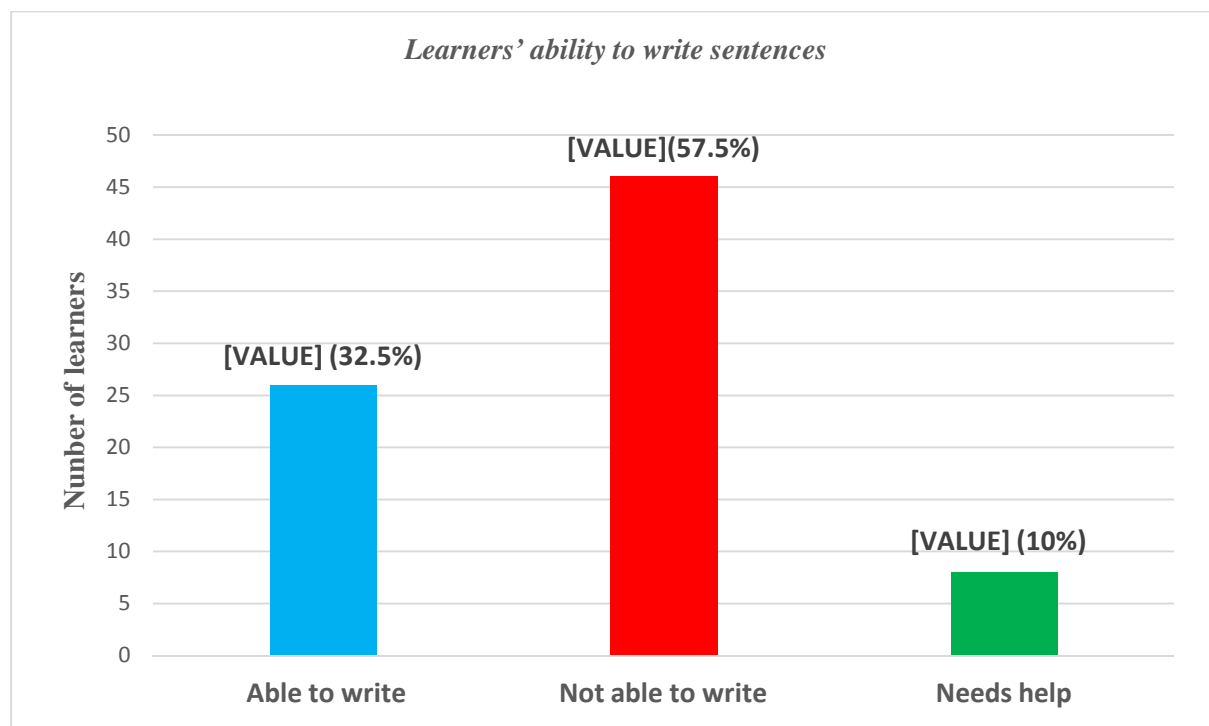
Words	Learners' level of literacy achievement					
	Higher achievers (N=32)		Average achievers (N=24)		Low achievers (N=24)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Milk	7	21.875%	13	54.17%	18	75%
Small	6	18.75%	10	41.67%	14	58.67%
Window	8	25%	14	58.33%	19	79.17%
Teacher	9	28.125%	16	66.67%	21	87.5%
Mean/SD	8 (1.29)	23.44%	13 (2.5)	55.21%	18 (2.94)	75%

Source: 2014 field data

Learners' ability to write sentences from the BASAT

Graph 3 indicates learners' ability to sentences from the BASAT. The two sentences that were dictated to learners from the BASAT were; **'look at the dog,'** and **'it is playing with the ball'.** The graph shows that, 26 (32.5%) out of 80 learners wrote both sentences correctly, while 46 (57.5%) out of 80 learners wrote both sentences incorrectly and 8 (10%) out of 80 learners, needed help in writing the sentences.

Graph 3: Learners' ability to write sentences from the BASAT (N=80)



Source: 2014 field data

Prevalence of sentence writing difficult by literacy achievement

Table 10 shows the prevalence of writing difficulties of sentences by learners according to their level of literacy ability in reading. There were two sentences in the BASAT that were dictated to learners. The table indicates that 7 (21.875%) out of 32 high achievers, 10(41.67%) out of 24 average achievers and 16(66.67%) out of 24 low achievers, wrote the sentence, '*look at the dog*' incorrectly. Results further show that, the mean score of 9 (26.56%) out of 32 higher achievers, standards deviation 2.12; 14(58.34%) out 24 average achievers, standard deviation of 5.66; and 19 (79.17%) out of 24 low achievers, standard deviation of 4.24; wrote incorrectly the dictated sentences.

Table 10: Prevalence of sentence writing difficult by literacy achievement (N=80)

Sentences	Learners' level of literacy achievement					
	Higher achievers (N=32)		Average achievers (N=24)		Low achievers (N=24)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Look at the dog.	7	21.875%	10	41.67%	16	66.67%
It is playing with the ball.	10	31.25%	18	75%	22	91.67%
Mean / SD	9 (2.12)	26.56%	14 (5.66)	58.34%	19 (4.24)	79.17%

Source: 2014 field data

Summary on the prevalence of incorrectly written words and sentences from the BASAT

Data from Table 11 shows the summary on the prevalence of writing difficulties of words and sentences from the BASAT. Results show that an average of 50 (64.04%) out of 80 learners, standard deviation of 32.12; incorrectly wrote the tested items from the BASAT. It further indicates that, 34(42.5%) out of 80 learners wrote the word '**dog**' incorrectly; 61(76.25%) out of 80 learners wrote the word '**window**' incorrectly and 65 (81.25%) out of 80 learners wrote the word '**teacher**' incorrectly. The table also shows that 42 (52.5%) out 80 learners had incorrectly written the sentence: '**look at the dog**', *incorrectly*. The rest of the learners' performance trends are indicated in Table 11.

Table 11: Summary on the prevalence of incorrectly written words and sentences (N= 80)

Dictated words	Frequency	Percentage
Me	46	57.5%
In	31	38.75%
To	49	61.25%
As	66	82.5%
Dog	33	41.25%
Bat	38	47.5%
Pen	59	73.75%
Cup	34	42.5%
Milk	56	70%
Small	58	72.5%
Window	61	76.25%
Teacher	65	81.25%
Look at the dog	42	52.5%
It is playing with the ball	66	82.5%
Mean / SD	50 (32.12)	64.04%

Source: 2014 field data

4.2.2. Presentation of findings on the prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade from the checklist.

Prevalence of Learners' handwriting difficulties by school

Table 12 shows scores on the prevalence of characteristics of handwriting difficulties of learners from the writing evaluation checklist. The prevalence on the characteristics of handwriting difficulties were obtained from the tested story. Results from the table indicate that, 7 out of 20 learners from school 'A' ; 5 out of 20 learners from school 'B' ; 6 out of 20 learners from both schools 'C' and 'D' had difficulties in the combination of both upper and lower cases when writing. The table also shows that, a total of 17 (21.25%) out of 80 learners had handwriting difficulties, while 14 (17.5%) out of 80 learners needed help in handwriting and 49 (61.25 %) out of 80 learners had no handwriting problems. The prevalence of writing difficulties trends, of learners in other handwriting activities are indicated in table 12. To understand the scores on table 12, the following key was used to interpret the scores:

KEY

- (a) **Yes** = incorrectly written: **No** = correctly written: **Needs help** = able to write some.
- (b) **Letters A, B, C and D** are pseudonyms for schools

Table 12: Data set on the prevalence of learners' handwriting difficulties by school (N=80)

Handwriting difficulties	Yes				No				Needs help				TOTAL
	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	
Poor letter formation	5	4	2	3	10	13	13	15	5	4	4	2	80
Staying on horizontal line	3	4	5	2	13	9	11	15	4	7	4	3	80
Mirror writing	6	2	1	3	13	18	14	17	2	1	3	0	80
Poor spacing	5	3	6	3	11	13	10	14	3	4	4	4	80
Combination of upper & lower case	7	5	6	6	8	13	9	8	6	2	4	6	80
Messiness	5	11	5	6	12	8	13	9	3	1	2	5	80
Reversals	5	1	2	3	12	18	12	15	3	1	6	2	80
Total	36	30	27	26	79	92	83	93	26	20	27	25	560
Mean	17				49				14				80
Percentage	21.25%				61.25%				17.5%				100%

Source: 2014 field data

Prevalence of writing difficulties in key markers of expressive writing among learners

Table 13 shows scores on the prevalence of writing difficulties in key markers of expressive writing exhibited learners by school from the checklist. The table shows that, there were 17 out of 20 learners from school 'A', 14 out of 20 learners from school 'B', 14 out of 20 learners from school 'C' and 12 out of 20 learners from school 'D' who had difficulties in punctuation marks. The table also indicates that, 16 out of 20 learners from school 'A', 15 out of 20 learners from school 'B', 13 out of 20 learners from school 'C' and 4 out of 20 learners from school 'D' had difficulties in formulation of meaningful ideas. Results from the table further shows that, an average of 53 (66.25%) out of 80 learners exhibited writing difficulties in all key markers of expressive writing, while 12 (15%) out of 80 learners had no difficulties in key markers of expressive writing and 15(18.75%) out of 80 learners needed help in key markers of expressive writing. The rest of the learners performance trends are indicated in Table 13.

Table 13: Data set on the prevalence of writing difficulties in key markers of expressive writing among learners by school (N=80)

Key markers in expressive writing	Yes				No				Needs help				Total
	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	
Poor punctuation marks	17	14	14	12	-	-	2	-	3	6	4	8	80
Poor paragraphing	17	15	14	12	-	1	2	2	3	4	2	6	80
Difficulty formulation of ideas	16	15	13	14	3	-	4	4	1	5	4	4	80
Unable to follow instructions	16	14	12	10	4	4	3	6	-	2	5	2	80
Unable to write the story correctly	16	14	11	10	3	3	4	5	1	5	4	3	80
Total	82	72	63	54	10	8	15	17	8	22	19	23	400
Mean	53				12				15				80
Percentage	66.25%				15%				18.75%				100%

Source: 2014 field data

Prevalence of incorrectly written Story by literacy achievement

As stated earlier, learners' literacy achievement levels under consideration in this study were as follows: Red level learners, categorized as low achiever learners; while Yellow level learners categorised as average achievers, and Blue level learners were categorized as high

achievers learners. This was according to literacy ability in the RPR, based on class teacher's assessment. Therefore, test results from table 14 indicate that, a total of 61(76.25%) out 80 learners were unable to correctly write the tested story. It further shows that 22 (68.75%) out of 32 high achievers wrote the story incorrectly while 18(75%) out of 24 average and 21(87.5%) low achievers also wrote the story incorrectly.

