






Literacy at the crossroad: Early-grade literacy teaching challenges in Zambia's Chama district

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Abstract— To retain teachers in the profession and encourage them to stay in rural areas, it is essential to recognise the challenges they face. Assisting them in discovering solutions will enhance their classroom practices. This study examines the challenges teachers face in supporting early-grade learners during the mentoring process. The study employed a qualitative case study design. Fifteen participants were purposefully selected from two schools in the Chama district in Zambia. These included one district official, two school head teachers, two senior teachers or mentors, two School in-service coordinators, four early-grade teachers, and four parents. Data for the study were collected through semi-structured focus groups and supplemented by observation. The data gathered were analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The findings revealed several challenges affecting the teaching of early-grade literacy and teacher support and mentoring. Accordingly, the study recommends that appropriate measures be implemented to ensure adequate teacher support and mentoring.

Keywords: Early-grade literacy, Mentoring, Teacher support, Mentor, Mentee

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I. INTRODUCTION

THERE is a plethora of literature that acknowledges the importance of early-grade literacy in children (Kombe & Mwanza, 2019; Quimson, 2022; Ssenkande et al., 2022; Apriliana et al., 2023). However, early-grade literacy teaching poses significant challenges due to changes in curricula, new teaching methods, parental demands, and learning needs (Magnusson et al., 2023). While developed countries have made some positive strides in early-grade literacy teaching, the situation has been different for many developing countries, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa (Trudell et al., 2012; Trudell, 2016; Ball et al., 2022). The teaching of early-grade literacy in Zambia has been challenging due to various factors, including methodological gaps, staffing levels, the kind of training received by teaching staff, ecological factors, stakeholder involvement, materials used, and language factors (Chibamba et al., 2018; Kombe & Mwanza, 2019; Mbale & Hara, 2020; Kafusha et al., 2021; Mandyata et al., 2024). For this reason, teacher support and mentoring have been utilised to enhance the teaching of early-grade literacy, as noted by Dlamini et al. (2024). Mentoring comes in different forms and is offered for various purposes. However, despite recognising the need for teacher support and mentoring, several challenges often arise. Understanding the obstacles encountered during these processes is cardinal, as it may provide solutions to strengthen the teaching of early-grade literacy.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Like many other countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, Zambia struggles with low literacy rates. Despite several initiatives aimed at improving literacy instruction in early grades, many children remain excluded from the group of learners who can read and write (Sampa et al., 2018). According to Mutandagai et al. (2024), various scholars have sought answers to why many children continue to struggle with reading and writing.

Phiri and Mulenga (2020) conducted a study in the Chama district of Zambia, identifying several challenges affecting teachers. Phiri et al. (2024) also acknowledged the challenges encountered while teaching literacy in Zambia but attributed them to the policy of using English as the language of instruction. Mandyata et al. (2024) attributed the literacy challenges to teachers' pedagogical training. While research has highlighted the challenges affecting early-grade literacy instruction, the literature on teacher support and mentoring in literacy education is limited. To enhance early-grade teachers' classroom practices, they require support and mentorship (Muraya & Wairimu, 2020). Despite the benefits of teacher support and mentoring, several challenges impede the successful teaching of early-grade literacy. This paper aims to identify the challenges teachers of early-grade learners encounter in support and mentoring processes.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Early-grade literacy is a crucial aspect of every individual's life, as it significantly influences student success (Apriliana et al., 2022). However, for this to be realised, teachers' classroom practices play a key role in promoting positive literacy outcomes, according to James (2020). There is a strong belief among scholars that teacher support significantly affects students' academic achievement, and that education is a dynamic process; as such, teachers must adapt their teaching to meet changing demands and continually enhance their practice (Chileshe & Tambulukani, n.d.; Magnusson et al., 2023; Fan, 2024). This can be achieved through professional development, a form of teacher support.

Teacher support

Teachers need to be appreciated, recognised, and encouraged in their work. According to Huang et al. (2024), teacher support encompasses providing educational, instrumental, emotional, or evaluative assistance. Assistance to a teacher should benefit the learner. This support comes in various forms, including mentoring, assisting with lesson planning, networking, collaboration, and professional development (Sydnor et al., 2023). Support may be provided by peers,

more experienced officers, supervisors, or parents. Kupiainen and Ouakrim-Soivio (2023) also mention teacher tutoring, which is a modern form of teacher support used in Finland. It involves teachers assisting their peers in areas where they experience challenges. By so doing, they learn from each other as peers. Another form of teacher support is coaching (Ministry of General Education [MoGE], 2019; Stone et al., 2019). According to PushFar (2021), coaching involves guiding others on their goals to help them reach their full potential. Therefore, the terms professional development and continuing professional development (CPD) refer to a support system designed to enhance current teachers' capacity to teach more effectively (Waters et al., 2020).

Teacher mentoring

Another aspect of professional development is mentoring. Like Garza et al. (2019), Muraya and Wairimu (2020) observe that, although the term may have different meanings in various contexts, there is a consensus that, in a traditional sense, mentoring refers to a more experienced person (the mentor) assisting a less experienced person (the mentee). According to Dlamini et al. (2024), various forms of mentoring programs exist, including peer mentoring, group mentoring, e-mentoring, collaborative mentoring, multiple-level mentoring, and reverse mentoring. Mentoring can be individual or one-on-one, formal or informal, and may occur in a group or team setup (Bressman et al., 2018; Ewing, 2021; Apriliana et al., 2022). In addition, Tynjälä et al. (2021) describe a form of peer mentoring used in Finland, grounded in an interpretivist view, in which the sharing of experiences and skills, as well as equal participation and interaction, are encouraged. Kumar et al. (2021) refer to mentoring and monitoring, where teachers receive on-the-spot support from resource persons. Another form of teacher support common in Zambia is teacher group meetings. It involves teachers of the same grade or similar grades collaborating on a topic or issue of common interest (MoGE, 2015). All this support is intended to mitigate challenges in literacy instruction. The following section discusses common difficulties in early-grade literacy.

Challenges affecting early-grade literacy teaching

In many countries, early-grade literacy instruction is often hindered by numerous obstacles. Although some of the challenges are similar, others are unique to specific countries due to various factors. Common problems in sub-Saharan Africa include inadequate teaching and learning materials, crowded classrooms, poor or insufficient infrastructure, unstable language policies, and low staffing levels (Chibamba et al., 2018; Toralba et al., 2018; Ball et al., 2022). Given the above challenges, teacher support and mentoring are required to enhance early-grade literacy instruction.

Lyytinen et al. (2019) note that many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including Zambia, face inadequate teaching and learning resources. The resource problem often affects literacy instruction in the early grades. Some studies (Apriliana et al., 2022) recommend paying attention to the learning environment and the provision of appropriate teaching and learning materials. Mutandagai et al. (2024) confirm that the availability of teaching and learning materials is key to positive literacy development. Therefore, for effective teaching and learning, teachers should be supported in creating resources using locally available materials.

Akram et al. (2020) note that large class sizes pose a significant challenge to teaching. The challenge is two-fold: class management and inadequate teaching and learning resources. Graham and Kelly (2018) and Mbale and Hara (2020) conducted studies in Malawi. They observed that, due to overcrowding, the teaching and learning materials were insufficient for effective early-grade literacy instruction. These findings are like those of Kombe and Mwanza (2019) in Zambia, who noted challenges associated with large class sizes and insufficient reading materials.

Low staffing levels affect the teaching of early-grade literacy and the teacher support and mentoring processes. Toralba et al. (2018) found that low staffing levels were affecting both developing and developed countries. When there are not enough teachers at a given school,

teaching literacy becomes challenging, as some teachers may have to instruct more than one grade or class (Mutandagai et al., 2024). Furthermore, teachers often take on additional responsibilities, such as supporting or mentoring colleagues. This aligns with Muyengwa and Jita (2020), who propose that mentorship is often assigned as an additional responsibility to teachers. Therefore, when there are only a few teachers, they are usually burdened with additional duties. As Chuonga (2023) cautions, it hurts their performance.

It has also been observed that early-grade literacy is affected by inappropriate/inadequate infrastructure. Available literature confirms that this challenge is common in many countries, including South Africa and Zambia (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Lemrani, 2019, 2021; Nkambule, 2022). Inadequate infrastructure affects the teaching of early-grade literacy, particularly in classroom organisation. For example, teachers of early grades will have challenges displaying reading materials, as others may use the same classroom.