Table 14: Prevalence of incorrectly written Story by literacy achievement (N=80)

Pupil-level of literacy achievement					
Higher achievers (N=32)		Average achievers (N=24)		Low achievers (N=24)	
Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
22	68.75%	18	75%	21	87.7%
TOTAL	61(76.25%)				

Source: 2014 field data

4.2.3 Presentation of findings on the prevalence of learners writing difficulties from grade four teachers' questionnaires

The researcher now presents findings on the prevalence of learners' writing difficulties from grade four teachers' questionnaires. As earlier stated, there were ten (10) grade four teachers who participated in the study.

Grade four learners writing abilities

Table 15 shows teachers responses when they were asked to rate their grade four learners writing abilities according to; handwriting, writing spacing, writing speed, spelling and expressive writing. The table shows that; 4 out of 10 teachers indicated that grade learners' handwriting ability was high, while 3 out of 10 teachers stated that learners' handwriting ability was average and 3 out of 10 teachers stated that learners' handwriting ability was low. Further, 1 teacher out of 10 teachers stated that grade four learners expressive writing was high, while 1 teacher indicated that learners' expressive writing was average but 8 out of 10 teachers stated that grade four learners' expressive writing ability was low. The table also shows that there were a total of 12(24%) out of 50 responses which rated learners writing

ability as high; a total of 18(36%) out of 50 responses rated them as average and a total of 20 (40%) out of 50 responses which rated learners writing ability low. The rest of the teachers responses are shown in table 15 below.

Table 15: Teachers responses on grade four learners writing ability (N=10)

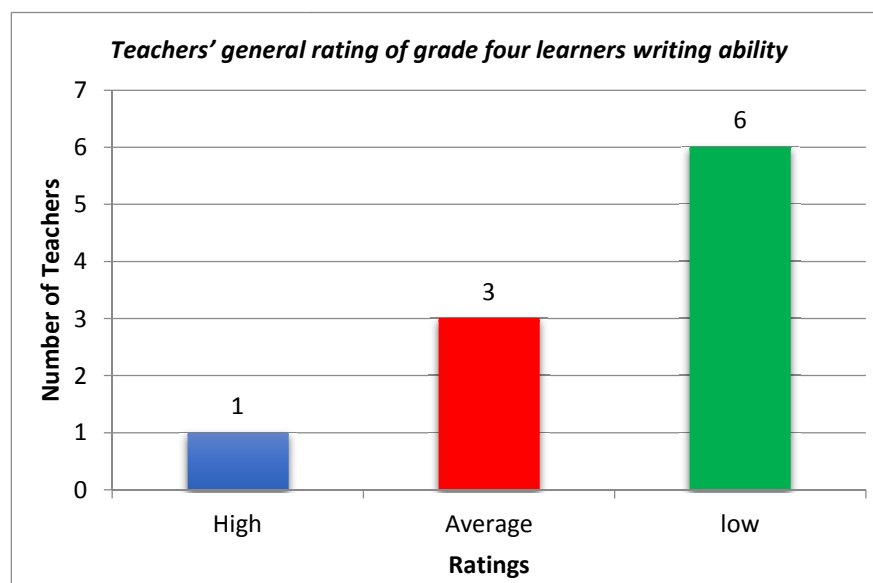
S/N	Type of Writing skill	RATINGS			TOTAL
		High	Average	Low	
		f	f	f	
1	Handwriting	4	3	3	10
2	Writing spacing	3	6	1	10
3	Writing speed	2	5	3	10
4	Spellings	2	3	5	10
5	Expressive writing	1	1	8	10
TOTAL RESPONSES		12(24%)	18(36%)	20 (40%)	50 (100%)

Source: 2014 field data

Teachers' general rating of grade four learners writing ability

Teachers were asked to rate the general writing ability of their grade 4 learners, whether it was high, average or low. Out of 10 teachers, 1 teacher said that, the general writing abilities of grade four learners was high, while 3 teachers said it was average and 6 of them, stated that it was low. The teachers' ratings are indicated in graph 4 below.

Graph 4: Teachers' general rating of grade four learners writing ability (N=10)



Source: 2014 field data

4.3. What factors contribute to writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade?

Findings on factors that may contribute to writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade are presented from data that was collected only from teachers' questionnaire.

School based factors that may affect learners' writing ability.

Teacher were asked to indicate whether the questions asked in table 16 were school based factors which contribute to learners writing difficulties in their classes. For example; in question 1, Out of 10 teachers, 3 of them said schools conducted writing orientation programmes, while 6 teachers said school based writing orientation programmes were not conducted in schools, and 1 teacher said that she was not sure if her school conducted school based writing orientations. The rest of the other teachers' responses are indicated in table 16. Additionally, the table also shows that there were a total of 17(24.3%) out of a total of 70 teachers' responses for '**YES**'; a total of 39 (67.7%) out of 70 teachers' responses, for '**NO**'; and a total of 14(20%) out of 70 teachers responses, for '**NOT SURE**'. This implies that, almost three-quarters (67.7%) of the teachers' responses indicated that, the school based factors that were asked to teachers in the questions contributed to grade four learners' writing difficulties in schools.

Table16: Teachers' responses on school based factors that may affect learners' writing ability. (N=10)

S/N	QUESTIONS	YES	NO	NOT SURE	TOTAL
1	Does your school conduct teacher writing orientation programmes?	3	6	1	10
2	Does the content for NBTL clearly guide teachers on how to teach writing skills?	3	5	2	10
3	Is the teaching of writing skills time tabled in your school?	3	6	1	10
4	Does your school always involve parents in writing remedial work of their children?	4	4	2	10
5	Does your school conduct periodical assessment of learners writing skills?	2	5	3	10
6	Has you school tried to locally revise the writing curriculum?	0	8	2	10
7	Does your school have a school writing policy?	2	5	3	10
TOTAL RESPONSES		17(24.3%)	39(67.7%)	14(20%)	70(100%)

Source: 2014 field data

Type of school based writing orientation programmes conducted by schools

When Teachers were asked to state any writing orientation programmes that had been conducted by their schools, of which they had attended; teachers mentioned National Break Through to Literacy (NBTL), Primary Reading Programme (PRP) and Step into English (SITE).

Methodology of teaching writing skills provided in the NBTL programme

When teachers were asked to explain the methodology of teaching writing skills provided in the NBTL programme; one teacher from school 'D' said that; *“there is demonstration method where teachers write a word on the chalkboard while pupils are made to follow. It also includes writing from left going to the right”*.

Another teacher from school 'A' said, *“Group work, pair work and individual work are some of the methods, which involves teaching of pattern writing, matching of letters and letter formation”*.

Learner factors that may contribute to learners' writing difficulties

The following were teachers' responses when they were asked to indicate learner factors that contribute to writing difficulties among grade four learners in schools: For example; out of 10 teachers, 7 said that insufficient NBTL skills in writing contributed to learners writing difficulties, while none stated that insufficient NBTL skills in writing contributed to learners writing difficulties, and 3 teachers indicated that insufficient NBTL skills in writing usually contributed to learners writing difficulties. The rest of the other teachers' responses are indicated in the table 17. However, the table also shows that there were a total of 41(51.25%) out of 80 teachers' responses for 'YES' and a total of 12 (15%) out of 80 teachers' responses, were for 'NO'; while a total of 27 (33.75%) out of 80 teachers responses were for 'SOMETIMES'. This implies that most of the learner factors indicated in the table 17 below

contributed to grade four learners' writing difficulties in schools, as indicated by over half (51.25%) of teachers' responses.

Table 17: Teachers' responses on learner factors contributing to writing difficulties in schools (N=10)

S/N	LEARNER FACTORS	RESPONSES			TOTAL
		YES	NO	SOMETIMES	
1	Insufficient NBTL skills	7	-	3	10
2	Insufficient phonological awareness	6	1	3	10
3	Poor reading	5	1	4	10
4	Poor fine motor skills	3	3	4	10
5	Poor visual & spatial ability	4	2	4	10
6	Poor memory	5	2	3	10
7	Poor writing posture	5	2	3	10
8	Learners' home background	6	1	3	10
TOTAL RESPONSES		41(51.25%)	12(15%)	27(33.75%)	80 (100%)

Source: 2014 field data

Views of teachers on other factors contributing to writing difficulties among grade four learners

Teachers who took part in the study were asked to give their personal experiences and views regarding other factors that contributed to grade four learners' exhibiting difficulties in writing. Teachers took part in the study cited lack of interest in writing by learners, overcrowded classrooms, poor writing posture, insufficient time to teach writing and lack of concentration by learners, as some of the factors which contributed to writing difficulties. Presented below are some of the views of grade four teachers:

One teacher from school 'D' said;

"Some pupils lack interest and concentration when the teacher starts to teach them how to write, they have problems in paying attention to see how letters, more especially in cursive writing are being formed by the teacher on the chalkboard. And since these pupils have difficulties in concentration in seeing how letters and words are being written, they end up not knowing how to write properly hence having poor handwriting."

Another teacher from school 'A' also stated that; *"Most classrooms at this school are over enrolled, which makes it difficult for the teacher to teach and monitor writing activities every day. For example, there are 97 pupils in my class, as such, I fail to give individual attention to my pupils who need help in writing."*

The issue of overcrowded classes was also indicated by another teacher from school 'B', who also said that; *"My class has about 95 pupils which makes me not to teach writing skills effectively."*

Additionally, a teacher from school 'C' said;

"Teaching of writing needs more reading books and time. In most cases more especially at lower primary school, we have only three hours to teach six subjects in a day before another class comes in the classroom. This affects pupils' ability to learn how to write because teachers have no enough time to teach pupils how to write different writing activities."

Furthermore, a teacher from school 'D' said that:

"Some pupils have poor handwriting because they can't easily follow writing instruction given by teachers when teaching writing activities. I have some pupils in my class who have poor memory and stiff finger muscles which makes it difficult for them to hold the pencil. I have told parents to send them to special schools, but their parents refuse. So as a teacher there is nothing I can do to assist them, because such pupils can't learn to write properly no matter how one tries to assist them."

4.4. What measures should be put in place to remediate writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade.

To answer this research question, data has been presented by indicating measures teachers have put place to remediate writing difficulties of learners in their classes, as well as teachers'

suggestions on measures that ought to be taken, to improve writing skills among grade 4 learner in schools, and in the Zambian education system in general.

Measures that teachers have put place to remediate writing difficulties of learners in their classes.

Teachers who took part in the study were asked to give their personal experiences and views regarding measures that they had put in place to remediate writing difficulties among their learners at fourth grade. The following were some of the teachers' views;

One teacher from school 'D' said that; *"I normally give pupils handwriting and spelling activities as home work so that they are also assisted by parents at home."*

The statement that was stated by a teacher from school 'D' was also echoed by another teacher from school 'B', who said that;

"As teachers at grade four level, the school encourages teachers to give interesting stories to pupils to read for two weeks and then tell them to rewrite the story from memory. Normally these stories are given as homework and we encourage pupils to read and write the stories so that parents can counter check by signing what the pupil has written."

Another teacher at school 'C' said,

"I have reserved one period in a week to teach pupils how to write letters, words and sentences that they find difficult during a topic in a week. I also teach them how to space words in a sentence by putting an index finger between the words for slower learners."

Last but not the least, a teacher from school 'A' said;

"I plan some writing activities in advance and when it is time for remedial work, I sit down together with those who do not do well, emphasise on writing neatly and show

some good or bad work to all the learners for them to compare. I encourage those who do not do well and praise those who do well.”

Teachers’ suggestions on measures that ought to be taken to improve writing skills of grade 4 learners in schools

Teachers were asked to suggest some measures that should be taken to improve writing skills of grade four learners in the Zambian education system; they recommended provision of writing materials in schools, introduction of workshops in writing, time tabling of handwriting in schools and teachers to encourage learners to practice writing activities regularly as well as having writing competitions.

Presented below are some of the suggestions from teachers who participated in the study. For example, a teacher from school ‘D’ said;

“The ministry of education, science, vocational training and early education should start providing writing materials like crayons, slates and jigsaws to enable pupils practice how to draw and write in different ways. This would motivate pupils to learn how to write.”

Another teacher from school ‘B’ suggested that;

“Government should introduce workshops on issues of teaching handwriting to pupils just as it is done with reading. This will help teachers acquire more knowledge and latest skills of teaching handwriting to pupils and how to assist slow pupils.”

On the same issue of writing workshops, a teacher at school ‘C’ also suggested that;

“Workshops should be held regularly to remind teachers on how to teach writing skills to learners.”

At school ‘A’, another teacher also recommended that; *“Handwriting should be put on the school time table to compel all teachers to prepare schemes of work and teach it.”*

However a teacher at school 'A', also suggested that, *“Teachers should use literacy hour given on the time table to teach and help pupils in writing skills which appear every day on the school time table.”*

Another teacher from school 'D' suggested that; *“Pupils need to have more time to practice writing daily by engaging them in dictation activities and imaginative writing of different types to foster competences in writing.”*

She further suggested that; *“Pupils need to be motivated by teachers by holding writing competitions on specific topic at a tender age where they can even win prizes. Doing all this would improve writing abilities of learners.”*

4.4. Chapter summary

The goal of this chapter was to present the findings of the study according to research questions. The key findings of the study are that; the nature of handwriting difficulty was mainly characterized with poor spellings, poor spacing and combination of upper and lower cases in words, while expressive writing difficulty was characterised by difficulties in formulation of coherent ideas and punctuation marks. An average of 50(64.04%) out of 80 learners had difficulties writing words and sentences from the BASAT, while 61(76.25%) out of 80 learners were unable to write correctly the story in expressive writing. Some factors that contribute to learners writing difficulties include; lack of continuous orientation writing programmes of teachers in schools, overcrowded classrooms and insufficient time to teach writing, as well as inadequate administering of writing remedial work. To mitigate writing difficulties, teachers have suggested that, the MOESVTEE should introduce writing workshops to train teachers on how to teach of writing skills and to time-table the teaching of writing skills on the school time table.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.0. Overview

This chapter discusses the main findings of the study which sought to investigate the nature and prevalence of writing difficulties among grade four learners in schools. The discussion of findings has been done according to following themes in the objectives: nature of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade; prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade; factors which contribute to writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade; and measures that should be put in place to remediate writing difficulties experienced by learners at fourth grade.

5.1. Nature of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade

The nature of writing difficult among grade four learners in this study looked at the style and eligibility of writing appropriate to grade level. According to Graham, Karen, Harris, and Lynn (2001), at grade four, learners are expected to exhibit accuracy in key markers of writing such as word spacing, writing speed, sentence structure, grammar, punctuation marks, capitalization and spelling. Common proficiency in expressive writing abilities at grade four include personal communications (which involves learners writing friendly letters, formal letters, messages, and invitations messages that have a clearly stated purpose) and creative writing (which involves writing of poems, short stories, and song lyrics). However, the nature of writing ability of grade four learners who participated in the study was poor, in relation to key writing markers of writing.

In relation to the nature of name writing difficulties among learners, it can be stated that, learners exhibited diversified writing difficulties. The general writing difficulties exhibited by learners in the effort to write their first names were in form of poor spellings, poor letter formation, ineligibility, poor spacing, messiness and combination upper and lower cases in

words. These findings are consistent with Kennedy (2004) who writes that, dysgraphia manifests itself as difficulties with spelling and poor handwriting.

According to the findings of the study in graph 1, a total of 22 (27.5%) out of 80 learners failed to write their names correctly. This number of learners who failed to write their first names, at grade four level was very worrisome. The general performance trend, on first name writing ability of learners at grade four indicated that, there was a large number of learners who passed through each grade level without knowing how to write their first names correctly, although this was the first task a learner in the first grade was taught, and ought to know. The characteristic of writing difficulties of first names among learners was characterised by omission of letters in a name as shown in sample 2. In this sample a learner wrote her name as *'Taong'* which was supposed to be written as; *'Taonga'*. Other characteristic of name writing difficulties by learners were, writing completely different words which did not imply names at all. Some learners were not even aware that a name should start with a capital letter. All these findings were in line with Davis and Elen (1994) who said that, learners with writing difficulties usually exhibited omission or addition of letters in words thereby distorting the meaning of the intended word or noun.

With regards to writing letters of the alphabet, study findings also indicated that there were some learners in grade four who were unable to write the letters of the alphabet in a chronological order. Test results in samples 1, 2 and 3 clearly indicate the nature of alphabet writing difficulties of some learners. For example; in sample 1, the learner wrote the letters of the alphabet in the following order: *'Z, e, A, r, o, a, w, I, s, n, T, m, o, B.....'* These study findings also continued to indicate that, there were learners who progressed in the education system without even knowing how to write basic symbols of letters that constitute words, hence affecting their school achievement at each grade level. These findings are in line with Keys (2000) who indicated that, when a learner fails to develop certain basic writing skills, this affected his or her ability to communicate effectively what the school system demanded.

A further analysis of writing difficulties of letters of the alphabet showed that learners found it difficult to write correctly letters of the alphabet from P to Z. For example, in sample 2; the learner only managed to write correctly letters of the alphabet from A to F. This is how the learner wrote the letters of the alphabet; ‘*A; B; C; D; E; F; H; G; I; Q; R; W; T; N; Q; K; L; Z*’. One explanation that could be attributed to why some learners failed to write most letters of the alphabet from P to Z was the inability by learners to know the letters by sight, as they only verbally said them through singing the alphabet song. It is a general practice in most Zambian schools for learners to recite the letters of the alphabet through an ‘*alphabet song*’, without paying attention to how they letters look like. Therefore, when it comes to writing them, they face difficulties to write them correctly from memory.

Some of the learners who participated in the study exhibited irregularities in the formation of letters of the alphabet. They either failed to write letters exactly as they appeared, or failed to copy the exact shape of a letter, thereby writing a word in a deformed manner although the spelling was correct. The above observation is also in line with Alston and Taylor (1987) who observed that, learners with extreme writing problem in written work, exhibited irregularities in letter formation. Additionally, Haring and Schiefelbusch (1976) have also indicated that, some learners with writing difficulties also exhibit reversals of numbers, letters and words as they struggled to write. In this study, some learners wrote letters which faced along a vertical or horizontal line in such a way that, some letters were turned upside down, or in other cases, there was poor transposition, where the sequence of letters in words were out of order. Other learners too exhibited reversal writing of letters in which letters were turned upside down as outline by Haring and Schiefelbusch (1976).

With regards to nature of writing of two-letter words, three- letter word and words with more than three letters, findings from the study indicate that learners also exhibited a variety of writing difficulty of words. There were some learners who wrote orthographical related

words. For example, table 2 indicates incorrectly written word '*in*', in that , the learners wrote the word '*in*' as; '*Ni*'; '*ain*', '*en*', '*ini*', and '*ene*'. Other learners also had difficulties writing words such as; '*to*' and '*as*'. The nature of incorrectly written word '*as*' included; '*anz*', '*has*', '*us*', and '*eis*'. The nature of writing difficulties of two letter words can be attributed to spelling difficult emanating from poor phonological awareness. Successful application of phonics is dependent on the learner's ability to hear and produce the sounds of a language and to write the correct corresponding grapheme of the phoneme. The revelation is in line with the findings of Dixon and Nessel (1983), who argued that, in order to learn sound-letter association, one must first be able to discriminate sounds orally and then must learn to associate those sounds with letters that they represent. Another reason why learners failed to write correctly the words '*as*' and '*to*' could be that learners transferred NBTL sounds learnt at grade one in Zambian local language to write words in English. They relied on speech sounds and applied the alphabetical principle as suggested by Matafwali (2005). However when we critically analyse how some learners incorrectly wrote the word '*to*', it can be said that some learners transferred the concept learnt in Mathematics and wrote the numeral '*2*' to mean the word, '*to*'.

Additionally, sample 3, shows some other orthographically written words by the learner. Words which were orthographically written by the learner include, '*me*' as '*meni*', '*in*' as '*ni*'; '*milk*' as '*melik*'; '*teacher*' as '*ticha*' and '*as*' as '*asi*'. This nature of writing difficult entails that learners were trying to apply the orthographical principle acquired in grade one , when they were learning to spelt in a familiar local language and transferred it into English . Another reason of orthographical writing style was that, English is opaque language in terms of orthography, whereas Zambian local languages like Nyanja is transparent. As such, when a learner heard a word and tried to write it, the symbols units that were mapped on to spoken language were not meaning in themselves as learners' transferred the English words into the local lexical formation. This observation was consistent with findings by Ziegler and

Goswami (2005) when they observed that children who read in English were likely to make a lot of errors due to lack of consistency in orthography for English words in local languages.