Inconsistent professional development is another challenge in early-grade literacy instruction. It has been observed that, in some countries such as Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, CPD exists but is not consistently pursued (Muyengwa, 2018; Nakambale, 2018; Kombe & Mwanza, 2019; Mbale & Hara, 2020; Echaune & Maiyo, 2023). This may ultimately affect teacher support and mentoring. Teachers of early-grade literacy need to undergo in-service training to sharpen their skills and become more effective. An environment that supports and mentors teachers in teaching literacy yields improved literacy outcomes, as noted by Wasike et al. (2024).

IV. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study was to identify the challenges that teachers of early-grade learners encounter during the support and mentoring processes.

V. METHODS

Research approach and design

To answer the question, "Which challenges do teachers of early-grade learners encounter during the support and mentoring processes?" a qualitative approach was considered appropriate and was consequently used. This is where the researcher attempts to understand and attach meaning to the problem under study in its natural setting (Ryen, 2023). As major stakeholders, teachers' perceptions matter in evaluating the impact of support or mentorship, whether present or absent (Stan, 2021). The meaning that people attach to a situation or phenomenon is key to understanding the depth of the problem and how to resolve it (Galvez et al., 2023).

Research paradigm

The interpretivist worldview underpinned this study, which employed a case study design. Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that interpretivists believe that social reality is created by those who participate in it. Moreover, Kumatongo and Muzata (2021) note that knowledge and meaning are subjective and depend on the interpretations of the research participants. Therefore, in this study, the researcher relied on participants' views.

Research design

A case study is an in-depth study of a phenomenon in its natural context (Rashid et al., 2019). It is often used in settings where the researcher cannot manipulate participants' behaviour (Carter, 2020). It is "...an intensive, systematic investigation of an individual, group, community, or some other unit in which the researcher examines in-depth data..." (Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021, p. 26). This study relied on participants' submissions and observations made in the natural environment.

Participants

This study targeted teachers of early grades (and those who support them) as the population. Since it was not possible or practical to study all the teachers of early grades, a sample size of fifteen participants,

including grade 1 to 4 teachers, school principals, district officials in charge of the teacher education department, senior teachers (teacher mentors), school in-service coordinators, and parents, was purposefully sampled. These participants were selected because they would provide reliable, credible data given their positions and roles (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). A district official in charge of teacher education was required to provide data on teacher support programs designed to build teacher capacity. Head teachers were targeted because they are the overall supervisors at the school level. Senior teachers and teacher mentors were selected for their role of supporting and mentoring early-grade teachers. The school in-service coordinators were chosen because they were responsible for continuing professional development at the school level, in collaboration with the zonal centre. Above all, parents were included as they play a critical role in supporting their children's education.

Data collection methods

To identify the challenges that teachers of early-grade learners encounter during the support and mentoring processes, the researcher employed semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and observations. These have been attached as appendices 1, 2, and 3. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather the views of district officials, teacher mentors (senior teachers), and head teachers. The semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to ask more questions, in any order, to establish the participants' views. Focus group interviews were conducted to gather data from participants, including school in-service training coordinators, early-grade teachers, and parent representatives. During focus group interviews, participants were asked open-ended questions. The participants were able to respond to the questions asked and to the responses given by others (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Both the semi-structured and focus group interviews allowed the researcher to probe for more information and rephrase questions as necessary (Gall et al., 2007). Teachers of early-grade learners and teacher mentors were observed to cross-check the information gathered through interviews, as explained by Chuunga (2024).

Research site

This study was conducted in educational institutions within the Chama district of the Eastern Province. The place is located more than 400km from the provincial education office. The district is one of the most rural districts. The researcher interacted with participants in their natural settings to gather their views and experiences on teacher support and mentorship in early-grade literacy.

Data analysis

The data was analysed thematically, and emerging patterns and themes were identified. The data were analysed manually by editing, coding, classification, and tabulation (Kothari, 2019). The six stages of data analysis identified by Creswell (2014) were employed in this study. First, the data were organised and prepared for analysis. Then, it was read several times to familiarise the researcher with it. Next, the data was coded. This led to the formulation of themes. Finally, interpretation followed the discussion of the findings.

Ethical considerations

This study followed all ethical requirements. Ethics approval was granted by the Unisa College of Education Ethics Review Committee under reference number 2024/04/10/13329979/28/AM. Therefore, the study complied with Unisa's Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure for Research Ethics Risk Assessment. Permission was sought and subsequently granted by provincial and district education offices. The researcher protected participants' rights and obtained their consent before they participated in the study. This concurs with submissions by Rashid et al. (2019). Participants' identities and the schools from which the data were collected were concealed using pseudonyms. For instance, the district official was referred to as DO; School 1 was coded S1, while School 2 was coded S2. Therefore, the head teachers were coded S1HI and S2HI to mean School 1 Head teacher Interview and School 2 Head teacher Interview, respectively. The other

codes were: S1FGT1, S2FGT2 (School 1 Focus Group Teacher 1 and School 2 Focus Group Teacher 2), S1M, S2M (School 1 Mentor and School 2 Mentor).

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Biographical profile of the participants

Table 1: Biographical profile of the participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Teaching experience	Years in current position	Qualifications
DO	45	M	17	03	Bachelor's Degree
S1HI	52	F	25	03	Diploma Primary
S2HI	50	M	24	12	Master's Degree
S1M	33	M	6	01	Diploma Primary
S2M	40	M	11	02	Bachelor's Degree
S1SIC	32	F	1.6	01	Diploma Primary
S2SIC	40	M	11	02	Bachelor's Degree
S1T1	33	M	6	01	Diploma Primary
S1T2	32	F	1.5	0.5	Diploma Primary
S2T1	28	F	2	2	Diploma Primary
S2T2	37	M	9	2	Diploma Primary
Parent 1:SIFG P1	42	F	N/A	N/A	Grade 9 certificate
Parent 2:SIFG P2	44	F	N/A	N/A	Grade 4
Parent 3:S2FG P1	45	F	N/A	N/A	Grade 7
Parent 4 (S2FGP 2)	65	M	N/A	N/A	Not disclosed

As shown in Table 1, the participants ranged in age from 28 to 65 years. Eight were male, while seven were female. Eleven participants were teachers, and four were parents. The most experienced teacher had 25 years, while the least experienced teacher had 1 year and 5 months. The participant with the highest qualification held a master's degree, while the participant with the lowest qualification dropped out of school at grade four. These factors influenced participation during data collection.

Low staffing levels in schools

The findings showed that low staffing levels were affecting both literacy instruction and teacher support and mentoring processes. Participants in all the categories acknowledged this challenge. When asked to mention some of the challenges that were experienced during teacher support and mentoring, the district official [DO] responded:

"We have the challenge of low staffing levels, which affects lesson delivery. Some schools in Chama District have... only three teachers for a school running from grade 1 to 7."

Participant S1FGP1 echoed this:

"Another challenge we face is inadequate teachers. This school has very few teachers."

The findings are like those reported by Toralba et al. (2018), who note that low staffing is common, even in some developed countries. This is supported by Mulenga and Phiri (2020), who observed a teacher shortage in the Chama district due to teachers frequently requesting transfers. The study further showed that inadequate teacher provision led to work overload, rendering mentors unable to provide sufficient support to teachers of early-grade learners. Participant S1M:

"It is not adequate because of the workload..."

The participant S1M further complained:

"Yes, I find some challenges because I have a class. I am a mentor. I am a ..., procurement officer ... for the school"

This was affirmed by early-grade teachers, who stated that they did not receive adequate support. One of the respondents was asked how often she was supported and mentored in producing and using teaching and learning materials as a grade 2 teacher. Participant S1FGT1 said,

"Once per year."

This frequency was inadequate compared to the need. Hence, the respondents would prefer more frequent assistance with teaching and learning materials.

These findings align with those of Chuunga (2023), a similar study in which guidance and counselling teachers were being mentored. It was gathered that, due to many responsibilities, they had insufficient time to fulfill their mentoring duties. When mentors have numerous responsibilities, they may struggle to fulfill their primary duties. These findings also align with those of Echaune and Maiyo (2023), who report a similar situation in Kenya, where teachers' workload and absences hindered mentoring and training.