On the contrary most learners who participated in the study, had difficulties writing the word '*pen*'. This could be attributed to learners not being familiar with the word '*pen*' as they were just introduced to using the writing utensil in the first term, in grade four, when this study was conducted. This is also observed by Paris (2005) who writes that, lack of adequate experience with English sounds and words, make English Second Language (ESL) learners unable to recognize a sound, discriminate and use those sounds in speech and consequently in writing. This inability, in turn makes it difficult for young learners to sound out words in print resulting in writing difficulties (ibid, 2005).

The study further revealed that, learners exhibited more writing difficulties words which were unfamiliar, as well as more than three-letter words, than three - letter or two - letter words. The more the words became complicated, the more the learners exhibited writing difficulties. It was also surprising that learners failed to write familiar words which they started learning in Grade 1 such as; '*small*', '*teacher*' and '*window*'. One reason for difficulties in writing familiar words such as '*teacher*' and '*window*' by grade four learners could be attributed to negligence due to inadequate practice writing such words. This assertion is in line with Haring and Schiefelbusch (1976) who indicated that, some learners were unable to write words because they could not just remember the words how they looked like though they knew them. Additionally, spelling difficulties of some learners could be attributed to some learners' poor visual memory, (Ibid, 1976). Indeed, some learners failed to recall the visual appearance of some familiar words even though they knew their meaning.

The nature of sentence writing among grade four learners was not good enough. Most learners failed to write the two sentences that were dictated to them correctly. Data from graph 3 shows that only 26 (32.5%) out of 80 learners wrote the two sentences correctly and a total of

54 (64.5%) out of 80 learners wrote the sentences incorrectly. Additionally, table 10, also indicates that even 10 (31.25%) out of 32 learners who were categorised as high achievers in reading had difficulties in writing the sentence, '*it is playing with the ball,*' correctly. The nature of writing difficulties of sentences included; '*luku ati they dogi*', for '*look at the dog*' and '*et is peying in the bola*' for '*it is playing with the ball.*' (Table 2). The nature of sentence writing by learners was characterised by both spelling and phonetic errors. This is also in line with Belinger (2007) who indicated that, lack of adequate phonemic awareness inhibits learners from writing even words or sentences that are either familiar or unfamiliar.

It can be said that findings from study that have been discussed so far are evident enough that the nature of writing difficulties of grade four learners is a source of concern. While the nature of writing difficulties involving simpler and more basic literacy skills, such as, letters of the alphabet, and one or two letter words were fewer than those involving more complex words and sentences, the persistent of such problems indicate how some learners continued to progress in the school system with these basic writing difficulties. Although, Mubanga (2010) states that, such difficulties were possible and expected in the learning situation, however, what was surprising was the magnitude of writing difficulties in very basic areas such as, learners' personal first names and alphabet knowledge, at grade four level. Writing difficulties at fourth grade suggest that the Zambian education system is ineffective with respect to learners' learning, particularly in teaching writing skills, because data from the study continue to show that many learners are still learning the alphabet in grades three or four. For many learners, grades one and two were lost years for learning such basic skills of literacy like writing their first names and the alphabet.

Since these difficulties had persisted even after learners had been in school for almost four years, this should be a source of concern because such difficulties can persist up to the upper grades in primary school, and possibly beyond, resulting in very serious learning difficulties. This is supported by Grubb et al. (1999) and Perin and Charron, (2006), who indicated that

learners with writing difficulties were unlikely to learn effectively at the next education level where they were enrolled if they were not assisted by the education system.

Handwriting and expressive writing were the two aspects of writing ability that were assessed using the writing evaluation checklist. Samples 4, 5 and 6 show examples of learners' characteristics of writing difficulties in handwriting and expressive writing. Findings from the study continued to indicate that some grade four learners exhibited poor handwriting even when coping from the textbook. Results from the study show that, handwriting difficulty among learners who took part in the study were; poor spacing, combination of upper and lower cases and messiness in writing. For example, sample 4 shows how a learner exhibited poor combination of upper and lower case of letters, in that, there was a lot of mixing of capital letter 'A' in words as such; '*plAys*' '*At*' and '*breAkfAst*'. These study results were also in line with the findings of Haring and Schiefelbusch (1976) who observed that, learners with writing difficulties were likely to exhibit poor letter combination, where upper and lower cases in words were more evident. According to Kirby and Peters (2007), combination of upper and lower cases in words revealed that there was no consistence in writing on the part of the learner. It also showed lack of an understanding of when upper or lower case letters were to be used.

With regards to poor spacing, results from samples 5 and 6 indicate how learners failed to space their written work. The learners' written work was so squeezed and clumsy such that it was not legible. These research findings were also observed by Kirk (1972) who indicated that difficulties in writing could be noticed by learners' poor spacing between words and letters. In the cited samples, learners left either too small, or no space at all between the words. In some cases, written work was too crowded or clustered together which rendered reading it difficult. In the same line, Kirk (1972) and Kennedy (2004) have added that, poor spacing could also entail learners writing letters within a word which were too far apart.

Messiness is a nature of writing difficult where learners' exhibit excessive untidiness, in that, the written work is excessively rubbed or cancelled. Therefore, results from the study indicate that, some learners in grade four still exhibited a lot of untidy written work which was unpleasant to the eyes of the reader. For example table 12 shows that a total of 27 (33.75%) out of 80 learners exhibited messiness in their handwriting. The impact of untidy rewritten work is that, it becomes ineligible. In most cases, people become discouraged to read untidy written text. Messiness writing is common among learners with dysgraphia whose fingers are clumsy and stiff. Learners with clumsy fingers usually press the writing utensil to an extent of even tearing the writing pad. O'Hare and Brown (1979) observes that, messiness in writing is attributed to learners who press the writing instruments (pencil or pen) very hard to an extent that, they can even tear the paper. This writing difficulty renders the written work to look dark and dirty. In some cases, messiness is as result of poor vision which makes coping from the textbook or chalk board very strenuous. In addition, Wedell (1973) states that, writing process for learner with dysgraphia may be slow and tedious resulting into messiness writing.

Mirror writing is the type of writing where learners write letters as if they were coping from the mirror. Mirror writing is different from poor letter formation in that, poor letter formation entails that, learners fail to form the correct shapes of letters, as such, they distort the shapes of letters. Therefore, there were still some learners in grade four who exhibit mirror writing and poor formation of letters, in such basic writing skills. This situation could pose a big challenge when learners are required to communicate what they have learnt in class either by the teachers or at home by parents. In the school setting, writing is a means of extending and deepening learners' knowledge; it acts as a tool for learning subject matter. These assertions are also supported by Keys (2000) who indicate that, when a learner failed to develop certain basic handwriting skills, this affected his or her ability to communicate effectively what the school system demands.

The study further revealed poor performance of learners in story writing. Three-quarters of the learners including, high achievers in reading, failed to write the story correctly. Learners writing difficulty in expressive writing was more characterised with poor punctuation marks, poor paragraphing and difficulty to formulate sequential ideas. Examples of incorrectly written stories are indicated in samples 4, 5 and 6. A further analysis of findings from table 13, revealed that 17 out of 20 learners at school 'A'; 14 out of 20 learners from both schools 'B' and 'C'; and 12 out of 20 learners from school 'D', had difficulties in using punctuation marks. This observation reveals that, learners at grade four did not know the importance of using punctuation marks when writing stories. Poor use of punctuation marks distorted the meaning of the story. These findings are consistent with Kirk, Gallagher and Anastasiow (2006) who observed that, learners with expressive writing difficulties, rarely pay attention to punctuation marks because they lack proof reading techniques. They also do not understand that a sentence should start with a capital letter and end with a full stop, (ibid, 2006).

In regards with paragraphing, study findings also indicate that, most learners did not manage to write the story in a paragraph as instructed by the researcher. Instead, they wrote single sentences as they appeared in the jumbled story. This nature of writing difficult in expressive writing was also confirmed by 8 out of 10 teachers in table 6, who indicated that grade four learners exhibited poor paragraphing during expressive writing activities. All these research findings are in line with Pollowry, Patton, Payne and Payne (1980) who observed that, difficulties in expressive writing become more evident when learners fail to segment their ideas in paragraphs in texts, such as essays or stories.

It can be stated that, over two –thirds of learners who participated in the study could not write the story correctly. The difficulties in expressive writing were somehow attributed to learners' inadequacies in putting ideas in order. These study findings were also supported by 9 out of 10 teachers (table 6), who also indicated that grade four learners fail to write stories correctly

due to difficulties in formulation of meaningful ideas. These findings are in line with Pollowry, Patton, Payne and Payne (1980) who observed that, poor narrative, sequencing and transition of ideas was a major factor affecting grade four learners in expressive writing. It was also observed that most learners failed to write the story correctly because they could not follow the instructions that were given by the researcher before they were required to write the story, even after reading the instructions to them. The other reason was that, learners lacked adequate oral language proficiency in English language as such, they could not organise the sentence structures in a meaningful way as they repeatedly wanted to read the story many times. Elden (1994) has observed that, adequate oral language ability is a determinant factor not only in acquisition of reading but also writing.

5.2. Prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade

Findings from the study in table 11 clearly indicates that, 50 (64.04%) out of 80 learners who participated in the study, did not meet basic and advanced writings abilities appropriate to their grade level. This entails that, the general writing ability of learners who participated in the study was low. The prevalence of writing difficulties of learners who participated in the study was generally high, because they were still some learners in grade four who could not write their first names correctly, and worse still had difficulties in writing correctly the letters of the alphabet. For example, findings from the study in graph 1 indicate that, 22 (27.5%) out of 80 learners, had difficulties in writing their first names, while figure 2 shows that, 24 (30%) out of 80 learners had difficulties writing letters of the alphabet correctly. The prevalence of writing difficulties in these basic writing skills at this grade level, is a source of concern, because it showed that, one third of lower primary school learners did not meet the readiness benchmarks of proficiency in basic writing skills required at lower primary school level as observed by Action Commission on teaching (2005).