Inadequate learning space and reduced contact time

Another finding was an inadequate learning space, which reduced teacher-pupil contact time. This is what participant DO said:

"In some schools, the learning space is insufficient due to a shortage of classrooms. Therefore, time is divided for lesson delivery, enabling each group to experience a lesson, which makes the teaching time for literacy inadequate".

However, the Zambia Curriculum Framework highlighted that learners at the lower primary level were supposed to spend 1 hour learning literacy (MESVTEE, 2013). However, one participant noted that, due to the shared classrooms, teachers occasionally reduced the time from one hour to forty minutes to allow others to use the classroom. This results in insufficient work coverage. Such findings are not uncommon in sub-Saharan Africa, as other scholars in Zambia and South Africa have confirmed (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Lembani, 2019, 2021; Nkambule, 2022).

Inadequate financial resources and related problems

Another challenge affecting teacher support and mentoring in schools was inadequate financial resources. Participant DO said:

"Another challenge is financial. When we invite these teachers to meetings, they sometimes expect the district to reimburse them for transportation costs, even though the district lacks the funds to do so. Others may not even attend because their schools lack the funds to sponsor them".

The study revealed that teacher support and mentoring require financial provision. It becomes tough to implement any programme without money. Mamadova et al. (2019) note that many developing countries have neglected primary and secondary education, focusing instead on financing higher education.

Participants were asked about existing gaps in support and mentorship. Both participants, S1FGT2 and S1M, replied that the classrooms were inadequate.

Lesson observation 2 for School One (LO2S1) was conducted in tandem with the participants' submissions, as the lesson was taught in a small wooden and grass-thatched shelter. Class libraries could not be successfully organised in such an environment. Responses from other participants were similar.

The school's in-service training coordinators mentioned a lack of infrastructure and inadequate classrooms as challenges. These findings correlate with those of Phiri and Mulenga (2020) in a study conducted in Chama. They found that some schools lacked sufficient teacher housing and had dilapidated classrooms, among other issues. The findings are also consistent with those of Chetty (2019), Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), and Nkambule (2022), who reported similar situations in some South African schools.

The study further showed that there were no in-service training activities for mentors and teachers of early grades. These findings are consistent with those of Sulimani-Aidan (2018), who asserted that mentors need in-service training and support to replenish their knowledge, skills, and emotional well-being. These findings were also like those of Muyengwa (2018), who reported inadequate in-service training among mentors and mentees in Zimbabwe, despite mentorship having been widely adopted in that country. Further, the situation is like that in Malawi (Graham & Kelly, 2018; Mbale & Hara, 2020).

Long distances to schools and absenteeism

The study reveals rampant absenteeism due to long distances and human-animal conflict. It was learnt that at times, stray lions and

elephants were terrorising people and threatening their lives. Participant S1HI indicated that:

"...at times we find that [there is] absenteeism on the part of the learners."

Participant S1M also submitted this. Participant S2HI from School 2 added:

"The challenges are two-fold: we have challenges with learners and with teachers. There is rampant absenteeism - absenteeism is high in rural schools."

As Lembani (2021) indicated, these findings confirm the challenges often faced in rural schools, where learners cover long distances to reach school.

Inadequate parental involvement

Other findings were that parents did not adequately support their children's education, as participant S2HI complained:

"The other thing is that the support from parents is not very much."

The study showed that parents were willing to support the teachers, although the support was inadequate, as acknowledged by participant S1FGP1, who said:

"The support is not enough ... As parents, we need to be brought on board."

Participant S1FGP1 equally said:

"One of the challenges we face is related to homework. Sometimes, children may approach a parent for homework help, but it may be a busy time of year, such as during harvest. If a parent is not literate, they may have challenges helping learners".

Therefore, some parents were illiterate and lacked the time to help their children due to busy schedules. This was a common problem affecting many countries, as shown in other studies (Mohammed & Amponsah, 2018; Nkambule, 2022; Villa et al., 2021). Furthermore, these findings align with modern research, which emphasises the importance of parental involvement (Bressman et al., 2018; Simweleba & Serpell, 2020; Zahedi et al., 2022; Wasike et al., 2023; Mutandagai et al., 2024; Wasike et al., 2024).