Results from the study also indicated that spelling errors were the most prevalent nature of writing difficulties among learners who participated in the study. Table 11 shows that a total

of 50 (64.04%) out of 80 learners exhibited spelling difficulties. A further analysis of spelling difficulties of learners in table 11 revealed that, 49 (61.25%) learners had difficulties in writing the word '*to*'; while, 66 (82.5%) failed to write the word '*as*'; 59 (73.75%) failed to write the word '*pen*', 65 (81.25%) wrote the word '*teacher*' incorrectly and 66 (82.5%) failed to write the sentence, '*it is playing with the ball*', correctly. The high prevalence of spelling writing difficulties among grade four learners was also confirmed (table 15), by 5 out of 10 teachers who indicated that learners spelling ability was low.

Since the sampled learners were categorised in three literacy achievement levels, it was also noticed that, learners in high achievers category had fewer spelling errors than those in average and low achievers categories, but they also faced more spelling difficulties as the word became more complex. These findings were consistent with Mubanga (2010) who also observed that high achiever learners exhibited fewer difficulties in spelling, while low achiever learners generally recorded the most difficulties in spelling of words. This situation, to some extent suggests that, learners who were categorised as high achievers in reading did better in spelling than the average and low achiever learners in reading. However, a further analysis of the prevalence of spelling difficulties among the high achiever learners also revealed that, they also exhibited more spelling errors in more complex words, such as, in more than three- letter words and unfamiliar words.

The most prevalent spelling errors among the sampled grade four learners were; omission of letters, phonetic errors and writing a completely different word. In table 4, 9 out of 10 teachers also confirmed that the most common spelling errors among grade four learners were omission of letters in a word. The high prevalent of spelling errors among learners could be attributed to inadequacy in the relationship between spoken and written language of learners. It is often argued that, we write what we say and we normally develop oral language before written language, (Mubanga, 2010). Another reason for high prevalence of spelling errors could be attributed to phonetic errors. This proposition is in line with the findings of Dixon

and Nessel (1983), who argued that in order to learn sound-letter association, one must first be able to discriminate sounds orally and then must learn to associate those sounds with letters that they represent. Successful application of phonics is dependent on the learners' ability to hear and produce the sounds of a language. Eldem (1994) also adds that, failure to spell correctly may be due to poor phonological awareness to identify sounds components of words and link them into syllables, hence resulting into poor spellings.

The prevalence of handwriting difficulties among grade four learners was minimal, in that, most learners were able to form the shapes of letters correctly. Table 12 shows that, a total of 17 (21.25%) out of 80 learners had handwriting difficulties, while 14 (17.5%) out of 80 learners needed help in handwriting. The reversal of letters and mirror writing was also less common. These findings were in line with Kennedy (2004) who observed that, although learners at fourth grade had less difficulties in handwriting, there was a considerable number of learners between 15% to 18% who may exhibit irregularities in letter formation, and failure to stay on horizontal line when writing. However the most prevalent handwriting difficulties among grade four learners were; 'poor spacing', 'combination of upper and lower cases' and 'messiness in writing. For example, data from table 12 indicates that, 7 out of 20 learners from school 'A'; 5 out of 20 learners from school 'B'; 6 out of 20 learners from both schools 'C' and 'D' who exhibited difficulties in combination of both upper and lower cases when writing. Therefore, the prevalence of handwriting difficulties among learners who both had handwriting problems and those who needed help was 31(38.75%) out of 80 learners.

According to Graham, Karen, Harris and Lynn (2001), learners at grade four, were expected to show proficiency in common expressive writing abilities creative writing, (writing which involves writing of poems, short stories, and song lyrics. However, study findings from table 14 shows that, a total of 61(76.25%) out of 80 learners did not write the story correctly. It can therefore be stated that, the prevalence of expressive writing difficulties of grade four learners who participated in the study was high, because over two thirds of the learners failed to write

the story correctly. A further analysis of learners expressive writing difficult also revealed that, 22 (68.75%) out 32 high achievers did not write the story correctly. Data also revealed that although high achievers were able to read considerably well, only 10 (31.25%) out 32 high achievers wrote the story correctly, (table 14). This simply entails that over half of high achievers learners in reading were not able to write competently at an expected proficiency level in expressive writing. These findings are consistency with teachers' responses in table 15, where 8 out 10 teachers indicated that grade four learners' expressive writing ability was low. These study findings were also in line with a study by the NAEP in 2002, in the U.S.A, which measured the level of writing proficiency of 4th graders: and revealed that only 22% to 26% of learners in 4th grade scored at the proficient level and very few were found to write at the advanced level, (Persky, Daane, & Jin, 2003).

The high prevalence of expressive writing difficulties by grade four learners who participated in the study could be attributed to learners' inability to correctly sequence ideas in a meaningful manner. These findings are in line with the teachers views in table 6, where most teachers, (9 out of 10), stated that grade four learners faced a lot of difficulties in formulation of meaningful ideas during expressive writing. This observation was also noted by Kennedy (2004) who noted that, learners who failed to write texts that required paragraphs such as essays, stories or personal letters had difficulties in processing and putting ideas in order, which were evident in poor narrative sequencing and transition.

A critical observation that can be made from this study about grade four learners writing ability was that, their general writing ability was low. A large number of learners at grade four who participated in the study were not able to write competently their first names, letters of the alphabet, simple words and sentences. Mubanga (2010) has observed that, the general performance of learners at grade 2 was that, there were fewer learners who were able to write the words correctly than they could read them after exposing them to PRP. It can therefore be stated that, this trend of learners' performance in written activities had continued even at

grade four, as very few learners were able to write competently at their grade level. There were also very few high achiever learners in literacy who wrote competently the tested items. This performance trends among high achiever learners was also a source of worry. The assertions are consistent with Farris (1993) who described writing as a demanding, but valuable skill which involved transforming thoughts and ideas into meaningful words and sentences. Therefore, writing at fourth-grade classroom was quite diversified, because some learners wrote very confidently, but others did not. This is in line with what Mubanga (2010) has observed, that, for some learners, writing was a dreadful and anxious activity, which made them strive for perfection with pencil strokes and word spellings resulting in learners discarding the work and beginning anew.

5.3. Factors contributing to writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade.

There were a number of factors which were attributed to writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade in the sampled schools. Some factors could be related more to teacher and school factors and to a lesser extent to learner factors. One school factor that contributed to writing difficulties among learners at grade four was lack of continuous writing orientation programmes of teachers in schools. Findings from the study continue to indicate that teachers were rarely oriented on how to teach writing skills to learners in schools. Most teachers (6 out of 10 teachers) in table 16, stated that writing orientation programmes were not conducted in schools. These findings are related to Mubanga (2010 p 66) observations, who also noted that, in the PRP, teachers were only subjected to short orientation programmes in form of workshops organized at school level and these training sessions only ran for less than one week. This meant that teachers were not adequately equipped with enough information and skills needed in the teaching of writing skills.

Research findings have further indicated that, writing as a component of literacy was not paid much attention to in the school curriculum. Since 1999, The Ministry of Education has

promoted Primary Reading Programme (PRP) in an effort to improve literacy standards in the country. The PRP has three major components, namely, New Break Through to Literacy (NBTL), Step into English (SITE) and Read on Course (ROC). According to Matafwali (2005), the main purpose of these programmes was to improve reading skills. Therefore lack of adequate programmes within the school curriculum aimed at enhancing the teaching of writing skills did not encourage the teaching of writing skills by teachers.

The other school factor that contributed to low writing levels among grade four learners who took part in the study was the ineffective teaching methodology of writing skills. In the PRP, the teaching of writing was not given much prominence as compared to reading. It was mostly taught as an independent learning activity by teachers. The PRP requires teachers either to instruct learners to copy the written work from the chalkboard or engage in individual creative writing, when they were busy attending to slower learners in reading in the teaching station. Mubanga (2010) writes that, in the PRP, most of the independent writing activities were not properly supervised by teachers who spent most of their time in the teaching stations with one of the four ability groups. This kind of teaching methodology paid much prominence to teaching reading than writing. Therefore, learners with writing difficulties were rarely attended to by teachers. This trend made learners to perform more poorly in writing than they did in reading, because of lack of adequate supervision of learners, during writing activities by teachers.

The study also revealed that less teaching hours in schools contributed to learners writing difficulties. Teachers in the study indicated that Teaching of writing needed more time, more especially at lower primary school. They indicated that there were only three hours to teach six subjects in a day before another class came in to use the classroom. Therefore, teachers had no enough time to teach learners how to write different writing activities, because of less contact teaching hours schools. These research findings are also supported by Kelly (1999 p154) who stated that, “double or triple sessions and tied timetables found in most

government schools in Zambia, worked against quality teaching-learning”. It was clear from research finding that there was inadequate teaching time in the sampled schools to teach writing skills effectively, due to double or triple sessions per day, which compromised the quality of teaching and learning.

The other school factor related to inadequate contact time of teaching, which contributed to writing difficulties among learners in schools, was lack of time tabling of teaching of writing skills on the school time tables. Table 16 indicates that, 6 out of 10 teachers stated that the teaching of writing skills did not appear on the school time table, while 1 out of 10 teachers said she was not sure if it appeared on the school time and only 3 out of 10 teacher said the teaching of writing skills appeared on the school time table. These varied responses from teachers clearly showed that teachers were not even aware if the teaching of writing skills was time tabled. From the number of teachers who indicated that the teaching of writing skills did not appear on the school time table, it can therefore be concluded that, lack of time tabling of teaching of writing skills contributed to writing difficulties among grade four learners. These research findings are also supported by Kelly (1999 p 154) who stated that, tied timetables in public schools also worked against quality teaching and learning.

Overcrowded classrooms in terms of enrolment was the other school factor that was cited in the study as contributing to writing difficulties among grade four learners in schools. Teachers clearly indicated that most classes in their schools were over enrolled which made it difficult for them to teach and monitor writing activities every day. For example, there were 97 grade four learners in one class in one sampled school. This over enrolment affected the teacher to give adequate individual attention to learners who needed help in writing. This finding is also supported by Mubanga (2010) who stated that, lower primary classes were mostly overcrowded, such that, there were no opportunities for pupil-teacher contact in order to offer individualized learning-support to needy pupils. Congestion due to over-enrolment in most of the classes contributed to poor class management on the part of the teachers. Sometimes, this

made teachers to behave quite emotionally, a situation which eventually contributed to poor teaching and learning, (Mubanga 2010).

One teacher factor that contributed to poor performance among learners in writing activities was lack of adequate teacher knowledge in the teaching of writing skills. It has been established in this study that most teachers had insufficient teacher training experience which affected the effective teaching of writings skills. The type of training offered to teachers at the inception of the PRP's SITE component was not sufficient. As stated earlier in this study, teachers were only subjected to short orientation programmes in form of workshops organized at school level and these training sessions only ran for less than one week, (Mubanga 2010). This meant that teachers were not adequately equipped with enough information and skills needed in the teaching of writing skills. This assertion is also related to findings in a study conducted by Gove & Ceviche (2011) in Liberia, which found that, teachers who were untrained, were required to teach literacy skills without adequate training and supervision, and where required to determine by themselves how to recommend pedagogical methods.

Additionally, teachers' inadequate knowledge and skills to teach phonic also contributed to learners' poor performance in phonological awareness tests and consequently writing tasks. Study findings in table 17 indicate that 6 out of the 10 teachers stated that they had inadequate phonemic training. This meant that, teachers rated themselves low in terms of phonic knowledge. Wong (1998) has observed that, adequate knowledge on the use of phonetic representation remains a chronic problem for teaching two languages more especially in multi-cultural setting like Africa, where learners need to be taught two languages of initial literacy. Under the SITE approach to teaching literacy, teachers needed to have phonic knowledge among other skills, without which, they could not be able to teach effectively and efficiently. In this case, it can be argued that, teachers' low knowledge of phonic content and methodology had also contributed to learners' poor performance in phonological awareness tests and consequently writing tasks. These findings are in agreement with Swanepoel van de

(2009) who noted that a phonological awareness deficiency is identified as a major contributor to a learner's spelling difficulties.

Another teacher factor that contributed to writing difficulties among grade four learners was lack of providing adequate remedial work to learners in writing activities. Remedial work is given to learners who are not making progress in writing. It is very important to administer remedial work in writing skills because it gives chance to learners to perfect their writing skills in specific deficit areas. Remedial work also provides chance for individual attention of learners by teachers in writing activities. According to MoE (2002), teachers are supposed to identify the type of writing deficit that require to be remediated before remedial work was to be administered to a learner. However findings from the study in table 16 indicate that some teachers gave remedial work to needy learners while others did not. In most cases teachers gave writing remedial work in form of homework which was difficult ascertain if it was the learner who did the work. For example, one teacher from school 'D' said that, she normally gave learners handwriting and spelling activities as home work so that they were assisted by their parents at home. However, this type of remedial work is somehow difficult prove if the learner did the work.

Lack of adequate and regular assessment of learners writing activities by teachers contributed to writing difficulties. Most teachers rarely assessed writing activities of their grade four learners. According to MoE (2002 p 57), assessment in literacy is defined as the processing of determining the level at which every individual learner in the class is. This enables the teacher to place each learner in an appropriate pace group so that learners with similar writing capabilities were given a set of appropriate remedial work. Assessment also enables teachers to track the progress of learners in the class particularly in writing. Research findings indicate that, out of 10 teachers, 2 teachers stated that periodical writing assessment was conducted by teachers in schools, while 5 teachers indicated that they did not conduct periodical writing assessment and 3 of them, were not sure if they conducted periodical writing assessment.

However, MoE (2002) has stated that, formal assessment should be done once every month in order to chart the progress of every learner in class, while informal assessment should be done every day as the teacher marks learners' books. Therefore, lack of stringent assessment measures by teachers in writing activities negatively impacted on the performance of learners in any writing activity.

One of the major learner factors that contributed to writing difficulties among grade four learners was lack of adequate phonological awareness. As it has already been stated in this study, most learners exhibited poor spelling errors due to inadequate training in phonemic awareness. Numerous studies that have been consulted in this study, have shown that early phonology awareness was among the best predictors of success in literacy abilities in different languages that were written in alphabetical orthography (Torgesen and Wagner, 1987; Stanovich, Cunningham and Freeman, 1984). Torgesen and Wagner (1987) further write that, the rationale of teaching learners phonics is that the graphemes should correspond to individual phonemes. Manipulation of individual phonic segments helps the learner to acquire abstract representation of phonemes. In this study, it seemed most learners had difficulties in discrimination of sounds more especially in the dictation test items, as evidenced by orthographical and phonological written errors. This observation is also supported by Berninger, (2007) who noted that learners who find it difficult to link sounds and syllables are more unlikely to write correct words. Inadequate phonemic awareness inhibited learners from writing words that were similar or unfamiliar.

Poor reading ability also contributed to learners' writing difficulties. Research on assessment and instruction shows that reading fluency is the enabling skills and significant predictors of later writing achievement. It can, therefore, be assumed that being able to read implies being able to write or at least being able to spell. Crystal (1996) indicates that, when learners face reading difficulties, they are very likely to experience writing problems as well, because reading and writing are complementary skills that usually develop simultaneously. According

to Shaywitz (1998) and Snowling (2000) it is approximately estimated that; 5-18 % of learners affected by dyslexia in schools often have associated difficulties with writing. Study findings in table 17 indicate that, 5 out of 10 teachers also confirmed that poor reading ability affected learners writing abilities. This is in agreement with Paris (2005) who writes that, learning to read is one of the greatest accomplishments in childhood, because it was the foundation for learning and academic achievement later in someone's life. Therefore, it is not surprising that debates among educators about how best to help children learn to read have been heated and unsettled for many years. This observation continued to suggest that, knowing how to read can facilitate knowing how to write with less difficulties.

Another learner factor that affected learners writing ability apart from poor reading, was learners' poor oral English language ability. This is so because there is a relationship between spoken and written language. It is also argued that, people write what they say and they normally develop oral language before written language. This assertion is supported by Berninger (2007) who states that children who have the task of learning to write in a language that they have not yet mastered orally perform poorly. It was generally noticed that, most of grade four learners who participated in this study had poor English oral language ability as they persistently asked questions in local Zambian language (cinyanja), for clarifications. Paris (2005) reveals that, research on oral language fluency is also an enabling skill and significant predictor of later writing achievement.

Learners writing difficulties were not only as a result of poor reading ability or poor oral language ability, but also poor visual memory. Results from the study have revealed that some learners failed to write even very familiar words simply because they forgot how the words looked like, though they knew them. In table 17, 5 out of 10 teachers indicated that poor memory contributed to writing difficulties. This point is also supported by Haring and schiefelbusch, (1982) who also observed that some learners were unable to write words from memory or dictation due to poor visual memory, because some learners failed to remember

how words looked like, although their reading ability was good. Additionally, MOE (1990) indicates that learners who are easily distracted or have poor attention are likely to find writing difficult, as they just forget to remember how letters are formed or how they appear.

In relation to the poor memory, poor visual-spatial skills and poor fine motor ability, in some way also could have affected learners writing abilities. For example, a teacher from School 'D' indicated that, some learners exhibited poor handwriting because they had stiff finger muscles which made it difficult for them to hold the pencil correctly. The teacher highlighted that there was nothing she could do to assist such learners because such learners couldn't learn how to write properly no matter how one tried to assist them. This observations are also supported by Blöte and Hamstra, (1991) who noted that, poor visual-spatial skills and poor fine motor skills were intrinsic factors that could make it difficult copying a word from the chalkboard or text book by some learners. Deficits in these areas can affect the learners' visual-motor integration and eye-hand coordination. Therefore, learners with visual-spatial problems had decreased awareness regarding the spatial arrangement of letters, words or sentence on the page. It was noticed in the samples highlighted in the study that, some learners wrote words and sentences that were suspended in air due to visual spatial difficulties.

5.4. Measures that should be put in place to remediate writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade.

One measure that should be put in place to improve the writing difficulties of grade four learners in schools is to, introduce more intensive and extensive writing orientation programs for teachers. This can be done during CPDs and TGMs, just as it was with reading. This is in line with MoE (2002) which encourages teachers to continuously share best methodologies of teaching literacy skills during TGMs sessions. Additionally, study findings revealed that, government through the MoESVTEE should introduce workshops on issues of teaching handwriting to learners just as it was done with reading. This would help teachers acquire

more knowledge and latest skills of teaching handwriting as well as know how to assist slow learners. In the same line, a teacher from school 'C' indicated that, writing workshops were supposed to be held regularly to remind teachers on how to teach writing skills to learners in the classroom.

The study established that teachers lacked adequate skills in teaching phonemic awareness. Therefore adequate teacher training in approaches of teaching phonics needed to be enhanced in the teacher training programmes. This would equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills on how to teach phonological awareness, which is a prerequisite to learning how to spell words and write them competently, (Swanepoel van de (2009). Therefore, pre-service teacher training colleges in Zambia should also device their literacy curriculum so that it was tailored towards equipping teachers in the effective way of teaching phonological awareness.

Teachers were not only supposed to be trained in how to teach phonological awareness, but also in other writing teaching strategies, such as, how to teach pre-writing activities, spacing size, writing straight on lines and spellings if they were to help learners to write legibly and intelligibly. With regards to prewriting activities, Swaroop (2010) indicates that teachers are required to know how to train learners in finger movements exercises so that, learners could improve their fine motor skills and enable them execute good handwriting. Fine motor activities can include sorting out beads or seeds, tracing around (objects, template letters, or around finger) and writing in sand or saw dust. (Pollowry, Patton, Payne and Payne, 1980).

Learner's poor spacing and writing on horizontal line could be corrected by following, Molloy (1985) suggestion who said that, learners can avoid writing too sequenced or too spaced work by using stamp pad or their fingertips placed between each word as they write. Teachers can also encourage learners to use paper with raised lines to keep writing straight on the line, (Hallahan, 2009). Additionally, teachers can also remediate learners spelling errors by involving learners with spelling difficulties in exercises that involve different usage of

words and simple repetitive spelling tasks that can increase spelling accuracy, (Kirk, Gallagher and Anastasiow, 2006).

According to Gearhear, Weishahn and Gearheart (1988), one effective approach to teaching children with writing problems is the Fernald VART approach, which requires a child to simultaneously feel, see, say and hear letters, or words as they are being written. The Fernald VART approach is a multi-sensory approach which requires a child to trace letters or words as many times as necessary until the child is able to write the letters without looking at the letter or word. This approach works well and can be used by teachers to teach handwriting skills to learners.