Inadequate teaching and learning materials

Another finding from the study was the inadequacy of teaching and learning materials. Below are some of the challenges that affected both teachers and learners. Participant S1M said:

"... the desks are there, but they are still not yet enough,"

LO1S2 and LO2S1 indicate that neither school had enough desks, as some learners had to sit on the floor during the literacy lesson, while three or four learners shared a desk meant for two.

The findings also reveal that other materials, such as books and charts, were insufficient. Many participants reaffirmed this: S1FGP1, S1FGT2, DO, S1HI, S1M, S2M, and SIC1. For instance, Participant S1FGP1 said:

"This school needs more books, chalk, information, and communication materials. We still need more teaching and learning materials in this school because we do not have enough."

This study has revealed that many scholars hold the view that teaching and learning materials are inadequate in literacy. For instance, Kombe and Mwanza (2019) cite inadequate literacy materials as one of the issues affecting the implementation of the Primary Literacy Programme. Inadequate teaching and learning materials are a common issue in many countries, including sub-Saharan Africa (Lyytinen et al., 2019; Akram et al., 2020; Lembani, 2021; and Mutandagai et al., 2024). As observed by many scholars (Graham & Kelly, 2018; Ndlovu, 2018; Mbale & Hara, 2020; Nkambule, 2022; Wasike et al., 2024), a supportive learning environment has positive effects on literacy outcomes.

Despite the above negative sentiments, other participants felt that the resources were enough. For example, participant S2H said:

"For literacy, the resources that the school provides are enough, but I do not think this scenario is the same in other schools."

One of the mentors [S2M] said:

"The resources are enough, but there is only one problem: the mentality of some teachers. For instance, we cannot make show pockets for them. No. They must make those things."

This mentor highlighted the issue of negative attitudes among some teachers who expected the school to provide them with everything.

However, the need to procure enough teaching and learning materials was acknowledged.

The findings revealed that support for the production and use of teaching and learning materials was inadequate. Although teachers were supposed to improvise, they needed regular support in producing and using teaching and learning materials. Therefore, these findings are at variance with those of Wasike et al. (2024), who emphasised a need for a supportive learning environment. Teacher support and mentorship are also essential in strengthening teacher quality, which has a significant impact on improved literacy outcomes as emphasised by many scholars (Muyengwa, 2018; Chaney et al., 2020; Muraya & Wairimu, 2020; Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021; Sydnor et al., 2023).

Negative attitudes

The study also revealed negative attitudes among learners and teachers of early-grade students. This was alluded to by participant S2M, who said:

“Some teachers have negative attitudes towards it [Catch-up]. To them, Catch-up is a punishment [or extra responsibility].”

Other participants were of the same view. Participant S1FGT1 bemoaned learners' negative attitudes:

“... sometimes learners ... run away, especially those who do not find it interesting, those who have not broken through to literacy, especially beginners. They... find it very boring.”

These findings are like those observed in Norway and Ghana by Kupiainen and Ouakrim-Soivio (2023) and Asuo-Baffour et al. (2019), respectively. Both studies show that teachers often exhibit negative attitudes towards literacy programmes. This leads to low literacy outcomes.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that teacher support and mentoring are crucial to teaching early-grade literacy. It has further revealed that although the teachers of early-grade learners received some support and mentorship, they faced several challenges during these processes. These obstacles range from the administration and management of CPDs to inadequate infrastructure. Others include inadequate teachers, insufficient teaching and learning materials, and poor in-service training through school-based CPD. Because of these challenges, the teaching of literacy and the support and mentorship offered to teachers of early-grade learners were problematic. These challenges require a multifaceted approach.

Considering the above conclusions, the following recommendations have been made: clearly define mentors' roles and responsibilities to enhance their performance in teacher support and mentoring. Secondly, due to inadequate teaching and learning materials, there is a need to enhance teachers' capacity to produce and use teaching and learning resources using locally available materials. Furthermore, there is a need to increase staffing levels to mitigate the impact of inadequate teacher numbers and minimise the growing gap in the teacher-pupil ratio. Apart from that, parents should also be sensitised to the importance of parental involvement in providing early-grade literacy. Finally, CPD activities for both mentors and teachers of early-grade learners should be enhanced to strengthen literacy instruction.

VIII. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest in this study.

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