Additionally teachers can also help learners with expressive writing difficulties by engaging learners in various written activities such as proof reading and editing written work. This strategy provides focus on developing written language skills and it also encourages learners to write a variety of exercises that involve sentence and paragraph correction, (Vogel and Moran, 1982). Besides teachers can discuss the story with learners in class or explain the content of the story before learners write can it. Kennedy (2004) has suggested that, teachers can teach learners how to write a story correctly by first making an outline of a story in a sequence.

All these remedial and teaching strategies can only be applicable and effective when the teaching of writing is time tabled on the school or class timetables. The issue of time tabling the teaching of writing skills in schools, is in line with the suggestion from teachers who participated in the study and recommended the teaching of handwriting skills to be put on the school time table in order to compel all teachers to prepare schemes of work and teach the skill.

The suggestion on the time tabling of writing skills on the schools' time table simply means that, specific and more time was also going to be allocated to the teaching of writing skills by

schools, thereby enhance the acquisition of the skill by learners. Study findings consistently indicated that, teachers were of the view of having specific time allocated to the teaching of writing skills for learners to have more time to practice writing, through engaging them in dictation activities, and different imaginative writing activities. According to Gearheart, Weishahn and Gearheart (1988), learners should be allowed practice writing activities at least 10 to 15 minutes in a day. Additionally, time- tabling of writing activities can enable teachers have more time to conduct one-on-one tutoring. It can also allow teachers to prepare suitable remedial therapies for learners with writing problem that can be administered through an individualized education programme (I.E.P), (Lerner, 1993).

Last but not the least, schools and teachers should motivate learners to participate in various writing activities within the school calendar to enable them improve their writing abilities. Ott (1994) suggests that schools can adopt a whole school writing policy where learners are allowed to engage in creative writing such as poems, short stories, and personal experiences and compete at school writing fairs. In the same line, teachers who participated in the study also suggested that; learners needed to be motivated by schools through holding writing competitions on specific topics at a tender age, where they could even win prizes. Engaging learners in various writing activities would improve writing abilities of learners. Therefore, to remediate writing difficulties among grade four learners' calls for consented efforts from the school system, teachers and parents. It also calls for motivation and innovation on the part of the teacher, if learners were to learn in a more natural and enjoyable way. In this vain, independent writing activities should be properly supervised and assessed by teachers.

5.5. Chapter summary

It has been established from this chapter that the nature of writing difficulties of learners who participated in the study was generally poor and below their grade level. The prevalence of writing difficulty among learners was generally low. The majority of the learners, who

participated in the study, including high achiever learners in reading, faced a lot of difficulties in writing the story correctly. This chapter has revealed that school and teacher factors contributed more to learners' writing difficulties than learner factors. The major school factors that contribute to writing difficulties include: lack of continuous orientation writing programmes of teachers in schools, overcrowded classrooms and insufficient time to teach writing skills. While teacher factors include; lack of adequate teacher knowledge in teaching phonological awareness, lack of assessing learner writing difficulties and inadequate administering of writing remedial work, whereas, learner factors include lack of phonological awareness and poor reading. The measures that should be taken include the MOESVTEE introducing new programmes aimed at the teaching of writing skills to learners and time-tabling of the teaching of writing skills on the school time table to compel teachers to teach writing skills.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.0. Overview

This chapter concludes the study and also makes some recommendations based on the major findings of the study

6.1. Conclusion

This study established that there were many grade four learners who continued to face numerous writing difficulties, which went on in schools without being helped by the education system. The nature of writing ability among learners at grade four was not impressive and was below their grade level. The writing performance trend of learners was more on a lower scale. The nature of writing difficulties were in form of ineligibility, poor spacing, messiness in writing, combination of upper and lower cases in words and poor spellings. The study established that learners exhibited a lot of difficulties in expressive writing and the common difficulties in expressive writing were poor punctuation marks, poor paragraphing and difficulties in formulation of meaningful ideas.

The prevalence of writing difficulty among learners was generally low in letters of the alphabet and two-letter words, and high in complex words. The majority of the learners, including high achiever learners in reading, faced a lot of difficulties in writing the story correctly. Although high achievers were able to read considerably well, most of them were not able to write at required basic and advanced level of proficiency more especially in expressive writing. The high prevalence of writing difficulties among grade four learners was more attributed to school and teacher factors, and to a lesser extent to learner factors.

The high prevalence of writing difficulties among grade four learners, predicts that, most learners were likely to face even more writing difficulties in their later academic life, if the

situation was not attended to quickly by the MOESVTEE through the provision of a wide array of favourable conditions such as a well-tailored writing curriculum, continuous writing orientation programmes for teachers, provision of adequate teaching time and an appealing physical environment that promotes creative writing by learners. The key point in this study was not to criticise the MOESVTEE for not paying attention to encouraging the promotion of writing skills in schools, but was to merely highlight the nature and prevalence of writing difficulties in schools and the effects it posed on learners academic, social and psychological wellbeing, as they progressed from one grade to the next grade.

However findings from this study sounded a serious warning that, early-grade literacy in writing, was not to be ignored or under-resourced, because doing so, meant remaining languishing in the distressing situation of educational environment of under-achievement and high rates of school failure. The evidence on nature and prevalence of writing difficulties among grade four learners was so powerful and real, as such, action on this issue was urgently required. Increased attention to early-grade writing literacy achievement in Zambian classrooms was critical to the attainment of lifelong learning, sustainable development, and all the economic and social goals of the country. Refusal to acknowledge the crucial component of learning how to write, would severely handicap efforts to improve the technical, scientific and vocational skills of Zambia's citizens. However, embracing the importance of early-grade writing literacy learning could help to turn the corner in educational achievement and provide a foundation for successful learning in both the school and the community.

6.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings and in line with study objectives, the following recommendations were made:

Recommendations to MoESVTEE

- More research should be conducted by the MoESVTEE, NGOs and other Scholars to determine the nature of writing difficulties common among learners in schools at different grades, using a variety of assessment tools.
- The MoESVTEE should ensure that research work on Literacy levels in Zambia should also reveal the prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at different grade levels in schools, in order to highlight the magnitude of writing difficulties among school going children.
- The MESVTEE through the directorate of teacher education should continuously promote orientation programs for teachers on the teaching of writing skills in schools, to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills on how to teach writing.

Recommendations to Curriculum Development Center

- The Curriculum Development Center should develop curricular for handwriting and other advanced writing skills in order to address issues such as, content and methodology at each grade level.
- Teaching of writing skills should be incorporated in teacher training curricular to equip teachers with knowledge and skills in teaching writing skills.
- The Curriculum Development Center should ensure that time-frame for teaching Writing skills is clearly stipulated and time-tabled on the school time table so that it is properly taught in schools.

Recommendations to Education Standards Officer and Head teachers

- Education Standards officers and head-teachers should ensure that over-enrolment of pupils in lower grades is controlled so that there is enough teacher-pupil contact in order to maximize learning opportunities for all learners.
- Continuous professional development programmes should be enhanced and regularly monitored in schools, to ensure that teachers share ideas and methodologies in teacher group meetings on the teaching of writing skills.
- Schools should formulate clear local writing policies so that a platform for writing skills assessment and remedial work are regularly conducted in schools.

Recommendations to class teachers

- Teachers should regularly assess learners writing abilities to determine the nature of writing difficulties in order to provide suitable remedial work to learners.
- Teachers should regularly supervise learners writing activities in the classroom to ensure that writing difficulties exhibited by learners are timely remediated.
- Teachers should motivate learners to learn writing skills using a variety of teaching methodologies in a more natural and conducive environment.

6.3. Future research

An area proposed for future possible research was for this similar study to be conducted in more schools and districts, both in rural and urban areas of Zambia, to determine the nature and prevalence of writing difficulties of school going learners at different grades, using a variety of assessment tools, to determine if the findings were to be similar.

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APPENDIX 1

GRADE 4 TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Sir/Madam,

You have been selected to participate in this study on the' **NATURE AND PREVALENCES OF WRITING DIFFICULTIES AMONG LEARNERS AT FOURTH GRADE**. The study is purely for academic purposes only and the information that will be obtained from the study will not be used for any unintended purpose. Please answer all questions as freely as possible because your in-put will make a valuable contribution to how writing skills are taught particularly at lower primary grades in schools.

I sincerely thank you in for accepting to participate in this study.

Juma Phiri,

Student-researcher

PART A: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA: (Please tick or write where necessary)

(a) SCHOOL: (write name of school only)

.....

(b) TEACHER 'S GENDER: Male [☐] Female [☐]

(c) TOTAL NUMBER OF PUPILS IN CLASS:

BOYS: GIRLS:

PART B: BACKGROUND INFORMATION: (Please tick or write where necessary)

Q.1. For how long have you been teaching Grade 4 pupils at this school? (Tick where appropriate)

(a) Less than a year [☐] (b) One to Two years [☐] (c) Two to Three years [☐] (d) More Three years [☐]

Q.2. Have you ever undergone any specific training/ orientation programme aimed at equipping you with teaching writing skills to learners?

Yes [☐] No [☐]

Q.3. (a) If the answer to question 2 is yes, what was the name of the programme?

.....
.....

(b) What key areas did the training/ orientation programme focus on?

PART C: NATURE OF WRITING DIFFICULTIES AMONG GRADE 4 LEARNERS

Q. 4. In terms of hand writing, would you say pupils in your class exhibit the following poor handwriting characteristics? (Tick where it appropriate in the three options given in the table as many as possible)

S/N	TYPE OF HANDWRITING DIFFICULTY	YES	NO	NEEDS HELP
1	Poor letter formation			
2	Poor letter identification of alphabet			
3	Poor spacing			
4	Poor letter combination of lower and upper cases in words			
5	Difficulties staying on horizontal line when writing			
6	Difficult holding of pen/pencil			
7	Reversal writing			

Q.5. Would you say the following spelling error are common among pupils in your class? (Tick where it appropriate in the three options given in the table).

S/N	COMMON SPELLING ERRORS	YES	NO	SOMETIMES
1	Omission of letters in a word			
2	Addition of letters in word			
3	Substitution of letters in a word			
4	Reversing of letters in a word			
5	Mirror writing			
6	Writing completely a different word			
7	Shows phonetic difficulties			

Q.6. As a practicing teacher, state types of expressive writing pupils in your class find difficulties to write on their own. (Tick where it is appropriate in the three options given)

S/N	Type of expressive writing	YES	NO	NEEDS HELP
1	Friendly Letters			
2	Formal letters			
3	Short stories			
4	Poems			
5	Invitation notes			

Q.7. Would you say learners in your class exhibit the following errors during expressive writing? (Tick where it is appropriate)

S/N	Errors made by pupils in expressive writing	YES	NO	SOMETIMES
1	Poor Punctuation marks			
2	Difficulties with use of Tenses			
3	Poor spelling			
4	Poor Capitalization			
5	Difficulties construction of meaningful sentences			
6	Poor Planning skills			
7	Difficulties in Formulation of ideas			

D. PREVALENCE OF WRITING DIFFICULTIES AMONG GRADE FOUR LEARNERS

Q.8. How would you rate the writing abilities of pupils in your class according to following writing skills? (Tick where it is appropriate)

S/N	Writing skill	High	Average	Low
1	Handwriting			
2	Writing spacing			
3.	Writing speed			
4	Spelling			
5	Expressive writing			

Q.9. As a practicing teacher, how you would you rate the general writing abilities of your grade 4 pupils? (Tick where it is appropriate)

High [] Average [] low []

E. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO WRITING DIFFICULTIES OF GRADE FOUR LEARNERS

Q.10. How would you answer the following questions in the table concerning the teaching of writing skills to pupils in your school? (Tick were it is appropriate in the three options provided).

S/N	QUESTIONS	YES	NO	SOMETIMES
1	Does your school conduct teacher writing orientation programmes?			
2	Does the content for NBTL clearly guide teachers on to teach writing skills?			
3	Is the teaching of writing skills time tabled in your school?			
4	Does you always involve parents in the writing remedial work of their children?			
5	Does your school conduct periodical assessment of learners writing skills?			
6	Has you school tried to revise the writing curriculum?			
7	Does your school have a school writing policy?			

Q.11. If your school conducts any writing programmes, state the writing orientation programmes that have been conducted at your school?

.....

.....

Q.12. If NBTL provides any teaching methodology in writing, state the kind of teaching methods that are provided in NBTL

.....

.....

Q.13. Would you attribute the following learner factors to contribute to your pupils writing difficulties in your class? (Tick where it is appropriate in the three options provided)

S/N	Learner factors	YES	NO	SOMETIMES
1	Insufficient phonological awareness			
2	Poor reading ability			
3	Poor fine motor ability			
4	Poor visual and visual spatial skills			
5	Poor memory			
6	Learners' home background			
7	Poor writing posture			

Q.14. In your view, what would you say are other factors contributing to writing difficulties of grade four learners, apart from the ones you have ticked above?

.....

.....

PART F: REMEDIATION MEASURES TO BE TAKEN TO IMPROVE WRITING SKILLS

Q.15. As a practising teacher, what measures have you put in place in your class to improve the writing skills of your grade four learners?

.....

.....

Q.16. What measures ought to be put in place to enhance the teaching of writing skills to pupils the Zambian education system?

.....

.....

Thank you for taking your time to answer this questionnaire.

APPENDIX 2

WRITING EVALUATION CHECKLIST

Grade four Learners writing abilities were further assessed using the writing evaluation checklist. The writing evaluation checklist provided an opportunity to the researcher to critically analyse learners writing styles. After seeking permission, the researcher assessed learners by giving them a short story selected from grade 4 English work book 1. Then writing samples were collected and analysed by the researcher.

SCHOOL:

CLASS:

LEARNER'S GENDER: AGE:

Type of writing activity: (Story writing selected from grade 4 pupils English work book 1)

S/N	NATURE OF WRITING DIFFICULTY			
A	HANDWRITING SKILLS	YES	NO	NEEDS HELP
1	Does the learner have difficulties in letter formation?			
2	Does the learner have difficulties staying on the horizontal line when writing?			
3	Does the learner exhibit reversals or mirror writing?			
4	Does the learner exhibit problems in spacing of letters or words?			
5	Does the learner combine small and capital letters in a word?			
6	Does the learner exhibit messiness when writing?			
B	SPELLING SKILLS			
7	Does the learner omit letters in a word?			
8	Does the learner add letters in a word?			
9	Does the learner write a completely different word?			
10	Does the learner show phonetic errors?			
C	EXPRESSIVE WRITING			
11	Does the learner exhibit poor punctuation marks?			
12	Does the learner show difficulties constructing meaningful sentences?			
13	Does the learner have problem with the use of correct grammar?			
14	Does the learner have difficulties formulating coherent ideas?			
15	Is the learner able to write a simple story correctly?			
E	SUMMARY OF WRITING DIFFICULTIES			
16	Handwriting			
17	Writing speed			
18	Spelling			
20	Expressive writing			

GRADE FOUR EXPRESSIVE WRITING ACTIVITY

TELLING A STORY

Read the following sentences and then rearrange the sentences to make a meaningful story of what Chongo does during the day. Write the story in a paragraph and put in correct punctuation marks.

1. After a bath he eats breakfast
2. At school he plays with his friends
3. Chongo wakes up at 06.00hours
4. At home he helps his mother in the garden
5. He goes to school at 07.00hours
6. First he takes a bath very quickly
7. He goes to sleep at 20.00hours
8. After school he goes back home

Now write the correct story on the piece of paper that has been provided.

EXPRESSIVE WRITING SHEET

First name:

Gender:

Now write the meaningful story in spaces provided below in a paragraph.

This image shows a full page of primary-ruled paper. It features approximately 20 horizontal rows, each defined by two parallel dotted lines. The paper is otherwise blank, with no margins, text, or other markings.

APPENDIX 3

BASIC SKILLS ASSESSMENT TOOL (BASAT)

ENGLISH

Reading and Writing Skills - Grades 1 and 2

Name: _____

School: _____

Grade: _____

Teacher: _____

Examiner: _____

Sex: Female Male Time

Province: _____ District: _____ begun _____ Time
ended _____

	Year	Month	Day	
Date				
Date of birth				
Age				

1. Has the child got any of the following impairments? Tick where appropriate	
Physical Disabilities	
Visual impairment	
Hearing impairment	
Intellectual Disability	
Speech/language Difficulties	
3. Summary of the BASAT (Fill in this table after completing the assessment)	
Area	Comments
Letter knowledge	
Letter-sound knowledge	
Phonological tasks	
Reading	
Writing	
Digit Span	
Reading comprehension	

Note: Yes = is able to; Needs help = is able to do some; No = is not able to do any

E. Writing		Yes	Needs help	No
1. Writes own name.				
2. Writes letters.				
3. Writes two letter words:				
a. me	b. in			
c. to	d. as			
4. Writes three letter words:				
a. dog	b. bat			
c. pen	d. cup			
5. Writes words with more than three letters:				
a. milk	b. small			
c. window	d. teacher			
6. Writes sentences:				
a. Look at the dog.				
b. It is playing with the ball.				

--

Basic Skills Assessment Tool (BASAT)

E. Writing

Name: _____

2. Letters

3. a. _____ b. _____

c. _____ d. _____

4. a. _____ b. _____

c. _____ d. _____

5. a. _____ b. _____

c. _____ d. _____

6. a. _____

b. _____

APPENDIX 4

PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This informed consent form was designed for parents / guardians of grade four learners to grant permission on behalf of their selected children to participate in the study at their respective selected school

Principle investigator: Phiri Juma

Organisation: University of Zambia (UNZA)

Sponsor: self:

This informed consent form has two parts

1. Information sheet (to share information about the study with you).
2. Certificate of consent (for your signature if you allow your child to participate in the study).

Part 1: Information sheet

Introduction

My name is Phiri Juma, a post graduate student with the University of Zambia, studying for the Master of Education in Special Education. As a requirement to obtain a master degree, the university requires that each student conducts a field research on a particular topic of the student's interest. I am therefore conducting a research *on the nature and prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade: in selected schools in Lusaka district*.

Your child (first name only) in grade 4..... (class) has been selected to participate in the study, and I would like you to decide on behalf of your child if he/she can take part in the research. You are free to ask me any questions to clarify any concerns that you may have, as we read through this information sheet.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the nature and prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade and thereafter make recommendation, based on the findings of the study, to stakeholders in the provision of education, so that, they may formulate suitable policies and make informed decisions on various intervention programmes which might be put in place to mitigate writing difficulties of learners in schools.

Method of data collection

This research will involve testing individual learners by using writing tests in the BASAT and checklists. Learners will be required to write various activities ranging from their first names

only, letters of the alphabet ,two letter words to simple sentences from the BASAT and then a simple short story selected from grade 4 English work book 1. Data collection may capture other information as needed during the research such as gender and level of literacy category of learners.

Participants' selection

Two selection procedures will be used to select learners to participate in the study. The researcher will first divide learners into four literacy groups in each class, in order to have an equal representation of learners from all ability categories in terms of literacy. After grouping learners into their literacy groups, simple random sampling will then be used to select pupils from the sub-groups. Those selected will represent various aspects of learners in their respective schools. This selection will be objective and very partial.

Voluntary participation

Participation of your child in this study is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to allow your child to participate in this study or not. If you choose that your child should not participate in the study, there will be no negative consequences.

Duration of data collection

Data collection for this research per each individual child will take about 40 minutes to finish all the two test writing items.

Benefits

Participating in this study will help schools, teachers and learners with insights into the written work of learners and help schools and teachers learn best practices that ought to be promoted to foster the spirit of writing competently by learners in schools

Reimbursements

Learners who will participate in this study will not be assured and provided with any incentives to motivate them to take part in the study. But after answering both writing tests items, learners may be given the writing utensils (pens) they will use to answer the test items as gifts.

Confidentiality

Information about learners who will participate in the study will not be shared with anybody, and shall be kept private and anonymous. Learners will only be required to write their first

names, and schools where learners will be selected from, will be withheld, as such, pseudonyms will be used to conceal their identity. Therefore, identities of participants will be kept anonymous

Sharing of results

As a requirement of the University, the research findings will be published so that other interested people may learn from the study but no results will be attributed to by participants by their full names.

Right to refuse or withdraw

Selected learners will not take part in this research if they will not wish to do so. Learners may stop participating in the data collection at any time without affecting their relationship with the researcher.

You are now free to ask any questions that you may have about what you have read or what we have read together.

Part II: Certificate of consent

The aforementioned grade four learner (first name:) in this consent statement has been invited to participate in this study on the *nature and prevalence of writing difficulties among learners at fourth grade*. I have read the foregoing information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and all the questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to allow the aforementioned child to participate in this study.

Signature of parent/guardian:

Title of Parent/guardian: (Father, mother, uncle, etc.):

Date: